The Moral Makeup of the World: Kierkegaard and Kant on the Relation between Virtue and Happiness in this World

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Abstract

While it is commonly held that natural evil and suffering undermine religious belief, Kant and Kierkegaard both argue that religion and ethics presuppose discontentment, hardship, and uncertainty. Both argue that moral purity requires that this world be imperfect both in the sense of having restricted knowledge and in the sense that virtue does not lead to happiness. Thus, both thinkers make constitutive assumptions about the moral structure of the world on practical grounds. But whereas Kant insists that there must be some connection in this world between morality and happiness, Kierkegaard tends to deny this, portraying this world either as amoral (in 1843–46) or as evil (in 1850–55).

I. Kant's Thought-Experiment

In the second *Critique*, Kant puts forward a thought-experiment in order to discuss our striving for the highest good, a moral world where virtue leads to happiness.[1] Kant asks what would be the result of possessing insight [*Erleuchtung*] into the relation between happiness and virtue. He gives the following answer:

> [T]he *inclinations*, which always have the first word, would first demand their satisfaction, and combined with reasonable reflection, their greatest possible and most lasting satisfaction under the name of *happiness*; the moral law would afterward speak, in order to keep them within their proper limits and even to subject them all to a higher end which has no regard to inclination. But instead of the conflict that the moral disposition now has to carry on with the inclinations…*God and eternity with their awful majesty* would stand unceasingly *before our eyes*….Transgression of the law would, no doubt, be avoided:

1 Regarding the key role the highest good plays in Kant's critical philosophy, see Philip Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reason*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2005, pp. 43–66.

what is commanded would be done; but because the *disposition* from which actions ought to be done cannot be instilled by any command, and because the spur to activity in this case would be promptly at hand and *external*, reason would have no need to work itself up so as to gather strength to resist the inclinations.[2]

We find basically the same thought-experiment in *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion:*

[S]uppose we could attain to knowledge of God's existence through experience or some other way…suppose further that we could really reach as much certainty through this knowledge as we do in intuition; then all morality would break down. In his every action the human being would represent God to himself as a rewarder or avenger; this image would force itself involuntarily on his soul, and his hope for reward and fear of punishment would take the place of moral motives; the human being would be virtuous from sensible impulses.[3]

If the outcome (consequences) of actions were not uncertain, then we would act, not from duty, but out of fear of punishment or hope of reward.[4] Our interest in happiness would undermine morality, since we would be motivated by happiness, not duty. If we knew that virtue led to happiness, and vice to unhappiness, then we would act *in order to* become happy. Thus, virtue is reduced to an instrument in the quest for happiness; morality is reduced to prudence. Kant concludes, "most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty."[5] Also, he suggests that acting out of fear and hope represents legality rather than morality.[6]

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2 Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 257 f.; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Kritik der Urteilskraft* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 146 f. When English translations of Kant are available, I first refer to the pagination in the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (vols. 1–16, ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997 ff.) and then to the pagination in the *Akademieausgabe* of Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (vols. 1–29, Berlin: De Gruyter 1900 ff.), except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* where references are to the A and B editions.

3 Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. by Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 415 f.; Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, pp. 1083 f.

4 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 257 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 146 f.).

5 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 258 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 147).

6 Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. by Peter Heath and Jerome B. Schneewind, trans. by Peter Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

The argument presupposes that man seeks happiness and that he is given insight into what brings it about. Given these premises we can expect man to try to bring about happiness by being obedient or by conforming to law. However, this interpretation is too simplistic. As Kant makes clear later on in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* we have not only the incentive (*Triebfeder*) of self-love or happiness but also the capacity to be motivated by the moral law by seeing it as making valid claims on us (something I will refer to as the moral incentive).[7] If we lacked the moral incentive, we would not be accountable, since we would be natural beings, not moral beings. Conversely, if the moral incentive alone exists, then we cannot choose to act immorally.[8] Since both incentives are necessary both must be adopted into one's maxim.[9] Kant concludes,

> whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not the material of the maxim) but in their *subordination* (in the form of the maxim): *which of the two he makes the condition of the other.* It follows that the human being…is evil only because he reverses the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims…he makes the incentives of self-love and their inclinations the condition of compliance with the moral law—whereas it is this latter that, as *the supreme condition* of the satisfaction of the former, should have been incorporated into the universal maxim of the power of choice [*Willkür*] as the sole incentive.[10]

Evil takes the form of prioritizing the incentive of happiness (self-love) over the moral incentive, whereas good involves the opposite priority. The latter does not necessarily mean, however, that happiness is resigned. Kant actually considers both virtue and happiness to be necessary. However, it is crucial that priority is given to morality so that happiness is conditioned and limited by morality—something that corresponds to the con-

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2001, pp. 244 f.; Immanuel Kant, *Kleinere Vorlesungen und Ergänzungen I* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 29, pp. 627 f.

7 Cf. Henry Allison, "On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 36, 2002, pp. 339 f.; Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1970, pp. 210–215; Paul Formosa, "Kant on the Radical Evil of Human Nature," *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 38, 2007, p. 222, p. 228 and pp. 234 f.

8 Cf. Allison, "On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil," p. 340.

9 Cf. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 82 f.; Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft. Die Metaphysik der Sitten* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 36.

10 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 83 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 36).

cept of the highest good, a moral world where virtue leads to happiness. However, in this context virtue means morality, not merely legality or prudence. Thus, the highest good conditions happiness on moral purity, whereas the thought-experiment conditions happiness on prudence, legality and obedience.

