

Evil, Virtue, and Education in Kant

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1. Introduction

For Kant, education is a staged process involving care, discipline, instruction, training, and formation (Päd, 9:441; Formosa 2011).¹ While education has multiple aims, an essential aspect of education for Kant is *moral* formation [*Bildung*] (Päd, 9:445). For Kant, the apex of moral development is a person with fully-perfected virtue. The aim of moral education is thus the formation of fully virtuous persons. But to understand how we can realise that aim, we first need to think about evil, since evil impacts how we approach education. If humans are naturally good, then moral education will need to ensure that it does not corrupt what is already good. If humans are naturally bad, then moral education will need to correct what is already bad. If humans are in part naturally good and in part naturally bad, then moral education will need both to correct the bad and not corrupt the good. Given the impact that our understanding of evil has on our approach to education, it is no coincidence that the text in which Kant investigates radical evil, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, is also a text in which he focuses heavily on moral development. For Kant, the fact of our radical evil as a species must inform our moral pedagogy. This is why we “cannot start out in ... ethical training ... with an innocence which is natural to us but must rather begin from the presupposition of a depravity of our power of choice” (RGV, 6:51). The challenge for Kant is to give an account of moral education that shows how something that starts out “crooked” can be made “straight” (RGV, 6:100).

But while the concepts of evil and education are clearly interlinked for Kant, there are also important internal tensions between them. First, in giving his account of how we can overcome evil, Kant seems to give not one but two accounts of moral progress. We can call these the *gradualist* and *revolutionary* accounts of moral progress. But these two accounts seem to have different implications for how we should think about moral education. Is this internally consistent? Some, such as Lewis White Beck (1978), have thought not. Are such concerns justified? Second, even if these two accounts of moral progress are consistent, there remains an important dispute in the secondary literature about which sort of progress comes first (Biss 2015; Allison 1990). Does a revolution in one’s disposition *precede* gradual progress towards the good, or does gradual progress toward the good *precede* a revolution in one’s disposition? This paper will explore these issues as follows. First, we outline the link between evil and education and detail four

¹ I use the following standard sigla for Kant’s work: *GMS* (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*); *MS* (*The Metaphysics of Morals*); *Päd* (*Lectures on Pedagogy*); *RGV* (*Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*).

components of moral expertise. We then turn to a key issue for this paper: outlining Kant's revolutionary and gradualist accounts of moral progress and establishing which comes first. I shall argue that, contra alternatives in the literature, for Kant gradual progress comes first, and a revolutionary change in our disposition is an asymptotic (but perhaps humanly unreachable) ideal that we should continually strive for. Finally, we shall look briefly at the implications this has for the cultivation of virtue.

2. Evil and the Four Components of Moral Expertise

Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) helpfully contrast the "romantic" and progressive views of moral education. The romantic view builds on the assumption that children are naturally good, and that educational practises should reflect this. The aim of this approach is not moral progress, since we are already naturally good, but to avoid moral regress through social corruption. In contrast, the progressive view, favoured by Kohlberg, aims to guide children through a series of distinct and ordered levels to the highest stage of cognitive and moral development. This approach assumes that we start out at a low level of development and need to become better by achieving the highest level of development. While Kant accepts elements of the romantic view (Cavallar 2014), his view is best thought of as a progressive one. For Kant, we start out evil and the aim of moral development is to overcome that initial corruption. However, while Kant broadly agrees with Kohlberg that the highest stage of development is the ability to think and reason for oneself in terms of universal principles (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972, 468), Kant differs from Kohlberg in stressing not just the *cognitive* ability to judge morally, but also the *volitional*, *affective* and *conative* components of virtue.

But to see this point, we first need to breakdown the different components of ethical expertise. Drawing on the neo-Kohlbergian account of Rest and colleagues, we can identify four interconnected components to moral expertise (Rest et al. 2000; Narvaez and Lapsley 2005). These are: moral *sensitivity* (the ability to be sensitive to the presence of moral issues); moral *judgment* (the ability to judge right and wrong); moral *focus* (the ability to prioritise moral judgments and moral values); and moral *action* (the ability to implement moral actions). Although Kant doesn't explicitly breakdown moral expertise in this way, all four components are essential in a Kantian framework. For Kant, to act morally we first need to be sensitive to the presence of a situation that calls for moral action (*sensitivity*), be able to judge what we morally ought to do in that situation (*judgment*), be able to prioritise morality and act from an interest in morality (*focus*), and then be able to skilfully implement what morality requires of us (*action*).

