

Immanuel Kant's aesthetics invites us to think the intensity of aesthetic contemplation as freeing the mind of its "pathological" subordination to desires and other empirical interests. For Kant, what is at stake in contemplation can never be understood as merely sensory: it involves a special disposition (*Stimmung*) that directs the mind to the supersensible, which he determines as the idea that transcends all sensibility. Beyond interpreting the domain of the ideal as an immaterial, self-sufficient realm, this collection of essays opens up the question of its 'life', suggesting an interrelation with the pathological that is more intimate than Kant himself seems to have surmised.

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ISBN 978-3-95758-032-0



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Pathology & Aesthetics

Edited by Louis Schreel

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Essays on the Pathological in Kant and Contemporary Aesthetics

düsseldorf university press

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

© düsseldorf university press, Düsseldorf 2016

<http://www.dupress.de>

Redaktion: Louis Schreel

Lektorat: Marnie Slater & Liz Allen

Titelbild: Etna © Petra Poggenpohl

Satz, Layout und Umschlaggestaltung: Hannah Reller

Herstellung: docupoint GmbH, Barleben

Der Fließtext ist gesetzt in Adobe Garamond Pro

ISBN: 978-3-95758-032-0

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Kant's Apathology of Compassion

Wolfram Bergande

Now reason's ability to become master over all the inclinations striving against it through the mere idea of a law is absolutely inexplicable, hence it is also incomprehensible how the senses could have the ability to become master over a reason which commands with such authority on its side. For if all the world proceeded in accordance with the precept of the law, we would say that everything occurred according to the order of nature, and nobody would think even of inquiring after the cause.
—Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*¹

Christianity has assuredly taught men to pay little attention to God's jouissance, and this is how Kant makes pass his voluntarism of Law-for-Law's-sake, which is something that tops, one might say, the ataraxia of the Stoic experience.
—Lacan, *Kant with Sadé*²

1. The Moral Pleasure of Respect

In his critical works, e. g. in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant employs the well-known and seemingly clear-cut distinction between sensuousness, *Sinnlichkeit*, on the one hand and understanding, *Verstand*, respectively reason, *Vernunft*, on the other, hence between the “physical” (Kant 1889, pp. 122, 133) laws governing human nature and the moral law, the categorical imperative, which ought to govern the individual's will and thence, at least in principle, his or her acts, too.³ Kant's moral philosophy accordingly seems to divide into two aspects: into what on the one hand could be called a pathology, taking care of reason as it tends to get heteronomously, i. e. sensuously affected or even passionately so; and, on the other, into what could not unjustly be called an ‘apathology’ which secures the grounds for an unaffected and dispassionate morality. This apathology comes close to a praxeology; even if Kant, unlike the Stoics or the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, does not

¹ Kant 1996, p. 102f. (Footnote †); cf. Kant 2007, 06: 059.

² Lacan 2006a, p. 651f. (Translation modified.)

³ Cf. Wood 2015, 132ff.

depart from an absolute Other (an almighty God) but only postulates his existence and his eventual afterworldly reward for a moral life.

For Kant, feelings, *Gefühle*, respectively sentiments, *Empfindungen*, almost invariably fall under physical laws, hence under the aspect of pathology. “[E]very feeling generally” (Kant 1889, p. 167) is “pathological” (*ibid.*), writes Kant in the second *Critique*, literally so because feelings ultimately derive from the subject’s *pathè*, from its physical nature, and critically because they tend to encroach upon the autonomy of moral reason. However, already in the second *Critique* there is one—although only one single—exception to this rule: the “singular” “moral feeling” of “respect”, *Achtung* (Kant 1889, p. 169). Being “produced simply by reason” (Kant 1889, p. 169), it is a case *sui generis*, even if compared with the somewhat similar aesthetic feelings which Kant will introduce only later in the *Critique of Judgement*.⁴ Standing out as an exceptionally “practical” (Kant 1889, p. 172f.) feeling, respect accompanies those and only those wills which are morally good because they would be grounded in pure reason. Practically, this means that the will in question would be absolutely cleansed even of the “slightest admixture” (Kant 1889, p. 112) of pathological (sentimental, as it were) causality. As a matter of fact, later, in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant will explicate that actually “any determination of the will” as such would carry a “state of mind which accompanies” it; and that this state of mind “is in itself a feeling of pleasure and identical with it” (Kant 1914, p. 70).⁵ So is respect, *Achtung*, then a pleasure? Kant’s answer must appear somewhat paradoxical: yes and no. Yes, because given that respect is a determination of the will, it must be identical with a feeling of

⁴ Cf. Kant 1886, p. 115: It “is entirely of its own kind”.

⁵ Cf. Kant 1914, p. 53: “But to will something, and to have a satisfaction in its existence, i. e. to take an interest in it, are identical.”

pleasure, too. No, because the feeling of respect actually suggests itself as exemplary for the “moral pleasure [*moralischen Lust*]” (Kant 2007, 06: 378, 391; Kant 1889, pp. 289, 301) of which Kant writes in 1797 in the *Metaphysic of Ethics*; and as ‘moral pleasure’ respect is far from being a pleasure in the ordinary sense of the term.

This is because the determination of the will by the “practical law” (Kant 1889, p. 112), which occasions the feeling of respect, makes a very special case for Kant. Even if one insisted on calling respect a ‘pleasure’, namely a ‘moral pleasure’, it nevertheless would not involve any kind of ‘pathological’ pleasure, neither in the sense of presupposing it, nor of feeding on it, nor of aiming at it. As Kant claims in the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Reason, with its practical law, determines the will immediately, not by means of an intervening feeling of pleasure or pain, not even of pleasure in the law itself [*nicht vermittelt eines dazwischen kommenden Gefühls der Lust und Unlust, selbst nicht an diesem Gesetze*], and it is only because it can, as pure reason, be practical, that it is possible for it to be legislative (*ibid.*; Kant 2007, 05: 025).

Nor is respect itself, as seems to go without saying at this point in Kant’s text, a pathological ‘pleasure in the law itself’ either. All of this holds true for Kant even though the determination of the will, as he admits, implies a somewhat painful feeling of “humiliation” of one’s “self-conceit” (Kant 1889, p. 167)⁶, a feeling of pain which, although it is not a pleasure, would have to count as “pathological” (*ibid.*) in equal measure, if only it was not indeed the negative reverse of the feeling of respect and thus, according to Kant, another major “effect of the consciousness of the moral law” (*ibid.*).⁷

So not only is it that the moral feeling of respect would not in any way involve or imply ‘pathological’ feelings. What is more, it “cannot be compared to any patho-

⁶ Cf. Kant 1889, p. 173.

⁷ Cf. Kant 1889, p. 213.

logical feeling” (ibid., p. 169) in the first place, let alone itself be “reckoned either as pleasure or pain” (ibid., p. 173) in the ordinary, ‘pathological’ sense, for it “[...] is a feeling that applies merely to what is practical, and depends on the conception of a law, simply as to its form, not on account of any object [...]” (ibid.). It is “produced by an intellectual cause” only (Kant 1889, p. 166). And that is also why it “is the only one that we know quite a priori, and the necessity of which we can discern [*einsehen können*]” (ibid.).⁸ So much does respect grow from purely reasonable grounds alone that even though for the sake of convenience one might call it a ‘moral pleasure’ it nevertheless and strictly speaking “contains no pleasure” (Kant 1889, p. 173) at all (nor pain, at least if we leave its negative reverse, humiliation, aside).