This account of moral agency from *Religion* appears to undermine the thought-experiment from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, since the thought-experiment fails to make it clear why we would have to be motivated by happiness even if we were given insight into what brings it about. Kant says that "the human being would be virtuous from sensible impulses" and that the inclinations would "have the final word,"[11] but this seems to go against the so-called "incorporation thesis." This thesis says that following inclinations involves freely incorporating these into one's maxim; any case of following inclinations rather than the moral law implies active resistance to the moral incentive.[12] If happiness and virtue are both necessary, then it is not clear why we would prioritize happiness over virtue even if we knew what brings about happiness.[13]

But what if the insight that the thought-experiment speaks of would be an insight into happiness being caused by something other than morality or legality? Would not this knowledge undermine morality? It seems so, given Kant's view that happiness represents a necessary purpose. Kant suggests that one wants knowledge about the existence of God, since one would like to know whether being moral pays off.[14] In the case that there is no God and virtue does not systematically result in happiness, one would have to choose between happiness and virtue. One can then either be a prudential scoundrel or a virtuous fool who tries to deny the importance of happiness.[15] The former goes against moral purity. The latter

11 See Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 416 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1084); Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 257 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 146).

12 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 73 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, pp. 23 f.).

13 A similar conclusion is reached by Eric Watkins, although he does not rely on *Religion.* Cf. Eric Watkins, "Kant on the Hiddenness of God," *Kantian Review*, vol. 14, 2009, pp. 81–122.

14 Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, pp. 198 f. (*Reflexion* 5495).

15 A similar, but not identical, dilemma is found in the moral argument for God's existence: Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. by Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 133 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 29, pp. 777 f.); See also Kant, *Lectures on*

denies the importance of happiness, and is described by Kant as a fool (or a *Phantast*) who denies his own nature and "expect[s] no consequences which are worthy of" his conduct.[16] Kant suggests that this type of position represents an "unstable condition [*schwankender Zustand*] in which one continuously falls from hope into doubt and mistrust."[17] The point seems to be that the virtuous is prone to give up hope, especially in cases where nature does not play into one's hands, such as when facing unhappiness or sickness.

In the case that there is a God who rewards virtue, one also has two options. One can either merely conform to the law or act out of duty, that is, either act prudentially or morally. However, the latter would require that one *ignores* the insight into the relation between virtue and happiness and does good for its own sake. Kant appears to believe that doing so would be virtually impossible for humans, therefore saying that it is beneficial that such knowledge is not available to us.[18]

II. Constitutive Assumptions about the Moral Structure of this World

Even if the thought-experiment is slightly diffuse, its implications are extraordinary: Kant says that it is desirable that the objects of moral faith (i. e., the highest good, immortality, and God) remain distant and uncertain, suggesting that it is *undesirable* that virtue is straightforwardly rewarded with happiness (and vice with unhappiness).[19] The thought-experiment indicates what we *can only be moral in an imperfect world*, a world where virtue does *not* always lead to happiness and where the outcome of actions is uncertain. Kant concludes, "If there were no dispro-

Ethics, pp. 45–47; Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 27, pp. 249–252.

16 Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 133 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 29, p. 777); cf. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 406 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1072).

17 Kant, *Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie* (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28), p. 1151.

18 In the thought-experiment God functions as a divine judge who rewards virtue and punishes vice. Kant's analysis suggests that we must remain ignorant about God as a judge. See Watkins, "Kant on the Hiddenness of God," pp. 83–93.

19 Cf. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 258 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 147).

portion at all between morality and well-being here in this world, there would be no opportunity for us to be truly virtuous."[20]

Kant can be taken to make two different claims here. On the one hand, he appears to make an *ontological* claim to the effect that there *is* a disproportion between morality and happiness (or well-being) in this world. Although Kant occasionally suggests that *experience* shows that virtue does not lead to happiness,[21] the above suggests that morality would be undermined if virtue simply led to happiness. Thus, morality presupposes a disproportion between morality and happiness (although the highest good involves that this disproportion can ultimately be overcome, if only in the afterlife).

On the other hand, Kant can be seen as making an *epistemological* claim to the effect that we must remain ignorant about whether virtue leads to happiness or unhappiness. First, we cannot know whether we—or others—are virtuous, for this would require knowing our fundamental disposition, something which involves having intellectual intuition or scrutinizing hearts. Second, we cannot know whether virtue leads to happiness in this world, and vice to unhappiness, since this would also require having intellectual intuition. More specifically, it would involve having knowledge of intelligible causation by knowing how our dispositions or the intelligible world (noumena) affects the natural world (phenomena). Clearly, this goes beyond having knowledge about phenomena (*Erscheinungen*).[22] Such knowledge is impossible, and Kant concludes, "we have only a very obscure and ambiguous view [*sehr dunkele und zweideutige Aussicht*] into the future."[23]

The epistemological claim is weaker than the ontological claim, since it only says something about how the world appears to us, not how it is in itself. Nevertheless, it is problematic to hold the epistemological claim only, since this leaves the possibility that this world *is* morally perfect although it may not appear so. If we claim that the world itself is morally good, we stand in danger of legitimizing everything that happens in the world. When happiness is seen as a result of virtue, we justify those who are successful; when unhappiness is seen as a result of vice, we de-

20 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 414 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, pp. 1081 f.).

21 Cf. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 420 f. and pp. 406 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1090, pp. 1072 f.).

22 See Reiner Wimmer, *Kants kritische Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1990, pp. 97–108 (*Kant-Studien-Ergänzungshefte*, vol. 124).

23 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 258 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 147)

monize the miserable.[24] Kant avoids this problem by making an ontological claim to the effect that virtue does not systematically lead to happiness in this world.[25] Also, he states that the laws and order of nature *are* different from freedom and the laws of morality.[26] Because this-worldly happiness is dependent on nature, and morality (or virtue) is a concept of freedom, it is suggested that happiness and virtue are not perfectly aligned but only contingently related. Kierkegaard describes this point, in his notes from Hans Lassen Martensen's lectures, by saying that "[T]he entire world is, in a way, cleft into a dualism, for nature goes its necessary way unconcerned about the moral law."[27]

The thought-experiment can be taken to say that the relation between virtue and happiness must be opaque in this world; we must be ignorant about the outcome of acts (and our dispositions). Hence, being committed towards morality involves ignorance and risking unhappiness. This suggests that ignorance and the risk of unhappiness form necessary presuppositions for morality. However, it does not say *how much* risk or unhappiness is necessary. It only says that morality presupposes *friction:* freedom and its laws cannot overlap completely with nature and its laws. Because of the very nature of moral agency, there must be a *gap* between freedom and nature that cannot be completely bridged in this life.