While Kant pays some attention to the development of all four components, his attention and interest is uneven. In terms of moral sensitivity, Kant's attention is arguably insufficient. In this regard, Barbara Herman (1993, 82, 93) argues that an account of

moral sensitivity, or what she calls Rules of Moral Salience (RMS), is needed to supplement a "Kantian account of moral judgment". This is essential, because we can't apply our powers of moral judgment unless we are first sensitive to the presence of morally salient features in our situation. In terms of moral judgment, Kant's discussion of "catechistic moral instruction" and the use of "casuistical question in the analysis of every duty" are both methods of helping students develop skills in moral judgment (MS, 6:477-484; Surprenant 2010). However, while these discussions imply that moral judgment must be cultivated, elsewhere Kant expresses what seems to be an overly optimistic view that "common human reason ... knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil" (GMS, 4:404). This optimism seems in tension with the need to develop judgment through considering casuistical questions. In terms of moral action, Kant primarily focuses on what we will, rather than on the consequences of our willing (GMS, 4:394). Nonetheless, he does mention action (and not just willing) at times, such as when he says that the problem with excessive alcohol consumption is that it can prevent the skilful use of our powers to realise moral choices (MS, 6:420). However, Kant's primary concern is with moral focus. This is because he sees the prioritizing of morality over self-love as the most important problem to be addressed by moral education. Since it is Kant's main concern, it will be ours too, although we shall also consider the other three components as appropriate.

3. Gradualist and Revolutionary Accounts of Moral Progress

Kant notes that the ancients discussed two key issues regarding virtue. First, "must virtue be learned"? Second, is there "more than one virtue" (i.e. is there a unity of the virtues)? (RGV, 6:25). These are clearly key questions for any theory of moral education, since if virtue can't be taught then it is unclear what role education could have in moral development, and if there is only one virtue then all virtues must be taught together or not at all. How does Kant answer these two questions? Surprisingly, he answers both questions in the affirmative *and* the negative. Kant (RGV, 6:25) says that the ancients answered both questions in the negative and "rightly so, for they were considering virtue *in itself*, in the *idea* of reason (how the human being ought to be)". On Kant's reading of the "ancients", virtue cannot be learned and there is only one virtue. But if we instead consider the human as he appears to be, then we should answer "both questions in the positive" (RGV, 6:25). That is, contra the ancients, virtue can be learned and there is more than one virtue.

But how can Kant claim that virtue can be learned and not learned, and that there is and isn't more than one virtue? By viewing the same phenomena from two different standpoints: first, what we ought to be and second, what we really are. Corresponding to these two standpoints, Kant develops two distinct accounts of moral progress. The first

gradualist account of progress focuses on a “*change of mores*” through gradual habituation. This takes up the standpoint of humans as vulnerable and imperfect agents. It focuses on the empirical elements of our character, such as our desires, emotions, and habitual dispositions. In its perfected form it is a type of virtue, “*virtus phaenomenon*” (RGV, 6:47). The second *revolutionary* account of progress focuses on a “*change of heart*” through a revolutionary change in our disposition or supreme character-defining value commitment. This takes up the standpoint of what we ought to be as rational agents. It focuses on our moral character. In its perfected form it is a different type of virtue, “*virtus noumenon*” (RGV, 6:47).

This dual account of moral development raises several questions. The two most important of these are whether the two accounts are compatible and what is the relationship between the two accounts. Regarding the first question, Beck (1978) argues that there is a tension between these two accounts that Kant never resolves. Does Kant resolve this tension? Regarding the second question, do the two accounts of progress operate concurrently or successively and, if the latter, which comes first? Does a good disposition (a “change of heart”) come first and ground gradual progress toward the good? Or does gradual progress toward the good (a “change of mores”) come first and lead to a good disposition? The first option has been defended recently by Biss (2015, 3), drawing on earlier work by Allison (1990, 169–70), whereas I have previously taken the second option, but without explicitly justifying it (Formosa 2007, 2011, 2017). Since resolving this second question (which comes first?), will also allow us to resolve the first question (are they compatible?), the question of which comes first will be our focus here.