What the feeling of respect actually does consist of phenomenologically speaking is, according to Kant, a certain kind of “*self-approbation*” which “contains something *elevating*” (ibid.), a kind of “inward peace” (Kant 1889, p. 181).⁹ More precisely, it is a “contentment, which is primarily contentment with one’s own person” (ibid., p. 215), however far from its opposite double: complacency, *Behaglichkeit*. This contentment or self-contentment may certainly amount to some kind of “enjoyment” (ibid.), as Kant admits. However, “contentment (*acquiescentia*)” in the full meaning of the term is “unattainable” for human beings “during life” (Kant 2006, p. 130). And, what is more, the contentment that is eventually attainable for humans is only “a negative satisfaction with one’s state” (Kant 1889, p. 215). It yields an only negative enjoyment, one which has “nothing to do with enjoyment of life” (ibid., p. 183) in the ordinary sense and

⁸ Translation modified.

⁹ Kant also writes of a “*Vernunftliebe seiner selbst*”, footnote ** in Kant 2007, 06: 045.

[...] which cannot be called happiness, because it does not depend on the positive concurrence of a feeling, nor is it, strictly speaking, bliss, since it does not include complete independence on inclinations and wants, but it resembles bliss in so far as the determination of one’s will at least can hold itself free from their influence; and thus, at least in its origin, this enjoyment is analogous to the self-sufficiency which we can ascribe only to the Supreme Being (ibid., p. 215).

For the worldly human being who seeks to practically emulate this self-sufficient Supreme Being, contentment spells out as the moral virtue of “apathy” (Kant 2006, p. 152) or “equanimity” (Kant 2006, p. 131), rarely also as: “ataraxia, *Ataraxia*” (Kant 2006, p. 154; Kant 2007, 07: 256).¹⁰ Kant repeatedly recommends or even commands apathy (e. g.: the “duty of apathy” (Kant 1886, p. 226) in the *Metaphysics of Ethics* (1797)), usually with an explicit reference to ancient Stoicism, like in the following passage from the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798):

The principle of apathy—namely that the wise man must never be in a state of affect, not even in that of compassion with the misfortune of his best friend, is an entirely correct and sublime moral principle of the Stoic school; for affect makes us (more or less) blind (Kant 2006, p. 152).

If the twin feelings of humiliation-and-respect together make up the moral contentment of the human being, then we could say that something like countenance (like ‘contentment’ deriving from the Latin *continere*, ‘to hold together, to enclose’) is the respective practical disposition of an individual’s “moral *ascetics*” (Kant 2005, p. 597; Kant 2007, 6: 484). In the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, Kant refers this “cultivation of virtue” (ibid.) to “the old watchword of the Stoa [...], *bear* and *forbear*: bear, endure the evils of life without complaint; forbear, abstain from its superfluous enjoyments [*überflüssigen Ergötzlichkeiten*]” (Kant 1886, p. 304). The virtuous human being ought to stay apathetic in the face of pathology, i. e. in the face of any sentiments/feelings, affects and passions, whether pleasurable or painful. This is because they constantly threaten to infringe upon the purely moral determination of the will.

¹⁰ Cf. “Ataraxia” in Kant 2007, 07: 256. On “ataraxia” as “*Gleichmüthigkeit*” (equanimity) see: “Entwürfe zu dem Colleg über Anthropologie aus den 70er und 80er Jahren” (Kant 2007, p. 15: 854).

Sure enough, this does not mean to be “dull” or “indifferent” (Kant 2006, p. 131), as Kant hastens to add in the *Anthropology*.

However, it can lead to quite extreme consequences. Kant's notorious example, which appears in both the *Anthropology* (Kant 2007, 07: 253; Kant 2006, p. 152) and the *Metaphysics of Ethics* (Kant 2007, 06: 457; Kant 1886, p. 276), is the rejection of compassion, *Mitleid*, as a form of pathological suffering. Kant's referee in the *Metaphysics* is again the Stoic “sage” who “rejected compassion [*Mitleidenschaft*]” even in “the case of his friend” because he could not “allow” himself—and as to Kant indeed he ought not to allow himself—“to be infected by his [friend's] sorrow” and thus to “augment the evils in the world” (ibid.) by suffering together with him.¹¹ For the Kant of the *Metaphysics* this is tantamount to saying that as a matter of principle “there can be no obligation to act kindly out of compassion [*Mitleid*]” (ibid.).¹²

2. Compassion as Surrogate of Reason

But this is not the whole story. For in the *Anthropology*, Kant continues the above quoted passage about the ‘principle of apathy’ with an important reservation:

Nevertheless the wisdom of nature has planted in us the predisposition to compassion in order to handle the reins provisionally, until reason has achieved the necessary strength; that is to say, for the purpose of enlivening us, nature has added the incentive of pathological (sensible) [*pathologischen (sinnlichen)*] impulse to the moral incentives for the good, as a temporary surrogate of reason [*einseitiges Surrogat der Vernunft*] (Kant 2006, p. 152).

And in the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, in a section titled *Of the Duty of Sympathy*, Kant continues the discussion of this “predisposition of nature”, namely of the natural predisposition “to have a fellow-feeling with the joys and sorrows [*Mitfreude und Mitleid (sympathia moralis)*] of others [*Anderer*]” (Kant 1886, p. 275; Kant 2007,

¹¹ Translation modified.

¹² Translation modified. Cf. Denis 2000.

06: 456).¹³ Here, these two feelings, *Mitfreude* (compassionate joy, so to speak) and *Mitleid* (compassion), appear under the category of “*sympathia moralis*” (Kant 2007, 06: 456), which is somewhat paradoxical given that Kant maintains that we are undoubtedly dealing with sensuous feelings, “*sinnliche Gefühle*”, thus obviously not with moral but instead with aesthetical, “*ästhetisch*” (ibid.), i. e. with ultimately pathological feelings. This paradox notwithstanding, Kant infers from the ‘predisposition of nature’ to have such sympathetic feelings if not a direct ‘obligation to act kindly out of compassion’ (which, as we just have learned, cannot be) then nevertheless an “indirect duty [...] to cultivate the [se] sympathetic affections” (Kant 1886, p. 276).

So surprisingly here we are called on by Kant not to repress the naturally pathological feeling of *Mitleid*, compassion. Instead we are to cultivate it. To allow for this cultivation, Kant is led to introduce a further distinction between a natural and a cultivated kind of sympathy; this distinction temporarily resolves the paradoxical categorization just mentioned, it is true, but only at the cost of reapplying the primary distinction between morality and pathology, i. e. between *Achtung* (respect) and *Mitleid* (compassion or sympathy, respectively), within the subsphere of pathology itself, i. e. within the subsphere of compassion (respectively sympathy). So within this subsphere we face again the second *Critique's* primary distinction between morality and pathology: namely between a “free” and morally cultivated compassion which is ‘participating’ (“*theilnehmend*” (Kant 2007, 06: 456) and “seated in the will and the ability to communicate to one another” and which “depends on practical reason” (Kant 1886, p. 276)¹⁴, if however, as we will learn, not on practical reason alone—and a slavish, “*servilis*” (Kant 2007, 06: 457), and pathologically admixed or soaked

¹³ Translation modified.

¹⁴ Translation modified.

compassion, a “*Mitleidenschaft*” (ibid.), which by contrast is “seated in that physical susceptibility, which nature has implanted in us, for feeling in common the delights or misery of our neighbour” (Kant 1886, p. 275f.). This latter *Mitleidenschaft* communicates itself by itself. By itself it is “*mittheilend*” (Kant 2007, 06: 457). It ‘spreads in a natural way’, “*sie sich ... natürlicher Weise verbreitet*”, comparable to ‘warmth’, “*Wärme*”, or ‘contagious diseases’, “*ansteckender Krankheiten*” (ibid.). By contrast to its counterpart, it is not a duty, not even an indirect one, but must remain repressed and avoided by all means.

