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KANT: MORAL PROGRESS, POLITICS, AND THE HIGHEST GOOD

A DISSERTATION

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BY


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SECTION ONE

Introduction

The genesis of this book came about through a thorough analysis of Kant's article, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent." This article was written shortly after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and makes some seemingly grand claims about the course of human history. How grand are these claims? The article focuses on the necessary progress of human beings through history, particularly *moral* progress through history. But why is such progress necessary? How strongly does Kant wish to advance this claim? And, importantly, how does such a claim fit with the rest of his philosophy?

This article is also interesting because of the strong link Kant makes between morality and politics. Kant maintains that moral progress is not to be had without political progress, and that working national and international constitutions are necessary to ensure the security between persons and nations. Certainly we know from Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* that the formation of laws is a moral question, since both have to do with the exercise of freedom in a world where other people exist as well. But this connection is made stronger in the "Idea" due to the necessitating of just political institutions in order to ensure not only legality but also morality. At least politics seems to be a necessary foundation for the moral project. Again, what are we to make of these strong claims?

The secondary literature is extremely limited on this subject, though there are two general schools of thought regarding the "Idea." The first takes Kant as trying to engender a project which is similar to Hegel's, namely, some sort of strong stance on the necessary development of reason in the world. The commentators then argue that Kant (naturally) fails in this

attempt, for he has no philosophical framework which allows him to say anything akin to the manifestation of the “Absolute” or of “Mind.” If this is really Kant’s project, surely the commentators’ evaluation is correct.

The other school of thought is to argue that the “Idea” represents an early attempt to wrestle with the question of teleology. They maintain that Kant is trying to work out the characteristics of natural development in the world, anticipating the *Critique of Judgment*. However, Kant’s notion of teleology is evaluated as being incomplete here, and commentators surmise that Kant has not yet adequately made the distinction between the regulative and constitutive use of teleology. Kant’s statements regarding progress are taken as being simply too strong, though it is claimed that he will rectify this problem with the third *Critique*. Surely if Kant is actually trying to use teleology as a constitutive principle, he has overstepped the limits of the first *Critique*, and if instead he has in mind the use of teleology as a merely regulative principle, he ought to have applied it more carefully.

In addition, inherent in many commentators’ analyses is the belief that Kant is really trying to tell us about how to investigate history, that is, the belief that Kant is concerned with a *speculative* question about history. Most commentators assume that Kant’s writings about history are of the same nature as his writings about mathematics, geometry, or physics that is, they concern the question of how we are to study history itself as a science. This proposition is not argued for; it is merely a tacit assumption.

I reject these two main lines of interpretation, particularly as they concern the “Idea.” As these beliefs represent what seem to be the majority of the few commentaries concerning this aspect of Kant’s philosophy, a major task of this book will be to point out the problems with such analyses. We might call this the “negative” aspect of this work, and “Section One” is largely devoted to arguing against these interpretations, both directly and indirectly.

The overall project of Section One is to examine Kant's discussion in all of his writings regarding the (moral) progress of the human species. Two concepts become most important, namely Kant's conception of progress (*Fortschritt*) and of "the highest good" (*das höchste Gut* or the *summum bonum*). There are two important findings in such an analysis. The first is that Kant intends there to be *two* locations for the highest good, namely one in a after-life, an "otherworldly" highest good, and one in the natural world, an "earthly" highest good. What this, in turn, indicates, is that moral progress in this world is a necessary assumption, a "postulate of practical reason," for barring this possibility, we should have to abandon the quest for the highest good, a quest which Kant thinks is mandated by reason. This leads to Kant's conception of progress, and his discussion of teleology. The other important thing we discover is that Kant does, in fact, speak of progress in human history not as a speculative problem, but as a practical problem. Kant is concerned not with the study of history, but with the investigation of history in order to find clues that the human race is indeed progressing. Kant uses language which speaks of progress in history as a notion from a practical point of view, basing his analysis on duty and morality.

The outline of the first section is as follows: Chapter One takes a brief overview of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to establish the parameters which Kant sets for any metaphysical discussion. This chapter is straightforward and uncontroversial.

Chapter Two examines Kant's understanding of teleology and his introduction of the highest good. Most importantly, I show that Kant, already in the first *Critique*, understands that teleology must be used as a regulative principle only. This allows us to look at the "Idea" from a new perspective: it seems clear that Kant knows full well the limitations of the notion of teleology, so either he has simply forgotten his stance from the first *Critique*, or he has a different kind of point to make with the "Idea." Kant's introduction of

the highest good here is brief, but I will look at its conception. Also, I try to show, in part, how the “Idea” is the natural result of Kant’s struggle with the inherent tension between the answers to the questions of, What can I know? and, What can I hope?

Chapter Three then takes a first important look at the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent.” After an overview of the piece, I examine the nature of the link between politics and morality. Here I show why Kant thinks politics to be so important as a foundation for morality. I also try to head off an objection regarding the nature of this link by introducing an argument that political institutions are necessary but not sufficient conditions of moral development.

In Chapter Four I present a brief account of Kant’s moral theory, focusing mainly on the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Of chief interest to us here is Kant’s argument for the highest good and his discussion of how something becomes a postulate of pure practical reason. In the first section I give a brief overview of Kant’s moral philosophy; in the second I give Kant’s argument for the highest good; in the third I discuss the necessary postulates of God and immortality; in the fourth I discuss the location of the highest good; and in the last I briefly point out Kant’s struggle with the question of the “expansion” of practical reason. This chapter shows the further importance of postulates of practical reason, as well as opening up the possibility of two locations for the highest good.

Chapters Five through Eight all deal with the *Critique of Judgment*. This work of Kant’s is important because of its dealings with teleology. I try to show that while Kant certainly makes great contributions to his notion of teleology in this book, he does not go beyond the original parameters which he established in the first *Critique*. Teleology remains a regulative notion, which again ought to lead us to suspect that Kant was quite aware of the limits to teleology when he wrote the “Idea.” In fact, while commentators

seem to think that the third *Critique* involves major changes from the “Idea,” I argue that it actually supports almost all the claims from the “Idea.” In his working out of this *Critique*, Kant discovers further reasons to believe in the progress of humankind, though he never violates the first *Critique* by thinking that teleology is inherent in nature or is constitutive of experience. In this work, Kant continues his talk about progress, the highest good, and even his concept of antagonism or “unsocial sociability” which he believes to be the driving force behind political developments.

Chapter Nine looks at the “Idea” again in light of the previous arguments. I argue, finally, that the “Idea” is best thought of in terms of a postulate of practical reason, a necessary belief for the pursuit of the highest good. Hence, the “Idea” is not intended by Kant to be something like Hegel’s development of the “Absolute,” cannot mistake teleology as a constitutive principle, and does not deal with history as a speculative question. While progress is certainly a regulative idea, it is by no means *merely* regulative, in the same way that God and immortality are not *mere* ideas of reason. Kant is concerned with moral progress and of the conditions of the pursuit of the highest good. Those conditions involve political institutions as well as practical postulates.

Chapter Ten is a transition between the two “Sections” of this book. I make some summary remarks concerning Section One, as well as making some additional comments on the secondary literature.

Having rejected these general approaches to Kant’s position, I want to say something more concrete about Kant’s notion of progress and the highest good, and hence “Section Two” is of more of a “positive” analysis. What is the nature of the link between morality and politics? What is the exact nature of the highest good? How will progress take shape in the world? These are the types of questions which I address.

Chapter One is an intensive analysis of Kant's notion of the highest good and its reception in the secondary literature. I try to say what the highest good is and what it is not. There are many crucial points here, and I try to establish the parameters of future discussions concerning the highest good. Many of the points I take to be settled, while many remain controversial.

Chapter Two deals with what I take to be serious problems with Kant's formulation of the "otherworldly" highest good. One main problem has to do specifically with Kant's insistence that virtue be rewarded with *proportionate* happiness. Not only does there seem to be no reason why we should accept this equation, but it also seems to be in violation of many of Kant's other tenets. I argue that we ought to reject the equation, and instead be concerned only with happiness which is either minimally necessary as a foundation for moral action, or which is merely permitted and not deserved. I try to show that this harmonizes better with the rest of Kant's philosophy, even though Kant himself insists on the necessity of this equation throughout his writings. In addition, I examine Kant's notion of happiness itself, and try to show that there are serious problems when we try to conceive of happiness in an afterlife. It is simply not conceivable that happiness could be a reward for morality in an afterlife.

In Chapter Three I look at the link between morality and politics. I argued (in previous chapters) that there are two locations for the highest good; if we are to take this seriously, then we must be concerned with the question of how this highest good on earth is to come about. This is largely a political question. I examine Kant's political writings, analyzing them in chronological order. I try to substantiate the following claims with this chapter: 1) Kant does posit the necessary belief in the moral progress of the species, 2) this belief concerns history, though it is a belief based on moral ends and is not meant to be a (merely) regulative idea for the study of history as a

science, and 3) certain political organizations are necessary (but not sufficient) for moral progress to occur. In the last section, I also discuss Kant's seemingly strange claim that nature alone must be the guarantor of peace. I argue that this is a perfectly understandable claim, and furthermore is a necessary one, given the requisite conditions for the moral project to begin in earnest.

In Chapter Four I outline what I take to be Kant's understanding of how moral progress is to take place. Kant seems to outline five specific steps toward moral perfection of the human species: 1) total state of nature, 2) national/internal constitution, 3) federation of nations, 4) culture and ecclesiastical faith, and 5) the highest good on earth. Again, the link between morality and politics will be examined and established. I try to show how the stages interact and to explain what the nature of each of these stages might be.

In Chapter Five I attempt to justify why a belief in the highest good is necessary. This far in the work, I have argued only that Kant indeed takes the highest good to be the appropriate object of moral willing, while now I present arguments as to why belief in its possibility might be necessary. It is an attempt to answer the question of, What would the consequences be if we rejected the possibility of the highest good? I think there are six possible reasons for its necessitation, though they vary greatly in strength. Ultimately, I think the best justification is one which seems to be virtually ignored in the secondary literature, namely that the belief is necessary if the world is to have any meaning or value. Kant's detailed examination of teleology in the third *Critique* lead him to three strong arguments for the link between the world as a possible creation and the moral vocation of human beings. Kant believes that if humankind cannot progress, then the world is a cruel joke.

Chapter Six deals with the question of why God might remain as a necessary postulate of practical reason. The problem arises through the rejection, in Chapter Two, of the equation of happiness as a proportionate reward for morality. If God is no longer needed to distribute proportionate happiness, why is a belief in God necessary? I begin by examining claims by Sharon Anderson-Gold and Charles Rossi that God is necessary for individuals to overcome their natural envy of each other, an envy which leads persons toward evil. I argue that, while this is indeed a problem which necessitates a belief in God, I do not think that Anderson-Gold's and Rossi's interpretations really get to the root of the problem of evil, and hence they do not solve all the problems which they think are solved. I argue instead that we must still believe in God because we must believe in the possibility of the moral responsiveness of nature. If nature does not exist with some bent toward morality, then the hope for political progress would have to be abandoned, and, subsequently, moral progress as well. Nature must be the guarantor of peace, and peace is necessary for the moral project. In the final pages of this chapter, I examine the difference between nature as existing and nature as having been created by a moral author.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion. I make some summary remarks and try to show the advantages of my interpretation of Kant. One such advantage is that we are rid of Hegel's problem of proving that nature is, in fact, teleological. Another is that we remain free to discuss and pursue "everyday" politics, namely problems of how to provide (minimal) services for persons, how to administer law and justice, and how to interact with other countries. The solutions to these political and societal problems must ultimately involve empirical knowledge of people as creatures of nature, not only rational beings. In addition to providing what I take to be a more accurate analysis of Kant's philosophy, I hope my interpretation frees both Kant and ourselves from the problems encumbered by a Hegelian account of nature and history, and allows us to pursue a better world more effectively.

Chapter One

Overview to the *Critique of Pure Reason*

I.

In his 1784 piece, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” Immanuel Kant discusses moral progress, political institutions, and, indirectly, the “highest good.” Kant makes some extremely crucial claims in this rather short piece, linking these three concepts together and providing a foundation for his later moral, political, and religious writings. While only a few chapters of Section One of this book deal directly with the “Idea,” Kant’s article and the concepts involved are the motivating forces behind this book. Very few commentators have focused on this article or on the implications it has for Kant’s philosophy as a whole. We want to understand how Kant envisioned and utilized the notion of moral progress, why he made it dependent upon politics, and how it is linked with the highest good.

In order to begin this investigation, we must begin with Kant’s first “critical” work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This work is important for us because it is here that Kant gives us the necessary parameters of any subsequent discussion of morality, religion, politics, or the self. In addition, many of the key ideas and concepts found in the “Idea” are also discussed for the first time in the *Critique*, and are retained in the second edition.¹ While much is new in the “Idea,” especially the combination of politics with morality, a surprising amount is already mentioned in the first *Critique*.

¹ The “Idea for a Universal History for a Cosmopolitan Intent” was published between the first and second editions of the first *Critique*.

In the next two chapters, I will examine the necessary principles and criteria for our discussion of morality, religion, and politics as they are presented by Kant in his first major (“critical”) work. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss Kant’s main conclusions in the first *Critique* as they pertain to our later discussion of morality. This chapter is not meant to be controversial, nor is any defense attempted, but only sets a basic, though necessary, ground for later discussion. Those more familiar with the first *Critique* may wish to skip this chapter. In the next chapter, I will discuss those particular concepts which Kant introduces in the “Ideal of Pure Reason” and the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method” that are expounded upon in later writings, particularly in the “Idea.” This second chapter offers new, if not controversial, interpretations. I will try to show that much of the later moral and religious writings are anticipated here, though they will undergo important changes as Kant’s theories develop.

II.

In general, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is Kant’s attempt to find the foundations for human experience and knowledge. Kant tries to answer the broad questions of how experience itself is possible and what kind of knowledge is attainable. Kant takes mathematics and geometry to be the prime examples of the achievements of human reason. Kant was certain of the truths of these sciences, and was impressed at their application to natural science, especially the discoveries of Newton. But why are we most certain of the knowledge found in these areas of study? What allows for the justification of such knowledge and in what ways can we be certain of it?

Essentially, Kant concludes that there are two elements which allow for experience and for knowledge based on these experiences. The first element is the “intuition” of space and time. In order to have an experience of an object, we must have some initial sensation of the object, since “intuition

takes place only in so far as the object is given to us.”² But this sensation always comes to us in specific ways, namely, as occurring in space and in time. Through a series of arguments,³ he contends that it is the nature of the human mind to intuit all objects in accordance with the forms of space and time. Space is the form of external intuition, while time is the form of internal as well as external intuition. Indeed, Kant argues that without space and time, we⁴ would not be able to experience objects as separate from each other and as separate from ourselves in the first place.

Thus space and time, Kant maintains, are two guarantors of the possibility for knowledge. This is because we, as human beings, are certain that if we are to have any experience of an object whatsoever, we will experience it in space and time. The propositions of geometry, then, are true because of the necessary character of our intuitions of space,⁵ regardless of what kind of object is intuited, we can know true propositions of geometry, because our intuitions of space and time exist prior to any intuited object.⁶ These truths are genuine discoveries, but they are discoveries only if we realize that space and time are not somehow “out there,” somehow existing apart from the intuition; “space does not represent any property of things in themselves, nor does it represent them in their relation to one another... Space is nothing but the

² A19 = B33. All citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* will give the first and second edition Akademie page numbers and come from: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

³ See especially in the “Aesthetic” and the “Antinomies.”

⁴ At least we as human beings. Other beings might be able to differentiate objects without intuiting them through space and time, though we could not conceive how. See: Isabel Cabrera, “Two Orientations for Kant's Transcendental Arguments: An Example,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 164-5.

⁵ Kant, of course, thought this space to be necessarily Euclidean in character. Several commentators have written on this fact. See: P.F. Strawson, “Imagination and Perception,” in *Kant on Pure Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 82-99; James Hopkins, “Visual Geometry,” *Philosophical Review*, 82 (1973): 3-34; and Norman Kemp Smith, *Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 117-120.

⁶ It seems we would have to have some experience or other before we could be aware of the forms of the intuitions, though there are sections where Kant seems to think we might have a direct experience of the forms themselves.

form of all appearances of outer sense.”⁷ At least in the case of mathematics and geometry, Kant can show the foundation for experience and knowledge.

Kant maintains that it was not until the mathematicians and geometers of old changed their way of thinking about their discipline that they were able to discover important truths. In the “Preface” to the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant claims that these men had to move from thinking about what could be deduced from the nature of the mathematical objects themselves, to the revolutionary attempt

to bring out what was necessarily implied in the concepts that he had himself formed *a priori*, and had put into the figure in the construction by which he presented it to himself... [H]e must not ascribe to the figure anything save what necessarily follows from what he has himself set into it in accordance with his concept.⁸

In this way, the focus shifts from how the objects must be in themselves, to how they must be for us, how the human mind gives them shape and properties. We apply concepts of mathematics and geometry to our intuitions, and we are thus able to procure new knowledge, but only by discovering the nature of our own intuitions of space and time, not by discovering the nature the objects themselves. Importantly, Kant maintains that this method applies not only to objects of mathematics and geometry, but to the objects of science as well.

This edict that we must not consider our knowledge as conforming to objects, but rather treat objects of the natural world as conforming to our intuition and understanding, has come to be known as Kant’s “Copernican

⁷ A26 = B42. Kant argues for this assertion not only in the “Aesthetic,” but also particularly in the “Antinomies,” where he asserts that space and time must necessarily be understood only as forms of intuition, because if they are taken to exist “out there” apart from our intuitions, many incongruities exist which can not otherwise be resolved.

⁸ B xii.

Revolution.”⁹ In the same way that Copernicus replaced the Earth with the Sun at the center of the solar system, Kant now removes the natural object from the center of knowledge, replacing it with human reason:

By nature, in the empirical sense, we understand the connection of appearances as regards their existence according to necessary rules, that is, according to laws. There are certain laws *which first make a nature possible*, and these laws are *a priori*. Empirical laws can exist and be discovered only through experience, and indeed in consequence of those original laws through which experience itself first becomes possible.¹⁰

This leads us to the second of two elements which allow for experience and for knowledge based on these experiences. Kant’s investigation into the disciplines of mathematics and geometry lead us to the discovery of intuitions of space and time. Kant’s investigation into the foundations which allow for experience of the natural world leads us to combine the pure intuitions with pure concepts. These concepts Kant calls “categories” or “pure concepts of the understanding.”

While intuitions give human beings the necessary raw data of empirical sensation, though only as represented in space and time, the categories allow us to think about this data. Kant divides human cognitive capacity, to be understood broadly, into intuition and understanding.¹¹ In an often cited quotation, Kant says that, “without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”¹² In other words, without sensations, we would, at best, have only empty concepts, with

⁹ Though there is at least one additional understanding of Kant’s “Copernican Revolution” which takes it to be the abandonment of the theoretical project for the practical project.

¹⁰ A216 = B263. First italics mine. See also A116 and A126-7.

¹¹ Certainly there is some question about just how many faculties Kant gives us in the first *Critique*, but this is beyond the scope of this chapter. There may also be the faculty of reason, though this may simply be the understanding in its transcendent, unschematized employment. There may also be the faculties of judgment and imagination.

¹² A51 = B75.

nothing to apply them to, and without understanding, we would have some jumble of impressions to which we could give no order or significance.

Human beings need material in order to think, and thus Kant agrees, in part, with Hume's conclusions that there could be no knowledge without first having experience. But while some experience is necessary to furnish the human mind with elements of thought, "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience."¹³

Space, time, and the categories exist *a priori* in the mind in order that the objects of experience might be able to be thought in the first place.

Now Kant is able to attempt an answer to the question of knowledge in the natural sciences. Because objects must conform to our understanding, and because the categories of the human understanding are universal, we can be assured that whatever object is an object of possible experience, it will have to conform to the categories. Concepts or categories of the understanding, though empty,¹⁴ exist *a priori*, in order that the material furnished by the senses can be thought. The particular empirical laws of nature, such as that of the acceleration of gravity or the motion of the planets, will be based on these rules.¹⁵ Natural science is secured as a body of knowledge because any natural object we might experience must conform to space, time, and the laws of the understanding, which are necessary and universal for all human beings: "we then assert that the conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are likewise conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*, and that for this reason they have objective validity..."¹⁶ Hence intuition and

¹³ B1.

¹⁴ "Thus the function of the categorical judgment is that of the relation of the subject to predicate... But as regards the merely logical employment of the understanding, it remains undetermined to which of the two concepts the function of the subject, and to which the function of predicate, is to be assigned... Similarly with all the other categories" (B128-9). See also A.C. Ewing, *A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 132-75.

¹⁵ "...all empirical laws are only special determinations of the pure laws of understanding, under which, and according to the norm of which, they first become possible" (A127-8).

¹⁶ A158 = B197.

understanding are the two elements which allow for experience and for knowledge based on these experiences.

Such a position has two (immediate) important consequences. The first is the fact that we may have knowledge only of those objects which sensation provides:

Objects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us *intuitions*; they are *thought* through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*. But all thought must, directly or indirectly, by way of certain characters, relate ultimately to intuitions, and therefore, with us, to sensibility, because in no other way can an object be given to us.¹⁷

Hence, pure “rational” philosophy, like that of Leibniz and Wolff, is ruled out by Kant, because the only objects about which we may have knowledge are objects of possible experience, and experience requires empirical input that conforms to the sensible intuitions of space and time. The categories, taken by themselves and not applied to the intuitions (unschematized), are empty. They possess only logical forms, and have no content. Thus, no new important knowledge can be gained by the mere analysis of concepts. Because humans are finite intelligences, we cannot create the objects through thought alone for which we might have a concept; God would be able to do such a thing, i.e., bringing something into being through thought alone, but we cannot.¹⁸ Subsequently, however, this also necessitates that we can discover nothing about metaphysics save for what can be given to us as an object of experience.

The second considerable consequence of Kant’s position is that it puts an incredible limit on what we can know in speculative philosophy; we can never get to the “thing in itself” (*die Sache an sich selbst* or *das Ding an sich*),

¹⁷ A19 = B33.

¹⁸ We can, of course, bring geometrical objects “into being” through the construction of concepts, but such objects have to be constructed in space, which means for Kant that they too are not known analytically.

and are therefore relegated to dealing with mere appearances (*Erscheinung*). Because any object must first be synthesized through the intuitions of space and time in order to be thought, we are never able to have an experience of an object apart from experiencing it in space and time. Hence, we are only able to think about appearances, not things in themselves:

Since we cannot treat the special conditions of sensibility [space and time] as conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances, we can indeed say that space comprehends all things that appear to us as external, but not all things in themselves, by whatever subject they are intuited, or whether they be intuited or not.¹⁹

Thus, the objects we have to think about, any object of possible experience, must not be things in themselves, but only appearances, that is, objects already intuited through space and time. As Norman Kemp Smith summarizes: “Existence takes a threefold, not a merely dual form. Besides representations and things in themselves, there exist the objects of our representations -- the extended world of ordinary experience and of science.”²⁰ The price for the truths of science is that knowledge of the natural world must be understood as knowledge only of appearances, not of things in themselves. The discoveries of science are indeed secured as knowledge, but only as knowledge of things as they appear to us in space and time. Humans, according to Kant, have no access to the realm of things as they are apart from our experience of them, no experience of what he terms the “noumenal” realm. We can only have knowledge of what we can experience, and we can only experience what is given to us as intuited through space and time and thought by the categories.

¹⁹ A27 = B43.

²⁰ Smith's *Commentary*, pp. 248-9.

III.

The human self is also subject to such a restriction of speculative knowledge. This restriction is especially important in this book because of our forthcoming discussion of freedom and immortality. As Hume argued so convincingly in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, we simply have no experience of a unified “self.” We have experiences of this and that thought or some particular sensation, but never of a self; “for my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other... I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.”²¹ On one hand, Kant must disagree with Hume’s conclusion that there is no unified self. While the argument for this position is much too detailed to cover here, its main premise is intuitively simple: there must be a unity of experience involved if we are to experience objects as objects, that is, to be able to differentiate between identical, changing, or different objects. Without such a unity of experience, which Kant calls the “transcendental unity of apperception,” there would only be fleeting impressions of the manifold of experience, if even that; “there can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible.”²²

On the other hand, however, Kant agrees with Hume that we can have no experience of a self, nor can we have any speculative knowledge of it. This is primarily due to the fact that, as seen above, we can only have knowledge of objects as they are given to us, and the self as given is only given through the intuition of time:

²¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), Book 1, Part IV, Section vi, pp. 252.

²² A107. See especially A107-8, A119, and B157-9.

Consciousness of self according to the determinations of our state in inner perception is merely empirical, and always changing. No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances... What has *necessarily* to be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought as such through empirical data.²³

The self can only be known by us as any other object of possible experience, namely as it is presented to us through the intuition. This is not the self as thing in itself, but only self as appearance. This is the self which is not only given in time, but also thought through the categories, and hence must be subject to these categories. We are ignorant of the true nature of the self as it may be apart from experience.²⁴ As Kant concludes, because the categories or concepts of the understanding are forms only and involve no content *per se*, “thought takes no account whatsoever of the mode of intuition, whether it be sensible or intellectual. I thereby represent myself to myself neither as I am nor as I appear to myself. I think myself only as I do any object in general from whose mode of intuition I abstract.”²⁵ We cannot know the self as substance. We can have no experience of the self as it is in itself. We are only privy to receive empirical impressions which have been intuited through time and thought through the categories. We cannot say with speculative reason whether the soul is a simple substance, whether it will exist eternally, or whether it can maintain a personality over time.²⁶

A natural consideration after this line of thinking is to inquire whether speculative philosophy, while providing us with no positive knowledge of the self, may necessitate some prohibitions regarding the self. The specific concern of Kant’s is whether speculative philosophy rules out the possibility of freedom, due to its insistence on the laws of mechanical

²³ A107. See also A350-1 and A381-2.

²⁴ See especially A398-402, B409-413, and B421-2.

²⁵ B428-9.

²⁶ Such a position may lead to even more radical conclusions regarding the self, but we need not discuss them here. See: Smith’s *Commentary*, pp. 248-84.

causation. Kant can answer this question only after his discussion of the “Third Antinomy.”

The problem of the “Third Antinomy” concerns freedom and mechanical causality, and arises in the following way: reason has an interest in searching out the unconditioned, the “*entire sum of conditions, and consequently the absolutely unconditioned*” for any given conditioned.²⁷ There are two possibilities when considering a conditioned occurring within a series of events in time: either there is a first cause, an unconditioned which begins the series (i.e., freedom²⁸), or no such unconditioned exists, in which case there is an infinite series. Now Kant maintains that such an antinomy arises naturally and unavoidably for reason because it must assume that *both* these possibilities are correct. On the one hand, the thesis (freedom) must be assumed true because otherwise we would have the problem of an effect with no cause, only an infinite chain of effects. As Lewis White Beck explains:

in a series of conditions and conditions of conditions, there is never a first condition; but the law of nature is that nothing occurs without a condition that is a priori sufficient. Hence... the law of nature is self-contradictory when taken in unlimited generality.²⁹

On the other hand, the antithesis must hold true if we are to maintain the concept of mechanical causality for the experience of nature. Beck summarizes:

If there is a spontaneous cause or an absolute beginning in the natural causal series, the later members of the series are independent of the earlier, and thereby the “unity of experience,” which depends upon the lawfulness of events

²⁷ A409 = B436. See also: A409-21 = B435-49. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter when dealing with the “Ideas of Reason.”

²⁸ “By freedom... in its cosmological meaning, I understand the power of beginning a state *spontaneously*. Such causality will not, therefore, itself stand under another cause determining it in time, as required by the law of nature.” A533 = B561.

²⁹ p. 184. Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Midway reprint, 1984).

in time, is made impossible, and thereby no criterion of empirical truth or objectivity is possible.³⁰

Thus reason is unavoidably lead into an antinomy, and Kant thinks that it is absolutely crucial for reason to find a solution to this antinomy because it is of reason's own making.³¹

The solution to this problem, of course, is that the natural world, while objective, is only the world intuited through space, time, and subject to the categories, and thus is only the empirical realm of appearance. This is not the only realm, for Kant has already argued for the division between appearances and things in themselves. Thus,

if appearances are things in themselves, freedom cannot be upheld. Nature will then be the complete and sufficient determining cause of every event. If, on the other hand, appearances are not taken for more than they actually are; if they are viewed not as things in themselves, but merely as representations, connected according to empirical laws, they must themselves have grounds which are not appearances... While the effects are to be found in the series of empirical conditions, the intelligible cause, together with its causality, is outside the series. Thus the effect may be regarded as free in respect of its intelligible cause, and at the same time in respect of appearances as resulting from them according to the necessity of nature.³²

If one considers appearances as things in themselves, then one must eliminate the possibility of freedom, but as one takes them to be mere appearances, Kant concludes that freedom is not incompatible with natural causality. While we necessarily apply the category of causality to objects of possible experience, as appearances, these objects have a "cause" which may not ultimately be that of another appearance; as he says, appearances "must have grounds which are not appearances." We have no idea how, ultimately, appearances come to be perceived by us, for we can only experience anything

³⁰ Beck's *Commentary*, p. 185.

³¹ Cf. A476-85 = B504-13.

³² A536-7 = B564-5.

through space and time. Thus, the antinomy is solved because mechanical causality is necessary for objects of possible experience, while freedom as an unconditioned cause is possible for things in themselves; both thesis and antithesis are needed for reason.

The solution to this antinomy clears the way for human freedom as well. Kant rightly notes that a world understood as operating completely under the rules of mechanical causation is incompatible with the possibility of human freedom. But the division between noumena and phenomena also applies to the person. In this respect, we may rightly think both that an effect in the world was simply one conditioned among a chain of conditions and that the effect was brought about as the result of a completely spontaneous and unconditioned cause. Thus, freedom and causality are not contradictory notions, for one has to do with the self as a non-empirical reality, while the other has to do with appearances in the world; the intelligible cause of the appearance may be regarded as free, while the series of appearances may be caused according to the laws of nature.

IV.

Having seen how the self and freedom are examined in the first *Critique*, we have finally to discuss Kant's consideration of God.³³ Kant gives only two possibilities for knowledge of God, both of which he rejects, namely knowledge based on reason, and knowledge based on revelation.³⁴ In "The Ideal of Pure Reason," Kant maintains that there are only three possible proofs for the existence of God,³⁵ all of which fail. The first is the "ontological" proof, which has it that God exists because the concept of God includes every possible perfection, of which one among them is "existence." Kant

³³ Kant maintains that "Metaphysics has as the proper object of its inquiries three ideas only: *God, freedom, and immortality...*" (B395 n.).

³⁴ A631 = B659.

³⁵ A590 = B618.

counters this argument by claiming that this only holds true if we except the existence of the object beforehand as it has been defined; this is like our understanding of a triangle, for “to posit a triangle, and yet to reject its three angles, is self-contradictory; but there is no contradiction in rejecting the triangle together with its three angles. The same holds true of the concept of an absolutely necessary being.”³⁶ Because we define the concept of God, to posit its existence but to then reject one of the characteristics would be contradictory; but rejecting the existence of the object of the concept together with its characteristics is permitted. To do otherwise would be to assume the very object to be proved.³⁷ The other two possible proofs, Kant claims, are the “cosmological” and the “physico-theological”³⁸ proofs. He argues that while both of them begin with different premises, namely some type of experience or other, the key to their proof always reduces to the ontological argument above, and are both therefore inconsistent.³⁹ Kant claims that all other attempts at such a proof are only different versions of these three mistaken arguments.

Given the discussion above, it should be clear that the only possible *knowledge* of God have would have to come from the experience of God as an empirical object: we cannot know God from the analysis of concepts, as many thinkers have attempted, because concepts are empty and without content until that content is supplied by the intuitions. But what possible content could be provided that could disclose a transcendent God? Any experience or “revelation” would be subject to space, time, and the categories, and concern only appearances. Thus Kant concludes that

³⁶ A594-5 = B622-3.

³⁷ A595 = 623.

³⁸ We might call this the “teleological proof.”

³⁹ On this reduction see: A590 = B618. A607 = B635. and A625 = B653.

all attempts to employ reason in theology in any merely speculative manner are altogether fruitless and by their very nature null and void, and that the principles of its employment in the study of nature do not lead to any theology whatsoever... All synthetic principles of reason allow only of an immanent employment; and in order to have knowledge of a supreme being we should have to put them to a transcendent use, for which our understanding is in no way fitted.⁴⁰

We cannot derive knowledge of God either from rational inquiry or from some experience of the divine. The categories are themselves empty, while revelation can only disclose knowledge of the realm of appearances.

V.

Were it not for a few hints along the way, we might think that Kant has made it impossible for us to know anything about God, freedom, or the self. And, strictly speaking, this is true. Because knowledge must deal with objects of possible experience, we cannot have knowledge of God, freedom, or the self. But as Kant's famous statement, "I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith (Glaube)*,"⁴¹ indicates, Kant is keenly aware of the limitations he has placed on metaphysics, and looks for a source other than speculative reason in which to investigate these metaphysical questions. This source, of course, is practical reason, and it is with practical reason that Kant feels we can have a rational basis for belief regarding God, freedom, and the self, though we cannot be assured of knowledge. As Kant's discussion in the "The Ideal of Pure Reason," the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic," and the "Transcendental Doctrine of Method" indicates, he believes it is only through an investigation into morality that we can aspire to answer the metaphysical questions:

But when all progress in the field of the supersensible has thus been denied to speculative reason, it is still open to us to enquire whether, in the practical knowledge of reason, data may not be found sufficient to determine reason's

⁴⁰ A636 = B664.

⁴¹ Bxxx. See also A745 = B773.

transcendent concept of the unconditioned, and so to enable us, in accordance with the wish of metaphysics, and by means of knowledge that is possible *a priori*, though only from a practical point of view, to pass beyond the limits of all possible experience.⁴²

Though Kant's critical project has prohibited any knowledge of metaphysics through speculative reason, it also has the positive effect of not placing any definite restrictions upon the possible nature of God, freedom, or the self. In other words, while we cannot be sure that these three metaphysical objects exist,⁴³ neither can we be certain that they cannot. Thus, Kant has made room for faith.

Specifically, room is made available by the fact that, while we cannot deduce anything from the mere form of the concepts of the understanding, we can utilize them in thinking. As Kant explains, while I can only know an object through experience or *a priori* through reason, "though we cannot *know* these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position at least to *think* them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears."⁴⁴ "I can *think* whatever I please, provided only that I do not contradict myself..."⁴⁵ Kant's three-fold division of reality into representations, appearances, and things in themselves, necessitated by the results of the *Critique*, allows us to think about the noumenal realm, though we cannot know anything about it.

In Section Two of "The Canon of Pure Reason," Kant makes his famous statement that, "all the interests of my reason, speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions: 1. What can I know?

⁴² Bxxi.

⁴³ This is not an entirely accurate statement, since Kant believes freedom can indeed be known to be certain, as a necessary foundation for the known moral law, though he seems to refrain from calling this knowledge *per se* since it is not discovered through speculative reason.

⁴⁴ Bxxvi-vii.

⁴⁵ Bxxvi n. See also B146. A287-8 = B344. and A771-2 = B799-800.

2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope.”⁴⁶ Above, we have already seen Kant’s answer to the first question, and seen that we are quite limited in what we can take to be knowledge *per se*. The answer to the second question concerns the moral law as spelled out in the categorical imperative; this question is passed over for the most part in the first *Critique*, Kant assuming here that there is a moral law, that we have access to it, and that it is not inconsistent with speculative reason. It is to the third question that we must now turn.

As Kant will explain in greater detail in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, though we cannot know God, freedom, and an immortal self, if these are necessary correlates to the moral law, we must *postulate* their existence. In the first *Critique*, Kant simply takes it for granted that we do have access to the moral law, the “categorical imperative” of the *Grundlegung*. From this point, he argues:

Now if it is indubitably certain that something is or that something ought to happen, but this certainty is at the same time only conditional, then a certain determinate condition of it can be absolutely necessary, or can be an optional and contingent presupposition... Now since there are practical laws which are absolutely necessary, that is, the moral laws, it must follow that if these necessarily presuppose the existence of any being as the condition of the possibility of their *obligatory* power, this existence must be *postulated*... At some future time we shall show that the moral laws do not merely presuppose the existence of a supreme being, but also, as themselves in a different connection absolutely necessary, justify us in postulating it, though, indeed, only from a practical point of view.⁴⁷

Thus, Kant introduces the necessity of postulates of pure practical reason. If a condition is necessitated for obeying the moral law, then we must postulate the existence of this condition, though we cannot know it to exist. As we will see in greater detail below, freedom is necessitated, because otherwise we

⁴⁶ A804-5 = B832-3.

⁴⁷ A633-4 = B661-2. See also A818 = B846, and A823-29 = B851-57.

would be subject only to the laws of nature, and could not be praiseworthy or blameworthy for our actions. An immortal self, containing a consistent personality, is postulated so that we can continue the project of becoming increasingly perfect moral creatures, as the moral law commands; otherwise, our lives on earth alone would be too short, and the moral law absurd. And, finally, we must postulate the existence of God, a being who can reward or punish us in accord with our level of moral perfection or our good will. These postulates are the answer to the third question, "What may I hope?" and are matters for belief or faith (*glaube*), and not knowledge.

With this last question in mind, and having established some crucial parameters for our discussion of moral progress, let us turn now to the next chapter where we will examine Kant's understanding of teleology, an important concept for the investigation of nature and history.

Chapter Two

Teleology and the Highest Good in the First *Critique*

I.

With our larger interest in Kant's conception of moral progress and the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" specifically in mind, there are a number of interesting points to be made regarding the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Kant's answer to the question, "What may I hope?" In this chapter, there are four central questions which will be examined: 1. What is the nature of an "idea," and what is the nature of its application to experience? 2. What is the nature of Kant's conception of teleology? 3. Is there a conflict between the answers to the three questions posed by the interest of reason?¹ 4. What is the highest good and where is it located? All four questions are interrelated. As we shall see, if we can have some indication as to the answers to these questions in the first *Critique*, we shall be in a better position to assess the claims Kant makes in the "Idea," and in his later works.

In addition, it is important for us to understand how Kant conceives of the answers to these four questions at this point, many years before the writing of the third *Critique*. This of particular importance because many commentators think that Kant's ideas of teleology are vastly underdeveloped at this stage, and that they are not solidified until the last *Critique*. In the presentation of the above issues in this chapter, especially the question of Kant's conception of teleology, it should become apparent that Kant had a

¹ What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? Discussed briefly in Chapter One above.

very clear notion of the limitations of the use of teleological ideas, and that he does not deviate from the parameters he himself recognizes and establishes. Hence, if Kant is aware of the necessary limitations, which I think he is, then we ought not attribute a “mere oversight” to his thinking in his subsequent political writings (the “Idea” and “Theory and Practice,” for example) if we find a claim which strikes us at first as possibly too strong. If Kant is clear in his conception of the correct employment of teleological ideas in the first *Critique*, then we ought to give him the benefit of the doubt when, in later chapters, we analyze these additional writings. For now, let us attempt to answer the four questions I have outlined.

II.

Ideas are necessary, Kant argues, for the systemization of the understanding. Just as the understanding dealt only with the information given to it by the intuitions, synthesizing and organizing this information, reason deals only with the understanding, organizing it and giving it structure;

the transcendental concept of reason is directed always solely towards absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions, and never terminates save in what is absolutely, that is, in all relations, unconditioned... Reason concerns itself exclusively with absolute totality in the employment of the concepts of the understanding, and endeavours to carry the synthetic unity, which is thought in the category, up to the completely unconditioned.²

[Transcendental ideas] are concepts of pure reason, in that they view all knowledge gained in experience as being determined through an absolute totality of conditions.³

In the “First Book of the Transcendental Dialectic” and in “The Ideal of Pure Reason,” Kant argues for the existence of three ideas, based upon the three categories of Relation. Each idea gives the understanding a totality towards which it can direct its actions, though such a totality could never be the

² A326 = B382-3.

³ A327 = B384.

object of an experience. The first is the idea of that which is a subject and never a predicate, the second is that which is unconditioned in the series of conditions of appearance, and the last is the idea of the "*ens realissimum*," or that which is the sum of all possible predicates. These three ideas of reason provide the understanding with totalities, ideas of the unconditioned, compelling the understanding to move beyond particular generalizations to give totality to experience.

But these ideas must be taken as regulative only, and not constitutive, for they are only guides that reason applies to the understanding, and do not constitute any object of possible experience. The (schematized) categories of the understanding allow for experience of objects in the first place, and are thus constitutive of experience. The ideas, while organizing the understanding and giving us a basis for the investigation of natural sciences, do not constitute the objects of experience:

I accordingly maintain that transcendental ideas never allow of any constitutive employment... On the other hand, they have an excellent, and indeed indispensably necessary, regulative employment, namely, that of directing the understanding towards a certain goal upon which the routes marked out by all its rules converge, as upon their point of intersection. This point is indeed a mere idea, a *focus imaginarius*... This illusion... is indispensably necessary if we are to direct the understanding beyond every given experience...⁴

We cannot meet the unconditioned or totality in experience, yet these ideas are necessary if understanding is to move beyond a random conglomerate of rules into the formulation of a systematic science. Thus Kant says that the idea is best thought of not as an object given, but rather as a problem to be solved, for "although we cannot have any knowledge of the object which corresponds to an idea, we yet have a problematic concept of it."⁵ "If the conditioned is given, a regress in the series of all its conditions is *set us as a*

⁴ A644-5 = B672-3.

⁵ A339 = B397.

*task.*⁶ Reason guides the understanding to systematize its knowledge through its application of the categories. If we take them to be more than merely regulative, we end up with the paralogisms, the antinomies, and the three mistaken proofs for the existence of God.

But along with ideas which allow for the furthering of the study of nature, Kant maintains that there exist ideas which allow of an influence in the sphere of practical reason. These include the idea of God, freedom, and immortality of a permanent soul, i.e., the same three categories of Relation applied now to practice, as well as, Kant maintains, the idea of the highest good, and of a perfectly organized and effectual constitution. The function of reason is the ordering of ends, for both the speculative and the practical sphere, “and as such [reason] is not bound down to natural conditions, it is justified in extending the order of ends, and therewith our own existence, beyond the limits of experience and of life.”⁷ As we saw in Chapter One above and will see again below, reason may extend itself thus because the necessary conditions for adhering to the moral law must be postulated if the moral law is true. These ideas are not matters for knowledge, yet are not mere opinions or hypothesis. They are properly termed “postulates” of pure practical reason, or “beliefs.” Reason gives rules as ideas for the ordering of the understanding, and

is here, indeed, exercising causality, as actually bringing about that which its concept contains; and of such wisdom we cannot, therefore, say disparagingly *it is only an idea*. On the contrary, just because it is the idea of the necessary unity of all possible ends, it must as an original, and at least restrictive condition, serve as standard in all that bears on the practical.⁸

⁶ A497-8 = B526. See also A287 = B344, A328 = 384-5, and A499 = B527.

⁷ B425.

⁸ A328 = B385.

Just because the ideas are not to be met with in experience, that does not mean they are “mere” ideas, for Kant deems them necessary for the understanding and for practical reason, for “it is only by means of this idea that any judgment as to moral worth or its opposite is possible.”⁹ The ideas of reason are a project. As such, they order the understanding in the investigation of nature, but also order the understanding towards the moral ends of reason. In this way, reason can help to bring about its object, though only in part, and only as a project.¹⁰ The ideas give us a totality, a “unity of all possible ends,” and order those ends appropriately, though we can never know the existence of such a totality. In this way, ideas aid practical reason in the instruction of the correct ends for morality.

Given our interest in the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” it is interesting that the very first idea that Kant provides in the first *Critique* as an example is the idea of a perfect constitution. In reconstructing Plato’s conception of an idea, particularly a practical idea as presented in the *Republic*, Kant maintains that

a constitution allowing *the greatest possible human freedom* in accordance with laws by which *the freedom of each is made to be consistent with that of all others* -- I do not speak of the greatest happiness, for this will follow of itself -- is at any rate a necessary idea, which must be taken as fundamental not only in first projecting a constitution but in all its laws.¹¹

Kant goes on to claim in this section, much in the same way as in the second book of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, that the organization of political institutions must be established in accordance with our ideas, and cannot be based on experience. This would be much the same as the error of trying to discern the notion of perfect virtue from examples of experience. It is only because

⁹ A315 = B372. See also A569 = B597.

¹⁰ A328 = B384-5.

¹¹ A316 = B373.

the ideas of reason are not to be met with in experience that they are able to function as grounds for moral judgment and comparison. Constitutions must be created with the moral law and the idea of the greatest possible reciprocal freedom and not created from “adverse experience. Such experience would never have existed at all, if at the proper time those institutions had been established in accordance with ideas...”¹² Kant argues that we have ideas of perfect virtue and a perfectly functioning society, and it is these ideas which allow for practical reason to have causal efficacy.

Three points are important to note about Kant’s discussion of the perfect constitution. First, this discussion occurs within a discussion of the possible moral perfection of human beings, and thus provides us with our first clue that moral perfection is somehow linked to political institutions. Before the example, Kant talks about virtue and the “approach to moral perfection.”¹³ After the example, he maintains that:

in a perfect state no punishments whatsoever would be required. This perfect state may never, indeed, come into being; none the less this does not affect the rightfulness of the idea, which, in order to bring the legal organization of mankind ever nearer to its greatest possible perfection, advances this maximum as an archetype. For what the highest degree may be at which mankind may have to come to a stand, and how great a gulf may still have to be left between the idea and its realization, are questions which no one can, or ought to, answer.¹⁴

In such a situation, the political and legal institutions would be so efficacious that persons, while having the greatest possible freedom, simply would not impinge on the freedom of others. This is required by the moral law at its perfection, at least in its external application, and no punishment would be necessary because no one would act (externally) in opposition to the moral law. It should be noted, of course, that in such a State, persons would not

¹² A316-7 = B373.

¹³ A315 = B372, quoted above.

¹⁴ A317 = B373-4.

necessarily be morally perfect, for they could indeed be acting legally without having a good will or attempting to act from duty alone.¹⁵ Hence, Kant is not claiming here that a State organized in complete accordance with the idea of freedom would simply *be* a situation in which individuals are morally perfect. But there is an important link, the nature of which we cannot discern for certain in this context alone, between the project of moral perfection, and the project of political and legal perfection.

The second important point can only be mentioned here, to be explained later, but is in a similar vein as the first point. In the paragraph following the first example of an idea, Kant writes:

It is, however, in regard to the principles of *morality, legislation, and religion*, where the experience, in this case of the good, is itself made possible only by the ideas -- incomplete as their empirical expression must always remain -- that Plato's teaching exhibits its quite peculiar merits... For whereas, so far as nature is concerned, experience supplies the rules and is the source of truth, in respect of the moral laws it is, alas, the mother of illusion!¹⁶

What is of interest here is the linking of the moral law not only with morality and religion, but again with legislation. We can say little here about the nature of this link, but it should be noted that Kant is maintaining that it is only with the ideas of reason that there can be some judgment regarding these three areas.

The third important point to note is that Kant is clearly concerned with the idea of political, if not moral, progress from the standpoint of practical and not speculative reason. Occurring after the first example of an idea, which we noted above concerned a political constitution, Kant writes as a transition: "But it is not only where human reason exhibits genuine

¹⁵ See Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹⁶ A318 = B375, italics added for emphasis. "If we set aside the exaggerations in Plato's methods of expression, the philosopher's spiritual flight from the ectypal mode of reflecting upon the physical world-order to the architectonic ordering of it according to ends, that is, according to ideas, is an enterprise which calls for respect and imitation." (A318 = B375). See also A314 = B371 and A569 = B597.

causality, and where ideas are operative causes (of actions and their objects), namely, in the moral sphere, but also in regard to nature itself, that Plato rightly discerns clear proofs of an origin from ideas.”¹⁷ Here we see that the progress of the human species, particularly the creation of continually improving political institutions, is an idea which Kant discusses in connection with “the moral sphere” before he proceeds to discuss the teleology of nature. What this shows is that the discussion of political progress in history originates with practical considerations, and not speculative ones. Kant considers natural teleology after his discussion of political progress, showing, at least in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that political progress and the greatest possible human freedom are matters of concern for practical reason and hence for the interests of morality.¹⁸ This topic is not a matter of the speculative concern of how to make a science of “history,” nor with how to comprehend the development of political institutions as a matter of speculative interest. This is contrary to many commentators’ claims that such a discussion of human progress and the development of political institutions, both here and in the “Idea,” is simply a primitive version of Kant’s view of teleology which will mature in the *Critique of Judgment*. Before we can say more about this, we need to say something first about Kant’s spelling out of the notion of teleology in the first *Critique*.

III.

Kant maintains that the idea of teleology is necessary for us to organize the categories and to have a science of nature in the first place. Why this is so may be seen with a relatively simple example. Imagine dissecting a frog and trying to figure out its nature, how it functions. If we ignore the ideas of reason, the only (mental) materials we have to work with are space, time, and the categories. Space and time are necessary for us to experience the

¹⁷ A317 = B374.

¹⁸ See also the ending transition of this paragraph, A318 = B375.

frog as an appearance. The categories let us think of substance, community, and of cause and effect. But these are only thoughts about “blind” material causality. This is only the concept of “billiard balls” of physical substance (corpuscles, atoms, quarks, etc.) knocking into one another and effecting each other. The question is, how could such blind matter self-organize?¹⁹ How could all the parts and organs of a frog work together to keep a whole frog alive? More precisely, the question is, how could our human mental materials of intuition and the categories alone lead us to have an experience of a self-organizing organism? This is the question that concerns Kant, though it will concern him again in the *Critique of Judgment*. His answer is that, in order to have a natural science, particularly one concerned with living organisms, we must at least think of organisms as created in accord with a concept. This is reason’s idea of teleology.

Teleology is the idea that living beings are organized according to a concept, that the concept plays a causal role in the coming to be of the being. For example, when a watchmaker makes a watch, the concepts s/he has of a watch, namely the way all the parts interact in order for the watch to keep proper time, is part of the cause in explaining how the watch came into existence.²⁰ The same is true when we think about living organisms. We must examine them *as if* they were created in accord with a concept. We must think of them as if all the parts were organized for a particular end, and thus the *teleological* aspect of the idea. The only way we can do this, Kant maintains, is to think of things as having been created by an intelligent author, much in the same way as we must think of the watchmaker when examining a watch. Hence, Kant argues:

The *speculative* interest of reason makes it necessary to regard all order in the world as if it had originated in the purpose of a supreme reason. Such a

¹⁹ Cf. A625 = B653.

²⁰ Cf. A626 = B654.

principle opens out to our reason, as applied in the field of experience, altogether new views as to how the things of the world may be connected according to teleological laws, and so enables it to arrive at their greatest systematic unity.²¹

The idea of teleology, and with it the idea of a supreme intelligence as author of the world, enables us to begin our investigation of nature, and to bring the understanding into a higher level of organization. The idea of teleology helps us to structure our study of nature, particularly of those organisms which exhibit what we take to be a self-organizing structure.

However, this is not to say that we are justified in stating that the organisms actually are organized according to a concept. Kant's point is only to maintain that we must have this idea of teleology if we are ever to begin such an investigation into nature, for we would have no other way of organizing the understanding or the science properly.²² Without the idea of teleology, it seems unlikely that we could have an experience of an organism which appears organized for a particular purpose.

In fact, the assumption that things actually have been organized by an author of the world goes directly against the purpose of the teleological idea, namely, to search out the *mechanical* causes behind what looks like a teleological organism. The idea exists only so that we can begin our investigation of nature, and to posit the idea as being more than merely regulative is to end the investigation before it even begins.²³ So we can see why this naturally leads to what Kant thinks is an inevitable "dialectic" of reason, for reason needs to posit the existence of such ideas, thus leading the understanding into the realm of the transcendent, but the understanding can

²¹ A686 = B714. See also especially A623 = B652 and A651 = B679.

²² There is a fair amount of current writing on this subject of teleology. While writers differ as to the degree of reality which we must assign teleology to nature, many agree that we simply could not have an experience of a living organism if we did not have an idea of teleology. The notion of simple mechanical causation, while it may be adequate, finally, to explaining the actual operations of the organism, may not be sufficient for our experience of the organism as a self-organizing whole.

²³ This is discussed again below and with further citations.

legitimately function only within the realm of appearances. There is a tension between reason and understanding, but a necessary and natural one.

It is important to be certain that Kant prohibited a constitutive use of teleology and permitted only a regulative employment; many commentators have alleged that the “Idea for a Universal History” functions only as a primitive notion of teleology, and that Kant is confused about the regulative employment of teleology in this article. Allegedly, he then corrects this defect in the third *Critique*. Certainly it is true that Kant’s understanding of teleology is not complete in the first *Critique*,²⁴ but neither is he uncertain about the merely regulative nature of teleology. There are abundant citations in the first *Critique* to show that Kant was quite aware of the necessary limitations of the teleological idea.

Does Kant wait only until the *Critique of Judgment* to argue that purposiveness is not actually to be found in the organisms? I think the answer is clearly negative. Kant makes many statements to this effect, many of which are to be found in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic.” Because this is such an important point, I will quote several of these passages here, and cite the rest:

Reason could never be justified in abandoning the causality which it knows for grounds of explanation which are obscure, of which it does not have any knowledge, and which are incapable of proof.²⁵

Now since every principle which prescribes *a priori* to the understanding thoroughgoing unity in its employment, also holds... of the object of experience, the principles of pure reason must also have objective reality in respect of that object, not, however, in order to *determine* anything in it, but only in order to

²⁴ We see nothing in the first *Critique* like the antinomy of teleology, nothing like the attempt to unite the two faculties and “worlds” of reason and understanding, and Kant here seems confused as to how to judge the teleological notion where several different organisms may interact together to bring about some effect.

²⁵ A626 = B654.

indicate the procedure whereby the empirical and determinate employment of the understanding can be brought into complete harmony with itself.²⁶

...if instead of looking for causes in the universal laws of material mechanism, we appeal directly to the unsearchable decree of supreme wisdom, all those ends which are exhibited in nature, together with the many ends which are only ascribed by us to nature, make our investigation of the causes a very easy task, and so enable us to regard the labour of reason as completed, when, as a matter of fact, we have merely dispensed with its employment... What we may presume to do is to follow out the physico-mechanical connection in accordance with universal laws, in the hope of discovering *what the teleological connection actually is*.²⁷

Moreover, the principle of such an hypothesis would at most serve only for the satisfaction of reason, not for the furtherance of the employment of the understanding in respect of objects. Order and purposiveness in nature must themselves be explained from natural grounds and according to natural laws.²⁸

It seems quite clear that Kant is not confused as to the proper limitations for the employment of the teleological idea. Its purpose is to organize the understanding and the natural sciences, and to posit the reality of teleology is to bring to a close an investigation which has yet to begin. The findings and logic of the entire *Critique of Pure Reason* would be violated if we were to assume that teleology could be discovered in nature.²⁹ The sections where he might *appear* to take the idea of teleology to be constitutive occur in Kant's discussion of the highest good, and I shall argue below that this is perfectly understandable.

Before moving on, there is one teleological-type principle of Kant's which deserves special consideration. This is the principle that no faculty or organ is to be found in nature which does not have its use. This principle is

²⁶ A665-6 = B693-4.

²⁷ A691-2 = B719-20. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁸ A772 = B800.

²⁹ For additional citations of Kant on teleology, see: A317-8 = B374-5, A626-9 = B654-7, A649-51 = B677-9, A663-5 = B691-3, A671 = B699, A687-8 = B715-6, A694 = B722, A698-701 = B726-9, and A772-3 = B800-1.

mentioned in five different places in the *Critique*.³⁰ Its most precise statement is:

If we judged according to *analogy with the nature* of living beings in this world,... reason must necessarily accept the principle that no organ, no faculty, no impulse, indeed nothing whatsoever is either superfluous or disproportioned to its use, and that therefore nothing is purposeless, but everything exactly conformed to its destiny in life...³¹

Such a principle is included not only in the first edition, but all references are kept in the second edition as well. The quote above is found only in the second edition.

There seem to be at least three versions of this principle. I will henceforth call them the “strong,” “medium,” and “weak” versions of the “principle of purposive mechanisms.” The strong version might take it as a fact or law about nature that every mechanism has some particular purpose. It simply would be a fact, like the Newton’s principles of motion, which we could discover and prove regarding nature. This seems to be the implied version of the quote above, where “everything [is] exactly conformed to its destiny in life...” This may not be a complete surprise to us, for as A.C. Ewing posits, “Kant, though he lived before the scientific establishment of the doctrine of evolution, was very interested in the notion of evolution as a possibility...”³²

The medium version of the principle of purposive mechanisms would take it to be a law of nature that every mechanism can have *some purpose or other*. This version would say that we can discover in nature the fact that everything can be put to some use or other. This seems to be implied when Kant writes that: “Everything which nature has itself instituted is good for

³⁰ B425-6, A688 = B716, A743-4 = B771-2, A747-8 = B775-6, and A800-1 = B828-9.

³¹ B425.

³² A.C. Ewing. *A Short Commentary*. p. 258.

some purpose. Even poisons have their use. They serve to counteract other poisons generated in our bodily humours, and must have a place in every complete pharmacopoeia.”³³ This medium version would merely take it to be true that we can find a use for everything in nature.

The weak version would have it that such a principle is merely regulative. This version comes to the fore when Kant writes:

medical physiology... [resorts] to a principle for which pure reason has alone been responsible; and it carries this principle so far as to assume confidently, and with general approval, that everything in an animal has its use, and subserves some good purpose. If this assumption be treated as constitutive it goes much further than observation has thus far been able to justify; and we must therefore conclude that it is nothing more than a regulative principle of reason...³⁴

This version asserts only that the “principle of purposive mechanisms” is useful for the ordering of the understanding and the study of nature. It allows us to find connections between the mechanisms within organisms, and perhaps to find connections between organisms themselves.³⁵

Are we able to decide between these three versions of the principle? Based on Kant’s writings alone, it would be difficult, particularly because Kant keeps this principle in both editions, even introducing the strong version in the second edition alone. However, it seems we must rule out at least the strong version of the principle, even if in opposition to Kant, for it seems too much to claim that every organ or mechanism is designed for a specific use. We seem to be able to come up with examples where this simply does not hold true. The weak version, on the other hand, squares well with the rest of Kant’s *Critique*, and seems to be born out as a regulative idea for the study of nature. But what of the medium version? This version does not

³³ A743 = B771. Italics added for emphasis.

³⁴ A688 = B716.

³⁵ See: *A Short Commentary*, p. 258.

seem to be *incompatible* with the weak version, for it could be the case that the weak version should be taken as a regulative idea, while the medium version just happens to be a fact about nature. In fact, Kant could say that the strong version should be taken as a regulative idea, thus *making* it the weak version, but that the medium version is an *a posteriori* fact about the world of appearance. The subsequent question, however, would be as to how far we should take this notion of “some purpose or other” implied in the medium version. Certainly we could use our spleen for a paperweight, but would this qualify as purposive? The medium version may simply turn out to be rather trivial. While the weak version seems to be acceptable, I do not think we are yet in a position to decide about the medium version. Nor does it seem that Kant had a firm grasp of exactly how to spell out this principle.

Similarly, there is an additional puzzle regarding how the faculty of reason itself is to be thought of under this “principle of purposive mechanisms.” Again, Kant gives us conflicting versions. At A800 = B828, Kant writes:

The whole equipment of reason... is in fact determined... yet further, namely, to the problem of *what we ought to do*, if the will is free, if there is a God and a future world. As this concerns our attitude to the supreme end, it is evident that the ultimate intention of nature in her wise provision for us has indeed, in the constitution of our reason, been directed to moral interests alone.³⁶

This passage appears to argue that, taking some version of the “principle of purposive mechanisms” as a fact, we can then deduce that the faculty of reason must be thought to have been given to us by nature in order to promote moral ends. However, at B425 Kant writes:

if we judged by such an analogy [of living beings] we should have to regard man, who alone can contain in himself the final end of all this order, as the only creature that is excepted from it. Man’s natural endowments -- not merely his talents and the impulses to enjoy them, but above all else the moral

³⁶ A800-1 = B828-9.

law within him -- go... far beyond all the utility and advantage which he may derive from them in this present life....³⁷

This too seems to take some version of the “principle of purposive mechanisms” as true, but seems to indicate that humans are the exception to the rule and should be exempted from the principle. This seems to be because there is nothing in the world which reason is particularly suited for, and is better suited to an environment other than this world.³⁸ As these are the only two passages we have to work with, I think a decision between them is impossible. The “Idea” supports the former stance, but the above second edition version must have been written after the “Idea.” We must postpone our judgment of this principle until later.

Before moving on, while some of the issues involved in teleology are left unresolved here, we have at least established some important points. I have tried to argue above that Kant is well aware of the limits of the notion of teleology as applied to nature: he recognizes that it is a regulative idea, and also recognizes the danger inherent in taking it to be a constitutive concept. As I shall argue in Chapter Six below, there are no significant changes in this line of thinking between what Kant argues in the first *Critique* and his conclusions in the *Critique of Judgment*. Certainly there is a deeper exploration of the concept of teleology, and many important conclusions are drawn from this,³⁹ but the central limitations regarding teleological concepts found in this work do not vary from the first *Critique*.

If we accept this fact, then I think we must take Kant’s early (as well as later) writings regarding the progress of the human race seriously. Therefore, I take it that there is no *prima facie* reason that we should think Kant

³⁷ B425-6.

³⁸ This may well be some sort of leftover premise in an older argument for immortality. Such an argument is traced out by Rolf George in: “Immortality,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 669-677.

³⁹ These conclusions will, however, only serve as further support for my thesis.

simply confused about his own concept of teleology and how it should be utilized. If Kant is clear in his notion of teleology, as I have argued he is, then there is every reason to think that his writings concerning the progress of political institutions and of human morality should be taken at face value as consistent with his use of teleology. If we can suggest an interpretation for these writings which leaves Kant consistent, instead of dismissing them outright, then I think such an interpretation ought to be favored. I will suggest such an interpretation in the chapters that follow.

IV.

Interestingly, not only can we now see why Kant claims that there is a natural dialectic of reason, but we can now observe that there is a conflict between the questions of “What can I know?” and “What may I hope?” The answer to the first question was discussed in Chapter One above, namely that one can know only about objects of possible experience and the transcendental structure which must make them possible. The answer to the third question in the first *Critique* has to do (at least) with the postulates of freedom, immortality, and God.⁴⁰ Notice, however, that the positing of any of these notions as objects of knowledge or as constitutive of experience would directly interfere with the project of the first question. By presuming knowledge of these objects of hope, a physico-mechanical science is terminated.⁴¹ Let us look at each of the three ideas to see why this might be.

If we explain a person’s action as simply an expression of freedom, we stop trying to determine the influential mechanical and psychological causes of action;

⁴⁰ I say “at least” here because it may also involve the postulating of the possibility of the highest good, both on earth and in another world.

⁴¹ This is a main point in each of Kant’s discussion in the “Antinomies,” “Paralogisms,” and “The Ideal of Pure Reason” respectively.

if we could exhaustively investigate all the appearances of men's wills, there would not be found a single human action which we could not predict with certainty, and recognize as proceeding necessarily from its antecedent conditions. So far, then, as regards this empirical character there is no freedom; and yet it is only in the light of this character that man can be studied...⁴²

This is particularly important if we remember Kant's discussion of Plato's perfect State. We see here that the notion of freedom would end an investigation which, at its fullest, could render the actions of persons knowable and predictable. Presumably, then, with such information, combined with the idea of the perfect constitution and its laws, the perfect State would be possible, at least in continual approximation.

Second, while the positing of an afterlife would not directly hinder scientific investigation, the positing of a simple substance as soul has the same problems as that of freedom. If we make the assumption that there is a single soul, a knowable "T" behind the "I think," then not only are we making the mistake of the paralogisms, but we also shut ourselves off from possible avenues of physico-mechanical explanations. Taking the soul for simple, or taking there to be some Cartesian Ego which exists through which all sensations of the brain must pass, thwarts many possible interpretations of the actual functioning of the brain or of psychology.⁴³ Scientific study would be limited to a search for the center of the mental universe, and philosophic and psychological endeavors would be limited in a similar fashion.

Finally, as we saw in section three above, the assumption of the existence of God as wise author of the world is an idea which, if taken to be constitutive and not merely regulative, would also hinder scientific investigation. If this idea is taken as constitutive, we will no longer look for

⁴² A550 = B578.

⁴³ This can be seen especially with the question of personal identity. Explanations such as those given by Derik Parfit or Daniel Dennett which focus on the absence of any possible single center for experience would be eliminated.

explanations of nature which are physico-mechanical, the only kind of explanation which is justified by the nature of the human mind.⁴⁴

However, no such conflict is necessary between the answer to the second question and the first and third questions, because what I ought to do is the correct moral action regardless of the conditions of experience. Despite limits on what I may actually be able to do in a given situation, and despite the fact that I may be greatly ignorant as to the possible effects, I am always commanded to do what the moral law requires. And this is so *despite* the fact that such an action may well be explained *entirely* by empirical and psychological means. As the “Antinomies” have shown, there is no conflict between the postulate of freedom and a completely physico-mechanical explanation.⁴⁵

These points are important to keep in mind as we move to the discussion of the highest good. We see here in the first *Critique* a conflict in addition to the natural dialectic. It is the conflict between what Kant deems to be necessary for the project of the first question and the answer to the third question asked by reason. The things that we can know will always be limited to physico-mechanical explanations, due to the nature of intuition and the categories of the understanding. But those things for which we must necessarily hope⁴⁶ would greatly hinder our knowledge if they were taken to be truly descriptive of nature and the world of appearance. And vice versa, for taking the realm of appearance to be the only possible reality would

⁴⁴ This might also have the unintended effect, spelled out in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of actually doing great harm to the moral law. Kant maintains that if we were to actually know of God and the inescapable necessity of rewards and punishments in proportion to our virtue, then we would no longer act out of duty, but out of fear, and thus “the conduct of man... would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.” See Chapter Two, Section Two below.

⁴⁵ Thus, freedom only enters into the *explanation* of how the carrying out of the moral law is possible, and is not the *answer* to the question of, “What ought I to do?” The answer to this question is, of course, “Do what the moral law commands.” Hence, I believe I am not contradicting myself when I say that though freedom is involved in the explanation of the answer to the second question, the second question is not in conflict with the first or third question.

⁴⁶ We shall see more precisely below why such hopes are actually, according to Kant, necessary.

undermine the possibility of hope. There is a direct conflict because reason is constrained to posit the necessity of both these ideas. Such a conflict is brought to extremes in passages where Kant claims that the objects of hope must necessarily unite with speculative reason; this occurs in Kant's discussion of the highest good.

V.

Kant explains the concept of the "highest good" in the "Canon of Pure Reason" in the first *Critique* in this way:

Happiness, taken by itself, is, for our reason, far from being the complete good. Reason does not approve happiness (however inclination may desire it) except in so far as it is united with worthiness to be happy, that is, with moral conduct. Morality, taken by itself, and with it, the mere *worthiness* to be happy, is also far from being the complete good. To make the good complete, he who behaves in such a manner as not to be unworthy of happiness must be able to hope that he will participate in happiness.⁴⁷

The highest good, then, is the combination of these two goods, the good of happiness and the good of morality. Thus, happiness "in exact proportion with the morality of the rational beings who are thereby rendered worthy of it, alone constitutes the supreme good of that world wherein, in accordance with the commands of a pure but practical reason, we are under obligation to place ourselves."⁴⁸ Kant claims that this is a necessary postulate of reason, for "even the reason that is free from all private purposes, should it put itself in the place of a being that had to distribute all happiness to others, cannot judge otherwise."⁴⁹ This is a necessary idea of reason, and a necessary postulate for practical reason. While the details of the highest good will change somewhat in the course of Kant's writings, the main concept of the proportioning of happiness to worthiness remains the same.

⁴⁷ A813 = B841.

⁴⁸ A814 = B842.

⁴⁹ A813 = B841.

Practical reason, Kant claims, cannot postulate the highest good without God;

It is necessary that the whole course of our life be subject to moral maxims; but it is impossible that this should happen unless reason connects with the moral law, which is a mere idea, an operative cause which determines for such conduct as is in accordance with the moral law an outcome, either in this or in another life, that is in exact conformity with our supreme ends. Thus without a God and without a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action.⁵⁰

The highest good is an idea of reason, giving us an “*estimation* of morality, in regard to its purity and consequences,”⁵¹ but we can see no necessary causal mechanism which would bring such a state about. We see little evidence in this world that truly moral acts are rewarded by appropriate happiness. The postulate of God is needed in order to secure such an appropriate cause;

the alleged necessary connection of the hope of happiness with the necessary endeavour to render the self worthy of happiness cannot therefore be known through reason. It can be counted upon only if a *Supreme Reason*, that governs according to moral rules, be likewise posited as underlying nature as its cause.⁵²

The only thing that can bring about the highest good is a God that is rational and moral, omniscient, and powerful enough to bring about a future world in which happiness is proportioned to morality.⁵³ We will have opportunity to discuss the components of the highest good and their complete justification in later chapters, but for now we must move on.

⁵⁰ A812-3 = B840-1.

⁵¹ A812 = B840.

⁵² A810 = B838.

⁵³ For a more complete presentation of the nature of the Highest Good in the first *Critique*, see “The Ideal of the Highest Good, as a Determining Ground of the Ultimate End of Pure Reason.”

It is within this discussion of the highest good that Kant talks about the objects of hope uniting with the regulative ideas of speculative reason. Importantly, Kant mentions this conjunction only in the section on the highest good. Kant maintains in a paragraph immediately following a discussion of the three questions of reason that “the third question... is at once practical and theoretical, in such fashion that the practical serves only as a clue that leads us to the answer to the theoretical question, and when this is followed out, to the speculative question,”⁵⁴ and later writes:

I maintain that just as the moral principles are necessary according to reason in its *practical* employment, it is in the view of reason, in the field of its *theoretical* employment, no less necessary to assume that everyone has ground to hope for happiness in the measure in which he has rendered himself by his conduct worthy of it, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably -- though only in the idea of pure reason -- bound up with that of happiness.⁵⁵

Kant conceives of morality here as worthiness to be happy; “...that law, if there is such a law, which has no other motive than *worthiness of being happy*, I term moral (law of morality).”⁵⁶ Thus Kant conceives that the system of morality must inevitably be intertwined with the system of speculative reason, which claims to determine the truth about reality and thus about happiness; we cannot know what makes us happy or the means to any particular pleasure without the knowledge which speculative reason can provide. Hence, the practical and speculative standpoints must both be brought to bear on this question about the ends of human beings. But Kant here seems to be stating that the answer to the question of hope, brought on by the question of what I ought to do, might somehow have a theoretical employment perhaps above and beyond a regulative idea.