Biss (2015, 3–4) admits that “the gradualist view of moral progress” found in the *Doctrine of Virtue* seems to stand in contrast with the “revolutionary approach taken in the *Religion*”. However, Biss argues that Kant’s idea of a one-off *resolution* [*Entschliessung*] to practice virtue in the *Doctrine of Virtue* is equivalent to Kant’s idea of a revolution in one’s disposition [*Revolution in der Gesinnung*] in the *Religion*. Further, she argues that for Kant a *resolution* to pursue virtue is the *necessary* precondition for any moral progress whatsoever. Since this resolution and a dispositional revolution are equivalent on Biss’s reading, it follows that a good disposition is a *necessary* precondition for any moral progress whatsoever. Thus, for Biss, a good disposition (“change of heart”) must come first and only then can gradual progress (“change of mores”) be made.

What evidence is there for this reading? Kant (RGV, 6:48) says that in order to “be good”, both a “revolution ... in the mode of thought” and “a gradual reformation in the mode of sense” is required. But which comes first? Kant (RGV, 6:48) writes:

If by a single and unalterable decision a human being reverses the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was an evil human being ... he is ... a subject receptive to the good; but he is a good human being only in incessant laboring and becoming

i.e. he can hope - in view of the purity of the principle which he has adopted as the supreme maxim of his power of choice, and in view of the stability of this principle - to find himself upon the good (though narrow) path of constant progress from bad to better.

This seems to imply that a revolution, in the form of a "single and unalterable decision [*EntschlieÙung*]" to reverse your underlying evil disposition and adopt a good one, is the *first* step in making yourself "receptive to the good". Once receptive to the good, you can *then* commence on the gradual path of progress from bad to better. "From this", Kant (RGV, 6:48) says:

it follows that a human being's moral education [*die moralische Bildung des Menschen*] must begin, not with an improvement of mores [*der Besserung der Sitten*], but with the transformation of his attitude of mind [*der Umwandlung der Denkungsart*] and the establishment of a character, although it is customary to proceed otherwise and to fight vice individually, while leaving their universal root undisturbed.

These passages seem to straightforwardly support Biss's approach: a good disposition comes first and is the necessary precondition for gradual moral progress. This implies that moral education must start with a reversal of our character defining disposition through a change of heart and only then seek gradual improvement via a change of mores. While this is a straightforward reading of these passages, there is nonetheless a significant problem with this approach as it leads to the following dilemma. Either a good disposition is a comparatively easy thing to acquire and therefore common, in which case we can't make sense of Kant's claims about radical evil. Or a good disposition is a comparatively hard (or impossible) thing to acquire and therefore uncommon (or non-existent), in which case the possibility of making *any* moral progress *whatsoever* is impossible for most (or all) people. If we take the first horn of the dilemma, we are forced to give up on Kant's claims about radical evil. This is a problem because Kant's claims about radical evil are independently plausible (Formosa 2007).² We are forced to give up on Kant's account of radical evil because that account depends on the claim that a good disposition is incompatible with any wrongdoing whatsoever under any circumstances. But given that all humans are disposed to act wrongly under some circumstances, it follows that a good disposition is universally absent among humans. This is incompatible with the claim that a good disposition is a comparatively easy thing to acquire and therefore common. Alternatively, if we take the second horn of the dilemma, we are forced to deny to most (or all) people the very possibility of making *any* moral progress *whatsoever*. If a good

² There has been an increasingly wide acceptance of the importance of Kant's account of radical evil – see, for example, Anderson-Gold and Muchnik (2010).

disposition is universally absent among humans, as Kant's claims about radical evil imply, then no human can make any progress whatsoever, given that having a good disposition is a necessary first step to making moral progress. But denying that most (or all) humans can make *any* moral progress *whatsoever* is a highly unappealing option. Given that neither horn of the dilemma is appealing, how can we avoid the dilemma altogether?

We can avoid this dilemma by flipping the relationship between sudden revolution and gradual reform. Rather than holding that a good disposition is a necessary first step to gradual moral reform, we can instead hold that gradual moral reform is a necessary step toward ideally perfecting our virtue through acquiring a good disposition. This alternative avoids the above dilemma. First, because it allows us to say that acquiring a good disposition is neither easy nor common (indeed, it may be humanly impossible), and this allows us to make sense of Kant's claims about radical evil which imply that a good disposition is universally absent (at least initially). Second, because it allows us to avoid having to say that a good disposition, which most or all people lack, is a necessary first step for making moral progress. This means that we don't have to deny to most (or all) people the possibility of making *any* moral progress *whatsoever*. This allows us to say both that a good disposition is rare (or impossible), in-line with Kant's claims about radical evil, while still holding that moral progress is a viable option for everyone. On this approach, rather than see a good disposition as the starting point of moral progress, we instead see it as the endpoint.