So if there is, as we have learned in the *Anthropology*, ‘the incentive of pathological (sensible) impulse to the moral incentives for the good, as a temporary surrogate of reason’, then we can conclude from the *Metaphysics of Ethics* that this surrogate impulse is not straightforwardly pathological but the result of cultivation. And the *Metaphysics* seems to agree with the *Anthropology* as to why at all we should cultivate ‘compassionate natural (aesthetical) affections’, “*mitleidige natürliche (ästhetische) Gefühle*” (Kant 2007, 06: 457). We should do so because we can “[...] make them serve as instruments enabling us to discharge the offices of a humane mind, upon ethical principles [*sie als so viele Mittel zur Theilnehmung aus moralischen Grundsätzen und dem ihnen gemäßen Gefühl zu benutzen*]” (Kant 1886, p. 276). Particularly, we may use them in cases where practical reason is in need of support; for instance, as we read in the *Anthropology*, ‘provisionally, until reason has achieved the necessary strength’. However, only insofar as they effectively serve such purposes should we cultivate them, that is, only insofar as they are directed to an active end. Otherwise they are useless, as Kant warns in the *Anthropology*: “[...] the ineffectual sharing of one’s feelings [*die thatleere Theilnehmung seines Gefühls*] in order to appear sympa-

thetically in tune with the feelings of others, thus allowing oneself to be affected in a merely passive way, is silly and childish” (Kant 2006, p. 132).

Still this is not the end of what can be termed Kant’s apathology of compassion. If the *Metaphysics* calls on us to cultivate natural compassion, i. e. the sensuous sympathy with others: “*humanitas aesthetica*” (Kant 2007, 06: 456), and to transform it into truly humane compassion: “*humanitas practica*” (ibid.) as it ‘depends on practical reason’, then this is not so much because, as Kant considers, “we might be unable to repress” (Kant 1886, p. 277) it anyway; nor is it only because compassion can function as a temporary surrogate impulse for the possibly deficitary ‘strength’ of practical reason; rather, and this is astonishing, compassion can help us “to do what the representation of duty on its own might be unable to accomplish [*dasjenige zu tun, was die Pflichtvorstellung für sich allein nicht ausrichten würde*]” (ibid.)¹⁵, as Kant surprisingly concedes towards the end of the *Metaphysics*’ section on the *Duty of Sympathy*:

Neither ought we to desert the chambers of the sick nor the cells of the debtor, in order to escape the painful sympathy we might be unable to repress, this emotion being a spring implanted in us by nature, prompting us to do what the representation of duty on its own might be unable to accomplish (Kant 1886, p. 276f.).¹⁶

There are—as Kant lets his readers know in what is a rather passing albeit concluding remark—actions commanded as duties by practical reason, and, as can be presumed, strengthfully so. Nevertheless, ‘the representation of duty alone’ does not suffice to determine the will effectively—presumably regardless of the support of the concomitant feeling of *Achtung*, respect. So obviously it is not only, as the *Anthropology* suggests, some temporary and hence sooner or later remediable deficit of

¹⁵ Translation modified.

¹⁶ Translation modified.

'the strength of reason' which compassion, the 'pathological surrogate of reason', is supposed to supplement in a however cultivated form. Rather, the *Metaphysics* seems to point here to a fundamental problem one might have with doing one's duty as it is commanded by the practical law alone. Can we not suspect that in extreme cases this problem might indeed become irremediable without the 'positive concurrence' of a cultivated 'pathological feeling'? And would not this consequently put the self-contentment of the virtuous agent in danger, together with the ideal of supreme self-sufficiency that orientates it?

One must be very precise here. Kant writes that "[...] although it is no direct duty to take a part in the joy or grief of others", it nevertheless "is a duty not to avoid" the occasions and places where such feelings are usually triggered: "the chambers of the sick" or the "cells of the debtor" (Kant 1886, p. 276). Even so, the feeling of the 'joy or grief of others' must remain problematic for Kant, like any of the other "inner and outer enjoyments" of everyday life: "only inasmuch as they are innocent in themselves, i. e., not contrary to morality, and present themselves spontaneously, may we adopt them, but never go in pursuit of them" (Kant 2001b, p. 397), as we learn from the notes taken by Johann Friedrich Vigilantius from Kant's lectures on ethics in 1793–94. Otherwise, Kant warns, they indeed might be "injurious to our self-contentment" (ibid.). As a consequence, it seems as if cases where cultivated compassion is asked for must neither actively be sought nor actively be avoided. If compassion arises, it must arise spontaneously, unintentionally. This probably also implies that such cases must not be passively sought nor be passively avoided either, i. e.: negligently or secretly. A perfectly balanced state of neither activity nor passivity is obviously what is at stake when it comes to the morally obligatory self-contentment of Kant's virtuoso of virtue.

Be this as it may, the remarkable result is that Kant seems to allow for cases where the 'representation of duty on its own' [*die Pflichtvorstellung für sich allein*], obviously because it is on its own, is not enough to determine the will; not just factually, e. g. because it would be overpowered by other pathological motives, "*Triebfedern*" (Kant 2007, 06: 036), or because it would lack the experience which enlivens or enhances its strength (and even granted that the effective outcome is always indeterminable because empirical), but principally—namely, as one may suspect, because without intuition the *Pflichtvorstellung* would be just as void, "*leer*" (Kant 2007, 03: 075) as it would then become "blind" or rather blinded under the rule of an uncultivated "affect" (Kant 2006, p. 152). Is this an overinterpretation? Certainly, Kant would have rejected any such interpretation, just like his *Metaphysics* explicitly opposes any such view. For if, according to Kant, "the power of mastering every opposing excitement of the sensory can, and indeed must, be absolutely postulated [*das Vermögen (facultas) der Überwindung aller sinnlich entgegenwirkenden Antriebe seiner Freiheit halber schlechthin vorausgesetzt werden kann und muß*]" (Kant 1886, p. 214f.; Kant 2007, 06: 397), then in principle reason must be the absolute master. Yet the question remains whether Kant's systematic treatment of compassion does not point to a fundamental problem with reason's principally absolute mastery, particularly in regard to Kant's famous coordination of freedom and constraint ('you can because you must'). The first epigraph to this text, taken from Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, is one of a small number of scattered marginalia in Kant's corpus which appear to reflect such a problematic.

And yet recent secondary literature on Kant often appears to ignore this problematic. To give an example: It certainly is not altogether wrong to interpret Kant's text—as has been done—in the conventional sense that “only the moral feeling of *Achtung*, which is exclusively triggered by the practical law and which has an inner causal relation to the practical law, can guarantee that it only motivates to moral actions” (Goy 2007, p. 352). It is not wrong, but it understates the case, because, as has just been evidenced in Kant's text, there seem to be at least imaginable cases in which a ‘temporary surrogate impulse’ not only “may later facilitate our doing our duty” (Cartwright 1984, p. 87 Fn. 11) or cases in which it “can be of instrumental importance” (Denis 2000, p. 65), as other interpreters of Kant have it; but also cases in which such a surrogate impulse might be indispensable for doing our duties in the first place. A ‘temporary surrogate impulse’ then may be principally indispensable for a ‘representation of duty’ which, ‘on its own’ as it in some cases obviously is, without such an impulse, without an as it were Fichteian “*Anstoß*” (Fichte 2013, p. 37) *avant la lettre*, cannot perform its moral duty.¹⁷ (And then again, if there indeed are such exceptional cases in which moral reason principally cannot dispense of this surrogate impulse, then of course the question arises as to how *Achtung* should be able to ‘guarantee that it only motivates to moral actions’ in all the other cases.)