⁵⁴ A807 = B833.

⁵⁵ A809 = B837.

⁵⁶ A806 = B834. See also the rest of this paragraph at A806 = B834, and the discussion at A809-15 = B837-43.

Kant gives a similar picture a few pages later. Here he writes:

But this systematic unity of ends in this world of intelligences -- a world which is indeed, as mere nature, a sensible world only, but which, as a system of freedom, can be entitled an intelligible, that is, a moral world... -- ... thus unites the practical with the speculative reason. The world must be represented as having originated from an idea if it is to be in harmony with that employment of reason without which we should indeed hold ourselves to be unworthy of reason, namely, with the moral employment...⁵⁷

Kant calls this unity a “transcendental enlargement of our knowledge” and claims that it “is not to be regarded as the cause, but merely as the effect of the practical purposiveness which pure reason imposes upon us.”⁵⁸ Kant here seems to be maintaining that, in regard to the third question posed by reason, there is actually an extension of our *knowledge* of the world of appearances because of the certainty of the moral law. Because morality is here conceived of as worthiness to be happy, the noumenal and phenomenal realm are combined at this point, and are both under consideration as possible objects for hope. We can know the moral law, and it indicates that we are purposive beings, striving to achieve moral perfection. It also tells us that morality is connected with happiness, and therefore we are at least permitted to hope for a world where morality will be rewarded by happiness. But since happiness is a matter concerning speculative reason, it seems that Kant is here claiming that practical reason is dictating something to speculative reason which must be applied to the realm of appearances and taken as knowledge.

What are we to make of these statements? On the one hand, they may simply be too strong to be admissible. Given Kant’s professed knowledge as to the proper limits of applying teleological ideas,⁵⁹ he may simply be

⁵⁷ A815-6 = B843-4.

⁵⁸ A817 = B845.

⁵⁹ See section three above.

overstepping his bounds in this chapter, not keeping to the established limits he himself set. I think there is a good argument that Kant goes too far in calling for a “transcendental enlargement of our knowledge,” though perhaps he has nothing more in mind than the simple need to say something about objects which would be necessary or permissible ends of our willing.⁶⁰ But while this may be true, I think there is something important happening in this chapter of the *Critique*. What I want to argue is that it is no surprise that the tension which I talked about in section four above comes to its greatest strain in the discussion of the highest good, and that it is only here that Kant makes statements about teleology which seem to violate his own prescribed limitations. Kant is struggling with a question, consciously or not, which he will continue to try to spell out satisfactorily for years to come. If the highest good is possible *on this earth*, if Kant thinks that there is some necessary reason to posit such a possibility as happening in the realm of appearances, then the tensions between what I can know and what I can hope become focused on the highest good. All the conflicting interpretations which I discussed above, from the nature of the application of teleological ideas, to the three versions of the “principle of purposive mechanisms,” to the role the faculties of reason play in that principle, to the natural dialectic and the conflict between the first and third question of reason, come into play at precisely this point about the highest good. Kant will continue to write about the progress of the human race until his death, and these different strains of his thought will continue to fluctuate. It will be one purpose of this book to try to sort out these strains, and come to some conclusion about them.

One question we may wish to ask at this point is, where does Kant think the highest good will be located? Is it to take place only in “Heaven” and have the nature of being only noumenal or “otherworldly”? Or will it take place on earth in the future? Unfortunately, this too is a question

⁶⁰ This may be true in this *Critique* especially, since at the time of its writing Kant still believed the study of morals to involve some empirical evidence, and thus not to be “purely” *a priori*.

fraught with conflict. Kant makes many statements in the first *Critique*, most of which are to be found in “The Canon of Pure Reason,” to support both interpretations; again, this may not surprise us given Kant’s seeming uncertainties discussed above. Supporting the “otherworldly” interpretation, Kant writes:

Now since we are necessarily constrained by reason to represent ourselves as belonging to such a[n intelligible] world, while the senses present to us nothing but a world of appearances, we must assume that moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the world of sense (in which no such connection between worthiness and happiness is exhibited), and therefore to be for us a future world. Thus God and a future life are two [necessary] postulates...⁶¹

This world [of happiness in exact proportion to morality] is indeed an intelligible world only, since the sensible world holds out no promise that any such systematic unity of ends can arise from the nature of things.⁶²

This last statement is quite definite about the possibilities of a highest good on earth, though the first statement is ambiguous. Kant maintains throughout all his writings that morality is not naturally rewarded by happiness, and often the reverse occurs. Nature does not seem to care about morality, and there is nothing we can do to change the laws of nature to make it otherwise.⁶³ Kant also continues to believe that morality is not its own reward, it is a duty; happiness is the proper reward for morality, but this is only to be found with the highest good.

Supporting the highest good on earth interpretation, Kant writes:

Pure reason, then, contains... in that practical employment which is also moral, principles of the *possibility of experience*, namely, of such actions as, in accordance with moral precepts, *might* be met with in the *history* of mankind... Consequently, a special kind of systematic unity, namely the moral, must likewise be possible.⁶⁴

⁶¹ A811 = B839.

⁶² A814 = B842.

⁶³ Cf. A810 = B838.

⁶⁴ A807 = B835.

...[the idea of a moral world] really can have... an influence upon the sensible world, to bring that world, so far as may be possible, into conformity with the idea. The idea of a moral world has, therefore, objective reality... as referring to the sensible world, viewed, however, as being an object of pure reason in its practical employment... so far as the free will of each being is, under moral laws, in complete systematic unity with itself and with the freedom of every other.⁶⁵

But this systematic unity of ends [the highest good] in this world of intelligences -- a world which is indeed, as mere nature, a sensible world only, but which, as a system of freedom, can be entitled an intelligible, that is, a moral world... -- leads inevitably also to the purposive unity of all things...⁶⁶

While these statements seem to support such an interpretation of the highest good on earth, perhaps the strongest argument we have for such an interpretation is Kant's writings on Plato's idea of the perfect State. Recall, as discussed above, Kant claims that the idea of "a constitution allowing *the greatest possible human freedom* in accordance with laws by which *the freedom of each is made to be consistent with that of all others* -- I do not speak of the greatest happiness, for this will follow of itself -- is at any rate a necessary idea..."⁶⁷ This is a situation which is very close to the highest good, though it cannot be the highest good itself, since we are only concerned with external actions here, and the effect of natural events on human happiness is left out of consideration. Such a State would be, however, a vast improvement over the current state of society, and let us not forget that though this concerns legality, such questions are *moral* questions for Kant, since they have to do with freedom. If we have a situation where the freedom of each is maximized while still not interfering with the freedom of others, and Kant is right to assume that the greatest happiness "will follow of itself,"⁶⁸ then this is a great step toward the highest good on earth.

⁶⁵ A808 = B836.

⁶⁶ A815 = B843.

⁶⁷ A316 = B373.

⁶⁸ In fact, I do not think that this is a warranted assumption, particularly given Kant's definition of happiness in the first *Critique* as: "the satisfaction of all our desires, *extensively*, in respect of their

We should also note that these two possible positions of Kant's are not necessarily incongruous. If we hold that the highest good on earth is impossible in its *complete* perfection, then there is no *necessary* conflict. In this case, we have the idea of a perfect State and of perfect individual morality, both of which can and do serve as ideas for moral comparison, as well as having a causal influence on our actions. Neither are, strictly speaking, possible goals to achieve, though they may both be continually approximated. Hence, Kant is correct to claim that, strictly speaking, "the sensible world holds out no promise that any such systematic unity of ends can arise from the nature of things," yet also claim that we have a duty to approximate the idea as best we can.⁶⁹ We will have opportunity to spell out this possibility in more detail below, but it should be kept in mind.

VI.

A few summary remarks are in order. Above, we have examined several different tensions running through the first *Critique*, most of them having to do with the idea of teleology and how to answer the three questions necessarily posed as the interests of reason. These tensions are related, and they appear to be most amplified in the discussion of the highest good. While these tensions will not be resolved satisfactorily in the "Idea," it is nonetheless not surprising that Kant attempted to work out some of these problems in this essay; the "Idea" does not simply "come out of nowhere," but is a natural outgrowth of the tensions found in the first *Critique*. We should anticipate that any attempt to spell out a version of the highest good

manifoldness, *intensively*, in respect of their degree, and *protensively*, in respect of their duration," A806 = B834.

⁶⁹ If we further maintain that we *ourselves* have no control over the outcome of our attempt to approximate the idea, so that we must hope that God will be able to make it real, then this seemingly strong statement of Kant's as to the impossibility of the highest good on earth no longer forbids the impossibility, but only points to the fact that we need a God to bring about the hoped for result. See below Section Two, chapters One and Six.

occurring on earth would run into serious difficulties and limitations. Why Kant should want to do this, and how it might be possible, are questions for later chapters. For now, let us proceed to the “Idea” in order to get a rudimentary understanding of this essay.

Chapter Three

A First Look at the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent”

I.

In this chapter we will take an introductory look at Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” written three years after the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the same year as “What is Enlightenment?” Here I wish only to outline the main premises of the “Idea;” later we will have occasion to examine it in more detail, and I will argue that this piece is crucial to Kant’s philosophy.

II.

Kant’s introduction and nine “theses” in the “Idea for a Universal History” attempt not only to show that the human species is progressing towards an end where all of its rational capacities will be perfected and humans will unite into a moral whole, but also endeavors to show how this teleological process might operate. Kant maintains that history operates according to laws which, concerning the “*freedom of the will*” as it is manifested in the “*appearances*” of human action, allow one

to hope that if we examine the play of the human will’s freedom in the large, we can discover its course to conform to rules as well as to hope that what strikes us as complicated and unpredictable in the single individual may in the history of the entire species be discovered to be the steady progress and slow development of its original capacities.

Certainly history cannot be concerned in any way with the study of noumenal “*freedom of the will* in a metaphysical context,”¹ for obviously it is

¹ Ak. 17.

impossible to know any empirical truths about persons in their intelligible, transcendent reality. Nor is Kant's "history" the study of the lives and wills of one or several important persons or events and their impact on others. Note that, from the very beginning of the "Idea," Kant is concerned with rules and laws of the human will's action which would determine the "steady progress... of its original capacities," and is not concerned with discovering rules and laws which would allow one to give a history of persons, issues, or events; this is an important point to consider when evaluating those commentators who maintain that the "Idea" is an initial attempt at a regulative concept to be applied to historical study. Rather, what is of concern in the examination of history as the development of the human species is the interaction of human wills in general, *en masse*. Nature, Kant asserts, has a plan of its own for the human species, and this plan can be seen in history.

What is nature's plan and how does it operate? Kant maintains that nature moves persons to interact with each other, while simultaneously impelling them to seek solitude. Kant explains that,

I understand antagonism to mean men's *unsocial sociability* (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*), i.e., their tendency to enter into society, combined, however, with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to sunder this society... Man has a propensity for *living in society*... [H]e also has, however, a great tendency to isolate himself, for he finds in himself the unsociable characteristic of wanting everything to go according to his own desires, and he therefore anticipates resistance everywhere...²

Individuals want to enter into social relations with one another for it is natural for them to be with one another. However, by observing their own desire for having things go the way they want, and realizing that others will have intentions and desires different from their own, individuals are also disposed

² Ak. 20-1.

to move away from one another for fear of opposition. This is the unsocial sociability of persons.

Kant claims that this dualistic movement, however, is nature's way of allowing the human species to develop, regardless of the intentions of individual wills. Kant writes:

while each according to his own ways pursues his own end -- often at cross purposes with each other -- they unconsciously proceed toward an unknown natural end, as if following a guiding thread (*Leitfaden*); and they work to promote an end they would set little store by, even if they were aware of it.³

Individuals are involved with the pursuit and attainment of their own goals, regardless of whether these goals are opposed to those of others. In the face of such opposition, one is forced to improve and advance the skills and talents one has in order to achieve one's goals. By leading man into a relationship of tension and opposition with others, "this resistance awakens all of man's powers, [and] brings him to overcome his tendency towards laziness..."⁴ But because the individual is also sociable, such struggles will always take place within a society, a collection of individuals who feel a need to stay together. This results in the constant improvement of the talents of individuals in a society.⁵

³ Ak. 17.

⁴ Ak. 21.

⁵ Here, I think, Kant has in mind those capabilities which would contribute to *culture*, though it is difficult to spell out explicitly what Kant understood both of these terms to entail. Given that, as shall be shown below, Kant thought the use of reason to be something which could be perfected only over time and with practice, it seems that "talents" may refer firstly to those capacities which aid reason, and which might help everyone in their improvement of their use of reason. Secondly, Kant also speaks of talents in a moral sense, such as improving the ability and desire to will in accordance with the categorical imperative. These two ways of thinking about talents seem to be borne out in Kant's discussion of culture in section 83 of the *Critique of Judgment*. Lastly, however, "talents" may refer to any type of ability which might somehow move a person *in any way* to strive toward morality and toward creating a moral whole. Painting, for example, might be a talent which should be improved, for a nation may be motivated towards peace if only, in part, to protect the work of this admired artist, or an individual may be influenced enough by a painting to change, even if slightly, his/her moral disposition towards the better.

The goal of this continual progression, the end to which the species is moving with the improvement of its talents, is the establishment of a community in which each person's rational capacities are perfected. Kant writes:

all man's talents are gradually developed... and through progressive enlightenment he begins to establish a way of thinking that can in time transform the crude natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles and thus transform a *pathologically* enforced agreement (*pathologische-abgedrungene Zusammenstimmung*) into a society and, finally, into a *moral whole* (*moralisches Ganz*).⁶

In his "*First Thesis*," Kant asserts that, "*all of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end.*"⁷ The natural end of persons as intelligible, noumenal beings, though existing in the natural world, is reason, and it is reason and the capacity for perfect morality which is to develop completely. However, Kant claims in the "*Second Thesis*" that "*in man (as the sole rational creature on earth) those natural capacities directed toward the use of his reason are to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual.*"⁸ The justification for such an assertion is that, "reason itself does not operate on instinct, but requires trial... in order gradually to progress... Therefore, each individual man would have to live excessively long if he were to make complete use of all his natural capacities."⁹ The development of the capacity for reason and morality takes time, perhaps "countless generations."¹⁰ Each individual must struggle with him or herself and with others in society if s/he is to move beyond animal instinct and into higher levels of rational proficiency.

⁶Ak. 21.

⁷ Ak. 18.

⁸ Ak. 18.

⁹ Ak. 19.

¹⁰ Ak. 19.

In addition, it is the end of nature to move the human species toward a society “in which one will find the highest possible degree of *freedom under external laws...*”¹¹ Because antagonism is necessary for the development of human reason, nature must have as its end a society in which there might remain antagonism but not war, a community in which each person would have the freedom to pursue one’s own ends and compete with one another as long as such competition did not directly interfere with the freedom of another. This would be a nation with a perfect constitution that would allow people to be free through coercion, allowing antagonism to develop talents without invalidating the freedom of another. Such an “internal” constitution of a nation would be inefficacious, however, if there were no “external” constitution between nations to regulate such freedom. Hence, Kant maintains that the goal of mankind is, “*an internally, and for this purpose, also an externally perfect national constitution, as the sole state in which all of humanity’s natural capacities can be developed.*”¹² Nations at war become economically drained and physically devastated, placing at risk their ability to function internally. Both the internal and external constitutions, then, are desirable in order to perfect the talents of the species,¹³ and are both brought about in the same way as above, namely through antagonism or unsocial sociability. The constant fighting of man against man and nation against nation, Kant maintains, will eventually lead to a state of peace, a cosmopolitan world in which persons will be able to pursue their own happiness without infringing upon the freedom of another. The end of the human being, then, is the exercise of perfect reason, and this end can only be achieved in a cosmopolitan world and only through the progress of the human species as a whole.

¹¹ Ak. 22.

¹² Ak. 27.

¹³ We shall see in our discussion of “To[ward] Perpetual Peace” the more exact nature of such an external constitution.

III.

As this chapter is merely an overview of the article, let me provide here only a few summary remarks. The first remark is to notice that Kant again asserts that everything in nature has a purpose, another recurrence of the “principle of purposive mechanism” as I have termed it. To quote in full:

All of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end. This is confirmed in all animals, both by external and internal, analytical observation. In the teleological theory of nature, an organ that is not intended to be used, an organization that does not achieve its end, is a contradiction. If we stray from that fundamental principle, we no longer have a lawful but an aimlessly playing nature and hopeless chance takes the place of reason's guiding thread.¹⁴

This is a particularly strong, and somewhat new thesis, at least the assertion that every capacity is to develop *completely*. How are we to take this? For example, take the frog's instinctual ability to shoot out its tongue in order to catch flies. Are we to suppose that, over time, frogs everywhere will get progressively better at this, to the point where they will never miss when they try to catch flies? Perhaps we are only to take this to mean that since the natural end of a frog is to keep itself alive by catching flies its natural instinct will be directed only to that end, and not to some other end.¹⁵ Or perhaps we should take this to mean that this is how we are to study all the organs and instincts which we find in a frog, namely with its natural end of survival through eating flies. This would make sense, but it seems difficult to justify Kant's assertion that any instinct or organ will develop *completely*.

¹⁴ Ak. 18. Also: “Nature does nothing unnecessary and is not prodigal in the use of means of her ends” (Ak. 19).

¹⁵ Though it is hard to imagine what this other end might be; catching rides on airplanes or licking postage stamps?

The only interpretation which might save Kant on this score is to suggest something like the “survival of the fittest” even of individual instincts and organs. On this interpretation, Kant might be thought to be saying that it is simply a fact of nature that instincts or organs which do not contribute to the end of an organism are weeded out over time. Thus, if we encountered a frog which attempted to kill flies by hopping on top of them, we might well observe that this particular behavior is ineffective, and such frogs will not live long enough to reproduce, thus the trait will not be passed down as such. In this way, over time, all such organs and instincts would continue to develop *toward* perfection, since the more effectual such an organ or instance would be in preserving the species, the more that type of animal would continue to exist. However, even this weaker thesis seems too strong, for we seem to have examples wherein an organ simply has no use which we can find, examples of organs or instincts which, while not hindering the organism, seem to have evolved on the “coattails” of other traits. And, in addition, it is difficult to see how these might develop *completely*.

This particular issue of complete development aside, the rest of Kant’s quotation is quite telling of an important point, namely that such a principle is necessary to employ, at least as a regulative principle, if we are to conceive of some order in nature. This is a thesis which we shall see much more fully developed in the third *Critique*, but which seems at least to be suggested here. We saw above that the idea of teleology may be necessary even to conceive of an organism to begin with. But in addition to this, what possible science could develop if organs had no comprehensible purpose, or if organisms did not have “goals”? How could we conceive of a nature which exhibited no orderly development, but only produced organs which had purposes foreign or contrary to the ends of the organism? A random or playful nature would be one which would be impossible to subject to regular laws of science.

Hence, again, a strong thesis regarding the “principle of purposive mechanisms” seems to be extremely difficult to defend, though it seems necessary as a regulative idea. And we see here further suggestions as to why such a regulative idea would be necessary.

Notice also that a non-teleological nature would be opposed to our interests in morality, particularly with regard to the human species. Kant here is concerned with the apparent problem that the history of the human race seems continually fraught with peril, and seems to be purposeless. Kant also notes that we do have the faculty of reason, and thereby access to morality.¹⁶ The question then naturally arises, What good is the faculty of reason if its effects in the history of humanity seem to be negligible?

One cannot resist a certain [feeling of] indignation when one sees men’s actions placed on the great stage of the world and finds that, despite some individuals’ seeming wisdom, in the large everything is finally woven together from folly and childish vanity and often even childish malice and destructiveness.¹⁷

Such a history devoid of a purpose would be a “senseless course of human affairs.”¹⁸

This is particularly a problem since nature seems to have given us the faculty of reason for no purpose. Reason seems so much more ineffectual than instinct at providing us with happiness; “nature seems here to have taken delight in the greatest frugality... [and] it appears that nature is utterly unconcerned that man live well...”¹⁹ Well might we despair and think that the world is only a place for misery if our faculty of reason is ineffectual

¹⁶ Of course, the moral law is not yet conceived of as it will be in the *Grundlegung* or the second *Critique*.

¹⁷ Ak. 17-8.

¹⁸ Ak. 18. Also see Kant’s comments at Ak. 30.

¹⁹ Ak. 19-20.

both in the pursuit of happiness and in a world which operates unconcerned with moral ends.

The second remark which should be made is to examine how Kant intends such a history to be conceived; does this idea of a cosmopolitan history serve chiefly for a speculative understanding of human history, as many commentators have asserted? I think that the answer to this is negative. Certainly Kant does claim that “we will leave it to nature to produce the man who is in a position to write [a history]. In this way she produced a Kepler, who in an unexpected way subjected the eccentric paths of the planets to definite laws, and a Newton...”²⁰ Kant hopes to sketch a “a guiding thread for *such* a history,”²¹ which would be spelled out by some other person in greater detail and in accordance with laws. But what kind of history is this “such a history”? Kant’s “guiding thread” for this history seems to have little to do with events and inventions of the past, but rather has to do from the start with “the steady progress and slow development of its [the human species] original capacities,”²² in other words, to do with a moral history. This is the history of nature’s plan to bring about an internal and external constitution exclusively for the reason that it is “*the sole state in which all of humanity’s natural capacities can be developed.*”²³ This is history from practical point of view.

We see reconfirmation of this in Kant’s closing paragraphs (“Ninth Thesis”). The most decisive statement of this is:

It would be a misunderstanding of my point of view to [believe] that I want this idea of a world history that is to a certain extent led by an *a priori* guiding thread to take the place of *history* as such, whose composition is wholly

²⁰ Ak. 18.

²¹ Ak. 18. Italics added for emphasis.

²² Ak. 17.

²³ Ak. 27.

empirical. This idea is only a reflection of what a philosophical mind... could attempt to do from another perspective.²⁴

Kant appears to be indicating that his conception of history as discussed in the “Idea” is not one concerned, at least in the main, with empirical information of the past being unified into a theoretical science. Kant is concerned with these events only insofar as they show “what peoples and governments have done to contribute to or impair the objective of cosmopolitanism.”²⁵ In fact, if we take Kant’s recommendations seriously about how to construct a theory of empirical events, this would seem to be a rather impoverished history indeed; Kant’s examples have only to do with “focusing everywhere only on civil constitutions and their laws and on the relations among nations.”²⁶ This is a history without science, without inventions, without literature, without art, and presumably even without great individuals.²⁷ It is a history of politics and geographical exploration, and only these because they are the driving factors behind the progress of the human race toward moral perfection. Again, this is an important point to make against those commentators who take the “Idea” to be primarily concerned with the attempt to give necessary concepts for the study of empirical history.²⁸ I think that we may conclude, then, that Kant has a different purpose in mind than the study of empirical history.

The third remark to be made is to simply bring to our attention the necessary connection between morality and political systems. After having

²⁴ Ak. 30. Incidentally, I take this other perspective to be a practical one.

²⁵ Ak. 31.

²⁶ Ak. 30.

²⁷ I include the last because Kant’s focus is on “*the play of the human will’s freedom in the large*” (17), and thus seems to exclude important individuals. However, it is possible that they would have to be included in descriptions of wars, politics, and constitutions; it is likely, for instance, that Kant would want to include King Frederick William II as an important instigator of enlightened reforms.

²⁸ Friedrich Kaulbach, for example.

claimed in the “Fourth Thesis” that the natural end for humans is to form “into a *moral* whole,” in the “Fifth Thesis,” Kant maintains that

thus must there be a society in which one will find the highest possible degree of *freedom under external laws* combined with irresistible power, i.e., a perfectly *rightful civil constitution*,²⁹ whose attainment is the supreme task nature has set for the human species; for only by solving and completing it can nature fulfill her other objectives with our species.³⁰

We can see this especially in the seventh and eighth “Theses.” Kant claims that nature’s “supreme objective” is “a universal *cosmopolitan state*, the womb in which all of the human species’ original capacities will be developed.”³¹ Kant clearly states that morality can only occur within a political system in which there is both an internal constitution and a “cosmopolitan state in which the security of nations is publicly acknowledged.”³² Indeed, in the statement of the “Fifth Thesis” itself, immediately after arguing that the natural end of human beings is the perfect development of their reason, and thereby their morality, Kant maintains that “*the greatest problem*” for us is the “*achievement of a universal civil society*,”³³ this is a strong thesis given that morality is stated as our final end. Kant might have said that a *good will* was our necessary end, but he specifically states that it is a cosmopolitan state operating under the laws of Right, and that this is the “*hardest and the last [problem] to be solved*.”³⁴ This indicates not only that there is a definite link between politics and morality for Kant, but also that the achievement of

²⁹ This misprint occurs in the translation.

³⁰ Ak. 22.

³¹ Ak. 28.

³² Ak. 28.

³³ Ak. 22.

³⁴ “Sixth Thesis.” Ak. 23.

a universal civil society is our necessary object of willing as moral (sensuous) creatures.³⁵

A necessary correlate to this discussion must be the fact that the will can be influenced by surrounding conditions. This correlate is borne out in all of Kant's writings, and we will have opportunity to examine it in more detail below. But for now we can at least note that the will is indeed influenced by external circumstances. And clearly Kant is concerned with such influence; otherwise, he would simply have written that a good will is the final object of all our willing, and his writings about perfect constitutions would have been rather incidental details, dealing only with Right or perhaps written only with an eye toward happiness.

The question naturally arises as to why the full perfection of morality should be linked with a perfect constitution and a cosmopolitan world? To begin with, we must note that Kant, like Hobbes, believes that the state of nature is not conducive to the betterment of persons, and that people needed to enter into a civil society before they could have had the safety to invest their time and improve their talents. Kant appears to take such a claim further, indicating that it is only within such a society that one has the ability to become morally better. We will see the nature of the relationship between Right and morality again in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, but we can at least make some intuitive sense of this belief: in a State where one's person and one's well being is continually under direct threat of attack, it is difficult if not impossible to act in accordance with the categorical imperative. How

³⁵ We will have to wait to say more about why Kant thinks that this is our necessary end, but let me give a brief indication of why I think this is. The main reason is that Kant takes the highest good to be necessary object of all our (rational) willing. The highest good concerns not one individual, but all individuals. And it concerns both morality and happiness. So, if our goal is to achieve the highest good on earth, we want to maximize morality, and (Kant believes) reward that morality with happiness. While we cannot directly make others more virtuous, we can attempt to bring about those conditions under which the cultivation of their rational nature can begin in earnest. And, for Kant, such cultivation occurs only with a perfect internal constitution and a cosmopolitan world.

could one behave perfectly morally and yet survive? What demand of Right could be adhered to in such a state of lawlessness?

Kant draws an analogy between the state of nature prior to entering into any civil society and a state of nature prior to entering into a civil relationship among nations:

What the lawless state did to savages -- namely, hold back all of our species' natural capacities until the evil that this placed them under compelled them to leave this state and enter into a civil constituion,³⁶ in which all those seeds can be developed -- barbarous freedom will also do to already established nations.³⁷

This indicates that Kant believes a similar state of nature to exist between nations which, like the original state of nature, hampers the development of morality. He maintains that we must "leave the lawless state of savagery and enter into a federation of peoples,"³⁸ "must force nations to just the same decision... to which savage men were so unhappily forced, namely, to give up their brutal freedom and to seek calm and security in a law-governed constitution."³⁹ Again, such a situation of lawless savagery between nations is an external situation which obstructs the development of morality.

Kant's reasoning concerning the source of such obstructions is that he believes that humans continually want to have things their own way, regardless of what harm it might cause others, and it is only through the coercion of a State that persons will behave in accord with Right. Each individual needs to be coerced, since

although as a rational creature he desires a law that establishes boundaries for everyone's freedom, his selfish animal propensities induce him to except

³⁶ Again, this misprint occurs in the translation.

³⁷ Ak. 25-6.

³⁸ Ak. 24.

³⁹ Ak. 24. We will encounter a fuller discussion of the requirement of nations to move out of a "state of international nature" in Section One, Chapter Nine and Section Two, Chapter Four below.

himself from them wherever he can. He thus requires a *master* who will break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will...⁴⁰

As sensuous creatures, persons have a natural interest in happiness, and hence many times they will to have their (lower)⁴¹ desires satisfied regardless of others' wishes to do the same. Because of this fact, persons behave better when coerced in accord with Right,⁴² and since such Right is simply the greatest freedom of each individual without transgressing the freedom of another, it is legislated from the moral law.⁴³ As Kant summarizes in a footnote in "To[ward] Perpetual Peace:"

a man (or a people) who is merely in a state of nature denies me... security and injures me merely by being in this state. For although he does not actively (*facto*) injure me, he does so by virtue of the lawlessness of his state (*statu iniusto*), by which he constantly threatens me, and I can require him... to enter with me into a state of civil law...⁴⁴

Again, following the analogy, we can intuitively conceive of why it is necessary for nations to enter into a cosmopolitan whole, namely because constant war, the threat of war, and preparation for war leave nations economically devastated, trade disrupted, and people fearing for their well being. Kant simply takes it as fact that war and the threat of war is a situation which is

⁴⁰ Ak. 23. Herder in his *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* rebukes Kant for his assertion that humans require a master. Kant attempts to reply to this charge in: Immanuel Kant, "Reviews of Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 201-220.

⁴¹ Cf. Kant's distinction between the "lower" and "higher" faculty of desire in the second *Critique*.

⁴² And, of course, this is not some completely foreign and arbitrary constraint, because Kant claims that Right is simply what we do will as rational creatures. When we put the moral law above self-love in the formulation of the categorical imperative, we rationally will for such a society to be formed. In addition, such a society is one of our Ideas of reason.

⁴³ See the *Metaphysics of Morals* for a more detailed discussion of this.

⁴⁴ Ak. 350. Immanuel Kant, "To[ward] Perpetual Peace: A philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Moral Practice*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), 107-143. All citations refer to Akademie page numbers.

incompatible, not with the development of all culture, but with the development of some aspects of culture which allow for the promotion of a moral education.

One reason why such a state of nature between nations is contradictory to morality is because it is contradictory to the final end of humanity. As Kant explains in, "To[ward] Perpetual Peace:"

Just as we view with deep disdain the attachment of savages to their lawless freedom -- preferring to *scuffle without end* rather than to place themselves under lawful restraints..., consequently preferring a mad freedom to a rational one --... so also should we think [this of] civilized peoples (each one united into a nation).⁴⁵

While we will see such ends discussed again with the third *Critique*, what we see with this quotation is that war does nothing (directly) to promote moral ends. War and the preparation for war do not teach persons about how to be moral; at most, war and the threat of war are "the greatest obstacle to morality... which constantly retards this advancement"⁴⁶ even at best, war does not cultivate persons' willingness to adhere to the commands of the moral law, teaching them the art of killing instead of art itself. The final end of human beings as rational creatures is a State in which everyone has the maximum amount of freedom while not impeding on the freedom of others.⁴⁷ This final end also entails the moral perfection of all persons, above and beyond a peaceful cosmopolitan whole. A state of war violates the final end of humankind. Kant is clear in all his writings that war is the single most

⁴⁵ Ak. 354. Italics added for emphasis.

⁴⁶ *Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Incidentally, we can also see that war does little to improve the happiness of persons. And, of course, there is nothing like the proportionality of happiness to morality in the spoils of the victor, since "the concept of the right of nations as a right to go to war is meaningless (for it would then be the right to determine the right not by independent, universally valid laws that restrict the freedom of everyone, but by one-sided maxims backed by force)" ("To[ward] Perpetual Peace," Ak. 357). And, finally, this is reconfirmation that the question about a cosmopolitan whole is a question asked with moral considerations in mind, not simply a concern for happiness.

threatening obstacle in the way of peace, and because such peace is necessary for the improvement of our capabilities, it is a threat to morality itself.

Nonetheless, Kant is also clear that antagonism is a necessary element in the cultivation of morality. Perhaps the best indication of this comes from Kant's discussion of what would happen if no antagonism existed among persons. In this case, "man would live as an Arcadian shepherd, in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love..."⁴⁸ This sounds like a wonderful ideal, but Kant maintains that in this situation, "all talents would lie eternally dormant in their seed; men docile as the sheep they tend would hardly invest their existence with any worth greater than that of cattle; and as the purpose behind man's creation, his rational nature, there would remain a void."⁴⁹ Here we must anticipate Kant's assertion in the second and third *Critique*, though this is easily enough done, that what makes persons valuable is their rational nature; it is because individuals are members of the intelligible, moral realm, and not merely participants in the natural realm, that they are "ends in themselves." An excellent summary of this point occurs in Kant's "Reviews of Herder's Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind" where he rebukes Herder, saying:

Does the author really mean that, if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more civilized nations, were destined to live in their peaceful indolence for thousands of centuries, it would be possible to give a satisfactory answer to the question of why they should exist at all, and of whether it would not have been just as good if this island had been occupied by happy sheep and cattle as by happy human beings who merely enjoy themselves?⁵⁰

Thus, while persons might be happy without antagonism,⁵¹ they would not have any more value than any other creature on Earth, for they would not be

⁴⁸ Ak. 21.

⁴⁹ Ak. 21.

⁵⁰ "Reviews of Herder's Ideas," p. 219-20.

⁵¹ This is different than Kant's other claim that persons would have been happier without the interference of reason (see especially the "Speculative Beginning of Human History," Ak. 111 and Ak.

cultivating the use of their reason, and therefore would not be progressing toward their natural, moral end.⁵² One needs antagonism, but not war,⁵³ a situation occurring “only in society -- and, indeed, only in one that combines the greatest freedom, and thus a thoroughgoing antagonism among its members, with a precise determination and protection of the boundaries of this freedom, so that it can coexist with the freedom of others.”⁵⁴

One important point we need to make here is to note the exact nature of this relationship between a political whole and morality. Put simply enough, morality depends on a cosmopolitan world, but a cosmopolitan world does not depend on morality. A cosmopolitan world is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the achievement of morality. This is a point which will lead to confusion, as it has led many commentators, if not properly understood and strictly adhered to.⁵⁵ We will have more to say about this in Section Two, Chapter Three below, but it is clear that Kant states this relationship, if not clearly, then at least consistently. The cosmopolitan whole is the “womb” from which our capacities can be perfected. It is the formation of

115); it is a claim that individuals would not have any *value* if they did not cultivate their rational abilities.

⁵² Heinz Wichmann maintains that this indicates “daß Kant keinen anderen Weg aus der rein tierischen Existenz des Menschen hin zu höheren Existenz sieht als den des gegenseitigen Kampfes der Menschen untereinander. Nur *der* soll Progression and positive Entwicklung garantieren,” (873-4). See: Heinz Wichmann, “Zum Problem des ewigen Friedens bei Kant,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 873-9.

⁵³ Thus, I think that Laberge goes too far in his analysis on the need for “external war,” for it does not seem necessary that there *always* be the threat of war in order 1) to continually motivate persons to develop culture and not be lulled into the life of an Arkadian shepherd, and 2) to secure the threat of a world despotism. As Schuler says, “because unsocial sociability is the source of creativity as well as destruction, its presence must somehow be felt within a state of perpetual peace,” (p. 903); Jeanne Schuler, “Reasonable Hope: Kant as Critical Theorist,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 901-7. See also: Pierre Laberge, “Von der Garantie des ewigen Friedens,” trans. Michael Walz, [French to German], in *Immanuel Kant: Zum ewigen Frieden*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 1995), 149-70.

⁵⁴ Ak. 22.

⁵⁵ It is perhaps this lack of differentiation which leads Laberge to attempt to make a rather strange and unconvincing split between ends which “nature sets for herself” and the more rational ends that humans set for themselves of which “nature has no knowledge.”

a State which can then be transformed “into a *moral whole*.” It is the “*sole state in which all of humanity’s natural capacities can be developed*.” Kant’s discussion of the Arcadian shepherd, noted above, also shows a state in which there is peace and even love, but not a moral whole, not a situation in conformity with the final end of human beings. We have later confirmation of this in “To[ward] Perpetual Peace” where Kant states plainly:

One can see that although the inner core of morality is certainly not its cause, presently existing but still very imperfectly organized nations have in their foreign relations already approached what the idea of right prescribes (so that a good national constitution⁵⁶ cannot be expected to arise from morality, but, rather, quite the opposite, a people’s good moral condition is to be expected only under a good constitution).⁵⁷

Kant believes that the development of morality, the cultivation of our rational nature, cannot develop properly under the threat of war. While it does seem to require antagonism, it also requires a lasting peace, so that citizens can devote themselves to developing these talents instead of developing the skills of war.

This fact saves Kant from an otherwise significant problem. We shall see this problem more clearly below, but we can see it here already and offer a solution. If a perfectly cosmopolitan world simply *was* the moral perfection of the human race, and if such a world was brought about by nature *despite* the actions of the human race, then persons would attain morality without having willed in accordance with the moral law, namely, that willing which gives them moral worth in the first place. In fact, the type of actions usually involved in bringing about the cosmopolitan whole Kant understands to be usually diametrically opposed to the moral law. But this problem is solved if the cosmopolitan world is merely the “womb” of morality, if it is a necessary but not sufficient condition of true moral achievement. If we have

⁵⁶ Again, misprint occurs in the original translation.

⁵⁷ Ak. 366.

understood Kant correctly, he appears to indicate that a condition of lasting peace is a condition which we must have in order to undertake in earnest the project of universal moral striving. War and the threat of war place the individuals of different nations in a condition similar to the state of nature out of which they originally moved, and such a condition Kant believes to be adverse to the cultivation of morality. Thus, we must hope that this condition can be overcome, and that we can move toward a cosmopolitan world in order to subsequently move toward a moral whole.

This also solves a related problem. If it is our duty as members of the human race to move toward a moral whole, and if it is true that such movement can only occur within the space of cosmopolitanism, then it is our duty to strive toward this cosmopolitanism. But does this give us a *carte blanche* for violence? Does Kant's picture of an antagonistic world lead us to the justification of war and violence in the name of moving the human race forward? I think such an interpretation would be a serious misconstrual of Kant's position, and probably one only possible through deliberate exaggeration. The end of the human race, as Kant sees it, is the formation of a moral whole, not simply a peaceful world. And what hinders the development of our rational capacities to begin with are conditions of violence, both between persons and between nations. Certainly Kant's well-known stance against revolution ("*Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!*")⁵⁸ and even against many forms of protest, speaks toward the prohibition both of direct violence as well as any action which might jeopardize the authority of the State. We must always will in accord with the moral law, always treat other people as ends in themselves; this is the only way in which we have true autonomy.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment," Ak. 37. In: *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Moral Practice*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), 41-8. All citations refer to Akademie page numbers.

⁵⁹ See the following chapter for more on this.

Commentators are right to point out that Kant does not have the same framework in place as Hegel does for the purpose of describing how the species might progress toward rationality. But this is good. Hegel's description of the world as being constitutively (i.e., not merely regulatively) dialectic leads to philosophical problems (not being able to survive a critique of "Modernity"), practical atrocities (the violent actions of persons against one another in the hopes that their "thesis and antithesis" would lead to some "synthesis"), as well as absurdities (Stalin's attempt, I have heard, to plant rice in the northern regions of the Soviet Union in the hope that it would produce a superior strand). For Kant, we are never certain that the highest good can be achieved, for its possibility is never something which could be taken as known. In addition, though war may lead human beings to those political structures necessary for the beginning of a moral community, the end of humankind is this *moral* community itself, and actions which detract from its creation are decidedly violations of the moral law. The ends never justify the means, though providence may help us to achieve desirable ends even though we do not seem to desire them ourselves.⁶⁰ Hence, we cannot

⁶⁰ While Susanne Weiper is certainly right to argue, as I do, that war can never be utilized as a means to peace (p. 915), I think she read too great a conflict between the ends of nature and the ends of human beings. In this regard, she argues that this conflict "should be interpreted as an antinomy," (p. 915, all translations mine), particularly that there is an antinomy between the positions of the "teleological historian" and the "philosopher of Right," (p. 915). But this hardly seems like a real thesis and antithesis. There is nothing incompatible between the facts that Providence will lead us to a condition of perpetual peace and either 1) that we can ourselves contribute to this process, or 2) that *moral* progress must come from our own endeavors. See: Susanne Weiper, "Eine Idee zwischen Politik and Moral: Der Friedensgedanke bei Kant and Scheler," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 909-918. Similarly, Eckart von Sydow writes: "The difficulty [namely, an "Antinomie der Geschichtskonstruktion"] concerning the meaning of history can be stated through the contradictory sentences: 1. History promotes morality and hence weakens natural capacities; 2. history promotes natural capacities and hence weakens morality," (p. 380). Obviously, if what I have argued is correct, von Sydow is simply wrong. To begin with, though we might be able to conclude that history does help develop natural abilities, we can never know, as a fact, that history promotes morality. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, natural capacities are in no way *ipso facto* in conflict with morality; this not only goes against Kant's writings on moral progress and culture, where the skills of individuals aid morality, but also against his moral writings and his belief in the free choice to be evil. All these points will be discussed further below, though I shall not bring up Eckart von Sydow specifically again. See: Eckart von Sydow, "Der Gedanke des Edeal-Rechts bei Kant," in *Materialien zu Kants Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976), 379-389.

choose "any means necessary" to reach the goal of the cosmopolitan world. The interpretation I have given would, of course, allow and even necessitate antagonism, but as I have tried to argue above, such antagonism is simply the natural antagonism which occurs when human beings have different ends regarding happiness, and it should occur within a society with a perfect constitution and can occur without violating the moral law. We shall see this in further detail below.

Chapter Four

Kant's Moral Philosophy and the Highest Good

I.

In this chapter I will present a brief account of Kant's moral theory, focusing mainly on the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Of chief interest here is Kant's argument for the highest good and his discussion of how something becomes a postulate of pure practical reason. In the first section I will give a brief overview of Kant's moral philosophy, in the second I will give Kant's argument for the highest good, in the third I will discuss the necessary postulates of God and immortality, in the fourth I will discuss the location of the highest good, and in the last I will briefly point out Kant's struggle with the question of the "expansion" of practical reason.

II.

In the *Grundlegung*, Kant is interested in the nature of moral commands. Specifically, Kant wants to know if we can find a single principle for morality. He utilizes what he terms the "analytical" method in which he starts with ethical principles which everyone will agree are true and then attempts to argue from these accepted principles to the necessary ground for their truth. The *Prolegomena* is another example of Kant's analytical method, since it begins with the accepted laws of geometry and physics and argues to what must be *a priori* necessary if these laws are to have a foundation, namely intuitions and the categories. In the *Grundlegung*, Kant moves from accepted tenets of ethics and morality in an attempt to find a single unifying principle for morality.

Kant reasons that the basis for ethical action cannot be grounded in the desire for happiness. This is for (at least) three relatively simple reasons. The first is that we all agree (Kant presumes) that talents, benefits, wealth, power, intelligence, etc., are only good if they are combined with a good will; such benefits can “become extremely bad and harmful if the will... is not good.”¹ Hence, a “good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of being even worthy of happiness.”² The second reason is that happiness is not an end of which we can consistently conceive: “men cannot form any definite and certain concept of the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations that is called happiness.”³ Happiness is a continually fluctuating concept, and even if we achieve momentary happiness, a different desire soon arises.⁴ The third reason, and perhaps the most important, is that Kant notes that an action done in accord with morality is an action that we say “ought” to have been done. The principle according to which the action was determined is therefore universal and necessary. We do not say that the action should be done *if* the person wanted some end or other, but that the action should be done independently of the end and the outcome. Thus, Kant reasons that since the willing of happiness deals with specific and contingent ends, these ends cannot possibly serve as grounds for morality.

Such conclusions lead Kant to three propositions, which then lead him to the formula of the moral law. The three propositions are: an action must be done from duty and duty alone to have moral worth,⁵ “an action done

¹ Ak. 393. All quotations come from: Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, trans. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Third Printing, 1988), 1-69. All citations refer to the Akademie page numbers.

² *Ibid.*, Ak. 393-4.

³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 399.

⁴ With the (hypothetical) imperative of skills, once one has chosen the end, the means follow necessarily, so that it is in the form of an imperative. But there can be not even a corresponding (hypothetical) imperative for prudence, since “the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills,” (*Grundlegung*, Ak. 418). See also: Ak. 417-8.

⁵ As the translator notes, this proposition is “implicit” in the discussion found at Ak. 397-9.

from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose that is to be attained by it, but in the maxim according to which the action is determined,”⁶ and “duty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law. I can indeed have an inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action; but I can never have respect for such an object, just because it is merely an effect and is not an activity of the will.”⁷ These propositions lead Kant to the conclusion that it must be the form of law itself which can give us the necessary conditions for an ethical action; the form abstracts from all empirical intentions, grounds, and ends. But what sort of ethical principle could give us such a form?

Kant’s discovered principle is, of course, the moral law given in the form of a “categorical imperative.” Kant gives us three formulations of it in this work:

Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.⁸

Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.⁹

Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.¹⁰

In this respect, the object which we will is the only object which is good in and of itself, and is not empirical, namely a good will. But Kant concludes that such willing is simply the willingness to will in accord with the moral law. Thus it is the form of the law, and not its material, which provides an

⁶ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 399.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 400.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 421.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 429.

action with worth. And, of course, such an action is simply willing in accord with duty. The way in which we check that any particular maxim conforms with the moral law is to see if we could universalize it. If we can consistently will that the maxim be universalized, then it is in accord with the moral law.

The material of the *Grundlegung* is well worn, as is most of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. As such, let me now move on to the second *Critique* in order to give a brief sketch of its background components.

The *Critique of Practical Reason*, probably written within the course of one calendar year and published on the heels of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, utilizes the “synthetic” method. This method is proper for a “critique,” and argues for the validity of *a priori* principles with as little reference to experience as possible. As the first *Critique* attempted to discover those principles and laws necessary for the knowledge of nature, the second *Critique* attempts to discover those principles and laws necessary for moral action and judgment.

The main thrust of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is “merely to show that there is a pure practical reason,”¹¹ in other words, that pure reason can be practical. We saw in the first *Critique* that reason has a speculative function, but Kant argues here that it has a practical function as well.

Again in the second *Critique*, Kant maintains that no principle that contains empirical content can take the form of a law, that is, it cannot command from universality and necessity. This is because, first, we cannot know *a priori* what objects would give us pleasure, and thus (even if happiness were consistent) it would be a merely contingent fact and not able to provide us with a universal and necessary object for willing,¹² and second, such matters of pleasure are different for each person, and thus cannot be

¹¹ Ak. 3. All references come from: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1956).

¹² *Ibid.*, Ak. 21.

universal.¹³ However, even if objects of pleasure were known *a priori* and even if all persons agreed on them, “even then they could not set up the principle of self-love as a practical law, for the unanimity itself would be merely contingent,”¹⁴ and thus be only subjectively necessary.

Thus Kant again argues that if there is a moral law, then it must command due only to its form, because no material is allowed in a universal and necessary imperative; “the sole principle of morality consists in independence from all material of the law (i.e., a desired object) and in the accompanying determination of choice by the mere form of giving universal law which a maxim must be capable of having.”¹⁵ This leads Kant back to the formulation of the categorical imperative, the command to act so “that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law.”¹⁶

Now Kant has argued that we can think of such a law, and we can formulate it appropriately. Thus he concludes that we have consciousness of the moral law. But since the moral law expresses nothing but the freedom of the will to give laws to itself apart from empirical influence, the moral law implies the necessity of a free will:

It is therefore the moral law, of which we become immediately conscious as soon as we construct maxims for the will, which first presents itself to us; and since reason exhibits it as a ground of determination which is completely independent of and not to be outweighed by any sensuous condition, it is the moral law which leads directly to the concept of freedom.¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 25 and 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 26. We can also always ask, given that one person likes such a thing, or that everyone likes such a thing, why should this thing be a necessary possession? And should it be necessary for everyone to desire it?

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 29-30.

The moral law, of which we can be conscious, commands that we will only those ends which can be necessary and universal, and thus will freely and without regard to sensuous nature. But such willing is free willing, the legislation of reason to itself.

Recall that the will, as Kant defines it, is “a faculty either of bringing forth objects corresponding to conceptions or of determining itself, i.e., its causality to effect such objects...”¹⁸ Such bringing forth of objects is a law-like behavior; “everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the power to act according to his conception of laws, i.e., according to principles, and thereby has he a will.”¹⁹ But what faculty controls the formation of laws? Reason, as we learned from the first *Critique*, is that faculty which is able to draw conclusions in a law-like fashion, as well as set its own ends. Animals presumably do not have freedom, do not have the ability to set ends for themselves and then to pursue those purposes in a law-like fashion. Thus animals cannot be moral. Importantly, Kant concludes

though freedom is certainly the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the latter is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we would never have been justified in assuming anything like freedom... But if there were no freedom, the moral law would never have been encountered in us.²⁰

Kant draws the important conclusion that we would not even be conscious of the moral law if it were not for the possibility of freedom. Freedom as the ability of reason to give laws to itself, independent of sensuous nature, is exactly what the moral law expresses, and to have consciousness of the moral law is to have an encounter with our own freedom.²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 15.

¹⁹ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 412.

²⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 4, n.

²¹ Though, of course, freedom is something “we can neither know immediately, since our first concept of it is negative, nor infer from experience, since experience reveals us only the law of appearances and consequently the mechanism of nature, the direct opposite of freedom.” (*Ibid.*, Ak. 29).

Thus, Kant concludes that the possibility which the *Critique of Pure Reason* opened up for freedom, is now filled in and confirmed by the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Freedom, while it cannot be met with as an intuition, is necessitated by the moral law, a law of which we would not be conscious in the first place if freedom were not possible. But this freedom is not merely the negative freedom which was expressed in the first *Critique*, i.e., simply the ability to begin a completely new causal chain from an unconditioned. We now have a positive freedom:

The sole principle of morality consists in independence from all material of the law... That independence, however, is freedom in the negative sense, while this intrinsic legislation of pure and thus practical reason is freedom in the positive sense. Therefore, the moral law expresses nothing else than the autonomy of the pure practical reason, i.e., [positive] freedom.²²

The possibility of freedom is now given as a necessity, though only from a practical point of view, so that we are led to move beyond a negative freedom to posit a positive freedom.²³ With the moral law, reason gives a law to itself, sets its own purposes, and is thus autonomous.

As Kant says, including any (empirical) material within a law results in heteronomy, and “*heteronomy* of choice... not only does not establish any obligation but is opposed to the principle of duty and to the morality of the will.”²⁴ Not mere negative freedom is expressed by the moral law, but positive freedom, freedom of the will from sensuous inclinations. Through this, we must understand that if we are not willing in accord with the moral law, and thus not giving the law to ourselves, then we are willing in accord with

²² Ibid., Ak. 33.

²³ “[E]ven in that [first] *Critique* it was emphasized that the supersensible was not mere fancy and that its concepts were not empty. Now practical reason itself... provides reality to a supersensible object of the category of causality, i.e., to freedom. This is a practical concept and as such is subject only to practical use; but what in the speculative critique could be thought is now confirmed by fact,” (Ibid., Ak. 6).

²⁴ Ibid., Ak. 33.

self-love, and such willing is not only heteronomous, it is willing to *give up* one's freedom; "when one's own happiness is made the determining ground of the will, the result is the direct opposite of the principle of morality."²⁵ "[I]t is heteronomy because the will does not give itself the law but only directions for a reasonable obedience to pathological laws."²⁶ By putting material into the form of the moral law, by having self-love as the guiding principle (even if the result of such a principle conforms to legality), human beings forfeit their freedom, and thus forfeit any claim to worth they might have;²⁷ Kant asserts that the fact one "has reason does not in the least raise him in worth above mere animality if reason only serves the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by instinct."²⁸

Finally, then, because moral willing, freedom, and (non-empirically determined) reason all express exactly the same thing, Kant may conclude that pure reason is practical as well; "practical reason has the same cognitive faculty for its foundation as the speculative, so far as they are both pure reason."²⁹ Will and reason are not two different things, for "the will is thought of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 33.

²⁷ As an aside, this should help us to understand why, in Kant's political writings, he insists that, even in matters of Right, we must give the law to ourselves. It is not enough to follow the dictates of the State; we must be *co-legislators* of the State. If we are not, then we are not free, not autonomous, and thus not of worth.

²⁸ *Second Critique*, Ak. 61. Kant changes his opinion on this matter of the forfeiture of freedom somewhat in his *Religion*. By that time, Kant realizes that if natural inclinations are to blame for immorality, then humans are not really responsible for such actions. Hence, Kant introduces the important concept of "disposition" (*Gesinnung*), and maintains that the propensity one has toward evil results from the *freely chosen* disposition in which the moral law is subjugated to the desire for happiness. Thus, as Silber summarizes on page cxiv of his "Introduction," "the evil man is one who freely decides to subordinate the demands of the law to the demands of his sensible nature. By expressing no more of his personality than is expressed in its abnegation, he fails as a free person and is evil." John R. Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*," in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), lxxxix - cxxxiv. Thus, one freely abnegates one's freedom, and freely wills heteronomy. Thus, one is free, but one still abnegates one's freedom. Silber seems to think that this is quite a different position than the second *Critique*, while Lewis White Beck seems to think that Kant's conclusions are essentially the same. Cf. Silber, pp. lxxx-xcvi, ciii-cxvii and Beck's *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 117-125.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 89.

as a faculty of determining itself to action in accordance with the representation of certain laws, and such a faculty can be found only in rational beings.”³⁰ Even when the seeking of one’s own happiness is the practical principle of the will, reason still generates maxims for the object of such willing; “the will is never determined directly by the object and our conception of it; rather, the will is a faculty which can make an object real.”³¹ But reason can give laws to itself, and thus it can be autonomous. Thus, pure reason in its law giving capacity can also be practical, giving the moral law to itself and thus exempting itself from sensuous determination which would otherwise eliminate freedom.

Let me quickly add, here, that we now see the importance of Kant’s (and my) discussion of the “Ideas of reason” from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Kant points out in the second *Critique*:

Thus reason [itself], which with its ideas always became transcendent when proceeding in a speculative manner, can be given for the first time an objective, although still only practical, reality; its transcendent use is changed into an immanent use, whereby reason becomes, in the field of experience, an efficient cause through ideas.³²

Recall that, as seen in Chapter Two above, reason possesses several Ideas which, while not constitutive for experience, are necessary for two reasons. The first is for the organization of the understanding. But second, recall,

reason is here, indeed, exercising causality, as actually bringing about that which its concept contains; and of such wisdom we cannot, therefore, say disparagingly *it is only an idea*. On the contrary, just because it is the idea of the necessary unity of all possible ends, it must as an original, and at least restrictive condition, serve as standard in all that bears on the practical.³³

³⁰ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 427.

³¹ *Second Critique*, Ak. 60.

³² *Ibid.*, Ak. 48.

³³ A328 = B385.

We saw also that the attempt to find every “unconditioned” in a series of conditions of appearance was “*set us as a task*,”³⁴ as an “idea of reason” and that these “ideas” are “the indispensable condition of all practical employment of reason.”³⁵

Now, perhaps, we can see the full force of this position. If reason is both speculative as well as practical, then it is a faculty of bringing objects into existence. The ideas of speculative reason which serve to guide the understanding in its quest for speculative knowledge will also guide reason itself in its practical application; the “two” reasons are the same, and Kant has tried to show that pure reason can indeed be practical. This, of course, is the other way of conceiving of Kant’s “Copernican Revolution,” namely that reason, once thought to be best suited for discoveries of science and (transcendent) metaphysics has now been judged rather inadequate for such an endeavor, and Kant now claims that reason’s proper function is practical, i.e., moral; “every interest is ultimately practical, even that of speculative reason being only conditional and reaching perfection only in practical use.”³⁶ Hence we know that the ideas of reason are to serve as standards for moral action and judgment, including the ideals of the perfectly moral person and of the perfectly functioning State. We can see, then, that what Kant cleared the way for in the first *Critique* has been confirmed by the second, and Kant has, in part, kept his earlier promise that the “concepts of reason may perhaps make possible a transition from the concepts of nature to the practical concepts... As to all this, we must await explanation in the sequel.”³⁷

³⁴ A498 = B526.

³⁵ A328 = B385.

³⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 125.

³⁷ A329 = B386. I say, of course, “in part” because we have no real mention in the *Critique of Practical Reason* of a perfect constitution. Presumably this is because the “sequel” of which Kant spoke was probably intended to be the *Metaphysics of Morals*, published much later in Kant’s career. On this see Lewis White Beck’s discussion in his *Commentary*.

Let me also quickly point out here something which should be uncontroversial and readily apparent, but perhaps is not. This is the fact that the sensuous world and one's condition in it can influence the will. Put simply, since Kant has argued that pure reason is practical, and that practical reason is the same as the will, it seems that we would always act in accord with the moral law were it not for the fact that other incentives influence our will, particularly our desire for happiness.³⁸ The moral law offers its own incentive, its own command, but nature also offers incentives toward pleasure. Certainly we cannot be *completely* overwhelmed by the incentives, for we are always commanded to be free no matter what the situation. But Kant is also certainly concerned about such influences and situations; the very fact that the categorical imperative needs to *command* indicates this fact.

We find the following as a constant theme in Kant's writing: "To secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for discontent with one's condition under many pressing cares and amid unsatisfied wants might easily become a great temptation to transgress one's duties."³⁹ Put another way, "man feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty...; this counterweight consists of his needs and inclinations, whose total satisfaction is summed up under the name of happiness."⁴⁰ Kant keeps to this premise, from the second *Critique* to the *Metaphysics of Morals*:

[the conflict between happiness and morality is] a practical conflict, and, were the voice of reason with respect to the will not so distinct, so irrepressible, and so clearly audible to even the commonest man, it would drive morality to ruin.⁴¹

³⁸ Henry E. Allison, in fact, takes this to be *the* condition which explains the possibility of "radical evil." See: Henry E. Allison, "Kant's Doctrine of Radical Evil," in *Akten des Sibenten Internationaler Kant-Kongresses*, ed. Gerhard Funke, Band I (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1991), 51-72.

³⁹ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 399.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 404.

⁴¹ *Second Critique*, Ak. 35.

It can even be a duty in certain respects to provide for one's happiness, in part because... it contains means to the fulfillment of one's duty and in part because the lack of it (e.g., poverty) contains temptations to transgress against duty.⁴²

the culture of discipline... is negative and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, a despotism that rivets us to certain natural things and renders us unable to do our own selecting...⁴³

Adversity, pain, and want are great temptations to violate one's duty... [T]he end [of promoting the happiness of another] is not the subject's happiness but his morality, and happiness is merely a means for removing obstacles to his morality...⁴⁴

These are only a few of many possible quotations. Such quotations, as well as the nature of Kant's entire discussion of the "incentives" of nature, should suffice to make the point that persons are influenced by nature.⁴⁵

III.

All three *Critiques* have at least one antinomy. Kant claims that the antinomy to be solved in the second *Critique* is that of the highest good. Kant maintains that we have two natural candidates for "good," namely happiness, by virtue of our creaturely nature, and perfect morality, by virtue of our intelligible nature. While Kant has argued before that virtue is the only good in itself, he also consistently states that it does not itself provide happiness. While he explicitly states that we receive some "self-contentment"⁴⁶ when we will in accord with the moral law, "this comfort is not happiness, not even the smallest part of happiness... This inner satisfaction is

⁴² *Ibid.*, Ak. 93.

⁴³ Ak. 432. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

⁴⁴ Ak. 388. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ See also Wike's discussion of this in chapter four of her book: Victoria S. Wike, *Kant on Happiness in Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ Second *Critique*, Ak. 117.

therefore merely negative with reference to everything which might make life pleasant.”⁴⁷ Kant states that “happiness and morality are two specifically different elements of the highest good and therefore their combination cannot be known analytically... The highest good is a *synthesis* of concepts.”⁴⁸ This is reaffirmed in Kant’s discussion of the Stoics, who were wrong to think that perfect morality simply brought about happiness of its own accord.

Now Kant has already argued (in the “Analytic”) that virtue is the “supreme” and unconditioned good. But he argues (in the “Dialectic”) that,

these truths do not imply that virtue is the entire and perfect good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings. For this, happiness is also required, and indeed not merely in the partial eyes of a person... but even in the judgment of an impartial reason... for to be in need of happiness and also worthy of it [i.e., to be virtuous] and yet not to partake of it could not be in accordance with the complete volition of an omnipotent rational being...⁴⁹

While morality and happiness are not the same thing, Kant claims that a highest good would unite the two, and that “this combination is known as a priori and thus as practically necessary... It is a priori (morally) necessary to bring forth the highest good...”⁵⁰ Thus, there must be some connection between these two elements, some connection of “ground and consequence.”⁵¹ This, then, is the antinomy of practical reason, namely to find a necessary connection between two goods which are themselves wholly heterogeneous and show no (apparent) connection in the world of nature.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid., Ak. 88. For more on the exact nature of “happiness” as Kant conceives it, see Section Two, Chapter Two below.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Ak. 112.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Ak. 110.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Ak. 113.

⁵¹ Ibid., Ak. 110.

⁵² Beck is right to claim that “it should be obvious that we do not have here an antinomy in any strict sense,” (*Commentary*, p. 247). This is because, one of the theses is simply false, and, subsequently, rejected. Compare this with the third antinomy where both thesis were necessary and both affirmed. See Beck’s discussion, pp. 247-8.

Because happiness cannot be a condition of virtue, and because the highest good is a necessary object of moral volition, Kant concludes that virtue must be the condition for happiness. The first is ruled out by both the “Analytic” as well as the *Grundlegung*, since happiness as the basis for willing an action produces heteronomy and cannot produce truly moral commands. But the second, while apparently not evidenced in nature, is “false only if I assume existence in this world to be the only mode of existence...”⁵³ Kant’s solution, then, is to reassert that human beings are members of two “worlds” and to conclude that “it is not impossible that the morality of intention should have a necessary relation as cause to happiness as an effect in the sensuous world; but this relation is indirect, mediated by an intelligible Author of nature.”⁵⁴ Thus,⁵⁵ it is an intelligible Author of nature, namely the moral God, which must be assumed to provide the connection between virtue and happiness, thus uniting the two into a highest good,

happiness in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy)... wherein... happiness, though something always pleasant to him who possesses it, is not of itself absolutely good... but always presupposes conduct in accordance with the moral law as its condition.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, this is about the extent of Kant’s arguments for why the highest good is a necessary object of our will in the first place; to try to justify this claim, we shall have to further analyze it below. In later chapters I will argue that the highest good must indeed be the proper object of our willing, but I will also argue that there are serious flaws in Kant’s conception of the

⁵³ *Second Critique*, Ak. 114.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 114.

⁵⁵ As an aside, I think we can already see a possible inconsistency here, of the kind Andrews Reath talks about in: “Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (October 1988): 593-619. The “antinomy” of the highest good does not seem to be solved by this solution, for Kant himself maintains that this world does not reward morality with happiness. We would have to have a future life or a future world.

⁵⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 110-11.

highest good and its corresponding antinomy. For now, let us take this claim as given, and move on to Kant's discussion of the necessary postulates which are needed to support it.

IV.

If the highest good is the necessary object of moral willing, we must also necessarily presuppose those conditions which would make it possible. Kant calls such presuppositions "postulates of practical reason." These postulates, as noted in "Chapter Two" above, are freedom (but here in the positive sense), immortality, and God, i.e., the positive assertions from practical reason of ideas of pure reason. Now Kant is clear to insist that such postulates are neither "known" in any strict sense nor are they "objectively" necessary. They are not the former because none of them can be given to us in an intuition, and thus are not objects of knowledge as defined in the first *Critique*. Kant argues that they are not the latter because they are not grounds for the possibility of the moral law itself, only for its hoped outcome; it is "not a necessity known by the reference to an object. In other words, it is a necessary assumption, rather, with reference to the subject as conforming to the objective practical laws of reason."⁵⁷ In short, it is necessary for the morally willing agent to postulate these objects in order to be consistent in their willing,⁵⁸ "a theoretical proposition which is not as such demonstrable, but which is an inseparable corollary of an a priori unconditionally valid practical law."⁵⁹ Before we attempt a fuller explanation of this, let us examine each of these postulates individually.

Of the three postulates, Kant thinks "freedom" to be the only one which is indeed a "fact" and is not in question as to its necessity, even though we cannot experience it as an intuition. This is because, as we noted above,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 12.

⁵⁸ We shall analyze this claim in detail below, Section Two, Chapter Five.

⁵⁹ Second *Critique*, Ak. 122.

Kant thinks that we would not have consciousness of the moral law if we did not have positive freedom, hence “with the pure practical faculty of reason, the reality of transcendental freedom is also confirmed,”⁶⁰ though we cannot have an intuition of it as such. Freedom is a “fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, such as the consciousness of freedom (for this is not antecedently given), and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition a priori...”⁶¹ Despite this, Kant sometimes refers to freedom as one of the three postulates of practical reason, “freedom affirmatively regarded (as the causality of a being so far as he belongs to the intelligible world)...”⁶² This seems acceptable enough, for though freedom is a “fact,” it is a very different sort of fact than that which we normally think, namely an intuition subsumed under space, time, and the categories. Freedom in the negative sense has already been necessitated by the solution to the “third antinomy,” but freedom in the positive sense is necessitated by the moral law. Freedom is therefore a necessary postulate because it is a strange type of fact, and a fact which is needed if there is to be morality at all.⁶³

The next necessary postulate is immortality of the soul. Kant explains that the moral law commands “complete fitness of intentions to the moral law,”⁶⁴ but such fitness is “holiness”⁶⁵ which is not possible for creatures with finite intelligences in the world of sense. Yet such complete fitness is commanded, for the moral law simply states that every action must be moral, must be such that it could be willed by every person and included in the laws of nature. Thus, while complete perfection is not possible, “an

⁶⁰ Ibid., Ak. 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., Ak. 31.

⁶² Ibid., Ak. 132.

⁶³ See also Beck’s discussion in the *Commentary*, pp. 207-8 and 251-5.

⁶⁴ *Second Critique*, Ak. 122.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

endless progress to that complete fitness”⁶⁶ is possible, and it is this that we must take to be true. Kant maintains that this solves the problem because

the Infinite Being, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in this series, which is for us without end, a whole conformable to the moral law; holiness... is to be found in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings.⁶⁷

Such perfection is “a practical ideal which must necessarily serve as a model which all finite rational beings must strive toward even though they cannot reach it.”⁶⁸ But such an endless progress is impossible if we understand ourselves to be limited in our life span, thus “infinite progress is possible... only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence and personality of the same rational being; this is called the immortality of the soul.”⁶⁹ Thus immortality of the soul is a necessary postulate to ensure the possibility of “unending progress” toward moral perfection.

The final postulate that Kant asserts is the existence of God as the (moral) author of the world. The highest good is the synthesis of morality with proportionate happiness. However, “the possibility of such a connection of the conditioned with its condition belongs wholly to the supersensuous relations of things and cannot be given under the laws of the world of sense.”⁷⁰ Keeping the first *Critique* in mind, Kant is indicating here that the laws of nature, as understood through the categories of the understanding, have nothing to do with morality, and we often witness nature’s apparent obliviousness to the consequences of moral actions. How can morality be rewarded, then? Such a solution “can occur only contingently in a system of

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Ak. 123.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Ak. 32.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Ak. 122.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Ak. 119.

nature,”⁷¹ and cannot be brought about by persons, since “not being nature’s cause, his will cannot by its own strength bring nature, as it touches on his happiness, into complete harmony with his practical principles.”⁷² The solution is only to be had through “the supposition of a supreme cause of nature which has a causality corresponding to the moral intention.”⁷³ As such, the highest good “is the Kingdom of God, in which nature and morality come into a harmony, which if foreign to each as such, through a holy Author of the world, who makes possible the derived highest good. The highest good is the necessary object of the moral law, and as such it must be possible; therefore, we must assume the existence of a God who would connect morality with proportionate happiness.

V.

Again, it is important to ask: Where is the highest good thought to be located? I think it is very clear in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that Kant was rather divided on the issue, with the result both that there are tensions, if not inconsistencies, between his statements, and that the highest good seems to have two locations. While I will save a discussion of possible inconsistencies until later, let me address the questions of location, and state again my belief that there exists for Kant both an “otherworldly” and an “earthly” highest good.

Kant’s talk of immortality of the soul certainly seems to place an emphasis on an “otherworldly” interpretation of the highest good. If the soul must progress endlessly toward perfect morality, this must take place in some realm beyond this world.⁷⁴ And if such a person is to be rewarded, then

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 115.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Ak. 124.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 125.

⁷⁴ I think Kant’s clearly Christian approach to questions of morality would rule out an interpretation of reincarnation, though whether such an interpretation could remain consistent itself is another question.

it seems this must also take place in the next world. Hence we end up with statements such as:

The holiness of morals is prescribed to them even in this life as a guide to conduct, but the well-being proportionate to this, which is bliss, is thought of as attainable only in eternity. This is due to the fact that... the latter, under the name of happiness, cannot... be reached in this life and therefore is made only an object of hope.⁷⁵

[R]eason certainly has an inescapable responsibility from the side of his sensuous nature to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to the happiness of this and, where possible, of a future life.⁷⁶

[A person who strives for morality] may very well have the comforting hope... that he will be steadfast in these principles in an existence continuing beyond this life... [H]e can have prospect of a blessed future. For "blessed" is the word which reason uses to designate a perfect well-being independent of all contingent causes in the world.⁷⁷

I think these statements are sufficient to establish Kant's position of an "otherworldly" highest good.