24 Cf. Jacqueline Marina, "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good," *Kant-Studien*, vol. 19, 2000, p. 340.

25 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 406–411, pp. 413 f. and p. 420 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, pp. 1072–1074, pp. 1076 f., pp. 1081 f. and pp. 1089 f.); Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 25 and p. 29; Immanuel Kant, *Abhandlungen nach 1781* in *Gesammelten Schriften*, vol. 8, p. 257 and p. 261; Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 243, pp. 231 f. and pp. 256 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 128, pp. 113–115 and p. 145; Kant, *Lecture on Ethics*, pp. 92 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 27, p. 302); Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 133 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 29, p. 777); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 680; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg: Meiner 1990, A811/B839.

26 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 256 f. and p. 231 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 145, p. 113); cf. Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, pp. 305 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 27, p. 549); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 317 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 452).

27 *SKS* 19, 141, Not 4:12 / *KJN* 3, 141.

Thus, Kant makes *constitutive* assumptions about the moral structure of the world on practical grounds.[28] Susan Neiman comments:

> The best of all possible worlds is not a world we could live in, for the very notion of human freedom depends on limitations. To act freely is always to act *without* enough knowledge or power—that is, without omniscience or omnipotence. Not knowing whether our good intentions will be rewarded is essential to our having them….Solving the problem of evil is not only impossible but immoral. For knowing the connections between moral and natural evils [unhappiness, suffering] would undermine the possibility of morality.[29]

Elsewhere, Neiman argues that a complete secularization of religious belief is finally impossible for Kant, because of the gap between reason and nature:

> If the need to find reason in the world itself seems outdated, Kant's acknowledgement that we cannot do so is deeply modern. And it is this acknowledgement that is missed by the attempt to view the highest good in purely secular terms. Nothing else in Kant's work exposes so clearly the gap that he believes to separate reason from nature. Morality, the product of pure practical reason, is free of all natural conditions, happiness is wholly dependent on the natural world ([*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.] V, [p.] 453). Our desire to become the authors of our own happiness is a desire to overcome that separation. But despite suggestions to the contrary, Kant's notion of the highest good is not a means by which to do so….Rational faith is the means that permits us to live with the consciousness of this separation, allowing us to hope that the world will become a place more appropriate to reason's needs.[30]

The highest good represents the ultimate synthesis of virtue and happiness, freedom and nature. The highest good is the idea of a moral world where virtue leads to happiness with necessity. Since virtue cannot lead to happiness in this world without exception, the highest good must transcend this world. Also, morality as such represents something transcendent since it is a never-ending task to be moral.[31] This means that the highest good cannot be conceived of in purely this-worldly, historical,

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28 Cf. Frederick Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Guyer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 620 and p. 622.

29 Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002, p. 68.

30 Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, pp. 178 f.

31 For an interpretation of the Kingdom of God on earth as the earth transformed into the highest good after the second coming of Christ, see Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 599.

and secular terms (although this has been suggested by some Kant scholars).[32]

III. Kierkegaard on Virtue and Happiness

On the following points, the views of Kant and Kierkegaard converge: First, Kierkegaard's notion of finitude comes close to that of Kant. Like Kant, Kierkegaard holds that "Human reason fails through its essential finitude to be an absolute (perspectiveless) perspective of the world."[33] Second, both Kant and Kierkegaard claim that we cannot decide objectively or theoretically whether God exists, but we can solve the matter on subjective, practical, and moral grounds.[34] Third, both endorse moral purity, not eudaimonism.[35] Fourth, both see the highest good as a synthesis of virtue and happiness that transcends this world, belonging to the hereafter.[36] Fifth, Kierkegaard sees discontentment as necessary in a way reminiscent of Kant. Indeed, Ronald Green has claimed that "In sharp contrast to the whole eudaimonistic tradition in its many forms, both [Kant and Kierkegaard] maintain that, in this world, virtue and personal happiness are usually inversely related to each other."[37] However, I will argue that Kant is more optimistic than this, seeing this world as *teleologically* ordered towards the highest good. Kierkegaard,

32 For an overview and references, see Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 599, pp. 602–604, pp. 621 f. and p. 628.

33 Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1991, p. 89; cf. Stephen Evans, *Subjectivity and Religious belief*, Washington, D.C.: University Press of America 1982, p. 75; cf. Ronald Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant*, Albany: The State University of New York Press 1992, pp. 121–146.

34 See Evans, *Subjectivity and Religious Belief*, pp. 9–13, pp. 74–75, pp. 77–78, p. 83, pp. 165–73 and pp. 178–80; Roe Fremstedal, "The Moral Argument for the Existence of God and Immortality: Kierkegaard and Kant," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (forthcoming).

35 Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, London: Routledge 1993, pp. 225–227; George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2005, pp. 99–102; Evans, *Subjectivity and Religious Belief*, p. 105.

36 Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, New York: Humanity 1999, pp. 142–147; Roe Fremstedal, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kierkegaard and Kant," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 69, 2011, pp. 155–171.

37 Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant*, p. 107.

on the other hand, does not share Kant's optimism, describing this world as amoral (the 1843–46 period) or evil (the 1850–55 period). Finally, I suggest that Kant may be used to criticize some of Kierkegaard's more extreme views. In the following I will focus on the relation between happiness and virtue in this world, since this issue has received less attention than the other points in the existing literature.