Now on the other hand it is not only to overstate the case but just wrong to argue (as has been done by one interpreter in the recently published *Kant-Lexikon*) that “the natural feelings of compassion [*die natürlichen Gefühle des Mitleids*]“ would be “necessary conditions of the accomplishment of charity [*notwendigen Bedingungen zur Erfüllung der Wohltätigkeit*]”, even granted that they are “not sufficient for the

¹⁷ Cf. Honneth 2001.

accomplishment of the moral duty of charity [*nicht hinreichend zur Erfüllung der moralischen Pflicht zur Wohltätigkeit*]” (Mieth 2015, p. 413).¹⁸ Natural compassion is a condition of cultivated compassion, so much is true. Just like “[...] the sensible feeling which is at the bottom of all our inclinations is the condition of that impression which we call respect, *Achtung*” (Kant 1889, p. 168; Kant 2007, 05: 075) according to the *Critique of Practical Reason*. But in the *Metaphysics* Kant is quite clear about that “painful sympathy [*schmerzhaften Mitgefühl*] [...] being a spring [*einer der... Antriebe*] implanted in us by nature” (Kant 1886, p. 277): It is one of the springs to do good, *einer der Antriebe*, not the only one. Hence compassion (*Mitleid* respectively *Mitgefühl*), whether in natural or cultivated form, cannot be a necessary, i. e. a general condition of charity; nor can any other feeling be such a necessary condition, except *Achtung*. In the second *Critique*, Kant leaves no doubt about it: “There is here in the subject no antecedent feeling tending to morality. For this is impossible, since every feeling is sensuous, and the motive of moral intention must be free from all sensuous conditions [*die Triebfeder der sittlichen Gesinnung aber muß von aller sinnlichen Bedingung frei sein*]” (Kant 1889, p. 168).¹⁹ Otherwise there could actually be no cases at all in which, as Kant claims, moral “[r]eason, with its practical law, determines the will immediately, not by means of an intervening feeling of pleasure or pain, not even of pleasure in the law itself, [...]” (ibid., p. 112). And according to Kant “practical pure reason” does determine the will, not only immediately but also effectively. It is not only the “objective determining principle of the objects of action as called good and evil” but also the “subjective determining principle, that is, a motive [*Triebfeder*] to this action [...]” (ibid., p. 168; Kant 2007, 05: 075).

¹⁸ My translation.

¹⁹ Translation modified.

As a result, compassion, i. e. the pathological affection, if not infectedness, by somebody else's feelings, appears as quite paradoxical, as quite Rousseauistic so to speak, at least in these two ultimate publications of Kant, the *Metaphysics* and the *Anthropology*. Both inessential and necessary, it appears to be an undecidable in the technical sense of deconstructive terminology. On the one hand compassion is ruled out as pathological by the authority of reason; either because it is an evil which must not be engaged with nor unnecessarily multiplied, like in the case of a friend's suffering, which can only be 'endured without complaint' if need be; or because it would have to be classified as 'superfluous enjoyment' from which one must 'abstain', like—the example is Kant's—the "offensive variety of this compassion called mercy, by which is meant that kind of benevolence shown to the unworthy" which only serves to "boast" one's own "worthiness to be happy" (Kant 1886, p. 276).²⁰ As a merely 'added' extra, compassion seems to add nothing really necessary to the good will, which is self-sufficient from the moral point of view. In any case, as Kant emphasizes, one just cannot be obliged to be compassionate, just like "love", being a natural "affection", simply, i. e. naturally, "cannot be commanded" (Kant 1889, p. 15)—even though as far as "love" is concerned, it may actually appear as an almost "indispensable complement" to the moral *Pflichtvorstellung's* "command of duty", given that "the latter as an incentive, without the contribution of the former [i. e.: of love], is not very much to be counted on", as Kant concedes in *The end of all things* (Kant 2007, 08: 338; Kant 2001c, p. 230). On the other hand and 'practically' speaking, this added surrogate seems to be essential, at least in those particular cases in which compassion incites reason to leave its abstract 'representation of duty

²⁰ Translation modified.

on its own' and to not only will but to also act according to the categorical imperative. Thence for Kant it becomes an 'indirect duty' not to foreclose on the real life occasions in which compassion can possibly affect or rather infect the moral agent, driving him towards its cultivation.

From this it follows that, paradoxically, compassion is both on either side and beyond the Stoic dichotomy 'bear and forbear' to which Kant refers. It is not really contained by that dichotomy, neither logically nor 'practically'; and in case compassion should be contained, it gets excluded from 'practical' reason, at least theoretically. Conversely, insofar as compassion should be beyond this dichotomy, it gets nevertheless included into 'practical' reason, needed as it is to incite to effective action in exceptional cases. So, paradoxically, it is both excluded and included within 'practical', i. e. moral reason. Its logic can thus be reconstructed as follows: Kant's concept of moral subjectivity firstly excludes compassion, namely either as a pathological object of the will or 'as commanded'; yet it is precisely in this excluded compassion where the subject, secondly, rediscovers a therewith excluded part of itself; hence it thirdly and laboriously undertakes to recover this part by saving compassion in the form of cultivated (albeit 'painful') sympathy (which is not a duty but which not to avoid is an 'indirect duty'). Here one can see how Kant's concept of moral subjectivity becomes quite twisted as it seeks to save not the appearances but, so to speak, the *noumena*. "The subject is, as it were, internally excluded from its object [*en exclusion interne à son objet*]" (Lacan 2006b, p. 731), as can be stated here with Lacan. Compassion marks the inner outland of the subject, subjected as it is to an allegedly purely rational moral law. And it is through cultivated compassion that the subject's apathy, its disposition to will and act morally, i. e. humbly and respectfully at the

same time, entertains an encrypted, i. e. encapsulated and hardly decipherable, communication with the pathological feelings of the social other—and eventually with his or her own pathological feelings, as it would be in the case of compassion with oneself, i. e. of self-pity, a concept which, not surprisingly, is alien to Kant's corpus.

So if for some moment Kant may have appeared to dismiss any form of pathological feeling as supplementary to intellectual reason alone (by the way quite similar to Plato's Socrates who e. g. in the *Republic*²¹ dismisses even the artistically staged feelings of tragedy and comedy), then it must now be clear that some rhetorical dismissals notwithstanding Kant straightforwardly accepts a more or less cultivated compassion as a natural supplement to moral reason. Making solitary reason leave its purely intellectual, i. e. unpractical (if not immoral) abstractions, truly humane and thus virtuously charitable compassion is attending, *"theilnehmend"* (Kant 2007, 06: 456), but not properly communicative, *"mittheilend"* (ibid.: 457). Thus it comes close to—but is not identical with—the communicable, *mitteilbar* aesthetic feeling of the *Critique of Judgement*.

3. Morality and its Discontents

All things considered, compassion, *Mitleiden(schaft)*, remains a problematical feeling in Kant's late theory of moral virtue, whether principally or only factually, already because it will not always be possible to critically distinguish between natural and cultivated compassion; nor between cultivated compassion and 'boasting mercy'; moreover, and more importantly, because in order to properly function as a supplement to reason, cultivated compassion is contingent upon the repression of the

²¹ Cf. e. g. Rep. 413a; 429c–d; 606a ff.

double of the feeling of respect, *Achtung*, namely upon the repression of the ominous 'pleasure in the law itself'. This is because it is precisely with cultivated compassion that Kant gets disquietingly close to such a commanded pleasure. Certainly, for Kant there simply is not anything like a commanded pleasure—the feeling of *Achtung* notwithstanding, as it is supposed to be not a 'pleasure in the law itself' but a pleasure on the mere occasion of that law; and the same would apply to the "moral pleasure (*moralischen Lust*)" or "moral enjoyment (*moralischen Genuss*)" which, as to Kant's *Metaphysics*, may be the "reward" (Kant 1886, p. 207; Kant 2007, 06: 391) of virtuously charitable actions.