However, surprisingly, the majority of the statements found in the second *Critique* support an "earthly" interpretation. Indeed, the entire question of God arises because nature in this world is not responsive to morality, and we must postulate an intelligent author of nature; the discussion concerns proportionality "in this world" and "in the world of sense." Thus:

[I]t is not impossible that the morality of intention would have a necessary relation as cause to happiness as an effect in the sensuous world...⁷⁸

In fact, the impossibility mentioned is merely subjective, i.e., our reason finds it impossible to conceive, in the mere course of nature, a connection so exactly proportioned and so thoroughly adapted to an end between natural events which occur according to laws so heterogeneous. But, as with every other purposive thing in nature, it still cannot prove that it is impossible according to

⁷⁵ Second *Critique*, Ak. 129.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 123 n.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 115.

universal laws of nature [only], i.e., show this by objectively sufficient reasons. But now a determining factor of another kind [namely practical reason] comes into play to turn the scale in this indecision of speculative reason.⁷⁹

[T]he existence is postulated of a cause of the whole of nature, itself distinct from nature, which contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality... Therefore, the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition [which we do make] of a supreme cause of nature which has a causality corresponding to the moral intention [of human beings].⁸⁰

All that here belongs to duty is the endeavor to produce and to further the highest good in the world, the existence of which may thus be postulated though our reason cannot conceive it except by presupposing a highest intelligence.⁸¹

[T]he Kingdom of God... [is that hoped for condition] in which nature and morality come into a harmony... through a holy Author of the world...⁸²

[I]f we inquire into God's final end in creating the world, we must name not the happiness of rational beings in the world but the highest good...⁸³

Thus, again, I believe that Kant asserts the necessity of a highest good on earth.

Now, presumably Kant could very well have said that the solution to the antinomy of the highest good is to assume that all actions will be suitably rewarded or punished *in the next life*. Since one of the two main problems of the highest good in the first place is the unresponsiveness of nature in this world, the rather obvious solution for Kant would have been to say that proportionality takes place in a different world. Kant could have easily wed the notion of proportionate happiness strictly to the notion of an endless progress in the next life. But Kant does not, and he emphasizes that such proportionality must be conceivable in this world. I take this to be particularly telling. I shall attempt to show in later chapters why, exactly, Kant might

⁷⁹ Ibid., Ak. 145.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Ak. 124-5.

⁸¹ Ibid., Ak. 126.

⁸² Ibid., Ak. 128.

⁸³ Ibid., Ak. 130.

think that this is necessary, but for now let me only indicate that it seems that Kant thought a world which was completely impervious to morality would make this world a farce, a purposeless world which in which nature seems to help every other creature except human beings. I think Kant has clear motives for the necessitation of two locations for the highest good.

VI.

Here I want only to mention briefly that we find again in the second *Critique* Kant's concern about the nature of a possible "expansion" of knowledge which practical reason has taken from speculative reason. This is a concern much like the one we noted above regarding the first *Critique*. While Kant insists that "reason is not hereby extended, however, in its theoretical knowledge" by the objects given in postulates of practical reason,⁸⁴ "the theoretical knowledge of pure reason does obtain an accession... [and] theoretical reason is, therefore, justified in assuming [these objects]."⁸⁵ Kant summarizes:

Theoretical knowledge not of these objects but of reason in general was extended so far that, by the practical postulates, object were given to those ideas [of reason], and a merely problematical thought thereby obtained objective reality. It was therefore no extension of knowledge of given supersensuous objects, but still an extension of theoretical reason and of its knowledge with respect to the supersensuous in general, inasmuch as knowledge is compelled to concede that there are such objects without more exactly defining them...⁸⁶

Kant therefore reaches the important conclusion that:

Now no object in intuition can be given to the categories so far as they are applied to these ideas; but that such an object *really exists* and that here the category as a mere form of thought is not empty but has significance -- this is

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 4-5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 135.

sufficiently demonstrated by an object which practical reason indubitably presents in the concept of the highest good...⁸⁷

Now Kant in these sections where he is concerned with the possible expansion of theoretical knowledge seems to be mostly concerned with such knowledge as it concerns freedom, the soul, and God, and not as much with the world as such. But what is important to note is that if we must assume a highest good on earth, then we will have the further tension between what reason can posit regarding nature as merely mechanical, and nature as *purposive*, as teleological. Thus, while we must wait a few chapters to analyze this, it should be no wonder to us that Kant felt the need for another major work devoted precisely to this issue; thus the resulting *Critique of Judgment*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Ak. 136. Italics added for emphasis.

Chapter Five

An Overview to the *Critique of Judgment*

I.

On the one hand, the *Critique of Judgment* goes a long way toward elucidating some of the conflicts that we observed in the first *Critique* and in the “Idea.” This *Critique* concerns a very detailed examination of the faculty or power of judgment itself, which is virtually absent from the other *Critiques*. Here, Kant gives much attention to the concept and possibility of teleology in nature with his analysis of “purposes.” He directly addresses the question of what we are to say about nature acting in accordance with purposes, and what conclusions we can draw from this, especially regarding God and the “final purpose” of the human species. It will turn out that an analysis of purposes can give us some partial confirmation of the possibility of achieving the highest good. We also get a fairly good indication of how to solve the question of the “principle of purposive mechanisms.”¹

On the other hand, Kant adheres to the general guidelines set out in the first *Critique* in his discussion of the “ideas” of reason and of teleology,² and we receive no new radical departures from these guidelines. Kant adheres to his main premise that the notion of teleology is necessary for us to understand and investigate nature. Though he spells out this necessity and the exact nature of teleology in far greater detail here than in the first *Critique*, he still argues that it is only a necessary idea for our cognition and examination of certain aspects of nature, and not a fact about nature itself. In

¹ See Chapter Two and Four above.

² See Chapter Two above.

other words, it remains only a regulative and not a constitutive concept. Therefore, we remain safe to adhere to the conclusions which we drew about teleology in “Chapter Two” above, and we remain safe to assume that Kant was not simply confused as to his own stance on teleology when he wrote the “Idea.” This is extremely important because, as we shall see in later chapters, if teleology is only a regulative principle, it means that moral progress must be, for Kant, a postulate of practical reason.

In this chapter, I shall begin with a brief overall summary of the *Critique of Judgment*, which is a necessary background to more specific points. In so doing, it will become clear, as Werner S. Pluhar argues in his “Introduction” to his recent translation of this *Critique*, why we cannot simply think of mechanical causality as a merely regulative idea, as so many commentators on Kant have claimed. This is the only possibly controversial claim I intend to make in this section, but it is important, as we shall see later. Those readers who are more familiar with the contents of the third *Critique*, and who are willing to accept that mechanical causality remains a constitutive principle at the end of the third *Critique*, may wish to skip this rather laborious chapter.

In the next three chapters, I will address more specific concerns and problems, many of which have been introduced in the previous four chapters of this paper. In the next chapter, I will address the general concern regarding just what to say about the nature of teleology and how much it is said to actually exist in nature. I shall argue that Kant stays with the conclusions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in maintaining that teleology is a regulative principle only. This is important if we are to adhere to the dictates of the first *Critique*, if we are to keep with a conception of nature which is strictly physio-mechanical, and if we are to understand why the existence of political organizations are so important. Next, I will again discuss the question of, Where is the highest good thought to be located? I will argue that we have

absolutely conclusive evidence in the third *Critique* that Kant conceives of a highest good on earth, and that he takes such a belief to be in some sense necessary. I will discuss how it is that the third *Critique* gives us additional hope for the possibility of achieving this highest good on earth. In the last chapter of this set, I shall again address the question of the “principle of purposive mechanisms,” showing how Kant intends this to be a necessary principle, but only a regulative one. Let us begin, however, with an overview of Kant’s third *Critique*.

II.

The main concern of the *Critique of Judgment* might be stated as follows: Kant concluded in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the categories provide the laws to which nature must conform to be experienced, and thus we can know these laws (causality, for instance) *a priori*. However, while these laws are necessary for nature in general, e.g., there must be a (mechanical) cause and effect for nature as appearance, there is nothing to indicate that such law-like behavior might be expected in the particular. In other words, nature in its organization of particular presentations or objects is *contingent* as far as we can see. While nature in general must be able to be cognized according to basic universal laws, there is no guarantee that nature will exhibit consistent, reliable, and understandable laws with regard to specific instances:

the universal supplied by our (human) understanding does not determine the particular; therefore even if different things agree in a common characteristic, the variety of ways in which they may come before our perception is contingent. For our understanding is a power of concepts... so that it must indeed be contingent for it as to what the character and all the variety of the particular may be that can be given to it in nature and that can be brought under its concepts.³

³ p. 290 = Ak. 406. All quotations come from: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). I will cite both the translation’s page number and the Akademie page number, respectively. “The point is this: Our understanding has the peculiarity that when it cognizes, e.g., the cause of a product, it must proceed from the *analytically*

Why should the motion of every planet, for example, be able to be explained with a few simple mathematical equations? Why should chemical reactions remain always the same and be able to be explained mathematically? As far as we human beings with our particular cognitive abilities can see, there is no reason why nature should be regular with regard to its more specific characteristics.⁴

As the two *Critiques* before it, this *Critique* also deals with an antinomy⁵ which can only be solved by reference to the “supersensible.” The antinomy begins with the judgment that an object (of nature)⁶ is beautiful. Often, we behold an object or scene which, upon reflection, we consider to be beautiful. This occurs when we have a feeling of pleasure while beholding something of nature, and we want to make a judgment about that feeling. But Kant claims that a judgment of beauty cannot be made through reference to a concept. The judgment that something is beautiful must not only be disinterested, but must be free of concepts. This is because “from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (except in pure

universal to the particular (i.e., from concepts to the empirical intuition that is given); consequently, in this process our understanding determines nothing regarding the diversity of the particular” (p. 291 = Ak. 407).

⁴ This should hearken us back to the writings of David Hume. How could we possibly know *a priori* that the flame of the candle will burn us? How could we know the way a certain product of nature operates without an experience of it? Thus, while Kant argues against Hume that there must be some laws of nature which we can know *a priori* to be valid and universal, namely the ones we give nature through the categories, he agrees with Hume that the particular rules of nature must be utterly contingent as far as we can judge.

⁵ While Kant presents an “aesthetic” and a “teleological” antinomy, Pluhar argues that there is really only one antinomy of the third *Critique*, much in the same way as there is only one antinomy of the first *Critique* though it has four aspects. I am inclined to agree with him. See: Pluhar, pp. xciii-xciv in the “Translator’s Introduction” to *Critique of Judgment*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

⁶ The more traditional interpretation of Kant is that he indicates that an object must be found *in nature* for it to be truly judged beautiful; but this may not be an accurate assessment. See: Theodore Gracyk, “Art, Nature, and Purposiveness in Kant’s Aesthetic Theory,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 499-507.

practical laws; but these carry an interest with them, while none is connected with pure judgments of taste).⁷ Kant maintains that there is no concept available to use for the judgment that something is beautiful.

However, though this is a judgment of taste, Kant maintains that it is essential to the judgment that something is beautiful to say not only that we, ourselves, find the object beautiful, but that everyone else should judge the same way. We want to say that everyone should find this object beautiful, “for he must not call it *beautiful* if [he means] only [that] *he* likes it. Many things may be charming and agreeable to him; no one cares about that. But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others...”⁸ Thus, Kant says, such a judgment resembles a logical judgment of attributing the predicate of “beautiful” to an object. But this cannot be what we are doing, since we would have to use a concept for such predication, and no concept is available. This raises the problem, then, of just how it is that we can make such a universal judgment without appealing to a concept.

What is the nature of this pleasure that gives rise to the (universal) judgment of taste? Kant explains it as follows: if we cannot appeal to concepts, then the basis of such a judgment

can be nothing other than the mental state that we find in the relation between the presentational powers [imagination and understanding] insofar as they refer a given presentation to *cognition in general*. When this happens, the cognitive powers brought into play by this presentation are in free play, because no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence the mental state in this presentation must be a feeling, accompanying the given presentation, of a free play of the presentational powers directed to cognition in general.⁹

⁷ p. 54 = Ak. 211-2.

⁸ pp. 55-6 = Ak. 212-3.

⁹ pp. 61-2 = Ak. 217.

This free play of the faculties is a “quickenning of the two powers (imagination and understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but, as a result of the prompting of the given presentation, nonetheless accordant: the activity required for cognition in general.”¹⁰ We cannot determine ahead of time that any particular object might cause such a free play or quickening which then would cause a feeling of pleasure in us. This free play is the pleasure we feel when our two faculties of imagination and understanding are in harmony.

Hence, what we receive a feeling of pleasure from are the conditions which make possible the ability to make judgments *at all*. With the beautiful, we are making a judgment about our ability to judge. Recall that, according to Kant, a judgment is a subsumption of a particular under a universal. The understanding provides the universal, in terms of the categories, judgment subsumes a particular under the universal, and then reason draws the logical conclusions.¹¹ But in order to make such judgments at all, there must be the ability of the understanding to give laws to the intuited manifold, and thus a harmony between the powers of imagination and understanding is needed. A beautiful thing is something which is particularly good at allowing for the harmony of these two powers. Thus we judge not that the object *is* beautiful, as if beauty were a predicate, but we judge that this particular object gives rise to the free play of the cognitive faculties, and since all such faculties of human beings must necessarily be the same,¹² we also judge that the object must be judged as beautiful by all people. This is a universal judgment, but only a subjective one, and not an objective one.

¹⁰ p. 63 = Ak. 219.

¹¹ This may be a quite general judgment about cause and effect, in accordance with the *a priori* categories of the understanding, or an even more specific judgment, using empirical concepts of the understanding, such as, “This is a dog.” In this case, the judgment subsumes a particular manifestation of the manifold (taken up through intuition and schematized by the imagination) under the empirical concept of “dog,” given by the understanding. Reason then draws the necessary conclusion.

¹² This is argued for in the first *Critique*.

This is how the antinomy shapes up in “Part One” of the third *Critique*, namely the question of how it is that we can reconcile the disparate claims that a judgment of beauty is a judgment of taste made without concepts and yet that it is a judgment that is universal. But this solution is not yet adequate, for in order to properly solve this antinomy, Kant brings in the concept of “purposiveness,” and this eventually leads him to his discussions of organisms in “Part Two.” In making a judgment that something is beautiful, we judge that the thing has “purposiveness,” namely the purposiveness of being able to be intuited and then taken up by the imagination, and also to be organized according to the concepts of the understanding. This is not a purposiveness that is *for* something particular, not, say, for the purpose of providing nourishment for animals or for the purpose of flying. It is what Kant calls “purposiveness without a purpose.”

But the question arises again, “Why should this be?” Why should there be objects in nature which are particularly well suited for human cognition? The only way that we can judge these objects is to judge that they have the purposiveness *of being able to be judged by human cognition*.¹³ We judge that an object is beautiful because of its subjective purposiveness, and judge that others should judge the same way because of the universality of human cognition.

We should be quick to add, however, that Kant intends this to be a regulative and reflective principle of judgment and not a constitutive or determinate one. Kant concludes that there is, finally, no way that we could possibly know whether something in nature could be caused and explained through an entirely physio-mechanical account:

¹³ As Pluhar summarizes: “the principle of judgment is the assumption that nature manifests a cognizable order not only in its (transcendental and metaphysical) universal laws (which are based on the categories) but in terms of its particular (and contingent) laws as well: *Nature makes its universal laws specific* (Ak. 186) in such a way that the particular laws will not be too ‘heterogeneous’ (Ak. 180) for us to have coherent experience even in terms of them (Ak. 180)” (p. lvii).

nature shows in all of its free formations a great mechanical tendency to produce forms that seem made, as it were, for the aesthetic employment of our power of judgment; and nature gives us no grounds whatever for supposing that [the production of such forms] requires anything more than nature's mechanism...¹⁴

In the final analysis, it is not possible for us as human beings with only our limited categories of the understanding to ever conclude whether something is possible only through mechanical laws, or whether a concept is needed for its formation.¹⁵ We are not allowed to say that nature's purposiveness without a purpose has been given to us as specifically designed for our possible cognition, or whether this is a happy coincidence. We cannot say that beautiful objects have been presented to human beings for the purpose of causing the free play of the faculties. We can only judge that such objects appear to us *as if* they were so designed,¹⁶ but this is only a principle which we need for the correct judging of objects of beauty, for a universal but subjective judgment.

The antinomy of the first part of the *Critique* is still not quite adequately solved, however, without the full explanation given in "Part Two." This is because the solution to the antinomy of "Part One" involved the indeterminate concept of nature's purposiveness without a purpose. But we see even here that we are not able to say whether nature is able to cause such purposiveness through mechanism only, or whether a concept is truly involved. In fact, we will never be able to make such a judgment, for we will never get beyond the cognitive limits set by the first *Critique*. But this still

¹⁴ p. 222 = Ak. 348.

¹⁵ "It is however quite undetermined, and for our reason forever indeterminable, how much the mechanism of nature does as a means toward each final intention in nature" (p. 300 = Ak. 414-5). More on this below.

¹⁶ "The diverse rules whose unity... arouses this admiration are one and all synthetic and do not follow from a *concept* of the object, e.g., that of a circle, but these rules require that this object is given in intuition. But that makes it seem as if the rule of this unity had an empirical basis outside us and distinct from our presentational power... and hence possible only through a purpose that aimed expressly at this harmony [of imagination and understanding]" (p. 242 = Ak. 364-5).

leaves us the antinomy that we are not able to think of such a purposiveness in nature, because, as far as we can see, such an ordering of the particular is completely contingent. We are saying *both* that the particular is contingent, and that it is necessary; it is contingent because our understanding cannot conceive of the particular as being necessitated, and necessary because of the subjective but universal judgment that is made about the beautiful. Contingency of the particular implies physio-mechanical causality, while necessity of the particular implies purposive causality. This is the real antinomy of the third *Critique*.

Such an antinomy is not simply solvable by changing the once constitutive principle of (mechanical) causality into a regulative principle, and thus calling teleology and mechanical causality merely regulative, for we are still left with completely antithetical assertions about one and the same presentation as regards its causality.¹⁷ “Contingency” itself implies the fact that we are *forced to conceive* of nature in terms of physio-mechanical laws, while “purposiveness” implies that we must think in terms of purposive causality. Thus we need a solution which allows us to cognize the possibility of such a necessitated contingency, much in the same way that we needed a solution to the antinomy of freedom and causality which allowed us to understand how both could be asserted to coexist.

This problem is brought to the fore in “Part Two” of the book, where Kant moves from presentations which are beautiful, to the presentation of organisms. Organisms are those objects in nature which are “self-organizing,” objects which have the peculiarity of having each of the parts serving for the purpose of the whole, i.e., where the concept of the whole dictates what the design of each of the parts must be. Kant calls this a “natural purpose:” “a thing exists as a natural purpose if it is *both cause and effect of*

¹⁷ This point will become clearer below.

*itself...*¹⁸ Here we encounter nature as not only organized, but self-organized. Here we seem to judge certain objects as having purposiveness with specific purposes, and hence we encounter “natural purposes” over and above the “subjective purposiveness.” When reason encounters such an object, it attempts to comprehend the formation of this object, and its necessity. But what it concludes is that, in the case of organisms, their formation is so utterly contingent, that “that very contingency of the thing’s form is a basis for regarding the product as if it had come about through a causality that only reason can have.”¹⁹ Yet, for such a thing to be a *natural* purpose, a self-organizing organism found in nature, we must also judge that “it is to be possible only as a natural purpose [*per se*], without the causality of concepts, which rational beings outside it have.”²⁰ In calling something a natural purpose, we must say that while it appears to have been caused according to a concept, we know that nature itself can only operate by mechanical causality, and thus we must judge that, though it is utterly contingent, somehow the parts all act together through mechanical causality in order to form the whole.²¹ Otherwise it would be an un-natural purpose, an object organized according to a concept. Thus, we see how the antinomy which developed in the encounter with beauty (subjective purposiveness) is intensified in the encounter with organisms (natural purposes).

Again, the problem is that we are unable to judge whether or not it is possible for the organisms to have come about by mere mechanism. On the one hand, “it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even adequately become familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible.”²² Indeed, Kant often

¹⁸ p. 249 = Ak. 371.

¹⁹ p. 248 = Ak. 370.

²⁰ p. 252 = Ak. 373.

²¹ p. 252 = Ak. 373 and p. 254 = Ak. 374-5.

²² p. 282 = Ak. 400.

speaks as though we need a teleological principle even for the very cognition of such organisms.²³ On the other hand, given the nature of our discursive understanding, neither can we say that it would be impossible for nature to self-organize using only mechanical causality:

it would also be too presumptuous for us to judge that, supposing we could penetrate to the principle in terms of which nature made the familiar universal laws of nature specific, there simply *could* not be in nature a hidden basis adequate to make organized beings possible without an underlying intention (but through the mere mechanism of nature).²⁴

In effect, we simply cannot judge whether such causation might be possible without an accompanying concept.

The only way out of this antinomy is to appeal to the supersensible in order to think of nature itself as being *created* by some author. But we must think of this intelligence as organizing nature using only mechanical causality to achieve the purposes which we encounter; hence, “however rash and unprovable it would be *for determinative judgment*,” in order to resolve the antinomy, we must nonetheless “think a causality distinct from mechanism -- viz., the causality of an (intelligent) world cause that acts according to purposes.”²⁵ Thus, the antinomy is resolved because we judge both that nature itself acts only mechanically, and that nature has been created with purposes in mind. Let us examine this more thoroughly.

To begin with, reason, by nature of its desire always to find the unconditioned, is naturally moved to thoughts of the supersensible in the hopes of finding a sufficient cause for nature located in this substrate of nature.

²³ See: p. 254 = Ak. 375, 263 = Ak. 383, 266 = Ak. 385, 266-7 = Ak. 386, 281 = Ak. 398, 297-8 = Ak. 412-3, 308 = Ak. 421-2, and 313 = Ak. 426.

²⁴ p. 283 = Ak. 400.

²⁵ p. 269 = Ak. 389. “[T]he peculiar character of my cognitive powers is such that the only way I can judge [how] those things are possible and produced is by conceiving, [to account] for this production, a cause that acts according to intentions, and hence a being that produces [things] in a way analogous to the causality of an understanding” (p. 280 = Ak. 397-8).

Reason finds a natural analogy between the organisms in nature and the objects that it itself produces: both geometrical objects, which it produces abstractly in accordance with a concept, and with more technical objects such as watches, where the parts must all work together for the whole, a whole which comes about only because of an antecedent concept. Reason has a will, and can (at least attempt to) cause nature to coincide with its will. Hence there is a natural analogy between such producing and willing on one side and the concept of an intelligent author of the world on the other. Reason can think of the intelligence behind nature as being like itself, willing nature to act in accordance with concepts, and utilizing nature through mechanical laws. This is, of course, only a regulative principle.²⁶

Though such an idea is natural for reason, it does not yet precisely solve the antinomy, for the understanding still sees particular empirical laws and organisms as contingent. The understanding, given only the categories for the cognition of nature, cannot cognize a nature that could organize itself by any other means than physio-mechanical causation. A final component is needed, namely the notion that the intelligent author of the world makes or intuits such contingencies as *necessities*. Kant argues that “the distinguishing feature of the idea of a natural purpose concerns a peculiarity of *our* (human) understanding in relation to the power of judgment and its reflection on things in nature.”²⁷ This is an extremely important point. What it indicates is that, for Kant, the problem of “natural purposes” *only arises in the first place* for an understanding which is like ours, because only with this understanding is there the problem of an empirical organization which is utterly contingent as far as we can tell. We have only the categories of the understanding to constitute nature, and, in fact, this is what nature *is* for us, nature as appearance because it has already been intuited and legislated to

²⁶ See Section Two below.

²⁷ p. 289 = Ak. 405.

by the understanding. And this understanding cannot give any reason why contingencies should be organized, or, particularly, be self-organizing.²⁸

But what this also shows, Kant argues, is that this conception of our understanding already indicates the possibility of a different understanding:

But if that is so, [namely, the peculiarity of our understanding,] then we must here be presupposing the idea of some possible understanding different from the human one... Only by presupposing this idea can we say that because of the special character of our understanding *must we consider* certain natural products, as to [how] they are possible, as having been produced intentionally and as purposes.²⁹

This is the idea of an understanding which is different from ours, the idea of a non-discursive intelligence. Whereas our understanding is only receptive to intuitions, this other understanding would actually be spontaneous, not working from only universal *a priori* categories. We can think of an intelligence for which it would be necessary for the particular laws of nature to be organized such that we can comprehend them through the understanding, an event which will always remain contingent for us, and which we can “conceive of... only as mediated by purposes.”³⁰ Such an intelligence is

not discursive but intuitive, and hence proceeds from the *synthetically universal* (the intuition of a whole as a whole) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts. Hence such an understanding as well as its presentation of the whole has no *contingency* in the combination of the parts in order to make a determinate form of the whole possible.³¹

Our understanding can only precede from the parts to the whole, viewing such wholes as “consequences.”³²

²⁸ “So what matters here is how *our* understanding relates to judgment: we must find in this relation a certain contingency in the character of our understanding, so that we can take note of this peculiarity as what distinguishes our understanding from other possible ones” (p. 290 = Ak. 406).

²⁹ p. 289 = Ak. 405.

³⁰ p. 291 = Ak. 407.

³¹ p. 291 = Ak. 407.

³² p. 292 = Ak. 407.

But a non-discursive intelligence would think the whole as a whole, and thus eliminate the contingencies of the particular, though the only way *we* can possibly judge such an organized object in nature is through judgment's concept of purposiveness, only through the idea of a being utilizing concepts. In other words, while we can think of an intelligence different than ours, we cannot actually conceptualize it, and thus we must still think and judge individual presentations of nature as if they had been caused according to a purpose; it is only by the principle of a purpose that we are able to conceive and judge such objects.

This, then, is the final solution to the antinomy. It is not possible to solve it merely by relegating both types of causality (mechanical and purposive) to regulative ideas, for we would still be judging one and the same object as possible according to entirely contradictory explanations. Pluhar explains this well, so I will quote him at length:

[we judge an object] in terms of mechanism insofar as the object is a product of nature, in terms of final causes insofar as it is a purpose. Now mechanism involves the necessity implicit in the principle of causality which is based on the categories; on the other hand, we cannot think of an object as a purpose without thinking of it as contingent, viz., contingent in terms of the universal natural laws (Ak. 398).³³ Hence it seems that we are judging as both necessary and contingent "one and the same product" (Ak. 413), indeed, even the same causal *connections* within that product (Ak. 373, and cf. 372-73). Hence we are *contradicting* ourselves (Ak. 396) *unless we can reconcile the two principles...* The fact that we are using these principles as mere maxims, as merely regulative, does not resolve the conflict as all: if the concepts that the two maxims use contradict each other, then we have not even a concept of a natural purpose; for the concepts and maxims will cancel each other, so that we shall not be "judging" at all.³⁴

Merely positing the two conceptions of causality as being regulative does not solve the antinomy. Certainly they remain regulative for any possible final

³³ This is Kant's point, discussed above, that it is only for our peculiar understanding that contingencies of nature are a problem in the first place.

³⁴ p. xc. For Pluhar's complete discussion, see: pp. lxxxvi-cix. See also especially: pp. 297-8 = Ak 412-3.

judgment as to whether a particular object is finally possible according to physio-mechanical causation, but this neither resolves the antinomy, nor does it change the conclusions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; mechanical causality is still constitutive for the understanding, though it is regulative for judgment.

Nor is it enough to think of an intelligent author of the world in analogy with the human will, for we are still left with the problem of the contingency of nature, and of how to judge such organized objects: are they created by an intelligence as art, that is to say, by a merely purposive cause, or can they be explained through mechanism? In the end, Kant argues, we must conceive of natural purposes as the product of a non-discursive intelligence, in which case what seems to us as contingent is actually necessitated by the whole, a whole of which this intelligence can conceive without building it up from the parts. We still require the concept of purposiveness, however, in order to judge, and, to some extent, even cognize organized and self-organized presentations of nature:

[T]he fact that we present [certain] products of nature as possible only in terms of a kind of causality that differs from the causality of the natural laws pertaining to matter, namely, the causality of purposes and final causes, is merely a consequence of the special character of our understanding. Therefore, this principle does not pertain to [how] such things themselves are possible through this kind of production..., but pertains only to the way our understanding is able to judge them.³⁵

This is an important statement. Here, Kant is pointing to the fact that the solution to the antinomy is actually completely indeterminate when we try to conceive of it concretely. We can have absolutely no concrete conception of such a non-discursive intelligence except to say how it would be different and unlike ours. Hence, we *still* need the concept of purposiveness, supplied by

³⁵ p. 292 = Ak. 408.

judgment, to judge organized presentations of nature³⁶. This is the special function of the power of judgment, and why Kant thought a *Critique* was needed to begin with. The only way we can cognize such objects is by thinking of them as caused for a purpose.³⁷ This is how we must judge them, but this cannot be the solution to the antinomy *per se*.

III.

This summary is important primarily because it provides a necessary background for the next several chapters. However, let me here anticipate the arguments of these chapters, and briefly list some important points to keep in mind. First, the *Critique of Judgment* shows that we cannot know whether nature actually behaves teleologically. Thus, the idea of teleology remains regulative while the categories, including (physio-mechanical) causality, remain constitutive of experience. Second, the conclusion that we must necessarily judge in accord with teleology, i.e., we must conceive of nature *as if* it were created for a purpose, allows Kant to make a very powerful argument later in the third *Critique* that if nature has a purpose, its ultimate purpose is to promote the free (moral) willing of human beings. This, in turn, supports the notion of the highest good on earth. Third, Kant's discussion of beauty gives us an indication, though indirect and never certain, that nature was indeed created for us. That is, because the contingent often exhibits law-like behavior and we experience feelings of pleasure, it would seem as if nature was created with the specific faculties of human beings in mind. These important points will allow for the possibility

³⁶ When we try to reconcile the two types of causality, "since the basis for this reconcilability lies in what is neither the one nor the other (neither mechanism nor connection in terms of purposes), but is nature's supersensible substrate that we cannot cognize at all, [it follows that] our (human) reason cannot fuse these two ways of conceiving how such objects are possible. We can only judge them as based... on a supreme understanding..." (pp. 299-300 = Ak. 414).

³⁷ "[W]e must... conceive of a different understanding: without as yet attributing any [concept of a] purpose to this understanding, we can then present this harmony between the [particular] natural laws and our judgment as *necessary* relative to that understanding, [even though] our own understanding can conceive of this harmony only as mediated by purposes" (p. 291 = Ak. 407).

of moral progress and the highest good on earth, show why the highest good can only be a postulate of practical reason, indicate why political institutions are linked to moral progress, and show why a belief in God is rational. With this in mind, let us move on to the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Limits of Teleology and the First Link between the Natural and Moral World

I.

I think that it is absolutely clear in the *Critique of Judgment* that the teleological principle which we need for the judgment of certain presentations of nature is not in any way thought by Kant to be constitutive. Kant makes abundant statements to this fact. To examine this, we must separate this chapter into two sections. The first section will deal with intrinsic teleology and the problem of how to judge an organism which is a natural purpose. The teleological judgment allows us to conceive of the parts of the organism as organized by the whole. The second section will deal with extrinsic or “relative” teleology, and the problem of how to judge the relationship between different aspects of nature; “by extrinsic purposiveness I mean a purposiveness where one thing of nature serves another as a means to a purpose.”¹ While it is clear that Kant intends such teleology to function merely as a regulative idea, Kant also thinks that it is an idea which is nonetheless to be used, and must be examined carefully, as it leads us to think of nature as a system of purposes, and to think of human beings as the final purpose of nature. Kant’s discussion of the “ultimate” and “final” purposes of nature are sometimes confusing. I shall try to spell out this argument more clearly, an argument which seems to have been overlooked in the secondary material.² The discussion in this chapter will give us the necessary materials to solve many of the problems which have already been introduced in this paper, as

¹ p. 312 = Ak. 425.

² With the notable exception of: Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

well as shedding light on how to read Kant concerning teleology as a regulative idea and human beings as the final purpose of nature. In addition, the discussion of the ultimate and final purposes of nature will give us one of three arguments linking teleology and morality, to be further discussed in the next chapter.

II.

Only a few sections in the *Critique* may give rise to uncertainty as to how we are to think of the purposiveness of individual organisms, thereby causing us to question the status of physio-mechanical explanations as constitutive. These sections occur where Kant speaks of the “subordination” of mechanical causality to purposive causality. In section 78, Kant writes that, concerning the inability of human beings to reconcile the two types of causality, “all we can do is subordinate the one type of production (mechanism) to the other (an intentional technic); the transcendental principle of the purposiveness of nature certainly permits that.”³ Section 80 itself is titled, “On the Necessary Subordination of the Principle of Mechanism to the Teleological Principle in Explaining a Thing [Considered] as a Natural Purpose,” and Kant writes that,

in judging things whose concept as natural purposes does undoubtedly have a basis (i.e., in judging organized beings), we must always presuppose some original organization that itself *uses* mechanism, either to produce other organized forms or to develop the thing’s own organized form into new shapes (though these shapes too always result from the purpose and conform to it).⁴

These statements and others like it seem to indicate the possibility both that mechanical causality is to be relegated to the position of only a regulative principle, and that it is also not even the preferred regulative principle of explanation, being inferior to a purposive explanation.

³ p. 299 = Ak. 414.

⁴ p. 304 = Ak. 418. Italics added for emphasis.

Why should it seem this way? To put it briefly, the reason for the subordination has to do with the answer to the antinomy of teleological judgment, discussed in the chapter above. Given that the antinomy can only be solved by appealing to the supersensible in order to reconcile the two types of causality, and given that human beings cannot conceive of the supersensible except to think of an understanding which is non-discursive and which we can only judge by thinking of it as using mechanism for its purposes, then purposive causality becomes more important than mechanistic causality *for judgment*.⁵ Purposive causality is important because, as we saw above, due to the peculiarity of human understanding we must judge organisms *as if* they were created in accord with a concept, for we can conceive of both subjective purposiveness and natural purposes in no other way. In other words,

we must keep to the above principle of teleology -- viz., the principle that, in view of the character of human understanding, the only cause that can be assumed [in order to account] for the possibility of organic beings in nature is a cause that acts intentionally, and that the mere mechanism of nature cannot at all suffice to explain these products of nature. But we are not trying to use this principle to decide anything about how such things themselves are possible.⁶

What Kant concludes about the subordination of mechanical to teleological causality is that it is necessary in order to make a judgment about natural purposes.

When it comes to the question of what role this principle should play in the investigation of nature as a science, Kant's answer does not stray from the first *Critique*. Thus, Kant writes, "without mechanism we cannot gain insight into the nature of things. Even if it were granted that a supreme architect directly created the forms of nature as they have always been... still

⁵ Specifically, for the judgment about how the existence of an organism is possible.

⁶ p. 298 = Ak. 413.

none of this advances our cognition of nature in the least..."⁷ In section 79, Kant addresses the question specifically, and states quite definitively that,

natural science requires determinative and not merely reflective principles in order to indicate objective bases for natural effects. Indeed, since the theory of nature explains natural phenomena in mechanical terms, through their efficient causes, there would be no advantage for it if we considered them according to... purposes... [Purposive explanations give] us no information whatever about the origin and inner possibility of these forms, while that is exactly what theoretical natural science is concerned with.⁸

Kant makes the distinction between the principle of teleology as it is needed for judgment, and as it is needed for speculative science and philosophy. The principle of teleology is necessary for the solution of the antinomy, but this principle says only that reconciliation is possible with the supersensible. When it comes to an actual explanation and understanding of the workings of nature, all we have are intuition and the categories of the understanding. Hence, we are left with a similar situation as at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

As in the first *Critique*, Kant here stresses the need for teleology as an aid to natural investigation. Again, however, Kant claims that if teleology is assumed from the beginning to be constitutive instead of regulative, such a principle would defeat its own purpose, and the investigation of nature in accord with science would never begin. Thus Kant argues we must ultimately use empirical laws, for it is "in terms of these laws that natural science must judge its objects... Hence natural science must not leap over its boundary in order to absorb... something to whose concept no experience whatever can be adequate..."⁹ Kant concludes definitively:

⁷ p. 295 = Ak. 410.

⁸ p. 302 = Ak. 417.

⁹ p. 262 = Ak. 382.

[W]e are not trying to introduce [into physics] a special causal basis, but are trying to introduce only another method for our use of reason in investigation - a method different from the one in terms of mechanical laws -- in order to compensate for the inadequacy we find in the latter method when we search even empirically for all the particular laws of nature... But in speaking this way we do not turn nature into an intelligent being (since that would be absurd), nor are we so bold as to posit a different, intelligent being above nature as its architect, since that would be presumptuous.¹⁰

III.

Kant maintains that intrinsic teleology naturally leads us to questions about extrinsic, relative teleology. When we examine an organism, we try to understand how each part or organ works for the sake of the whole. Why does this organ exist? What does it do? We can then take this question one step further, asking about the organism itself. Why is it here? What does it do? This line of inquiry can be extended indefinitely, thus “this concept of a natural purpose leads us necessarily to the idea of all of nature as a system in terms of the rule of purposes.”¹¹ Here we examine all of nature as if it were a system, and we inquire as to what good each of the parts might be to the others, a part being “called either usefulness (for human beings) or benefit (for any other creature).”¹² Kant maintains that the recognition of natural purposes automatically raises questions about how to judge nature as a system.¹³ Kant spends the second half of “Part II” wondering what we might be able to conclude *if* we assume that nature operates as a system. But how valid is such an assumption? On what grounds should we make it?

Ultimately, Kant’s answer about extrinsic teleology is close to his conclusions about intrinsic teleology: it is a useful tool, a regulative principle, and nothing more. In fact, extrinsic teleology is even more dispensable than intrinsic, for

¹⁰ pp. 263-4 = Ak. 383.

¹¹ p. 258 = Ak. 379.

¹² p. 245 = Ak. 367. See also: p. 314 = Ak. 427.

¹³ See also: p. 322 = Ak. 434.

extrinsic purposiveness of natural things does not give us adequate justification for also considering them to be purposes of nature so as to explain their existence, and for treating -- in thought -- their contingently purposive effects as the bases [responsible] for their existence in terms of the principle of final causes.¹⁴

In other words, while we need the concept of purposive causality in order to conceive of the utterly contingent and to think of natural purposes to begin with, we need not think that one thing was created for the sake of another. Whereas we cannot understand how a single organism could be self-organizing without the concept of teleology, for the relations between organisms, we “find that natural causes are fully adequate to make [things] come out this way...”¹⁵ We can explain the rise and fall of certain organisms and environments wholly within mechanical causality, and without appealing to any purpose which might exist between organisms.¹⁶ Thus, Kant concludes definitively, “the universal idea of nature as the sum total of sense objects gives us no basis whatever [for assuming] that things of nature serve one another as means to purposes...”¹⁷ and that “it goes without saying that this principle holds only for reflective but not for determinative judgment, that it is regulative and not constitutive. It serves only as a guide...”¹⁸

Given that such teleological judging is only regulative, why pursue such inquiry into a possible system of nature? Kant answers:

once we have discovered that nature is able to make products that can be thought of only in terms of the concept of final causes, we are then entitled to go further; we may thereupon judge products as belonging to a system of

¹⁴ p. 257 = Ak. 377.

¹⁵ p. 247 = Ak. 369.

¹⁶ p. 315 = Ak. 428.

¹⁷ p. 235 = Ak. 359. See also: pp. 246-7 = Ak. 368-9.

¹⁸ p. 259 = Ak. 379. Also: “while that maxim of [teleological] judgment is useful when applied to the whole of nature, it is not indispensable there, since the whole of nature is not given us as organized (in the strictest sense of *organized* as given above).” (pp. 280-1 = Ak. 398).

purposes even if they... do not require us, for their possibility, to look for a different principle beyond the mechanism of blind efficient causes. For the idea of nature as a system of nature already leads us, as concerns its basis, beyond the world of sense, so that the unity of the supersensible principle must be considered valid not merely for certain species of natural beings, but just as much for the whole of nature as a system.¹⁹

In this important passage, and as elsewhere in section 67, Kant's point seems to be this: we have already seen that it is necessary to appeal to the supersensible in order to solve the antinomy of judgment. This solution forces us to think of natural purposes as being caused by a divine author in accord with a concept. But if a single organism is caused in this way, and nature is composed of such organisms, then we seem entitled to view nature itself as a system. And if we are entitled to view it as such, then we are entitled to ask the question of what this system is *for*. Why was it created at all? Because of the peculiarity of human understanding, it is necessary to view the world in terms of purposes, and in so doing we have *already* subordinated mechanical to purposive causation. In this way, we are entitled to wonder what possible final purpose there might be in having created nature. This, then, is the question Kant is concerned here to answer.

If we are not careful in our reading, Kant's discussion of natural, ultimate, and final purposes in sections 82 through 84 of the *Critique of Judgment* may seem a simple restatement of his past arguments for the moral worth of humans and their goal of the highest good. But upon closer examination, we see that this is a new type of argument.²⁰ Kant seems to be trying to say that, given the solution to the antinomy of judgment, he can now argue from natural purposes in nature to the ultimate and then the final purpose of nature. In other words, he attempts to move *from* the existence of organisms, which we must conceive of as being created, *to* the necessity of culture as

¹⁹ pp. 260-1 = Ak. 380-1.

²⁰ Also, cf., Kant's *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, pp. 139-141.

promoting the final purpose, to humans as the ultimate purpose, and then to human beings (as freely willing agents) as the final purpose. This is a very different type of proof than Kant presents either in the first or second *Critique*, and is different from the typical proof Kant uses in arguing from the existence of freedom and the moral law to humans as an end in themselves. This argument is not particularly clear, nor is Kant's use of the terms "ultimate" and "final," and I have found nothing particularly helpful in the secondary literature. Hence, I will try to spell out this argument as clearly as possible, and I will argue that, as it stands, such a proof does not accomplish what it intends, but with a few minor changes, it may succeed. Such a reconstruction is extremely important for three reasons: this "upward" proof is unique to this *Critique*, it is virtually ignored in the secondary literature, and it gives Kant a strong reason to postulate the necessity of moral progress of the human species.

It may seem strange that Kant begins with the examination of specific natural purposes and then attempts to argue his way "up" to a final purpose. Perhaps he believes that this is a natural way for human beings to think about the issue, namely that encounters with organisms eventually lead us to think about final purposes, and feels he needs to make an argument which would also proceed along these lines. A more likely reason may be Kant's attempt to unify the three *Critiques* in the *Critique of Judgment*, and he may think that this attempt will be strengthened if, beginning merely with the realm of nature, he could move into the realm of the supersensible aspect of human beings (humans as noumenon); in other words, it may be an attempt to reason from the conclusions of the first to the conclusions of the second *Critique* via the conclusions of the third. Hence, in trying to spell out this proof, we should try to accept as valid only those premises which have been argued for in the first or third *Critique*, and see how far into the second *Critique* Kant can get. A proof of this type could only be attempted in the

third *Critique*, through the initial assumption that we have a legitimate reason for viewing the world in a teleological manner.²¹

Kant maintains that questions about the creation of nature lead to the question of the “ultimate” and “final” purposes (*letzter Zweck* and *Endzweck*) of nature. When we encounter a natural purpose, Kant claims that we want to know whether it is an end in itself, or whether it is only a means to another end. Now Kant’s definition of an ultimate purpose is rather vague. Because Kant will finally place limitations on the ultimate purpose in terms of an additional purpose, namely the “final” purpose (as we shall see below), we must consider the ultimate purpose as itself being another means to an end, and cannot simply be the last step in a chain of purposes: “we can even prove *a priori* that what might perhaps be an *ultimate purpose* for nature can still, insofar as it is a natural thing, never be a *final purpose*.”²²

Kant’s next move in this proof seems to occur in section 82, where Kant attempts to rule out the possibility that the question of the ultimate purpose could be answered by merely looking at nature itself. Kant seems to make the following argument: let us assume that there is an *objective* purposiveness in nature. Now, when we examine nature, we find that humanity, which we might think as the ultimate purpose of nature, is “one of the many animal species, and nature has in no way exempted [it] from its destructive forces any more than from its productive forces, but has subjected everything to a natural mechanism without a purpose.”²³ Kant maintains that we see not only the random destruction of all types of organisms, including humans, but also that the environment which humans need in order to survive, “the habitat of all these creatures, the native soil... and... the sea... provides no indication of having been produced by any but a wholly

²¹ But of course, as always, only regulatively and not constitutively.

²² p. 313 = Ak. 426. While it is hard to see how this might be done *a priori*, it may be possible to make this point at least *a posteriori*. See below.

²³ pp. 314-5 = Ak. 427.

unintentional mechanism."²⁴ Nature, Kant concludes, seems to be indifferent to those plant and animal organisms which human beings need to survive, destructive of many now extinct species, and also seems to indicate the possibility of explaining the development of human beings and their necessary habitat through blind mechanism.

But having reached this conclusion, Kant thinks we have come to an absurdity. He argues:

This argument, however, seems to prove more than it was intended to prove: not merely that man cannot be an ultimate purpose of nature, and that by the same token the aggregate of organized natural things on earth cannot be a system of purposes, but even that the natural products we earlier considered natural purposes originate from nothing but the mechanism of nature.²⁵

If we reason in line with the original assumption, namely that *objective external purposiveness* exists, we reach the conclusion that no natural product can be thought of as having a purpose. But this is impossible to prove, since we already saw in the antinomy of judgment that we are never able to prove whether an organism has been caused by mechanical causality alone. Hence we have a *reductio ad absurdum*, and we must reject the original assumption. And this is what Kant argues for in the next paragraph.²⁶ He argues that while we are "certainly permitted to strive as hard and even as boldly as possible to explain such beings mechanically,"²⁷ the solution to the antinomy (which itself arises because of the peculiar nature of our understanding) dictates that we must think of organisms as natural purposes. The conclusion of this section is to show that the question of the ultimate purpose of nature cannot be solved by looking at nature as

²⁴ p. 315 = Ak. 428.

²⁵ p. 316 = Ak. 428.

²⁶ p. 316 = Ak. 428.

²⁷ p. 316 = Ak. 428.

having objective external purposiveness, but also reminds us that we are still constrained to examine nature with a bent towards teleology.

This does not seem to be a particularly convincing argument. Why are we constrained to draw the conclusion that the destruction of some species and of some human beings makes it impossible for human beings to be the ultimate purpose of nature, let alone make it impossible for us to conceive of anything as being a natural purpose? Many thinkers have used a similar argument about the destruction of earlier species and the fragility of the necessary habitat of human beings to argue for precisely the opposing conclusion. And, more importantly, why, if we assume an objective extrinsic purposiveness, are we forced to draw the conclusion that the origin of organisms can be explained through mechanical causality? Kant says that this is because we can explain the origin of the *habitat* of organisms according to mechanical causality, thus, "if that is so, how can we, and what right do we have, to demand and assert that those creatures [which need the habitat to survive] have a different origin?"²⁸ While it may be true that we cannot say for certain that organisms could not be explained by purposive causality, this definitely does not lead us to the opposite conclusion, namely that such organisms must be explained through mechanical causality. If this were true, Kant would not have a *Critique of Judgment* to begin with.

However, while it appears that such a strong claim cannot be made, it does not appear that Kant needs to make this point with a *reductio ad absurdum*. Kant seems interested in, and only to need, the following two points: first, that we cannot assume *objective* extrinsic teleology to exist, and second, that we cannot reach any conclusions about the ultimate purpose of nature through a mere examination of nature, i.e., completely without reference to some additional facts or principles. Point one, I think, is proved adequately elsewhere in the third *Critique*, especially with the discussion at the

²⁸ pp. 315-6 = Ak. 428.

beginning of section 82 and in sections 63 and 67, discussed above. Kant need only prove that there exists no need for humans to conceive of nature as acting in accord with this constitutive principle of relative teleology.²⁹ Point two is similarly proved in these sections, but perhaps is best set out in Kant's presentation of Linnaeus' position. While we may think that humans are the natural candidate for being the ultimate purpose of nature, Linnaeus' position is that humans exist only to help regulate the animal kingdom, which, in turn, regulates the vegetable kingdom. This seems a perfectly acceptable position, and there seems to be no way to choose between a system of nature which supports only humans and one which supports the continued existence of the vegetable kingdom. In this respect, Kant seems to be able to prove what he needs.

Yet, while this line of argumentation may rule out an objective solution from the mere examination of nature, it still has not solved the original problem of discovering an ultimate purpose. Now Kant does have a very legitimate argument to make in favor of man as the ultimate purpose, namely one which would begin with the moral law. Commentators seem to take this more standard line of thought as Kant's argument in this section.³⁰ Yet this is not the argument Kant makes here. In the first sentence of section 83, Kant claims that he has "shown in the *preceding* section that [certain] principles of reason give us sufficient grounds for judging man -- though reflectively rather than determinatively --... to be the *ultimate* purpose of nature here on earth."³¹ How does he think he has obtained this conclusion?

If there is such an argument in section 82, perhaps it is this: it is only human beings who can think or make nature into a *system* in the first place, and thus human beings must be the ultimate purpose of nature

²⁹ Of course, the need does exist for it as a regulative principle.

³⁰ This includes Pluhar. See his "Translator's Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*: p. lxxxiv.

³¹ p. 317 = Ak. 429. First italics added for emphasis.

because there would be no nature as a system without them. Kant states that “man” is the ultimate purpose “because he is the only being on earth who can form a concept of purposes and use his reason to turn an aggregate of purposively structured things into a system of purposes.”³² Later he makes a similar statement, quoted above, that if human beings are not the ultimate purpose of nature, then “by the same token the aggregate of organized natural things on earth cannot be a system of purposes.”³³ And in this first sentence of section 83, Kant defines human beings as the ultimate purpose as, “the purpose by reference to which all other natural things constitute a system of purposes.”³⁴

This argument, however, still seems unconvincing as it stands. How is it that human beings can turn nature from an aggregate into a system? Is it through cognition? But why should nature have to be cognized (by human beings) as having a purpose in order for there to be a purpose? Many organs of organisms are judged by us to exist for the sake of the whole organism, but certainly neither are they cognized by that organism, nor do they function just because human beings can cognize them. It seems possible for nature to be a system without anyone being able to cognize it, especially given Kant’s arguments that the ultimate purpose cannot simply be determined from examining nature. Maybe Heidegger is able to make a point like this, but not Kant. And, indeed, Kant himself rejects this possibility in section 86: “it is not by reference to man’s cognitive power (theoretical reason) that the existence of everything else in the world first gets its value, i.e., it is not [because] (say) there is someone *to contemplate* the world.”³⁵

³² p. 314 = Ak. 426-7. More on this below.

³³ p. 316 = Ak. 429.

³⁴ p. 317 = Ak. 429.

³⁵ p. 331 = Ak. 442. Kant’s claim in section 82 that “man” is the ultimate purpose because of the “diverse *uses* to which his understanding teaches him to put all those creatures” may also be telling. p. 314 = Ak. 426. Italics added for emphasis.

Perhaps Kant is indicating that the ultimate purpose is a question of which *species* in a system is the most important, the last “for the sake of which.” Initially, Kant maintains that man is the ultimate purpose. But, first, why should this species be human beings?³⁶ Indeed, Kant recognizes in section 82 that a counter argument is possible, namely Linnaeus’ position that the vegetable kingdom is the ultimate purpose of nature. Second, why should this purpose be assumed to be a single species at all? If we make the analogy between an organism and nature as a whole, why should we think that nature exists for the sake of one particular species? Why should nature not exist for nature itself, in the same way that one part of an organism exists not simply for another particular part, but exists for the sake of the whole? Why not nature as a self-organizing whole itself? From what we can tell in section 82, it does not seem that Kant can conclude that humans are the ultimate purpose of nature. Hence, while we now have a clue that the ultimate purpose of nature has something to do with the ability to organize other purposes into a system, we do not yet have an argument.

But perhaps he does not have to make the argument in this way. At this stage, Kant is trying to make the point that humans are the ultimate purpose of nature. Such a strong position does not seem necessary, however. As will make more sense below, the point that Kant seems to need to make in this step of the proof is something like: man is the only possible *candidate* for an ultimate purpose of nature. Now, could Kant make this point? This appears to be possible along the following lines. First, Kant has argued that, “we can even prove a priori that what might perhaps be an *ultimate purpose* for nature can still, insofar as it is a natural thing, never be a *final purpose*.”³⁷ While this seems unlikely as an *a priori* proof, this rather strong point has already been made with Kant’s discussion of extrinsic teleology and

³⁶ Recall that, in accord with this “upward” proof, we are not allowed to cite the noumenal nature of persons as a premise of the proof.

³⁷ p. 313 = Ak. 426.

his definition of a final purpose. When observing any organism (or species), Kant claims that there exist two options:

We can say that the purpose of the existence of such a natural being is in that thing itself, i.e., the thing is not merely a purpose but also a *final purpose*. Or we can say that the final purpose is outside the thing and in other natural beings, i.e., that although the thing exists purposively it is not a final purpose: rather, it is necessarily a means as well.³⁸

So, if Kant is correct to argue that we can always conceive of any organism or species of nature as existing for the sake of another, and if we accept his definition of a final purpose, it seems to follow that nothing we could find *which exists entirely in nature* could be said to exist as a final purpose.

Second, given this, Kant seems justified in his statement that “we can... prove... that what might perhaps be an *ultimate purpose* for nature can still, *insofar as it is a natural thing*, never be a *final purpose*.”³⁹ When we discover something in nature, we always appear to be in a position to conceive of it as a means to some other end. Hence, “insofar as it is a natural thing” we can never say decisively that it is an end in itself. A restatement of this is: “the final purpose is unconditioned, and... nature would therefore be incapable of achieving it and producing it in accordance with the idea of this purpose. For nothing in nature (considered as a being of sense) has, within nature itself, a basis determining it that is not always conditioned in turn.”⁴⁰ Let us call this the “principle of nature’s exclusion.”⁴¹

Third, this leads to the conclusion that if nature is to have an ultimate purpose, this purpose could only be found *in reference to a final purpose*. If a final purpose of nature cannot be found simply by looking at

³⁸ p. 313 = Ak. 426.

³⁹ p. 313 = Ak. 426. Italics added for emphasis.

⁴⁰ p. 322 = Ak. 435.

⁴¹ “The final purpose, [that is, an unconditioned purpose] however, we must not seek within nature at all,” p. 318 = Ak. 431. See also: p. 329 = Ak. 440-1.

nature, then if there is to be an ultimate purpose, it must be discovered only in reference to something “outside” of nature. This may naturally lead us to the question of whether there exists something which is *not* entirely a natural thing which might then be a final purpose. Of course, fourth, Kant has already argued in the first *Critique* that a human being is this type of thing, namely a creature which is part nature and part noumenon; the solution to the third antinomy allows that humans could be entirely subject to mechanistic causality, yet still retain the possibility of generating a purely spontaneous and unconditioned sequence of events. Hence, Kant seems to be able to draw the conclusion that if there is to be an ultimate purpose of nature, then humans are at least *a* candidate for being that purpose.

This conclusion allows us to answer two problems posed above. The first is the problem of the clue that the ultimate purpose of nature has something to do with the ability to organize other purposes into a system. We cannot see why any part of nature should be an end in itself. Thus we cannot see why nature should be a system without reference to something else. But if we could discover a final purpose, *then* nature could be formed into a system. And if that final purpose has something to do with human beings, then it is human beings which form nature from a collection of mere aggregates into a system. Thus Kant writes (with an eye to the final purpose):

if we regard nature as a teleological system, then it is man’s vocation to be the ultimate purpose of nature, but always subject to a condition: he must have the understanding and the will to *give* both nature and himself reference to a purpose that can be independent of nature, self-sufficient, and a final purpose.⁴²

Kant thinks that we now have the legitimate conclusion that humans are the ultimate purpose of nature, *as long as* at some point later in the proof, we can deduce the final purpose to which we can refer the ultimate purpose.

⁴² p. 318 = Ak. 431. Italics added for emphasis.

The second problem from above is the definition of an ultimate purpose. While Kant maintains that the final purpose cannot be found in nature, it seems that the ultimate purpose must be. If the final purpose is outside of nature, but we are interested to know why nature was created, then the ultimate purpose of nature would be the last thing in nature which promotes the final purpose. A working definition of ultimate purpose might be: the last “for the sake of which” or means to the end of the final purpose which is a part of nature. We will have opportunity below to confirm this definition.

But while Kant may have reason to believe that humans are a candidate for the ultimate purpose of nature, are humans the *only* candidate? The concern seems to remain that while we could not necessarily point to a certain species of pure nature as a candidate for the ultimate purpose, what about the possibility of nature itself as this purpose? This seems to depend on whether we could find a final purpose in reference to which nature as a whole would be the necessary ultimate purpose. But then we would have to refer to something like “the pleasure which God takes in his/her creation,” or “nature as a manifestation of the Absolute in the world.” However, it is difficult to see why we would need to believe in a final purpose such as this. If we could argue coherently and decisively for a final purpose like this, then Kant might have to concede the ultimate purpose of nature, but such an argument would have to be made.

In section 83, with humans as the selected candidate for the ultimate purpose, pending the deduction of the final purpose, Kant asks the following question: “what is it, within man himself, that is a purpose and that he is to further through his connection with nature?”⁴³ Here it might seem as if Kant is looking for the ultimate purpose again. But, despite Kant’s rather sloppy wording in these sections, I think he has already decided on human beings to

⁴³ p. 317 = Ak. 429.

fulfill this role, since in the sentence preceding this question he names humans as the ultimate purpose. Nor does it seem from the way that he answers this question that he could be asking here only after the final purpose.⁴⁴ It seems as if he is asking after the final purpose *by way of* some “penultimate”⁴⁵ purpose of nature. Hence, this question must be posing something like: “What is the final purpose of human beings, as the ultimate purpose, *which is to be assisted by* some aspect of nature as a system?” Again, Kant’s wording is confusing at best, but let us accept my wording of the question for now. Kant is not satisfied with “man” himself being the final purpose, but only something within human beings. This is likely to be due to the fact that part of the human constitution is made up of nature, and part is not, and he is concerned to exclude the natural part from the final purpose. The larger question to keep in mind, then, is how can Kant move from humanity⁴⁶ as a possible candidate for the ultimate purpose to the deduction of this final purpose?

The question Kant seems to want to ask, then, might be restated as, “How does nature become a system in order to promote some aspect (the “penultimate” purpose) in human beings (the ultimate purpose) which, in turn, assists some aspect (forthcoming answer: freedom) which is the final purpose?” Thus, this is not a question about the “ultimate” purpose, but rather what we might call either simply the “purpose of nature” or, the term I will use, the “penultimate” purpose of nature. It is a question of what purpose nature pursues in order to facilitate the final purpose of the ultimate purpose. To answer this question, Kant outlines two possibilities regarding this penultimate purpose: either it “can be fulfilled by nature itself in its

⁴⁴ Kant’s answer to his question is “culture.” Hence, because this is a part of nature, it falls under the “principle of nature’s exclusion,” and simply cannot be a final purpose. Nor, despite his calling it “nature’s ultimate purpose” can it be the “ultimate purpose” since he has already concluded this is human beings.

⁴⁵ See the following paragraph.

⁴⁶ Kant, of course, does not use the term “humanity,” but “man.”

beneficence, or else [must] be man's aptitude and skill for [pursuing] various purposes for which he can use nature."⁴⁷ In other words, it must either be something which nature can accomplish entirely by itself, or something which nature can promote. This may seem like a false alternative. Perhaps what Kant is indicating is that *if* nature is to be thought of as a system, nature must either be able to achieve the penultimate "for the sake of which" by itself⁴⁸ or nature must at least be a necessary link in this chain to a purpose which would be achieved in some other way. In the first of these two alternatives, Kant designates the purpose as happiness, and in the latter, as culture.

Kant, of course, rejects happiness as the penultimate purpose of nature, just as in the second *Critique* and in the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent." Here, Kant argues that happiness is only an idea, and "since [a human's] understanding is tied to imagination and the senses, he formulates the idea so diversely..., even if [nature] were subjected completely to man's choice, still [man] could not possibly adopt a definite and fixed universal law that would [keep] it in harmony with that wavering concept..."⁴⁹ Kant again makes the point that humans are simply not designed to receive lasting happiness from nature, for not only are their conceptions of happiness constantly changing, not only does nature often turn hostile on humans, but humans are also constantly fighting with one another. Now because Kant claims that happiness is never very forthcoming to human beings, and, further, because humans would never be able to legislate a system which would lead to such happiness (due to the fact that humans can never conceive of a possible state of happiness), the penultimate purpose of nature cannot be to make humans happy; it would simply never be successful.

⁴⁷ p. 317 = Ak. 430.

⁴⁸ It cannot be the ultimate "for the sake of which" for this would be the last purpose in the chain, and we have already seen that this purpose must be outside of nature.

⁴⁹ p. 317 = Ak. 430.

This also leads to the conclusion that the final purpose cannot be either the happiness of humans or the willing of humans to be happy under any circumstances (i.e., ignoring moral considerations). Of course, this is not to say that humans cannot will to be happy, since we know that the highest good calls for happiness in proportion to morality, but only to say that humans cannot will for happiness without conditions; happiness “is the matter of all his purposes on earth, and if he makes it his whole purpose it makes him unable to set a final purpose for his own existence and to harmonize with this final purpose.”⁵⁰ This cannot be the final purpose because it cannot be coherently willed,⁵¹ since Kant believes that it simply is not achievable, not even in principle.

Apparently, there is an additional reason to reject the willing of happiness as the final purpose. Having already rejected happiness, Kant writes that “we must find out what nature can accomplish in order to prepare man for what he himself must do in order to be a final purpose, and [then] separate that from all those purposes whose achievability rests on conditions that we can expect nature to fulfill alone.”⁵² Kant seems to be writing this with the “principle of nature’s exclusion” in mind. If those things which are constituted by nature alone cannot be a final purpose, and if happiness could be achieved by nature alone,⁵³ then we must eliminate this as a final purpose to begin with. If humans are just another part of nature, then they could not be a final purpose of nature. Kant wants to take man out of the chain of purposes.

With this aim in mind, Kant claims that we are left with culture as the only possibility for the penultimate purpose of nature. If nature is a

⁵⁰ p. 319 = Ak. 431.

⁵¹ This may give us another clue to the reason why Kant thinks the highest good must be possible to be achieved, and why God and immortality are necessary postulates of practical reason.

⁵² pp. 318-9 = Ak. 431.

⁵³ In theory, for we have already seen Kant’s argument that this is not, in fact, possible.

system, if something in humans (themselves being the ultimate purpose) is to be the final purpose, and if nature cannot provide happiness, then the only possibility left for the penultimate purpose of nature is something which nature could promote for humans. Now Kant has eliminated the possibility that the final purpose is the willing of human happiness, with happiness defined as “sum total of all those of his purposes that can [be achieved] through nature outside and within him.”⁵⁴ Kant thus argues that *culture* is the penultimate purpose of nature. This is because it is the understanding and the ability to set one’s own goals which sets humans apart from the rest of nature, that is, the ability to will freely.⁵⁵ Humans, as spelled out clearly in the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, are not necessarily completely subject to mechanical causality, but have the freedom to set their own purposes. Again, Kant seems concerned to take humans out of the chain of purposes. Thus, humans are the ultimate purpose on the condition that “he must have the understanding and the will to give both nature and himself reference to a purpose that can be independent of nature, self-sufficient, and a final purpose.”⁵⁶ What Kant concludes is that the penultimate purpose of nature is not to make humans happy, but to make them able to produce and pursue their own purposes; culture

is a formal and subjective condition, namely, man’s aptitude in general for setting himself purposes, and for using nature (independently of [the element

⁵⁴ p. 319 = Ak. 431.

⁵⁵ This is a rather strange move again. We might have expected something along these lines: if Kant has eliminated the things which humans can will with the intent that nature fulfill them, then we are still left with those things which humans can will freely, i.e., in complete unconcern for the outcome. Do humans have this ability to will without concern for the compliance of nature? Certainly they do; they can will to will in accord with the categorical imperative. While this seems to be a strong move here, it also seems to take more for granted that Kant apparently desires, namely several of the conclusions of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant makes a different move, and this supports the original premise here that Kant is attempting to reach many conclusions of the second *Critique* through the first and third.

⁵⁶ p. 318 = Ak. 431. Indeed, as we learn in the *Religion*, a person who subjugates the moral law to the principle of happiness voluntarily chooses to abdicate his/her freedom, and act as if they were merely an animal, merely subject to natural laws.

of] nature in man's determination of purposes) as a means [for achieving them] in conformity with the maxims of his free purposes generally.⁵⁷

This accords well with Kant's statements in section 82 both that the final purpose cannot be found in nature, and that the ultimate purpose cannot be given without reference to the final purpose.⁵⁸

Nature, it seems, has two parts which make up the penultimate purpose. The first is the culture of skill. This is "an aptitude to promote purposes generally."⁵⁹ This seems to be not so much the ability to achieve purposes once they have been set, but rather what might be called the "motivation" to set purposes to begin with. This is best accomplished by nature through the unsociable sociability of humans which lead to an internal and external constitution.⁶⁰ Under the constant condition of antagonism, quite violent at first but resembling something like friendly competition in the last stages, humans are motivated to set themselves purposes; humans are not designed for happiness, but rather for the development of understanding. The second element of the penultimate purpose is the culture of discipline. This is the assisting of "the *will* in the determination and selection of its purposes,"⁶¹ in other words, "the purpose of making room for the development of our humanity, namely, by making ever more headway against the crudeness and vehemence of those inclinations that belong to us primarily as animals and that interfere most with our education for our

⁵⁷ p. 319 = Ak. 431. Also: "Hence the only [thing] which can give man's existence an absolute value, and by reference to which the existence of the world can have a *final purpose*, is... the value that he can only give himself, and that consists in what he does, how and on what principles he acts, not as a link in nature, but in the *freedom* of his power of desire..." (p. 332 = Ak. 443).

⁵⁸ Also: "But suppose even there were rational beings [in the world], but that their reason were able only to posit the value of the existence of things in nature's relation to these beings (their well-being), but not able to procure that value originally on its own (in its freedom): then there would indeed be purposes in the world (relative ones), but no final (i.e., absolute) purpose..." (p. 339 = Ak. 449).

⁵⁹ p. 319 = Ak. 431-2.

⁶⁰ p. 320 = Ak. 432-3. See also: "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent."

⁶¹ p. 319 = Ak. 432.

higher vocation...”⁶² What seems to be the particularly important role of the culture of discipline is once again pulling humans out of the chain of nature, making “great headway against the tyranny of man’s propensity to the senses, and so prepar[ing] him for a sovereignty in which reason alone is to dominate,”⁶³ i.e., assisting their ability to will freely.⁶⁴ These are the two parts of nature which promote humans’ ability both to create and to pursue purposes in general.⁶⁵

If Kant has argued legitimately up to this point, then Kant may be able to make the last step toward the deduction of the final purpose. Kant has argued that nature promotes humans’ “aptitude in general” for setting and achieving purposes. But Kant has also argued that if such purposes are only the pursuit of happiness, humans will fail in this pursuit. So if these are the only purposes of humans, nature could not be thought of as a system, and there could be no final purpose. But Kant has already argued in the solution to the antinomy of the third *Critique* that we must think of nature as a system of purposes. Hence, because humans cannot achieve happiness, and because nature does promote the ability of humans to formulate purposes not necessitated by nature, the final purpose must be the formulation of freely willed purposes. This leads Kant to conclude, finally, that

if things in the world, which are dependent beings with regard to their existence, require a supreme cause that acts in terms of purposes, then man is the final purpose of creation. For without man the chain of mutually subordinated purposes would not have a complete basis. Only in man, and even in him only as a moral subject [i.e., as a freely willing creature], do we find unconditioned

⁶² p. 321 = Ak. 433.

⁶³ p. 321 = Ak. 434.

⁶⁴ See also: pp. 231-2 = Ak. 356-7.

⁶⁵ We may well wonder why such a specific conclusion is necessary, i.e., why Kant does not simply conclude that the purpose of nature is to create and support human existence. The answer seems to be that mere human existence is always subject to the possibility of being simply a means; there always remains the question of why humans had to exist in the first place. And while human existence is a necessary prerequisite for human free willing, it is not the final prerequisite. See especially: p. 372 = Ak. 477.

legislation regarding purposes. It is this legislation, therefore, which alone enables man to be a final purpose to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated.⁶⁶

Kant seems to have successfully proved that free willing is the final purpose of all of creation, that humans are the ultimate purpose of nature, and that the penultimate purpose of nature is the development of culture.

While we may think it rather more than fortuitous that Kant's argument from natural purposes leads him to the conclusion that free (moral) willing is the final purpose, it does not seem circular. Certainly Kant has human beings already in mind as the ultimate purpose of nature and their ability for free willing as the final purpose, but it is not uncommon to have the conclusion in mind before beginning the proof. Yet what is perhaps of more specific concern is the very connection between the ultimate and final purposes; even though Kant is working "upward" in his proof of a final purpose, he maintains that we cannot decide on an ultimate purpose unless it can be found in reference to an final purpose. But this too seems acceptable. Since we have already assumed that there is a final purpose to be found, due to the solution of the antinomy, Kant may simply say that whatever the ultimate purpose is, it would simply not be an ultimate purpose if it did not lead to or at least provide part of the foundation for the final purpose; this is simply what it *means* to be an ultimate purpose. And Kant seems right to suspect that humans are a good candidate for this purpose, because of their supersensible nature, already given in the first *Critique*. If something appears amiss in the proof, this connection does not seem to be it.

In addition, given that Kant has already stated that the condition for attempting such a proof in the first place is the merely *regulative* status of extrinsic teleology, it does not seem that Kant has proven too much. Kant cannot and does not claim that humans are objectively the ultimate purpose

⁶⁶ p. 323 = Ak. 435.

of nature, or that free will is objectively the final purpose, but merely that if all of nature was created by a divine author, and if we are lead to ask the reason why it was created, then free will must be that final purpose. In fact, Kant spends all of the next section explaining why such a proof does not and could not lead to knowledge of God. There are several statements in section 85 maintaining that with regard to the final purpose, “nature does not tell us anything, nor ever will, while yet, apart from this final intention, we can form no common reference point for all these natural purposes, no adequate teleological principle...”⁶⁷ Also, given Kant’s belief in the possibility or probability of life on other planets, it does not seem that Kant’s arguments should be thought to be too species-centric. Kant’s argument might apply to any creature of finite intelligence which is constituted as part nature and part reason.

Kant seems to have gotten rather far into the conclusions of the second *Critique* through the first and third, and given his conclusion that free will is the final purpose, Kant seems free to move on to additional related arguments. In the conclusion to section 84, Kant first alludes to the fact that a free will is such that “the law in terms of which these beings must determine their purposes is presented by these very beings as unconditioned and independent of conditions of nature, and yet necessary in itself.”⁶⁸ While this point is not argued for here, it is, of course, the conclusion to Kant’s argument for the necessity of the categorical imperative he spells out in the *Grundlegung*. Such a conclusion fits nicely with Kant’s claim that the final purpose must be unconditioned by nature, yet necessary, though the conclusion cannot be argued for without those premises in the *Grundlegung*.