4. How to Seek a Good Disposition

While this flipped approach might seem appealing as it avoids the above dilemma, to properly defend this approach we still need to justify the claim that Kant's views on radical evil imply both that a good disposition is incompatible with any wrongdoing and that a good disposition is universally absent. This reading of Kant's argument for radical evil, which I have defended previously (Formosa 2007), relies on three key claims. First, the rigorist claim that a disposition is either good or evil. Second, the evil disposition derivation whereby Kant argues that from even a *single* act of wrongdoing we can *a priori* infer an evil disposition. Third, the universalist claim that an evil disposition is universal in the human species because a disposition for wrongdoing is universal among humans. We shall now look at each key claim in turn.

Kant's rigorism is undeniable. He clearly states that "between an evil and a good disposition ... there is no intermediate position" (RGV, 6:20). If we know that a disposition is not good, then we know that it must be evil, since there is no middle ground. So how do we tell if a disposition is good or evil? Kant's evil disposition derivation addresses this question. Here Kant (RGV, 6:38-39) writes:

In order, then, to call a human being evil, it must be possible to infer a priori from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim, and, from this, the presence in the subject of a common ground [i.e. an evil disposition], itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims.

From even a *single* wrongful action, we can *a priori* infer that an evil disposition must underlie that action. If we can infer an evil disposition from a single wrongful action, it follows that a good disposition is incompatible with a single wrongful action. Of course, as Kant makes clear, we cannot infer a good disposition from a complete lack of wrongful actions, since an agent who does no wrong may still have an evil disposition that has yet to manifest itself. As Kant (RGV, 6:39) puts it: "if nowhere is a virtue which no level of temptation can overthrow... [then] there is no one righteous [i.e. no one with a good disposition]". Since a good disposition is incompatible with *any* wrongdoing, a good disposition must be an effective unconditional commitment to *always* put morality first no matter what temptation is faced and under any circumstances.

This also tells us that a good disposition is equivalent to perfected *virtue* but not equivalent to *holiness*. While a good disposition is incompatible with *adopting* wrongful maxims, it is compatible with having *temptations* to adopt wrongful maxims that are not acted upon. Holiness is a state in which we are never even *tempted* to act immorally. Given our finite and vulnerable natures, holiness is beyond us (MS, 6:396). Virtue, in contrast, is the strength to overcome counter-moral temptations. In its perfected form then, virtue is a good disposition, since a good disposition is a commitment to morality so strong that it cannot be overthrown by any level of temptation under any circumstances.

This understanding of a good disposition, which follows directly from Kant's evil disposition derivation, is incompatible with the alternative interpretation favoured by Biss. Instead, Biss claims that a good disposition is *compatible* with wrongdoing. She writes that someone with a good disposition may "demand unwarranted special treatment ... and hence *act* [my italics] on ill-formed maxims despite her good basic moral disposition" (Biss 2015, 4). This is no mere oversight, but a necessary consequence of Biss's approach. If we understand a good disposition to be the *starting* point for *any* moral progress as Biss does, rather than its ideal *endpoint* as I do, then you can't understand a good disposition to be incompatible with any wrongdoing, given the ubiquity of human wrongdoing. This is because you would then be impaled on the horn of the dilemma that would deny to all people the possibility of any moral progress whatsoever. Further, the claim that a good disposition is incompatible with wrongdoing is not a trivial claim for Kant. This is because Kant's entire argument for radical evil is premised on it, since that argument depends on being able to infer a priori an evil disposition from even a single wrongful action.