Yet at closer inspection Kant's scattered remarks on the ominous topic of a 'pleasure in the law itself' and on a possibly 'commanded' feeling appear quite contradictory: On the one hand it must remain true for Kant that 'any determination of the will' is a 'feeling of pleasure'.²² And the prime case for such a determination of the will, namely the will's determination by the moral law and the concomitant feeling of *Achtung*, is something which even forces itself upon us, *"sich für sich selbst uns aufdringt"*²³ (Kant 2007, 05: 031).²⁴ So remarkably, *Achtung* results as a 'moral pleasure' which the moral law forces upon us. However it is supposed to be no 'pleasure in the law itself'. On the other hand, Kant asserts in a footnote to his discussion of the sources of the aesthetic feeling in the *Critique of Judgement* that "[a]n obligation to enjoyment is a manifest absurdity [*Eine Verbindlichkeit zum Genießen ist eine offenbare Ungereimtheit*]." And he continues: "Thus the obligation to all actions

²² Cf. Kant 2007, 06: 211; 05: 178.

²³ Kant's wording here is interesting: In the strictest sense the moral law not just forces itself upon us, but it "forces itself for itself [*sich für sich selbst*] upon us", as if this force would act on behalf of itself, like another subject, and not on behalf of e. g. a desired outcome, namely the subjectivation of the thus moralized individual.

²⁴ Cf. Kant 2007, 06: 036.

which have merely enjoyment for their aim can only be a pretended one; however spiritually it may be conceived (or decked out), even if it is a mystical, or so-called heavenly, enjoyment.” (Kant 1914, p. 52 Fn. 2; Kant 2007, 05: 209, Fn. *) So whereas the moral law obliges the subject to the painful humiliation of its self resulting in the ‘moral pleasure’ of *Achtung*, it nevertheless does not oblige, it cannot oblige according to Kant, to enjoy pathologically, because that would be, according to this marginal assertion, manifestly absurd from a logical point of view. There is a similar argument in a passage from the Vigilantius-notes. There one can read that ‘to enjoy having duties’ would be ‘contrary to the nature of duty’ (‘nature’ here metaphorically in the sense of essence and not of physical quality). And one can paraphrase Kant in that passage by saying that to enjoy duties would be symptomatic of ‘impulses’ standing under the unacceptable ‘authority’ of ‘painful or despotic commands’:

[...] it is also certain that every obligation is forthwith associated with a moral constraint, and that it is contrary to the nature of duty to *enjoy* having duties incumbent upon one; it is necessary, rather, that man’s impulses should make him disinclined to fulfill the moral laws, and that these impulses should be overcome only through the authority of the latter, without it being possible to say that these laws demand respect in the manner of painful or despotic commands” (Kant 2001b, p. 259).²⁵

Now to enjoy one’s submission to a prohibitory law and to take this culpable enjoyment as a libidinally “regressive surrogate [*regressiver Ersatz*]” (Freud 1973, p. 240) for the enjoyment of the object prohibited by that law is exemplary for the “essence of masochism” (ibid., p. 241) as perversion according to Sigmund Freud’s seminal text *A Child is Being Beaten*. So obviously what Kant excludes as a double of *Achtung*, throughout all these contradictory statements on the topic of a forced enjoyment, and without really getting at it, is something similar to what moral masochism is for Freud: pleasure in the law itself. As far as Freudian psychoanalysis is concerned, it

²⁵ Cf. Baxley 2015, p. 237.

identifies perversion as one of the major clinical structures besides neurosis/hysteria and psychosis. In Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, these structures represent the possible avatars (*Schicksale*) of the drives (*Triebe*) deriving from the castration complex. As such they represent different ways to cope with a primarily repressed “pernicious enjoyment” (Lacan 1991, p. 52) which is the necessary libidinal remainder resulting from the institution of the super-ego (*Über-Ich*) as inner agent and executor of the moral law within the individual, i. e. from the individual’s subjectivation. Thereby, as Freud explains in *Civilization and its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*), morality is based on a self-sustaining and indeed self-aggravating libido-economic logic: The super-ego parasitically feeds on the pathological satisfaction which it itself prohibits. The super-ego derives its strength from the libidinal energy of what it prohibits. And so what Kant admitted as pathological ‘surrogate’ of moral reason, namely compassion (if only it is ‘not commanded’ but ‘cultivated’), reveals itself as a quite *unbehaglich*, discontentful constituent of morality, namely in the form of an a priori compassion-*of*-oneself (rather than *with*-oneself), imposed as it always already is by the social other. So from a Freudian perspective, Kant’s ‘strength of reason’ is in pathological deficit right from the start. The more pathological satisfaction the super-ego prohibits, however, the stronger it gets, and the stronger it gets, the more it prohibits, and so on. Now to conceive of how this spiral logic is set into motion, one must logically presuppose, firstly, a primordial moment in which the moral law would have been originally imposed, that is forced upon the subject, and, secondly, a concomitant primordially prohibited enjoyment. This is the enjoyment of a pathological object whose only function it would be to serve the institution of this prohibitory law. The concomitant state of mind would be identical with the determination of the will by that law.

In contradistinction to simple pleasure, Lacan at one point starts to reserve the term “*jouissance*” (Lacan 1967, 30.05.67, p. 274f.) for this enjoyment insofar as it is logically, ethically and aesthetically ‘extimate’ (included/excluded) to a subjectivity thence twisted by this extimacy.²⁶ And Lacan ranges the literary work of Kant’s contemporary Marquis de Sade among the ancient ethical traditions in philosophy, e. g. Stoicism or Peripateticism, insofar as it would provide a noteworthy access to the experience of this enjoyment. (Lacan 2006a, p. 645) According to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis some of antiquity’s ethical schools, just like various Christian virtue doctrines, ultimately projected this enjoyment onto a Supreme Being, onto a fatherlike, almighty God, onto an Other who is the, as it were, Subject Supposed to Enjoy. As to Lacan, de Sade’s *La philosophie dans le boudoir* supplements Kant’s *Critique of practical reason* with its “truth” (ibid., p. 646)—and we should add: a truth about the enjoyment of this supreme Other which for Lacan turns out to be the unconscious as the discourse to which the subject is subjected. In a similar vein, Julia Kristeva speaks of a “logic of the intimate” which would work the Kantian ‘practical’ reason from within and which the literary work of de Sade would “stage [...] by illustrating how the intimate of the passionate and sensitive soul, because it finds itself under the empire of judging Reason and his de-sensitizing and unifying power, is an intimate which is *condemned to enjoy* this force”²⁷ (Kristeva 1997, p. 76).

It is with his theorem about the radical “propensity [*Hang*]” to do evil in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that Kant had earlier approached this ‘pleasure

²⁶ In the context of his concept of the Thing (la Chose) Lacan speaks of an intimate exteriority (“*extériorité intime*”) and of extimacy (“*extimité*”) (Lacan 1986, p. 167).