In addition, Kant also alludes to the fact that the necessary object of human free (moral) willing is the highest good, “the object that this being can

⁶⁷ p. 329 = Ak. 440.

⁶⁸ p. 323 = Ak. 435.

set before itself as its highest purpose.”⁶⁹ This is argued for in the first and second *Critique*, and Kant gives a very brief restatement of such an argument in a footnote to section 84. Again, this seems to fit nicely with Kant’s argument about the final purpose, but it cannot be adequately supported without additional premises.⁷⁰ This positing of the highest good then gives Kant a further means toward thinking about God:

in referring natural purpose to an intelligent world cause, as the character of our reason forces us to do, we now have a *principle* that allows us to conceive of the nature and properties of this first cause, i.e., the supreme basis of the kingdom of purposes, and hence allows us to give determination to the concept of this cause.⁷¹

Given the “linking” nature of the third *Critique*, Kant undoubtedly thinks that the argument from natural purposes to the final purpose, which then allows for subsequent arguments for the highest good and the nature of God, lends further credit to his philosophical system.

IV.

Kant’s conclusion about the final purpose of nature leads to some interesting consequences. The first is that the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” is not rejected by the third *Critique*, as many commentators have claimed, but is instead supported. Free (moral) willing is the final purpose. Nature as a system is designed to support such willing, though it cannot cause it directly. The way that nature supports such willing is to provide the conditions necessary for its formation and exercise. And this support is culture. But culture as “that constitution of human relations where the impairment to freedom which results from the mutually conflicting

⁶⁹ p. 323 = Ak. 435.

⁷⁰ These premises are given in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 804-19 = B 832-47), the *Critique of Practical Reason*, later in the third *Critique*, and modified slightly again in the *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

⁷¹ p. 333 = Ak. 444.

freedom [of the individuals] is countered by lawful authority within a whole called *civil society*,”⁷² and culture as “a *cosmopolitan* whole, a system of all states that are in danger of affecting on another detrimentally”⁷³ simply is the “unsociable sociability” which Kant spells out in the “Idea.” Kant even repeats his notion from the “Idea” here in the third *Critique* that “this shining misery has to do with the development of man’s natural predispositions, and [so] nature still achieves its own purpose, *even if that purpose is not ours*.”⁷⁴ Humans require antagonism, although, eventually, peaceful antagonism, in order to cultivate their ability to set themselves purposes. Hence, it is nature’s responsibility to promote this condition of antagonism, even though this state might not be of our own choosing.⁷⁵

Also, if free willing is the final purpose, and Kant is right to maintain that the highest good is the proper object of such a will, then we have further support of the importance of the highest good. We might call the highest good the “final *object*” since it is what a free will is obligated to will. And if this is so, then we have more reason for the rational hope (*glaube*) for the existence of God. If we must will the highest good, then we must also will for

⁷² p. 320 = Ak. 432.

⁷³ p. 320 = Ak. 432.

⁷⁴ p. 320 = Ak. 432. Italics added for emphasis. Kant writes that the final purpose, which makes nature into a system, “[assists physical teleology by] directing our attention to the purposes of nature and by [inviting us] to investigate the unfathomably great art that lies hidden behind nature’s forms, so that the ideas that pure practical reason supplies may find incidental confirmation in natural purposes,” (p. 334 = Ak. 445).

⁷⁵ While the following discussion (in this footnote) could be placed in a number of places, let me place it here. Holly L. Wilson points out two important things in a footnote to her: “A Gap in American Kant Scholarship: Pragmatic Anthropology as the Application of Kantian Moral Philosophy,” in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. Gerhard Funk, Band II.2 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1991), 403-419. She notes that Auxter’s discussion of moral teleology (in *Kant’s Moral Teleology*) is “dissatisfying since his notion of teleology is limited to human volition, and seems to mean little more than intentional behavior, using means for ends. Human teleology [however] is lived out in all of its natural predispositions. He also claims nature is adequately described by mechanism, and that nature has no teleological order which is conducive to human morality,” (407, fn.). But Auxter must be wrong, for as we have seen, and as Wilson concludes, “This contradicts Kant’s explicit claim that nature has an ultimate end for the human species which contributes to the development of morality in human beings; it can produce the formal subjective condition of morality, which is the aptitude for arbitrary purposes.” (407, fn.).

the conditions in which the highest good could come into being; this condition is the existence of a moral creator of the world. Again, it is no coincidence that Kant moves from section 84 to his explanation that this proof does not prove the existence of God, and from there to a discussion of the moral proof for the existence of God. While the proof for the final purpose does not prove the existence of God, its implications are welcome confirmation of the unity of all three *Critiques*.

Finally, while we can only hint at its importance here and save a full discussion for a later chapter, we see in Kant's discussion of culture the important principle not only that the will can be influenced, but that there are conditions under which free willing is better promoted. Perhaps the most important condition is a collection of individually sovereign nations with republican constitutions that are not at war with one another, forming a cosmopolitan whole, "for only in this constitution of human relations can our natural predispositions develop maximally."⁷⁶ As we saw with the "Idea" and as is reinforced in this *Critique*, Kant surmises that humans are simply not so constituted to be content with their situation from moment to moment, and this leads to unrest both within and between persons and nations. Under these conditions, persons are not naturally content, and are forced to set purposes for themselves, both toward the end of happiness and the end of morality, and to attempt to achieve those purposes in the world. In addition, Kant maintains that the fine arts and the sciences can incline us away from the demands of our natural inclinations or at least lessen those demands, making us "not indeed morally better for society, but still civilized for it."⁷⁷ With Kant's discussion of the culture of skill and of discipline, the will can be influenced, and there exist better and worse conditions for the promotion of free willing.

⁷⁶ p. 320 = Ak. 432. This is an additional confirmation of the harmony between the third *Critique* and the "Idea."

⁷⁷ p. 321 = Ak. 433.

In addition, and by way of transition to the next chapter, we may also notice that the State and teleology are bound up together in an interdependent way. While a further discussion of this is given below, mention of this is desirable here, with Kant's discussion of culture fresh in our mind. As we saw especially in the "Idea," the formation of an internal constitution for a State allows its inhabitants to better pursue their own purposes, without the threat of unrestrained devastation. Unsociable sociability leads to the formation of a State. Antagonism will always exist, however, since no one person can satisfy all his/her natural desires for happiness without interfering with the fulfillment of the desires of another. As the formation of a State allows for persons to set themselves purposes more effectively and more freely, persons will thereby be in a position to will more and more in accord with the moral law. As they are increasingly freed from the threat of violence, they can will more freely and effectively. This is, of course, no guarantee that persons will in fact become more moral, but the situation has opened itself up for this greater possibility. Finally, if persons are willing more in accord with the moral law, increasingly willing and acting from duty, then they will have the highest good as their final object. But since part of the highest good includes the concept that the freedom of each person should be maximized as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others, and since the State is the most efficient means of securing such freedom between persons and between nations, then this naturally leads to people willing for an effective State and a cosmopolitan world. Hence the interdependence of morality and the politics, and the link between teleology and the State.

Chapter Seven

The Highest Good and Two Additional Links between Nature and Morality

I.

In Chapter Six above not only did we secure the concept of teleology as a regulative one, we also encountered the first of three arguments which links the natural world to the moral world, i.e., which links humans in their moral capacity both with humans in their natural capacity and with nature as a whole. The first argument was the “upward” proof of humans as the final purpose of nature, occurring in sections 82 through 84, as well as the suggestion in Kant’s discussion of culture that civil society may operate teleologically. But there are two additional arguments. The second argument is familiar to both the first and second *Critique*, and reasons from humans as moral agents to God and then to nature as the locus for the highest good. After spelling out this argument, we shall take a moment to again address the question of the location of the highest good, before proceeding to the next argument. The third argument is also unique to the *Critique of Judgment*, and argues that the experience of beauty and natural purposes gives us at least the hope that the world has been created with a moral purpose in mind. Of course, none of these arguments for a teleological link between humans and nature can give proof that such a link must exist.

II.

Now Kant’s argument in sections 82 through 84 seems to be a specific attempt to reason “upward” from natural purposes to the final purpose, beginning with the assumption of nature as a system. But in sections 87 and 88, Kant attempts a proof which moves in the opposite direction, namely

“downward,” beginning with freely willing agents as the starting premise and moving back through humans, to God, and finally toward nature. As Kant says:

There is a physical teleology; it provides us with a basis that gives us sufficient proof... for assuming the existence of an intelligent cause of the world. But we also find in ourselves, and even more so in the general concept of a rational being endowed with freedom (of its causality), a moral teleology.

Strictly speaking, Kant’s “upward” proof could not lead to a proof of God, since such a premise had to be assumed in order for there to be the possibility of extrinsic teleology to begin with. With the “downward” proof of moral teleology, Kant hopes to give a rational proof for the belief in the existence of God, and after that, to show that if the world was created, then it must be teleological, supporting the highest good. Kant is now moving away from the examination of what can be gained from a physical teleology, to what can be discovered by using a moral teleology. This is a proof similar to the ones given in the first and second *Critiques*, and seems to be preferred by Kant over the “upward” proof.

The first premise in the argument is that humans have a free will, the ability to spontaneously generate unconditioned purposes. As such, this free will is subject to the categorical imperative, so that it is not simply free, but also bound by moral necessity. This is argued for most extensively in the second *Critique* and the *Grundlegung*.¹ Because the moral law is necessary and not simply a means to anything else, this automatically makes humans a natural candidate for being the final purpose of creation, since “moral laws... prescribe something to reason and they prescribe it as a purpose not subject to a condition, and hence just as the concept of a final purpose requires.”² Importantly, this is not to say that human beings *are* the final purpose, but

¹ See also: p. 362 = Ak. 468.

² p. 339 = Ak. 449.

rather “that if there is indeed to be a *final purpose* that reason has to indicate a priori, then it can only be *man* (or any rational being in the world) *under moral laws*.”³ Thus, Kant maintains we have the fact that human beings are moral agents, but only the assumption that humans are the final purpose of creation: “if this is not so, then the existence of the world is either based on no purpose at all in the cause, or only on purposes without a final purpose.”⁴ Such a possibility is a deplorable but possible situation.

Humans, considered here as originators of an unconditioned series, are not determined by nature, and are outside of nature in this respect. Hence, Kant writes that we are no longer concerned with “a purpose of (i.e., within) nature, so far as nature [already] exists, but with the purpose of the [very] existence of nature and all its arrangements. In other words, we are concerned with the ultimate *purpose of creation*...”⁵ If human beings were concerned only with “their well-being” but were not able to freely create value for themselves, “then there would indeed be purposes in the world... but no final... purpose, because the existence of such rational beings would still always be purposeless.”⁶

Now Kant could have begun this proof in the same way as he began the “upward” proof, namely with the assumption of (regulative) extrinsic teleology which automatically brings in the reference of nature to a divine author,

but the principle that [allows us to] refer the world to a supreme cause, as deity, because some of the beings in it are morally destined for a purpose, does not do this by merely supplementing the psysicoteleological basis for proving

³ p. 338 = Ak. 448.

⁴ p. 339 = Ak. 450.

⁵ p. 332 = Ak. 443. This too should give us reason to consider Kant’s discussion in sections 82-84 as something different from the more standard “downward” proof.

⁶ p. 339 = Ak. 449.

[the existence of this deity], in which case it would necessarily presuppose that basis. Rather, it is sufficient even *by itself* to provide this reference...⁷

In other words, while extrinsic teleology necessitates the referencing of nature to a divine author as an original premise, a moral teleology does not need to make such a move, since it can find the connection between the world and a divine author without such an assumption. This is why Kant's more common "downward" proof is stronger, and why Kant does not use extrinsic teleology as a premise.

The next step in the proof is the premise that the necessary object of human free willing is the highest good. The highest good, as presented in all three *Critiques* is perhaps best described as the complete proportioning of happiness to virtue. Kant writes that the moral law "also determines for us, and a priori, a final purpose, and makes it obligatory for us to strive toward [achieving] it; and that purpose is the *highest good in the world* that we can achieve through freedom."⁸ Kant does not give a lengthy argument here as to why this should be, but we can take such an argument as understood from the first and second *Critique*. Kant only reiterates that the human being's natural purpose is happiness, and that we can only think that such happiness must be "subject to the objective condition that man be in harmony with the law of *morality*..."⁹

This leads Kant to posit the necessity of God. The harmony between morality and happiness is the necessary object of the highest good, but we can observe nothing in nature which indicates that morality and happiness might actually be linked. Thus we cannot see how such a harmony would be possible "if the causality of nature is the only causality (of a means [for

⁷ pp. 333-4 = Ak. 444.

⁸ p. 339 = Ak. 450.

⁹ *Ibid.*

achieving the highest good)) that we [necessarily] connect with our freedom."¹⁰ But because the highest good is the necessary object of free willing,

in order to set ourselves a final purpose in conformity with the moral law, we must assume a moral cause of the world (an author of the world); and to the extent that setting ourselves a final purpose is necessary... it is also necessary that we assume [that there is] a moral cause of the world: in other words, that there is a God.¹¹

In other words, because the moral law necessitates the willing of the highest good, and because there is no indication that nature alone would bring about the highest good, we must postulate the existence of a moral being which would connect happiness with morality in the world. Of course, Kant is quick to point out that this is only a postulate, and "is not meant to provide an *objectively* valid proof of the existence of God."¹²

Now if human beings are the ultimate purpose, and if God exists and secures the possibility of the highest good, then nature will be teleological because God will have created it in this way. Kant here is more interested in the (subjective) proof for the existence of God and establishing the nature of God as a moral intelligence than he is interested in proving that nature is teleological. But surely such a conclusion is warranted. Kant writes earlier in section 87 that while the moral law does not need reference to God in order to account for itself,

on the other hand, this moral teleology does deal with us as beings in the world; and those same moral laws enjoin us to direct our judging to those other things [regarded] either as purposes or as objects for which we ourselves are the final purpose. This moral teleology, then, deals with the reference of our own causality to purposes...¹³

¹⁰ p. 340 = Ak. 450.

¹¹ p. 340 = Ak. 450.

¹² p. 340n. = Ak. 450n.

¹³ p. 337 = Ak. 447.

Hence, persons are naturally concerned with the effects of moral action in nature, and particularly concerned with the possibility of achieving the highest good in the world. By starting with human beings under the moral law as the final purpose, and with the postulate of the existence of God, it must be possible for nature to be created such that the highest good is possible. As Kant writes at the end of section 86:

the inner *moral* destination of man's existence for a purpose has compensated for the deficiency in our knowledge of nature, by directing us to add something to the final purpose of the existence of all things... to add, [namely,] the thought of the supreme cause... as having properties that enable it to subject all of nature to that single intention (with nature merely as the instrument for achieving this intention).¹⁴

If nature is the creation of a moral intelligence, then nature will contain the possibility for the harmony between morality and happiness, though we cannot see this necessity through an examination of nature. As such, nature must be teleological, a system of purposes created with the final purpose of the moral law in mind.

Lest we take such a proof to be constitutive, and thus too strong, Kant gives us several warnings in the next few sections that such a proof tells us nothing objectively true either about the nature of God or of nature itself. This is most clearly seen in the "Restriction of the Validity of the Moral Proof," "On What Kind of Assent There Is in a Teleological Proof of the Existence of God," and "On What Kind of Assent Results from a Practical Faith," though there are several other places where Kant addresses this.¹⁵ Perhaps the most decisive statements are:

¹⁴ p. 336 = Ak. 447.

¹⁵ In addition to these sections and the quotations to follow, see also: p. 327 = Ak. 439 and pp. 329-30 = Ak. 440-1.

can we not establish the objective reality of the concept of a final purpose of creation in a way that would satisfy pure reason's theoretical demands?... Yet even this, little though it is, is far more than speculative philosophy can ever accomplish.¹⁶

And yet [the concept of a] final purpose is merely a concept of our practical reason; we cannot infer it from any data of experience, so as to judge nature theoretically [in terms of it], nor can we apply it to cognition of nature.¹⁷

the existence of things in conformity with a *final purpose*... requires us to make two assumptions: first, that there is, as author of the world, an intelligent being;... but, second, that [this] being is not merely intelligent but also *moral*, and hence a *God*. We can see from the character of this second inference that we make it only for [the use of] judgment in accordance with concepts of practical reason, and hence for reflective rather than determinative judgment.¹⁸

Again, I take it to be incontrovertible that teleology is intended to be a mere regulative idea, and not a constitutive one, and that in judging that the world acts teleologically and that it will eventually conform to the necessities of the highest good, this judgment is made from a practical point of view only.

III.

Having focused so much attention on the highest good, this seems a good place to discuss the recurrent issue of where the highest good is to be located. Whereas both the first and second *Critique* seem to reveal Kant's ambiguity as to the location of the highest good, I think that the *Critique of Judgment* certainly places the emphasis on it occurring in this world, on earth. Indeed, the discussion of the highest good arises in the first place with the question of whether nature as a whole could be teleological or whether "all of creation would be a mere wasteland, gratuitous and without a final purpose."¹⁹ Kant says that "in reference to the *highest good*" God must be thought to be "*omnipotent*, so that it [God] can make all of nature accord with

¹⁶ p. 344 = Ak. 454.

¹⁷ p. 345 = Ak. 455.

¹⁸ pp. 345-6 = Ak. 455.

¹⁹ p. 331 = Ak. 442.

that highest purpose,” and also be “*omnibenevolent* as well as *just*... the conditions under which a supreme cause of the world can be the cause of the world [taken] as the highest good under moral laws.”²⁰ We see this in the “Comment” to section 86 and again in the “Comment” to section 88, where Kant maintains that even the thought of the existence of God came from a dissatisfaction with the lack of reward for virtuous persons in the world, “the subjective principle not to settle for considering the world in terms of the purposiveness it has through natural causes, but to regard the world as based on a supreme cause that rules nature in terms of moral principles,”²¹ and the thought that “this is not how it should be.”²² The moral proof for the existence of God is framed by a discussion of nature, and nature’s possible response to moral action.

Time and time again, Kant presents the question of the highest good in terms of this world. In the “Introduction,” Kant says that “the effect [at which we are to aim] according to the concept of freedom is the final purpose which (or the appearance of which in the world of sense) ought to exist...,”²³ and that the “final purpose... can be actualized only in nature and in accordance with its laws.”²⁴ Kant writes that “what reason makes the final purpose is the furtherance of happiness in harmony with morality. Now the moral law commands us to further that final purpose (*with regard to the beings of the world*) as far as we can...”²⁵ and that the moral law

provides us in addition with a principle that is subjectively constitutive: the concept of an object that only reason can think [the final purpose] and that we

²⁰ p. 333 = Ak. 444. This occurs again at p. 354 = Ak. 461-2.

²¹ p. 335 = Ak. 446.

²² p. 350 = Ak. 458.

²³ p. 36 = Ak. 195-6.

²⁴ p. 37 = Ak. 196.

²⁵ p. 341 = Ak. 451. Italics added for emphasis.

are to actualize in the world through our acts... [R]eason determines us a priori to strive to the utmost to further the highest good in the world.²⁶

Human beings are the only candidates for the final purpose of creation because they can “cognize the [moral] law and the object of this causality, the object that this being can set before itself as its highest purpose (the highest good in the world).”²⁷ In the last paragraph of the book, Kant writes that from the practical point of view we must attribute some properties to God “when this attribute of its causality concerns an effect [to be achieved] in the world which involves an aim that is morally necessary...”²⁸ Between the fact that the discussion of God and the highest good almost always occurs within a discussion of the (possible) teleological constitution of nature, and the numerous references by Kant to the highest good “in the world,” I think that the *Critique of Judgment* does emphasize the location of the highest good on earth.

However, this is not to say that the third *Critique* is solely concerned with the highest good on earth. While Kant does not specifically mention the highest good occurring in an afterlife, he does talk about the necessity of immortality as one of the postulates necessary to support the moral law. This discussion occurs primarily in “On What Kind of Assent Results from a Practical Faith.” In this discussion, Kant never presents an argument as to why immortality is a necessary postulate of practical reason; he mentions both God and immortality of the soul as necessary postulates several times in this section, but no argument is given for why immortality is necessary. It is likely that Kant takes this proof to be taken from the second *Critique*. However, what this indicates is that even though this discussion begins with “the *highest good* in the world,”²⁹ talk of immortality is necessarily talk of the

²⁶ p. 343 = Ak. 453.

²⁷ p. 323 = Ak. 435.

²⁸ p. 380 = Ak. 484.

²⁹ p. 362 = Ak. 469.

afterlife. The reason that Kant needs to bring in immortality in connection with the highest good is so that one can be rewarded or punished in accord with one's virtue, even if such a correlation was not found during one's lifetime. This must be the "other worldly" highest good, for the immortality of an individual must take place in the afterlife. Hence, while I believe a change in emphasis as been made in this *Critique*, I do not take this to indicate any radical shift in Kant's position regarding the locus of the highest good.

IV.

The third argument for a link between the natural and moral worlds is particularly unique to the third *Critique*. This link is first alluded to in section 59 of "Part I." Kant notes that there are certain similarities between the judging of a beautiful object, in which judgment reflects freely upon an object and gives itself its own rule for judging, and the (moral) free will, which freely provides a law to itself for action. Kant here is primarily concerned with the way in which the three faculties of the mind are able to harmonize together. What Kant notes in this section is the way in which judgment's concept of purposiveness is a natural mediator between the other two faculties. This is because the understanding and the imagination harmonize together in the judgment of beauty, and because reason can make the analogy between purposiveness and its own setting of purposes. As Kant explains in the "Introduction,"

the spontaneity in the play of the cognitive powers, whose harmony with each other contains the basis of this pleasure, makes that concept of purposiveness suitable for mediating the connection of the domain of the concept of nature with that of the concept of freedom, as regards freedom's consequences, inasmuch as this harmony also promotes the mind's receptivity to moral feeling.³⁰

³⁰ p. 38 = Ak. 197.

Judgment is the natural mediator between reason and understanding, and because of the similarities between it and practical reason, reflection upon the beautiful can more easily prepare the mind for moral thinking.³¹

Not only this, but the more important point Kant makes is that all three powers of the mind must necessarily appeal to the supersensible in order to solve their antinomies; understanding appeals to something that underlies nature which makes our intuition of it possible, judgment appeals to an intelligent author of the world who thinks non-discursively, and morality appeals to the supersensible both to show that freedom and material causality are not incompatible and to show that God is a necessary postulate for the object of the moral law, namely the highest good. Kant explains it in the "Introduction:"

The understanding, inasmuch as it can give laws to nature a priori, proves that we cognize nature only as appearance, and hence at the same time points to a supersensible substrate of nature; but it leaves this substrate wholly *undetermined*. Judgment, through its a priori principle of judging nature in terms of possible particular laws of nature, provides nature's supersensible substrate (within as well as outside us) with *determinability by the intellectual power*. But reason, through its a priori practical law, gives this same substrate *determination*. Thus judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom.³²

This particularly dense quotation is the real fruit of the third *Critique*. What it says is this: the first *Critique* showed that our understanding of nature was merely nature as appearance, and thus appealed to a supersensible about which nothing could be said, i.e., an undetermined substrate of nature. The second *Critique* showed that the highest good was the necessary object of

³¹ Note, however, that beauty is only a symbol of morality, and also that Kant presents several differences between the power of judgment and the power of practical reason in legislating to themselves. See p. 229 = Ak. 353-4, Pluhar's discussion, pp. lxi-lxvii, and Sidney Axinn, "On Beauty as the Symbol of Morality," in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. Gerhard Funk, Band II.1 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 615-621.

³² p. 37 = Ak. 196.

moral willing, and that we must postulate whatever conditions are necessary for the possibility of its achievement. In this respect, the supersensible was determined, though only from a practical point of view, in respect of God's moral nature and God's ability to create a moral world. But how is it possible to link these two "worlds"?³³

It is the solution to the antinomy of judgment that allows us "to throw a bridge from one domain to the other."³⁴ As we saw above, judgment demands that we conceive of a non-discursive intelligence that, as Pluhar describes, "would *necessitate* even the particular" and thus permit "us to *think* of the 'contingency' of the particular as being only a *seeming* contingency... but as in fact being a *necessity*."³⁵ However, since the understanding cannot conceive of such a possibility, we must finally think of the world as *created* by an intelligence, in analogy with human reason's ability to bring about changes in nature. But such a solution tells us more about nature than was obtained from the first *Critique*, and while this does not tell us anything constitutively about the supersensible, it does allow for the supersensible to be determinate, to have "*determinability by the intellectual power*."³⁶ Pluhar summarizes this extremely well: the solution to the antinomy of judgment give us the concept of a non-discursive intelligence,

but our understanding... instead thinks of the supersensible basis of nature's purposiveness as an intelligent cause of the world in terms of purposes... [This] makes determinable the concept of the supersensible as mere basis of nature... and thus "mediates" between this latter concept and the concept of the supersensible which is determined practically... Through this mediation judgment's concept of the supersensible basis of nature's... purposiveness... *unites* the "three" supersensibles into one. For the substrate of nature was

³³ In many respects this is the "possible 'expansion' of knowledge which practical reason has taken from speculative reason" which I alluded to at the end of Chapter Four above, and we may now be able to see why Kant felt an entire *Critique* was necessary in order to address this issue.

³⁴ p. 36 = Ak. 195.

³⁵ Pluhar, p. xciii.

³⁶ p. 37 = Ak. 196.

merely made determinate enough *to be* nature in itself as the “purpose” brought about by an intelligent cause, and then to be nature itself as caused by a *moral author*, a God.³⁷

To simplify this somewhat, we might say that if we must think of nature as being caused by an intelligence, and if we must think that this intelligence is a moral God, then we can think of nature as teleological (the possibility of which was opened up by the fact that the first *Critique* showed us that we cannot know the supersensible side of nature), because God will have created it to support the final object of our free (moral) willing.

Now whereas this link between the moral and natural “worlds” cannot be proven theoretically, Kant finds welcome confirmation in the fact that we often do discover instances where nature appears ordered just for our understanding. This occurs with beauty, as well as with teleology. When we behold a beautiful object, the harmony that it provides between the imagination and understanding leads us to the judgment that nature was created with human faculties in mind. Similarly, whereas “we can conceive of rational beings finding themselves surrounded by a nature that showed no distinct trace of organization, but only the effects of a mere mechanism of crude matter,”³⁸ we often find that the many diverse laws of nature are actually understandable, and “we rejoice... when, just as if it were a lucky chance favoring our aim, we do find such systematic unity among merely empirical laws, even though we necessarily had to assume that there is such unity even though we have no insight into this unity and cannot prove it.”³⁹ We recognize that there is no reason for nature to provide beautiful things for us, nor is there any reason why the utterly contingent might be organized in accordance with regularity and (particular) scientific laws.

³⁷ Pluhar, pp. ci-cii.

³⁸ p. 373 = Ak. 478.

³⁹ pp. 23-4 = Ak. 184.

In the judgment that we must subordinate mechanical causality to teleological causality, we find further confirmation that the world may indeed conform to our moral needs. As Kant explains:

the fact that the actual world offers the rational beings in it a wealth of material for physical teleology (which indeed would not have to be so) does serve the moral argument as welcome confirmation, as far as nature is able to offer something analogous to the (moral) ideas or reason. For this [confirmation] provides the concept of a supreme cause that has understanding...⁴⁰

The world certainly does not have to offer up beautiful objects, nor do specific natural laws have to be systematizable. But nature does give us these presentations. While we bring such a principle of judgment to objects of nature, beautiful objects prove able to harmonize with our human faculties. Such presentations allow us to judge them as if they were created for us by an intelligent author for the harmonizing of our understanding. Though we cannot prove this for certain, since it is merely a reflective judgment, it does offer us additional hope that the world was indeed created with our mental powers in mind, and if this is so, then it may have been created for the final purpose of human beings as moral agents. And if this is so, nature will eventually be able to conform to the highest good. This is the second argument for the link between nature and morality particular to the *Critique of Judgment*.

V.

The regulative nature of the idea of teleology combined with the three proofs which Kant offers us linking the natural and moral “worlds” in the *Critique of Judgment* provide us with a strong foundation for our investigations. Most importantly, it shows just how vital Kant considered the possibility of moral progress: if there is no moral author of the world, or if human

⁴⁰ p. 374 = Ak. 479. Also: “if we combine our cognition of physical purposes with that of the moral purpose, then, because of pure reason’s maxim to strive to unify principles as much as we can, physical purposes are very important, since they support the practical reality of the idea of God by the reality that from a theoretical point of view it already has for judgment.” (p. 347 = Ak. 456).

reason cannot improve over time, then there can be no final purpose to the world. A world without moral progress has, for Kant, literally no purpose, and has no value. Moral progress and the object of moral willing, the highest good, must be assumed (postulated) to be possible on earth. Moreover, we also see that there is good reason to postulate this possibility, since Kant has given us three specific reasons why the world seems to confirm to human needs. The link between the moral and natural worlds suggests that nature may indeed assist us with the promotion of the highest good; the highest good is a very rational belief for Kant. In addition, given the three proofs and Kant's discussion of culture, we are again brought back to the question of the empirical conditions necessary for moral improvement, and therefore brought back to a discussion of politics. Nature is responsible with promoting the ability of humans to will freely, and it does this through antagonism and un-social sociability. Though Kant does not discuss political institutions at length in the third *Critique*, he does mention a "civil society" and "a *cosmopolitan* whole, a system of all states" in his brief discussion of culture, thus indicating the key position of politics in nature's promotion of a "moral basis."⁴¹ As we shall see in the chapter after next, it is the "Idea" which allows us to make sense of all of these concerns of Kant's; the "Idea" and other of Kant's political writings allow us to examine, organize, and harmonize the issues of morality, politics, and the highest good.

⁴¹ p. 320 = Ak. 433.

Chapter Eight

The Principle of Purposive Mechanisms Reexamined

I.

In this (brief) chapter, I want only to address the question of the “principle of purposive mechanisms” raised in chapters Two and Four above. I think that with the *Critique of Judgment* we can finally answer this question satisfactorily. In the final analysis, I believe that it is Kant’s position that such a principle must be accepted only as a regulative idea, but that it must be applied to internal as well as external purposiveness.

II.

Recall that the problem of the “principle of purposive mechanisms” was as follows: in several places throughout Kant’s writings he speaks of the necessity of assuming that organs, mechanisms, and organisms have been made for some purpose or other. This is not the overall problem of teleology, i.e., not the question of when we are to say that something has been *created* for a purpose, but rather the question of whether all mechanisms or organisms in nature are good for some more or less specific task. Kant speaks of this in different ways and in differing strengths. Sometimes it seems that this is a merely regulative idea, while at other times it seems to be simply a fact about nature. Sometimes it seems as if each organ or mechanism should be thought to have a particular and definitive purpose which will continually move toward perfection, while at other times it seems that they must only be thought to be able to be put to some purpose or other. Accordingly, I outlined “strong,” “medium,” and “weak” versions of this principle. How are we to decide among them?

In essence, I think the *Critique of Judgment* gives us a rather simple answer which was, however, impossible for Kant to have grasped before its writing. In essence, the solution seems to be that teleology is only a regulative idea, but one which we must try to utilize in *all* its applications. As we saw above, Kant's solution to the antinomy of the third *Critique* called for the necessitation of thinking of all nature as if it had been caused in accord with a purpose. Hence, it is at least clear that we must think in terms of purposes, and here is the justification for the existence of the "principle of purposive mechanism" in some form or other. This is already an improvement, because it shows that we are able (forced, actually) to rely on this principle even in cases where we cannot discern any confirmation directly from nature.

But which form of the principle should we accept? To begin with, we have also seen that the notion of purposiveness cannot be taken as constitutive of nature as a whole, for Kant argues that this basically violates the parameters of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hence, we are left with two alternatives: either the principle is a regulative one, or it just happens to (also) be a "fact" about nature. In other words, it certainly *is* a regulative principle, but it may turn out that it also describes something we can know about nature. Hence, we must ask whether it is a fact about nature. I argued above that, with regard to the *whole* of nature, the "strong" version seems mistaken, since there seem to be cases where organs or mechanisms have no purpose, perhaps having developed only on the "coattails" of another trait, while the "medium" version seems to be rather trivial, given that we could always think of some trivial purpose or other for any given object. In addition, we must recall Kant's assertion that an actual "explanation" of the way something works must always be ultimately given through mechanical causality.

This is not to say, however, that some organs or mechanisms might not really have a purpose, and I think we can say this physio-mechanically.

A particular gear on a watch does have the purpose of keeping track of seconds. The heart does have the purpose of circulating blood throughout a body's circulatory system. Importantly, neither of these discoveries could have been made in the first place without a teleological principle. And it seems that we really can talk about purposes here because we can explain them, ultimately, using physio-mechanical causality. The difference between the watch and the body, however, ought to remind us of the difference between the general question of teleology and the question of the "principle of purposive mechanisms" which we are addressing here: the gear was designed teleologically, i.e., the concept of the whole (the watch) was part of the coming-to-be of the part (the gear), whereas we will never be able to know if the same is true of the heart. Hence the teleological notion

does quite splendidly in certain areas: Of what use are the things in the world to one another? What good is the manifold in a thing to that thing itself? Indeed, we even seem to have grounds for assuming that nothing in the world is gratuitous, but that... everything is good for something or other *in nature*...¹

Teleology in all its aspects is to be used as a guide for further scientific study, a guide for physio-mechanical explanations.

To return to the question of which form of the "principle of purposive mechanisms" we should accept, I think the answer is this: we must regard the principle as regulative, but we must try to apply it *in every possible way* to everything in nature. That is, we must regard the principle as being "weak" but attempt to apply it in "strong" and "medium" application. Where could we draw the line in order to say whether or not something has a purpose? We must use the principle of teleology in our judgments, and there seems to be no way we could discern limitations one way or the other.

Unfortunately, Kant says very little regarding specific applications of this concept and I do not believe he realized that this specific matter needed

¹ p. 325 = Ak. 437-8.

to be dealt with as a special aspect of the issue of teleology. He does seem to indicate that if we were ever to forbid the use of the principle in one area, then this would lead to a “slippery slope” which would eventually eliminate the principle. In a discussion on the need to judge every hereditary trait which has been passed down as having a purpose, he writes:

For if we depart from this principle, then we cannot [even] be certain as to whether some of the other features we now find in a species did not have an equally accidental and purposeless origin. And so we could no longer with any reliability apply the principle of teleology: the principle of judging nothing in an organized being as unpurposeful if it is preserved in the being's propagation.

Given that we must indeed apply the principle in our judging, Kant's point seems essentially to be this: once we make a restriction as to the cases where the teleological principle can be applied, then this begins a chain, the result of which is the elimination of the principle. In other words, if we think we have found a mechanism which has absolutely no purpose, and we accept this as a fact, then we seem to be able to doubt whether other mechanisms which we thought had a purpose might not actually have a purpose, and so on. However, it is not clear as to the exact nature of this problem, and here it appears to be more of a motivational than a logical problem.

Kant has already hinted at something like this in the “Idea,” though only vaguely. In discussing the use of the “principle of purposive mechanism he maintains that “if we stray from that fundamental principle, we no longer have a lawful but an aimlessly playing nature and hopeless chance takes the place of reason's guiding thread.”² While it appears that Kant's statement that *every* mechanism or organ must have a purpose³ is too strong, I think his overall point is clear: if we cannot use this principle in our attempt to investigate and understand nature, then we would so construe nature that we

² “Idea,” Ak. 18.

³ Ibid.

would be left with complete chaos, unpredictability, and inconceivability. A nature which would create organs and mechanisms which had no purpose would be a nature so irregular that we would be unable to understand it. Hence, Kant can be taken as indicating that we must use the principle if we are even to begin our investigation into nature, and that we must attempt to use it with as wide a range as possible.

The only other clue we have after the writing of the third *Critique* is this section from the *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*:

In the whole of organized nature it must be assumed as a necessary maxim of our reason that in every animal and plant there is not the least thing which is useless and without purpose; on the contrary, it must be assumed that everything contains a means best suited to certain ends. This is a principle taken for granted in the study of nature, and every experiment made has confirmed it. Setting these experiments aside, the field of discoveries would be closed to the anatomist. Hence the cultivation of our own reason urges us to assume and use this maxim.⁴

Again, Kant reasons that we must apply the concept of teleology to “the whole of organized nature.” The justification seems to be that, since there is no *prima facie* reason to limit the scope of (regulative) teleological explanations, and since the artificial limiting of some part of a teleological explanation might cut off scientists from certain discoveries, the principle should be applied to the whole of organized nature. Thus, the solution to the problem seems to be that, whereas the “strong” version is too strong for the whole of nature, and the “medium” version is rather spurious, there do appear to be cases of purposive mechanisms and organs in nature, cases in which a physio-mechanical explanation for the purpose can be given, and such cases serve to further enforce the application of the principle of teleology to all possible aspects of nature. Ultimately, the notion must be regulative, but that does not detract from its importance.

⁴ *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, Allen W. Wood and Gerturde M. Clark, trans. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 138.

III.

With regard to the specific question concerning the application of the principle to the faculty of reason, our conclusion seems to remain the same, namely that we cannot say for certain whether or not reason was created on account of a purpose. However, as we saw in the last two chapters, there are stronger reasons to think that, in fact, reason may indeed have been created with a purpose in mind. First, if all of nature has been created, of which there is no certainty, then it is reason which is the final purpose of creation. So, if nature was indeed created, then reason was created in accord with a purpose. Second, there are hints to be found in nature that it was indeed created for human beings. Such hints are the existence of beauty, the contingent but stable particular laws, and the ability of the three faculties of human cognition to harmonize so well together. So, whereas we cannot know for certain that our reason was created with a purpose in the mind of the creator, and thus Kant seems to step too far in those places where when he insists that reason's natural end must be morality since it was *designed* and since it functions so poorly in finding happiness, nonetheless we cannot limit the application of the teleological principle to reason.

Hence, returning for a moment to the "Idea," I think we must ultimately reject Kant's "First Thesis." Recall that this thesis is the strongest version of the "principle of purposive mechanisms" which is to be found, and states that "*All of a creature's natural capacities are destined (sind bestimmt) to develop completely and in conformity with their end.*"⁵ I think that this must be rejected, for it seems simply too strong: if it is taken to be a fact about nature, then it remains unconfirmed "by external and internal, analytical observation"⁶ and there appear to be counterexamples to which we could point. It seems impossible to say constitutively, as Kant seems to want to do here, that every natural capacity will develop to perfection.

⁵ "Idea," Ak. 18.

⁶ Ibid.

Kant uses this “First Thesis” as a rather important first step in the “Idea.” Because individuals have the faculty of reason, then this faculty must be thought to develop to perfection. Thus, Kant’s next two theses are that reason is to develop to perfection, but only in the species, and that humankind must have been designed for moral purposes since human reason is so inept at the pursuit of happiness. It seems that if we reject the “First Thesis” we have placed much of the “Idea” in jeopardy.

However, having removed this thesis as Kant presented it, I think we can replace it with the stronger conclusions from the *Critique of Judgment*, thus improving the argument. Two important conclusions were drawn from the *Critique*, both of which I discussed above. The first was that we are forced by the “peculiarity of human understanding” to think of the world and nature as having been created, though we can never know this for certain. Because of this, we are more than justified in using the teleological principle when investigating nature; we are required to do so. The second conclusion deals with the relation between nature and human beings. Kant gives three arguments as to the likelihood that nature will be responsive to moral considerations: the “upward” and “downward” proofs,⁷ and the fact that nature conforms so well to the human faculties of imagination and understanding. Of these three arguments, the first two seem the most important. The first leaves us with the fact that if the world was created, then it was created for human beings as rational, moral agents. The second argues from the moral law to the necessity of God, and thereby to a nature which was created by a moral author. All of these considerations give strong support for the progress of human reason and morality.

So, the “First Thesis” can be replaced by these two grand conclusions from the third *Critique*. First, Kant can argue that we are necessitated in our thinking of nature as created, and must think of each organ or

⁷ See above: Chapters Six and Seven respectively.

mechanism as having a purpose, though we can never say this constitutively. Given this conclusion, Kant can argue that we can take human reason to be purposeful, and we can go on to search for what that purpose might be. But more strongly, Kant can now argue that human reason *in particular* ought to be conceived as having the purpose of progressing toward perfect morality because of the strong links apparent between nature and human beings as rational creatures. Moving either from nature as designed, knowledge of the moral law, the feeling of the beautiful, or the contingent but regular laws of nature, Kant has presented strong cases for the human species as having been designed for morality. If we replace the “First Thesis” with these two conclusions, Kant can be saved from a starting premise which is too strong to be used, and his argument can be given a stronger foundation. From this point, Kant can clearly move on to his subsequent considerations, the second and third “Theses” falling nicely in line.

These two conclusions from the *Critique*, of course, cannot be proven constitutively. However, as I will try now to argue, the “Idea” ought not to be thought of as a speculative analysis of nature or history, but is better thought of as the outline of a necessary postulate of practical reason; given its nature as a postulate, the conclusions of the third *Critique* make it a very, but not excessively, strong one.

Chapter Nine

The “Idea” Reexamined: Moral Progress as a Postulate of Practical Reason

I.

It has been difficult for commentators to decide what to make of Kant’s work, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent.” This article, written three years after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but almost ten years before “On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But is of No Practical Use,” presents a picture of a world history, somewhat like Hegel’s, in which the actions of human agents will inevitably lead, oftentimes despite the wills and intentions of the self-interested parties, to a better condition, a world of fully rational agents acting together in a perfectly moral whole. Some have claimed that such a teleological notion of progress is a precursor to Hegel, and functions along similar lines. Others, more convincingly, have maintained that this particular formulation of teleology is a crude notion of a regulative idea, functioning in general for the assimilation of empirical data into a conceptual whole and, specifically, for the betterment of the study of history, though this notion gets improved and finalized in the *Critique of Judgment*.

In this chapter, I will argue that this teleological notion of progress is, instead, a proposition demanded by practical reason, and one which should be regarded as discredited by empirical evidence only if such evidence is completely conclusive. I will argue that this idea almost precisely parallels Kant’s position in the *Critique of Practical Reason* regarding the necessity of postulating God and immortality for the eternal improvement of rational

agents. However, because one has more experiential data to deal with when talking about the progression of the human species on earth than when dealing with the progression of the human individual in an afterlife, Kant must attempt to give a more thorough and empirical explanation as to how this “highest good on earth” might come about; and this is what the “Idea” does. I will conclude by arguing that a good way to understand how this postulate of practical reason operates is to place it within the context of Kant’s essay, “On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But is of No Practical Use.”

This chapter is a consequence of the foregoing chapters, and thus many of the necessary positions have already been argued for. I have already discussed the main tenets of the “Idea” above. I have presented Kant’s discussion regarding the postulates of practical reason, and the reason for their necessity. I have improved the first “Thesis” of the “Idea” by replacing it with the conclusions of the third *Critique*. Finally, I have also tried to argue above both that Kant asserts the necessity for an “earthly” highest good, and that a constant tension in his writings has been his concern regarding how this possibility might occur in the world. The “Idea” is Kant’s initial attempt to answer this question. Its main tenets will remain throughout the rest of Kant’s work. This later assumption will have to be argued for later, though we can see already it is true in “Theory and Practice.”

II.

Several interpretations for such strains of thought in Kant’s philosophy have been offered by scholars, either directly or indirectly addressing the “Idea” itself. A common explanation for these notions, as mentioned above, is that they are a crude precursor to a system of thought which would later be explicated and greatly improved by Hegel. Kant, it might be argued, is searching for a way to unite the moral law with empirical institutions of justice. Kant’s answer to this, then, is, in part, to sketch a picture of such a

progression of political institutions in the "Idea," where governments come about through nature, without the use of reason and in an irrational, empirical world. Hegel, then, is said to improve on this picture, for he is able to maintain not only that the world is rational, but that the Absolute is working towards the realization of reason in the world. As Williams explains in *Kant's Political Philosophy*, "Hegel, of course, affords an important contrast to Kant in this respect. He believes that reason can be fulfilled in practice, and this is done in the activity of the loyal citizen within the modern state".¹ On such an interpretation, then, in the "Idea," Kant desires to explain how it is that humans can approach a near-perfect government, one which will accord with the moral law but which will be concerned with empirical institutions, but he does not have the background philosophical concepts necessary to justify such a progression, and it is not until Hegel and his "Ethical Life" that humanity and the State can both be fully rational in the empirical world.

A second interpretation, perhaps more popular as well as plausible, is that such notions as found in the "Idea" function as regulative concepts for the improvement of the system of speculative reason in general and, specifically, the betterment of the study of history. Such a basic position might run something like Lewis White Beck's in his "Editor's Introduction" to *Kant: Selections*, where he writes:

The word Idea... here is a kind of a priori model or paradigm for writing history. The facts of history are questions for historical research by historians, but the long-range meaning of the facts and their significance for our understanding of human nature and destiny are not questions to be answered by empirical historical investigation. They are philosophical questions the

¹ p. 57. Howard Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Basic Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983). See also: Manfred Buhr and Gerd Irrlitz, "Immanuel Kant," in *Materialien zu Kants Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976), 102-124.

answers to which, though conjectural, can guide research and give significance to the facts discovered by the historian... Thus the Idea is a regulative concept.²

In other words, the "Idea" establishes concepts about the teleological progression of history which will allow one to better comprehend empirical events by placing them in a correct and useful framework for the achievement of a complete system of thought. The French Revolution or the invention of the steam engine, for example, might be better understood if one places these events in a pattern of teleological progression in which humanity is moving from primitive beginnings to the establishment of a world community; such an architecture, then, will allow one to better comprehend the orderliness, influence, and significance of these events. Such regulative notions are not to be found in, or verified by, the phenomenal world, for they are *a priori* concepts enabling one to bring together a myriad of data which would otherwise remain a confusing and disintegrated manifold. Thus, on this type of interpretation, the "Idea" functions as a kind of template, a set of regulative concepts which allow one to study history to a fuller extent.

There are several variations of this type of interpretation to be found in the literature. Yirmiahu Yovel in his *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, for example, similarly argues that the "Idea" introduces regulative concepts for the integration of one's speculative reason,³ but adds that such regulative concepts are not yet fully understood by Kant at the time of writing the

² p. 413. Lewis White Beck, "Editor's Introduction," to *Kant: Selections*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan Publishing company, 1988), 413-414.

³ Cf. pp. 3-25, where Yovel is concerned with the "architectonic unity of reason." See also Chapters 3 and 4. Interestingly, Yovel also makes the link between Hegel and Kant, writing that, "It may well be that Hegel not only presented a more comprehensive and developed, but also a more coherent theory [than Kant]" (*Kant and the Philosophy of History*, p. 24). Williams also makes such an analogy between the way the "Idea" functions for history and the way other regulative concepts function for biology (p. 21), and maintains that "Kant's *Critique of Judgment* sheds a great deal of light on why he thinks it important to look at history from a teleological point of view" (p. 20). See also: Friedrich Kaulbach, "Der Zusammenhang zwischen Naturphilosophie und Geschichtsphilosophie bei Kant," *Kant-Studien* 56, Heft 1 (1965): 430-451, and "Welchen Nutzen gibt Kant der Geschichtsphilosophie?" *Kant-Studien* 66 (1975): pp. 65-84.

“Idea.” Yovel argues that it is not until the writing of the *Critique of Judgment* that Kant is able to set out and completely comprehend the nature of regulative concepts in general, and teleological concepts in particular; the “Idea” is a rough picture of what is to be perfected only in the third *Critique*. As Yovel points out, “history is conceptually distinct from mere chronology or a chaotic aggregate of facts. Its concept presupposes a pattern of unity or totalization...,” and he maintains that it is only the third *Critique* which provides the correct sort of explanation for this framework.⁴ Yovel concludes, then, that nature’s providence,

thus becomes an *a priori* principle in the explanation of history, founded by pure reflection on empirical history and on its relation to reason... Among other things, we will have the rules for selecting relevant topics for historical research, for sifting out contingent and incidental particulars, and no less important, for discovering additional *causal* factors by which to supply the missing links in the chain.⁵

The “Idea” is the beginning of a notion of regulative concepts which are to help one in the unification of reason and the study of history, but such concepts are only roughly conceptualized here. On accounts similar to Beck and Yovel, then, it is argued that in the third *Critique* Kant finally understands that such notions function only as regulative concepts, that while being *a priori*, they only instruct one in the possibilities for the organization of

⁴ Yovel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 166.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168. Such a quotation, and several others in the work which are similar, show, then, that even though Yovel often seems to take a position which is similar to mine, he finally concludes that Kant’s notions in the “Idea” are too strong, and, when corrected and spelled out fully in the third *Critique*, function to help one with the study of history and the unification of reason. Yovel writes that “the *Idea* seems to commit a major dogmatic error. It ascribes to nature as such a hidden teleological plan, by which the totality of empirical history is to be explained and predicted; but this stands in conflict with the *Critique of Pure Reason*...” (pp. 154-5), and goes on to claim that the only way we can “explain that Kant so bluntly adhered to a dogmatic principle of purpose three years after the publication of the first *Critique*” (p. 156) is to suggest that Kant simply forgot what he had earlier argued. This is rather unfortunate, since I think much of Yovel’s work is completely on target.

knowledge and the systematization of reason.⁶ There is another possible and, indeed, more probable alternative, however.

III.

The categorical imperative demands that we try to bring about the highest good on earth,⁷ but our daily experience with the world suggests that such attempts will be frustrated. Yet the highest good is demanded by reason and morality. Hence the highest good must indeed be possible. Moreover, the highest good must be thought to be possible in *this* world, not simply in some afterlife. This, in turn, implies the necessity of political organizations⁸ where humans' freedom and pursuit of happiness can be perfectly instituted. Now, perhaps, one may be in a position to understand why it is a necessary postulate of practical reason to assume that the human species will progress to a point of perfect rationality, and also to see why this proposition will need to be spelled out in a slightly different way for this world than it would be for a world of immortal souls. If it is a duty to pursue the highest good in this world, we must ask after the conditions under which

⁶ Pierre Laberge seems to offer us a third possibility, namely that Kant did indeed understand and adhere to the limits set by himself in the first *Critique*, and even anticipated much of the third *Critique*, but ultimately concludes that the "Idea" concerns only a "theoretical, reflective judgment," and that it outlines only "a special instance of the development of natural aptitudes of all organized beings," (p. 151, all translations mine). But Laberge contradicts himself, for he later cites the "Idea" several times as supporting and even predating important aspects of "To[ward] Perpetual Peace" which he specifically indicates are tied with the "duty" to promote peace, and thus tied with practical and not merely theoretical reason. Thus, if we opt for his latter statements, he seems to support an interpretation of the "Idea" where it no longer deals only with speculative teleology. See: Pierre Laberge, "Von der Garantie des ewigen Friedens," 149-170.

⁷ I have tried to argue throughout this work that there are two locations for the highest good. For additional supportive material, see: Andrews Reath, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant"; Philip J. Rossi, "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 77-102; Victoria S. Wike, *Kant on Happiness in Ethics*, Chapters One and Six; and Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Interests of Reason: From Metaphysics to Moral History," in *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986), 135-148.

⁸ This was discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Seven above, and will be argued for again in greater detail below.

this is possible, if it is possible at all. One might ask, Why should I attempt to pursue the highest good in this world if not only will I not be able to achieve perfect morality in this lifetime, but, importantly, nature also does not reward moral persons with proportionate happiness? If this question cannot be properly answered, Kant believes that a contradiction will occur within the moral law.

It can be seen in many of Kant's writings, from the "Idea" through *The Conflict of the Faculties*, that he believed in the necessity of avoiding such a contradiction. For instance, in the "Idea" Kant writes:

For what use is it to laud and recommend observing the majesty and wisdom of creation in the nonrational realm of nature, if that part of the great theatre of supreme wisdom that contains the purpose of all the rest -- the history of the human race -- should remain an endless reproach to it, the sight of which compels us against our wills to turn our eyes away from it and, since we despair of ever finding a perfectly rational objective in it, *brings us to the point of hoping for that end only in another world?*⁹

In "What is Orientation in Thinking," written in 1786, Kant states that the moral laws

lead... to the idea of the highest good that is possible in the world... and on the other hand, they also lead to something which depends not just on human freedom, but also on nature -- namely the greatest happiness, in so far as its distribution is proportionate to that of morality. Now reason needs to assume [this]... in order... to prevent the [highest good], along with morality as a whole, from being regarded merely as an ideal...¹⁰

Finally, as a last example, Kant writes, in 1798, in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, that "it is a vain affair to have good so alternate with evil that the whole traffic of our species with itself on this globe would have to be considered as a mere farcical comedy, for this can endow our species with no greater value..."

⁹ Ak. 30. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁰ pp. 242-3. Immanuel Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking?" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

than that which other animal species possess..."¹¹ The question about the possible futility of all moral actions must be answered, and this answer must take the form of postulates of practical reason if reason is not to be plagued with doubts and contradiction.¹²

Two postulates, then, are needed, which are analogous to the postulates of immortality and God. The first, nature as working providentially, functions analogously to the postulate of the existence of God in the second *Critique*. It is not God *per se* which allows the human species to develop their capacities to the fullest, but providential nature,¹³ utilizing man's unsocial sociability to develop man's talents; "such a *justification* of nature -- or better, of *providence* -- is no unimportant motive for adopting a particular perspective in observing the world."¹⁴ But a second postulate, similar to the immortality of the individual, is needed so that one may hope for the achievement of perfect morality. Clearly, a perfect willing obedience to the moral law is not possible for the individual in a single life. However, it may be possible for the human species as a whole, and it is this assumption which practical reason adopts. Talking about the sacrifices one generation makes for the next, Kant writes, "no matter how puzzling this is, it is nonetheless equally as necessary once one assumes that one species of animal should have reason and that as a class of rational beings -- each member of which dies, while the species is immortal -- it is destined to develop its capacities to perfection."¹⁵ Whereas one cannot become perfectly moral oneself in a lifetime, the highest

¹¹ p. 147. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

¹² We will have opportunity to discuss the exact nature of this "contradiction" of reason below, in Section Two, Chapter Five.

¹³ See Section Two, Chapter Six below.

¹⁴ "Idea," Ak. 30. For more on the possible attributes of providence, see: Leslie A. Mulholland, "Freedom and Providence in Kant's Account of Religion: The Problem of Expiation," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 77-102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Ak. 20.

good can be continually approximated if providential nature brings it about that society approaches a state where the species is perfectly rational and moral, and each person is able to pursue his or her own happiness without infringing upon the freedom of others. As Kwang-Sae Lee expresses it,

Kant conceives a definite analogy between moral progress... at the level of the individual and that at the level of world history towards the highest good... If at the individual level, the highest good is (or projects) the synthesis of the intention and the hope of the moral man, at the level of the entire human species, it embodies (or projects) the total mobilization of human history through the cumulative efforts of generations of humanity.¹⁶

Morality, as discussed above, necessarily implies politics, and politics leads to the pursuit of the highest good for all persons in a society. Perfect morality can only occur in a world with a just commonwealth, a perfect national constitution, and a cosmopolitan association of nations. Infinite progression is indeed possible in this world, though not for the individual, and such a cosmopolitan world "is therefore the hardest task of all; indeed, its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned. Nature only enjoins us to the approximation of this idea."¹⁷

The question soon arises, nonetheless, as to how the possibility of these two postulates of practical reason might be attested to in the world, how the perfection of reason in the species is conceivable, especially given that nature seems to be uncooperative in rewarding virtuous behavior. Here, Kant can, or perhaps must, offer a more detailed account regarding this possibility than he could with the postulate of immortality of the individual; given that one set of postulates concerns the realm of empirical nature and that the other set, as emphasized in the second *Critique*, concerns some

¹⁶ p. 553. Kwang-Sae Lee, "Some Reflections on the Idea of the Highest Good as a Regulative Idea of Pure Practical Reason," in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. Gerhard Funke, Band II.2 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 551-561.

¹⁷ "Idea," Ak. 23.

domain of which persons have had and will have no possible experience, it is possible to flesh out the possibility of progression of the human species with more detail than the immortality of the soul. He must, however, answer this question using only natural laws and empirical data, in order to remain true to the first *Critique*.

As discussed above, Kant's detailed account of how this progression might be possible is presented in the "Idea" and has to do with the unsocial sociability of individuals and the providential movement of nature. One cannot explain how a person (or transcendental ego) remains immortal, but one can give some conjectures as to how human reason might progress toward perfection. What is important to note, however, is that the postulating of this progression stems from the authority of the moral law, and is not a claim of speculative reason.¹⁸ Seeing this connection between morality and politics, and the place that the pursuit of the highest good occupies in Kant's philosophy, it may now be firmly posited that *the progress of the human race is a necessary postulate of practical reason*.

IV.

One may conclude, then, that though Kant does not say so explicitly, the actual details of how the progression of the species is possible may indeed be mistaken, but the fact that the human species is progressing is a postulate necessitated by pure practical reason. In order to address this issue more thoroughly, I want to examine a work which Kant published nine years after the "Idea," namely "Theory and Practice,"¹⁹ especially the third essay which

¹⁸ Kant writes in the *Grundlegung*: "Teleology considers nature as a kingdom of ends; morals regards a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. In the former the kingdom of ends is a theoretical idea for explaining what exists. In the latter it is a practical idea for bringing about what does not exist but can be made actual by our conduct, i.e., what can be actualized in accordance with this very idea" (Ak. 436 n.).

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, "On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But Is of No Practical Use," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Moral Practice*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), 61-92. All citations refer to Akademie page numbers.

deals specifically with “the well-being of the *human race* as a whole.”²⁰ The idea of the continual progression of the human species again comes to the fore as Kant attempts to dialogue with Moses Mendelssohn regarding the nature of the development of human history, and one may be able to get an even clearer picture as to how Kant intends universal history to fit with the rest of his philosophy.

Kant begins the third section of “Theory and Practice” by indicating that the assumption of a universal history is made for moral reasons. Mendelssohn was of the opinion that the human species never progressed, that no matter how hard it might attempt to act virtuously, history stacked the deck against humanity. Kant maintains that such a supposition,

for a while may perhaps be moving and instructive, but the curtain must finally fall. For in the long run it becomes a farce... To be sure, if it is only a play, the punishment that comes at the end can make up for the unpleasant sensations experienced along the way. But allowing vice to mount upon endless vice in the real world (even with an occasional virtuous act interjected) so that in days to come there can be plenty to punish is, to say the least, contrary to our conception of the morality of a wise creator and governor of the world.²¹

Note that even if in the afterlife, or analogously after the play is over, all immoral actions are punished, Kant maintains that this is not enough to justify allowing vice to mount upon vice, nor is it an adequate reason for pursuing the highest good on earth. As was alluded to above, Kant believed that if history is said to act always regardless of moral actions, even if one’s morality is rewarded in the afterlife, life in this world would be farcical.²² This is important because it shows again that Kant is not only concerned with the possibility of willing a moral life for oneself, for simply acting virtuously on one’s own with the rational hope that such actions will be rewarded individually in

²⁰ “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 308.

²² See also the “upward” proof of the third *Critique* discussed in Chapter Six above.

the afterlife. Kant is also concerned with the improvement of this world, with the possibility of bringing about the highest good on this planet, and for such a good to occur, one must presume more than one's own reward in the afterlife.

Kant follows this important paragraph with another. He writes:

I will thus permit myself to assume that since the human race's natural end is to make steady cultural progress, its moral end is to be conceived as progressing toward the better... It is not necessary for me to prove this assumption... For I rest my case on my innate duty -- a duty belonging to everyone in the sequence of generations to which... I belong,... the duty so to affect posterity that it will become continually better (something that must be assumed to be possible)...²³

In this paragraph, Kant clearly refers not to some premise of theoretical or speculative knowledge for the justification of human progress, but to moral principles and pure practical reason. Kant "rests his case" on duty, not on theory. He even concludes that,

however uncertain I may always be, and may remain, as to whether we may hope anything better for the human race, yet this uncertainty can detract neither from the maxim that from a practical point of view it is attainable, nor from the presupposition of its necessity.²⁴

Progress is a maxim which, without completely conclusive evidence to the contrary, must be judged as "attainable" and is a necessary "presupposition" "from a practical point of view." These statements seem to make it clear that Kant is basing the progression of human perfection on practical reason and those postulates which are necessary for faith in the moral law. Indeed, in the next paragraph, Kant goes on to claim that without such a supposition one could not "rationally hope" for enlightenment, and writes that,

²³ "Theory and Practice." Ak. 309.

²⁴ Ibid., Ak. 309.

empirical arguments against the success of these resolutions, which are based on hope, fail here. For the argument that something has until now been unsuccessful and therefore shall never be successful does not justify abandoning even a pragmatic or technical intention (for example, travel by aerostatic balloons), much less a morally obligatory one, unless, of course, its attainment is demonstrably impossible.²⁵

Here Kant stresses morally obligatory intentions over pragmatic and technical ones, and notes again that such a progression is a hope, presumably a rational hope of pure practical reason.

It is of importance to note that it is only here, after stating the place and necessity of postulating the progression of human moral perfection, that Kant attempts to explain how such a progression might be possible. He explains, in the same vein as the "Idea" that,

If we now inquire as to the means by which this eternal progress towards betterment can be maintained and perhaps even sped up, one soon sees that this immeasurably distant result depends not so much on what *we* do... nor on what method we adopt so as to bring it about; instead, it depends on what human *nature does in and with us so as to compel us onto a path that we ourselves would not readily follow.*²⁶

In this paragraph and the two that follow, Kant sets out an account of how the human species might progress which follows along much the same lines as the explanation in the "Idea." Basically, man's unsocial sociability will lead him to cultivate his skills and talents, but the constant and increasingly violent struggle between persons and nations will lead man to seek a perpetual peace. This continual movement is again said to be enacted through self-concern and not necessarily a desire to bring about a moral community.

After explaining and spelling out how progression might take place, Kant ends both the section and then the article by stating explicitly that his explanation may be mistaken. He begins the last paragraph of his third

²⁵ Ibid., Ak. 309-10.

²⁶ Ibid., Ak. 310.

section of "Theory and Practice" by writing: "Meanwhile, this is only opinion and mere hypothesis -- as uncertain as all judgment claiming to set out the slow appropriate natural cause for an intended effect that is not entirely in our power."²⁷ This quotation, along with others in this piece, seems to support the above hypothesis that Kant is trying to give an account of how the perfection of the human species might be possible, one which can be much more detailed than the account of immortality for the individual, but an account which, nonetheless, stems from a postulate of practical reason and which could be mistaken in the details, though the concept must be retained. In the final paragraph of the work he maintains that,

for my own part, I place my trust in the theory about what the relation among men and nations *ought to be* that derives from the principle of right and that recommends to the earthly gods the maxim always so to proceed in their conflicts that such a universal cosmopolitan nation will thereby be introduced, and thus to assume that it is possible (*in praxi*) and that it *can exist*.²⁸

Once again it seems that Kant is making the final appeal to morality to justify his belief in the human species and its history. He has a faith in progression for reasons of what ought to be, for what should be possible in practice. His account of how this progression is instantiated may be mere hypothesis, but the belief in its possibility is a postulate of practical reason.²⁹

V. Conclusion:

I believe that Kant's "Idea for Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" is an essential component in Kant's philosophical system, and that it gives new depth and understanding to Kant's moral and political philosophy.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 311-12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 313.

²⁹ "Here, therefore, is a proposition valid for the most rigorous theory, in spite of all skeptics, and not just a well-meaning and practically commendable proposition: the human race has always been in progress toward the better and will continue to be so henceforth." *Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 159.

“Theory and Practice” provides an excellent example of how Kant expects his concepts of a universal history to be integrated into his philosophy, though other texts such as “What is orientation in Thinking?” and “Is the Human Race Continually Improving?” also afford one insights into the place and function Kant intends the concepts involved in the “Idea” to have. As was shown above, in his debate with Mendelssohn, Kant does not appeal primarily to nature, regulative ideas, or empirical history in order to justify his position. Rather, time and time again he makes an appeal to morality, and to the futility which would result from the rejection of the idea of the progress of human beings. Recall also that he makes such a claim despite the fact that immortality for the individual has been postulated, and that one may indeed expect reward for virtue in an afterlife. It is important for Kant’s system to posit a progression so that persons may pursue the highest good for this world. It is only after such justification has been made that Kant attempts to spell out how a progression might occur, after which he maintains that such a description is mere hypothesis. The “Idea” seems best accounted for in the manner presented above, namely that it is a postulate of pure practical reason, one that must be endorsed if one is to pursue the highest good in this world, but one that might be spelled out in different ways.

Chapter Ten

Evaluation and Transition

I.

The tradition of Kant scholarship has tended to separate and isolate several aspects of Kant's philosophy, keeping moral, teleological, political, and, often, religious considerations apart from one another. Perhaps they are trying to save some aspects of Kant's philosophy by cutting out other parts which may not be as palatable. Morality may be more appealing if it is not bound up with religious implications. Teleology might be more acceptable as a mere aid to science than an indication that the human species may have been created for a final purpose by a moral author. And who wants to assert the proposition that human beings are morally improving in light of such tragic events as the Holocaust? It is possible, however, that such isolation is merely a result of the need for specific areas of research in Kant.

Regardless of the motivation behind traditional Kant scholarship, I have tried to argue above that many aspects of it seem to be mistaken, and that Kant believed there to be strong connections between all aspects of his philosophy. If my analyses have been correct, Kant intends his moral philosophy to support and harmonize with all other "metaphysical" considerations. Throughout all of his writings, Kant was concerned with the dignity of the human creature and the place of reason in the world.

This chapter provides a transition between Section One and Two, and is divided into three parts. In the first part, I try to briefly summarize the important points of the above chapters, and mention their difference to some

traditional aspects of Kant scholarship. All of these themes will be supported again in Section Two, though with more specific considerations. In the second part, I directly engage what I take to be mistaken positions in the secondary literature with regard to the conclusions I have reached so far in this section. I think this is important not only because it may help to correct what seem to be misinterpretations of Kant's philosophy, but also because, in so doing, my own position will be clarified. Finally, in the third part, I say a few words in transition to Section Two.

II.

Let me begin by emphasizing some points which ought to be clear at this stage in the work. First, I argued that Kant had a clear conception as to the limits of the employment of teleological ideas. Kant is clear on this from the first through the third *Critique*, though, of course, the third *Critique* offers many new insights. Associated with this fact is the apparent tension in the *Critique of Pure Reason* between what can be considered as *knowledge* and what Kant thinks we ought (morally) to hope for. I cannot know that nature will be responsive to moral willing and action, but I hope that it will. Second, I argued in my discussion of each of the three *Critiques* that there are two locations for the highest good. The first is an "otherworldly" location, corresponding to the postulates of God and immortality. The second is an "earthly" location. These different aspects seem to harmonize well in the following powerful statement by Kant:

Teleology considers nature as a kingdom of ends; morals regards a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. In the former the kingdom of ends is a theoretical idea for explaining what exists. In the latter it is a practical idea for bringing about what does not exist but can be made actual by our conduct, i.e., what can be actualized in accordance with this very idea.¹

¹ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 436 n.

These three aspects of Kant's thinking, teleology, the tension between knowledge and hope, and the two locations of the highest good combine for a powerful new interpretation of the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent."

As I stated above, initially it may seem difficult to know how to analyze the "Idea." But if we accept Kant's unwavering belief in and defense of the moral law and the majesty of reason, and we consider the above three aspects of Kant's thinking, I think an interpretation emerges. If Kant believed that the moral law was that aspect of human existence which alone brought value to the human species, if he hoped that nature might indeed support moral willing and action, and if he believed in an earthly highest good as the necessary object of all moral willing, then it would seem that the "Idea" is a natural forum for Kant to bring these aspects together. Kant has to defend moral progress and the possibility of the highest good on earth, and he has to do so within the limits of the first *Critique*. He does this with his nine "Theses."

Let us add more background to this emerging picture. I argued above that moral willing can be influenced by empirical conditions. This is not to say that it can be determined by these conditions, for moral willing is always free, but only to say that Kant agrees with the common intuition that adverse conditions sometimes make it difficult to will in accord with the moral law. But if this is so, and if we are to hope for a continual improvement of every person's morality, then it seems we have a duty to eliminate those conditions which most hinder the possibility of moral improvement. Kant is clear in all of his writings that this is the responsibility of political institutions. It is the formation of a State with a perfect (internal) constitution which, in turn, participates in a cosmopolitan whole of republican nations that allows for the moral project to begin in earnest. I shall discuss this role of political institutions in much greater detail below.

If this were not enough, Kant's discussion of the ultimate and final purpose of nature in the *Critique of Judgment* shows us why Kant is so adamant about the need for moral progress. Human existence on earth would be completely without value if morality could not improve. Not simply the existence of the moral law, but the ability of the human species as a whole to morally improve throughout history is what gives existence its worth. Thus, moral progress of the human species in history is crucial for Kant, even though we can never have certain knowledge of such progress. However, Kant believes that the conclusions of the third *Critique* offer us increased hope for this possibility; the "upward" proof, the standard "downward" proof, and the discussion of beauty all give further confirmation of the possible link between the moral and natural "worlds." These conclusions, combined with his discussion of "culture," allow for a rational hope that nature will aid us in our moral endeavors.

While the need for moral progress is especially clear in the third *Critique*, Kant's discussion of Arcadian shepherds and Tahitian villagers brings his point home forcefully. While human beings are part of nature, they were not meant to live like the rest of nature, that is, contentedly. Providence "has marked out for us so toilsome a road through this earthly world"² but with good reason: antagonism and not happiness is more helpful to moral creatures. Kant argues that culture, antagonism, and unsocial sociability all foster our ability to will freely and morally. Nature cannot bring about moral improvement itself, but there are conditions which may more or less aid our rational abilities. And without moral improvement, we would be but worthless shepherds.

Thus, I believe that Kant's "Idea" is an extremely important piece in his philosophical writings. For the first time we see specifically how Kant may have conceived of the link between morality, politics, and religion, the

² "Conjectural Beginnings." Ak. 121.

link between moral progress, political institutions, and the highest good. I have argued that, for Kant, there must exist the possibility of a highest good on earth and that moral progress is a necessary postulate of practical reason. Again, the problem that Kant faces throughout his entire life and writings is the defense of this possibility. While Kant did not have the Holocaust to contend with, he did have the devastating Lisbon earthquake, many international and civil wars, and the growing cynicism of many of his contemporaries regarding any possible human improvement. Kant refused to accept even Mendelssohn's static, cyclical model of history. Thus, Kant felt compelled to give some account as to how human progress might be possible despite so much evidence to the contrary. Kant's answer, to be repeated and expounded so often in all of his political writings, is given to us in the "Idea."