Although it is commonly held that evil and suffering *undermine* belief in an almighty and good God,[38] Kierkegaard appears to follow Kant in holding that ethics and religion *presupposes* both (epistemological) ignorance and an (ontologically) imperfect world.[39] However, rather than referring to Kant, Kierkegaard (Climacus) quotes approvingly a famous remark by Kant's contemporary Gotthold Lessing: "If God held all truth enclosed in his right hand, and in his left hand the one and ever-striving drive for truth, even with the corollary of erring forever and ever, and if he were to say to me: Choose!—I would humbly fall down to him at his left hand and say: Father, give! Pure truth is indeed only for you alone!"[40]

This quotation suggests that we should strive for truth rather than possess it. Elsewhere, Kierkegaard tries to improve on Lessing by saying: "[N]o, if God held salvation in his right hand and also held in his left hand the concern that had become the content of your life, would you not yourself choose the left although you nevertheless became like someone who chose the right?"[41] I take this to say that we do not get saved by choosing salvation, but by choosing the concern or striving that makes up our life. Instead of being motivated by salvation, happiness or bliss, we should be concerned with striving for good and truth for its own sake. Only he who strives in this manner becomes happy or saved. In this context, Kierkegaard (Climacus) explicitly breaks with eudaimonism, a position widespread among his predecessors.[42] Like Kant, Kierkegaard (Climacus) favors moral purity over eudaimonism:

38 See, for instance, Peter Zapffe, *Om det tragiske*, Pax: Oslo 1996, pp. 63–69, pp. 202–215 and pp. 478–489.

39 In this connection, Green (*Kierkegaard and Kant*, pp. 133–135) speaks not only of broad similarities but also of a striking affinity between Kierkegaard's thinking and Kant's thought-experiment (quoting *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 146 f.).

40 *SKS* 7, 103 / *CUP1*, 106 (italics removed); cf. *SKS* K7, 166.

41 *SKS* 5, 267 / *EUD*, 272.

42 *SKS* 7, 367, 385, 387, 546 / *CUP1*, 403, 423, 426, 602. Eudaimonism was a matter of much dispute in post-Kantian Danish philosophy and theology. Many refused to accept Kant's critique of eudaimonism. See, for example, Carl Henrik Koch,

True ethical enthusiasm [*Begeistring*] consists in willing to the utmost of one's capability, but also, uplifted in divine jest, in never thinking whether or not one thereby achieves something. As soon as he [*Villien*—the will] begins to cast a covetous eye on the outcome, the individual begins to become immoral—the energy of the will becomes torpid, or it develops abnormally into an unhealthy, unethical, mercenary hankering that, even if it achieves something great, does not achieve it ethically—the individual demands something other than the ethical itself. A truly great ethical individuality would consummate his life as follows: he would develop himself to the utmost of his capability; in the process he perhaps would produce a great effect in the external world [*i det Ytre*], but this would not occupy him at all, because he would know that the external is not in his power and therefore means nothing either *pro* or *contra.* He would remain in ignorance about it, lest he be delayed by the external and fall into its temptation.[43]

It is desirable to remain ignorant about the consequences of one's actions—especially about whether they lead to happiness. If not, one ends with a mercenary hankering (*lønsyg Higen*) instead of morality proper, since then one would do good in order to become happy. This point applies not only to ethics but also to religion. Kierkegaard (Climacus) writes:

Whereas up to now faith has had a beneficial taskmaster in uncertainty, it would have its worst enemy in…certainty. That is, if passion is taken away, faith no longer exists, and certainty and passion do not hitch up as a team [*Vished og Lidenskab spændes ikke*]. Let an analogy illustrate this. Whoever believes that there is a God and also a providence has an easier time (in preserving the faith), an easier time in definitely gaining the faith (and not an illusion) in an imperfect world, where passion is kept vigilant, than in an absolutely perfect world. In such a world, faith is indeed inconceivable. Therefore it is also taught that faith is abolished in eternity.[44]

Faith is said to presuppose an imperfect world and uncertainty. However, it seems clear that we are speaking not only of restricted knowledge but also of virtue not always leading to happiness. Kierkegaard's earlier pseudonymous writings present this world as *indifferent* towards good and

Dansk oplysningsfilosofi, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2003, pp. 96–99, pp. 123–127 and pp. 279 ff.; Anders Thuborg, *Den Kantiske periode i dansk filosofi*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1951, chapter 8. Those who defend eudaimonistic virtue ethics today claim that eudaimonistic ethics is egoistic in a formal sense only; its content can be as other-regarding as that of other systems of ethics. See Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, pp. 127 f.

43 *SKS* 7, 126 f. / *CUP1,* 135 f. Cf. *SKS 7*, 270 f., 125 f., 129 ff. and 144 / *CUP1*, 296 f., 134 f., 138 ff. and 155.

44 *SKS* 7, 36 / *CUP1*, 29 f.

evil: "[I]mperfection is the fundamental law of the external world, and here it happens again and again that he who does not work does get bread, and he who sleeps gets it even more abundantly than he who works …. It is different in the world of the spirit. Here an eternal divine order prevails…only the one who works gets bread."[45]

In this world goodness is not rewarded, neither is evil punished. *Fear and Trembling* describes this by saying that "the external world" is "subject to the law of indifference," comparing this-worldly happiness with a price won in a lottery.[46] Essentially the same point is made in *Postscript*, except the focus lies on world history:

> [T]he absolute ethical distinction between good and evil is world-historically-esthetically neutralized in the esthetic-metaphysic category of "the great," "the momentous," to which the bad and good have equal access. In the world-historical, an essential role is played by factors of another kind, different from the ethical-dialectical: namely, the accidental, circumstances, that play of forces in which the reshaping totality of historical life absorbs the individual's actions in order to transform it into something different that does not directly belong to him. Neither by willing the good to the utmost of his ability nor by willing evil with diabolic callousness is a person assured of becoming world-historical …. Ethically viewed, he becomes world-historical by accident.[47]

The *Postscript* describes religiousness—both Christian faith and natural religion—in terms of suffering: one suffers by virtue of being separated from the highest good (eternal bliss), one's very telos.[48] While happiness and virtue are perfectly aligned in the hereafter, this is not the case in this world. Kierkegaard (Climacus) therefore writes: "the specific sign that one relates oneself to the absolute [telos, the highest good] is that not only is there no reward to expect but suffering to endure."[49] Suffering has a general meaning—passivity—and a specific meaning—*Qual*

45 *SKS* 4, 123 / *FT*, 27.