²⁷ My translation.

in the law itself” (Kant 2007, 07: 265).²⁸ Besides, with respect to the provocations in de Sade’s writings one might want to follow Lacan’s text on *Kant with Sade* and argue that Kant’s theory of evil can actually come to terms with de Sade, given that de Sade’s work would stay within an (anti-)virtue-ethical framework. As to Lacan, “[h]is [de Sade’s] apology for crime merely impels him to an oblique acceptance of the Law. The Supreme Being is restored in Evil Action [*le Maléfice*]” (Lacan 2006a, p. 667). As far as Kant’s *Religion* is concerned, it is the subject’s “free power of choice [*freien Willkür*]” from which “depravity [*Bösartigkeit*]”, which can also be called “perversity [*Verkehrtheit*] (*perversitas*)” (Kant 1996b, p. 83; Kant 2007, 06: 037), ultimately derives—depravity respectively perversity to be understood not as the simple propensity to yield to one’s natural inclinations but as the formal “propensity of the power of choice [*Willkür*] to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones)” (Kant 1996b, p. 78; Kant 2007, 06: 030). As a somewhat paradoxical “innate guilt [*angeborene Schuld*]” perversity “must nonetheless have originated from freedom [*aus der Freiheit entsprungen*]” (Kant 1996b, p. 84; Kant 2007, 06: 038). For Kant there is “no conceivable ground for us, therefore, from which moral evil could first have come in us [*kein begrifflicher Grund da, woher das moralische Böse in uns zuerst gekommen sein könne*]” (Kant 1996b, p. 88; Kant 2007, 06: 043).

And even though “the concept of freedom [...] first and foremost derives from this law”, i. e. from the moral law as freedom’s *ratio cognoscendi*, i. e. even though “the concept of the freedom of the power of choice [*der Begriff der Freiheit der Willkür*]” does not precede in us the consciousness of the moral law but is only inferred

²⁸ Cf. Zac 1972, p. 153.

from the determinability of our power of choice through this law as unconditional command” (Kant 1996b, p. 93 Fn. *; Kant 2007, 06: 049), this for Kant cannot mean that “the freedom of the power of choice”, “*Freiheit der Willkür*”, and thus evil would also be ontologically grounded in the consciousness of the moral law (as its *ratio essendi*).

Consequently, and given that for Kant there just cannot be a ‘pleasure in the law itself’, there can be no pleasure in the opposition to the law itself either. Hence there can be no “evil reason [*boshafte Vernunft*]” in which “resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to incentive [*Triebfeder*] (for without any incentive the power of choice cannot be determined)”. This is because in being “so the subject would be made a *diabolical* being” which according to Kant “is however not applicable to the human being” (Kant 1996b, p. 82; Kant 2007, 06: 035).

4. The Aesthetics of Rationalization: Disgust, Boredom and Humour

As Kant thus ignores or rather pushes aside the possibility of perverse enjoyment within morality, he accordingly misjudges “[...] the *aesthetic* constitution [*ästhetische Beschaffenheit*], the *temperament* so to speak *of virtue*”, too, conceiving of it as a “joyous frame of mind [*fröhliche Gemüthsstimmung*]”, a “heart joyous in the compliance with its duty (not just complacency [*Behaglichkeit*] in the recognition of it)” (Kant 1996b, p. 73 Fn. †; Kant 2007, 06: 023 Fn. †)²⁹. Kant detects, it is true, something “very ambiguous”, i. e. some moral ambiguity within “the self-torment of a remorseful sinner”. But this turns out to be unproblematic because it “usually [is] only an inward reproach for having offended against prudence” (ibid.). It is the usual self-

²⁹ Cf. Zac 1972, p. 147.

reproach of the offender for not having been clever enough (since he got caught). This is obviously not a moral disposition betraying a secret perverse enjoyment. And so for Kant this just fits all too well with a “slavish frame of mind [*sklavische Gemüthsstimmung*]” of those who, rather unambiguously, are just “weighed-down by fear and dejected” and likewise “never [...] without a hidden *hatred* of the law [*nie ohne einen verborgenenen Haß des Gesetzes*]” (ibid.) to which they feel themselves subjected. To this analysis of Kant one would have to object today with Lacan that at least in the case of masochism “the masochist is not” a mere “slave [*esclave*]” of the law (Lacan 1967, 30.05.67, p. 276f.).³⁰ Nor is it that the ‘slavish frame of mind’ would boil down to the simple question of being clever enough or not. Rather, such a mindset reveals the subject—the subject of the unconscious—as being more than just clever. The masochistic subject of the unconscious is all-too-clever, a clever-clever “old fox [*un petit malin*]” (ibid.) according to Lacan, since it is precisely in the act of submitting to the law and its punishment that he or she finds enjoyment. As Lacan states: “the masochist knows that he is within enjoyment [*le masochiste sait qu’il est dans la jouissance*]” (ibid.).

Be this as it may, Kant’s *Critique of practical reason* sides with the derided “Stoic” who refuses to recognize anything evil in some “paroxysms of gout” which to him must appear as a merely physical pain:

A bad thing [*Übel*] it certainly was, and his cry betrayed that; but that any evil [*ein Böses*] attached to him thereby, this he had no reason whatever to admit, for pain did not in the least diminish the worth of his person, but only that of his condition. If he had been conscious of a single lie it would have lowered his pride, but pain served only to elevate him [*ihn zu erheben*], when he was conscious that he had not deserved it by any unrighteous action by which he had rendered himself worthy of punishment. (Kant 1889, p. 151f.; Kant 2007, 05: 060)³¹

³⁰ My translation.

³¹ Translation modified.

In contrast to the Stoics who moralized the whole of physical reality, Kant is surely more than critical of the tendency of “human reason [...] to link the course of nature with the laws of morality [*den Lauf der Natur an die Gesetze der Moralität anzuknüpfen*]” (Kant 1996b 114 Fn. *; Kant 2007, 06: 073 Fn. *).³² Correspondingly, he makes a sharp distinction between the spheres of morality and of physical reality, i. e. pathology. Still for Kant these two extremes, the Stoic’s cosmotheistic and his own quasi-monotheistic view, converge in the idea of an ideal elevation, *Erhebung*, a genuinely “moral apathy, *moralische Apathie*” which would be cleansed of all pathological activity (‘lies’, punishable ‘unrighteous actions’, etc.) as much as of all pathological passivity (“bluntness, *Fühllosigkeit*”, “listlessness, *subjective Gleichgültigkeit*” and “indifference, *Indifferenz*” (Kant 1886, p. 226; Kant 2007, 06: 408)).³³ Aesthetically, Kant’s ‘moral apathy’ should thus be free of the boredom (*Langeweile*) which characterizes, according to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the “general terms beyond which Stoicism cannot get”, for instance “[t]he True and the Good, wisdom and virtue”. For Hegel, these Stoic terms are “lacking the fullness of life”; they are “no doubt elevating [*erhebend*], but since they cannot in fact produce any expansion of the content, they soon become boring [*fängen sie bald an, Langeweile zu machen*]” (Hegel 1977, p. 122).³⁴

³² On Kant and Stoicism cf. Schneewind 1996, 292ff., particularly p. 294. Cf. also Santozki 2006, p. 508, who argues that despite many parallels Kant’s critical philosophy was developed without substantial recourse to ancient Stoicism: “Wenn man ihm [Kant] überhaupt in eine antike Richtung einordnen kann, dann ist die *Stoa* zu nennen. Er selbst hätte sich als kritischer Philosoph allerdings sicher gegen derartige Zuschreibungen gewehrt. [...] Negativ konnte der Gang durch die drei Kritiken jeweils begründet zeigen, dass eine genuine Auseinandersetzung mit der Antike für die Genese der grundlegenden Prämissen der jeweiligen Theorien keine Rolle spielt.”

³³ Translation modified. Cf. Assmann 2003, *passim*, for the distinction between monotheism and cosmotheism.