III.

In the last chapter, I presented two general schools of thought regarding how to interpret the "Idea," and I argued that these interpretations were flawed. Let us take a look at a few interpretations which deal with this topic of progress, though not necessarily with the "Idea" itself. In this way, I hope not only to correct some common mistakes, but perhaps my own position will thereby become clearer. First, let us look at Migumi Sakabe's article, "Freedom as a Regulative Principle: On Some Aspects of the Kant -- Herder Controversy on the Philosophy of History,"³ which concerns Kant's article on the "Conjectural Beginning of Human History." To begin with, Sakabe's article is certainly an improvement over many others, for, as the title shows, it already accepts Kant to be using regulative concepts in his early examinations of history. Sakabe maintains that,

³ Megumi Sakabe, "Freedom as a Regulative Principle: On Some Aspects of the Kant -- Herder Controversy on the Philosophy of History," in *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986), 183-195.

contrary to the generally accepted view as to the development of Kant's philosophical reflections on the teleological principle, I strongly emphasize the important, indeed definitive role played by his deliberations on the status of this principle in "Conjectural Beginning of Human History": the status of this principle as a regulative principle has its origin [here].⁴

Sakabe goes on to link Kant's article to his later article, "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," and asserts that there is a clear line of development from here to the third *Critique*. As far as this argument goes, I think Sakabe is correct in his insistence that Kant is not confused as to the basic parameters for his use of the notion of teleology, that he looks at history from a regulative and not constitutive point of view, and that this is *precisely* the reason that Kant objects so strenuously to Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* in the first place.

Having said this, while Sakabe seems to ultimately reject the traditional an interpretation of this piece, Sakabe is unwilling to see this as a question for practical philosophy. Sakabe seems to think that, in Kant's analysis of history, Kant has in mind some type of regulative principle, though he maintains that Kant "makes it clear that the philosophy of history is an intermediate domain between theory and praxis or, from another point of view, between imagination and reason."⁵ Sakabe appears to view Kant as using a concept to interpret history that somehow "occupies an intermediate position between knowledge and action (or theory and praxis)..."⁶ Ultimately, perhaps Sakabe is simply trying to argue that Kant is here concerned with something like the faculty of judgment which he investigates in the third *Critique*. However, regardless of the status of this regulative notion, Sakabe quite plainly states:

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

In his controversy with Herder as to the problem of Averroism, Kant explicitly qualifies his vision of human history as a regulative principle (in contrast, perhaps, to the postulate of the immortality of the soul as a quasi-constitutive principle).⁷

Now, if my analysis of Kant's position regarding history is correct, then Sakabe is wrong on exactly this point, for Kant's analysis of history has to do with a practical postulate that is precisely like that of the immortality of the soul.

I think that Sakabe, like many other commentators, fails to satisfactorily answer the following question: Why is Kant so concerned to examine the question of the progress of human reason in history? Sakabe's answer is rather ambiguous, and seems to ultimately to refer to something like Kant's interest in the examination of the concept of teleology. While this may be in part true, Kant's answers in "Conjectural Beginning" are much more straight forward:

It is of the greatest importance, however, *to be content with providence* (even though it has marked out for us so toilsome a road through this earthly world), partly so that we can always take courage under our burdens and... fix our eyes on that fact and not neglect our own obligation to contribute to the betterment of ourselves.⁸

So this is the outcome of a philosophical attempt at setting out man's primordial history: Contentment with providence and with the course of human things as a whole, which do not progress from good to bad, but gradually develop from worse to better; and in this progress nature herself has given everyone a part to play that is both his own and well within his powers.⁹

Clearly Kant's concern is not history from a speculative point of view, not a philosophy of history *per se*. But neither is Kant's specific concern the working out of the proper use of the notion of teleology. Kant, it seems clear, is

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁸ "Conjectural Beginning," Ak. 121.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 123.

concerned with two things: an interpretation of history that would allow for the likelihood of moral progress and that would, in turn, keep individuals from being discouraged and thus becoming slack in their efforts to contribute as much to this progress as may be within their power. Kant is concerned with the possibility of moral progress.

While Sakabe seems willing at least to acknowledge Kant's concern for a "teleological space of 'understanding' and 'hope' which is situated between 'knowledge' and 'action',"¹⁰ and while this is certainly to be considered an improvement over many other commentators, I do not believe he goes far enough. In the end, we are left with the feeling that this is a "mere" regulative idea.¹¹

On the other hand, Friedrich Kaulbach goes too far in the other direction with his writings, attempting to reconstruct a philosophy of history in which Kant is interested in history from a theoretical and speculative point of view.¹² Again, this is an improvement over some commentators, since at least this speculative point of view is constructed out of legitimate regulative ideas and does not charge Kant with a "slip" back to his pre-critical thinking. Kaulbach claims that the "Idea" concerns "the attempt to answer the question of how history and philosophy of history is possible as a science."¹³ While Kaulbach notes that Kant's writings concerning such an attempt are "meager," he hopes to "reconstruct" such a science.¹⁴

Kaulbach's suggestion is to replace Kant's category of "causality" with "probability."¹⁵ He rightly notes that the main problem in attempting a

¹⁰ Sakabe, "Regulative Principle," pp. 191-2.

¹¹ In this respect Sakabe is similar to Laberge.

¹² Friedrich Kaulbach, "Der Zusammenhang zwischen Naturphilosophie und Geschichtsphilosophie bei Kant," and "Welchen Nutzen gibt Kant der Geschichtsphilosophie?" All translations mine.

¹³ "Nutzen," p. 65.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵ Ibid.

science of history is Kant's division between the world as appearance, and thus subject to the law of causality, and the world as noumenal, where human actions originate in complete freedom. How can one have a science of history where its causes originate in freedom? This is especially problematic considering a nature which itself may be thought to have its own intentions outside of the will of individuals.¹⁶ Kaulbach's solution is that, since all (free) actions must manifest themselves as appearances, such appearances are subject to the categories, and thus may be subject to some generalizations and predictions. Kaulbach points out Kant's interest in mathematics and statistics, as well as Kant's references to Kepler and Newton in the "Idea," and concludes that a science of history can be constructed out of probability theory.¹⁷ To quickly summarize an otherwise detailed theory, Kaulbach maintains that we are permitted to utilize the concept of "purposiveness" as a regulative idea for the unification of all our knowledge, a unification required by the "architectonic of reason;" thus, this allows us to unite the events of history through the notion of purposiveness in order to erect a science, and to utilize the concept of probability in order to investigate nature and thereby furthering the architectonic of reason. Kaulbach recognizes that this would not result in knowledge *per se*, and thus these notions would not be constitutive of experience, but would allow for a systematic investigation of nature.

In response to these writings, what I want to argue is that they are an excellent attempt at such a reconstruction, staying very true to Kant's critical writings, but that such a reconstruction is a non-starter. Let me present only a general argument here, but one that ought to be obvious from the above chapters. The simple question which ought to be asked is: did Kant really have such a speculative theory of history in mind when he wrote his

¹⁶ Kant often speaks in his political writings of nature as having its own "intentions" which differ from our own.

¹⁷ Kaulbach, "Nutzen," p. 67.

articles regarding history? I think an examination of all of Kant's writings will show that Kant had nothing like a "probability theory" in mind. As was shown above, in his debate with Mendelssohn in "Theory and Practice," Kant does not appeal primarily to nature, regulative ideas, or empirical history in order to justify his position. Rather, time and time again he makes an appeal to morality, and to the futility which would result from the rejection of the idea of the progress of human beings. Kant appears to be indicating that his conception of history is not one concerned, at least in the main, with empirical information of the past being unified by and for the architectonic. Kant is concerned with these events only insofar as they show "what peoples and governments have done to contribute to or impair the objective of cosmopolitanism."¹⁸ In fact, as I noted above in Chapter Three, if we take Kant's recommendations seriously about how to construct a theory of empirical events, this would seem to be a rather impoverished history indeed; Kant's examples have only to do with "focusing everywhere only on civil constitutions and their laws and on the relations among nations."¹⁹ This is a history without science, without inventions, without literature, without art, and presumably even without great individuals.²⁰ It is a history of politics and exploration, and only these because they are the driving factors behind the progress of the human race toward moral perfection. Kaulbach is right to note that Kant's writings on a science of history were "meager" and that Kant often remained "silent" regarding the problem how to move from freedom to probability; I do not think this was unintentional on Kant's part.

There is another concern regarding Kaulbach's position. Having established this speculative theory of history, Kaulbach argues that it can be

¹⁸ "Idea," Ak. 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 30.

²⁰ I include the last because Kant's focus is on "*the play of the human will's freedom in the large*" (17), and thus seems to exclude important individuals. However, it is possible that they would have to be included in descriptions of wars, politics, and constitutions; it is likely, as I noted above, that Kant would want to include King Frederick William II as an important instigator of enlightened reforms.

further used as a way of orienting oneself for practical ends. He begins by describing Kant's thought experiment regarding the ability to test any particular maxim by thinking of it as being implemented as a law of nature. Kaulbach makes an analogy between this way of thinking about a possible nature and the speculative thinking of a historical and purposive nature, stating that there is "also an analogous function in the sketch (*Entwurf*) of a philosophy of history describing nature for political actions, which should and wants to work with [humans] towards the establishment of a world-wide constitution (*weltbürgerlicher Verfassung*)."²¹ If what Kaulbach means by such an analogy and such an orientation for practical activity is simply that the possibility of a purposive nature allows us to hope that a state of peace could come about even if it is not our direct goal, than this seems acceptable.

But it appears as if Kaulbach wants to go further, to claim that we somehow ought to use the actions of nature as a model for our own actions.²² If this is the case, it seems that the analogy is dangerously misleading, and leads us to a position similar to Hegel. The reason for this concern is that if nature's use of war, hostility, and antagonism is somehow to serve as a mirror for behavior, then our actions would not very likely be moral at all, but precisely immoral. Simply stated, if we mirror nature's use of individuals, then we would use others as means and not ends, we would be inclined to wage war in the hope of a resulting better constitution, we would be violently antagonistic, and we would not be immediately concerned with moral ends. The possibility that antagonism would, ultimately, lead to a state of perpetual peace is merely a hope that a state of Right would emerge

²¹ "Nutzen," p. 76.

²² This seems to be what Kaulbach intends, given 1) the strength of the analogy between an imagined moral world and the pseudo-knowledge of a purposive nature with regards to political institutions, 2) his insistence that it is nature's handling of individuals and politics which gives us our practical orientation, 3) his analogy between the "three questions" of metaphysics and the three sections of his paper, and 4) the fact that the following section deals specifically with *hope* and therefore not with an orientation for action but rather a hope that progress may be brought about despite our actions.

though we ourselves have not worked directly toward it;²³ it is in no way a model for moral behavior, but only a hope that what appears a threat to moral progress will actually turn out to help its promotion. While Kaulbach has stayed true to the first *Critique*, I think he has moved far away from the spirit of the rest of Kant's writings concerning history.

Finally, having sketched out his reconstruction of a science of history, Kaulbach concludes that it can be used "to allow a *prognosis*"²⁴ regarding the future. He argues that, utilizing the science of history, the notion of purposiveness, and probability theory as *a priori* guides, we can hope that progress will happen on earth.²⁵ However, Kaulbach insists that "the possibility of prognosis requires that history as a science has found its philosophical justification,"²⁶ in other words, that hope can only be founded on speculative theory. Further, while Kaulbach is correct to insist that human beings do indeed have a natural interest in the outcome of their willing and thus a need for hope, he writes specifically that "progress in history cannot be maintained in the form of a postulate of reason."²⁷ He provides only two brief explanations for this impossibility of progress being a postulate: "History is not a 'kingdom of God,' but instead a kingdom of men,"²⁸ and, "the question of the possibility of the 'highest good' of history cannot be answered with regard to a 'kingdom of God,' but instead must find its answer from the standpoint of history itself..."²⁹ Apparently Kaulbach believes, as many commentators, that the highest good must occur in an "afterlife," or at least believes that it has little to do with political institutions.

²³ This will be discussed further in Section Two, Chapter Six below.

²⁴ "Nutzen," p. 79.

²⁵ Given Kaulbach's position regarding the use of nature as a point of practical orientation, and given the discussion to follow, it is unclear how much Kaulbach considers this progress *moral* progress.

²⁶ "Nutzen," p. 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

I find this position very difficult to harmonize with the rest of Kant's writings. While it seems true that concrete examples from history would bolster one's hope in the possibility for (moral) progress, I think it goes against much of Kant's philosophy to demand that hope be based on speculative and not practical reason. Perhaps if Kaulbach thought that a highest good on earth were possible, and if he believed in the connection between morality and politics, he would be more willing to consider progress as a postulate.³⁰ However, to base both hope and action on a statistical analysis of history seems misguided at best, and dangerous to the Kantian project at worst.

Moving on to other commentators, similar types of misinterpretations do not stop with Kant's earlier works. Let us take, for example, a recent article by Irmgard Scherer, "Kant's Eschatology in *Zum ewigen Frieden*: The Concept of Purposiveness to Guarantee Perpetual Peace."³¹ In this piece, Scherer maintains that even "Perpetual Peace" is premature to the ideas of the third *Critique*, and maintains that "the concept of perpetual peace... is intelligible only through the concept of purposiveness in the *Critique of Judgment*."³² Scherer continues to make an error with "Perpetual Peace" that many commentators make with the "Idea," namely, he poses the following question and expects an either/or answer: "is there *in nature* an objective reality for providential processes, or are 'purposes of nature' constructs of the mind?"³³ In other words, Scherer wants to know, given Kant's epistemological background from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, how could we possibly observe a teleological process in nature, such as the one given in "To[ward]

³⁰ In addition, Kaulbach seems to overlook Kant's direct insistence in the *Religion* of the victory of the good over the evil principle which results in the kingdom of God on earth.

³¹ Irmgard Scherer, "Kant's Eschatology in *Zum ewigen Frieden*: The Concept of Purposiveness to Guarantee Perpetual Peace," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 437-43.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 437.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

Perpetual Peace,” such that we could say we *know* it exists? Clearly the answer is that we could never say for certain that such teleology exists, and Scherer jumps to the conclusion along with most other commentators, that progress is best understood as a merely regulative idea. And, we see the familiar conclusion that Kant must be misusing this notion of teleology here in “Perpetual Peace,” which he will finally use correctly in the third *Critique*.

But I have tried to argue specifically against such a conclusion, as well as against such an either/or possibility. Regarding the first, I have tried to show throughout Section One that Kant understood the general nature of teleology *all along*, from the first *Critique* onwards. Thus, the natural question which should be raised is *why*, given this understanding, would Kant insist on writing about progress and nature’s guarantee of peace for his entire “critical period”? Kant must be given the benefit of an examination, if not the benefit of the doubt, and that is what I have tried to do, with the offered conclusion that Kant was consistently interested to maintain such a position because of his concern with the moral progress of the species. Thus, regarding the second conclusion, I have argued that there is not a definite either/or possibility when it comes to the question of moral teleology. It is not merely a question of saying that teleology is, or is not, known for certain in nature, for the third possibility exists that moral teleology is a postulate of practical reason. If this is so, as I have argued that it is, then Kant is faced with the additional problem of how to *explain the mechanism* by which such progress might take place, or at least he feels called to give the skeptics a clue that this indeed might be the case. For this purpose, Kant turns to un-social sociability in its many forms. But, as I have tried to argue, looking especially at “Theory and Practice,” Kant knows full well that he could be wrong in the exact way that he has spelled out such progress. This is Kant’s

best guess, as it were, and perhaps we are inclined to agree with him, but it is only a guess. The postulate, nonetheless, remains.³⁴

The subject of the French Revolution also seems to be cause for several misconceptions of Kant's view of teleology. Peter Burg, for example, seems simply wrong to assert in his book about the French Revolution that,

causality and finality of history can be an object of human knowledge. In the prediction of the unforgettability of the [French] revolution, the claim is included, that knowledge concerning the course and goal of history exists. The knowledge of history is founded on a knowledge of man, because historical development is founded on the fact that man is moving toward a goal.³⁵

This seems wrong not only because, as Kant insists time and time again, progress can never be a "fact" or an object of knowledge, but also because Kant is more concerned with the *attitudes* of the observers, not with the actual, predictable course of history. Kant's often quoted observation concerning what is important about the Revolution is that:

This event consists neither in momentous deeds nor crimes committed by men... It is simply the mode of thinking of the spectators which reveals itself publicly in this game of great revolutions... Owing to its universality, this mode of thinking demonstrates a character of the human race... which not only permits people to hope for progress toward the better, but is already itself progress...³⁶

Thus, we see that it is not even the revolution *itself* nor something about the participants of that revolution which gives us a clue that the human species is progressing, but, rather, the clue is revealed merely in the attitude of the

³⁴ See my concluding chapter of Section Two, below.

³⁵ p. 38. Peter Burg, *Kant und die Französische Revolution* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974). All translations mine. I shall remind the reader of this again in Chapter Three of Section Two.

³⁶ p. 152. Immanuel Kant, "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" in *On History*, trans. Lewis Beck, Robert Anchor, and Emil Fackenheim, copyright ©1975. The Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1968 by The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., reprinted by permission of the publisher in *Conflict of the Faculties*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. Mary J. Gregor. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 139-71.

spectators. Thus, it concerns neither the participants nor the outcome of the French revolution.

Similarly, Buhr and Irrlitz also seem to take too much from Kant's reflections of the Revolution.³⁷ At some points, it sounds like they are arguing for my position exactly, writing:

Kant aims at a universal moralization (higher development, perfection) of humankind -- society should become a "moral whole."³⁸

Kant knew that his thoughts on the philosophy of history were more likely hypotheses and practical-moral orders (*Aufforderungen*) than scientifically grounded and confirmed through experience... In this respect, he searched world history for incidents and evidence which could prove the views of his philosophy history.³⁹

Certainly this sounds similar to my contention that Kant's thoughts on history had to do with practical considerations and that he only looked to empirical situations as (partial, but not factual) confirmation of progress.

However, Buhr and Irrlitz follow the above statement by writing that:

In his old age he [Kant] came to the conclusion that at least one event in recent history could be mentioned, which shinningly and irrefutably confirms the theses of continual progress of the human race and with it the primary insight of his philosophy of history: the French Revolution.⁴⁰

In support of this argument the authors cite Kant's quotation (given in the paragraph above) regarding the position of the spectators. However, such a reflection on the Revolution in no way "shinningly and irrefutably" confirms a

³⁷ Manfred Buhr and Gerd Irrlitz, "Immanuel Kant," in *Materialien zu Kants Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976), 102-124. All translations mine.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

thesis of any type of progress, moral or political. Such progress, as we have seen, can never be confirmed. What Kant (presumably) intends with his statement is exactly what he states and no more: that the attitude of the spectators reveals an aptitude and propensity of individuals toward what is right and what is moral, even though this situation may be harmful to the spectators themselves. Wolfgang Röd states it well:

Kant did not want to leave this general observation [of progress] at that, and searched for a clue in experience which could indicate a tendency toward development. He found it in the reaction of most individuals to the French Revolution -- not in the revolution itself! -- namely in the participation of the observer at the efforts of the French to construct a good, that is, a republican constitution.⁴¹

Kant does see an indication of progress surrounding the French Revolution, but this is to be found precisely in the attitudes of the spectators, and says nothing factual a predictable future.

From a different perspective, Georg Cavallar in his book *Pax Kantiana*⁴² does an excellent job of defending Kant's belief in the progress of Right, but seems to go too far in his defense by way of cutting out the necessity of the belief in moral progress.⁴³ I will spend some time discussing his book, since he is the only writer besides Yovel to discuss the "Idea" in depth.

To begin with, let us note several points in common between Cavallar's thesis and my own. The first point is that Cavallar agrees that, according to Kant, we cannot see into the purposes of nature, and thus can have no

⁴¹ p. 140. Wolfgang Röd, "Die Rolle transzendentaler Prinzipien in Moral und Politik," in "Zum ewigen Frieden:" *Grundlagen, Aktualität und Aussichten einer Idee von Immanuel Kant*, eds. Reinhard Merkel and Roland Wittmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 125-141. All translations mine.

⁴² Georg Cavallar, *Pax Kantiana: Systematisch-historische untersuchung des Entwurfs "Zum ewigen Frieden" (1775) von Immanuel Kant* (Wein: Böhlau Verlag, 1992). All translations mine.

⁴³ It is my belief that they are so concerned to make a palatable defense of the seemingly over-optimistic claim of political progress that they try to divorce themselves (and Kant) from any thought of moral progress for the human race.

knowledge *per se* regarding progress. He also notes that “above all, humans cannot foresee the free actions of historical actors,”⁴⁴ since “humans as ‘homo noumenon,’ as moral beings, are unknown under the conditions of experience.”⁴⁵ He writes that, “the course of history can be determined ‘a priori’ regulatively through the moral certainty of duty... [but] lays no claim [to being] a priori.”⁴⁶ He also makes the interesting point that, since we cannot know whether nature has purposes or not, it is equally dogmatic to assume that it does not, as it is to assume that it does.⁴⁷

Second, Cavallar agrees that Kant’s discussion of history has nothing to do with a theoretical investigation of history, but, as I have argued, has to do with necessary moral assumptions. Cavallar writes very plainly that:

Kant’s philosophy of history is dependent on premises of moral teleology. He develops it within the scope of a theory of culture as a “final end of nature,” which should close the gap between freedom and nature. The necessity of the assumption that ethical ends must be established in the world, is only a moral necessity. Moral teleology asks, whether and how ethical ends in the world are possible. Hence, nature must itself be purposeful in its empirical manifestations: Moral teleology desires a natural teleology. Kant’s philosophy of history “in praktischer Absicht” (Frieden A 65) is founded on moral principles. The certainty that humankind is progressing towards the better is grounded not in history... but in duty.⁴⁸

The coercion towards peace may not be understood in the sense of a merciless, naturally caused necessity. Not a prophesy from a philosophy of history, but instead a “duty” “to work toward this goal” of perpetual peace exists in the explanation of the guarantee [of nature] in the first place. This [duty] first warrants the hope “in praktischer Absicht” that the natural half of man will not lead to destruction.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Cavallar, *Pax Kantiana*, p. 266.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292. See also 290.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 290 and 292.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

Keeping all this in mind, we can appreciate Cavallar's conclusion that the notion of "the 'cunning of nature'⁵⁰ is a regulative principle of reflective judgment,"⁵¹ and therefore assume that he means a regulative principle not merely for the theoretical study of history, but reflective for practical purposes.⁵²

Third, Cavallar agrees that there is no break between Kant's earlier and later writings on history and teleology. Not only is the "Idea" not an incomplete and overstated picture of teleology which gets improved with the *Critique of Judgment*, but Cavallar argues that the "Idea" is consistent with all of Kant's later writings.

Kant's train of thought in the explanation of the guarantee [of nature in "Perpetual Peace"] follows that in the "Idea [for a Universal History]."⁵³

The maintained break between the writings before and after the appearance of the third *Critique* (1790) is... not available. Ultimately, there is no ground to assume that Kant had been moved from the political events of 1789 to a revision of his philosophy of history.⁵⁴

Cavallar also argues, as I have, that this is true even of the third *Critique*, which "offers no principally new conception of the philosophy of history"⁵⁵:

The "Idea [for a Universal History]" could be integrated with every paragraph of the *Critique of Judgment* where Kant moves from the view of natural products to the history of the human race. There he changes the teleological reflection, and now no longer asks about the form of organized natural

⁵⁰ Several authors use the term "cunning of nature," taken from Hegel, in place of Kant's own term "providence" or providential nature.

⁵¹ Cavallar, p. 281.

⁵² Many other citations on such conclusions are possible. See chapters nine and ten from Cavallar's book.

⁵³ Cavallar, p. 282.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

productions as ends, but instead asks about the end of nature's existence and ultimately about the ultimate end.⁵⁶

Fourth, and last, I will simply add that Cavallar also agrees that political progress can take place without requiring moral progress; "a moral revolution in the way of thinking is in no way necessary for the establishment of a condition of Right."⁵⁷

However, while Cavallar's conclusions agree with my own in many ways, it seems that Cavallar is so interested to defend the possibility of political progress that he is not willing to incorporate the notion of moral progress. The way Cavallar allows for this possibility, it seems, is to construct a break between Kant's writings on history and his writings on religion; "the inward education (*Bildung*) of ethics relates to the history of religion, which Kant leaves out of his political history."⁵⁸ Cavallar certainly does not want to deny a place for religion and theology in Kant's thinking,⁵⁹ but he appears to want to maintain that Kant's religion has to do with internal and moral growth while Kant's history has only to do with politics and the establishment of Right; "Kant excludes [considerations of moral progress] from his philosophy of history, which concerns the hope of Right and legality."⁶⁰ Cavallar is concerned that Kant's strict views of autonomy and radical evil could not allow us to say anything about the possibility of moral progress, and "the main question is, how this conviction [of moral progress] is consistent with the principle of moral autonomy."⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281. See also 314 and 319.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁵⁹ See especially sections 10.1 and 10.2.

⁶⁰ Cavallar, p. 322. See also 296.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294. See also 295.

A second of Cavallar's objections seems to be that the struggle to achieve peace may make one more clever, "but not morally better,"⁶² in other words, that Right does not directly promote morality. Likewise, a third objection seems to be that we can "differentiate between 'moral steps' and 'steps toward morality,'" which then allows us to note that political progress is merely that later, and not the former.⁶³ He states finally that "the development of moral propensities have no "place" in the philosophy of history."⁶⁴

Let me try to address these objections in order. Regarding the main objection, that there exists some strong division between Kant's religion and politics *as it concerns history*, I think that Cavallar ultimately contradicts himself. To put it simply, if Cavallar believes that Kant's philosophy of history rests on *moral* concerns, and that if his assumptions regarding political progress are justified only in reference to Kant's moral theory, then I think Cavallar cannot make a differentiation between political and moral improvement *in history*. That is to say, certainly there is a difference between moral and merely political or legal improvement, but if the possibility of political improvement is *only* assumed because of the need for moral actions to have an effect in history, then Cavallar cannot cut out the possibility of assuming moral progress based on the same need of morality. Cavallar himself writes that "the philosophy of history is grounded not in theology, but *both* [are grounded] in the moral law and morality."⁶⁵ But Cavallar cannot have it both ways: if hopes and predictions for future history are based on the moral need to have good actions have good effects, i.e., the hope that nature is not completely unconcerned with morality, and if this hope is not based on any

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. See also 293 and 331-2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 293. For the whole of Cavallar's objections, see esp. pp. 293-9, 313-4, 319, 322, and 331-5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334. Italics added for emphasis.

knowledge of nature itself, then hope for a real moral (not merely legal) progress must be spoken about within history as well.

Perhaps this contradiction can best be seen in Cavallar's discussion of the three possible interpretations of history as Kant envisions them. Recall that these three possibilities, which Kant discusses in response to Mendelssohn, are that history is progressing, regressing, or cyclical. Cavallar writes that "between these three possibilities, theoretical (*anschauende*) reason can make no decision... The philosophy of history has to do with 'freely acting agents', about whom one cannot predict 'what they will do' (A 139)."⁶⁶ How are we (or, particularly, Kant) to decide between these interpretations of history? As Cavallar concludes, "naturally, Kant does not remain agnostic. He goes further and decides *on moral grounds* for the model of progress... Kant argues against Mendelssohn above all moral-philosophically. A cyclical model of history causes (*errege*) moral disgust, and is therefore rejected."⁶⁷ The question to ask, then, is: How can Cavallar go from this conclusion about moral progress in history to the *mere* progress of Right and legality? How can political progress be assumed on this moral basis without making similar assumptions regarding moral progress? Presumably, it cannot. If political progress is a necessary assumption from the standpoint of morality, and if there exists "no proof"⁶⁸ for such political progress, then surely moral progress stands or falls on the same considerations.

Further, does the possibility of "radical evil" speak against moral progress in history? Cavallar's position could run one of two ways. First, it could be a concern over the impossibility of predicting a future of fully autonomous creatures. But this cannot be a legitimate concern on Cavallar's part, since the establishment of Right would involve similar concerns, and

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291. Italics added for emphasis.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Cavallar is correct to think that it is not a question about predictability from nature itself, but a question about moral beliefs. Second, however, Cavallar could be concerned over the impossibility of moral perfection given Kant's conviction in the *Religion* of the presence of "radical evil in human nature." Does this radical evil preclude the possibility of moral progress?

In response to this, let me summarize the position of Henry E Allison in his helpful, and I think mostly correct, article, "Kant's Doctrine of Radical Evil."⁶⁹ Allison reasons that radical evil cannot come from the natural inclinations, since Kant repeatedly insists that they are not bad in themselves, and can even be good. Nor can it be thought to exist somehow apart from the free will of the individual, something that the individual simply cannot help, for it would make the attribution of guilt or responsibility impossible. Allison concludes that the nature of radical evil "must be understood as the maxim to give priority to the non-moral incentive, even in those cases where it conflicts with the dictates of morality,"⁷⁰ in other words, to willingly subordinate moral maxims to maxims of natural inclination. In addition, such a "propensity" to evil must be thought of as merely the fact that "finite, sensuously affected rational beings are not only autonomous moral agents but also creatures of desire and inclination, which, as resting on natural causes, are neither completely in their control nor necessarily in agreement with the dictates of morality."⁷¹ What this means is that, to remain true to Kant, we cannot say that there is some external reason for the human race to have a predisposition towards evil, but rather we must say that this predisposition exists only in the fact that the moral side of human beings continually

⁶⁹ Henry E. Allison, "Kant's Doctrine of Radical Evil," in *Akten des Siebenten Internationaler Kant-Kongress*, ed. Gerhard Funke, Band I (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1991), 52-72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

struggles against the sensuous side which is inclined simply to follow natural instincts regardless of moral considerations.⁷²

Thus, Cavallar's concern over radical evil seems misplaced. Certainly Kant does think that "radical evil" exists, and that humans are never likely to achieve moral perfection. But this in no way excludes the possibility of continual moral improvement. Radical evil does not exist somehow outside of the individual's autonomy, thus precluding any move toward moral perfection.⁷³ It exists in the fact that people are always tempted to subordinate the moral law to considerations of happiness. But this is an autonomous decision, a question about moral willing, and this being the case, there is no *theoretical* justification for choosing a progressive, regressive, or cyclical model of history. Who is to say what will happen in a state of perpetual peace where the focus of culture will be devoted to moral improvement?⁷⁴ "No one," is the answer from the point of view of theory, though Kant argues that, from the point of view of morality, we have every right to assume that moral progress is possible.

Moreover, what about Kant's discussion of "The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Foundation of a Kingdom of God on Earth" from the *Religion*? Certainly this title alone seems an excellent *prima facie* reason to think not only that moral progress is possible, but more importantly for this discussion of Cavallar, that such progress will happen on earth, and therefore *in history*. While we can indeed separate a discussion of political and religious progress, it seems that both necessarily take place in history, and that both are based upon moral considerations. If there is a

⁷² "The very fact that we are never beyond the possibility of temptation, which for Kant means that we only obey the law reluctantly (*ungern*), indicates not merely a lack of holiness but also an actual propensity to subordinate moral considerations to our needs as sensuous beings..." (Ibid., p. 66).

⁷³ If this were the case, it would throw more into question than merely the possibility of moral progress in history.

⁷⁴ See Chapter Four below.

reason to ignore Kant's own insistence that a kingdom of God on earth is possible, Cavallar has certainly not provided it.

I think the basic inconsistency in Cavallar's position speaks against all of his objections, but let me say a few additional words addressing the more specific objections. Certainly Cavallar is right to differentiate between "moral steps" and "steps toward morality," and certainly mere legality and Right are the latter, since all immoral persons could behave legally. But, as I have argued above,⁷⁵ Kant believes that true steps toward moral progress can only be taken in those conditions of internal and external Right. Morality requires the establishment of a system of Right not only because it is the proper way to express freedom, but also because such a condition is necessary if the moral project is to be taken on in earnest. In addition, as we saw above with the discussion of the *Critique of Judgment*, it is clear that Kant conceived of nature as being able to indirectly promote morality through culture, that skill and discipline could aid persons in moral willing. What Holly Wilson said with regard to an article by Thomas Auxter could be applied to Cavallar here: Cavallar's position "contradicts Kant's explicit claim that nature has an ultimate end for the human species which contributes to the development of morality in human beings; it can produce the formal subjective condition of morality, which is the aptitude for arbitrary purposes."⁷⁶ While we ought to differentiate between "moral steps" and mere "steps toward morality," this in no way allows us to exclude the first.

IV.

Whereas Section One has dealt with some rather broad themes, the following Section will deal exclusively with moral progress, politics, and the

⁷⁵ And as I shall argue below.

⁷⁶ Holly L. Wilson, "A Gap in American Kant Scholarship: Pragmatic Anthropology as the Application of Kantian Moral Philosophy," p. 407 fn.

highest good. In the above section, I have cleared the way for this second section with the analysis of Kant's understanding of teleology and by arguing that moral progress is a necessary postulate of practical reason. In this way, I have tried to give support to Kant's seemingly grand claims in order that we might attempt to analyze them seriously. But, given this broad clearing, how are we specifically to understand the postulate of moral progress of the species? What is the precise nature of the highest good which is the necessary object of all moral willing? Is Kant consistent in his conceptions? And how does the postulate of moral progress function? Why is its belief necessary? What is the exact link between morality and politics? We saw above that external factors can influence moral willing, but what role must politics play in promoting a moral foundation? And how does Kant envision moral progress to take place? What are the factors which promote and detract such progress? What is the ultimate picture which he envisions? And how are we to evaluate such claims? It is to questions such as these that we now turn.

Section Two

Chapter One

Defense of the Highest Good

I.

Though it seems incontrovertible that Kant wanted the concept of the highest good, or *summum bonum*, to play an important role in his ethics and philosophy, this concept has been taken by some Kant commentators to be problematic. The main issue has to do with whether this concept is essential, unnecessary, or flatly incompatible with the rest of Kant's philosophical system in general, and his moral theory in particular. Beginning with Lewis White Beck's attack on this concept¹ and John Silber's defense,² several commentators have offered contributions on how one is to best understand the highest good. In this chapter I hope to present what I take to be the most important points of this debate; I shall begin with those points which are most likely to be settled and uncontroversial, and proceed with increasingly controversial elements which I will argue to be necessary but which are not likely to be readily accepted. Without giving a specifically historical account of the debate,³ I hope to contribute to the dialogue in two ways: by showing which issues are most likely to be already settled, or at least by arguing for some necessary parameters to the debate, and by giving some original interpretations and conclusions which follow from many of these important points.

¹ Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*.

² See especially: John R. Silber, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good as Immanent and Transcendent," *Philosophical Review* 68 (October 1959): 469-492; "The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics," *Ethics* (April 1963): 179-197; and, "The Metaphysical Importance of the Highest Good as the Canon of Pure Reason in Kant's Philosophy," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* (Summer 1959): 233-244.

³ For such an account see: Lance Simmons, "Kant's Highest Good: Albatross, Keystone, Achilles Heel," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (October 1993): 355-368.

II.

1. *One can have the duty to strive for the highest good even if one cannot, in fact, achieve it.*

This point is made especially well in John R. Silber's famous piece, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good as Immanent and Transcendent." The problem is this: Kant maintains that the necessary object of the moral law is the highest good, and that one is therefore commanded to pursue the highest good. But he also claims that it is impossible for human beings to achieve the highest good, or, at least, that it is impossible for human beings to bring it about themselves.⁴ In addition, Kant has argued that something cannot be commanded of a person if it is impossible for that person to perform such a duty (this is part of his argument for the necessity of freedom in the second *Critique*). On this account, if one attempts to bring about the highest good in the world and, predictably, fails, one then must be considered blameworthy, since it was one's duty to achieve the highest good. Hence, how can it be one's duty to pursue the highest good if its attainment is impossible?⁵

Silber's answer is to posit that the highest good must be considered as a model for action. What Kant should have been clearer in saying, argues Silber, is that "man is obligated not to attain in full, but rather to approximate the highest good to the fullest possible degree."⁶ It cannot be one's duty to achieve the highest good, but it is surely within one's power to attempt to promote the highest good, and one can be judged blameworthy if one fails to make such an attempt. Though one cannot make others more virtuous, one

⁴ The importance of making such a distinction will become clear later in this chapter.

⁵ It should be noted that, as Silber points out ("Kant's Conception," pp. 473-479), Kant needs to keep these premises in order to keep his proof for the existence of God. If he denies the highest good as the final object of the moral law, the necessity of the possibility of achieving what is one's duty, or the impossibility of man to bring about the highest good on his/her own, then Kant must reject the need for God and immortality.

⁶ "Kant's Conception," p. 478.

can work on becoming a better moral agent oneself, and can also, Silber maintains, make oneself and others happy to the degree that one judges the agent to be deserving.⁷ In this way, one can promote the highest good without being commanded to achieve it, and it serves the important function of giving one a model for action:

The idea of the highest good as transcendent -- that is, the idea of the highest good as the object which man is obligated to attain in full -- is the measure that man uses in assessing the limits of his capacity. This is the only norm which can assure him that he does not sell himself and his freedom short, that he does not become insensitive to his capacities and hence to what may be his duties... While Kant insists on representing the highest good as transcendent in its employment as the ideal measure for human striving, he also insists on representing it as immanent in its employment as the measure of moral accountability.⁸

With the highest good as an ideal or model for action, it ensures that one will not simply act based upon what one has done or has been capable of doing in the past. Given the nature of human beings as free beings, one should not rely on past actions as predictions as to what is possible for the future, and the highest good as the ideal end of the moral law ensures that one will not underestimate one's potential for action. But Kant cannot require that the highest good actually be achieved in one's lifetime, hence as far as culpability is concerned, one is only blameworthy if one does not strive to achieve the highest good.⁹

2. *One cannot will without an object - or - one cannot simply will a good will.*

To begin with, it is important to keep in mind that when Kant talks about the moral law and its categorical commands to human beings, he is

⁷ I will argue below that this second element of making ourselves and others happy based on our judgment of desert or worth needs modification.

⁸ "Kant's Conception," pp. 484-5.

⁹ See also: Kwang-Sae Lee, "Some Reflections on the Idea of the Highest Good as a Regulative Idea of Pure Practical Reason," in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Band II. 1 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 551-561.

already concerned with human beings as finite rational creatures, and not simply *any* possible rational being, such as God. Human beings are not holy, since they are finite and have a sensuous side to them as well as a rational side. Indeed, the categorical imperative cannot *command* a will that is holy, for such a will totally uninfluenced by a sensuous or finite nature would already act in accord with the moral law because it would be wholly rational.¹⁰ Kant explains in the second *Critique* that,

though we can suppose that men as rational beings have a pure will, since they are affected by wants and sensuous motives we cannot suppose them to have a holy will, a will incapable of any maxims which conflict with the moral law. The moral law for them [human beings], therefore, is an imperative, commanding categorically because it is unconditioned.¹¹

A holy will, the will of God, simply would will in accord with the moral law, and therefore the law would not command *per se*. Human beings as finite rational creatures, though they have a pure will, also have a sensuous nature, and do not always formulate maxims in accord with the moral law. Thus, such creatures are “in need of the moral constraint of the resistance offered by the practical reason, which may be called an inner but intellectual compulsion.”¹²

There seem to be two good arguments, then, for the position that one needs an object for the will to engage in the act of willing. We shall leave the second argument for point number three below, but the first comes from Mary-Barbara Zeldin’s article, “The Summum Bonum, the Moral Law, and

¹⁰ Certainly a holy will by mere definition is only a will which would be incapable of being determined by sensuous inclinations, and thus a holy will could be sensuously impressed. However, it seems clear from Kant’s discussion of a holy will in the second *Critique* that he has in mind a will which is, in fact, uninfluenced by sensuous inclinations. Cf. Ak. 32, 33, 84, 122, and 123n. Regardless, it is certainly clear that human beings cannot become holy, but can only approximate a holy will, and this is all I need for my current point concerning the *command* of the moral law.

¹¹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 32.

¹² *Ibid.*, Ak. 33.

the Existence of God,"¹³ a direct response to Beck's attack on the highest good. Zeldin writes:

any being whose practical reason *can* be *impure* and for whom, consequently, the moral law is a law of duty which *commands*, must understand, not merely logically through unschematized categories, but as an *object*, the moral law as a command, and must therefore be able to schematize it by *some* schema both as to its meaning and as to its complete object... Thus no rational being whose will is not holy can be commanded what cannot really be, because he would then simply not be aware of the command and it would thus not be a command for him. To be commanded the production of a something-I-know-not-what is tantamount to being aware of something which means *nothing* and is thus not a something.¹⁴

As was discussed above, the moral law commands finite rational creatures only, not creatures whose wills are holy. As such, human beings must find some content for the form of the moral law. If human beings had holy wills, the form of the moral law would be enough, since they simply would will in accord with this law. But persons must will something or other in their willing, else they have only the empty form of the law with nothing that they can conceptualize; as Kant explains,

pure practical reason is a capacity for ends generally, and for it to be indifferent to ends, that is, to take no interest in them, would therefore be a contradiction, since then it would not determine maxims for actions either (because every maxim of action contains an end) and so would not be practical reason.¹⁵

Recall from our discussion of the second *Critique* above that Kant defines the will as "a faculty either of bringing forth objects corresponding to conceptions or of determining itself"¹⁶ in a law-like fashion, and thus as a faculty of

¹³ Mary-Barbara Zeldin, "The Summum Bonum, the Moral Law, and the Existence of God," *Kant-Studien* 62, no. 1 (1971): 43-54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, Ak. 395. See also: Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 3-6.

¹⁶ Second *Critique*. Ak. 15.

desire, it is a faculty of realizing an object (in part) through the representation of it. For reason to be practical it must act, and in order to act in finite rational agents, it must have some end, some content for willing. Let us proceed to the next section, since its discussion is intertwined with this one.

3. *The highest good is the proper object of moral willing.*

This is perhaps too controversial a point to address so high up the list, but I think it is best discussed here nevertheless. We can then also give the second reason mentioned above as to why willing needs an object.

Kant maintains that the highest good is “the object which is given to [the morally determined will] a priori,”¹⁷ and “is a synthetic practical proposition *a priori* (and indeed objectively practical) given by pure reason.”¹⁸ An “object of practical reason” is, for Kant:

the idea of an object as an effect possible through freedom. To be an object of practical knowledge as such signifies, therefore, only the relation of the will to the action whereby it or its opposite is brought into being. To decide whether or not something is [such] an object... is only to discern the possibility or impossibility of willing the action by which a certain object would be made real, provided we had the ability to bring it about...¹⁹

On the one hand, Kant concludes that the object of free willing should be free willing itself. On the other hand, Kant also clearly states that “it is certainly undeniable that every volition must have an object and therefore a material.”²⁰ Indeed, this is the basis for Kant’s rejection of Wolff’s and Baumgarten’s use of “perfection” as the foundation of morality, for not only is it “empty, indeterminate, and hence of no use for finding in the immeasurable

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 4.

¹⁸ *Religion*, p. 6 n.

¹⁹ *Second Critique*, Ak. 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 34. See also: *Religion*, pp. 3-6.

field of possible reality the maximum sum suitable for us,"²¹ it is also simply "tautological."²² But this also seems true of the necessity of willing a free will. By definition, willing to have a good will concerns merely the *form* of willing, and therefore is empty of content. Thus Kant writes that "in the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will can take place in man, since such determination cannot be followed by no effect whatever."²³ If we necessarily need material for any type of willing, then Kant must provide a suitable content.

The moral law states that the mere form of the will must be the determining ground of the will, but this does not rule out the necessity for willing something or other; "the material of the maxim can indeed remain but cannot be its condition."²⁴ As long as we do not make desire for some object the foundation of willing, and as long as it is not prohibited with the application of the moral law, such an object is allowable;

though the highest good may be the entire *object* of a pure practical reason, i.e., of a pure will, it is still not to be taken as the *determining* ground of the pure will; the moral law alone must be seen as the ground for making the highest good and its realization or promotion the object of the pure will.²⁵

Kant is consistent in telling us that something or other must be the object of our willing, that the good will is not itself such an object, and that this need is not prohibited by the fact that the moral law must be free of content, so long as the object does not prove to be the determining ground of the will.

The highest good as the "totality of the object of the pure practical reason"²⁶ is the proper object of our moral willing, though it is not the

²¹ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 443. Ellington translation.

²² See Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*, pp. 24-26, and 29.

²³ *Religion*, p. 4.

²⁴ *Second Critique*, Ak. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 109.

²⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 108.

determining ground. Though this point may still be considered controversial, I think it has been well argued for in the past, and must be accepted as one of the parameters of the debate concerning the highest good. Beck, Murphy, Friedman, and, to some extent, Auxter have all argued that “no formulation of the categorical imperative contains any reference to the highest good,”²⁷ that the formal moral law contains no content, and that the highest good cannot provide this content. But Silber, Packer, Anderson-Gold, Rossi, and, importantly, Mary-Barbara Zeldin have all defended the view that one can deduce the highest good from the moral law. Let us see how a defense might be possible.

To begin with, a good *prima facie* reason for thinking that the concept might be inferred from the moral law is Kant’s third formulation of the categorical imperative, namely, “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means,”²⁸ which he later modifies, stating:

The concept of every rational being as one who must regard himself as legislating universal law by all his will’s maxims... leads to another very fruitful concept, which depend on the aforementioned one, viz., that of a kingdom of ends. By “kingdom” I understand a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws... [T]herefore,... it will be possible to think of a whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole both of rational being as ends in themselves *and also of the particular ends which each may set for himself*);...²⁹

Here, in Kant’s notion of the kingdom of ends, one finds not only a collection of rational agents, but also their specific, “particular ends which each may set

²⁷ Jeffrie G. Murphy, “The Highest Good as Content for Kant’s Ethical Formalism: Beck *versus* Silber,” *Kant-Studien*, 56 (1965): 104.

²⁸ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 429.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 433. Italics added for emphasis.

for himself.”³⁰ As Zeldin summarizes, “the kingdom of ends is, however, identical with the idea of a moral world as described in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the latter, in turn, is the *summum bonum*. Thus, the command to promote the *summum bonum*, as the kingdom of ends, is found in the third formulation of the categorical imperative.”³¹ With the highest good as the collection of all ends which are willed by rational agents in accord with the moral law, this is equivalent to the kingdom of ends and the *summum bonum*. If the moral law commands one to will universally, and to treat others and oneself as ends in themselves, and since the law commands finite rational agents as creatures with a sensuous nature as well as a rational nature, it therefore commands one to take the particular ends of another as one’s own ends, though of course only if these particular ends are permissible.³²

Let us defend the highest good as the necessary object of moral willing from another direction, with the question: What is the connection between virtue and happiness? I have tried to show above that the moral law already concerns human beings as finite creatures, because the law *commands*. We also know that, as creatures, human beings have a natural concern with their happiness: “to be happy is necessarily the desire of every rational but finite being, and thus it is an unavoidable determinant of its faculty of desire,”³³ and, “man is a being of needs, so far as he belongs to the

³⁰ I find it interesting that while Auxter believes the notion of the highest good to have to philosophical value, he himself recognizes the importance of Kant’s discussion of “particular ends.” See: Thomas Auxter, “Kant’s Theory of Retribution,” in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Band II.2 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 307-315, (especially p. 313).

³¹ Zeldin, “The Summum Bonum,” p. 49.

³² This does not, it should be mentioned, present a problem of motivation for Kant. As Zeldin explains: “heteronomy is not, however, involved [even though the relation of the *summum bonum* to the moral law is synthetic and not analytic]... since the *summum bonum* as the goal is not the determining factor... [S]ince the *summum bonum* is in fact no more than the moral law brought ‘nearer to intuition,’ [that is, “schematized”] it would, as the kingdom of ends and the goal of a pure but finite practical reason, involve a heteronomous element only insofar as is required for such a reason to have a moral end at all” (Ibid., p. 50).

³³ Second *Critique*. Ak. 25.

world of sense, and to this extent his reason certainly has an inescapable responsibility from the side of his sensuous nature to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to... happiness..."³⁴ Now if we accept this, then persons have both the need to be moral and the need to be happy, and reason, which has been proved by the second *Critique* to be practical itself, must then be *necessarily* concerned with both. Of course, this gives rise to the problem that "happiness and morality are two specifically different elements of the highest good and therefore their combination cannot be known analytically,"³⁵ and this leads Kant to his solution of the "antinomy" of the second *Critique*. Thus the highest good simply arises out of the fact that practical reason has a necessary concern with the human being both as a moral agent and as a being of needs.

Another approach is possible. Kant calls the highest good the "totality of the object of the pure practical reason,"³⁶ "the [sum of] inevitable consequences of maxims adopted as conformable to [morality]"³⁷ and "the concept of a final end of all things (harmony which, while not multiplying men's duties, yet provides them with a special point of focus for the unification of all ends)."³⁸ Now certainly the moral law commands some actions, prohibits some, and permits others. Many of these required actions are spelled out in Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, the happiness of others (as a wide duty) and a certain form of representative government, for example. There are necessary objects of the will and of practical reason, for though one cannot begin with such ends and then find the necessary maxims for their attainment, "in ethics the *concept of duty* will lead to ends and will have to establish *maxims* with respect to ends we *ought* to set ourselves, grounding

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 113.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 108.

³⁷ *Religion*, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

them in accordance with moral principles,”³⁹ “for this reason ethics can also be defined as the system of the *ends* of pure practical reason.”⁴⁰ Thus, I agree with Reath’s statement:

One can view the Highest Good as a final end without thinking that it is supposed to provide a material content that complements the otherwise purely formal character of the Moral Law... [T]he Highest Good is a systematization of the content of the Moral Law, which can be generated by individuals applying the Moral Law to their conduct. If the Moral Law could not generate any content, there could be no place for [the] Highest Good in Kant’s theory...⁴¹

Human beings must will something or other, and it is the concept of the highest good as the totality of all moral maxims which provides the appropriate content for the will.⁴²

This leads, finally, to the second reason, mentioned in the question above, why one cannot simply will to have a good will, though this reason is connected with the willing of the highest good. This argument comes from John Silber’s article, “The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant’s Ethics.” Silber begins by ruling out possibilities for content other than the highest good. Instead of simply willing to will in accordance with the moral law, which was shown above to be void of necessary content, one possibility for an end of practical reason might be to will to have a good will, to bring the will to moral perfection. However, this will not work, Silber argues, because “in an act of volition one does not simply will a good disposition. Rather one expresses a good disposition by willing something more concrete.”⁴³ The willing of a good will does not add any content to the moral law and does not inform one as to what to do if one wants to will in accordance with the moral law.

³⁹ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 382.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 381.

⁴¹ Reath, p. 604 n.

⁴² See also Zeldin, “The Summum Bonum,” p. 51.

⁴³ Silber, “The Importance of the Highest Good,” p. 186.

Silber maintains that in Kant's attack on Wolff and Baumgarten he was "well aware of the need to say more," and deemed any ethics as useless which gave the tautological proposition that it was good to do what was good.⁴⁴ Another possibility for content of the moral law is the willing of the perfection of one's natural capacities. But, as Silber points out, either this is just another way of willing to have a good will, in which case it is again a mere tautology, or it is willing an unconditioned, natural good, in which case the will is being determined by an object and not the moral law.⁴⁵ It is only the highest good, Silber concludes, which can provide the necessary material for the moral law.

Silber argues that the highest good, as the combination of virtue and proportionate happiness for all, is the only end possible for this role. As was shown above, ethics is concerned with ends. The highest good as a single "idea" encompasses all of the ends which are in conformity to the moral law;

Kant's theory is well prepared, of course, for the extension of reason to the conditions of man since it has its foundation in the human situation. Kant builds his ethics on the foundation of the experience of obligation, which is the experience, not of a pure rational being, but of man, a rational-sensible being.⁴⁶

As a human being, one should will that one strive towards moral perfection, that one do whatever one can to bring one's will into conformity with the moral law. But as a human being, one must also take into consideration the natural end of happiness; hence, this second aspect of the highest good necessarily follows from Kant's concern with a categorical imperative which commands not a holy but a human will. Of course, one cannot will only one's own happiness, nor can one will one's happiness when it is opposed to the moral law. As Silber summarizes:

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 187-190.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 191.

Now a material object of volition that can inform and direct the will in the act of volition is supplied. And yet, remarkably, this material stands under the determination of law because it is a demand of the *law* and not of *inclination* that one must seek the happiness of others...⁴⁷

Because the willing creature under constraints of the categorical imperative is a human being, not a holy being, and because any maxim must be universalizable, the highest good as the collection of all ends of rational but human creatures is the appropriate end to supply the necessary material for the moral will.⁴⁸

4. *Questions of morality are a priori concerned with man as a natural creature, i.e., not as the possessor of a holy will.*

This point should be clear from the above discussion, and is discussed in more detail by Steven G. Smith and R.Z. Friedman.⁴⁹ The categorical imperative, as noted above, can only command if it would not be obeyed naturally, that is, it cannot command a holy will; as Friedman explains,

neither is it correct to suggest that reason in its critical or self-reflective function has before it man as a rational creature 'undiluted' by a natural dimension... We must remind ourselves that in Kant's analysis a... creature subject to the moral law must be both natural and rational, directed by inclination to happiness yet possessed of a disinterested respect for the moral law.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.

⁴⁸ Kant gives us a possible third argument for the highest good as the necessary material of the moral will in the *Metaphysics of Morals* when he writes: "But ethics goes beyond this [concern only with the formal condition of outer freedom] and provides a *matter* (an object of free choice), an end of pure reason that it presents as an end which is also objectively necessary, that is, an end which, as far as men are concerned, it is a duty to have. For since men's sensible inclinations tempt them to ends (the matter of choice) that can be contrary to duty, lawgiving reason can in turn check their influence only by a moral end set up against the ends of inclination, an end that must therefore be given a priori, independently of inclinations," (Ak. 380-1).

⁴⁹ Steven G. Smith, "Worthiness to be Happy and Kant's concept of the Highest Good," *Kant-Studien* 75 (1984): 168-90; and R.Z. Friedman, "The Importance and Function of Kant's Highest Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 325-342.

⁵⁰ Friedman. "Kant's Highest Good." p. 341.

Thus, not only does one again see that some content is necessary for moral willing, but also that morality, since it commands human beings, must say something about happiness *a priori*; as Smith notes, “reason introduces the idea of happiness, it is true, but only because we are naturally constituted to desire natural goods... It [the rule to seek happiness] is conditional on an empirical fact of human existence, albeit an empirical fact known *a priori*.”⁵¹ As human beings, we seek happiness. This is a fact *a priori*. But as human beings, we also have a duty to be moral, indeed, we can only really be free if reason gives the moral law to itself. Propositions of morality must, therefore, say something about both the quest for virtue and happiness. Smith argues:

The merely formal moral law does not hang in the air, enjoining universality of practical judgment in the abstract; it appears to us as a condition of our already-ongoing quest for happiness. Human morality is structured *a priori* by the fact that we are human beings and not angels. Therefore, if we cannot be moral *human beings* -- if the highest good is demonstrably unattainable because its component parts are irreconcilable -- then we cannot be moral at all.⁵²

The moral law must address the question of persons’ quest for happiness. Kant’s answer to this question, of course, is that happiness must be allowed only in proportion to virtue, since there are many things (talents, intelligence, money, etc.) which might either be good or evil depending upon how they are put to use, that is, depending upon the will of the person pursuing these ends. But the important conclusion, then, is that happiness is not somehow added from the outside, some extraneous concept which has no place in thinking about moral issues; happiness is part and parcel with the moral law because the law can only command finite rational creatures. The moral law must say something about happiness, and this is incorporated into the end of the highest good.

⁵¹ Smith, “Worthiness,” p. 171.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 172. Second set of italics added for emphasis.

5. *One cannot observe anyone's worthiness or virtue, and hence cannot reward another in proportion to virtue.*

This point is absolutely essential to the issue of the highest good, though it may be a difficult pill for some proponents of the highest good to swallow. It seems to be very clear that Kant insists one simply cannot observe whether another is willing completely out of a sense of duty, or whether inclination has a part in the motivation for any maxim. It also seems clear that Kant did not think one could be sure of the purity even of one's own willing:

In fact there is absolutely no possibility by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of action that may in other respects conform to duty has rested solely on moral grounds... It is indeed sometimes the case that after the keenest self-examination we can find nothing except the moral ground of duty that could have been strong enough to move us to this or that good action and to such great sacrifice. But there cannot with certainty be at all inferred from this that some secret impulse of self-love, merely appearing as the idea of duty, was not the actual determining cause of the will.⁵³

One cannot know what another is thinking or what sort of maxim they might have in mind when performing some action. One cannot know whether one's own will is pure, or if it has been influenced in some way by incentives. Hence, it seems that it is simply impossible to reward anyone, including oneself, with happiness which would be proportionate to virtue.

Such an impossibility is argued for most clearly by Jeffrie G. Murphy in, "The Highest Good as Content for Kant's Ethical Formalism."⁵⁴ If one interprets the duty to promote the highest good as the duty to reward persons with happiness in proportion to their virtue,⁵⁵ then it seems impossible to

⁵³ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 407.

⁵⁴ Murphy, pp. 102-110.

⁵⁵ I shall argue below, in defense of the highest good, that this is not precisely how we are to interpret such a duty.

promote the highest good, since one cannot know the virtue of another or of oneself;

the good act, occurring as it does in the phenomenal world, would be the only datum which we could use in attempting to determine a man's virtue of moral worth -- a datum which is (since true virtue of disposition occurs noumenally) totally insufficient. Thus we are met with an insurmountable epistemological problem: we can never know if another person is, in fact, virtuous.⁵⁶

All one can observe with regard to others is their actions, but this tells us nothing definitive regarding the maxim which was used to produce such an action. Because moral worth concerns the noumenal realm, one cannot even accurately assess one's own moral worth. How then, as Murphy asks, can it be possible to proportion happiness to worth if one can have no way to observe anyone's disposition? Silber is simply wrong, it appears, in his rather infamous assertion that "in rearing children, serving on juries and grading papers"⁵⁷ we are able to apportion happiness to worthiness, and wrong in thinking that "although this task [of apportionment] is God-like in dimension, it does not totally transcend the powers of citizens and legislators."⁵⁸ Reath is therefore also wrong, in his otherwise outstanding article, to think that "one could construct the idea of a historical state of affairs in which social institutions were arranged to promote happiness in proportion to virtue."⁵⁹ One cannot know a person's virtue, thus one cannot apportion happiness to it.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Murphy, p. 107.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Silber, "Importance of the Highest Good," p. 195.

⁵⁹ Reath, p. 602.

⁶⁰ This is why I think it must be concluded that Beversluis' solution to the problem of the highest good, namely that we can promote it through rewarding legality and not morality, though perhaps appealing, is fundamentally flawed. It seems clear that one may be very far from having a good will, though (as Kant pointed out) one may act completely in accord with Right. See: John Beversluis, "Kant on Moral Striving." *Kant-Studien* 65, no. 1 (1974): 67-77.

One should be careful, however, not to conclude too much from this epistemological problem. Though one cannot know the moral worth of individuals, one can know at least three important things. First, one can know when the action of another is not legal, that is, when it is not in accord with Right. Kant is very clear in the “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right” that one can conclude that certain ends are one’s duty to promote, that certain forms of government are not in conformity with the moral law, and that some actions are in direct violation of the categorical imperative. Though one cannot coerce another to have certain ends, one can coerce them to behave in certain ways. Second, one can improve one’s own moral perfection. Kant is also very clear in his writings, perhaps most clearly in “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue,” that one can identify those aspects of our lives which one can work on to better oneself morally. Granted that one can never know that one is willing only for the sake of duty, but one can know on occasion (perhaps quite often) that one has willed something only because of one’s inclinations to have that object, and one can also know some activities which will help to strengthen one’s moral character (“to be a useful member of the world,” for example, and not lazily idling the days away⁶¹). Third, and perhaps more controversially, one can identify a lack of conditions which help to promote moral virtue in others. Kant is certainly concerned with the natural side of human beings, and maintains over and over again that the human will is something that *can* go astray from the moral law if the lure of inclinations is strong. Though one cannot directly make another more virtuous, there are conditions, poverty for example, which detract from the ease with which the will can will in accord with the moral law. More will be said on this below, but for now one should not preclude the possibility that promotion of the highest good is possible, nor should one conclude more than is necessary from Murphy’s analysis.

⁶¹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 446.

6. *Pure practical reason needs no sensible motivation.*

This is the lesson of the second *Critique*, though many commentators seem not to take this conclusion as seriously as they might when trying to explain why one needs a guarantee of the possibility of the highest good. In the second *Critique* Kant is asking whether or not “pure” reason is also “practical,” that is, whether reason can motivate a person to action or whether reason must be thought to be primarily speculative or merely pragmatic in its functioning. This, of course, leads Kant to what has been called his “Copernican revolution” in ethics, namely that the primary and fundamental sphere of reason must be practice instead of theory. One’s knowledge of the moral law leads to the discovery of freedom, and freedom entails the possibility and, consequently, the necessity of acting in accord with the law.⁶² Indeed, it seems to be Kant’s claim that one can only be truly autonomous if one wills in accord with the categorical imperative.⁶³ Hence, reason is practical, and though one can never have an intuition of autonomous freedom, one does know that reason needs no external cause or motivation to will in accord with the moral law. Granted that Kant does maintain that there can be a subjective side of motivation of the moral law, that the moral law does offer a “moral feeling” of contentment for acting in accord with the moral law,⁶⁴ but this is not a necessary incentive to acting morally.⁶⁵ One must be careful to

⁶² Second *Critique*, Ak. 29-31.

⁶³ Second *Critique*: “Subordinate to reason as the higher faculty of desire is the pathologically determinable faculty of desire, the latter being really and in kind different from the former, so that even the slightest admixture of its impulses impairs the strength and superiority of reason,” (Ak. 25). See also especially: Ak. 28-9 and Ak. 33.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, see especially Ak. 73-77. For more on the nature of “contentment,” see the following chapter.

⁶⁵ In this respect, I think that Packer’s conclusion that the highest good is needed because it provides an end which is necessary to the *motivation* of a person is fundamentally flawed. See: Mark Packer, “The Highest Good in Kant’s Psychology of Motivation,” *Idealistic Studies* 13 (May 1983): 110-19.

take this into consideration when trying to argue for the necessity of the guarantee of the highest good.⁶⁶

7. *Virtue is not its own reward -or- contentment is not happiness.*

This is another point which seems very clear in Kant, but is often forgotten or disregarded by commentators. Kant's discussion of happiness and of the Stoics in the second *Critique* shows that virtue and happiness are "wholly heterogeneous... happiness and morality are two specifically different elements of the highest good and therefore their combination cannot be known analytically (as if a person who... followed virtue found himself *ipso facto* happy in the consciousness of this conduct)."⁶⁷ Kant specifically addresses the proposition that knowledge of a virtuous disposition is, in fact, happiness with his reproach of the Stoics. The Stoics were wrong not only to think that virtue was the same as happiness, and thus not recognizing that virtue and happiness are heterogeneous, but also in thinking that one's natural incentives were bad. Kant's mature position⁶⁸ is to argue that "natural inclinations, *considered in themselves*, are *good*, that is, not a matter of reproach, and it is not only futile to want to extirpate them but to do so would also be harmful and blameworthy."⁶⁹ The highest good not only commands the perfection of one's virtue, but as the perfect good and not just the supreme good,⁷⁰ it commands happiness as well. Happiness is not virtue, nor is happiness considered in itself a bad thing. Happiness is merely the satisfaction of natural, human inclinations, which is the end of every human being as a creature existing in the phenomenal realm. Thus, it seems that

⁶⁶ Victoria S. Wike, I think, is careful to do this even though she argues that it is acceptable to have the concept of an end as part of the determining ground for an action. See: *Kant on Happiness in Ethics*, Chapters 3, 5, and 6.

⁶⁷ *Second Critique*, Ak. 112-3.

⁶⁸ There may be some debate as to whether Kant holds this belief before the *Religion*.

⁶⁹ *Religion*, p. 51.

⁷⁰ For this distinction see: *second Critique*, Ak. 110-11.

any defense of the highest good which equates virtue with happiness, or which claims virtue to be its own reward, simply misconstrues the heterogeneous nature of virtue and happiness as well as the aim of the highest good.⁷¹

8. Reason has a necessary "interest" in the outcome of its willing.

This is an important, but rather neglected, point made particularly in the writings of Silber, Rossi, and Yovel,⁷² but it ought to be rather intuitively clear given Kant's insistence that (the same) reason has both theoretical and practical applications, with the practical concerns taking precedence. Silber, Rossi, and Yovel maintain that reason, as pure but fundamentally practical, has a "world-constructing" character, and that reason has an "interest" in the outcome of its construction. As Rossi explains, "I take 'world-constructing' to be one way of understanding Kant's characterization of reason as a faculty which seeks to establish the totality of the unconditioned."⁷³ Kant writes in the first *Critique*:

Now the transcendental concept of reason is directed always solely towards absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions... Reason concerns itself exclusively with absolute totality in the employment of the concepts of the understanding... Reason accordingly occupies itself solely with the employment of understanding... in order to prescribe to the understanding its direction towards a certain unity of which it has itself no concept, and in such a manner

⁷¹ Thus, I think that both Packer's approach in "The Highest Good in Kant's Psychology of Motivation," and Auxter's conclusions in *Kant's Moral Teleology* are flawed because of this equation of virtue and happiness. See: Thomas Auxter, *Kant's Moral Teleology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982). For more on the exact nature of "happiness," see the following chapter.

⁷² See: John R. Silber, "The Metaphysical Importance of the Highest Good as the Canon of Pure Reason in Kant's Philosophy," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* (Summer 1959): 233-44; Philip Rossi, "Moral Interest and Moral Imagination in Kant," *The Modern Schoolman* 57, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 149-58; Philip Rossi, "Autonomy and Community: The Social Character of Kant's 'Moral Faith'," *The Modern Schoolman* 61 (March 1984): 169-186; Philip Rossi, "Kant's Doctrine of Hope: Reason's Interest and the Things of Faith," *New Scholasticism* 56 (Spring 1982): 228-238; and Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Interests of Reason: From Metaphysics to Moral History," in *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986), 135-148. See also Kwang-Sae Lee, pp. 551 and 559-61.

⁷³ Rossi, "Moral Interest and Moral Imagination." p. 150 n.

as to unite all the acts of the understanding, in respect of every object, into an *absolute* whole.⁷⁴

This world-constructing function of reason might also be called the “architectonic” nature of reason. We have seen this in detail in Section One above, particularly those chapters dealing with the “ideas of reason” which are set to us “as a task.” Reason directs one to find the synthesis, the unity of the unconditioned; indeed, this is why, Kant says, reason often leads itself astray into thinking that it is able to give speculative answers to metaphysical questions about objects of which one can have no experience. But reason not only points to the limits of what we can know, it also insists in pushing toward the totality of the unconditioned, toward the final and ultimate end of reason.

Thus reason has an interest in the outcome of its willing, and this is why Silber maintains that the highest good must be seen as the canon even of pure reason. Reason seeks a unity. Reason is also able to act spontaneously, that is, it can propose its own objects to itself;

reason produces of its own spontaneity ideas which are its own necessary object to which no corresponding objects can be given in sense experience... These ideas, as the necessary objects which reason imposes on itself, are the ends of reason which guide it in practice, that is, in all the reasoning processes. Having projected these ideas as its necessary ends, reason reveals additional spontaneity in its striving toward their realization. This striving of reason takes place in all of its employments.⁷⁵

Here one sees that reason is practical not only in its important moral function, but also practical in that it guides the understanding’s search for theoretical truths and speculative unity as well.

⁷⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 326-7 = B 382-3. Rossi also points to A 409-10 = B 436-7 and A 462-85 = B490-513.

⁷⁵ Silber. “Metaphysical Importance.” p. 234.

We see this especially well in Kant's discussion as to the nature of "philosophy" in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. He urges that we understand philosophy and "wisdom" in a way similar to how the Greeks understood it, namely "instruction in the concept wherein the highest good was to be placed and in the conduct by which it was to be obtained."⁷⁶ Not only this, but Kant also maintains that we should try to "bring it [the highest good] to [the level of] science" and "comprehend under the name of philosophy the love of *science*, and thus of all speculative rational knowledge, *so far as it is serviceable to reason* [in defining] that concept and the practical determining ground."⁷⁷ Given this discussion, as well as Kant's remarks in "On the Primacy of the Pure Practical Reason..." and "Extending Pure Reason in a Practical Respect...", it should be no surprise that even "pure" reason has an interest. For Yovel, Kant is concerned with a "unity of purpose" of which

morality, politics, religion, and their encompassing domain of moral history, are to provide human reason with a legitimate field in which to satisfy the metaphysical interest in its ultimate and totalizing thrust... In consequence, the ultimate objective of metaphysics is no longer Truth or Being as such but the Good, more precisely, the Highest Good, taken as a historical ideal.⁷⁸

Kant maintains that pure reason is the same as practical reason, and these, in turn, are the same as the (autonomous) will. As such, with Kant's "Copernican Revolution," reason must have an interest in the outcome of its willing.

It is reason which "prescribes to the understanding its direction," a movement not only aimed at a synthetic unity of speculative knowledge, but, more fundamentally, a unity of all ends of practical reason: a moral whole. As Silber explains,

⁷⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 108.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 108. Second italics added for emphasis.

⁷⁸ Yovel, "The Interests of Reason."

the realization, however, that reason is not only practical and active in the projection and realization of ideas but also is active in several employments simultaneously, leads to the conclusion that reason must have some supreme or comprehensive end. There must be some general idea in terms of which reason itself can be directed so that all its ideas and interests are capable of realization in a way that satisfies the demands of its total nature... All other aims and ideas of reason are related as means to the end of *morality* which is the highest interest of humanity and of reason itself.⁷⁹

Reason is spontaneous in its ability to propose and pursue objects of its own creation. This spontaneity naturally leads, however, to the question of what sort of end reason should pursue, what sort of world reason should create;

take a man who, honoring the moral law, allows the thought to occur to him (he can scarcely avoid doing so) of what sort of world he would create, under the guidance of practical reason... He would not merely make the very choice which is determined by that moral idea of the highest good... he would also will that [such] a world should by all means come into existence (because the moral law demands that the highest good possible through our agency should be realized)...⁸⁰

Thus, the spontaneity of reason in its many practical applications leads one to the consideration and the necessity of the highest good. Reason is world-constructing in its very nature, and it naturally asks what sort of world it should create. With the knowledge of freedom and the autonomy of the will, this leads to the necessity of willing in accord with the moral law, but it also leads to the necessary projection of a world which would be the appropriate object of the moral law. Reason, because of its interest in the outcome of its willing, shows that it is not enough to think of the highest good; one must try to bring it into existence as well.