46 *SKS* 4, 123, 156 / *FT*, 27, 63.

47 *SKS* 7, 126 / *CUP1*, 134.

48 Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, pp. 161–165; Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, "Suffering," in *Kierkegaard and Human Values*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1980 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 7), p. 135 and. p. 143. This also holds for Christian suffering: "Because they are separated from the eternal, everyone suffers…the temporal condition makes impossible the full possession of the eternal and, in this sense, there is still a source of pain within human beings" (Benjamin Olivares Bøgeskov, "Can We Joyfully Will One Thing? The Place of Joy in the Present Life According to 'The Purity of Hearth,'" *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2007, pp. 144 f.).

49 *SKS* 7, 366 / *CUP1*, 402. Cf. *SKS* 5, 326–328 / *EUD*, 337–339.

(agony, anguish, or torment). We are passive insofar as we cannot save ourselves, being dependent on divine assistance in order to realize the highest good.[50] And we are subject to agony insofar as we experience injustice and hardship, since virtue does not result in happiness here.

What then is the solution to suffering? Kierkegaard answers: "The external impossibility of being able to free oneself from the suffering does not prevent the internal possibility of actually being able to make oneself free in the suffering, of being able freely to take the suffering upon oneself since the patient one gives *his consent* by *willing* to submit to the suffering."[51] Insofar as one freely takes over suffering, as long one wants it, one is not simply a victim of it.[52] Although this may sound Nietzschean to us, Kierkegaard views this solution as exclusively Christian, saying that (natural) man does not seek suffering and abasement.[53] Christian suffering takes the form of imitating Christ, something that involves self-denial, obedience, and martyrdom.[54] Since Christianity is opposed to the world, nothing "is more certain than what the New Testament predicts, that the true Christian will come to be hated, despised, put to death, and with a passion expended on no one else who is put to death."[55] Kierkegaard's last writings go beyond the early writings by describing this world as evil and sinful, as a vale of tears, and as an asylum where one gets punished ("*en Straffe-Anstalt*").[56] On this view, the crucifixion of Christ shows just how the world reacts to goodness, namely, with punishment and mockery. Understandingly, this extreme view—a view belonging to the 1850–55 period, culminating in the 1854–55 writings—has led to accusations of nihilism and pessimism.[57]

50 Cf. Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, p. 161.
51 *SKS* 8, 220 / *UD*, 119.
52 David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 176.
53 *SKS* 12, 170 / *PC*, 167.
54 Michael Olesen, "The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard's Gospel," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2007, pp. 181 f.
55 *SKS* 25, 370, NB29:107 / *JP* 3, 2908.
56 *SKS* 13, 307 / *M*, 251.
57 Cf. Johannes Sløk, *Da Kierkegaard tav*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1980, pp. 7 f., p. 98, p. 103, p. 106, p. 110, pp. 112 f., p. 121, p. 125, p. 127, p. 135 and p. 137; Michael Theunissen, *Der Begriff Verzweiflung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1993, p. 155 (note 24). Kierkegaard is hostile towards the body and sexuality (cf. *SKS* 13, 307 / *M*, 251). Although the same tendency is found in Kant, he appears less extreme. Cf. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 265; Kant,

In 1839 Kierkegaard refers approvingly to the Judeo-Christian doctrine that creation is "very good."[58] Later he (Climacus) makes it clear that man's fallen nature, his sinfulness, alienates him from divine goodness.[59] But it is not entirely clear that Kierkegaard's later comments about the world being evil only refer to human evil (as might seem reasonable); for the world itself is portrayed as a place where virtue leads typically to unhappiness, mocking and punishment. Ultimately, a notion of an evil world threatens to undermine not only the goodness of creation but also divine goodness.[60] Nevertheless, Kierkegaard maintains (in 1850) that an "eternal blessedness or unblessedness is decided in time by a relation to something historical."[61] Despite everything, this world is supposed to make it possible for one to become a good person (i. e., a Christian), something that involves anticipating the highest good by believing in—and hoping for—good. But instead of hoping for good in this world, Kierkegaard appears to hope for the afterlife. At worst, the notions of an evil and an amoral world could undermine our ability to act morally: if morality cannot be realized at all in the world, this could lead one to despair and to give up on morals. This result would be as unwelcome to Kierkegaard as it would to Kant. One way of avoiding it is to move in the direction of Kant and Hegel by making room for the realization of morality in history. However, Kierkegaard's preferred solution is to see this life as an ordeal or examination that prepares for the realization of the highest good in the afterlife.

We can conclude that Kierkegaard is in essential agreement with Kant both when it comes to the epistemological point about our restricted knowledge *and* the ontological point about this world not being a moral world. Both are opposed to dreams of creating a perfect world here. Whereas Kant makes constitutive assumptions about the moral structure of the world on moral grounds, Kierkegaard goes beyond this in his analysis of Christian suffering by making constitutive assumptions based on Scripture and revelation. And whereas Kant speaks of a stepmotherly

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Der Streit der Fakultäten. Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, p. 40.

58 *SKS* 18, 20, EE:43 / *JP* 2, 1313; *SKS* K18, 37.

59 *SKS* 4, 251 / *PF*, 46 f.; Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, p. 114.

60 Cf. Sløk, *Da Kierkegaard tav.*

61 *SKS* 23, 116, NB16:33 / *JP* 3, 3093.

nature,[62] Kierkegaard (de Silentio) compares this world with a lottery and goes beyond Kant by depicting this world as amoral (in 1843–46 writings) or evil (in 1850–55 writings). We will see that although Kant partially agrees with the early Kierkegaard, he does not want to claim that this world is completely amoral.