The third element of Kant's argument for radical evil is to move from a claim about individual dispositions to a claim about the character of the species via the universality of evil dispositions among humans. Kant (RGV, 6:21) writes:

That by the "human being" of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals ... but the whole species, this can only be demonstrated later on, if it transpires from anthropological research that the grounds that justify us in attributing one of these two characters [i.e. good or evil] to a human being as innate are of such a nature that there is no cause for exempting anyone from it, and that the character therefore applies to the species. Here Kant says that for the human *species* to count as being radically evil, it must be the case that humans *universally* or *without exception* have an evil disposition. The reason for this is that if every human without exception has an evil disposition (at least initially), then a propensity to evil can be said to "express" the "character" of the species.³

We can see here a contrast with the alternative approach favoured by Biss. Since, on this approach, a good disposition is common, Biss is forced to separate Kant's claims about the radical evil of the human species from claims about the ubiquity of evil dispositions. She argues, following Pablo Muchnik (2010, 133), that the "propensity to evil 'ranges over' all *Gesinnungen*, both good and evil, of individual agents" (Biss 2015, 5). But this seems to be incompatible with what Kant says above: namely, that there is no good reason for exempting anyone from having an evil disposition and that is *why* we can say that the human species has a propensity to evil. If we could exempt lots of humans from having an evil disposition, then we would no longer be *justified* in saying that a propensity to evil expresses the character of the species. Once again, we see that interpreting a good disposition as the starting point of moral progress is incompatible with Kant's arguments for radical evil. In contrast, the alternative approach proposed here *is* compatible with those arguments. Since a good disposition is the ideal endpoint (which may be humanly beyond us) of moral progress, and not the starting point, we can make sense of the claim that we all have an evil disposition (at least initially) as without exception we all seem to start out lacking a commitment to morality that no temptation can overthrow.

However, we still need to return to those passages which seemed initially to support the approach favoured by Biss and others. In those passages Kant seems to say that we first need to engage in a sudden one-off revolution by adopting a good disposition to become "a subject receptive to the good" and only then can we make gradual moral progress. This is why a "human being's moral education must begin, not with an improvement of mores, but with the transformation of his attitude of mind" (RGV, 6:48).

³ But how this character can be, for Kant, both "innate" and yet "freely acquired" is clearly vexing - see (Fremstedal 2012).

But to understand these passages, consider them in the context of the following discussion of whether virtue is the result of habituation. Kant (RGV, 6:68-69) writes:

one cannot straightaway do all that one wants to do, without having first tried out and exercised one's powers. But the decision [or resolution] [*EntschlieÙung*] to do this [i.e. to become virtuous] must be made all at once and completely, since a disposition [*Gesinnung*] (*animus*) to surrender at times to vice, in order to break away from it gradually, would itself be impure and even vicious, and so could bring about no virtue (which is based on a single principle).

As this passage makes clear, *wanting* to be good and *being* good (i.e. having a virtue so strong that no temptation can overcome it) are not the same thing. Nonetheless, we first need to *want* or *resolve* to be better *all the time* if we are to become virtuous. If we resolve to be better only *sometimes*, then we are not resolving to become virtuous at all, since to pursue virtue is to pursue a commitment to morality that cannot be overcome by any temptation.

But wanting or resolving to be fully virtuous is not the same thing as having a good disposition since, as Kant says, we cannot straightaway do what we want. As Kant (RGV, 6:68) explains:

one who has always found himself unable to stand fast by his often repeated resolutions to be good [*Vorsatze zum Guten*] but has always relapsed into evil, or who has been forced to acknowledge that in the course of his life he has gone from bad to worse ... [such a one] can reasonably entertain no hope of improving.

In contrast, if his resolutions to be good are often kept and if he can see that he is going from bad to better, then he will gain greater courage and "increase his *strength* for future" progress (MS, 6:477). Success at keeping one's resolution to be virtuous is evidence of progress and signifies an increasing *strength*; that is, a higher degree of virtue in the form of a stronger dispositional commitment to morality. At its ideal, where the resolution is *always* kept, one might even hope that one's virtue has reached a perfected form which no temptation can overthrow under any circumstances. To reach that stage is to have finally undertaken a dispositional revolution and adopted a good disposition. But one can never be certain that such a revolution has been achieved, since a stronger temptation may come along that proves that one's virtue was imperfect. Given this uncertainty and given the need to avoid regression, we need to continually strive to further strengthen and reinforce our commitment to morality.