Rossi takes such an argument to point to the necessity of thinking the highest good to be a social good. If, he reasons, "Kant's overall account of

⁷⁹ Silber, "Metaphysical Importance," p. 235.

⁸⁰ *Religion*, p. 5.

the functions of human reason... presents human reason as fundamentally ordered to representing and to fashioning that totality of interconnected conditions which constitute the idea of a 'world',"⁸¹ then

the highest good is the representation that reason appropriately makes of the totality and interconnectedness that can be hoped for as the outcome of the exercise of human moral freedom. This outcome is a shared and sharable world of abiding good... This ordering of freedom to mutuality thus can be understood as the fundamental way in which the "world-constructing" character of reason manifests itself in the practical use of reason.⁸²

Because of the world-constructing nature of reason, reason has an interest in the outcome of its willing, an outcome taking place, though not exclusively, in the phenomenal realm. As such, reason's primary task must be to unify its speculative knowledge, but this cannot be seen as the most important task of reason. Rather, reason's primary task is the unification and ordering of all ends, the most important function of which is to subordinate other ends to reason's moral ends. So, in asking what sort of world reason should create, it must be a moral world, but also a world in which one harmonizes with others. In so doing, one must "imagine" how one's willing will affect the world, wondering what sort of structures would develop as a result of maxims willed to be universally accepted as "natural" laws. Kant explains that, regarding the formulation of every maxim, we must "always inquire into what it should be if it were to hold as a universal law of nature,"⁸³ and thus question whether it "could not constitute a permanent natural order."⁸⁴ If it is granted that reason has a world-constructing nature, and that it therefore has an interest in the outcome of its ordering and construction of ends, then it seems

⁸¹ Rossi, "Autonomy and Community," p. 171.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

⁸³ *Second Critique*, Ak. 45.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 44. See also especially: Rossi, "Moral Interest and Moral Imagination," p. 153. Rossi is right to note that his conception of how to formulate and evaluate maxims of the categorical imperative is similar, though not identical, to Onora O'Neil's interpretation in *Acting on Principle*, 1975.

that reason must also be concerned about the concrete, stable, and enduring relations that it would will between itself and others. This, then, is the highest good, a necessarily social good, and a good which one must take pains to promote.

III.

In this section, I want to offer three more points which will be elaborated in the following chapters. I can at least offer a partial defense of them here, while a full defense can be had through the content of the next several chapters.

9. The moral law does not only pertain to ourselves; it commands action in a physical world, one inhabited by other human beings.

This is perhaps still a controversial point in Kant scholarship, but one that I think has been well argued for, especially by Anderson-Gold and Rossi. Friedman, for example, is simply wrong to state that, “the moral law commands not that one make the world better, that is, happier, but that one make oneself better, that is more worthy... The focus of Kant’s ethical theory is the individual and his choosing,”⁸⁵ and that, “morality for Kant is not concerned with the production of beneficial consequences or conditions in the world. Morality is concerned with the individual and his goodness. The dynamics of Kantian morality are played out in the will, not in the world.”⁸⁶ To defend against such an interpretation, the arguments needed are similar to those for points three and four above, namely to show that other persons are of immediate concern in the categorical imperative, and that as ends in themselves, one must also take their specific, phenomenal ends as one’s own.

To posit that morality should, according to Kant, only be concerned with our own will and virtue, seems much too strong a claim, and in flat

⁸⁵ Friedman, “Kant’s Highest Good,” p. 336.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

contradiction with much of Kant's writings. Again, the *prima facie* argument against such a position would be Kant's third formulation of the categorical imperative and his subsequent comments on the kingdom of ends. Indeed, the moral law addresses us as beings who are *already* in relation to other finite rational creatures. This relation to others is present from the very beginning of the moral law. As Kant writes in an often quoted passage from the *Religion*, "the species of rational beings is objectively, in the idea of reason, destined for a social goal, namely, the promotion of the highest good as a social good."⁸⁷ The categorical imperative enjoins one to will universally, to treat others as ends in themselves, and to take their ends as one's own. As Rossi explains:

what the textbook picture fails to capture... is the fact that Kant quite clearly... characterizes such elevation [of man as noumenal] as an introduction into a "realm" or "world", i.e., into a connected and ordered totality of relations to the moral agency of all others who constitute the human moral community. Thus, moral decision... is the precise point of contact with and full participation in the human moral community[,]... placing us in a world constituted by persons in mutual moral relation...: mutual respect and moral interdependence among persons.⁸⁸

The moral law immediately places one in a relationship with others, a relationship of concern and respect, and one which is in the phenomenal as well as the noumenal world.

⁸⁷ *Religion*, p. 89. Many passages of Kant's, especially those in the *Religion*, seem to speak against Friedman's claim that, though the notion of a perfect, moral world is an ideal in a sense, "...this does not mean that the moral world does not exist, that it is merely a goal to be aimed at, a target for our moral activity. It is an already existent world which we discover in the awareness of ourselves as agents subject to the moral law" ("Kant's Highest Good," pp. 329-30). In one respect, certainly it is correct that we are already related to others as a noumenal being in a noumenal realm (another reason it is odd Friedman insists that the moral law is only about willing my own virtue), but it seems mistaken to think that we already have a moral commonwealth, given that the moral law can command us only as finite rational beings and not beings with a holy will.

⁸⁸ Philip Rossi, "Kant as a Christian Philosopher: Hope and the Symbols of Christian Faith." *Philosophy Today* 25 (Spring 1981): 28.

Friedman is right, I think, not to want the highest good to prescribe duties above and beyond those given by the moral law, duties which would simply not be encompassed by the moral law;⁸⁹ but it does not seem that this has to be the case. Victoria S. Wike provides a good discussion of this point,⁹⁰ maintaining among other things that,

Kant's writings argue that the highest good is not foreign to, separate from, or other than the moral law though it is not the same as the moral law. It is the object of the moral law, the necessary, final object, though not the law itself... It is special, it is *sui generis*. While this account is difficult and complex, it does not seem to be contradictory. There is no contradiction if something which is not separate from a thing is yet different from the thing and such is the case with the highest good and the moral law.⁹¹

Perhaps the best way to summarize such a possibility is Kant's statement that "it cannot be a matter of unconcern to morality as to whether or not it forms for itself the concept of a final end of all things (harmony with which, while not multiplying men's duties, yet provides them with a special point of focus for the unification of ends)."⁹² Perhaps the most important function of the highest good is to focus one's practical reason, a reason which formulates maxims for the attainment of certain objects which are to be pursued, focused away from a strictly individual approach to those ends which are social in nature; in other words, to prevent such an interpretation as Friedman's. Though it may be a somewhat controversial claim, I think that one *could* formulate maxims within the bounds of the moral law which have little to do with concern for others; this might be taken as subject merely to the negative command simply not to treat another as a means to one's own end. However,

⁸⁹ And, indeed, in taking such a stance on the formal qualities of the moral will, I think Friedman is stuck with the moral law as simply the command to "will a good will" (c.f., "Kant's Highest Good," p. 330), a violation of point number two above.

⁹⁰ See: Wike, *Kant on Happiness*, Chapter 5, especially pp. 138-48.

⁹¹ Wike, *Kant on Happiness*, p. 146.

⁹² *Religion*, p. 5.

there seems to be a positive command as well that would be missed if the highest good did not “focus” one’s will towards the concerns of others. Perhaps Kant was concerned to avoid an attitude like that of the Stoics who were so concerned only with their own virtue that they sat idly by while Rome went to ruins. More needs to be said regarding such a possibility, but the point should at least be an intuitively acceptable one.⁹³

Also, consider the following: What of the “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right”? Why would Kant include a partial treatise on government in the *Metaphysics of Morals* if one’s concern with morality should only be with one’s virtue? Why, for that matter, should Kant insist that political questions, even questions about what sort of government should be established, are properly considered *moral* questions? And why include the second part of the “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue,” namely the “Duties of Virtue to Others,” specifically discussing our duty towards the happiness of others, in this treatise on morals? And why is the moral law and the highest good mentioned or alluded to not only in works like the second *Critique* and the *Religion* but also in most of Kant’s political writings? The answers to these questions seem to argue in favor of the point that the moral law commands action in the physical world, and against Friedman’s claims that “morality for Kant is not concerned with the production of beneficial consequences or conditions in the world.”

⁹³ In her excellent article, “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth: The Highest Good as a Social Goal,” *International Philosophy Quarterly* 26 (March 1986): 23-32, Sharon Anderson-Gold presents a strong case for a very similar interpretation. Space prevents me from discussing it here, but it is Anderson-Gold’s position that “the concept of the highest good is reformulated by Kant in the *Religion* as a social goal as a consequence of his introduction in this work of the concept of *radical evil*,” and claims that “if virtue is... primarily an orientation toward others, then the duty to promote the ideal of social union is *inseparable* from the goal of individual moral perfection” (p. 24).

10. Though reason is interested in bringing about the highest good, it is ultimately helpless to do so.

This may be a difficult premise to assent to, but I think it is a necessary one, and one that will not stand in the way of our ability to promote the highest good (interpreted in a new, nontraditional manner). I think we must take Kant seriously in his claims that, although it is one's duty to promote the highest good, we do not have control over whether happiness could be proportioned exactly to virtue; indeed, this is why Kant maintains that the establishment of an ethical commonwealth can only have the status of a hope. As Rossi explains, "Kant has placed a limit upon autonomy's role in determining the essential character of human moral personhood. This limit, moreover, is not an accidental one; it has its ground in the character of autonomy as an exercise of reason in its proper human modality: finite reason."⁹⁴ From the first *Critique* ("such a Ruler together with life in such a world, which we must regard as a future world, reason finds itself constrained to assume... since without this postulate the necessary consequence which it itself connects with these laws could not follow"⁹⁵), to the "antinomy" of the second *Critique* ("it is not impossible that the morality of intention should have a necessary relation as cause to happiness as an effect in the sensuous world; but this relation is indirect, mediated by an intelligible Author of nature"⁹⁶), to his *Religion* ("the idea of a highest good in the world for whose possibility we must postulate a higher, moral, most holy and omnipotent Being which alone can unite the two elements of the highest good"⁹⁷), Kant asserts that though one knows that one has freedom, one does not know if happiness will be the result of one's moral willing. Several more

⁹⁴ Philip Rossi, "Moral Autonomy, Divine Transcendence and Human Destiny: Kant's Doctrine of Hope as a Philosophical Foundation for Christian Ethics," *The Thomist* 46 (1982): 446.

⁹⁵ First *Critique*, A 811 / B 839.

⁹⁶ Second *Critique*, Ak. 115.

⁹⁷ *Religion*, p. 4-5.

passages from Kant could be presented here, but as this point has been argued at length by Rossi,⁹⁸ there seems no need to do so here.

There is a further reason to think that this point should be taken seriously. There are a number of suggestions made by Kant that even if every single person resolved to will in accord with the moral law from this point on, the ethical community would not simply come into being at that point. Two propositions are needed to perceive this possibility. The first is Kant's insistence that the perfection of reason, and thereby moral perfection, takes time, in fact, an infinite amount of time. As Kant describes the situation, "reason itself does not operate on instinct, but requires trial, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another. Therefore, each individual man would have to live excessively long if he were to make complete use of all his natural capacities."⁹⁹ It is this fact about reason which leads Kant to postulate the necessity of the belief in immortality;

the utmost that finite practical reason can accomplish is to make sure of the unending progress of its maxims toward this model and of the constancy of the finite rational being in making continuous progress... One can never, in fact, achieve moral perfection, only infinite approximation is possible. This is virtue, and... it can never be perfect.¹⁰⁰

But this should lead one to the consideration that it is not likely, at least from Kant's point of view, that even if everyone in the world made the decision to formulate maxims in accord with the moral law, the ethical community, the perfected kingdom of ends, would thereby come about. Reason takes time to perfect, and although it seems that Kant thinks we have made progress in this respect, "its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped

⁹⁸ See especially: Rossi, "Moral Autonomy," pp. 441-458. See also Anderson-Gold, "Kant's Ethical Commonwealth."

⁹⁹ "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," Ak. 19. See especially also: second *Critique*, Ak. 32-3, 121-4, and *Religion*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 32-33.

wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned.”¹⁰¹ The perfection of reason can only take place by infinite progress and approximation.

The second proposition needed to conceive of the possibility that the ethical community might not come into being even if every individual so willed it comes from Anderson-Gold. She argues that, with Kant’s solution to the problem of radical evil in the third book of the *Religion*, virtue must now fundamentally be seen as an appropriate moral attitude towards others, thereby avoiding the propensity of reason to fall into self-love; “action in accordance with the moral law, good character, is fully compatible with the continued dominance of the principle of self-love. What is at stake is a reorientation of the self, a positive act of identification with others which moves beyond the ordinary social condition.”¹⁰² The perhaps surprising conclusion this leads to, however, is:

The problem of virtue as developed by Kant in the *Religion* is not reducible to the fulfillment of duties of benevolence as characterized by Kant’s examples in the *Groundwork*, that is, of providing material assistance to someone in need... The development of an ethical community goes beyond questions of the redistribution of material possessions. It entails minimally the abandonment of aggressive and competitive attitudes toward others, and maximally the adoption of cooperative and supportive networks.¹⁰³

Among the interesting conclusions which can be drawn from this line of argumentation is that, when combined with the first proposition above about the imperfection of reason, though everyone may decide to try to be virtuous, the necessary systems of “cooperative and supportive networks” may be a long time in coming.¹⁰⁴ The highest good as the greatest possible virtue for

¹⁰¹ Kant, “Idea,” p. 34 / 23.

¹⁰² Anderson-Gold, “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth,” p. 28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ There has been a fair amount of debate in the last few years, this being the 200th anniversary of Kant’s article “Towards Eternal Peace,” about how to understand Kant’s notion of historical progress, especially as it relates to politics. I will discuss this in full below. However, I think that some of the answers to these questions can be found in examining this 10th (and forthcoming 11th)

all human beings, then, will depend upon structures and relationships of intercommunication which simply may not be possible to bring into existence by just deciding to do so; in other words, virtue cannot be forced, especially as it relates to the highest good.

11. Though there are limits to one's ability to promote the highest good, one can improve those structures that make it easier for all to strive to be virtuous.

Given the discussion above, what can the duty to promote the highest good amount to? It cannot, I have argued, be the duty to reward virtue with proportionate happiness; here I am in agreement with Beck and Murphy. Neither, I think, can it be the proportionate rewarding of merely legal acts;¹⁰⁵ this may be a tempting solution, but I think it runs contrary to Kant's discussion in his political writings, especially *The Metaphysics of Morals*, of one who acts within the bounds of legality but does not have a good will. Also, I do not think that the duty can be to try and maximize happiness for all, including oneself, regardless of virtue; while this may be something more under the individual's direct control, Kant clearly thinks that a good like happiness can only be considered a good if it is in accord with the moral law, that is, a conditional good, and happiness ought only to be given in correspondence with worth. Nor do I think that the pursuit of the highest good is the only way to unite what would otherwise be simply a series of "immediate moral actions," the only way to have a "moral life" as Terry F. Godlove, Jr.

point in more detail. For example, when Kant writes that, "if we now inquire as to the means by which this eternal progress towards betterment can be maintained and perhaps even sped up, one soon sees that this immeasurably distant result depends not so much on what *we* do (e.g. on the education we give the world's children), nor on what method we adopt so as to bring it about; instead, it depends on what *human nature does in and with us so as to compel us onto a path that we ourselves would not readily follow*. Only from nature, or rather only from *providence...* can we anticipate a result that will affect the whole..." ("Theory and Practice," p. 310), and when Kant insists, in many places in his writings, that *culture* is to play such an important role in the progression of the species. I think he must have something in mind like this 10th point, namely that the highest good and even our own moral perfection is not as much up to us as we would perhaps be inclined to think.

¹⁰⁵ See Beversluis. "Kant on Moral Striving." for this suggestion.

argues.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, I think Anderson-Gold's account of this duty to promote the highest good, though correct in sum and substance, does not take into account the many concrete acts that Kant gives as examples for aiding in the perfection of virtue. Given all the points above, what conclusion ought to be drawn?

What one's duty must be, finally, is not only to strive to improve one's own virtue, but is also the establishment of the necessary structures for interaction, world peace, and controlled competition ("antagonism") which will allow everyone to pursue the perfection of their own virtue; in other words, work for virtue and hope for happiness.¹⁰⁷ As a starting point for this argument, it should be kept in mind that Kant was indeed concerned with the many influences upon the will, coming both from natural inclinations for empirical objects and from the social and economic situations in which one was immersed.¹⁰⁸ It cannot be said that Kant was naive about the difficulties involved in the pursuit of the moral will or involved in setting up more enlightened systems of government. Kant's main concern, especially in his political writings, is that there are certain social and economic structures which inhibit the increasing perfection of virtue. War would be the foremost example of such an impediment:

But we are a long way from being able to regard ourselves as *moral*. For the idea of morality belongs to culture... So long, however, as nations expend all their energies on their vain and violent designs, thus continuously inhibiting their citizens' plodding efforts to shape internally their way of thinking, even withholding all support for it, no progress of this sort is to be expected, because

¹⁰⁶ Terry F. Godlove, Jr., "Moral Actions, Moral Lives: Kant on Intending the Highest Good," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (1987): 49-63. I think that Godlove's distinction between the kind of life an atheist can live versus the kind of "moral life" which only the religious person can live ultimately falls flat, particularly given the points above, Kant's discussion of "character" in the *Religion*, and a conception of the highest good which seems to have little to do with the unity of one's actions.

¹⁰⁷ For Kant, of course, this happiness would have to be "proportionate." But I think there are problems with this picture; see the following chapter.

¹⁰⁸ It is for this reason that I am in some, though perhaps only slight, disagreement with Anderson-Gold's account.

the formation of citizens requires a long process of preparation... The human race will likely remain in this state until... it has worked itself out of this chaotic state of national relations.¹⁰⁹

One's ability to pursue moral perfection does depend on one's cultural environment. In a state of war, human beings cannot continue the difficult task of pursuing their moral perfection without severe hindrances.

In order to properly defend this view that one's ability to will morally can be effected by external circumstances, it is necessary to turn our attention to the "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue" in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In this work, Kant argues that we do indeed have virtuous duties toward others, the duties of "love" and "respect." The duty of respect as "the maxim that limits our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person... [is] actually only negative (not to exalt oneself above others)..."¹¹⁰ But the duty of love is positive, particularly the duty of "beneficence," and is thus of particular interest to us here.

Let us begin by asking how this duty of love comes about. Interestingly, Kant argues that it comes about because we *ourselves* often find ourselves in positions of need:

For every man who finds himself in need wishes that he might be helped by other men. But if he should make known his maxim of not wanting to give assistance in turn to others in their need... then everyone would likewise refuse him assistance when he was in need... Thus the selfish maxim conflicts with itself when it is made a universal law...¹¹¹

Thus, because I might find myself in need, and would therefore want someone to assist me, I must make it a maxim that I should help others in need, lest my maxim contradict itself. Put succinctly, "I want every other person to

¹⁰⁹ Kant, "Idea," Ak. 26.

¹¹⁰ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 449.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 453

have benevolence... for me; I should therefore be benevolent to every other person.”¹¹²

Now, because what I desire is “happiness,” “welfare,” or “well-being,” we might be tempted to interpret Kant in the following way. Because I want to be happy, this is allowable only under two conditions: 1) its willing does not involve a maxim which is contrary to the moral law, 2) I count myself as part of humankind as a whole, and am allowed to be benevolent or beneficent to myself because I am benevolent or beneficent to everyone.¹¹³ Thus, what Kant is concerned with, according to this interpretation, is an interest in many different sorts of happiness which we all desire as creatures of nature.

However, while this interpretation may be allowable, I do not think this is what Kant has in mind here in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. It seems that Kant is more concerned here with cases where anyone (myself included) is in *need* of happiness, i.e., not a case where one desires, say, a (permissible) luxury item, but rather a case where one has a great need of an object, most likely food, shelter, and the like. Two factors indicate that this is, in fact, what Kant has in mind.

The first indication of Kant’s true concern is that in the few places where he actually discusses the duties of “beneficence” Kant always speaks of one being in “need,” and not one simply desiring happiness. In the “Introduction,” Kant states that the duty of beneficence concerns our need “...to obtain help from them [“others”] in case of need.”¹¹⁴ In the first paragraph where Kant discusses the “Duties to Other People Considered Simply as Men,” he notes that “we acknowledge ourselves obligated to be beneficent to a poor man.”¹¹⁵ Later, in section 29, he mentions the “duty that everyone

¹¹² Ibid., Ak. 451.

¹¹³ Though, of course, “one person may be closer to me than another, and I am the one closest to myself as far as benevolence is concerned,” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 451).

¹¹⁴ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 393.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Ak. 448.

who has the means show beneficence to those who are needy.”¹¹⁶ In section 30 he talks about one being “in need” and regarding “fellow men... as needy rational beings.”¹¹⁷ Finally, in section 31 he is concerned with the “rich man” assisting “the needy,” a situation which, Kant claims, “is for the most part a result of the patronage of various men owing to the injustice of government, which introduces an inequality of wealth that makes beneficence necessary.”¹¹⁸ Now, presumably Kant could have had in mind both helping those in dire straits as well as merely helping others to achieve permissible ends of pleasure and happiness; but he mentions only the former, and reserves all talk of the latter for his discussion of “(purely moral) friendship.”¹¹⁹

The second indication comes from a close examination of the concept of “avarice.” To begin with, let us examine what Kant’s takes avarice to be. Considered as a duty to oneself, it is “one’s restricting his own enjoyment of the means of living well to a point below the measure of his true need [and thus] conflicts with his duty to himself.”¹²⁰ Kant also speaks of “possessing the means to all kinds of ends, but with the proviso of not wanting to use any of them for oneself and so of robbing oneself of the agreeable enjoyment of life; such a thing is... directly opposed to one’s duty to himself.”¹²¹

While we might be inclined to interpret these statements as indicating that Kant is concerned with the mere enjoyment of life, when we examine exactly why avarice is opposed to our duty to ourselves, we see this is not

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Ak. 452.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Ak. 453.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Ak. 453-4.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Ak. 469-474. There may be a further indication in the fact that Kant not only maintains that the duty of love “at the same time obligate[s]” the recipient, but that “this kindness also... humiliates him,” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 448). This is not definitive, however, because “*this*” kindness may be a specific type of beneficence. On the other hand, because beneficence *always* obligates the recipient, this lends itself to thinking about cases of real need.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Ak. 432.

¹²¹ Ibid., Ak. 432-3.

true. Why is this “miserly avarice,” “stinginess,” and “minute exactness in spending” contrary to duty? Kant replies that:

Miserliness is not mere misunderstood thrift but is the slavish resignation of oneself to the goods of fortune, rather than the mastering of them... [M]iserliness is opposed to the principle of being independent of everything else except the moral law, and it is, accordingly, a fraud which the subject commits against himself.¹²²

It seems that the reason that avarice is opposed to virtue is that in being miserly, one has violated the moral principle by subordinating moral concerns to empirical ones, resigning oneself to natural inclinations. This mirrors another passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals*:

Adversity, pain, and want are great temptations to transgress one's duty... It is not directly a duty to seek affluence for itself; but indirectly it may very well be a duty, namely, in order to guard against poverty, which is a great temptation to vice. But then it is not my happiness, but the preservation of the integrity of my morality, that is my end and at the same time my duty.¹²³

Here, Kant is concerned to reject the possibility that seeking my own happiness could be a duty. Kant says that this cannot be a duty regarding happiness *per se*, but can be a duty because some minimal level of happiness is necessary to prevent undue influence from the sensuous side of human existence. Though it is always one's duty to act in accord with the categorical imperative, there are definite external influences which may make it harder for one to do so.

Now, so far, this is a duty to oneself. What does this have to do with our duty toward others? It concerns others because, in formulating the maxims of the will, I must consider myself as part of humanity. What is avarice? It is a situation in which I have the means (which I do not utilize) to

¹²² Ibid., Ak. 434.

¹²³ Ibid., Ak. 388.

provide myself happiness. But, considered from a universal point of view, what is this but a case where one person (myself as moral being) has a duty to another person (myself as human being) to be beneficent, to provide another with happiness? It is the same situation, though considered from different points of view. Therefore, if I have a duty to provide myself with happiness, when I consider humankind in general (though “one person [i.e., myself] may be closer to me than another”¹²⁴), I have a duty to try to promote the happiness of others as well. Indeed, it is precisely because I want happiness in the first place, precisely because I am concerned with my own needs, that I must consider the happiness of others. Therefore, though Kant maintains that “adversity, pain, and want are great temptations to transgress one’s duty” only in relation to a duty one has to oneself, surely this is applicable to our duty of beneficence toward others.

Thus I think that we may conclude that one’s duties of love, particularly beneficence, and one’s duties of respect are all aimed at curtailing possible effects which might negatively influence the pursuit of moral perfection. Certainly it is permissible to further the specific ends of others, and thus promote their happiness on several different (morally permissible) levels, when Kant talks in the *Metaphysics of Morals* about the *duties* we have towards others, he seems always concerned with the other’s ability to will morally. Regarding love, not only beneficence but also gratitude and sympathy are all duties not only because gratitude is “a duty whose violation... can destroy the moral incentive for beneficence in its very principle”¹²⁵ and because “malice, which is directly contrary to sympathy... would destroy the general good of the world...”¹²⁶ In addition, the “negative” duties of respect which we “owe” to others,¹²⁷ the opposite of which are “pride,” “calumny,” and

¹²⁴ Ibid., Ak. 451.

¹²⁵ Ibid., Ak. 455.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Ak. 459-60.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Ak. 488.

“mockery,” are necessary because without them, in the extreme case, “every given scandal weakens this respect [the respect “owed humanity in general”] and makes it incredible; yet upon this respect depends the impulse to what is morally good.”¹²⁸ Thus, the entire discussion and tone involved in Kant’s discussion of our duties toward others indicates that Kant’s concern here is with those structures which are impediments to the ability of others to work on their virtue. Thus, bringing us back to our original topic, I think this gives us additional reasons why the promotion of the highest good ought to be concerned with the duty to promote those institutions and organizations which help others to become independent from “the goods of fortune.”

Moving on from the *Metaphysics of Morals*, given the specific premises that reason takes time to perfect, that the individual is ultimately unable to ensure the outcome of his/her moral willing, and that there are external, structural influences upon one’s propensity for moral willing, it seems our duty to pursue the highest good must be not only to work on our own virtue, but importantly to try to remove as many of those impediments to the pursuit of others’ virtue as possible. Certainly Kant is right to insist that the actual improvement of the virtue of another cannot be one’s duty. But he also insists that impediments to such improvements, poverty and war for example, do exist and can be lessened. In addition, if Anderson-Gold and Rossi are correct in their analysis, then one’s own moral perfection simply cannot take place without increased perfection in others; virtue, they and I have argued, is not up to the individual.

There is also the suggestion in Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History” that one simply could not improve one’s talents, those important for the increasing perfection of reason and subsequent morality, if one did not exist in society. The human situation is described as one of “unsocial sociability,”

¹²⁸ Ibid., Ak. 466.

and it is only such antagonism which will aid in the development of one's talents and, subsequently, one's reason:

In this way,... all man's talents are gradually developed, his taste is cultured, and through progressive enlightenment he begins to establish a way of thinking that can in time transform the crude natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles and thus transform a *pathologically* enforced agreement into a society and, finally, into a *moral* whole. Without those characteristics of unsociability... man would live as a Arcadian shepherd, in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love, and all talents would lie eternally dormant in their seed;...¹²⁹

Thus, one must promote the type of society, namely one where there is interaction but not war between all persons of the world, in which one is able to interact and be antagonistic without infringing on other's rights, and a world increasingly free from poverty, sickness, war, and other detriments to the cultivation of virtue for all persons.

In one respect, this may be a more "political" view of Kant's moral philosophy than is usually taken. In promoting the highest good, one main target of *moral* concern must be the *social* structures which influence us all; war must be eliminated, poverty abolished, and structures of true care and commitment established. In another respect, this is also a more "religious" view of Kant's philosophy. Human beings are ultimately unable to bring about the highest good, even if every single person immediately decided to try to will in accord with the moral law:

Therefore, we shall seek to establish the grounds of that possibility primarily with respect to what is immediately in our power, and secondarily in that which is beyond our power but which reason holds out to us as the supplement to our impotence to [realize] the possibility of the highest good, which is necessary according to practical principles.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Kant, "Idea," Ak. 21.

¹³⁰ Second *Critique*, Ak. 119.

The postulates of practical reason, particularly God and immortality, play a large role in this picture of Kant's system, for they are sorely needed to guarantee the outcome of our moral striving. It should now be clear, however, why such postulates are necessary, and why the highest good provides such an important focus to our moral endeavors.

Chapter Two

Problems with the Highest Good: Worthiness and Conceivability

I.

In the last chapter I argued that Kant's notion of the highest good was compatible with the rest of his writings, and that it was a concept which could be defended from within the standpoint of Kant's philosophical system. Essentially I argued that the concept of the highest good is naturally and necessarily generated from the fact that the moral law as a categorical imperative *commands*. As such, it already deals with human beings as creatures with needs and a desire for happiness. And since the question of morality would not even arise in the first place if there existed only a single individual in complete isolation, the moral law must command individuals within a community, i.e., a kingdom of ends. Hence, the concept of the highest good flows naturally from these two facts, since the moral law must say something about "objects" of willing, both for myself and for others, particularly since Kant believes we cannot simply will to have a good will. I tried to argue, then, that we have a duty to promote the highest good, though not achieve it, but that this duty cannot be translated into humans rewarding the virtue of others through happiness or into virtue itself being happiness. We shall have to wait a few chapters to see exactly what this duty entails, though I tried to hint in the last chapter that it is essentially the command to improve my own morality while promoting those structures which allow for others, if they so will, to improve their own morality.

In this chapter I want to discuss two primary objections to Kant's formulation of the highest good, both of which I take to be valid. The first

concerns Kant's assertion that virtue (morality) is "worthiness to be happy."¹ This is a central tenet which operates in the background of all discussions of the highest good, and needs to be examined. Not only this, but Kant also says that worthiness entails "happiness in *exact proportion* to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy)..."² Ultimately, I believe that this equation ought to be rejected, at least with any understanding of "worthiness" as desert. I think Kant is correct to assert that we should not deny ourselves happiness if we have a good will, but this is not the same as thinking that we deserve such happiness. My conclusion goes against Kant's explicit assertion of this equation. In this respect, I am arguing directly against Kant's stated position. However, I think this is consistent with the rest of Kant's writings. I will deal with these considerations in the first part of this chapter.

Second, and more problematic, however, is what I term the "conceivability" problem of the highest good. This problem pertains mainly to an "otherworldly" highest good, but I think is problematic for both versions. I argue that, as Kant has spelled it out, the highest good is simply inconceivable, and thus cannot legitimately be the object of our willing. These inconceivability problems have to do with the nature of happiness as Kant has defined it, particularly as it relates to humans as intelligible. Again, then, I am arguing directly against Kant's stated position, though I think a partial reconstruction is possible, one which I will present. I will deal with these considerations in the third part.

II.

One of the most significant problems with the highest good is Kant's rather blanket assertion that morality can be interpreted as "worthiness to

¹ "That virtue (*as the worthiness to be happy*) is the supreme condition of whatever appears to us to be desirable... [has] been proved in the Analytic." *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 110. Italics added for emphasis.

² *Ibid.*, Ak. 110. Italics added for emphasis.

be happy.” How is this to be taken, and how is it grounded? If Kant intends this to be a fact which is analytic *a priori*, this simply seems impossible. Certainly an action may be worthy, but this is because it has moral worth, and such worth seems to have nothing to do with happiness. Kant commentators are right to think that there is no reason that this equation can be made analytically. But is this in itself a problem for Kant? Does Kant actually think that this can be known analytically *a priori*?

Given that the primary discussion of the wedding of happiness and morality occurs only after the “Analytic” of the second *Critique*, and given that Kant explicitly writes that “happiness and morality are two specifically different elements of the highest good and therefore their combination cannot be known analytically,”³ it seems clear that Kant did not expect the two components to be linked analytically; “since [“this combination”] cannot be analytic, as has been shown, it must be thought synthetically...”⁴ But, unfortunately it is not clear just *why* the two are linked, and Kant never gives us an explicit answer. Ultimately, I do not believe that Kant can provide a coherent argument as to why virtue and happiness are linked or why morality implies worthiness.

A.

I have found only one commentator who addresses this question directly, and this is Steven G. Smith in his article “Worthiness to be Happy and Kant’s Concept of the Highest Good.”⁵ Smith indicates that Kant approaches the worthiness equation from two standpoints, that of happiness and morality. From the standpoint of happiness, “the human quest for happiness, which is constitutive of human nature, is mocked if morality bars the door to

³ Ibid., Ak. 112.

⁴ Ibid., Ak. 113.

⁵ Steven G. Smith. “Worthiness to be Happy and Kant’s Concept of the Highest Good.” *Kant-Studien* 75 (1984): 168-190.

happiness,”⁶ and from morality, “human efforts in behalf of the moral law are mocked, if virtue is not at least ideally proportioned to happiness.”⁷ In other words, Smith asserts that there are two directions from which to defend a necessary link between morality and happiness. Let us take Smith’s discussion from the standpoint of happiness first.

Smith argues that there are two reasons for such a link stemming from the needs of happiness. The first he calls “the problem of motivation,” which stems from Kant’s discussion in the “Canon of Pure Reason” of the first *Critique* that the ideas of morality could be objects of approval “but not springs of purpose and action.”⁸ Now Smith rightly notes that this need is eliminated by Kant himself with the claim in the second *Critique* that the moral law can itself motivate. However, Smith also claims that “a problem remains concerning man’s susceptibility to moral motivation, which is only solved by the possibility of the highest good.”⁹ Smith says little about this, but perhaps he is alluding to Kant’s many statements that we should believe in moral progress so as not to be overly discontent with life. But this does not show us why the worthiness equation should exist. If there is an argument here, it is only that an individual ought not to become too disillusioned by hardship.

Smith’s second reason for the link is “the problem of the unity of reason.”¹⁰ Smith explains that this is “the issue of personal sanity itself. The split between phenomenal and noumenal humanity, which produces the ‘natural dialectic’ [*Grundlegung*, Ak. 405]... is felt by Kant to be intolerable.”¹¹ In other words, individuals as rational creatures have two interests,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 841.

⁹ “Worthiness,” p. 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

oftentimes in opposition to one another, and there is a need of reason to find some way of ordering these disparate interests. As Smith explains, apart from the harmonizing concept of the highest good, which provides an order for these two concepts, “the interests of reason remain merely heterogeneous, and reason’s very nature, which is to systematize is violated.”¹²

I think Smith is on to something here, but I think that his argument is not nearly complete. He brings up Kant’s concept in the *Critique of Judgment* of the “final purpose,” and alludes to the fact that the highest good is necessary to secure this final purpose. But we are still lacking an argument as to why this is so, and why it should be that “morality has its own interest in happiness, and therefore its own interest in participating in the mediating solution of the concept of the highest good.”¹³ This is the very question at issue. I also think that Smith is approaching *this* particular argument from the wrong side, namely as a need of happiness. He claims that “it seems to be the interest in happiness, and not morality, that is urging [this] reconciliation,”¹⁴ and this does not quite seem to be true, for it appears that it is reason and its “interest” in systematization which urges such reconciliation. We still do not seem to have a justification for the equation which necessarily links morality with (proportionate) happiness.¹⁵

The only real argument to be found in Smith’s essay for morality’s (positive) interest in happiness, and thus for the “worthiness” equation, is

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 176-7. This is similar to Silber’s point about the “interest” of reason.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 177. I shall try to offer my own argument in the next chapter. However, given that Smith seems to reject the necessity of a moral author of the world (God), his failure to embrace an argument from moral teleology may be intentional.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ It is not clear how much Smith is interested to prove from his discussion of the two standpoints addressing the highest good. On the one hand, he does seem to think that we can deduce something about the nature of this “worthiness” link from the standpoint of morality’s interest in happiness (though I fail to find any conclusive arguments for this). On the other hand, it does not seem that Smith really thinks we can address such a question until he comes to the *next* section of his paper, for he writes that “we have not yet seen... why there should be a ratio between virtue and happiness, or why the latter should issue from the former.” (p. 183-4).

Smith's simple assertion that a worthy act is not merely worthy but "*praiseworthy*."¹⁶ Smith's point comes down to the following: we are involved with others in a community, and when someone (else) acts morally, we naturally feel the need to respond in some way;

his role in this case is not to act immediately on the maxim that has been exhibited by his virtuous neighbor, but rather to use the only timely means available to him of expressing his assent to the maxim: he must in some sense repeat the other's adoption of it, ratify it, consummate the universalizing of the maxim that the other willed, if he willed morally -- "reward" it by praise.¹⁷

While Smith seems right to take into account that the individual is already directly involved with others if the question of morality is to arise, from where does he draw the conclusion that we have a need to respond externally to any or all morally worthy actions? He may be right to assert that when we happen to witness a morally worthy act, we will feel a respect for the moral law. But why should there be any need to *externalize* such a feeling of respect. Smith states that

the sense of this moral approval is connected with universalization. He who approves, will[s] that everyone should act on the maxim adopted by the one of whom he approves. By so willing, he acknowledges that he too should adopt the maxim to govern his own behavior...¹⁸

This seems reasonable enough, but how then do we get to the fact that such an acknowledgment must be externalized, and that this should also take the form of a "reward"? There seems little justification for this, particularly from any of Kant's writings.

There are two additional problems with such a defense of the highest good. The first is the problem, stated in the last chapter, that we *cannot*

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

know when an action has been willed from duty alone. We cannot know this even for our own willing, let alone for someone else's. So, are we to reward those actions which *seem* most moral? Or only those which are merely legal? Neither of these seem to be legitimate possibilities. Smith's discussion of knights and dragons is not particularly helpful. The second problem is a logistical one, even granting that the first problem could be solved. *How* could we praise or reward every observed action that was moral, especially if such reward had to be the distribution of *happiness*? To put it simply, it seems impossible to envision how we would be able to continually reward all such actions for every single person we observe, and how we could possibly produce the requisite happiness in others. Yet Smith seems to indicate that there must be a *positive* reward, not merely the refraining from doing something bad to the virtuous person.

Even if we granted all of this, Smith's further defense of the need for the highest good seems misguided as well, if Smith even intends for it to be a defense. Now, because Smith has defended the "worthiness" equation from the standpoint of the community and the need for any observer of a moral action to "praise" or "reward" that action, Smith argues that this in no way entails the need for a God. Smith writes that God is only expected to reward moral actions if there *is* a God, for in this case God would be an observer as well. It is an "object of hope, an expected reciprocating gesture, only on the supposition that God is a member of the moral community,"¹⁹ and thus "purposelessness is morally offensive only if God is taken to be the author of it."²⁰ Smith argues that we can convince the atheist of God's existence "only if, presupposing the availability of immortal bliss, we wish to control the dispensation thereof with moral considerations."²¹ Of course, this could never

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189. Given his views, Smith probably should have written: "...morally offensive only if God is taken to be the *moral* author of it."

²¹ *Ibid.*

convince an atheist of God's existence, because, as Smith has already indicated, only if the author of the world is a *moral* being, and thus is already involved in the community of moral agents, is there any duty to "praise" or "reward" happiness, here or in the afterlife.

Now this view of the highest good and God is not inconsistent, but it seems to be extremely un-Kantian. One reason for this I noted above, namely that there does not seem to be anything in Kant's writings which indicates the necessity of externally praising or rewarding the moral actions of others; indeed, this seems not only not likely, but impossible. But in addition, if virtue or morality really is worthiness to be happy, then I think Smith has not considered just how serious the consequences of this equation are, or at least how serious Kant takes them to be. If Smith really takes the worthiness equation to be true, then the real problem of the world seems to be this: nature seems wholly unconcerned with the outcome of worthy actions. A person who performs an action strictly from duty may or may not gain happiness. This may be because the consequences of this action may go completely awry, for example the money we give to a poor woman may be stolen before she can buy food, or because the action goes directly against what would make us happy, for instance returning someone else's money when we are very poor. The problem is that nature is seemingly uncooperative with the outcome of moral willing. And this problem does not seem to be solved by simple "praise." While praise might be a nice confirmation that we have done our duty, it is not likely to solve these types of problems, and proportionality seems utterly impossible. What kind of highest good could Smith's highest good be? Kant's highest good thus requires God, for only God can create the conditions necessary for the reality of the "worthiness" equation. Thus Smith has taken seriously neither the requirements and consequences of this equation nor the fact that Kant's highest good should have a real chance of convincing the atheist at least of the necessity of postulating God's existence.

B.

Smith's interpretation of the "worthiness" equation seems unsatisfactory, and since it is the only one available, I must try to propose my own. I take it to be impossible that the equation can be proven analytically *a priori*. But can it be defended as a synthetic *a priori* proposition? I do not think that it can, even if we take it to be a conclusion of Kant's, instead of a premise, as Kant seems to use it. In order to argue against this equation, let me give what I take to be the strongest possible argument that one could make in favor of this equation, and then I will show why it is unsatisfactory.

The real problem seems to be how to ground the link between morality and happiness, and what I want to argue is that the link between these two disparate ingredients might be grounded in the nature of human beings; the two elements are necessarily linked only because we find them both existing as needs for human beings. In essence, perhaps Kant considers the equation necessary because the lower faculty of desire is a desire for the ends of happiness (pleasure), while the higher faculty of desire is a "desire" for the ends of morality, but both are concerned with bringing about an object in accordance with laws. Both faculties are, in fact, one. Recall that "the *faculty of desire* is the faculty such a being has of causing, through its ideas, the reality of the objects of these ideas,"²² and that "the capacity to set oneself an end -- any end whatsoever -- is what characterizes humanity..."²³ But the will as the "faculty either of bringing forth objects corresponding to conceptions or of determining itself, i.e., its causality to effect such objects..."²⁴ is the same as desire and both are equated with practical reason. And the practical nature of reason is only one aspect of pure reason, so that the same reason is

²² *Second Critique*, Ak. 9 n.

²³ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Gregor trans., Ak. 392.

²⁴ *Second Critique*, Ak. 15.

both speculative and practical. The upshot of all this is that pure reason, as that which provides laws and synthesis, must necessarily provide a synthesis for all possible ends of the will.

Hence, reason is naturally and necessarily concerned with the ordering of ends which are possible objects of willing. So, what ends should be willed? Of course, Kant concludes that “there is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a *good will*,”²⁵ and this leads us to the categorical imperative. But what of the ends of happiness? Reason must say something about them, since they are objects of desire for every human being: “certainly our weal and woe are very important in the estimation of our practical reason.”²⁶ Reason must solve the “natural dialectic” between the demands of morality and the “powerful counterweight” of the inclinations of happiness.²⁷ Kant concludes that pleasures, while sometimes good “can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will... is not good.”²⁸ On the other hand, there is no reason that happiness need be thought of as bad or evil in itself: “the ground of... evil... cannot be placed, as is so commonly done, in man’s *sensuous nature* and the natural inclinations arising therefrom.”²⁹ There is nothing wrong with the desire for happiness, as long as it does not interfere with the dictates of the moral law, and as long as it is had by one with a good will. Hence, because a synthesis is necessary, Kant argues that the only one of which reason could conceive is that “a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of being even worthy of happiness,”³⁰ in

²⁵ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 393.

²⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 61.

²⁷ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 405.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 393.

²⁹ *Religion*, Ak. 30.

³⁰ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 393.

other words, that a good will is the “supreme”³¹ good, and “happiness, though something always pleasant to him who possesses it, is not of itself absolutely good in every respect but always presupposes conduct in accordance with the moral law as its condition.”³²

C

While this seems to be the strongest claim for the “worthiness” equation, I think that it is ultimately unsatisfactory. The real problem is that Kant begins with the premise that both virtue and happiness are linked in the concept of the highest good, and then sets about to discover the nature of this link. Then he investigates the nature of this link, concluding that virtue must finally be the condition for happiness,³³ and thus the resulting “worthiness” equation, with subsequent “proportionality” clause. Presumably Kant concludes that happiness should be rewarded “proportionally” precisely because virtue is the *cause* of happiness. But the original premise of the necessary link seems tenuous, and the conclusion therefore circular. If Kant cannot give us a reason why the two are necessarily linked in the concept of the highest good in the first place, then there seems to be no legitimate way to conclude that (because they are necessarily linked) they must be in a relationship of ground and consequence, and thus virtue must be worthiness to be happy. As I stated above, the only link between these two concepts seems to be that they are linked as universal ends of human beings. But this link does not seem to be strong enough to support conclusions which Kant wishes to draw.

To begin with, the only link that seems to exist between the two heterogeneous elements is that they both happen to be objects of desire for human beings. But this seems much too contingent to be the grounds for the

³¹ *Second Critique*, Ak. 110.

³² *Ibid.*, Ak. 111.

³³ *Ibid.*

conclusion that virtue is worthiness to be happy. Particularly, what is missing is an argument to the effect that humans have a *right* to happiness. Certainly we can agree with Kant that virtue itself is not happiness, that happiness is not good in itself, and that the ends of happiness ought to be synthesized by reason along with its other (moral) ends. But unless humans have a right to happiness, we are left only with the conclusion that if there is to be *any* happiness, it should only be had when it is permissible; happiness is not evil, but it is not good in all circumstances, thus it is only permissible to pursue it. But this is far from saying that humans have a right to happiness, and far from a conclusion that virtue is worthiness to be happy.

The problem seems to lie in Kant's justification of the link, which, as far as I can see, really consists of only two points: first, that practical reason is certainly concerned with our weal and woe,³⁴ and second, that "to be in need of happiness and also worthy of it and yet not to partake of it could not be in accordance with the complete volition of an omnipotent rational being, if we assume such only for the sake of the argument."³⁵ Assuming God, then, what Kant is indicating is that there is no reason why a person with a good will should deprive him/herself of happiness. But this is only an argument for permissibility, for in this case, the end of happiness is not contrary to duty. If a person wills in accord with the moral law, then Kant seems right to insist that there is no reason why such a virtuous person should not partake in happiness. But to insist that a virtuous person is somehow *entitled* to happiness, that somehow they are *deserving* of happiness requires an argument which is not given. Again, there is no justification for why virtue and happiness are necessarily linked. As Theodore M. Greene summarizes Kant's problem:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 110.

In order to secure human freedom he has analyzed man into two irreconcilable natures; the one abstractly rational and noumenal, the other phenomenal and purely sentient. The former is completely severed from the empirical world and all empirical motives, desire and impulses, and... [t]he latter is empty of all moral reasonableness and is concerned solely with irrational sensuous satisfaction.³⁶

While Greene's statement and position are stronger than necessary for our current argument, it does indicate a problem within Kant's philosophy with which we are here concerned. In short, in order to free humans from determinate natural causes, Kant has posited a will that can be (ultimately) free from the inclinations of lower desire. That being said, Kant must tell us where the (necessary) link between virtue and happiness reappears, and this must be more than the merely contingent link of two disparate ends of practical reason.

This entails an additional problem. Kant seems justified in stating that humans do indeed need *some* happiness, but why *proportionate* happiness? We should agree with Kant that there exist external circumstances and states of affairs in which a person would be under great strains to act morally (though it would still be a duty), conditions such as extreme poverty or war; "to secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for discontent with one's condition under many pressing cares and amid unsatisfied wants might easily become a great temptation to transgress one's future duties."³⁷ Hence, it seems as though there is in some sense a "right" to this minimal happiness, a need for happiness from the stance of morality, a need to be free from poverty and war so that one will not be strongly tempted to violate the moral law. But is there a need for more happiness than this? Is there a need for a more virtuous person to receive more happiness, and only

³⁶ Theodore M. Greene, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's *Religion*," "Introduction" to *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), lxii.

³⁷ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 399.

in exact proportion? Again, Kant seems warranted in maintaining that happiness is not to be avoided by the morally good person, but why should that person be deserving of a particular proportion?

The only additional argument which Kant seems to offer for the equation is another blanket statement that persons without a good will should not be happy. Now, we may indeed be right to agree with the quotation (above) that some pleasures can be “extremely bad and harmful if the will... is not good.” But this is an argument as to the *effects* of a person with a bad will, for instance that “the coolness of a villain makes him... much more dangerous...”³⁸ Here we are concerned with actions which might hurt others, cause war, or generally impede the progress of others’ moral development, transgressing not only the moral law but probably the legal code as well. But this is not an argument that, for instance, a law-abiding person ought not to be happy, though such a person may not have a good will. The only such justification is Kant’s mere assertion that “the sight of a being who is not graced by any touch of a pure and good will but who yet enjoys an uninterrupted prosperity can never delight a rational and impartial spectator,”³⁹ and this “not merely in the partial eyes of a person who makes himself his end but even in the judgment of an impartial reason...”⁴⁰ Perhaps we can sympathize with Kant’s assertion that it pains us to see (apparently) immoral persons who are happy, but is it *unreasonable* that such persons might be happy? Certainly I may well feel discouraged if my moral willing has kept me from great happiness, but is there some offense to reason itself? While this may be a fine and common sentiment, it belongs more to part one of the *Grundlegung* than it does to a transcendental deduction of the objects of the moral law. Again, why must happiness be linked with virtue? We need more

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 394.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 393.

⁴⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 110.

than the seemingly commonsense assertion that this is the case, especially where actions are legal but not based on duty alone.⁴¹

We seem left, then, with the justifiable option that reason and thereby morality should simply be *unconcerned* with anything more than the basic needs of happiness. Now this conclusion seems to be warranted by the rest of Kant's writings, though it is in contradiction to his belief in the "worthiness" equation; thus, while it may violate the "letter" of Kant's project, I think it is entirely within the "spirit."⁴² To begin with, there is Kant's strong assertion that "for *his own happiness* is an end that every man has (by virtue of the impulses of his nature), but this end can never without self-contradiction be regarded as a duty... Hence it is self-contradictory to say that he is *under obligation* to promote his own happiness..."⁴³ Thus happiness and the pursuit of happiness is not a duty, though it is an end that is universally desired by human beings. Of course reason cannot be unconcerned with the impulses for pleasure, for the reason that the moral law is an imperative for us is precisely because such impulses must be overcome and placed in a position which is secondary to morality. Perhaps the position is best stated in "Theory and Practice":

I did not fail to remark that man is not expected to *renounce* his natural end, happiness, when the issue of obeying his duty arises; for he cannot do that... Yet he must completely *abstract* from such considerations when the command of duty arises, and he must never make happiness the *condition* of obeying the law that reason prescribes for him.⁴⁴

⁴¹ This conclusion is also offered by Andrews Reath in his "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," though he presents little by way of defense. He simply states that "no explicit arguments are given for taking a proportionality of virtue and happiness, either as an end, or as a way of ordering different ends or interests" (p. 611), and concludes that, as such, it "represents a departure from Kant's basic principles" (p. 613).

⁴² In addition, I think that by weeding out this equation we will actually make Kant's claim that it is a duty to promote the highest good stronger.

⁴³ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 386. Also: *Second Critique*, "Remark II" to "Theorem IV," Ak. 35-41.

⁴⁴ "On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, but is of No Practical Use." Ak. 278-9.

Reason must be concerned with happiness only in order to keep the incentives of pleasure from determining the will and to ensure that one will not be strongly tempted to violate the moral law;

it can even be a duty in certain respects to provide for one's happiness, in part because (since it includes skill, health, and riches) it contains means to the fulfillment of one's duty and in part because the lack of it (e.g., poverty) contains temptations to transgress against duty. But to further one's happiness can never be a direct duty...⁴⁵

Thus, the pursuit of some happiness is necessary, but only as an indirect duty and only in order to avoid conditions which might threaten the pure use of our will.⁴⁶

In addition, if we agree to a(ny) version of the "principle of purposive mechanisms,"⁴⁷ Kant uses this to conclude precisely that humans were not designed by nature for happiness, and that only a good will is good in itself: "if that being's preservation, welfare, or in a word its happiness, were the real end of nature in the case of a being having reason and will, then nature would have hit upon a very poor arrangement..."⁴⁸ Kant is consistent in his writings to indicate that if humans were designed by nature for the achievement of happiness through reason, then we were poorly designed indeed. It would have been much better if happiness were achievable through instinct. But, if we are created, and if our reason is to have some purpose, then this

⁴⁵ *Second Critique*, Ak. 93. See also: *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 388, where Kant clearly states that such concerns for happiness are "merely a means for removing obstacles to his morality -- a permitted means..."

⁴⁶ "An action which is neither commanded nor prohibited is merely allowed... and therefore also no duty," *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 223, Ellington trans. Victoria S. Wike discusses precisely this point in her article, "Kant on the Indirect Duty to Pursue Happiness" in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Band II.1 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), 599-611. She concludes, as I do, that Kant thought we ought to be concerned with happiness in a minimal sense, but that, "in short, the seeking of happiness becomes an indirect duty *only* because of the relationship of happiness to an end which it facilitates and to which we have a direct duty," (p. 606, italics added for emphasis).

⁴⁷ On the "principle of purposive mechanism" see: Section One, Chapter Eight.

⁴⁸ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 395.

purpose cannot be the pursuit of happiness, though such a pursuit is permissible. Kant even goes so far as to say that “happiness can even be reduced to less than nothing, without nature’s failing thereby in her purpose [the “establishment of a good will”].”⁴⁹ Far from being a duty, happiness is barely a consideration for the pure will.

We get a similar picture of this position of happiness in Kant’s specific discussion in the *Critique of Practical Reason* of the difference between *das Gute* and *das Wohl*, where he concludes that while reason has a natural interest in happiness, “he has reason for a yet higher purpose, namely, to consider also what is in itself good or evil, which pure and sensuously disinterested reason alone can judge, and... to distinguish this estimation from a sensuous estimation...”⁵⁰ In this section, “The Concept of an Object of Pure Reason,” Kant makes the division between well-being (happiness) and the good (the moral) extreme. Something which is unpleasant may well be good, such as a necessary operation, and vice-versa. In fact, Kant makes the bold assertion that “the concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law...”⁵¹ Thus, Kant writes:

Though one may laugh at the Stoic who in the worst paroxysm of gout cried out, “Pain, however thou tormentest me, I will never admit that thou art anything bad...” he was nevertheless right. He felt it was an evil, and he betrayed that in his cry; but that anything [morally] evil attached to him he had no reason to concede...⁵²

The point of this quotation, as well as this section, is to show that the morally good and the merely pleasant are completely disparate objects of willing, and that only the morally good is a necessary and worthy object of the will of rational creatures. Certainly one is allowed to seek happiness, but only if it

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 396.

⁵⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 62-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Ak. 60.

does not conflict with the moral law; otherwise humans would be no better than animals. Kant seems to have done a more effective than intended job of separating *das Gute* from *das Wohl*.

Thus, the option which seems legitimately left open to us as rational creatures is simply to deny that happiness has anything but a minimal place in morality, except where a lack of happiness might be a threat to moral willing.⁵³ It seems that the skeptic can agree to all of the following points, without having any need for God⁵⁴: humans have a natural and necessary interest in the ends of both virtue and happiness, some happiness is necessary if humans are to begin the difficult project of cultivating their virtue, happiness (in the form of talents, riches, etc.) can be dangerous if given to persons with a bad (evil) disposition, reason has a need to order all of the ends of the will, the end of happiness and the natural inclinations toward happiness are not bad or evil, and happiness can rightly be pursued as long as it neither contains the grounds for willing nor is contrary itself to the moral law. It seems that one might agree to all these premises and still not believe in the necessity of virtue as worthiness for proportionate happiness; “the majesty of duty has nothing to do with the enjoyment of life...”⁵⁵ Certainly the (Kantian) skeptic might say that, speaking from common-sense, it would be nice if virtuous persons were rewarded, or at least not seemingly punished outright by nature; but in what way would such common-sense serve as an argument, especially an analytic or synthetic *a priori* proposition? Perhaps such a skeptic might even be able to agree that, since there

⁵³ As to the question of what is left of the duty to promote the highest good, this will have to be postponed. But as to the question of the “worthiness” equation, I would be glad to know if there exists a better argument as to why it is necessary. Perhaps one could be fashioned negatively, from the concept of “punishment” instead of reward. The immediate problem with this, of course, is that punishment deals only with legality, thus leaving morality out of the question, as well as failing to say anything about positive reward. Perhaps an analysis of the concept of “worthiness” or “desert” itself might lead to a possible defense, but I do not see how.

⁵⁴ The need for God *here* would be in reference to the need of proportionate happiness. I will argue later that there are other needs for a belief in God.

⁵⁵ Second *Critique*, Ak. 88.

are two goods in which humans are interested, the highest good would be maximal happiness and maximal virtue. But the question is one of the *link* between these two concepts, and the skeptic does not seem obliged to believe it.

III.

The other major problem with the highest good is one of conceivability, and has primarily to do with the nature of happiness as it relates to human beings. In this section, I address four such problems of conceivability. These are problems especially with the “otherworldly” highest good, but overlapping problems with the “earthly” formulation can be seen as well.

A.

In essence, the first major problem is this: Kant claims that all human beings desire happiness, and that we can hope that our virtuous disposition will be rewarded in the next life. However, given Kant’s split between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, and given the unknowable nature of the next life, it seems at least possible that we will not have the requisite nature necessary for the experience of happiness, nor would we desire it. As Greene summarizes this problem:

The *Summum Bonum* argument rests on the assumption that the happiness man craves now, and will continue to desire after death, is exclusively sentient in character and unrelated to his higher nature in any internal or organic way. But he has previously shown that man’s sentient nature is phenomenal, that is, temporal, and not eternal. He cannot, therefore, consistently maintain now that this phenomenal self will continue after death or that in the next life man will continue to desire the happiness which he craves in this.⁵⁶

According to Kant’s philosophy, a person has value because s/he is a member of the intelligible world, because of that person’s independence from the

⁵⁶ Greene, “Historical Context,” p. lxiv. See also: Kwang-Sae Lee, “Some Reflections on the Idea of the Highest Good as a Regulative Idea of Pure Practical Reason,” pp. 555-6.

phenomenal world through the moral law. A person is also free from space and time, and thus is properly noumenal. Thus, it seems difficult to assert that humans will desire happiness in a “noumenal” afterlife, and seems unlikely that they would have the sensory apparatus to experience it. Such a conclusion, if it is to be drawn, rests on the premise that happiness cannot be intelligible, that is, that Kant considers happiness to be a phenomenon which is physical and sensual in nature, and the premise that the nature of human beings will not remain the same in the next world as it is in this world. Let us consider these two premises.

The first necessary premise is that Kant considers happiness to be a phenomenal state, and that happiness is not to be equated either with contentment with moral willing (“self-contentment”⁵⁷) or with complete independence from sensuous inclinations (“bliss”⁵⁸). Now Victoria S. Wike has devoted an entire book to the study of the nature of Kant’s understanding of happiness in her excellent work: *Kant on Happiness in Ethics*,⁵⁹ so I need only refer to her conclusions regarding happiness, which I take to be correct. In the first chapter of her book, she examines the three different concepts of self-contentment, bliss, and happiness, concluding: “Kant considers happiness to involve a physical state in the natural world. There is a connection between happiness and pleasure, inclination, and sensation... This notion of what happiness is and what happiness involves treats happiness as a sensible state.”⁶⁰ Happiness, for Kant cannot be considered as either the satisfaction of knowing that one wills solely from the moral law or as the freedom from all sensuous inclinations.⁶¹ Happiness

⁵⁷ *Second Critique*, Ak. 117.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 118.

⁵⁹ See also: “Kant on the Indirect Duty to Pursue Happiness,” 599-611. It is a shame that Wike, while addressing the question of the highest good in several chapters, never addresses the question of virtue as “worthiness to be happy.”

⁶⁰ *Kant on Happiness*, p. 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

involves the positing of a material end, the obtaining of that end, and a pleasure which is derived from this end.⁶² The nature of happiness, as Kant understands it, is physical and sensuous in nature, and is not either self-contentment or bliss.

Interestingly, Wike subsequently draws the same conclusion that I have, namely that there is a problem with Kant's insistence that happiness is the necessary reward in the next world. Wike writes that:

if the highest good is to be realized out of the world, then this definition of happiness does not make sense. How can we speak of the satisfaction of our needs and inclinations in an intelligible world? In this case, a new definition of happiness is needed and so happiness in the intelligible world should perhaps be understood to be moral happiness, self-contentment, or bliss.⁶³

Hence, as Kant has formulated the highest good, it seems inconceivable as an object of hope, and seems impossible for creatures of a purely intelligible nature. This does leave us, however, with the possibility that we are confused on either of two points: happiness may not be what Kant intends as the reward in the next world, and our existence in the next world may not be as "intelligible" as we have considered it here.

The first possibility I think is easily dismissed. As Wike points out, Kant is never inconstant in his use of the term happiness, and throughout his writings he takes happiness to be of a physical nature. Indeed, this is why happiness is excluded from pure morality in the first place, and what leads to the discussion of the antinomy of the second *Critique*. A particularly good example of this is a passage in the second *Critique* where he discusses self-contentment, bliss, and happiness all within three pages.⁶⁴ Here, Kant could well have used any of these three concepts as the reward for virtue,

⁶² Though it may also involve that "consciousness" that one is happy, but this is uncertain. See *Kant on Happiness*, pp. 3-4.

⁶³ *Kant on Happiness*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Second *Critique*. Ak. 117-119.

especially given his explicit statement that all inclinations, even good ones, are “burdensome.”⁶⁵ Kant could easily have insisted⁶⁶ that we should hope for self-contentment or bliss in the next world, leaving happiness to this world alone, but instead he concludes “that happiness, though it indeed constitutes the second element of the highest good, does so only as the morally conditioned but necessary consequence of the former.”⁶⁷

This does leave us with the possibility, however, that Kant does not intend us to be purely noumenal in the “other world;” this is also the second premise (above) we wished to examine. There is some indication that Kant may indeed believe that the next world would not be entirely intelligible. Let us begin by asking, why, in fact, does Kant not simply hope to be relieved of all inclinations altogether, and thus hope for what he terms “bliss”? Indeed, if we want to be moral, and if we find *all* inclinations to be “burdensome,”⁶⁸ why should we not hope for the freedom from all sensuous inclinations? The answer, I think, brings us back to Kant’s “worthiness” equation. In particular, beyond the need Kant feels for virtue to be rewarded, Kant also wants the evil person to be punished. Punishment, he says, is “mere harm in itself,” “involves a forfeiture of happiness at least in part,” and “is physical harm which, even if not bound as a natural consequence to the morally bad, ought to be bound to it as a consequence according to principles of moral legislation.”⁶⁹ Thus, we see both that evil persons ought to be punished and that such punishment involves a “physical harm.” This seems to indicate that if we agree that non-virtuous persons ought to be punished, even in the after-life, then we cannot simply hope for bliss for everyone; if everyone simply

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 118. Kant seems to reject this notion of “burdensome” inclinations in the *Religion*, but he certainly could have alluded to it here, since he brings it up in the middle of this discussion.

⁶⁶ Though not, perhaps, given his belief in the necessity of reward and punishment; see below.

⁶⁷ *Second Critique*, Ak. 119.

⁶⁸ As I noted above, Kant did not always hold this view. See: *Religion*, p. 51.

⁶⁹ All three quotations: *second Critique*, Ak. 37.

died and were subsequently only intelligible creatures, then those deserving of punishment would escape it, not to mention that there would be no proportionate rewarding of virtue with happiness. Kant insists in the *Religion* that “no religion can be conceived of which involves no belief in a future life... and therefore in a heaven and hell; for this belief automatically obtrudes itself upon everyone by virtue of the universal moral disposition...”⁷⁰ and writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that “the belief in a future life does not, strictly speaking, come first in order that penal justice may be seen to have an effect upon that future life; but, conversely, the inference to a future life is drawn from the necessity for punishment.”⁷¹ Hence, Kant insists that all religions need a belief in punishment, and because punishment is a physical negation of happiness, punishment could not occur in a purely intelligible future life.⁷²

There is further reason to consider this possibility. When Kant specifically addresses the nature of time at the “end of the world,” he seems to indicate that our existence necessitates existing in time. I will only address this point briefly, as Kant’s discussion is rather difficult, but this discussion occurs in “The End of All Things.”⁷³ Here, Kant is concerned with “*judgment day*” and “*passing from time to eternity*,” and with the question of what it might mean to have an end of time. Kant argues, bringing up the need for

⁷⁰ *Religion*, p. 117.

⁷¹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 490 n. Ellington translation.

⁷² Victoria Wike, in her article “Another Look at Kant’s Arguments for Immortality,” also notes this strain in Kant’s thinking. She then uses this strain in an attempt to prove the necessary (moral) belief in an afterlife: “Practical reason requires immortality not because persons need an infinite amount of time to become worthy of happiness but because reason requires a reckoning of happiness with worth,” (p. 666). I think there are problems with this argument, namely the “worthiness equation” and the need of reason to believe “that actions done for the sake of the moral law have consequences” (p. 666), but at least Wike recognizes this aspect of Kant’s thinking. See Wike in: *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 661-668.

⁷³ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things,” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 93-105. All citations refer to Akademie page numbers.

punishment again, that from a practical point of view we cannot believe in a “*monistic view of eternity*,”⁷⁴ for this would not lend credence to reason’s notion of “an eternity in which there will be consequences governed by a good or bad principle commensurate with this merit or that guilt.”⁷⁵

However, in addition, Kant argues that reason must think of itself as occurring *in time*. This assertion is rather surprising. Kant gives us two reasons for this assertion. First, practical reason strives toward an *end*, but “since where there is no time, there can also be *no end*,” we must reject the prospect that eternity would be timeless, and instead “think an *unending duration*.”⁷⁶ Second, Kant argues that the representation of eternity as outside of time,

offends the imagination. For then, surely, nature in its entirety will be fixed and, as it were, petrified; the last thought, the last feeling will come to a standstill... For a being who is able to be conscious of its existence and its extent (as duration) only in time, such a life, if it can be called another life, must appear the same as [this] life’s annihilation, for in order to think its way into such a state, a being such as ourselves must in general think of something, but *thinking* includes a [process of] reflection, which can itself only happen in time.⁷⁷

Thus, because we are duty bound to pursue an end that we can never fully achieve, and because, Kant argues, *thinking* requires existence in time, “nothing remains, then, for reason except to think of steady progress toward its ultimate purpose through a (temporally) unending process of change, in which instance its *character*... remains permanently the same.”⁷⁸ Regardless of the plausibility of this argument, it does indicate another reason why Kant may think of the afterlife as occurring in a not-wholly intelligible realm.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 328.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 330.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 334.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

There is even a further reason to consider this possibility. Kant indicates in all of his writings that we could never measure up to the moral law; the moral law demands full submission, and it is clear that even the best of us have transgressions. Indeed, it is this point which leads to Kant's problem (antinomy?) in the *Religion* between forgiveness (atonement) and punishment, necessitating a God who is "benevolent," not merely just:

If now it is admitted that, though indeed all men are guilty of sin, some among them may be able to achieve merit, then the verdict of *Him who judges from love* becomes effective. In the absence of this judgment [i.e., justice without benevolence], only a *verdict of rejection* could follow, whose inescapable consequence would be the *judgment of condemnation*...⁷⁹

This leads to the following consideration: perhaps we should hope for eternal "progress" toward pure morality because any judgment which we or God could make with regard to our moral status would be one of condemnation, since we cannot make up for past transgressions; thus, we should hope for progress precisely because we will always come up short on any judgment which would be "final." Kant writes in the second *Critique*:

on the basis of his previous progress from the worse to the morally better... he may hope for a further uninterrupted continuance of this progress... But he cannot hope here or at any foreseeable point of his future existence to be fully adequate to God's will, without indulgence or remission which would not harmonize with justice. This he can do only in the infinity of his *duration* which God alone can survey.⁸⁰

Hence, it is possible that we should only hope for progress, that is, hope for an enduring existence in time, instead of hoping for an existence apart from time, for otherwise we should rightly be judged inadequate to the moral law, and thus deserving of some punishment.

⁷⁹ *Religion*, p. 137. Kant's full discussion of the attributes of a judging God: pp. 131-138.

⁸⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 123-4. Italics added for emphasis. See also: *Religion*, pp. 60-72 and *Lectures on Philosophical Philosophy*, p. 163.

Despite these three possible reasons for Kant to think that the next world would be one in which we existed in time and in nature, Kant makes other statements which seem to indicate that the next world is purely intelligible. Our initial reason for thinking this is, of course, Kant's insistence on the intelligible nature of human beings, and their being constituted as autonomous only as they are members of the noumenal realm. However, there are other reasons to think this as well. In the *Religion* Kant writes that "reason can neither take an interest in dragging along, through eternity, a body..."⁸¹ In the first *Critique* Kant maintains that the world of the highest good "is indeed an intelligible world only, since the sensible world holds out no promise that any such systematic unity of ends can arise..."⁸² There is also Kant's insistence that the true moral character of persons is unchanging, that one's participation in the intelligible realm is, from the solution to the third antinomy of the first *Critique*, free from cause and effect, and Kant's presentations of images of an eternity in which one's self-contentment (or lack thereof), i.e., so-called "moral happiness," would remain in effect. Perhaps the strongest argument is Kant's assertion, paradoxically enough occurring again in "The End of All Things," that

in the moral order of purposes, this end [of all time] is at the same time the beginning of the *supersensuous* survival of these same temporal beings, consequently the beginning of their existence as beings that do not stand under conditions of time, and thus their beginning as beings whose state is such as to allow nothing other than a moral evaluation of their nature.⁸³

This statement certainly indicates a wholly supersensuous existence in the next world. Hence, if we are, most importantly, intelligible creatures, it

⁸¹ *Religion*, p. 119 n. This is not necessarily a good indication of his views, since this passage concerns "the hypothesis of the spirituality of rational world-beings" though Kant does say that "this hypothesis is more congenial to reason" than a "materialism of personality."

⁸² First *Critique*, A814 = B842.

⁸³ "End of All Things." Ak. 327.

seems strange to be denied access to this realm of purely moral existence after the death of our bodies.