IV. Discontentment and Hardship

We have seen Kierkegaard (Climacus) claiming that an imperfect world makes it possible to keep passion (*Lidenskab*) vigilant.[63] Although not perfectly clear, the reason appears to be that living in an imperfect world involves suffering and yearning for something better since we are not satisfied with the world's current state. Similarly, Kant argues that discontentment (*Unzufriedenheit*) is necessary for humans:

> What about *contentment* (*acquiescientia*) during life? —For the human being it is unattainable: neither from the moral point of view (being content with his good conduct) nor from the pragmatic point of view (being content with the well-being that he intends to secure through skill and prudence). As an incentive to activity [*Stachel der Thätigkeit*], nature has put pain in human being that he cannot escape from, in order always to progress toward what is better, and even in the last moments of life, contentment with the last stage of it can only be called comparative (partly because we compare ourselves with others, and partly because we compare ourselves with ourselves); but the contentment is never pure and complete. To be (absolutely) contended in life would be idle *rest* [Ruhe] and the standstill of all incentives, or the dulling of sensations and the activity connected with them.[64]

Moral contentment is unattainable since we can never be assured that we have done our very best, partially because we might have done better in the past and partially because of new tasks which stand before us. For

62 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 257 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 146); Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 50; Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1. Aufl. 1781). Prolegomena. Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p. 394.

63 *SKS* 7, 36 / *CUP1*, 29 f.

64 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. by Günter Zöller and Robert Louden, trans. by Mary Gregor, et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 338, cf. p. 341 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, pp. 234 f., cf. p. 238); see also Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 75 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 27); Kant, "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," in *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, p. 235 (*Reflexion* 536).

Kant as for Kierkegaard, being moral is a never-ending task from the temporal perspective. Neither can man be fully content with his well-being or happiness during life. First, this happiness is not a result of being completely virtuous and is therefore not morally deserved. Second, even happiness (as a concept of nature) is unattainable, at least as pure well-being. Kant states, "[i]ll [*Übel*] is necessary if the human being is to have a wish and an aspiration [*Verlangen*—demand] towards a better state [*Zustand*], and at the same time to learn to strive to become worthy of it."[65] This means that discontentment is necessary if man is to strive for something better and to become worthy of it (by being moral). Kant says contentment without desire, a pure pleasure, would result in the most useless human being in the world, a being that lacks the incentive (*Triebfeder*) to action. We cannot frame a correct concept of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) except by thinking of it as a *progress towards contentment*, since happiness and pleasure presuppose pain and discontentment.[66] For us, happiness is labor (*Arbeit*), difficulty (*Schwierigkeit*) and effort (*Mühe*) with the prospect of tranquility (*Ruhe*) (and the striving toward the achievement of the idea of *Ruhe*).[67]

Kant stresses that hardship is necessary in order for man to develop.[68] Kierkegaard, on the other hand, stresses that hardship (*Modgang*) is not only necessary but even fortunate.[69] One of Kierkegaard's points of departure here is the proverb "*Modgang er Medgang*," that "bad luck is good luck" (or "downs are ups"). Kierkegaard takes *Modgang* to refer to what hinders one in reaching the goals of temporality (for example, honor, wealth, and power), while *Medgang* refers to what contributes to-

65 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 413 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1081).

66 See Beatrix Himmelmann, *Kants Begriff des Glücks*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2003, pp. 15 ff. and p. 184 (*Kant-Studien-Ergänzungshefte*, vol. 142). See also Marina, "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good," p. 338.

67 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 413 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1080).

68 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 297 ff. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 430 ff.); Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 524 f. and pp. 533 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 394, p. 405). Some interpreters stress the role of suffering in this context. According to Despland, "On the Failure of All Philosophical Attempts in Theodicy" (1791) constitutes the decisive turning point where evil appears as something "that must be suffered and borne by man, Job-like in patience and faith" (Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press 1973, p. 171).

69 *SKS* 5, 116 ff. / *EUD*, 110 ff.

wards realizing the highest good or the Kingdom of God.[70] *Modgang* makes it easier to give up what Kierkegaard calls "poorer goods," the goals of temporality,[71] presumably because it is easier to forsake what one is denied than what one is given.[72] Elsewhere, Kierkegaard (Haufniensis) says that if everything goes regularly (*regelmæssig*) and good gets rewarded, then it is easy to merely strive for a finite good instead of the highest good.[73] Examples of this seem to be that one seeks honor, wealth, and power instead of virtue.

Kierkegaard claims that hardship is beneficial, since it can help us avoid self-deception and gain insight. Kierkegaard says that the "life-perilous spiritual decisions [*den aandelige Livsfares Afgjørelser*]…make it really clear on an enormous scale what good and evil dwells in a human being [*gjør det rent aabenbart, hvad Godt og Ondt der boer i et Menneske*]."[74] This suggests that the decisions you make, especially hard decisions, indicate your moral qualities or your moral identity. You do not really know what you are good for until you are put to the test. It is hard to know whether you can forsake something until you actually have to do it.[75] The luckier you are with external circumstances, the harder it is to avoid deceiving yourself by being in so-called inauthentic despair (Anti-Climacus). Kierkegaard concludes that one needs hardship (*Trængsel*) in order to wake up.[76] One needs to experience a loss of some kind since this leads to the possibility of (authentic) despair.[77] However, Kierkegaard still wants to maintain that all have essentially the same possibilities of overcoming despair by believing. Because of this he insists that it is ultimately oneself rather than the surroundings which blocks one's joy, peace and happiness.[78]

70 *SKS* 10, 159 f., 163 and 230–235 / *CD*, 151 f., 155 and 222–228.
71 Cf. *SKS* 10, 230–235 / *CD*, 222–228.
72 *SKS* 10, 164 / *CD*, 156 f.
73 *SKS* 4, 459 / *CA*, 160.
74 *SKS* 10, 272 / *CD*, 258.
75 Here it should be remembered that to forsake or to resign is an integral part of faith, at least if we interpret faith as implying the double movement found in *Fear and Trembling* (*SKS* 4, 129–145, 167, 189 f. and 197 / *FT*, 34–52, 75 f., 99–101 and 109).
76 *SKS* 10, 119 f. / *CD*, 108 f.
77 *SKS* 10, 117–124 / *CD*, 106–113. The same claim is also found in *Sickness unto Death.* See Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1997, pp. 143–153.
78 *SKS* 10, 120 / *CD*, 109 f.