³⁴ Translation modified.

Against this background it must have been unthinkable for Kant that the pain-trodden’s sage elevation, *Erhebung*, might secretly contain a malign (i. e. all-too-cleverly evil) pleasure as an added extra, as a pernicious surplus enjoyment, for instance a kind of elevated self-pity. But then how would Kant have judged the legendary apathetic self-contentment of the Stoic “[...] Epictetus who, when his master was twisting his leg, said, smiling and unmoved, ‘You will break my leg’, and when it was broken, he added, ‘Did I not tell you that you would break it?’” (Origen 2001, chap. LIII). Is not Epictetus’ jovial countenance in face of a pain unjustly suffered an extreme form of what Kant had in mind when he praised “contentment (*acquiescentia*)” as an “enjoyment analogous to the self-sufficiency which we can ascribe only to the Supreme Being” in the *Critique of Practical Reason*?³⁵ Actually, it is not. For Kant sees a limit to moral elevation beyond which man’s “moral capacity” becomes “fancifully” exaggerated and thus “nonsense” (Kant 2001a, p. 32). And it is precisely some famous Stoics which Kant—as quoted by Herder—has in mind here: “Seneca was an impostor, Epictetus strange and fanciful.” (Ibid.)³⁶ However, can Kant’s moral apathy, the subject’s countenance, based as it is on reason’s practical law only and on a solitary *Pflichtvorstellung* (‘representation of duty on its own’), be said to be free of all fancies?

³⁵ See above (Kant 1889, p. 215).

³⁶ Schneewind 1996, p. 292 quotes the whole passage from which this phrase is taken: “Man fancifully exaggerates his moral capacity and sets before himself the most perfect goodness; the outcome is nonsense; but what is required of us? The Stoic’s answer: I shall raise myself above myself, ... rise superior to my own afflictions and needs, and with all my might be good, be the image of godhood. But how so, for godhood has no obligations, yet you certainly do... Now the god departs and we are left with man, a poor creature, loaded with obligations. Seneca was an impostor, Epictetus strange and fanciful” (Cf. Kant 2001a, p. 32). Schneewind resumes Kant’s relationship to Stoicism as follows: “Kant’s reservations about Stoicism were as pervasive as his appreciation of it” (ibid.).

Interestingly, for Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* section on *Erroneously carried out actions*, it is precisely the "striking countenance [*Fassung*] which the patients show" in the face of "apparently accidental injuries" which "in the more serious cases of psychoneuroses" may "betray the portion of unconscious intention" causally involved therein. An analysis of the respective unconscious intention regularly reveals that these "pretended accidents" in truth "are really self-inflicted" and "symptoms of the disease". Behind the seeming "calmness, *Ruhe*" we must, according to Freud, suppose an unconscious and "constantly lurking tendency to self-punishment [...]" which skilfully, makes use of an external situation" (Freud 1922, p. 198f.).³⁷ This self-punishment results in a pernicious enjoyment through which the subject (of the unconscious) communicates with itself. Freud's exemplary case in the *Psychopathology* is a young married woman who

[...] broke her leg below the knee in a carriage accident so that she was bedridden for weeks. The striking part of it was the lack of any manifestation of pain and the calmness [*Ruhe*] with which she bore her misfortune. This calamity ushered in a long and serious neurotic illness, from which she was finally cured by psychotherapy. During the treatment I discovered the circumstances surrounding the accident, as well as certain impressions which preceded it. The young woman with her jealous husband spent some time on the farm of her married sister, in company with her numerous other brothers and sisters with their wives and husbands. One evening she gave an exhibition of one of her talents before this intimate circle; she danced artistically the 'cancan', to the great delight of her relatives, but to the great annoyance of her husband, who afterward whispered to her, 'Again you have behaved like a prostitute'. The words took effect; we will leave it undecided whether it was just on account of the dance. That night she was restless [*unruhig*] in her sleep, and the next forenoon she decided to go out driving. She chose the horses herself, refusing one team and demanding another. Her youngest sister wished to have her baby with its nurse accompany her, but she opposed this vehemently. During the drive she was nervous; she reminded the coachman that the horses were getting skittish, and as the fidgety [*unruhigen*] animals really produced a momentary difficulty she jumped from the carriage in fright and broke her leg, while those remaining, in the carriage were uninjured. Although after the disclosure of these details we can hardly doubt that this accident was really contrived, we cannot fail to admire the skill which forced the accident to mete out a punishment so suitable to the crime. For as it happened 'cancan' dancing with her became impossible for a long time" (ibid., p. 199f.).

³⁷ Translation modified.

Here self-communication adopts the twisted form of an acting out of an unconscious phantasy of self-punishment. It is rooted in what can be called a symptomatic 'compassion-of-oneself'. "[I]n our present state of civilization", writes Freud in 1904, "[t]he self-inflicted injury which does not entirely tend toward self-annihilation has [...] no other choice [...] than to hide itself behind the accidental [...]. Formerly, it was a customary sign of mourning, at other times it expressed itself in ideas of piety [*Frömmigkeit*] and renunciation of the world [*Weltentsagung*]." (Ibid., p. 199 Fn. 1)

It is known, of course, how Kant repeatedly denounces *Schwärmerei* and other ambiguous forms of moral pathology like e. g. bigotry. And it has been evidenced above how much Kant's moral subject is supposed to differ from that through its 'joyous frame of mind' etc. Yet in Kant's later philosophy traces of a symptomatic enjoyment at the roots of moral subjectivity can be detected, too. A comparison with de Sade is helpful here, following Lacan's text on *Kant with Sade*, for it suggests that the elevated and self-content enjoyment of the virtuous subject would turn into, so to speak, 'moral' disgust under de Sadean conditions: "Imagine a revival of Epicurus in Sadean experience: 'You see, you broke it', he says, pointing to his leg. To reduce *jouissance* to the misery of an effect in which one's quest stumbles—doesn't this transform it into disgust?" (Lacan 2006a, p. 651) And as Jacques Derrida suggests in *Economimesis*, "the experience of disgust" together with "the scheme of vomiting" (Derrida 1981, p. 21) mark the blind spot of Kant's rationalistic moralism. Or rather it occupies "[...] within the Kantian system a strategic point that unites

all faculties”, as Winfried Menninghaus convincingly argues (Menninghaus 2003, p. 114).³⁸ It is in Kant’s own conception of disgust indeed where his contradictory statements on the paradoxical topic of a ‘commanded feeling’, a ‘pleasure in the law itself’ or an ‘enjoyment of duties’ converge—statements like: that the determination of the will by the moral law ‘imposes itself (*sich aufdringt*)’ and that *Achtung* is the ‘moral pleasure’ resulting from this imposition; that it is ‘contrary to the nature of duty to *enjoy* having duties incumbent upon one’; that ‘an obligation to enjoyment is a manifest absurdity’, just like it ‘cannot be commanded’ to have a certain ‘affection’ like e. g. ‘love’.

This is not least because disgust (including possible variants) is the only form of forced enjoyment that Kant openly admits (again *Achtung* and its reverse, humiliation, notwithstanding). In the *Critique of Judgement*, § 48 dealing with the *Relation of Genius to Taste*, Kant defines disgust, *Ekel*, as the “[...] peculiar sensation, which rests on mere imagination, [in which] the object is represented as [if] it were imposing itself for our enjoyment [*als ob er sich zum Genusse aufdränge*] while we strive against it with all our might” (Kant 1914, p. 195; Kant 2007, 05: 312).³⁹ As it were, disgust is a feeling which commands itself to us. The aesthetic result according to Kant is that in disgust, *Ekel*, “the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation”, which is to say that an imaginary let alone symbolic distancing of the object is impossible. Thus disgust is the singular “kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance

³⁸ On Kant’s concept of disgust cf. Menninghaus 2003, particularly pp. 103–120. Menninghaus observes that „[t]he sensation of disgust judges, as it were, on physical, aesthetic, and moral levels, thus occupying—very much like the sensation of beauty—within the Kantian system a strategic point that unites all faculties. It supplements the purely theoretical critique with a test of taste—with a dietetic organon judging all sorts of ‘food for the intellect.’” (Ibid., p. 114f.)