In the end, there seems to be no way to make a conclusion regarding either Kant's opinion on the next life, or the necessary nature of this future existence. The first seems impossible since Kant makes so many varied statements but does not discuss the issue directly. The second is impossible given the dictates of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that no knowledge of the supersensible is possible. Neither does there seem a resolution possible from a mere practical point of view, since denying a sensuous afterlife seems to preclude the possibility of punishment, while the assertion of a sensuous afterlife seems to rob us of the possibility of ever participating in an existence which would be purely *moral*. This is certainly a problem in Kant's thought, which may be more or less serious. At least it seems to force the conclusion that the highest good is inconceivable in the sense that we cannot imagine what the nature of our future existence might be, especially in the sense required for an experience of happiness which would allow for proportionate rewards or punishments. Nor do we seem to have any rational arguments to prefer one conception to the other.

Let me mention one additional problem with Kant's considerations on time as they pertain to the highest good. This is a problem raised by John R. Silber in his "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*."⁸⁴ The problem is that while Kant maintains that the character of one's disposition (*Gesinnung*) is to remain unchanging, "moral volition is ineluctably temporal. The will is tempted in time, decides in time, and, depending on its decision, feels guilty or satisfied in time... Kant again and again refers in temporal terms to the problems of moral volition, improvement, and decline."⁸⁵ Put

⁸⁴ John R. Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*," introduction to *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), lxxix-cxxxiv.

⁸⁵ "Ethical Significance." pp. xcvi-xcix.

bluntly, what good is the phenomenal world if the character of one's disposition is already decided and does not change? If there is no real progress, no real struggle in this world, then our existence in it seems purposeless. Indeed, the *command* of the categorical imperative must take place in a phenomenal world. Silber considers this such a problem that he feels obligated to reconstruct much of Kant's philosophy regarding the noumenal realm.⁸⁶

B.

A second problem is the question of how to square Kant's two apparently conflicting claims that progress is required and that one's moral disposition remains unchanging. On the one hand, we have seen above that progress is required of human beings in their moral endeavor. On the other hand, especially in Kant's *Religion*, the nature of our (moral) disposition seems unable to progress for two reasons. The first, also discussed above, is that our moral nature is not supposedly located in time, unless we reject Kant's division of the noumenal and phenomenal realm altogether. Indeed, Kant even states that "a good or an evil disposition as an inborn... constitution... has not been acquired in time."⁸⁷ The second reason, more importantly, is Kant's description of the nature of our disposition (*Gesinnung*). In order to avoid the problem of attributing our moral failures merely to the influence of nature, which would then result in these failures not being *attributable* to us, Kant explicitly concludes in the *Religion*⁸⁸ that evil in the world comes from the subordination of the maxims of the moral law to the maxims of happiness. Nature is not to blame, but humans themselves, for freely setting the interests of happiness above the moral law. However, what this indicates is that there is no middle ground between the morally good and the

⁸⁶ See "Ethical Significance," pp. xcvi-ciii. I do not have space to assess his reconstruction here.

⁸⁷ *Religion*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Though this may be implicit as early as the *Grundlegung*.

morally bad person; either they have willed to will in accord with the moral law, or they willed to subordinate moral maxims to desire. Commentators often refer to this as Kant's "rigorism." Hence, Kant writes that a person's "disposition in respect to the moral law is never indifferent, never neither good nor evil. Neither can a man be morally good in some ways and at the same time morally evil in others. His being good in one way *means* that he has incorporated the moral law into his maxim."⁸⁹ Thus, while Kant often talks about progress and even a range of possibilities for moral disposition,⁹⁰ it seems that our disposition is also in some way rightly considered to be either good or evil, with only an "immeasurable gulf" in between, for "the disposition, *i.e.*, the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of our maxims, can be one only..."⁹¹ Thus, if the highest good is taken to be the rewarding of proportionate happiness to virtue, and if there can be only a good or an evil will, then there seems to be only a set amount of happiness for good persons, and a set amount of punishment for evil persons. Kant's insistence on "rigorism" of moral character and his desire for proportionate degrees of reward and punishment seem to be at odds with each other. While this does not make the highest good inconceivable *per se*, if we accept Kant's rigorism, it certainly strains the definition and notion of a highest good which is a system of "proportionate" consequences for virtue.

⁸⁹ *Religion*, p. 20. Italics added for emphasis. See also Kant's discussion in a footnote to p. 53 regarding the "immeasurable gulf" between moral goodness and evil.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27, and "Ethical Significance," p. cxxvi. This specific range, however, might not conflict with an "all or nothing" interpretation of the good will: the individual subject to the "frailty" of human nature has already willed to take the moral law into his/her disposition, and although having occasional problems, still has a will which is good. Indeed, there does *not* exist, for Kant, a good person who is not in some way frail. Those who have "impurity" of human nature are *ultimately* evil, for they have not willed to take the moral law for their own, and thus are subject to the whims of nature. Thus, "perhaps, every time" the person takes the quest for happiness as his or her ultimate disposition, and are thus evil. John R Silber., "Ethical Significance," lxxix-cxxxiv. Certainly several commentators have addressed this issue. Henry E. Allison, as a notable example, suggests that these "stages" in the *Religion* can be made coherent with Kant's rigorism by bringing in the concept of "self-deception;" Henry E. Allison, "Kant's Doctrine of Radical Evil," 51-72.

⁹¹ *Religion*, p. 20.

C

While Kant may have a way to escape the above problems, though perhaps only by putting incredible strains on the rest of his philosophy, the next problem with the conceivability of the highest good I take to be severe. It is this: in all of Kant's writings, he maintains that if we were to have proof that all our actions would be rewarded with proportionate happiness or punishment, then the result would be the death of morality, for we (ultimately) could not fail to take considerations of happiness as the ultimate incentives for our maxims. I will term this the "puppet" problem, for Kant writes that if "God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes,"⁹² then

because the disposition from which action should be done cannot be instilled by any command, and because the spur to action would in this case be always present and external, reason would have no need to endeavor to gather its strength to resist the inclinations by a vivid idea of the... law. Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of action... would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it now is, would be changed into mere mechanism... as in a puppet show...⁹³

Because we could not but help be influenced by the external situation around us and our (natural and not intrinsically evil) concern for happiness, if we could be convinced of the existence of God, the result would be rather paradoxical: with the proof of God (or even God's presence) would come the fact of God's reward or punishment, and we would be so (naturally) concerned for our well-being that we would simply not be able to will morally. All our actions would (presumably) be legal, but they could not be moral precisely because one could not will these actions in accord with duty alone. Thus, with the knowledge of God, "all our morality would break down. In his

⁹² *Second Critique*, Ak. 147.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

every action, man 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.”⁹⁴ Knowledge of inevitable consequences for moral and immoral actions would lead to the complete breakdown of the moral law.⁹⁵

Obviously, if this is true, then, paradoxically, the existence of the highest good as a proportionate rewarding for virtue would create the demise of virtue. Or, more precisely put, *existence* in a world in which virtue was known to be rewarded by proportionate happiness would destroy one’s ability to follow the categorical imperative, even though all of one’s actions could be legal. If one existed in a world in which one’s virtue was visibly rewarded, by Kant’s own admission, one would ultimately be incapable of willing in accord with the moral law. The only situation in which this might not happen seems to be a state in which persons were *already* morally perfect, willing in full accord with the moral law. But, as we saw above, we must always judge ourselves to be short of this ideal. And, while Kant at times hints that it might be possible for the human race to eventually achieve this state of moral perfection, there are also statements by Kant that we will only be able to approximate this goal, and never reach it. Therefore, willing to exist in a state where virtue was known to be rewarded by (proportionate) happiness could not possibly be commanded by the moral law, since it would lead to the very opposite intended by the moral law, namely its own downfall. Nor could this be a state commanded by reason to be brought about by us. Thus, the highest good is, in this sense, simply inconceivable.

⁹⁴ Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, p. 121.

⁹⁵ For further confirmation of Kant’s belief in the “puppet” problem, see: second *Critique*, Ak. 38 and 84, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, pp. 111 and 121, and *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 377-8. Such a possibility is also suggested in the *Religion* in Kant’s discussion of the “impurity” of the human heart (pp. 23-25 and 32-3), in which case mere legality happens to be the easiest and happiest thing to will, which leads to what Silber calls “the quiet death (euthanasia) of morality [(Silber himself gets the term “euthanasia” from Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 378)] through his confusion of moral and non-moral incentives” (“Ethical Significance,” p. cxxii).

D.

The final problem with the highest good as proportionate happiness relates to Kant's statements that human beings are simply not designed for happiness. I do not think that this problem renders the highest good *completely* inconceivable, but I think it must be at least a stumbling block. We might state the problem as this: Kant maintains not only that nature is often unpredictable concerning the outcome of willing, even willing happiness, but that even if nature were *completely* cooperative, humans would still not be able to be happy. Kant notes that the term "sensuous contentment," even though synonymous with a definition of happiness as "contentment with our existence"⁹⁶ or as "contentment with one's *physical state* (freedom from evils and enjoyment of ever-increasing pleasure)"⁹⁷ is "improperly so called" a "contentment" because "inclinations vary; they grow with the indulgence we allow them, and they leave behind a greater void than the one we intended to fill."⁹⁸ Humans are never, Kant seems to indicate, content with their sensuous situation. In the "Idea" Kant writes that "it appears that nature is utterly unconcerned that man live well,"⁹⁹ in the *Grundlegung* that "the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills,"¹⁰⁰ and goes so far in the *Critique of Judgment* to assert that happiness is

an idea to which he tries to make that state adequate under merely empirical conditions (which is impossible)... [S]ince his understanding is tied to imagination and the senses, he formulates the idea so diversely and even changes the concept so often that nature, even if it were subjected completely to man's

⁹⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 25.

⁹⁷ *Religion*, p. 61.

⁹⁸ *Second Critique*, Ak. 118.

⁹⁹ "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent." Ak. 20.

¹⁰⁰ *Grundlegung*. Ak. 418.

choice, still could not possibly adopt a definite and fixed universal law that would [keep] it in harmony with that wavering concept and so with the purpose that each person chooses to set himself... [I]t is not his nature to stop possessing and enjoying at some point and be satisfied.¹⁰¹

Hence, humans are not designed for happiness not only because they have no instinct for it, but also because they are never content for more than moments at a time with their state of well-being. Even if nature were aligned with humans' wishes, Kant maintains that happiness is too "wavering" a concept to allow that humans would be satisfied with their condition of well-being. As Kant summarizes: "even if nature outside us were utterly beneficent, its purpose would not be achieved... if that purpose aimed at the happiness of our species, because nature within us is not receptive to it."¹⁰²

Now this doctrine alone may not pose a serious threat to the highest good, though the highest good seems saved only if Kant brings in the notion of God. Kant seems to indicate that humans are simply not designed for happiness. This seems to be true, even on a more modest definition of happiness than Kant's original one.¹⁰³ The resulting problem is that humans seem to be incapable of experiencing much happiness, let alone a continual state of happiness which would be exactly proportionate to their virtue. At least this should rule out once and for all any notion that humans could do this for one another.¹⁰⁴ But, if humans are not able to do this themselves, Kant may legitimately be able to bring in a God who can, for Kant has already instructed us of the need for a God who could unite the "cause" of virtue with the "effect" of proportionate happiness. So while a single person him/herself could not bring about his/her own happiness, even if all of nature was cooperative,

¹⁰¹ *Critique of Judgment*, Ak. 430.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ "Happiness is the satisfaction of all our desires, *extensively*,... *intensively*,... and *proten-sively*..." A806 = B834. And: "a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life which without interruption accompanies his whole existence is happiness," second *Critique*, Ak. 22.

¹⁰⁴ This, I think, is another reason to reject those commentators, including Silber and Reath, who assert that we could bring about the highest good on earth ourselves.

perhaps Kant could argue that God who is omniscient, moral, and all-powerful could know enough about nature and each individual's needs to be able to reward that person proportionally. Kant often talks about the impossibility of knowing how God might bring this about, but that we just have to do our duty and hope.

However, if we combine this incapability of individuals to be continuously happy with another of Kant's tenets, the highest good seems to be threatened again. This second tenet is Kant's indication that human beings are also not happy with what is given to them, and that they will only be happy if they bring the happiness about themselves. Hence, Kant tells us in one of the nine theses of the "Idea" that "*Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence and partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason.*"¹⁰⁵ Humans, much to their chagrin, must attempt to find happiness through reason, a situation of nature which seems ill-suited to happiness and can even lead to a hatred of reason.¹⁰⁶ Kant seems to indicate in the second *Critique* that happiness only occurs when humans give an object to themselves, seek to bring about the object, actually bring about the object, and then see whether the object brings them the anticipated pleasure.

This picture seems to be intuitively correct: while at first it might be wonderful to have anything we want given to us whenever we want it, or even simply to receive rewards for which we have not worked, I think ultimately this situation would not bring us happiness, as so many stories, reports, and even folk tales seem to indicate. This seems to be what Kant indicates by writing:

¹⁰⁵ "Idea," Ak. 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 395-6.

the determining ground of choice consists in the conception of an object and its relation to the subject, whereby the faculty of desire is determined to seek its realization. Such a relation to the subject is called pleasure in the reality of an object, and it must be presupposed as the condition of the possibility of the determination of choice.¹⁰⁷

Kant writes that “no man asks, when he is concerned only with the agreeableness of life, whether the *ideas* are from the sense or the understanding; he asks only how much and how great is the pleasure which they will afford him over the longest time.”¹⁰⁸ This seems to indicate, again, that humans must formulate the idea of the object that will (perhaps) make them (momentarily) happy, and then try to bring about the existence of this object. In his *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, Kant asserts that “the novelist is quite conscious of the fact that he cannot describe happiness as mere enjoyment. Rather, it is labor, difficulty, effort, the prospect of tranquillity, and the striving toward the achievement of this idea which is happiness for us...”¹⁰⁹ Thus, it also seems from Kant’s writings that we are not happy with those things given to us from without, or those (material) things which do not come about through reason.¹¹⁰

The threat to the conceivability of the highest good is the possibility that not even God could make us happy, even if God knew what would, in fact, make us happy in the necessary proportion to virtue. If happiness for human beings is the striving after and achieving of ends which they set themselves, as Kant seems to indicate that it is, then it seems God cannot simply give a person the happiness which they would merit. I do not think we could imagine a way for God to give us happiness which would *seem* like

¹⁰⁷ *Second Critique*, Ak. 21. See also: Ak. 8 n. and Ak. 22.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 23. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, p. 119.

¹¹⁰ See also: Kant’s discussion of “the empty longing... for the *golden age*” in the “Speculative Beginning of Human History,” Ak. 120, as well as his objections to Hobbes’ father-like ruler in “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 290-1.

we were striving after it and achieving it on our own without a serious encroachment on our free will. Hence, I think that between the fact that, as Kant indicates, humans are simply not designed to enjoy happiness for any great length of time, and the fact that happiness comes from the striving after and achieving of certain ends, I think that the highest good as a proportional system of happiness is inconceivable, on Kant's own terms.¹¹¹

IV.

In this chapter, I have tried to argue that Kant's conception of the highest good as the rewarding of virtue with proportionate happiness is an end which is inconceivable. It is inconceivable, for the following reasons: 1) there appears to be no necessary connection between the disparate elements of virtue and happiness, 2) we cannot conceive (from any point of view) of the nature of human beings in a future world, or why happiness would be desirable in this state, 3) the nature of our "character" leads to an either/or situation of being good or evil, and thus allows of no proportional rewards or punishments, 4) existing in a world where virtue is rewarded with happiness would lead to a "puppet" existence and would undermine morality, and 5) happiness does not seem to be something which humans are designed to enjoy, particularly in an "afterlife." The highest good as Kant has depicted it, while harmonizing well with the rest of Kant's system, must ultimately be rejected as a conception of rewarding of virtue with happiness.

Subsequently, it follows that it cannot be our *duty* to promote or our *duty* to bring about the highest good. How are we to bring about an object which is inconceivable? How could we, even if we could know the maxim which another is using for an action (which we can never know), possibly

¹¹¹ Kant does write in a footnote in the *Religion* (p. 24 n.) about "delight" which one would experience before one willed it or even knew of its existence, for example, a hitherto unsampled intoxicant. Perhaps the highest good could be saved by conceiving of it as each person being (proportionally) rewarded by continually differing "delights," but I think this conception would be radically different from the highest good as Kant conceives it and I think we would find such a condition eventually unsatisfactory.

reward another with proportionate happiness, given that humans are not designed to enjoy or receive happiness? How could we have a duty to bring about a system of immediate and unavoidable consequences for virtue if Kant believes such a system to inevitably destroy the very foundation of morality itself? This highest good simply cannot be the object of our will.

However, having said this, let me quickly add that it is only *this* version of the highest good which I think is inconceivable, while there is another version which I think does serve as a necessary end of moral willing. Perhaps I have already given enough clues as to what this version might be. I indicated above that the real problem with the highest good is Kant's necessary insistence on the synthetic *a priori* combination of virtue and happiness, followed by additional problems regarding the fact that humans are not designed for happiness in an afterlife. However, if we can sever the (positive) connection between virtue and happiness, I think the highest good will remain on firm footing. We have seen that there is indeed an important connection between happiness and virtue, but that this connection is merely negative: "happiness is merely a means for removing obstacles to [one's] morality -- a *permitted* means, since no one else has a right to require of me that I sacrifice my ends if these are not immoral."¹¹² Happiness is *necessary* when its absence is detrimental to the moral project; this is the negative connection. These concerns motivate the duties I have regarding happiness for myself and of others, as clarified in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. And happiness is *permitted* when the agent pursuing happiness knows that there is no conflict between what s/he is willing and the moral law; in this case, there is no connection, which is why happiness is permitted.

Hence the duty to promote the highest good ought to be primarily concerned with the moral improvement of all of humankind. What we are left with after the above analysis is the categorical imperative's unrelenting

¹¹² *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 388.

command that each person is to improve his/her moral willing. As Kant says in the *Religion*, “the final purpose even of reading... holy scriptures, or of investigating their content, is to make men better... [T]he moral improvement of men... constitutes the real end of all religion of reason...”¹¹³ This is the command of the moral law, and, according to Kant, as far as we can tell, there is no reason to think that its command cannot be obeyed. In addition, however, because the categorical imperative *already* commands us from a standpoint of existing with other human beings, the moral law commands us to aid those around us in their moral improvement as well. This, in many respects, is a “broad” duty toward others, since we can have no specific commands regarding how to aid another person. However, there is also the specific duty to bring about a government which operates in accord with reason’s conception of Right. Only a system of government which operates within certain parameters is consistent with the freedom of all human beings. And, in addition, such a government must ultimately be concerned with the international community, and establish itself in such a way that peace may be obtained. Peace is necessary so that the moral project may not be hampered by outside influences. Hence, we might formulate the duty to promote the highest good as: the duty to promote virtue in all persons, both by concentrating on moral values (a function of “culture”)¹¹⁴ and by eliminating all external obstacles to the promotion of virtue. In the following chapters we will now turn our focus to this version of the highest good, discussing the moral progress of the human race, the connection between progress and politics, and how Kant envisions such moral progress as occurring.

¹¹³ *Religion*, p. 102.

¹¹⁴ We shall discuss this further below, but let me say at least this to block an early objection. Certainly Kant does indicate that it is not possible to make another virtuous. This is why, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, we have only the duties to increase our own virtue and to help others in their well-being. But Kant surely also indicates that we can help others to “hear” the call of the moral law which they give to themselves (the incentive stemming from the “*Wille*”). Kant writes a great deal both on the correct pedagogical method for teaching ethics, as well as the role of “*Kultur*” in the promotion of the virtue of humankind.

Chapter Three

Morality and Politics

I.

Most Kant commentators simply ignore Kant's insistence that there is an important connection between morality and political institutions. That this connection receives such a lack of attention is probably due to one of three reasons.

First, following Schopenhauer's cue and working mostly from the *Grundlegung*, many commentators still consider Kant's ethics to be entirely formal in nature. But I have argued that the faculty of reason is practical, and Kant reasons that it must necessarily have an object if it is to will, for "ethics goes beyond this [Right] and provides a *matter* (an object of free choice), an end of pure reason that it presents as an end which is also objectively necessary, that is, an end which, as far as men are concerned, it is a duty to have."¹

Second, commentators believe that individuals have a duty to obey the categorical imperative, regardless of the external situation, thus a discussion of political institutions is superfluous. While it is certainly true that persons must obey the moral law no matter what their condition, this certainly does not exclude the possibility that we should try to improve conditions so that moral improvement is made easier. We can see Kant's concern for this problem in his discussions about war, the duty to promote the happiness of others, necessary forms of governmental organization, pedagogical

¹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Gregor trans., Ak. 380.

methods, culture, as well as his many asides. Kant was clearly concerned with how to assist moral progress.

Third, commentators have argued that our moral duty only concerns ourselves, and that because we should (or can be) concerned only with the improvement of our own will, there is no duty toward others. Again, I have tried to show that this is fundamentally mistaken. The question of morality only comes up in the first place in relation to our involvement with others, and we are linked to them through a moral and natural community. In addition, as we can see especially in the *Critique of Judgment* and the *Religion*, Kant also maintains that we have a duty as human beings to morally improve our species; otherwise, we are without purpose and have no more worth than animals.

In this chapter, I want to establish this link between morality and politics as a certain tenet of Kant's philosophy. I have argued that there are two locations for the highest good; if we are to take this seriously, then we must be concerned with the question of how this highest good on earth is to come about. This is largely a political question. We have already examined this idea before, namely in our discussions of Kant's "Idea," "Theory and Practice," and the *Critique of Judgment*. Much of Kant's writing on the moral improvement of humankind is to be found in his political writings. Here, I shall examine Kant's political writings, analyzing them in chronological order. I want to substantiate the following claims throughout this chapter: 1) Kant does posit the necessary belief in the moral progress of the species, 2) this belief concerns history, though it is a belief based on moral ends and is not meant to be a (merely) regulative idea for the study of history as a science, 3) that Kant considers this belief to be necessary if we are not to consider the world and all creation as a mere farce, 4) the means which nature uses to drive us toward perfection is "unsocial sociability," and 5) certain political organizations are necessary (but not sufficient) for moral progress to

occur. In the last section, I will also discuss Kant's seemingly strange claim that nature alone must be the guarantor of peace. I will argue that this is a perfectly understandable claim, and furthermore a necessary one, given the requisite conditions for the moral project to begin in earnest.

II.

A. *Speculative Beginning of Human History*(1786)

In this essay, Kant uses the story of Genesis as his "guiding thread" to produce a history of the beginning of the use of reason. Showing that this is not meant to be used for the scientific study of history *per se*, he notes that his "speculations" "cannot compare with those histories that, as actual reports whose verification rests on ground entirely different from the mere philosophy of nature, set out the very same events and are to be believed as such."²

What interests us here is Kant's talk of progress. Kant maintains that, as the "fourth step" of reason, humans realized that they were "to be the true *end of nature*."³ After discussing just how much reason interferes with pleasure and happiness (so that we are not confused and wrongly take happiness to be our ultimate end), Kant writes:

Whether man has gained or lost as a result of this change [from instinct to reason] can no longer be asked, at least if one looks to the vocation of his species, which consists of nothing other than *progress* toward perfection... [T]his path that for the species leads to *progress* from the worse to the better does not do so for the individual.⁴

² "Speculative Beginning," Ak. 109. At the close of the essay Kant again states that "such a picture of man's history [as we have here] is useful and conducive to his instruction and betterment..." (Ak. 123).

³ "Speculative Beginning," Ak. 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 115.

This quotations confirms many of our above points. Kant argues that the human race is the “*end of nature*,” but only because our “vocation” is “*progress toward perfection*.” And, because Kant asserts that “paradise” and “bliss” are “a creation of his imagination -- where he could dream or trifle away his existence in peaceful inactivity and permanent peace” as well as an “imagined place,”⁵ we are certain that “perfection” here does not mean our ability to achieve happiness, but rather our moral perfection. And we see again that such perfection (at least in this world) is not meant for the individual, but for the species.

We also see Kant giving the same explanation for how the species is to engender such a moral progression. Kant here talks about “culture” instead of “unsocial sociability,”⁶ but the description is essentially the same. Kant asserts that culture will “progress so as to develop capacities belonging to mankind’s vocation as a *moral species*...”⁷ and that while natural impulses seem to do nothing but contribute to vice, such impulses

are, in themselves and as natural capacities, good and serve a purpose. But since these natural capacities were given man in his natural state, they will conflict with culture as it proceeds, just as it will conflict with them until art so perfects itself as to be a second nature, which is the final goal of the human species’ moral vocation.⁸

Again, we see that natural impulses, while often leading individuals to transgress the moral law, also serve for the development of their capacities, and serve as a stimulus to culture for the continual honing of the skills necessary for moral perfection.

⁵ Ibid., Ak. 115.

⁶ Though Kant did use the term “*Kultur*” in the “Idea” as well, saying that “the idea of morality belongs to culture,” (Ak. 26).

⁷ “Speculative Beginning,” Ak. 116.

⁸ Ibid., Ak. 117.

We see this need for conflict reiterated in Kant's discussion of the settling of nomadic tribes into farmers. Kant claims that the beginning of farming necessitated the establishment of communities, and

culture and the beginning of art, of entertainment, as well as of industriousness... must have sprung from this; but above all, some form of civil constitution and of public justice began... a form of government... From this first, crude structure, all human arts, of which *sociability* and *civil security* are the most worthwhile, could gradually develop... *Inequality* among men -- that source of so many evils, but also of everything good -- also began during this period and increased later on.⁹

Here we see familiar themes: though security is necessary, conflict is as well; sociability is necessary for the interaction of individuals which thereby causes conflict; conflict leads to the honing of reason's skills; and government is necessary as a foundation for moral improvement.

Indeed, we should take Kant's instance on the necessity of conflict for moral promotion seriously, for he goes on to present a case where all herdsmen finally settled down, apparently without any conflict, leading to a state where

a scarcely begun culture [was] abandoned in slavery to a soulless opulence, accompanied by all the vices of man's crude state [of existence], and, on the other hand, the human race's irresistible urge to depart from the path marked out by nature toward developing its capacities for goodness. And it was thus that man made himself unworthy of existing as a species designated to rule over the earth, and not as one designated to live in bovine contentment...¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., Ak. 119-20.

¹⁰ Ibid., Ak. 120. There is a strange tension in this article between Kant's statement that "even now the danger of war is the only thing that tempers despotism, because wealth is required if a nation is to be powerful, and without *freedom* none of the industriousness that produces wealth will arise" (Ak. 120), and his statement that "one must understand that the greatest evil that can oppress civilized peoples derives from *wars*, not, indeed, so much from actual present or past wars, as from the never-ending and constantly increasing *arming* for future war," (Ak. 121). I think this tension is easily explainable, however, by the fact that, while able to make some contributions to the development of culture (especially in the *initial* stages), and while at times being the (perhaps) only thing which keeps the human race from stagnating, war is, ultimately, a hindrance to the development of a true morality. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Hence, mere contentment with life and lack of conflict apparently, for Kant, leads to a state in which moral development does not take place,¹¹ and in which humans are again “unworthy” of having been created, thus forfeiting their place as the “end of nature.” And, again, we see Kant’s insistence that it is nature’s plan that the human race progress morally.

A final confirmation of our major concerns is Kant’s “Concluding Remark” in which he discusses the feeling of “grief that the unreflective do not know, a grief that can well lead to moral ruination: this is a discontentedness with the providence that governs the entire course of the world.”¹² Kant speaks about the necessary “hope for something better,” and how “it is of the greatest importance... *to be content with providence...* so that we can always take courage under our burdens and... fix our eyes on that fact and not neglect our own obligation to contribute to the betterment of ourselves.”¹³

Clearly it is important for Kant to hope for (postulate) moral improvement of the species in the world, if only to keep us from abandoning the moral project. And, again, Kant insists that “the greatest evil that can oppress civilized peoples derives from *wars*,”¹⁴ and he also discredits the hope and the “empty longing... for the *golden age...*” or for a state like “*Robinson Crusoe*,” because such a wish is “stimulated... by the weariness that a reflective man feels regarding the civilized life when he seeks its worth solely in *enjoyment*, and when reason perhaps reminds him to give his life meaning through action he counteracts that reminder by falling back into idleness.”¹⁵ All the components of our hypothesis are here: progress of the human species in this world

¹¹ This hearkens back to Kant’s discussion of his disapproval of the Arcadian shepherd and the Tahitian villagers.

¹² “Speculative Beginning,” Ak. 120-1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 121.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 122.

as a postulate of reason (at least here for motivational reasons), the usefulness of conflict, war as (ultimately) an impediment to moral development, and humankind as the end of nature.

B. The End of All Things (1794)

We have briefly mentioned this essay before, so we shall only spend a little time on it. While Kant specifically is speaking about the proposed end of the world which is to happen on “judgment day,” there is also the lurking question about what the condition of humankind might be on that day, and thus the question of progress. Kant notes that the idea that all persons will be condemned to hell would give “no adequate reason to justify why in general persons had been created” and the idea that God would simply destroy God’s creation “would indicate a flawed intelligence.”¹⁶ Kant concludes that we must think about our possible future existence, as well as the fate of the species in terms of its use of practical reason. Again, we see the idea that “reason tells them that the duration of the world has a worth only insofar as the ultimate ends of the existence of rational beings can be met within it” and “if these should not be attainable, creation itself would appear... as purposeless as a play that has no upshot whatsoever...”¹⁷ Kant speaks of a “universal feeling of need to cultivate its moral capacity.”¹⁸ Kant again affirms his belief in the need not to doubt that providence has actually provided a good arrangement for this world and our moral development, for even though it may not seem this way,

no matter how difficult to believe it may be, where it is absolutely impossible to see with certainty in advance the result of particular means that are accepted on the basis of all human wisdom (which, if it is to be true of its name, must proceed solely toward morality), one must in a practical way believe in a

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things,” Ak. 329.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 331.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 336.

concurrence between divine wisdom and the course of nature, if one is not to give up one's cherished ultimate purpose.¹⁹

Again, as we saw above with "Theory and Practice," where the evidence is uncertain, "one *must* in a practical way believe" in providence's guidance for our moral progress.

C. *To[ward] Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch (1795)*

The following two articles are perhaps the best for a corroboration of my thesis. The first is "Perpetual Peace," in which Kant outlines his position against war and introduces ways in which war can be prevented. Kant is concerned with "a certain Dutch shopkeeper's sign" on which "To[ward] Perpetual Peace" was inscribed over a picture of a graveyard.²⁰ Kant is concerned to show that perpetual peace is not to be had only with death, but can and must be achieved on earth. While the first half of the piece deals with the specific articles that governments ought to abide by in order to eliminate war, the latter section deals with the link between peace, politics, and morality.

Kant tells us in the later portion that war is to be eliminated for *moral* concerns, not just for happiness; the categorical imperative "is the principle of the *moral politician*,²¹ for whom it²² is a *moral task*..., and its method of pursuing perpetual peace -- which one now desires not merely as a physical good, but also as a condition that arises from acknowledging one's duty -- is completely distinct [because it is derived from the moral law

¹⁹ Ibid., Ak. 337.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, "To[ward] Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," Ak. 343.

²¹ Kant makes the distinction in "Perpetual Peace" between "a *moral politician*, i.e., one who so interprets the principles of political prudence that they can be coherent with morality," and "a *political moralist*, i.e., one who forges a morality to suit the statesman's advantage," (Ak. 372).

²² It is somewhat unclear what "it" refers to in this sentence. It may mean "perpetual peace" or "the problem of civil, international and cosmopolitan right," both of which are mentioned before it.

alone].”²³ As he will explain in more detail in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that the nature of government is necessarily a question for morality, for it concerns the actions of free agents in a community, and only the moral law can give us the law for the right use of freedom. Thus, “adherence to political maxims must not be based on the benefit or happiness that each nation anticipates...; instead, adherence must derive from the pure concept of the duty of right (from the *ought*, whose principle is given *a priori* though pure reason), let the physical consequences be what they may.”²⁴ It is clear from the essay that perpetual peace is necessary not only for the smooth working of a constitution, but, as we saw with the “Idea,” also because it is a moral necessity.

Hence, Kant gives us two reasons to accept the link between morality and politics: political organizations are concerned with the freedom of communal agents, “thus, true politics cannot progress without paying homage to morality,”²⁵ and perpetual peace is a moral goal which can only be achieved if the necessary political organizations and constitutions are in place, for “a people’s good moral condition is to be expected only under a good constitution.”²⁶ Thus it is a moral imperative that nations eventually enter into (cosmopolitan) relationships with one another in order to settle their differences by law instead of war, since “reason absolutely condemns war as a means of determining the right and makes seeking the state of peace a matter of unmitigated duty.”²⁷

²³ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 377. See also: Heinz Wichmann, “Zum Problem des ewigen Friedens bei Kant,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 876; Pierre Laberge, “Von der Garantie des ewigen Friedens,” pp. 151 and 153; Otfried Höffe, “Einleitung: Der Friede – ein vernachlässigtes Ideal,” pp. 9-10, 15, and 21; and Otfried Höffe, “Völkerbund oder Weltrepublik,” pp. 112 and 118-9, all in: *Immanuel Kant: Zum Ewigen Frieden*, Otfried Höffe, ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).

²⁴ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 379.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 380.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 366.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 356.

We again see Kant suggesting that belief in providence, which might establish the necessary conditions for moral progress, and the belief in moral progress of human beings, are beliefs necessitated by practical reason, and thus seem to be a type of postulate of practical reason. Kant mentions providence several times in this essay, particularly in his insistence that “perpetual peace is *insured* (guaranteed) by nothing less than that great artist *nature*...”²⁸ Kant writes that, regarding this insurance by nature/providence:

the relationship of objects to and their conformity with the purposes that reason itself sets out for us (the end of morality) can be represented from a *theoretical* point of view as a transcendent idea, but from the practical point of view (where, e.g., it is employed in relation to our concept of duty regarding *perpetual peace*), it is represented as a dogmatic idea and it is here that its reality is properly established.²⁹

Thus, it is from a practical point of view that the idea of nature’s guarantee of perpetual peace is posited, and while providence is clearly the more accurate term to use for a description of nature’s guiding hand, Kant feels that “the term *nature* is less *pretentious* than a term connoting that there is a *providence* of which we can have cognitive knowledge...”³⁰ Heinz Wichman in his article, “Zum Problem des ewigen Friedens bei Kant,” also argues that such a guarantee must be seen as stemming from a practical point of view, concluding that:

[perpetual peace] remains therefore as a postulate, which can never be proven... The guarantee of peace is a precondition for the possibility, given by

²⁸ Ibid., Ak. 360. Laberge attempts to make a distinction between what Kant means by “nature” and “providence” here, but I think that even if Laberge is correct (which I do not believe, unless it is *only* the difference between the connotations which these terms conjure up), this distinction does not play a significant role in our present concerns.

²⁹ Ibid., Ak. 362. In this essay the term “dogmatic” is not used by Kant in his usual sense, and connotes nothing negative, unexamined, or purely transcendent.

³⁰ Ibid.

practical reason, that the concept of Right can be moved completely through politics to reality.³¹

Nature's guarantee of peace is not known by speculative reason, but is posited by practical reason.

And, as Kant argued in the "Idea," nature ensures peace through the antagonism between individuals. Regarding the "*moral objective*" of perpetual peace,³² Kant tells us (as in the "Idea") that it is brought about in three ways: through a perfect internal constitution, "solvable even for a people comprised of devils (if only they possess understanding),"³³ through peace between nations, "produced and secured by an equilibrium of the liveliest competing powers,"³⁴ and finally through an active desire to interact with one another in a cosmopolitan whole, for "the *spirit of trade* cannot coexist with war, and sooner or later this spirit dominates every people."³⁵ Again, we see Kant's insistence on a necessary political condition for the promotion of morality, a condition brought about through war and conflict, which, ultimately, eliminates war forever,³⁶ while maintaining a safe arena of competition, so that individuals do not lapse into a state of "bovine" existence.

Kant also mentions the necessity of believing in a moral progress of the species. While this is implied, I think, both in Kant's discussion of his disapproval of the innkeeper's sign, and by the fact that he believes

³¹ "Es [perpetual peace] bleibt jedoch auch hier bei dem Postulat, der Beweis wird wiederum nicht angetreten... Das aber ist die Voraussetzung dafür, daß der von der praktischen Vernunft geforderte Rechtsbegriff vollständig durch Politik in die Wirklichkeit umgesetzt werden kann,... dann auch den Frieden für immer zu garantieren imstande sind," ("Zum Problem des ewigen Friedens bei Kant," p. 876. Above translation mine).

³² "Perpetual Peace," Ak. 365.

³³ Ibid., Ak. 366. On the forming of the constitution see: Ak. 365-7.

³⁴ Ibid., Ak. 367.

³⁵ Ibid., Ak. 368.

³⁶ Höffe considers this to be an advantage in Kant's thinking, namely that he "abandons the [impossible] ideal of freedom from all conflict" in favor of an international peace which comes about through conflict. See: Höffe Otfried "Einleitung: Der Friede -- ein vernachlässigtes Ideal." 18-19.

perpetual peace to be a necessary moral goal because it alone can provide the foundation for moral improvement, he also writes:

the course of world events justifies providence. For the moral principle in man never dies out, and with the continuous progress of culture, reason, which is able pragmatically to apply the idea of right in accordance with the moral principle, grows through its persistence in doing so...³⁷

Here again is Kant's idea that reason will always progress, and that it will improve with time and with practice. And, Kant concludes that while belief in moral progress of the species cannot be proven theoretically, it must be postulated practically:

[I]t seems impossible to be able to use a theodicy to provide any justification whatsoever for creation, namely, that such a race of generally corrupt beings should have been put on earth. We will be unavoidably driven to such skeptical conclusions, if we do not assume that pure principles of right have objective reality...³⁸

Here we also see the recurrence of Kant's belief that, if persons were created, then we can only justify their existence through moral reasons, and that we must assume moral progress in order not to be driven toward skepticism. Perhaps the following quotation provides an acceptable summary of Kant's position:

nature guarantees perpetual peace by virtue of the mechanism of man's inclinations themselves; to be sure, it does not do so with a certainty sufficient to *prophesy* it from the theoretical point of view, but we can do so from a practical one, which makes it our duty to work toward bringing about this goal (which is not a chimerical one).³⁹

³⁷ "Perpetual Peace," Ak. 380.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 368.

D. An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing? (1798)

This article, one of Kant's last published works, makes many of the same arguments as "Theory and Practice," though we do encounter a second (new) foundation on which Kant basis his predictions of the future. As with his discussion of Mendelssohn in "Theory and Practice," Kant is concerned here with the three possible futures of the human race: regression, stagnation, and improvement. Kant maintains that we are asking a moral question, not one regarding the science of history, for in asking the question, "the important thing is not the natural history of man..., but rather his moral history and, more precisely, his history not as a species according to the generic notion (*singulorum*), but as the totality of men united socially on earth and apportioned into peoples (*universorum*)."⁴⁰ Since Kant specifically speaks of the "totality of men (*dem Ganzen der gesellschaftlich auf Erden vereinigten*)," this gives us further evidence of a duty not only to ourselves, but to the human race as a whole, and should recall us to the "*sui generis*" duty of the *Religion*.⁴¹

Kant recognizes, in a somewhat new admission of the difficulty of the question, that a history of the future is made all the more difficult by the fact that we are dealing with persons as free agents, and thus of whom "what they ought to do may be dictated in advance, but of whom it may not be predicted what they will do."⁴² Whereas with the first *Critique* Kant was concerned with the possibility that all human actions might one day be entirely predictable, here he seems to be concerned with the opposite possibility, namely that we might never be able to predict what individuals as freely acting agents might do. Kant concludes, apparently for several reasons, that

⁴⁰ "Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" p. 141.

⁴¹ See also: "Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" p. 151.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

“The Problem of Progress Is Not to Be Resolved Directly through Experience,”⁴³ i.e., we cannot simply tell from an investigation whether humans are improving or will improve in the future. However, Kant notes that “if the course of human affairs seems so senseless to us, perhaps it lies in a poor choice of position from which we regard it,”⁴⁴ and thus while we cannot say for certain simply through observation that the human race is improving morally, for we are dealing with free beings, perhaps we can find a clue which would allow us to make a prediction: “there must be some experience in the human race which, as an event, points to the disposition and capacity of the human race to be the cause of its own advance toward the better...”⁴⁵

Kant finds his clue in the “mode of thinking of the spectators”⁴⁶ of the French Revolution. This is slightly different than the explanation of human progress through conflict. Kant here notes that the spectators of the Revolution are grossly interested in this event, evidencing “a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race.”⁴⁷ Kant maintains that the spectators are truly interested in this movement toward a civil and republican constitution,⁴⁸ even though such enthusiasm might not be in their best interest, and even though the Revolution might not succeed. Thus Kant concludes that “genuine enthusiasm always moves only toward what is ideal and, indeed, to what is purely moral, such as the concept of right, and it cannot be grafted onto self-interest.”⁴⁹ It is the enthusiasm *itself* of the spectators which Kant

⁴³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

takes as his clue for the moral progress of humankind, the desire of the human race to have a just constitution, one which they themselves would will and which eliminates the possibility of war; this “not only permits people to hope for progress toward the better, but is *already itself progress* in so far as its capacity is sufficient for the present.”⁵⁰ Thus, as an excellent summary, Kant maintains:

Now I claim to be able to predict to the human race -- even without prophetic insight -- according to the aspects and omens of our day, the attainment of this goal. That is, I predict its progress toward the better which, from now on, turns out to be no longer completely retrogressive. For such a phenomenon in human history is *not to be forgotten*, because it has revealed a tendency and faculty in human nature for improvement..., and one which nature and freedom alone, united in the human race in conformity with inner principles of right, could have promised. But so far as time is concerned, it can promise this only indefinitely and as a contingent event.⁵¹

Several familiar themes appear in this essay. Here, political organization is clearly and consistently linked with the possibility of moral progress. It is a constitution and, specifically, a republican constitution which allows for there to be peace and the beginnings of moral progress; “it thus establishes the condition whereby war (the source of all evil and corruption of morals) is deterred; and, at least negatively, progress toward the better is assured humanity in spite of all its infirmity...”⁵² This “Platonic Ideal (*respublica noumenon*), is not an empty chimera, but rather the eternal norm for all civil organization in general, and averts all war.”⁵³

Also, as in “Theory and Practice,” Kant alludes to the fact that progress is an assumption we can make, regardless of what the outcome of the Revolution will be and even (somewhat) regardless of what happens in the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 153. Italics added for emphasis.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 159.

⁵² Ibid., p. 155.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 165.

future. The former is not a concern because Kant is concerned with the way of thinking of the spectators of the Revolution, and this is a phenomenon which is itself “not to be forgotten,” thus no matter what happens, “that philosophical prophesy still would lose nothing of its force.”⁵⁴ The latter is not a concern because we are dealing with free agents, and if the human race seems to be declining,

if it is moving backwards, and in an accelerated fall into baseness, a person may not despair even then of encountering a juncture (*punctum flexus contrarii*) where the moral predisposition in our race would be able to turn anew toward the better... for [we have seen cases where people]... when things disintegrate altogether, know how to adopt a strengthened motive for making them even better than they were before that state.⁵⁵

It seems that, for Kant, we must hold onto this thesis “provided at least that there does not, by some chance, occur a second epoch of natural revolution which will push aside the human race to clear the stage for other creatures...”⁵⁶

We also see the continual theme that the antithetical hypothesis would be “a subversion of the ultimate purpose of creation itself,”⁵⁷ and even the thesis that there exists neither progress nor decline is strenuously rejected, for “it is a vain affair to have good so alternate with evil that the whole traffic of our species with itself on this globe would have to be considered as a mere farcical comedy, for this can endow our species with no greater value in the eyes of reason than that which other animal species possess...”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 159. I pointed out in a footnote in Chapter Ten of Section One above that Peter Burg in his book about the French Revolution seems simply wrong to assert that we could have (theoretical) knowledge of progress in human history. I take the present discussion to be further refutation of Burg’s argument.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

And, finally, despite Kant's reliance on the attitude of the spectators of the Revolution to ground his hypothesis, we may still take note that the way in which persons were lead to enthusiasm for such a republican constitution was through conflict: "a civil society organized conformably to this [Platonic] ideal... can only be painfully acquired after multifarious hostilities and wars..."⁵⁹ Hence, Kant concludes again: "here, therefore, is a proposition valid for the most rigorous theory, in spite of all skeptics, and not just a well-meaning and practically commendable proposition: the human race has always been in progress toward the better and will continue to be so henceforth."⁶⁰

III.

A second approach to the link between morality and politics is to be had by way of considering the "public" nature of reason. This approach is found particularly in "What is Enlightenment?" and "What is Orientation in Thinking?" While much of Kant's writings emphasize the need for freedom of public expression, these two articles articulate this need the most clearly. The link between morality and political organizations is necessary here, not for the avoidance of war, but so that persons may dialogue with each other in order to better the use of their reason. While such dialogue is necessary for reason, it is also essential for any attempt to form a moral community as such.

A. *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)*⁶¹

This is perhaps the most well known of Kant's political writings, and its main point is the need of persons to emerge from their "*self-imposed*

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 165. See also: pp. 165-167 and p. 169. This is also implied in Kant's discussion of Hume, pp. 169-71.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

⁶¹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Moral Practice*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), 41-48. All citations refer to Akademie page numbers.

*immaturity.*⁶² Kant here calls for all human beings to think for themselves, to enlighten themselves, and “nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except *freedom*; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason *publicly* in all matters.”⁶³ This leads Kant to his famous support of the dictate of Frederick II, “*Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!*”⁶⁴ as well as his division between the “private” and “public” use of reason, where persons must do and teach as they are expected in their roles as civil servants or religious leaders (“private use”), while they should be allowed to voice their true opinions in print, addressed to the “*literate world*”⁶⁵ (“public use”). Kant argues that the banning of the use of public reason “would be a crime against human nature, whose essential destiny lies precisely in such progress [in the use of reason],”⁶⁶ and “to renounce it [enlightenment] for himself, or, even more, for subsequent generations, is to violate and trample man’s divine rights underfoot.”⁶⁷ Essentially, Kant argues that it is up to the governments to allow their citizens (or, in this case, subjects) to have freedom of religion as well as freedom to criticize (in print) their government. Kant makes the tacit assumptions both that enlightenment is itself something to be desired, and that a government (king) which allows its citizens (subjects) freedom of thought will be respected and obeyed; in this respect, the next essay may be an improvement, so let us turn to it.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Ak. 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 36.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 39.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 40.

B. What is Orientation in Thinking? (1786)⁶⁸

This article was written by Kant during the Jacobi-Mendelssohn controversy over Lessings' alleged Spinozism, and concerns both the connection between reason and morality as well as the public use of reason. Kant's general aim here is basically a reiteration of his conclusions in the first and second *Critique*, from the perspective of the question of how we are to orient ourselves in thinking. He concludes that, while reason is practical and it has a "need" to assume the possibility of the highest good since "it is not just a matter of indifference whether one wishes to make [such] a definitive judgment...",⁶⁹ such a belief is only a "*postulate* of reason"⁷⁰ and is based solely on reason's practical needs, not a "basic principle of zealotry."⁷¹ Though it may be important to note that this is another of Kant's defenses of the highest good, what interests us here is the link between morality and politics.

Having defended the need to orient ourselves morally and rationally in our thinking, Kant goes on to argue that this can only be achieved under certain external conditions. Kant makes the following bold assertion:

We do admittedly say that, whereas a higher authority may deprive us of freedom of *speech* or of *writing*, it cannot deprive us of freedom of *thought*. But how much and how accurately would we *think* if we did not think, so to speak, in community with others to whom we *communicate* our thoughts and who communicate their thoughts to us!⁷²

Here Kant maintains that our ability to think and reason is directly hindered by a situation where the government would censure freedom of speech.

⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking?" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237-249.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Morality, as we have seen, comes from the proper use of reason, and is not simply a moral feeling.

Hence, while every person has immediate access to the moral law without scholarly interpretation, there are (at least) three important reasons why reason needs to be exercised. First, as Kant tells us in the *Grundlegung*, “ordinary understanding” is able to be moral and “innocence is indeed a glorious thing; but unfortunately, it does not keep very well and is easily led astray. Consequently, even wisdom -- which consists more in doing and not doing than in knowing -- needs science... in order that wisdom’s precepts may gain acceptance and permanence.”⁷³ Second, given that certain political structures are necessary for the moral project, and given that the actual manifestation of such satisfactory structures in the world is a matter for empirical solutions, we must be able to dialogue with one another in order to come up with the best governmental structures. Third, there are many moral problems in the world which are difficult to solve, and Kant gives us a myriad of such “casuistical” examples in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.⁷⁴ The moral law is singular, but our choice of how we are best to manifest the moral law in our daily lives can be answered in many different, though legitimate, ways, for “the maxims of agents may be very different with regard to the same laws.”⁷⁵ Thus, the exercise of reason is necessary for moral improvement, and this exercise cannot take place without public dialogue.

Kant believes that enlightenment, that is, the ability to think for oneself in accordance with the natural constraints of reason, is necessary for the moral project, because morality is tied so intricately to reason. Without

⁷³ *Grundlegung*, Ak. 405. Recall also Kant’s discussion of “wisdom” in the second *Critique*.

⁷⁴ There is also a fourth important reason for this, though we can only anticipate it, which is the need for us to find a “pure religious faith” which would allow the entire world to come together in a kingdom of God; however, this cannot come about on its own, and will require finding an “ecclesiastical faith” which would be acceptable to all and which could act as “vehicle.” For more on this, see the next chapter.

⁷⁵ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 225. Ellington translation. See also Ak. 397, 433 n., and “The Diadactics of Ethics.”

freedom of expression, Kant believes there to be no freedom of thought. Without freedom of thought, there is no improvement of reason, and thus, no improvement of morality. Perhaps this remark of Reiss' regarding Kant's essay is appropriate:

The essay thus shows how, in Kant's view, epistemology and ethics are closely interlinked with politics as well as how, in his opinion, rational inquiry and moral conduct can be practiced properly only in a society governed according to principles of politics based on the Idea of freedom. In other words, Kant's theory of politics, as this essay shows, is not an unimportant appendix to his critical philosophy, but a necessary consequence of it.⁷⁶

IV.

In this chapter, I have argued that there is an important link between political organizations and morality. Throughout this work I have also argued that moral progress is influenced by external conditions, and that it is a duty to try to bring about those external conditions which would allow for the morality of all to progress unhindered. The main condition which Kant asserts to be the most detrimental to morality is war. Now Kant has asserted that it will be nature and not individuals as moral agents which will be the guarantor of perpetual peace. Kant also asserts that such peace will come about *regardless* of the wills of individuals, that is, regardless of moral intent. Why should this be?

Kant's thinking, I believe, can be spelled out as follows. To begin with, moral progress is a necessary postulate of practical reason, i.e., it is necessary to believe that humans are indeed progressing in order to avoid a contradiction within practical reason.⁷⁷ Therefore, those structures which

⁷⁶ p. 236. Hans Reiss, "Introduction to *What is Orientation in Thinking?*" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 235-6. For more on the relationship between reason and freedom see: Onora O'Neill, "Reason and Politics in the Kantian Enterprise," in *Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Howard Williams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 15-80, and "Vindicating Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 280-308.

⁷⁷ For more on this contradiction, see Chapter Five below.

would allow for such moral progress to occur must be thought to be possible themselves. Now Kant argues that both a perfect external and internal constitution are necessary before moral progress can begin in earnest.⁷⁸ Thus, we see arguments that both of these constitutions are indeed possible, both the “Platonic Ideal” of a perfectly functioning government as well as a federation of sovereign nation-states which are devoted to peace. However, as we saw with “Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?”, Kant knows full well that we are dealing with a history of a species which is *free*, and thus which would be free at any point to change their minds about an issue. This last point is crucial to understanding Kant’s need of nature as the guarantor of peace, for if peace were not somehow guaranteed by nature, then there would *always* be the threat of war, for humans are free to act as they see fit, and a continual threat of war is precisely the condition which Kant is concerned to eliminate. On the one hand, the act of war is a voluntary act committed by human beings, and thus seems to concern only a moral problem, i.e., that once everyone at some time decided or willed there to be no more war, the problem of war would be solved. But, on the other hand, precisely because war is a *free* act, we are aware that, without some external guarantee of peace, there would always be the possibility of someone changing their minds about the peace, and the world being plunged into war again. Thus, if Kant could not give us some indication about how peace might be achieved *perpetually*, then we would never escape a “state of international nature,” and we should then have reason to doubt that continual moral improvement is possible. But how can nature guarantee this?

Let us begin an answer to this question by examining Kant’s controversial claim in “Perpetual Peace” that “the problem of organizing a nation is solvable even for a people comprised of devils (if only they possess

⁷⁸ I will argue for this further in the next chapter.

understanding).⁷⁹ We have seen in the first and second *Critique* as well as in his political writings that Kant believes the problem of a successful political organization “must be *solvable*.”⁸⁰ The problem, as Kant describes it, is how to organize a group of rational beings to behave in accord with Right, “though each is secretly inclined to exempt himself from such laws.”⁸¹ Kant asserts that the solution to this problem

does not require the moral improvement of man, it requires only that we know how to apply the mechanism of nature to men so as to organize the conflict of hostile attitudes present in a people in such a way that they must compel one another to submit to coercive laws and thus to enter into a state of peace, where laws have power.⁸²

As early as the first *Critique*, Kant asserts that “the more legislation and government are brought into harmony with the above idea [of the ideal constitution] the rarer would punishments become, and it is therefore quite rational to maintain... that in a perfect state no punishments whatsoever would be required,”⁸³ with the obvious implication being that there would be no punishments because no one would transgress the principles of Right. Though Kant believes that the correct form of government can only be conceived on the basis of the moral law, he does not believe that such a government can only come about through adherence to the moral law. Kant cannot rightly be accused of thinking too much of human nature, for throughout his political writings, he insists that Right will emerge precisely from humans’ tendencies of self-inclination; this is the primary thrust behind all of “*Theory and Practice*.”

⁷⁹ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 366. This passage has received a good deal of commentary, especially at the recent, Eighth International Kant Conference.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ First *Critique*, A317 = B373.

What allows for a solution to the problem of a perfect constitution? Though Kant does not argue for it explicitly, a proper defense would likely concern the clause “if only they possess understanding.” What this suggests, given that Kant continually emphasizes that (political as well as moral) progress comes about through self-interested agents, is that the more a nation approximates the form of Right, the more all self-interested agents will see an advantage to such an organization, *as long as* they are not completely irrational. This last clause is intended to rule out those individuals who, though they would recognize a situation as being advantageous, would endanger the situation anyway. Thus, someone without understanding, someone really irrational, might jeopardize his/her own advantageous situation even though thinking said situation helpful to promote his/her own happiness.⁸⁴ Barring such an occurrence, if Kant is correct in his analysis, even completely self-interested agents would prefer and uphold a State based on Right because they would correctly understand it to be the most advantageous for them.

Obviously, the question arises as to whether such “devil” agents really would believe that a state of Right would be advantageous to them, and in his article, “A Constitution for a Race of Devils,” William Clohesy argues that they would.⁸⁵ Clohesy asks the question, “What sort of government would arrogant and cynical devils form among themselves?”⁸⁶ and contends that it would be a republican form of government. Clohesy concludes:

⁸⁴ This is consistent with Kant’s examination of evil in the *Religion*. There, the truly wicked person is just that individual who, while still hearing the call of the moral law, subjugates it to a general maxim whereby the agent’s own happiness is of the highest value. Thus, the moral law is not transgressed simply for the sake of transgressing it, but rather for the sake of happiness. Thus, the “devil” as long as s/he had understanding, would be willing to maximize his/her own happiness, and thus act in accord with Right (though not will in accord with the moral law).

⁸⁵ William Clohesy, “A Constitution for a Race of Devils,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 733-41. See also: Peter Laberge, “Von der Garantie des ewiges Friedens,” pp. 162-3, and Otfried Höffe, *Den Staat braucht selbst ein Volk von Teufeln: philosophische Versuche zur Rechts* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988).

⁸⁶ “Constitution for a Race of Devils,” p. 738.

fearful of one another, unwilling and unable to take upon themselves the task of assuring good government, they might well decide that such a rule of law would best protect their interests while allowing many unsavory private pursuits and associations. That is, they would accept a rule of law grounded in practical reason because their prudential calculations would suggest that it would better suit their interests than any other system. That is, the devils would be persuaded by their *understanding* to accept a system despite the fact that it was derived from the moral reason of a just lawgiver.⁸⁷

Thus Clohesy argues that devils would desire a republican form of government, one which recognized the rights of individuals while still establishing a system which would limit the possibility of one party gaining the upper hand of self-interest, because it would best safeguard their own interests. And Clohesy brings up the important point that this necessarily requires “understanding” on the part of the devils to recognize that this is indeed the best situation for them; an irrational devil who misconstrued the situation might not be willing to agree to the terms of this contractual government. This problem aside, there seems to be no *prima facie* reason to think that Kant is wrong in his belief that a republican national constitution can arise in which agents will willingly participate even if only through self-interested motives.⁸⁸

Let us return to the question of perpetual peace guaranteed by nature alone. We have already seen how Kant describes this guarantee in the “Idea,” namely that the unsocial sociability of human beings will lead them to improve themselves, and “unconsciously proceed toward an unknown natural end, as if following a guiding thread... promot[ing] an end they would set little store by, even if they were aware of it.”⁸⁹ Here Kant talks about “the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 739.

⁸⁸ Such an argument is similar to Rawl’s take on the “veil of ignorance” method of thinking about government.

⁸⁹ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 17.

inevitable outcome”⁹⁰ of progress and a state of peace which -- “partially through the best possible internal organization..., partially through common external agreement and legislation -- a state similar to a civil commonwealth is established and can maintain itself *automatically*.”⁹¹ Because this is guaranteed by a plan of nature, Kant even states in a footnote that “the role of man is thus quite artificial.”⁹² We see this again in “Theory and Practice,” where Kant makes the bold statement that, regarding “eternal progress,”

one soon sees that this immeasurably distant result depends not so much on what *we* do... nor on what method we adopt so as to bring it about; instead, it depends on what human *nature does in and with us so as to compel us onto a path that we ourselves would not readily follow*. Only from nature, or rather only from *providence*..., can we anticipate a result that will affect the whole and, as a consequence, the parts.⁹³

Thus, in all of Kant’s political writings,⁹⁴ it is nature and the self-interested nature of individuals which allow for the guarantee of peace, not mere moral willing, and the reason for this need seems most likely to be the necessity of securing a perpetual peace in the face of human freedom.⁹⁵ Through war and unsocial sociability, humans finally come to reject violence and war, finally entering into a republican constitution and an international

⁹⁰ Ibid., Ak. 24.

⁹¹ Ibid., Ak. 25.

⁹² Ibid., Ak. 24 n.

⁹³ “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 310.

⁹⁴ This is true even of the “Idea.” See: Ak. 23n. and Ak. 25.

⁹⁵ Thus, I think that Aleksander Bobko in his article, “The Problem of Evil and the Idea of Eternal Peace in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), pp. 857-863, has simply misunderstood the nature of perpetual peace as it relates to moral issues. Bobko asks, “What character then has the foundation which makes the basis for Kant’s project of eternal peace? The answer to this question lies in the way we understand and solve the problem of evil,” (p. 862). Bobko concludes that the foundation for perpetual peace is the elimination of evil (and thus is a problem solved by the establishment of a moral community). But this seems completely wrong, for evil is the subordination of the moral law to the principle of happiness, and as such it is totally compatible with Right and with peace. Kant insists that peace is not a matter of morality, but only a matter of behavior, i.e., a question not of virtue but of Right. Thus, we simply do not require the elimination of evil for the establishment of peace.

federation, even if from entirely self-interested motives. I think that Kant believes such a guarantee to be necessary because, as natural creatures, humans always desire to exempt themselves from constraints which restrict happiness (namely Right) and manifest a propensity towards violence. Individuals must be *utterly convinced* that war is undesirable, convinced beyond a mere intellectual belief, as it were.

This is, of course, not to say that we are helpless to promote such a situation; in fact, I have tried to argue that we have a duty to do so. Kant also provides us with the necessary room for this interpretation, writing that peace depends “not so much” on us, and, stating in “Perpetual Peace,” that even though nature “does it [brings about peace] herself, whether or not we will it,”⁹⁶ government “is a *moral task*..., and its method of pursuing perpetual peace... is completely distinct [from merely empirical considerations].”⁹⁷

Kant, however, insists that to try to work for peace directly and by considering it as a “mere *technical task*” is ineffectual. He claims that peace “requires considerable natural knowledge so that one can use nature’s mechanism to attain the desired end; yet it is uncertain how this mechanism will function as far as its consequences for perpetual peace are concerned; and this is so in all three areas of public right.”⁹⁸ Thus Höffe writes that “for concrete, political judgments, a philosopher is no more competent than any other well informed and thinking citizen. Kant does well to leave such judgments to political representatives and specialized advice to lawyers.”⁹⁹ Kant is here urging something which is analogous to his writings about happiness,

⁹⁶ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 365.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 377. This is why, to repeat a point, I think that Susanne Weiper is wrong in her insistence in “Eine Idee zwischen Politik and Moral: Der Friedensgedanke bei Kant and Scheler” that the ends of nature and the ends of human beings should be considered as an antinomy, and, for the same reasons, Eckart von Sydow, in his “Der Gedanke des Ideal-Reichs bei Kant.”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 377. See also: *Religion*, pp. 113, 123-4, and 130 n.

⁹⁹ Otfried Höffe. “Einleitung: Der Friede -- ein vernachlässigtes Ideal.” pp. 8-9. translation mine.

i.e., we know what it is our duty to do, but, conversely, we are quite uncertain about how to bring about an end which belongs to an unspecified concept. Happiness and peace are alike in that they are “ideas” and their specific content is unknown to us; it is uncertain *exactly* how to bring about a situation in the natural world in which every nation could work together to ensure peace. Thus, reason “cautions us not to employ power in direct pursuit of it [peace], but rather to approach it indirectly through those conditions presented by favorable circumstances... [T]he less it makes conduct depend on the proposed end... the more conduct will in general harmonize with morality.”¹⁰⁰ What this shows is that, ultimately, the moral law commands what it always has: obey the categorical imperative and act in accord both with Right and with virtue. We may not know exactly how to form an international federation of independent states,¹⁰¹ but we know that we must establish an internal constitution in accord with Right as well as organize our nation into a Republic so that a cosmopolitan world can be more easily established and war can be avoided. Keep in mind that the ultimate hope is not simply peace, but to “transform a *pathologically* enforced agreement into a society and, finally, into a *moral* whole.”¹⁰²

Let me pause a moment and include some relevant observations from Jeanne Schuler, since her article, “Reasonable Hope: Kant as a Critical Thinker,” nicely addresses this problem between historically situated, concrete political needs and Kant’s vision of a utopian future.¹⁰³ Schuler agrees

¹⁰⁰ “Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 378.

¹⁰¹ Though if Höffe is correct in his arguments concerning the formation of a “Minimalstaat,” and I think that he is, we may have more specific content than originally thought. See: Otfried Höffe, “Eine Weltrepublik als Minimalstaat: Zur Theorie internationaler politischer Gerechtigkeit,” in *Zum ewigen Frieden*, eds. Reinhard Merkel and Roland Wittmann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 154-171, and Höffe, “Völkerbund oder Weltrepublik.”

¹⁰² “Idea,” Ak. 21.

¹⁰³ Jeanne Schuler, “Reasonable Hope: Kant as Critical Theorist,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 901-7.

that progress in history concerns “a learning process which leads... to institutions and policies required for human moral development,”¹⁰⁴ and thus that political institutions are necessary but not sufficient for moral progress, since “a calculated peace falls short of enlightened culture... As history moves from hot to cold war, so peace born of prudence evolves toward morality.”¹⁰⁵ But in addition to this important point, she also discusses the interplay between the envisioned, moral end on one hand, and the historically situated, concrete tasks on the other. As she describes it, there exists a dialectic between the utopian end and the historical process:

the first provides a yardstick and direction; the second probes actual tendencies toward the ideal. Both offer perspectives on human nature in terms of its realization and its fumbling formation... Immanent analysis without utopia is blind. Utopia without immanent analysis is empty.¹⁰⁶

In this respect, then, it is well that Kant insisted upon the need of each side of this dialectic, for not only would a pure utopia be rather fanciful while pure politics would be without Right, but also the “end of history” would have been either completely non-definable, or, conversely, much too specifically defined.

There is also no reason to think that an enlightened ruler could not help speed this process along. Recall, for instance, that Kant insists that changes in constitutions, while necessary, should be done slowly, so as not to change too much too fast and thus risk rebellion.¹⁰⁷ Due to Kant’s arguments in the first section of the *Metaphysics of Morals* that the ruler or rulers must have complete executive power, constitutional change must come from the top down; learned people have a right and perhaps a duty to publish their

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 912.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 904.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 906.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. “Perpetual Peace.” Ak. 347 and 372.

recommendations for changes, but ultimately some sovereign must take responsibility for sensible and timely reforms. Thus Clohesy writes that

although citizens and officials need not be motivated by moral reason in their political action, reform will be best furthered by those who recognize its moral import. These moral reformers should be the rulers themselves who attempt gradually to change their regimes by preparing their subjects to become citizens. They should be the well-born, accustomed to participation in public affairs, who recognize the plight of the "great masses" for the injustice that it is.¹⁰⁸

Government is ultimately concerned with the rights of persons, with individuals as ends in themselves. The ruler who wishes to further the cause of Right must have an eye to the nature of the moral law and of human beings in both their moral and empirical natures. As Kant maintains, "politics says, 'Be ye wise as serpents,' to which morality adds... 'and innocent as doves'."¹⁰⁹ Clohesy notes that "the founding of good government has always been recognized as one of the greatest of human accomplishments. The wisdom and leadership needed to bring together fractious, frightened, and needful people has been held as almost divine."¹¹⁰

The existence of our own country and constitution should be a prime example: what would the United States look like without people like Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, or Hamilton? And, as a republic draws its power from the people as they give the law to themselves, the continued maintenance and improvement of the republic will fall upon the shoulders of all, and their ability to work together to form new ideas and recommendations. As we noted above, solutions to particular problems, ending poverty, for example, will require empirical solutions, and while the moral law is the foundation for such maxims, the maxims themselves must take a particular

¹⁰⁸ "A Constitution for a Race of Devils," p. 737.

¹⁰⁹ "To[ward]Perpetual Peace," Ak. 370.

¹¹⁰ "Reasonable Hope," pp. 738-9.

form. The form they should take will be up to us to decide, and the community to enact.

Chapter Four

The Five Stages of Moral Progress

I.

In this chapter I want to discuss Kant's vision of how the moral improvement of the human species is to progress. I believe that Kant has in mind five distinct stages for the human race, beginning with a state of nature and leading up to the moral Kingdom of God. It seems that the first and last stage exist independently, while the middle three stages appear to develop at the same time. I will try to spell out the nature, the necessitated duties, and the dangers inherent in each of the five stages. Because Kant does not speak specifically of there being five stages or what the exclusive characteristics of each stage might be, I will do my best to make an otherwise confusing characterization clear, perhaps unnaturally so.

II.

A. *State of Nature*

This is the beginning state of human existence, and one out of which we have already passed, if we were ever really in it. This is Hobbes' state of nature where there is no law, no Right, and no organization of individuals. This is the original condition which gives rise to Kant's agreement with Hobbes that entering into a civil society is a matter of contract. The primary duty of persons in this state is simply to leave it, and enter into civil society. There are (at least) three reasons for this. First, as discussed before, it would be obviously impossible to act morally for any length of time in a society devoid of any securities. Second, and relatedly, we are commanded to act in

accord with the moral law, and this means not only attempting to will morally, but also means that we must behave in accord with Right, for only the principles of Right can instruct us on the correct manifestation of freedom. Third, we must enter into a society in order to stimulate and improve our talents of skill and of discipline. Without a civil society, we would be tempted to remain hunters and gatherers, to be Robinson Crusoe, or simply to be content. Contentment, however, places us back on the level of other animals, and cannot be consistent with our final end as moral agents. Thus, we must leave this state of nature, as we already have, in order to enter into a society.

B. National/Internal Constitution

Kant makes it clear that this stage and the next are codependent upon each other, for a perfect internal and external constitution are both necessary to safeguard each other. Originally, however, this stage begins (and perhaps for a long time continues) with some type of internal constitution, while there remains a state of nature between nations. This external, international state of nature continues to threaten each nation's internal composition because of actual wars as well as the mental and financial resources drained through the preparation of war. While we are always commanded to will in accord with all aspects of the moral law, the focus and the emphasis at this stage, if only for the sake of clarification, is on Right.

The most urgent concern is to establish a republican form of government so that international peace can be promoted. As we have seen, Kant insists that a republican form of government has the best chance for promoting peace, since the people ought to be consulted before a war would be possible.¹ If worldly situations can effect the ability of persons to take on the

¹ Though I think Kant is ultimately correct in this belief, there are possible objections to this: 1) that nations with republican governments have a history of war equal to those without a republican government, 2) that the people are not, in fact, directly consulted regarding the decision to go to war, and 3) that many wars are fought not for monetary gain, as Kant seems to emphasize, but instead fought for revenge, prestige, or a host of other possibilities. On these objections see (respectively): Michael W.

moral project in earnest, then Kant seems right to urge that our immediate concerns ought to be with controlling this situation. War, as the largest threat to morality by far, must be eliminated. Culture, both as skill, the ability to set and pursue ends, as well as discipline, the ability to consistently choose moral ends, is ultimately threatened and hampered by war and the preparation for war.² Yet, culture plays an essential role in the progression of the human species. It is culture which allows us to continue to develop our talents in a state of conflict without being in a state of war. The formation of a republic continually approximating a perfect constitution is necessary for the safeguarding of culture and for the elimination of war. In other words, Kant believes that a certain type of internal constitution is necessary before an external one can be created, hence, in the interest of eliminating war, we must create this republican form of government to pursue peace.

In addition to this rather negative need, there are also several positive aspects to the republican system of government. One is the simple fact that Kant believes this to be the only organization for freely willing agents that is possibly consistent with the moral law, and hence we have the moral duty to promote this organization. Kant's very definition of Right is: "Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law,"³ thus not only must I act in accord with Right, but I am also allowed to *coerce* others into this system of Right.⁴ The call to Right is "based on everyone's consciousness

Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (1983): 205-35 and 323-53; Otfried Höffe, "Ausblick: Die Vereinten Nationen im Lichte Kants," in *Immanuel Kant: Zum ewigen Frieden*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 254-56; and Susanne Weiper, "Eine Idee zwischen Politik and Moral: Der Friedensgedanke bei Kant and Scheler," p. 914.