Kant, on the other hand, states that human beings "can assess themselves and the strength of their maxims only by the upper hand they gain over the senses in time."[79] He says that when man has been luckier than deserved, he is in the habit of believing that he has deserved it.[80] Thus, one confuses luck for something moral. This can be taken to suggest that those who are lucky are more prone to self-deception than those who are unfortunate. Kant suggests that those who are unfortunate can have better insight into their own situation than those who are fortunate. If this is correct, Kant anticipates not only some of Kierkegaard's ideas but ideas that are associated with recent theories such as the standpoint theory of Sandra Harding.[81]

V. Overcoming Dualism

Kant famously writes, "Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will [the good will] should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose—if with its greatest effort it should yet achieve nothing."[82] This passage gives the impression that nature can be *indifferent* to morality, that nature can be amoral. However, rather than holding nature to be completely indifferent to morality, Kant considers the possibility of a singular good will failing to realize itself in nature, something which does not mean that morals in general cannot be realized in nature at all. Elsewhere, Kant is concerned with the history of mankind rather than the individual, focusing on the realization of morality in general, not the outcome of particular acts. More specifically, Kant is concerned with the realization of the final end of all things, the highest good. The highest good represents a moral world where virtue leads to happiness. Thus, the highest good bridges the gap between virtue and happiness, freedom and nature. Within Kant's framework this amounts to the realization of moral freedom; the moral disposition succeeds in realizing its end and thereby produces its intended consequences (in a non-arbitrary way). Interpreted in this way, the highest good over-

79 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 92 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 48).
80 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 419 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 28, p. 1088); cf. Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 106 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 27, p. 320).
81 Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 119–137. Harding says that this approach originates in Hegel and Marx (p. 120).
82 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 50 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p. 394).

comes the dualism between freedom and nature, virtue and happiness, disposition and consequences.

Frederick Beiser explains, "The importance of the highest good in Kant's thinking really lies…in explaining the possibility of moral action."[83] The reason for postulating God's existence (as a judge who rewards virtue) is that "only then do we have reason to assume that our moral strivings will have some effect in the world."[84] However, this does not mean that singular actions can be judged from their consequences; for the particular consequences of an act can be accidental rather than intended (because of mishaps etc.). Nonetheless, consequences *as a whole* and the history of mankind cannot be completely without moral content (*Gehalt*). Sharon Anderson-Gold comments, "Kant's approach has the advantage of permitting a perspective on the whole that, while it is agnostic on the question of specific intentions of particular agents, does not eliminate the moral qualities and moral potentialities of historical activity."[85]

When commenting on the realization of the highest good, Kant writes,

> It cannot be a matter of indifference to morality, therefore, whether it [morality] does or does not fashion for itself the concept of a final end of all things…for only in this way can an objective practical reality be given to the combination, which we simply cannot do without [*gar nicht entbehren können*], of the purposiveness [deriving] from freedom and the purposiveness of nature.[86]

In this context, objective practical reality need not mean more than that it is possible to realize by acting on it.[87] In the 1793 edition of the third *Critique*, Kant writes,

> Now although there is an incalculable gulf between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible…yet the latter *should* have an influence

83 Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 621.

84 Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 623 (quotes Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 86 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 446)).

85 Sharon Anderson-Gold, "A Common Vocation: Humanity as a Moral Species," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. by Hoke Robinson et al, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1995, vol. 2, p. 693.

86 Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 58 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 5).

87 Cf. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 267 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 396); Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 619.

on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom. —Thus there must still be a ground of the *unity* of the supersensible that grounds nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically, the concept of which, even if it does not suffice for cognition of it either theoretically or practically, and thus has no proper domain of its own, nevertheless makes possible the transition from the manner of thinking [*Denkungsart*] in accordance with the principles of the one to that in accordance with the principles of the other.[88]

Rather than claiming to know that freedom and nature make up a unity, Kant argues that we need to assume some mediation between freedom and nature for *practical purposes*. Onora O'Neill comments:

In short we must assume that there is some sort or degree of coordination of nature and freedom that ensures that our future is one in which we can act, and in which the aim of moral action is not absurd: it must be possible to insert the moral action into the world….we are committed to moral aims whose feasibility we cannot prove theoretically; to make sense of this we need to postulate, assume, or hope for a human future that allows room for human progress…these hopes for the future of humankind cannot be renounced if we are committed to morality.[89]

Kant's moral argument for the existence of God and immortality may be read as saying that if morality cannot be realized at all in the world this would lead to despair[90] or practical absurdity where one violates our duty to promote the highest good by being virtuous.[91] As Zev Friedman puts it:

If there is no highest good, if there is no connection between virtue and happiness, between merit and fate, then one has no objective reason which can justify adherence to the moral law. To say that fate is unaffected by merit is to say that the only causality is natural causality, that the only kingdom is the natural kingdom. Inasmuch as the moral law is incompatible with natural causality, the moral kingdom incompatible with natural kingdom, these moral concepts cannot be said to be related to the world in which the individual makes his choices and experiences his life. Consequently the moral law and the moral kingdom

88 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 63 (bold characters changed to italics) (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 175 f.).

89 Onora O'Neill, *Kant on Reason and Religion*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1997 (*The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 1995–96), p. 282 (first half of the quotation) and pp. 287 f.