³⁹ Translation modified.

with nature”. It cannot be forborn because it cuts through any kind of imaginary or symbolic distancing. Disgust is a formation of the ‘real’ in Lacan’s sense. Therefore it ruins (“*zu Grunde zu richten*”) “all aesthetical satisfaction [*ästhetische Wohlgefallen*] and consequently artificial beauty [*Kunstschönheit*]” (ibid.). As disgust collapses the difference between sensation and representation, it also tends to collapse the difference between the subject and the disgustful object—be it a suffering human being. From an aesthetical point of view, it thus marks the blind spot of the ethically and logically necessary self-implication of the morally judging subject into his own systematized rationalizations. Through disgust, the moral subject is blinded and thus beyond good and evil. Yet at the same time, we may presume, disgust is just the extreme reverse side of compassion and thus is related to the very possibility of practical reason; as surrogate or supplement of morality’s truth, it kicks the solitary *Pflichtvorstellung* into the fullness of life. Moreover, we can conclude that in analogy to the feeling of *Achtung*, which is a feeling “the necessity of which we can discern (*einsehen*)”, in the case of disgust it is necessity as such, i. e. the necessity of subjectivation, i. e. morality’s *ultima ratio*, which becomes an object of aesthetic experience. Thus it appears that in Kant’s moral philosophy disgust is the—ugly—truth of the “necessity, indeed urgency” of “a demand of morality itself”, namely of “finding a sensible representation of morality” (Guyer 1993, p. 178).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Cf. Menninghaus: “While virtually all pertinent scholarly work on Kant focuses on the duality of the sublime and the beautiful, the Kantian system is in fact distinguished by a triad—that of ‘the feelings of the sublime, the beautiful, and the disgusting’. This triad proves to be highly functional with regard to the paradigm of philosophical organa. [...] The beautiful and sublime positively compensate for theoretical deficits of foundation and practical deficits of motivation; the feeling of disgust warns us away, and shelters us in negative-apotropaic fashion, from giving in to what would be opposite to the (groundless) good or the (unknowable) purposiveness of nature. As an effect of cultivation, such desirable achievements do not constitute a miraculous natural phenomenon, proving that the human being is naturally good in essence. Rather, to speak with Freud, in the end these positive functions of disgust are instituted by the superego” (Menninghaus 2003, p. 116).

Aesthetically speaking again, this ultimate necessity appears here in a most ‘accidental’ (Freud) form, namely in a form which, in everyday experience, is as pervasive as it is unpredictable: boredom. And just as disgust is the reverse side of compassion, *Mitleid*, and by the same token the discontentful double of respect, *Achtung*, so analogously is boredom the discontentful (*unbehaglich*) double of Kant’s moral apathy. For it is “disgust” that, in Kant’s *Anthropology*, essentially defines “boredom”. Boredom, *lange Weile*, writes Kant, boils down to disgust or nausea, given that boredom is the “disgust [*Anekelung*] with one’s own existence, which arises when the mind is empty of the sensations toward which it incessantly strives [*aus der Leerheit des Gemüths an Empfindungen, zu denen es unaufhörlich strebt, der langen Weile*]” (Kant 2006, p. 43; Kant 2007, 07: 152). In other words: boredom is the disgust, *Ekel*, felt on the occasion of a permanently frustrated striving for sensations. As we have every reason to suspect here, boredom or disgust become morally relevant precisely in cases where the ‘representation of duty on its own’, emptied as it is of all ‘pathological’ determinations, would not accomplish the practical determination of the will.

So we can further presume that it is through the aesthetic (i. e. ultimately: pathological) feelings of disgust and/or boredom that “[t]he rule of the Judgement according to laws of pure practical reason” (i. e. the categorical imperative) can indeed get suspended, a rule which obliges to “ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of the system of nature of which you were yourself a part, you could regard it as possible by your own will. Everyone does, in fact, decide by this rule whether actions are morally good or evil” (Kant 1889, p. 161; Kant 2007, 05: 069). Affected by disgust/boredom, the Kantian subject, like the Stoic, simply cannot ask him- or herself whether he or she ‘could regard’ the propo-

sed action ‘as possible by his or her own will’⁴¹. This is because it is precisely disgust/boredom which masks both the self-implication of the subject’s will into the moral law (conceived of in analogy to a ‘system of nature’) and the unconscious (quasi-natural, quasi-pathological) “pre-determinism” of the will resulting from it; how such pre-determinism could possibly “co-exist with freedom” is something which, as to Kant’s *Religion*, “we want to discern [*einsehen*], but we never shall” (Kant 2006, p. 94, Fn. *; Kant 2007, 06: 049).

It cannot be discerned, in any case, unless the subject stops ignoring his or her as it were ‘moral’ disgust, which is compassion in its most extreme, namely its most debased form. If, as Kant claims, in disgust ‘the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation’, i. e. if not even the artistic representation can temper disgust, then *fortiori* we may conclude that actually any representation of the (disgusting) object ‘is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation’. Such ‘moral’ disgust thus makes it impossible to decide whether a sympathetic affect springs from intuition or rather from reason, i. e. whether from ‘pathological’ infection by a social other (*‘humanitas aesthetica’*) or rather from the subject’s ‘practical’ free will (*‘humanitas practica’*). Thus in the experience of disgust the subject can no longer decide whether its ‘representation of duty’, *Pflichtvorstellung*, is ‘pathological’ or ‘practical’. For it is only in pure “thinking” that I can imagine that “I am *free*, because I am not in an other, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself [*schlechthin bei mir selbst bleibe*], [...]”; nothing but “[...] my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself [*meine Bewegung in Begriffen ist eine Bewegung in mir selbst*]”,

⁴¹ Cf. Cooper 1996, p. 266.

as Hegel remarks in the *Phenomenology* with respect to (not only) ancient Stoicism. As Hegel explains, this is because “[...] in the case of a representation [*Vorstellung*], [...] consciousness still has specially to bear in mind that this is its representation [*Vorstellung*]; on the contrary, the concept [*Begriff*] is for me straightaway my concept [*Begriff*]” (Hegel 1977, p. 120).⁴² Disgust breaks up this rational self-communion. So besides veiling the self-implication of the moral subject into its object and besides blurring the distinction between pathological and moral compassion, disgust lastly makes it impossible even to discern whether the *Pflichtvorstellung* really is the subject’s very own representation or not, and whether it is a representation of a concept or a representation in the sensuous, aesthetic sense.



Screenshot from *The Amputee* (1974) directed by David Lynch

⁴² Translation modified.

While the *Pflichtvorstellung* tends to become indiscernible in the experience of disgust, and despite Kant’s verdict about the impossible artification of disgusting objects, there are nevertheless artistic strategies to counter the symptomatic knot interlacing disgust, apathetic boredom and painful compassion. David Lynch’s *The Amputee* of 1974 artistically stages and exposes such symptomatic feelings as they eventually mask an unconscious over-determination. The objective humor involved in Lynch’s short film communicates something unfathomable which cannot be discerned, it is true, but which can be enjoyed and thus sensed.

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Filmography

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