This means that we should read Kant as saying that it is a *resolution* in the sense of *wanting to be better*, and contra Biss and others not a good *disposition* or a *dispositional revolution*, that is the preceding step on the road to perfected virtue. This reading requires differentiating a resolution from a disposition. A *resolution* to be better is not the same thing as a *revolution* in one's moral disposition, because *resolving* or *wanting* to have an

unconditional commitment to morality is not the same thing as actually *having* such a commitment. To give a related example, resolving to give up smoking might be the first step to giving up smoking, but resolving to give up smoking is not the same thing as having an unconditional commitment to stop smoking under any circumstances. Resolving to stop smoking is compatible with smoking sometimes while making gradual progress, whereas an unconditional commitment to stop smoking under any circumstances is not compatible with subsequent smoking. The same point applies to a good disposition. Resolving to be better is compatible with occasional wrongdoing, whereas having a good disposition is not. Nonetheless, to pursue virtue itself directly we need to at least *want* to become better.

But if for Kant a disposition is only good or evil, and since we all have an evil disposition (at least initially), how can this account make any sense of moral progress that is short of adopting a good disposition? To answer this worry, we need to understand that virtue is a type of *strength* that comes *in degrees*: "For a human being's moral capacity would not be virtue were it not produced by the strength of his resolution (*Vorsatz*) in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations" (MS, 6:383). The *strength* of one's resolution already implies a matter of degree. A stronger resolution will be able to overcome stronger opposing inclinations than a weaker resolution. As the resolution to be better gets stronger and stronger, we gradually approach closer and closer to the ideal of an unconditional commitment to morality that no temptation can overthrow (i.e. a good disposition). This implies that different evil dispositions, while equally radically flawed at their root (because at some price point self-love is favoured over morality), can be comparatively better than others if they exemplify a commitment to morality that is less conditional and therefore stronger. This allows us to make sense of moral progress from worse to better, even while remaining radically evil. The asymptotic endpoint of this gradual progress is the revolutionary shift from an evil to a good disposition; that is, the shift from an ever stronger and stronger but ultimately conditional commitment to morality (i.e. an evil disposition), to an unconditional commitment to morality (i.e. a good disposition) that cannot be overthrown by any temptation whatsoever.

5. Kantian Moral Development

For Kant, the formation of moral beings begins at birth through the provision of love and care. The early stages of moral development (namely, "care" and "discipline") are thus not stages that we are even responsible for. However, at some point we begin to take on the responsibility, under appropriate guidance, for our own ethical "formation" (Päd, 9:441, 456; Formosa 2011). It is only at this point that a resolution to be better becomes an important step on the road towards developing virtue. With this resolution in place (which assumes an existing radical flaw), we can make gradual progress by cultivating a

change of mores through practicing being good. With good habits already in place, this process will be comparatively easier; without them, it will be harder (Päd, 9:444). If we have success at doing good deeds, we can gradually strengthen our commitment to morality in the face of temptation and comparatively weaken our radically deep commitment to self-love. Having success in this regard will also, hopefully, help to cultivate our pro-moral desires and emotions, such as love for others, which will further reinforce and express our commitment to morality (Formosa 2017). In time, this makes it easier to be moral and transforms our sense of identity to include a commitment to morality as self-defining. The ultimate endpoint of this process of gradual progress, which is likely to take many years of adulthood, is the sudden acquisition of a good disposition or perfected virtue. However, given the counterfactual nature of a good disposition, we can never *know* for sure that we have a good disposition, since even if we only perform moral actions, we might still be disposed to give up on morality if our commitment to morality came with a higher price than any we had previously faced. So, in practice, we must keep on strengthening and reinforcing that commitment to morality through gradual progress in the hope of eventually undertaking (or maintaining) a revolutionary change in our disposition.

With this model of moral progress in place, we can now understand why, for Kant, virtue both can and cannot be taught and is and is not singular. Virtue, in the *virtus noumenon* sense, is singular because virtue is simply a good disposition, and a good disposition, due to Kant's rigorism, is singular. We can also see why virtue in this sense cannot be taught. No one can teach you to *have* a good disposition. Since a good disposition is nothing other than a special meta-maxim that radically underlies all our other maxims, and since maxims (like ends) are things that we can only give ourselves (MS, 6:381), it follows that virtue is something that we must obtain for ourselves through adopting a good disposition. This explains why *virtus noumenon* requires a revolutionary view of moral progress. Adopting a maxim is not a lengthy or drawn out process. Changing a character-defining maxim, like the adoption of any other maxim, must therefore happen all at once. Thus, the change from an evil to a good disposition (i.e. a change of heart) cannot be anything other than a sudden revolutionary change.