90 Cf. O'Neill, *Kant on Reason and Religion*, p. 283.

91 Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good," p. 604; Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, p. 22, pp. 25 f., pp. 28 ff. and p. 106.

must be abandoned as having no objective status. In such a context my sense of being commanded to come to the aid of the victim must be dismissed as a fantasy….Reason cannot allow this duality [the concern of morality and the pursuit of happiness] to be final or ultimate.[92]

However, the possibility of an afterlife where the virtuous are happy still leaves the task of approaching the highest good in this world. Kant believes that we must assume—for practical purposes—that there is some mediation (*Vermittlung*) or bridge (*Übergang*) between nature and virtue in this world, in history. The function of God is to make it possible that some of our moral acts will produce their intended consequences (in a non-arbitrary way) and that if we do what is within our power to promote the highest good, God will complete the task.[93] To some extent it must be possible to realize ethics in the world and thereby to mediate between freedom and nature. Thus, we can legitimate hope that the moral intention can be partially realized in history. Kant holds that we should use our knowledge in order to create a moral realm and that we must presuppose that nature can "play into" our hands if we are to pursue this project of creating a moral world.

When dealing with the mediation between freedom and nature in the third *Critique*, Kant writes:

[T]he power of judgment, provides the mediating concept between the concept of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of *purposiveness* of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized.[94]

This mediation can be viewed either through reflective aesthetic judgment or through reflective teleological judgment and its concept of objective natural purposiveness. There are two types of the latter, one corresponding to hypothetical imperatives (and our technical predisposition)

92 Zev Friedman, "The Importance and Function of Kant's Highest Good," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 22, 1984, p. 337 and p. 341. Objective does not seem to refer to objective principles of reason but rather to objective states of affairs in the world and the very possibility of realizing morals in the world.

93 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 317–324 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 452–459); Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 207 f. and p. 215 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 192, p. 201); Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 98 and pp. 106 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 27, p. 310 and pp. 320 f.).

94 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 81 f. (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 196).

and another corresponding to the categorical imperative (and our moral predisposition).[95] Holly Wilson argues convincingly that "Kant believed there was a link between teleological judgment and the actualization of morality."[96] She writes:

> In the *Grounding*, Kant explicitly refers to teleological purposiveness and the way that nature is construed through it as essential to viewing "a possible world of rational beings (*mundus intelligiblis*) as a kingdom of ends" (*Gr*, [*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p.] 438). He asserts that "a kingdom of ends is only possible on the analogy of a kingdom of nature" (*Gr*, [*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p.] 438). This idea of construing nature through teleology, and then modeling the kingdom of ends on that is, Kant continues, a "practical idea for bringing about what does not exist but can be made actual by our conduct…" (*Gr*, [*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p.] 436 note).[97]
>
> Teleological judgment of the natural realm construes nature as purposive; teleological judgment in maxims construes nature and specifically human ends as a kingdom of ends in which the moral law gives the rule for a subordination of contingent ends under unconditional ends. Thus, in order for morality to be actualized, the natural realm must be construed as purposive, and those purposes must admit of subordination under supersensible purposes.[98]

Although the thought-experiment we dealt with indicates that this world cannot be fully moral, this does not mean that it is evil or completely amoral as suggested by Kierkegaard. Rather, this world is capable of letting man progress towards the highest good by realizing morals gradually since it is ordered *teleologically* towards a final purpose.[99] It is not just nature but also human history that is viewed as purposive by Kant. Kant's philosophy of history interprets human history as a progression towards legality and even morality. Although this progression is not easy or smooth, humans are pushed in the right direction by the arts and sciences and by law and representative government.[100]

To the extent that morality can be realized in history, the world is not merely governed by the law of nature or contingency: it also involves

95 Holly Wilson, "Kant's Integration of Morality and Anthropology," *Kant-Studien*, vol. 88, 1997, pp. 87–104, p. 93 and p. 96.
96 Wilson, "Kant's Integration of Morality and Anthropology," pp. 93 f.
97 Ibid. p. 93.
98 Ibid. p. 95.
99 Marina, "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good," pp. 350 f.
100 See Robert Louden, "General Introduction," in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, pp. 10–15. Louden stresses that "[t]he assumption of progress is to be regarded as a *regulative* as opposed to a *constitutive* ideal….On Kant's view, the idea of progress is merely a heuristic device, albeit a humanly necessary one" (p. 12.).

"lawfulness following from the law or rule-guided choices in the intelligible world."[101] This entails that moral actions are historical and empirical *expressions of the intelligible world.* Thus, actions have freedom as their ground. Whereas the intelligible world is the ground, the empirical world is the effect.[102] As Kant states, "*the world of understanding* [the intelligible world] *contains the ground of the world of sense and so too of its laws.*"[103]

VI. Conclusion

Kierkegaard follows Kant in holding our knowledge to be restricted and in holding the world to be imperfect. Both thinkers argue that discontentment is necessary for human beings, seeing the highest good as otherworldly. However, Kant sees this world as *teleologically* ordered towards the highest good, whereas Kierkegaard describes it as either amoral (in 1843–46 writings) or evil (in 1850–55 writings). At best, these two Kierkegaardian approaches both represent exaggerations; at worst, they could both undermine morality, since it hardly makes sense to be moral if morality is impossible to realize. Unlike Kierkegaard, Kant does not view the highest good in opposition to temporal goals. In Kant the realization of eternal peace and international law (*Völkerrecht*) contributes to the highest good *and* makes up political and juridical conditions for it. We hardly find anything that corresponds to this in Kierkegaard. This appears to be a consequence of Kierkegaard having a pessimistic view of this world, and showing less interest in political theory, philosophy of law, and philosophy of history than Kant does. Kant is more optimistic about making progress towards the highest good in this world than Kierkegaard is. Whereas Kant's view belongs to enlightenment and pietism, Kierkegaard's view is reminiscent of Lutheran orthodoxy.[104]

101 Wilson, "Kant's Integration of Morality and Anthropology," p. 90.

102 Ibid. See also Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 2, p. 31, pp. 57–67, p. 76, pp. 95 f., pp. 133–135 and p. 164.

103 Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 100 (original emphasis) (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, p. 453).

104 For an overview of these movements that include Kant and Kierkegaard, see Paulus Svendsen, *Gullalderdrøm og utviklingstro*, Oslo: Gyldendal 1979, p. 71, pp. 146–148 and pp. 359–367.