Kant (MS, 6:395, 410) is careful to differentiate the singular "virtuous disposition", from the many "duties of virtue" we have. While virtue in the singular is a good disposition, virtues in the plural correspond to morally obligatory ends. There are several morally obligatory ends and thus several virtues (Denis 2014, 194). This is why when we think of virtue in the sense of "*virtus phaenomenon*", Kant holds that there are several distinct virtues, which can be cultivated separately, and which can be taught. Take the virtue of benevolence as an example. How do we become a benevolent person? For Kant, we don't start by cultivating the *feeling* of love for others. Rather, we start by *doing* good to others

through adopting benevolent ends, and doing good to others will gradually “produce love of them in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general)” (MS, 6:402). However, you might cultivate the virtue of benevolence in this way without also cultivating, for example, the virtue of gratitude by practising expressing gratitude. This explains why the virtues are several and distinct.

By developing the full suite of Kantian virtues, we not only achieve good ends, but also tend to develop pro-moral emotions and desires by doing those good ends. This helps to generate “a frame of mind that is both *valiant* and *cheerful* in fulfilling its duties” (MS, 6:484). This is important, because what “is not done with pleasure but merely as compulsory service has no inner worth ... such service is not loved by him; instead he shirks as much as possible for occasions for practising virtue” (MS, 6:484). Someone who doesn’t cultivate love for morality will not go looking for occasions to practice virtue. While doing this might not be strictly immoral, given the latitude that we have when it comes to imperfect duties such as benevolence, there is something less than virtuous about a person who shirks as much as is morally permissible from (in this case) helping others. In contrast, when we love to help others and are properly committed to morality, then we will *actively look* or *seek out* occasions for helping others, and thereby become a more benevolent person. Indeed, someone who is not a benevolent person may not even see certain opportunities for helping others. This last point links clearly to the role that habituating our emotions and desires can have in terms of moral sensitivity. The cultivation of pro-moral emotions and desires, such as love for others, can help us to see that an occasion for the practicing of virtue exists. This is because the right emotions are often essential to alerting us in real-time to the *presence* of a situation in which virtue might be called for (Sherman 1997). And the way to develop these emotions is through practice. Virtue “in this sense, is accordingly acquired *little by little*” through a “long habituation (in the observance of the law)” (RGV, 6:47).⁴ But capacities that can be acquired little by little through practice and reinforcement are precisely the sorts of things that can be taught. Thus, it follows that the plural virtues that comprise *virtus phaenomenon* (i.e. a change of mores) can be taught and are gradually acquired.

6. Conclusion

Of course, this hardly constitutes a complete account of Kantian moral education. Instead, we have primarily concentrated, as does Kant, on moral focus as the prioritising of morality as a response to our radical evil. But judgment, action and sensitivity also need cultivation

⁴ Kant (MS, 6:383) is careful to deny that virtue should be “defined and valued *merely* [*bloß*] [my italics] as an aptitude and ... a long-standing *habit* of morally good actions acquired by practice”. But such an aptitude does seem to be *part* of virtue (in the *virtus phaenomenon* sense), where that aptitude is based in a commitment to morality.

as part of moral education. These are all clearly interconnected. Developing a commitment to morality, for example, helps to clarify the absolute worth of human dignity, which can help to sharpen both sensitivity to situations where human dignity is at stake and the ability to judge what to do. Cultivating appropriate pro-moral feelings and desires through doing good will aid sensitivity, since emotions are important means to appreciate morally salient features in real-time, as well as aid action, since through practise one gets better at realising one's good ends. Likewise, cultivating judgment through learning a moral catechism and testing out our judging abilities through considering different casuistical questions (MS, 6:478-484), can help us to focus on what is morally important, which will aid the other components of ethical expertise. Spelling out a complete Kantian account of moral education would require elaborating on all these components and their interconnections, while developing scaffolded and age-specific guidelines and exercises, all the while situating this process in the context of a Kantian account of radical evil and historical progress. But although such a complete account is beyond the scope of any one paper, we have nonetheless made important progress toward it here by setting out the groundwork for any such account. We have done that by showing that, for Kant, a good disposition is the ideal endpoint, and not the necessary starting point, of moral progress. And the way to approach that revolutionary endpoint is through gradual progress in cultivating the various virtues through habituation and practise at adopting good ends.

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