² Cf., "Idea," Ak. 27.

³ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 230, Gregor trans.

⁴ Cf., *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 230-33.

of obligation in accordance with a law.”⁵ Such a constitution is also necessitated because the moral law is constituted such that the individual must represent giving laws to him/herself, representing the law not as something which is foreign to him/herself, thus the laws of the State must be such that they could be agreed to by all persons and not simply be arbitrary.⁶

In addition, a republican constitution seems simply to be most *desirable*, moral issues aside. Unless one is part of the ruling or powerful class, a constitution which is in accord with Right will lead to a system of government which is most representative of the rights⁷ and desires of human beings. This is the thinking behind the constitution which is possible for a race of devils. We will always be moved toward a republican constitution, for our nature as moral persons, as well as human beings, will urge us to strive for this goal, thus “nature and freedom alone” guide us to this end.

And, in addition, there is another suggestion from Kant as to why such a constitution is to be strived for, keeping in mind our final moral end. This is found in the “Idea” where Kant, speaking about the need to move out of the state of nature, uses the following analogy:

It is just as with trees in a forest, which need each other, for in seeking to take the air and sunlight from the others, each obtains a beautiful, straight shape, while those that grow in freedom and separate from one another branch out randomly, and are stunted, bent, and twisted. All the culture and art that adorn man, as well as the most beautiful social order, are fruits of unsociableness that is forced to discipline itself and thus through an imposed art to develop nature’s seed completely.⁸

⁵ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 232.

⁶ Cf., “Idea,” Ak. 23, “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 289 ff., and “To[ward] Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 379.

⁷ I think that there is a possible non-moral use of this term, and I understand “rights” here in that respect.

⁸ “Idea.” Ak. 22.

Here again we see Kant's notion of antagonism without violence, conflict without war. A constitution in accord with Right is desirable because it allows for that situation in which each person can maximize their freedom without violating the freedom of others. And this situation is desirable because it furthers the development of culture, which, in turn, furthers the moral end.⁹

While I think the emphasis at this stage must be on Right, surely we must also continue to try to pursue those additional duties of virtue. We ought to try to promote the happiness of others as well as work on our own moral willing. We also ought to work on those external constraints which might hinder others both from behaving and willing in accord with the moral law; thus, we ought to try to eliminate poverty and to focus on the development of culture. However, the problem with this, as I have argued, is that, according to Kant, war will continually threaten such projects as long as it remains a threat. Thus, let us save a discussion of such positive duties for the section on culture and ecclesiastical faith below.

C. Federation of Nations

Our duties here are basically outlined by Kant in "To[ward] Perpetual Peace." On the negative side, it is the duty of every nation to enter into an organization of all nations, "an enduring, ever expanding *federation* that prevents war and curbs the tendency of that hostile inclination to defy the law..."¹⁰ Kant insists that nations cannot give up their independence and

⁹ There is one further suggestion made by Kant, but I am uncertain as to its exact nature or forcefulness. This is the suggestion in "To[ward] Perpetual Peace," especially at Ak. 354, 356-7, and 379, that because of the analogy between persons moving from a state of nature into civil society and nations moving from the international state of nature into a federation of nations, States would have to be republican in form because that is the only way they would be *autonomous*. It is clear in this essay that Kant believes that nations cannot give up their constitutions and their independence, and that the federation cannot be ruled by a single nation. Thus, the suggestion is something to the effect that because the federation must consist of independent nation-states along the analogy of a nation organized in accord with Right, each nation must be free and autonomous, and the only condition under which this is possible is if each nation has a republican constitution.

¹⁰ "To[ward] Perpetual Peace." Ak. 357.

enter into one giant and despotic world-nation.¹¹ The federation must keep each nation as independent. Kant's suggestion seems to be not only that a world ruled by a single dictator would be fraught with too much peril, but also that, in the same way that individual persons cannot be asked to give up all of their freedom, no nation can be asked to give up its right to self rule.¹² Thus, the federation "does not seek any power of the sort possessed by nations, but only the maintenance and security of each nation's own freedom, as well as that of the other nations leagued with it... [T]his *idea of federalism* should eventually include all nations and thus lead to perpetual peace."¹³ It is also the (negative) duty of each nation not to engage in those practices, such as standing armies, assassination, or national debt, which might provoke nations to engage in war. Each nation must do as much as possible to ensure that war will be forever eliminated.

However, as Otfried Höffe points out in several articles,¹⁴ Kant's position regarding the federation of nations is complicated and even contradictory. On the one hand, as mentioned above, Kant makes the analogy between the need of individuals to move out of a state of nature and the need of nations to move out of an (international) state of nature. Thus, some constitution is needed to promote peace between nations. On the other hand, Kant is concerned to protect the sovereignty of each individual nation, in the same way that the sovereignty of every individual ought to be protected within a nation. However, Kant takes this protection to the extreme, maintaining that the relationship must be "a federation of nations, but it must not be a

¹¹ Cf., "Theory and Practice," Ak. 310-11, and "To[ward] Perpetual Peace," Ak. 354 ff.

¹² Kant often uses the analogy between individual persons leaving a state of nature, and separate nations leaving an international state of nature.

¹³ "To[ward] Perpetual Peace," Ak. 356.

¹⁴ Otfried Höffe, "Eine Weltrepublik als Minimalstaat: Zur Theorie internationaler politischer Gerechtigkeit," pp. 154-171; "Völkerbund oder Weltrepublik," pp. 109-132; and *Vernunft und Recht* (1996). Chapter 5.

nation consisting of nations.”¹⁵ He also asserts that nations will not want to enter into a

nation of peoples... because it does not conform to their idea of the right of nations... so (if everything is not to be lost) in place of the positive idea of a *world republic* they put only the *negative* surrogate of an enduring, ever expanding *federation*... though there will always be constant danger of their breaking loose.¹⁶

Thus, there is a tension, if not a contradiction, in Kant’s extreme protection of the nation-state which is not equally applied in this analogy to the individual.

Hence, Höffe points out that there is a contradiction: if we follow the analogy linking individuals and nations “the Völkerstaat [world republic] and not the Völkerbund [federation] seems to [logically] follow.”¹⁷ It seems inadequate for Kant to insist that nations ought to be able to arbitrarily enter and exit this federation of nations, i.e., this establishment of a Völkerbund which is a mere “negative surrogate,” for without any power to enforce a peaceful union, such a scenario leads only to a temporary peace like the “house of Swift.”¹⁸ Just as individuals must relinquish some of their freedom in order to enter into a legal society, nations ought to enter into a relationship with one another in which they cannot simply choose to break the laws and leave the union whenever they wish. Kant is not taking his analogy seriously enough, and should require nations to undergo the same sacrifices as individuals in order to leave the state of (international) nature.

But how can Kant require that nations leave the state of nature without violating their sovereignty and without founding a world despotism?

¹⁵ “To[ward] Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 354. “...ein Völkerbund, der aber gleichwohl kein Völkerstaat [ist]...”

¹⁶ Ibid., Ak. 357.

¹⁷ Höffe, “Völkerbund oder Weltrepublik?” p. 113. All translations of Höffe are my own.

¹⁸ “Theory and Practice.” Ak. 312.

Höffe's solution is an insightful, and I think correct, answer to this problem. Since "all" that is required from an international organization of nations is the securing of (perpetual) peace, a Völkerstaat could be founded whose only mission was "the coordination and, above all, violent-free solution to conflicts [between nations]"¹⁹ and "a well defined and, at the same time, assured legal protection (*Rechtsschutzes*) [for all individual nations]."²⁰ In other words, the job of the world organization would be the securing of sovereignty for each individual nation. Anything above and beyond this protection, however, "would violate the natural right (*Menschenrecht*) of nations, the nation's right to (political and cultural) self-determination."²¹ In this manner, the sovereignty of each nation is protected while peace is promoted. Using the analogy between individuals and nations, Höffe argues that there must be some official power to enforce the sovereignty of each nation, to protect it from encroachments from other nations; a mere voluntary organization with no official power or an organization not formed in accord with Right will simply not suffice. Thus, given the rest of Kant's political writings, it seems Höffe is right to argue for this stronger need for a nation of nations.

However, an additional comment may be important here, namely to note that Höffe himself seems not to go far enough regarding the necessity of this requirement for the formation of a Völkerstaat. He asserts that, because we must accept the right of self-determination of all nations as so fundamental, "one may not force an individual nation into joining a federation of nations nor force its conversion into a republican form of government."²² Yet this does not harmonize with the analogy. If we consider the condition of individuals within a nation, surely the State has not only the right, but also the requirement (in accord with Right) to force people into a

¹⁹ Höffe, "Eine Weltrepublik as Minimalstaat," p. 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²¹ Höffe, "Völkerbund oder Weltrepublik?" p. 117.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

legal organization, and to force them to behave accordingly. As Höffe himself writes: “the establishment of a definite society is a duty... [and] certainly presents a categorical imperative of Right.”²³ Though the individual retains his/her individual rights at all times (or at least ought to) and remains the ultimate foundation for any national organization, that individual does not reserve the right to exempt him/herself from that nation. Hence, keeping with the analogy, it seems that an international organization would indeed have the right to force nations into a federation of nations, a *Völkerstaat* and not a mere *Völkerbund*. Given the requirement of Right that individuals and individual nations ought to leave their state of nature, a *Völkerstaat* ought to have some right to at least put pressure on other nations to join this organization, especially since its only power would be to protect the sovereignty of each nation.²⁴

Moving to more positive considerations concerning this third stage of moral progress, Kant indicates that nations should try to promote interaction between the people of different nations, especially with an eye to promoting trade.²⁵ Kant makes the distinction in “To[ward] Perpetual Peace” not only between a national and international constitution, but also between “one conforming to the *rights of nations* in relation to one another... [and] one conforming to the *rights of world citizenship*, so far as men and nations stand in mutually influential relations as citizens of a universal nation of men.”²⁶ While the former seems to concern the work of the federation to prevent war,

²³ p. 25. In: Otfried Höffe, “Einleitung: Der Friede -- ein vernachlässigtes Ideal.”

²⁴ In a private discussion with Höffe (Tübingen, Deutschland, November 1996), he admitted that this was indeed a problem, and indicated that what he should have stated more clearly in these articles is not that a *Völkerstaat* could not try to compel other nations to join the federation, but only that they could not use *violence* in order to do so. Höffe said he would deal with this in a forthcoming book. It remains unclear, however, just how far a *Völkerstaat* could use its power in order to compel other nations to join it. Economic sanctions? Mere political pressure?

²⁵ There remains the possibility that this is merely a negative duty, since trade is only one means among many for the elimination of war. However, I think that Kant would insist on the interaction of individuals for the mere sake of promoting cosmopolitanism, thus as a (positive) end itself.

²⁶ “To[ward] Perpetual Peace.” Ak. 348 n.

the latter seems to be concerned with “universal *hospitality*.”²⁷ Thus, this latter duty is not a duty between nations, but instead between the individual and foreign persons or nations. Thus, Kant considers it a matter even of Right for individuals to be allowed to visit other countries peacefully.

There seem to be (at least) four reasons why this second duty might be necessary. The first reason is that it is necessary to bolster trade, a device which contributes to peace.²⁸ Second, “because a... community widely prevails among the Earth’s peoples, a transgression of rights in *one* place in the world is felt *everywhere*.”²⁹ This appears to indicate the pragmatic consideration that we ought to treat foreigners in accord with Right so not as to threaten relations between nations. Third, it is simply a matter of Right to treat all persons in this manner. Fourth, if we are to take Kant’s insistence of the duty to establish a kingdom of God on earth, clearly we have to be able to interact with each other in terms of cosmopolitan (*weltbürgerlich*) citizens, individuals who, while always belonging to some State or other, will have to interact in order to actively promote a moral world. While this fourth reason will lead us into the next stage of moral development, at this stage we can think of this duty towards cosmopolitanism as the duty to treat persons from different nations in accord with Right, again stressing at this stage political and external duties over those of virtue.

Before moving on to the next stage of moral development, let us address the following question for the last time: Is a state of perpetual peace a *moral* condition? I have tried to argue in sections above that it is not. Kant insists again and again that war will eventually be eliminated through nature alone, and that we will enter into a federation even if we are not willing

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 357.

²⁸ Cf., “To[ward] Perpetual Peace.” Ak. 359 and 368.

²⁹ “To[ward] Perpetual Peace.” Ak. 360.

to do so.³⁰ From the first to the last of Kant's articles on peace and politics, he holds that obedience to the laws of Right "eventually... will also extend to nations in their external relations toward one another up to the realization of the cosmopolitan society, without the moral foundation in mankind having to be enlarged in the least..."³¹ Peace will be achieved through self-interest. Yovel comes to exactly the same conclusion in his *Kant and the Philosophy of History* writing, among other things, that:

nature cannot produce the goal of history. It reaches only as far as the stage of culture. As such, it can produce the political facet of the highest good, but even here it is only a sufficient, not a necessary condition. As for the ethical community, the core of the historical ideal... nature can only prepare the external ground for it by ensuring a political order, guaranteeing life and property, refining the brutish instincts. But it cannot bring about the system of ethical dispositions itself.³²

Wolfgang Röd argues for the same conclusion, maintaining that, because the organization of all nations in accord with Right "is not the last goal, but itself only a means, this shows, therefore, that according to Kant, the final goal of history exists in the moralizing of humankind, which should follow from their civilization and culturalization."³³ Lewis White Beck writes that "morality is not a product of nature, but of a new beginning which, nevertheless, presupposes the natural processes leading up to civilization,"³⁴ and that

³⁰ Pierre Leberge has worked out a very detailed version of how nature secures such peace even though we do not wish it, focusing particularly on war, differences in speech and religion, and trade. See: "Von der Garantie des ewigen Friedens," pp. 149-170.

³¹ "Is the Human Race Improving?" p. 167. Notice, however, that such phrasing does leave room for the possibility of our helping this peace along, for the thrust here, like all of Kant's writings on this issue, is that peace will occur *whether or not* we will it. Thus, it is possible that we do indeed will it, and perhaps can help to further it.

³² p. 196. Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Yovel's section, "Rational History Versus Natural Dialectic" is absolutely clear on this point.

³³ p. 140. Wolfgang Röd, "Die Rolle transzendentaler Prinzipien in Moral und Politik." Translation mine.

³⁴ pp. 198-9. Lewis White Beck, *Essays on Kant and Hume* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

moral progress “is *not* an event occurring under the mechanism of nature.”³⁵ Finally, Jeanne Schuler simply notes that “a calculated peace falls short of enlightened culture. Cordial trade relations [for example] discourage Japan bashing but do not constitute mutual respect.”³⁶ There are numerous hints throughout Kant’s writings which indicate that peace is a necessary precursor to moral improvement, but that it is not itself moral.

In addition to the many quotations I have cited above, let me offer a few more in order to secure this argument. In the fifth “Thesis” of the “Idea,” regarding the establishment of “a perfectly *rightful civil constitution*,” Kant writes that “only by solving and completing it can nature fulfill her other objectives with our species,”³⁷ thus giving us the clue that it is morality, not peace, which is the final end of nature and which will occur after the establishment of peace. In the “End of All Things,” Kant addresses a similar theme, and gives us some indication of separate stages of progress:

In the natural progress of the human race, talents, skills, and tastes... become cultured before morality develops, and this state is precisely the most burdensome and dangerous one possible for morality... However, humanity’s moral capacity..., which always lags behind, will someday overtake them (as one may hope to occur under a wise world ruler), though in its hasty course it becomes tangled in itself and often stumbles...³⁸

I take Kant’s discussion of well-being, both in these sections and in his discussion of Arcadian shepherds and the Tahitian islands, to indicate that peace is mere well-being and mere well-being is only “glittering misery” if it is not “grafted onto morality.”³⁹ In “Theory and Practice,” talking about how later generations will eventually discontinue war for merely financial

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³⁶ p. 904. Jeanne Schuler, “Reasonable Hope: Kant as Critical Theorist,” 901-907.

³⁷ “Idea,” Ak. 22.

³⁸ “End of All Things,” Ak. 332. Compare with “Idea,” Ak. 26.

³⁹ “Idea,” Ak. 26.

reasons, Kant writes that “succeeding generations (unburdened by debts they themselves have not incurred) will be able even in a moral sense to make ever more progress towards bettering themselves. And they will do this not as a result of any love of their ancestors for them, but rather solely by virtue of... self-love.”⁴⁰ In “Perpetual Peace” Kant writes explicitly: “a good national constitution⁴¹ cannot be expected to arise from morality, but, rather, quite the opposite, a people’s good moral condition is to be expected only under a good constitution.”⁴²

Hence, given the overwhelming number of quotations which attest to Kant’s insistence that humans will be brought to peace merely through their self-interested nature, given his assertions that war is the largest hindrance to morality, given that mere well-being is often at cross-purposes with morality, and given these hints that morality is a project which must occur after peace, I think we can conclude that peace is a necessary but surely not sufficient condition for moral progress.⁴³

D. Culture and Ecclesiastical Faith

As relations among nations improve and the prospects for a permanent peace increase, especially should the time come where all nations

⁴⁰ “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 311.

⁴¹ Misspelling occurs in translation.

⁴² “To[ward] Perpetual Peace,” Ak. 366. Thus, the dilemma which Aleksander Bobko presents in his article “The Problem of Evil and the Idea of Eternal Peace” is a false one, and his conclusions are flawed. Bobko’s argument is this: Kant, in the first two books of the *Religion*, concludes that the reasons for the existence of evil must ultimately remain a mystery, and thus evil is an “invisible enemy.” Thus, humankind as a whole is helpless in the face of evil. Bobko then concludes that Kant is wrong to think in “To[ward] Perpetual Peace” that peace can be achieved through reason, for we are helpless to overcome evil. This conclusion is based on the assumption that peace and evil cannot co-exist. But this assumption is wrong, for peace has to do with external action, while evil concerns non-adherence to moral maxims. Hence, the conflict Bobko presents is a false one, and his conclusion that “Kant, fascinated by rationality and motivated by dreams of eternal peace, seems to forget about the radical evil of human nature described earlier” (p. 862) is wrong. See: Aleksander Bobko, “The Problem of Evil and the Idea of Eternal Peace in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant,” pp. 857-863.

⁴³ Since the next section deals with a similar issue, it will offer even further evidence for this claim.

would finally join together in one organization, in every nation the focus can now shift toward the improvement of morality. The promotion of morality will no longer be hindered by war or the preparation for war. Money can again be used for education. The perfect or increasingly perfect constitution of each nation will allow for free competition, both among individuals as well as nations, i.e., an antagonism which will foster talents without leading to war. While there exists the danger that individuals will slip into a state of well-being, unconcerned with bettering themselves morally, the stage is set for real moral progress to begin, and Kant gives us many different ways in which to focus on this project.

1.

The first way that moral progress is promoted is spelled out in some detail in the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, namely the “Elements of Virtue.” These consist of the duties toward oneself and toward others. The former set of overarching duties concerns several specific duties. The first is to avoid the vices of “self-murder, the unnatural use which anyone makes of his sexual inclination, and the immoderate enjoyment of food and drink that weakens one’s capacity to use his powers purposively.”⁴⁴ The second includes telling the truth, keeping one’s self-esteem, and moral self-knowledge.⁴⁵ Kant considers these first and second sets of duties to be “subjective” duties:⁴⁶ the first concerns a person considered as an “animal being,” and thus concerns the need to keep oneself and the species alive, while the second concerns a person “considered only as a moral being,” and seems to concern the preservation of the foundation for the possibility of moral willing. The third and fourth set of duties concern the promotion of talents, the third being the

⁴⁴ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 420. All following quotations of the *Metaphysics of Morals* come from the Ellington translation.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 429-442.

⁴⁶ Kant’s division between “objective” and “subjective,” and “formal” and “material” is rather confusing, if it is even coherent, but this division itself is not important to our discussion.

“duty to himself to develop and increase his natural perfection, that is, for pragmatic reasons,”⁴⁷ while the fourth is the “duty to himself to heighten his moral perfection, that is, for purely moral reasons.”⁴⁸ These last two duties correspond nicely with Kant’s other discussions of culture, hence let us save a discussion of them for the moment.

The second overarching set of duties in the *Metaphysics of Morals* concern duties to others.⁴⁹ One type of duty is merely negative, “expressed only indirectly (by forbidding its opposite),”⁵⁰ and consists in the strict duty to refrain from any action which would violate the respect which is necessarily given to other human beings. The other type of duty Kant spells out in extremely positive and active terms. Our chief duty toward others is love, but Kant insists that this “is not understood here as a feeling,”⁵¹ but instead “the love of mankind (philanthropy) is here thought of as practical and, consequently..., it must be placed in active benevolence, and thus concerns the maxim of actions,”⁵² and “can also be expressed as the duty to make the ends of others (as long as they are not immoral) my own.”⁵³ Perhaps the best summary given by Kant is:

One soon sees that what is meant here is not mere well-wishing, which is, strictly speaking, a mere complaisant regard for the welfare of every other person without one’s having to contribute anything to it..., but, rather, an active practical benevolence, which makes the welfare and happiness of others one’s end...⁵⁴

⁴⁷ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 444.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 446.

⁴⁹ We have already discussed these duties in Chapter One above.

⁵⁰ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 464-5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 449.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Ak. 450.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 452.

Kant emphasizes the need for active duties, not mere well-wishing, and the duty not to do anything which would lead another to loss of self-esteem as well as the duty to help others both mentally and materially. Specifically, these positive duties are beneficence, gratitude, and sympathetic feeling.⁵⁵

2.

A second main way that Kant spells out how we are to promote moral progress is through his many discussions of culture. The theme of culture runs throughout all of Kant's writings, but let us here only examine the "Idea" and the *Critique of Judgment*. We have already seen a part of Kant's discussion in the "Idea" surrounding culture with his talk of the improvement of "all of a creature's natural capacities." We have seen how Kant describes "the first true steps from barbarism to culture, in which the unique social worth of man consists," and how "all man's talents are gradually developed, his taste is cultured, and through progressive enlightenment he begins to establish a way of thinking that can in time transform the crude natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles..."⁵⁶ Now Kant gives us several different warnings in the "Idea," reiterated in other writings, that culture is the main mechanism for avoiding the otherwise dangerous state of what might be termed "well-being" or "contentment." After discussing culture, Kant gives us his discussion of the Arcadian shepherd, and then writes that

man wills concord; but nature better knows what is good for the species: she wills discord. He wills to live comfortably and pleasantly; but nature wills that he should be plunged from laziness and inactive comfort into work and hardship, so that he will in turn seek by his own cleverness to pull himself up from them.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., Ak. 452-8.

⁵⁶ "Idea," Ak. 21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Kant warns that a state in which we are concerned only with happiness is “the harshest of evils, which pass in disguise as external well-being,”⁵⁸ continuing on to give us his statement about “glittering misery.” As I have perhaps discussed this subject enough, I will leave it be. But Kant’s point is clear: culture does not promote happiness and well-being; it works toward the development of all of one’s capacities, both pragmatic and moral, so that humans will continue to exercise their will and not be lulled into complacency.

This message is reinforced in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant’s discussion of culture resembles the “Idea” and parallels the positive duties to oneself found in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Recall that Kant maintains that “producing in a rational being an aptitude for purposes generally (hence [in a way that leaves] that being free) is *culture*,” and that culture, as nature’s penultimate purpose, promotes “man’s aptitude in general for setting himself purposes...”⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that, in keeping with the “Idea,” Kant asserts that “it is hard to develop skill in the human species except by means of inequality among people,” and maintains that it is such inequality that “...has to do with the development of man’s natural predispositions, and [so] nature still achieves its own purpose, even if that purpose is not ours.”⁶⁰

While the culture of skill allows for the promotion of our willing in general, our ability to conceive of an end and to follow through with our attempts to secure it, Kant also writes of the culture of discipline. The culture of skill does not tell us which ends to choose, and this leads us to the culture of discipline, the need “to assist the *will* in the determination and selection of its purposes.”⁶¹ Kant explains that discipline “is negative and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, despotism

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 26.

⁵⁹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 431.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 432.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

that rivets us to certain natural things..."⁶² Thus, while the culture of skill allows us to improve the formulation and pursuit of ends generally, the culture of discipline seems to be that which aids us in filtering out the call of our animal inclinations so that we can be better tuned to the moral law. The tools of this culture Kant identifies with education, the fine arts, and science, for "they make great headway against the tyranny of one's propensity to the senses, and so prepare him for a sovereignty in which reason alone is to dominate."⁶³ Thus culture forces us never to be merely complacent, and develops within us those conditions by which we could improve our morality, should we so choose.

We should briefly note that Kant's characterization of culture again forces us to conceive of nature as bringing us to a state in which we *could* improve our morality, without culture actually morally improving us. In other words, nature provides for those foundations which are necessary for moral improvement but which are not themselves moral improvement. Our original indication of this is to be had from Kant's framework for his discussion of culture, namely his search for something "which nature can accomplish with a view to the final purpose outside of nature." Here Kant is looking for what nature itself can do, not what human beings considered as rational agents can do. But let us look at the two aspects of culture. Clearly the culture of skill does not promote morality alone, for it is the promotion of setting and pursuing *any* end whatsoever. Kant describes this as something "nature herself" accomplishes, with or without our conscious contributions. Thus, culture can prepare us for morality without increasing morality.

While at first glance it might appear that the culture of discipline would necessarily directly promote morality, Kant insists that "in this regard too we find *nature* acting purposively,"⁶⁴ and that the arts and sciences

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Ak. 433. Italics added for emphasis.

“...make man, not indeed morally better for [life in] society, but still civilized for it.”⁶⁵ Indeed, Kant says quite clearly that “nature pursues the purpose of making room for the development of our humanity,”⁶⁶ not that it promotes such moral development itself. Thus, again, I think we ought to conclude that nature provides the foundation for morality without adding directly to morality.

Now, while culture does not directly promote morality, the two divisions of culture do lend themselves to better moral cultivation, and thus we are brought back to the *Metaphysics of Morals*. To begin with, as pointed out before, there is the direct comparison between Kant’s discussion of culture in the third *Critique* and his discussion of the duties to ourselves. On the one hand, the culture of “skill” should be compared with the “duty to himself to develop and increase his natural perfection, that is, for pragmatic reasons.” This mirrors Kant’s statement about skill, for this duty of “perfection” is “to cultivate his natural powers (of the spirit, of the mind, and of the body) as a means to all kinds of possible ends. Man owes it to himself (as an intelligence) not to let his natural predispositions and capacities (*which his reason can use some day*) remain unused, and not leave them, as it were, to rust.”⁶⁷

On the other hand, the culture of “discipline” from the third *Critique* is also part of the duty in the *Metaphysics of Morals* to increase one’s perfection. While Kant argues that the culture of “skill” is the cultivation of the means of promoting any end whatsoever, Kant states that we ought to cultivate such skills so that they might be used by reason for moral purposes, “for apart from the necessity of self-preservation, which in itself can establish no duty, man owes it to himself to be a useful member of the world...”⁶⁸ This is,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Ak. 444. Italics added for emphasis.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Ak. 445-6. This is, in addition, further proof that Kant is concerned with the duty to promote a highest *social* good.

of course, not the only aspect of personal perfection, hence there is also the “duty to himself to heighten his moral perfection, that is, for purely moral reasons.”⁶⁹ Kant provides us very little in way of explanation of this duty, but this is for the obvious reason that this duty concerns full adherence to the moral law and all its ends. Thus, this duty commands us to “Be holy” and consists “in attaining the completeness of one’s moral end...”⁷⁰ Hence, we have a duty to cultivate our willing of all ends, which is assisted by culture, but also the duty to cultivate our purely moral ends.

3.

This leads us to the third main type of promotion of morality, the pedagogical concern. This is discussed primarily in the “Methodology of Pure Practical Reason” in the second *Critique*, and in the “Methodology of Ethics” in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, but is touched upon in many of Kant’s writings. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant gives a very specific method for “teaching” morality, as it were, which must concern itself only with attuning the individual to the call of the moral law while introducing no other considerations. While the influence of the moral law is certainly innate, “virtue must be acquired (and is not innate)... for one cannot straightway do whatever he wills if he has not tried and exercised his powers beforehand.”⁷¹ Sensuous inclinations weigh heavily on each individual, and they must be overcome, or at least subordinated to the moral law. Thus, “virtue can and must be taught,”⁷² since it is our duty to will morally and to help others do this as well. Kant recommends a twofold approach to teaching virtue. First, using a moral “catechism,” the teacher asks questions of the pupils which make the pupils look “inside” themselves and to the moral law for the answers; “the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 446.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 477.

⁷² *Ibid.* We must take this expression with a note of caution. since it cannot, according to Kant, be taught *per se*.

teacher seeks in his pupil's reason what he wants to teach him; and if perhaps the student does not know the answer to the question, then (directing his student's reason) he suggests it to him."⁷³ Kant has given us an example of such a procedure in his "Fragments of a Moral Catechism."⁷⁴ He uses the analogy of the teacher as "midwife for the pupil's thoughts."⁷⁵ Kant adds that casuistical questions are also important, "generally sharpening the understanding of the young" as well as enlivening their moral interest.⁷⁶

After such a catechism, Kant advises that both the student and the teacher engage each other in "Socratic dialogue," eliciting help from each other. The only example Kant gives us seems to be from the second *Critique* where Kant talks about how much people like to argue about the morality of others.⁷⁷ Kant urges that in all such teachings, we ought not appeal to any advantage which might be had through moral willing, but rather simply appeal to what reason ought to do, independent of any mitigating circumstances. Thus, Kant summarizes:

the exhibition of pure virtue can have more power over the human mind, giving a far stronger incentive to effectuate even that legality and to bring forward more powerful resolves to prefer the law to everything else merely out of respect for it, than all allurements arising from enjoyment and everything which may be counted as happiness or from all threats of pain and harm.⁷⁸

Kant gives us two additional recommendations for such pedagogy, namely, "the experimental (technical) means for the cultivation of virtue [which] is the good example of the teacher himself (his own conduct being

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 480.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 480 ff.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 478.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 484.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 153 ff.

⁷⁸ Second *Critique*. Ak. 151-2.

exemplary) and the admonitory example of other people.”⁷⁹ Thus, the pupil can learn from imitating the teacher, or by examining “biographies of ancient and modern times.”⁸⁰ Kant makes two warnings for each, however. Regarding the first, he warns against “habituation” which “is the establishment of a firm inclination by its more frequent gratification and without the use of any maxims; such habituation is a mechanism of sense rather than a principle of thought...”⁸¹ As such, habituation seems to be helpful only as a foundation upon which to improve. Otherwise, it is simply a way of acting, and thus may lead one astray from willing in accord with maxims.⁸² Regarding the second, Kant warns that the examples given should not be “noble (super-meritorious) actions” for such “romantic” characters, “while priding themselves on their feeling of transcendent greatness, release themselves from observing the common and everyday responsibility as petty and insignificant.”⁸³ Kant’s consistent theme is that virtue is to be taught by appealing directly to the call of the moral law in each individual, without mixing incentives.

4.

A fourth type of promotion of virtue comes from the examination of beauty. This is again found in most of Kant’s writings, but is particularly of focus in the *Critique of Judgment*. As the link between beauty and morality has been discussed by many commentators, much more adequately than we have space for here, I shall only mention it. In essence, the link is a result of the fact that we must judge nature as if it had been created. This leads to three different considerations, all of which lend themselves to morality. The first consideration is that objects of beauty, those objects which we judge to

⁷⁹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 479.

⁸⁰ *Second Critique*, Ak. 154.

⁸¹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 479.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Ak. 407. See also Ak. 383-4.

⁸³ *Second Critique*. Ak. 155.

be beautiful as if beauty were a predicate, seem to have been designed especially for us, especially for the interplay between imagination and understanding.⁸⁴ This leads to the second consideration, namely the possibility that nature might be responsive to moral considerations, and thus may ultimately assist in our moral project. Similarly, the third consideration comes from the necessity of viewing all of nature as a system, and thus the possibility that nature was created for us, that human beings are the ultimate end of nature while morality is the final end of creation. Thus, for (at least) these three reasons, an interest in beauty may help to foster moral progress.⁸⁵

5.

Finally, had Kant not written the *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, we might well think that this list covered all of the ways in which a moral world can be promoted. However, in the *Religion*, Kant introduces a very different discussion, revolving around what he terms the “ethical commonwealth” and “ecclesiastical faith.” This, then, concerns a fifth type of promotion. Let us begin by looking at the ethical commonwealth.

If there remained any doubts that Kant believed there to be two locations for the highest good, the *Religion* (alone) ought to convince us. In this work, Kant clearly discusses two “kingdoms of God”: an afterlife, leading Kant to the problem (antinomy) of punishment and atonement, and a union of persons in this world into an “invisible church.” Regarding the latter, Kant offers several explicit statements, including the famous “*sui generis*” one, stating our duty to form “a union of such individuals into a whole toward

⁸⁴ This was discussed in Section One, Chapter Seven.

⁸⁵ There is, in addition, Kant’s suggestion in the second *Critique* (Ak. 159-160) and his discussion in the third *Critique* that there is something in the contemplation of beauty itself which inherently promotes morality. Kant proposes that, because objects of beauty stimulate the free play between the faculties of the imagination and understanding, such free play furthers our moral abilities. The beautiful also has the feature that we make a (subjective) universal judgment, just as we make (objective) universal moral judgments. See especially Kant’s discussion “On Beauty as the Symbol of Morality.” in the third *Critique*.

the same goal -- into a system of well-disposed men, in which and through whose unity alone the highest moral good can come to pass --... a whole, as a universal republic based on laws of virtue..."⁸⁶ Kant emphasizes both the fact that "the highest moral good cannot be achieved merely by the exertions of a single individual toward his own moral perfection,"⁸⁷ thus reemphasizing the need for the individual to work with and for the community, and the fact that religion is a matter of action, i.e., again, not a matter of mere well-wishing or of praying, but a question of actively promoting virtue, for "the maxim of *action*, which in religious faith (being practical) is the condition, must take the lead, and the maxim of *knowledge*, or theoretical faith, must merely bring about the strengthening and consummation of the maxim of action."⁸⁸ Kant gives us images of an "ethical commonwealth," a "kingdom of God on earth," the "world's highest good," and a "church invisible" with a "moral religion." The underlying theme remains the same: we are to "leave [our] *Ethical State of Nature*" in order to join a commonwealth which would base itself on moral principles alone.⁸⁹

What is emphasized, however, is the necessity of combining into groups of individuals for the promotion of a moral world, and this leads to a discussion of church and ecclesiastical faith. Now Kant asserts that the church invisible is based on reason alone, and thus is based on a "pure religious faith." Such true and desired faith is no different from adherence to the moral law itself. The problem, however, is that the church invisible, the ethical commonwealth, cannot manifest itself without a "visible church," i.e., some phenomenal manifestation or other. The church invisible is "a mere idea... an idea serving all as the archetype of what is to be established by

⁸⁶ *Religion*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109. See also: pp. 92, 95, and 123.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

men,”⁹⁰ while the “*visible church* is the actual union of men into a whole which harmonizes with that ideal.”⁹¹ Further, we also face the problem that, while pure religious faith is the ultimate end, it too is not to be found without first manifesting itself in some phenomenal form or other. Thus, a “historical” or “ecclesiastical” faith is the “vehicle” for pure faith. Hence, whereas “pure *moral* legislation, through which the will of God is primordially engraved in our hearts, is not only the ineluctable condition of all true religion whatsoever but is also that which really constitutes such religion,”⁹² “a church, on the other hand, as the union of many men with such dispositions into a moral commonwealth, requires a *public* covenant, a certain ecclesiastical form dependent upon the conditions of experience.”⁹³ As with any ideal of reason, that which remains perfect as an archetype can only be approximated in experience.

Thus we have rather a strange situation: although reason gives the moral law to itself, and thus knows full well how it ought to act, “men are conscious of their inability to know supersensible things,”⁹⁴ and, “by reason of a peculiar weakness of human nature,”⁹⁵ individuals have always attached themselves to some particular historical (ecclesiastical) faith or other. Kant writes that while “in men’s striving towards an ethical commonwealth, ecclesiastical faith thus naturally precedes pure religious faith,”⁹⁶ “morally, this order ought to be reversed.”⁹⁷ Thus, ecclesiastical faith remains and may always remain the vehicle for pure faith. As such, Kant recognizes that “it is

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 95.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 96.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 97 n.

also possible that the union of men into one religion cannot feasibly be brought about or made abiding without a holy book and an ecclesiastical faith based upon it.”⁹⁸ Hence, though we wish to strive toward a more “pure” faith, we are best advised to do so within the boundaries of an “ecclesiastical” faith, not engendering a revolution,⁹⁹ but simply working within existing structures to interpret such faith as closely as possible to one based on the moral law. The object is not the elimination of ecclesiastical faith, “not that it is to cease (for as a vehicle it may perhaps always be useful and necessary) but that it be able to cease; whereby is indicated merely the inner stability of the pure moral faith.”¹⁰⁰ Kant’s emphasis is not on the destruction of historical faith, but on the bringing of such faith in line with the moral law.

There is no reason to think even that many different faiths could not be consistent with a pure moral religion, as long as they realize that there is only one religion and as long as they strive for the establishment of a moral community. Kant has asserted in many of his writings that the moral law awakens the idea of God, and that persons have found many different ways of relating to this God throughout history. As reason becomes stronger, however, this relationship to God moves farther away from a worship of idols (ancients), a worship of mere laws (Judaism), and a worship of the God-Man (Christianity), and finally more closely approximates not a worship, but rather practical actions which are in accord with the moral law. As such, it is the task of the philosopher (and, perhaps, the enlightened clergy) not so much to eliminate these faiths as to reinterpret them in accord with the moral law, though “frequently this interpretation may, in the light of the text (of revelation), appear forced -- [and] it may often really be forced.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 112-3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 126 n.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 101. This need for interpretation leads Kant to his defense of the necessary place of the philosophy faculty in comparison to the theological faculty in the first part of his *Conflict of the Faculties*.

I wish to examine one particular passage before moving on, in order to get a better idea of this fifth way in which moral progress can be promoted. Kant writes, regarding those who are attuned only to a historical faith instead of a rational religion:

Thus it happens that men will regard neither union into a church, nor agreement with respect to the form which it is to take, nor yet *public* institutions, as in themselves necessary for the promotion of the moral element in religion, but only, as they say, for the service of their God, through ceremonies, confessions of faith in revealed laws, and observance of the ordinances requisite to the form of the church (which is itself, after all, only a means). All these observances are at bottom morally indifferent actions...¹⁰²

Kant seems to be indicating that we have three duties, all of which are “necessary for the promotion of the moral element”: to unify together into a church, to agree to a single form of church, i.e., not fight about the empirical form which an invisible church is to take, and to form *public* institutions. These three duties reflect the necessity of unifying in order to promote a moral world, a *social* good. They also reflect Kant’s list of four “requirements” of the “true (visible) church.”¹⁰³ Thus, Reath seems correct in saying that we must

act on the duty to promote the Highest Good by working, collectively with others, to restructure existing social institutions in accordance with moral principles... [Also,] some system of social institutions is needed as a stabilizing force -- both as a source of moral education, but also to provide background conditions that are conducive to moral conduct and the maintenance of the moral disposition on the part of individuals.¹⁰⁴

Kant’s passage is also interesting because it indicates that the fault of those of a mere historical faith is not so much in what they do, but how they

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 92-3.

¹⁰⁴ Andrews Reath, “Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant.” p. 617.

“regard” the necessary moral duties. Kant seems to indicate, again, that reformation of the church is a matter of a different focus, not of elimination or revolution. The “observances” of ceremonies, confessions, etc. are morally *indifferent*, not bad, though they tend to shift the focus away from where it should be, namely, adherence to the moral law and the formation of a universal church.

Thus, the fifth means of promoting moral progress, according to Kant, is the duty to come together as individuals for the express purpose of attempting to unify into an ethical commonwealth, forming “visible churches” and “*public institutions*” for the betterment of humankind and the mutual support of the moral law.

E. The Highest Good on Earth

Regardless of the name that we give to it, the final stage of moral progress is an idea of reason which we can only always approximate. Kant spells out this final state in many different ways in different writings, but it remains essentially the same, namely, a state in which maximal virtue and maximal (allowable) happiness coincide. As I have discussed it so often and under so many different topics, let me offer only a few cursory remarks as to its nature.

The most detailed description of this final ideal state which Kant offers is in the *Religion*. Fundamentally, this would be “an *ethico-civil state [Zustand]*... in which they [all people] are united under non-coercive laws, *i.e., laws of virtue alone.*”¹⁰⁵ This world would be one in which every person acted in accord with moral laws, each giving the moral law to him or herself. All actions and intents would be universalizable. A pleasant description of this goal is “the establishment and spread of a society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue, a society whose task and duty it is

¹⁰⁵ *Religion*, p. 87.

rationally to impress these laws in all their scope upon the entire human race.”¹⁰⁶ This is larger than any political commonwealth could be, since it is to expand to the entire world and unite it, a unification which would be against Right if it were attempted for governments. The *Religion* emphasizes the need for a *public* acknowledgment of the moral law, and thus “an ethical commonwealth must rest on *public* [but non-coercive] laws and possess a constitution based on these laws...”¹⁰⁷ Hence, while we cannot coerce anyone to be moral, we must make the moral law public, and thus erect a “church.”

As explained above, the goal is an “invisible” church which must, however, be manifested in some empirical form. The ideal is “the union of all the righteous under direct and moral divine world-government,”¹⁰⁸ while the actual “visible” church “is that which exhibits the (moral) kingdom of God on earth so far as it can be brought to pass by men.”¹⁰⁹ Kant gives us four characteristics of the ideal church: it must include all persons, though “variance in unessential opinions” is acceptable; it must have “no motivating force other than *moral* ones;” it must be free from constraint and not constrain others; and it must have an essentially unchangeable constitution, a set of “*a priori*... settled principles.”¹¹⁰ Kant asserts that such a constitution does not resemble a political constitution, for it “is neither *monarchical* (under a pope or patriarch), nor *aristocratic* (under bishops and prelates), nor *democratic*...”¹¹¹ Again it is a constitution which aids persons in their understanding of and compliance to the moral law, but which can have no coercive power. Thus, the constitution “could best of all be likened to that of a household (family) under a common, though invisible, moral Father...” where the

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

family members “accordingly honor the Father... and so enter with one another into a voluntary, universal, and enduring union of hearts.”¹¹²

Kant cautions us, however, that the ultimate form of such a state must necessarily remain a mystery for us. This seems to be for three reasons. The first rests on Kant’s assertion at the beginning of “Book Three” that

envy, the lust for power, greed, and the malignant inclinations bound up with these, besiege his nature, contented within itself, *as soon as he is among men*. And it is not even necessary to assume that these are men sunk in evil and examples to lead him astray; it suffices that they are at hand, that they surround him, and that they are men, for them mutually to corrupt each other’s predispositions and make one another evil.¹¹³

Here we see Rousseau’s influence once more, as Kant considers human beings to be relatively content with their worldly situation until they compare themselves with others. Thus, Kant believes that a real obstacle to the formation of a church is the fact that individuals become envious and greedy simply by coming into contact with other individuals. How is this to be overcome? Kant concludes, quite simply, that the solution is up to God. Kant maintains that the duty to form an ethical community “will require the presupposition of another idea, namely, that of a higher moral Being through whose universal dispensation the forces of separate individuals, insufficient in themselves, are united for a common end.”¹¹⁴ Kant asserts that while “man is not entitled on this account to be idle in this business and to let Providence rule, as though each could apply himself exclusively to his own private moral affairs and relinquish to a higher wisdom all the affairs of the human race...”,¹¹⁵ we still have no idea how God might be able to solve the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 85.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 89. See also p. 130.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

problem of such an adverse influence, and thus cannot actually picture the final state.

The second reason for the mystery of the future state is founded upon the possibility of a new ecclesiastical faith. At this time, Kant thinks that the best way for us to work toward a moral religion is to use the (Christian) scriptures and interpret them in accordance with the moral law.¹¹⁶ However, because moral religion always remains the same while the vehicle for such a religion could take many forms, there remains the possibility that Christianity could be replaced by another ecclesiastical faith. Kant's general theme about the necessity to interpret any faith to make it harmonize with the moral law leads directly to this conclusion. In talking about the progress toward a working ethical constitution, Kant indicates the possibility of "revolutions which might hasten this progress" though "they rest in the hands of Providence and cannot be ushered in according to plan without damage to freedom."¹¹⁷ The need for an empirical manifestation of the invisible church leads to the inability to say for certain how this future church will be constituted.

Finally, moving away from the *Religion*, there is the very basic problem of the establishment of peace. How will nations ultimately be able to enter into a federation with one another? How will governments and other social institutions solve the problems of poverty, education, and cultural reforms? How will war ultimately be averted? How will the particular constitution of a nation be drafted and how will the government operate? As Andrews Reath summarizes:

[the highest good on earth] is an ideal by which to guide our conduct. It tells us to aim at bringing about a world in which individuals can develop a morally good character, and have the ability and means to achieve their permissible ends. Further concrete guidance would follow from determining what

¹¹⁶ See Kant's discussion, *Religion*, p. 121-6.

¹¹⁷ *Religion*, p. 113.

arrangement of social institutions is needed for the realization of these ends, and how to best bring these arrangements into existence.¹¹⁸

These are just a few of many grand questions which have yet to be worked out, and whose empirical solution we cannot yet determine with any high degree of certainty.

Philip Rossi in his article, "The Social Authority of Reason: The 'True Church' as the Locus for Moral Progress,"¹¹⁹ faults Kant for not being more specific with regard to this last point. Rossi writes that Kant "provides neither a specific list nor a systematically detailed account of the kinds of external conduct or social practices that are not themselves directly subject to coercive power...",¹²⁰ and that while Kant does give us some negative requirements for such institutions (freedom of speech but no coercive power) and a list of four requirements for a moral religion in the *Religion* (presented above), "neither of these models thus provides an account of the concrete institutions and social practices that would enable a society [to form into an ethical commonwealth]."¹²¹

Rossi's objections seem partly true, and partly false. While it may be true that Kant does not present a "specific list" of those social practices which support moral willing, I have tried to show in part four above that he does indeed provide us with several examples. Kant's many writings about culture and his section on "Methodology" in the *Metaphysics of Morals* seems particularly important. I have tried to outline many of these examples above. With regard to the actual social institutions themselves, while certainly it is true that Kant does not even give us specific examples of what such

¹¹⁸ Reath, "Two Conceptions," p. 608.

¹¹⁹ Philip Rossi, "The Social Authority of Reason: The 'True Church' as the Locus for Moral Progress, in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, ed. Hoke Robinson, 2, pt. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 679-685.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 684.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

institutions might be, how can this be a fault? If anything, such restraint shows Kant's real understanding of the difficult problems involved in bringing about a highest good on earth. As we saw with our examination of "What is Enlightenment?" and "What is Orientation in Thinking?" in Chapter Three above, it seems impossible to say what form moral, rational thinking will take in the centuries to come, for it seems there is no eternal foundation or algorithm for such thinking. But, this aside, it also seems impossible to say with any degree of certainty what any social institution might look like in the future. The concrete solutions to the problems of morality and well-being are likely to take many forms. Hence, instead of faulting Kant for not being more specific, I think we ought to credit him for his restraint.

Hence, for these four main reasons, the exact conditions of the end of moral progress on earth remain a mystery to us, though reason gives us a general outline. We can imagine, but only imagine, what such a world would look like, a world of international peace and a world-wide moral community. In the end, as Kant has advised us all along, we can only do our duty, trying to improve ourselves and our community, hoping that God and providence will see to the rest; "therefore, we shall seek to establish the grounds of that possibility primarily with respect to what is immediately in our power, and secondarily in that which is beyond our power but which reason holds out to us as the supplement to our impotence to [realize] the possibility of the highest good, which is necessary according to practical principles."¹²²

III.

I want to make one comment before moving on to the next chapter. On the one hand, this discussion regarding the five stages of moral progress is important because it is new to Kantian scholarship. Given that little has been written on Kant's belief in moral progress, it is not surprising that this

¹²² *Second Critique*, Ak. 119.

issue has not been raised before. This detailed discussion helps to further emphasize this strain of thought Kant's philosophy, and also helps to bring together several seemingly unrelated aspects of his philosophical writings. I hope that it gives further credence to the hypothesis that moral progress, politics, and the highest good are inextricably intertwined for Kant.

On the other hand, I take this discussion to be extremely important for anyone interested in applying Kant's moral theory to practice, and for anyone concerned with taking the Kantian project seriously. If we are interested to take Kant's moral theory to heart, and if my interpretation of Kant's position regarding these five steps of moral progress is correct, then the material involved in this chapter can serve as a guide to action in the world. Obviously, we are located somewhere in the middle three stages of progress. This discussion is rich with advice and possibilities which can be further explored and analyzed. Kant's writings on Right and the separation of powers coincide on many levels with our own system of government. His visions about the necessary republican nature of a successful constitution seems to have been born out in the last two hundred years. Writers like Otfried Höffe have used Kant's theory of international relations as a foundation for an analysis of the United Nations. These are but some ways in which Kant's writings can be utilized as a way of approaching important issues in today's society.

In addition, the five ways in which moral progress can be promoted which I outlined in part "D" alone provide extremely rich material for further exploration. This material has gone relatively unexplored. Could we take Kant's suggestions to heart? If we believed moral progress to be possible, and that we had a duty to promote it, are Kant's suggestions the best possible for promoting moral progress? What sort of national and international organizations could be established to help this process? What sort of moral and religious teachings could be endorsed? How might we go about forming

together as a cosmopolitan whole or ethical commonwealth? I hope that my discussion might open up a horizon for dialogue about these questions.

Chapter Five

Importance of the Highest Good

I.

I have argued above that the highest good is the necessary *object* of moral willing. In this chapter, my interest concerns why Kant thinks that we must believe in its *possibility*. In Chapter One above, as in much of the literature, the debate seldom addresses Kant's own writings on why he thought belief in the highest good to be necessary; usually attacks and defenses of the highest good concern whether it is *possible* to accept this concept, dealing with its coherence and its compatibility with the rest of Kant's philosophy. However, throughout his writings, Kant maintains that there is no objective need to believe in the possibility of the highest good; rather, this is a subjective need, and one that cannot be commanded. What, then, is the nature of this need, and how can the highest good be justified as an object of faith? Another way to address this question is to ask, What would happen to the moral law (and morality) if the highest good were believed to be *impossible*? Accordingly, this is also the question of why the postulates of practical reason are needed, for they are postulated precisely in order to secure the possibility of the highest good. Strangely, though such a justification seems to be of extreme importance to Kant's philosophical project, Kant makes a relatively limited number of remarks to offer such a justification, and there has been little commentary in the secondary literature.

I will argue that there seem to be six different justifications which Kant gives for a belief in the possibility of the highest good. Four of these seem to be at least recognized in one way or another in the literature. The

other two justifications I have not encountered in the literature, nor does Kant spell them out specifically in connection with the highest good. Kant does not seem to have settled on any one of these, and we encounter reassertions of each throughout all of Kant's writings. In the first section, I shall look at four justifications which are likely to be more well known, beginning with the most stringent of these claims about the highest good, working through to the weakest. Interestingly, this is the same order in which these justifications first occur in Kant's writings. In the last section, I will end with what I take to be two rather different justifications. I will argue that the last is perhaps the best justification possible.¹

II. Traditional Defenses

A. *Rejection of the Moral Law: Consequences and Inattainability*

Kant's most emphatic statements with regard to the justification for the highest good are that the moral law would have to be rejected if the highest good were not possible. There seem to be two different arguments for this, corresponding to the first and second *Critique*. The first seems to concern the appropriate consequences of moral or immoral willing. Kant writes that:

reason finds itself constrained to assume [God and immortality]; otherwise it would have to regard the moral laws as empty figments of the brain, since without this postulate the necessary consequence which it itself connects with these laws could not follow. Hence also everyone regards the moral laws as commands; and this the moral laws could not be if they did not connect a priori suitable consequences with their rules, and thus carry with them *promises* and *threats*.²

¹ The sixth justification concerns an earthly highest good, and it is perhaps for this reason that it has been overlooked by commentators.

² First *Critique*, A811-12 = B839-40.

This argument seems to state that the moral law would have to be rejected if the highest good were not possible because 1) it is the highest good which allows the linking of rewards and punishments with the corresponding type of willing,³ and 2) rewards and punishments are part and parcel with the moral law because consequences are necessary for the moral law to command. In other words, it seems Kant wants to argue that the moral law(s) would have to be deemed “empty figments of the brain” if the highest good were not possible because the moral law demands “happiness... in exact proportion with... morality...”⁴

Now, as I have interpreted it, this first argument seems too strong to succeed.⁵ Kant would reject this line of argumentation in the second *Critique*. In the second *Critique*, Kant notes that the moral law commands simply because of the form of the law, and says nothing about necessary consequences. Thus, if no reward came from moral willing, this would not count against the moral law. If proportionate happiness in accord with virtue was not possible, the moral law would still command.

The second argument Kant makes for a possible rejection of the moral law following from the rejection of the possibility of the highest good occurs primarily in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Here Kant reasons that if the moral law dictates that we must achieve the highest good, then either this end is possible, or the moral law is false:

Since, now, the furthering of the highest good, which contains this connection [of happiness to morality] in its concept, is an a priori necessary object of our will and is inseparably related to the moral law, the impossibility of the highest good must prove the falsity of the moral law also. If, therefore, the highest

³ A810-11 = B838-9.

⁴ A814 = B842.

⁵ I may have interpreted it wrongly; it could be that Kant is really concerned here with a question of motivation, since at A813 = B841 we have his statement that “without a God and... a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action.” This argument, of course, is rejected by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* because “pure” reason can be “practical” and thus provide its own motivation.

good is impossible according to practical rules, then the moral law which commands that it be furthered must be fantastic, directed to empty imaginary ends, and consequently inherently false.⁶

Thus, if the moral law commands us toward ends which we know for certain are impossible, then it must be rejected. Indeed, this must be of particular concern for Kant since he has already given us many statements regarding both the corrupted nature of persons and the moral unresponsiveness of nature. Hence, the moral law might seem quite fantastical in its demands, given the nature of individuals and the world as Kant has already presented them, or as most people ordinarily perhaps view them.

A few pages later, Kant gives us a similar argument, though addressing only a concern about immortality. Here, he seems concerned with two possibilities:

Without it [“the thesis of... an infinite progress toward complete fitness to the moral law”], either the moral law is completely degraded from its holiness, by being made out as lenient (indulgent) and thus compliant to our convenience, or its call and its demands are strained to an unattainable destination, i.e., a hoped-for complete attainment of holiness of will, and are lost in fanatical theosophical dreams which completely contradict our knowledge of ourselves. *In either case*, we are only hindered in the unceasing striving toward the precise and persistent obedience to a command of reason which is stern, unindulgent, truly commanding, really and not just ideally possible.⁷

If immortality not assumed to be possible, then there seem to be two possibilities. First, if individuals did not have the requisite time necessary for moral progress, then the moral law could command only something less than complete moral perfection of the individual, and would thus be “lenient.” The second possibility seems to be that if the moral law is too stringent, and commands something which we could not possibly attain, then it is “strained to an unattainable destination.” In the first case, the moral

⁶ *Second Critique*, Ak. 113-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Ak. 122-3. Italics added for emphasis.

law must be rejected since it does not command, but seems merely to recommend, while in the second case, it is rejected because it commands something which cannot be achieved. While this citation deals with a question of motivation,⁸ it also shows that the impossibility of one aspect of the highest good leads to a full rejection of the moral law.

While such statements occur primarily in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, we see something similar even in “Perpetual Peace,” where Kant writes that

morality is in itself practical, for it is the totality of unconditionally binding laws according to which we *ought* to act, and once one has acknowledged the authority of its concept of duty, it would be utterly absurd to continue wanting to say that one *cannot* do his duty. For if that were so, then this concept would disappear from morality (*ultra posse nemo obligatur*)...⁹

While this passage implies that the highest good must be rejected as an object of duty if it is impossible, the reverse of this seems easily inferred, since Kant claims that it *is* a duty commanded by the moral law, and hence if it is impossible, then the moral law must also be false.

The immediate objection to these strong formulations of the problem of justification seems to be that it is not a duty to *achieve* the highest good, only to *strive* for it. This is Silber’s argument, discussed above in Chapter One. Thus, the moral law only commands us to pursue the highest good, and this is indeed something which we can do. Therefore, even if the highest good cannot, in fact, be achieved, it does not invalidate the moral law.

A second objection to this strong position might be one similar to Lewis White Beck’s original objection, namely that the moral law simply deals with one’s own willing, and says nothing with regard to happiness, either of oneself or of others. I have tried to argue in Chapter One that this is

⁸ We will deal with the question of motivation below.

⁹ “To[ward] Perpetual Peace.” Ak. 370.

not entirely true, since we are dealing with a moral law which *commands*, and such a law already deals with human beings as both creatures and rational agents.

However, perhaps Beck's concern with pure willing may lead us to a third objection to Kant's strong justification. This would be that the moral law commands moral willing regardless of the outcome of such willing, an argument which Kant makes in the *Grundlegung* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The moral law must not be founded on the outcome of actions.¹⁰ It is rather surprising, then, that the best argument against his own original justification of the highest good comes not from either of these two works, but instead from the *Critique of Judgment*. Here, Kant specifically raises the question of whether a person who cannot believe in God would then be released from the moral law, and concludes that all that we

would have to give up is our *aiming* at that final purpose that we are to achieve in the world...; every rational being would still have to cognize himself as strictly bound by what morality prescribes, because the moral laws are formal and command unconditionally, without regard to purposes (which are a matter of volition)... Fulfillment of duty consists in the form of the earnest will, not in the intermediate causes [responsible] for success.¹¹

In other words, Kant seems right to argue that the moral law is concerned with the command to will in accord with reason, and thereby with morality, and this command comes from the pure form of the will. The success of the highest good is on par with other consequences of moral willing, thus I must tell the truth regardless of whether the outcome will be beneficial or not. While I have argued that the natural (necessary) object of such willing is the highest good, it also seems reasonable to say that the attainment of this

¹⁰ Although I have tried to argue that it is not thereby *unconcerned* with this outcome. This is the point in the last chapter about the *interest* of reason.

¹¹ *Critique of Judgment*, Ak. 451. See also especially the "Preface to the First Edition" of the *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

object cannot be commanded. Of all of Kant's justifications for the highest good, this one must be rejected outright.

B. A conflict within reason would occur

Certainly, however, Kant is right to recognize some sort of tension which would occur if the highest good were thought to be impossible. If the foregoing analyses have been correct, then the moral creature naturally wills that the highest good should come about, and naturally does what s/he can to further that state. The highest good is the necessary object of the moral will. Hence, there would be some tension within an agent who heeded the call of the moral law, yet also believed that no highest good was possible, that humankind was simply not capable of progress. But we have also seen that this tension cannot simply result in the rejection of the moral law; we are obligated to will morally regardless of the consequences. So what is the nature of this tension?

Kant indicates in a few places that we are perhaps best to think of this tension along the lines of a mere inconsistency. This does not appear to be a vicious or even perhaps illogical inconsistency. There can be no *duty* to believe in the postulates of practical reason, for "faith that is commanded is an absurdity,"¹² so belief is not commanded. And, as long as the agent continues to do his/her duty, then there is no direct conflict with the moral law. Indeed, the assumption is made because of a need of practical reason, which is ultimately concerned with willing and actions, and therefore if the agent continues to will and act in accordance with the moral law, there is no violation of duty.

Yet there does seem to be some kind of inconsistency in the willing of an object and not believing in the possibility of its attainment. Perhaps it is best thought of as a psychological inconsistency, or as a conflict within the "interest" of reason. Kant asserts:

¹² *Second Critique*, Ak. 144.

No, my conviction is not *logical*, but *moral* certainty; and since it rests on subjective ground (of the moral sentiment), I must not even say, '*It is morally certain that there is a God, etc.*', but '*I am morally certain, etc.*' In other words, belief in a God and in another world is... interwoven with my moral sentiment...¹³

The problem is that, as Kant explains it, "once an end is accepted, the conditions of its attainment are hypothetically necessary... [I]t is sufficient, absolutely and for everyone, if I know with certainty that no one can have knowledge of any other conditions which lead to the proposed end."¹⁴ Reason has set itself the end of bringing about the highest good. Therefore it must consider those means which are necessary for its existence to be possible. Thus, while belief in these postulates "is itself not commanded," Kant has argued all along that "it rather springs from the moral disposition itself."¹⁵

So, with the case of a person who believes in the validity of the moral law but not the postulates of practical reason, there would necessarily be a tension within reason itself. Practical reason is the creator of the postulates, which are needed to achieve its ends, yet the person would reject these very same postulates while still acknowledging the moral law. It seems that Kant did not believe this to be vicious, only that the postulates should be believed "from a practical point of view, i.e., so that he can at least form a concept of the possibility of [achieving] the final purpose that is morally prescribed to him..."¹⁶ Unfortunately, Kant tells us nothing as to the specific nature of this tension.

However, there is one specific reason to take this tension seriously. Kant writes in different places that the idea of a God could not have arisen in history without the development of practical reason. We understand the

¹³ A829 = B857.

¹⁴ A823-4 = B851-2.

¹⁵ *Second Critique*, Ak. 146. See also: Ak 12n.

¹⁶ *Third Critique*, Ak. 453.

concept of God today as including omniscience, omnipotence, etc., but Kant believes that these attributes were not always attributed to God. Kant has also argued that the notion of God does not arise from theoretical reasoning, for even nature as teleologically conceived does not lead to the concept of a moral author of the world, but at most to an “*architect*.”¹⁷ Thus, Kant argues that when, at some point in the past,

people had progressed far enough in their inquiries to deal philosophically even with moral subjects, about which other peoples had never done more than talk, they found for the first time a new need, a practical need which gave them the definite concept of the First Being. In this, speculative reason was only a spectator, or at best it had the merit of embellishing a concept which did not grow on its own ground...¹⁸

The concept of God as we now understand it was not always the same as it is today. It took time to develop, time which practical reason needed in order to become more mature. Theoretical reason cannot truly lay claim to any proof for the existence of God, nor, it seems, can it lay claim to the genesis of the concept of God. It seems likely that the same story could be told about the highest good and the (positive) nature of freedom, though perhaps we have always felt the need for immortality.

This ought to lead us to the consideration that it seems rather incongruous for reason to reject a postulate which had arisen because of its own needs. The postulate and nature of God, (positive) freedom, and the highest good all arose through needs of a maturing practical reason. They were needed for reason to present an account to itself of how its natural and necessary end might be achieved; “it would be practically impossible to strive for the object of a concept, which, at bottom, would be empty and without an object.”¹⁹ One argument here, then, seems to be that there would not have

¹⁷ A627 = B655.

¹⁸ *Second Critique*, Ak. 140.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 143. See also: *third Critique*, Ak. 454.

been the notion of a God or highest good to deny in the first place if it were not a necessary need of practical reason. The need of reason “has its ground objectively in the character of things as they must be universally judged by pure reason and is not based on inclination... This is, therefore, an absolutely necessary need...”²⁰ These concepts would have been entirely empty to begin with had not they been a need of reason. For reason itself to reject them seems to be inconsistent, though perhaps this specific defense could be repudiated if one rejected Kant’s belief that the concepts of God and immortality arose through needs of practical reason.

Returning to the more general defense for the highest good concerning the “tension” which would ensue, why should reason wish to reject these postulates? It cannot be that reason feels itself strong enough to create the highest good on its own, for we ought to be well versed in examples of moral actions leading to undesired results; we are not the masters of a nature which is unresponsive to moral needs.²¹ So practical reason ought not to reject them. But perhaps, while practical reason gave rise to these concepts, speculative reason would find some reason to reject them; but this is also not possible. What arguments could theoretical reason find to reject these postulates? God, freedom, and immortality are not objects of possible experience, so it is not possible to have some experience which would disprove their existence. Kant has cleared the way for all three with the first Critique. The only remaining objection could be based on the alleged lack of moral progress in human history. But this too is something which it seems impossible to prove or disprove through experience, though Kant has, as we have seen, given the skeptic plenty of reasons to think that we can find clues to the race’s progress. Given that Kant has already conceded that these are not supposed to be objects whose existence we could know theoretically, and are

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For more on this, see the following chapter.

mere postulates, there seems no reason to deny practical reason the objects of its need. But this brings us to the next section.

C. There is no reason not to believe, while there is a reason to believe

This point is a relatively simple one, and should be obvious from all of Kant's writings. In essence, this justification for belief in the postulates might be summarized by Kant's assertion that, "the assumption of its possibility is not at all in need of a command, for theoretical reason has nothing to say against it."²² Kant's point is simple: these postulates are for the use of practical reason alone, and are not intended to be theoretical proofs of the existence of these objects, "but only for the sake of a practically necessary end of the pure rational will, which does not here choose but rather obeys an inexorable command of reason....."²³ Thus, because practical reason "turns the scale" in favor of their use,²⁴ and because there is no reason forbidding their use, we ought to feel free to do so. Hence, between "pure" and "practical" reason, "it is not a question of which must yield, for one does not necessarily conflict with the other."²⁵ The only conflict which seems to exist is the conflict which would take place within reason itself if it attempted to *deny* the possibility of these postulates. Hence, Kant writes, for example, that the duty to strive for the highest good is "based on an apodictic law... which is independent of these presuppositions, and thus needs no further support from theoretical opinions on the inner character of things, on the secret final end of the world order, or on a ruler presiding over it..."²⁶

The *Critique of Judgment* gives us even further reason for this type of justification. In fact, the conclusion of this *Critique* is not only that it is

²² *Second Critique*, Ak. 144.

²³ *Ibid.*, Ak. 143.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ak. 145.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ak. 120.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Ak. 142-3.

permissible for us to think that there is a God and that nature operates teleologically, but that we *need* to think this, and we need to think it in the interests of *theoretical* reason. Thus, practical reason is not merely allowed to postulate the existence of God and teleology, as if it were at odds with speculative reason over this issue, but there is now a harmony of reason concerning these issues:

if we combine our cognition of physical purposes with that of the moral purpose, then, because of pure reason's maxim to strive to unify principles as much as we can, physical purposes are very important, since they support the practical reality of the idea of God by the reality that from a theoretical point of view it already has for judgment.²⁷

While this concerns speculative reason, giving us only a *regulative* idea, and thus cannot provide any separate *confirmation* of the postulates of practical reason, such a conclusion certainly lends support to the type of justification we are concerned with in here. As we saw in Section One above, there are three reasons why the conclusions of the third *Critique* lead to a connection between morality and the natural world and hence God. The need for judgment to think in terms of a moral author of the world lends further support to the possibility of the responsiveness of nature to the needs of morality. Thus, conflict created through the rejection of the postulates of practical reason seem not only unnecessary, but also unwarranted.

D. Motivation

Despite the fact that Kant insists that no material can be the foundation of the moral law, and thus the highest good cannot be the determining ground of the moral will, Kant is surely not unconcerned with the question of motivation. I addressed this issue in Chapter Four of Section One above, where I discussed Kant's concern with "influence" of the will, as well as in

²⁷ Third *Critique*, Ak. 456. See also: Ak. 453.

those places where I talked about the relationship of both happiness and politics to morality. Kant does think that the will is influenced by outside factors, and such influences can lead the will astray.²⁸ If we add this to the fact that reason has an interest in the outcome of our willing and that the highest good is the natural object of moral willing, the result is that belief in the highest good is necessary if we are not to lose faith in the moral law. And this is a question of motivation.

Kant presents us with many quotations regarding this relationship, many of which (unsurprisingly) come from his political writings. Here are but a few of the many possible citations:

[With the impossibility of the postulates] we are only hindered in the unceasing striving toward the precise and persistent obedience to a command of reason which is stern, unindulgent, truly commanding, really and not just ideally possible.²⁹

A need of pure practical reason, on the other hand, is based on a duty to make something (the highest good) the object of my will so as to promote it with all my strength.³⁰

And so practical reason gives us a pure moral basis for assuming this cause (since we can do so without contradiction), even if only for the sake of avoiding the risk of [having to] regard that striving as wholly futile in its effects and of therefore allowing it to flag.³¹

[A person must postulate these notions if] he does not want his respect for the moral law, by which this law directly inspires him to obey it, to be weakened, as would result from the nullity of the one ideal final purpose that is adequate to this respect's high demand (such weakening of his respect would inevitably impair his moral attitude)...³²

The reflective person feels a grief that the unreflective do not know, a grief that can well lead to moral ruination: this is a discontentedness with the

²⁸ They would not *necessarily* lead the will astray, of course, but a "weak will" might thereby be misguided.

²⁹ *Second Critique*, Ak. 123.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 142.

³¹ *Third Critique*. Ak. 446.

³² *Ibid.*, Ak. 453.

providence that governs the entire course of the world... It is of the greatest importance... *to be content with providence...* so that we can always take courage under our burdens...³³

The underlying theme to all of Kant's assertions is clear, namely that practical reason is not insulated from external influences, and that the postulates are necessary in order for practical reason to secure its efforts in bringing about the highest good. Certainly many people might be tempted to give up hope in the achievability of the highest good, if they have not already given up, if they truly believed that humankind was not able to be improved. The moral law itself could be threatened if a person were completely convinced of the impossibility of the highest good. Kant is well aware that the call of the moral law is already impeded by the enticements of happiness, and a disbelief in the postulates certainly would not help matters any. Certainly it takes great motivation to attempt to consistently will in accord with the moral law, and the possibility that all such willing would come to naught would undermine some of that important motivation.

III. Additional Defenses

The above four justifications for the need of the postulates of practical reason and the belief in the possibility of the highest good are rather explicit in Kant's writings, dealing explicitly with such objects. As for the first justification, it seems to be too strong, and is later rejected by Kant himself. The second seems acceptable, but given the rather ambiguous nature of the conflict involved, perhaps it is not particularly persuasive. However, I think some type of conflict would result from following the moral law while rejecting the possibility of the highest good. The third justification, while perhaps seeming rather trivial at first glance, I think is rather strong. If we accept Kant's assertion that practical reason does indeed have a need to assert the postulates, then it can offer up a defense against the person who simply felt

³³ "Speculative Beginning of Human History." Ak. 120-1.

ambivalent regarding the possibility of the highest good. In order to prove the impossibility of the postulates of practical reason and the highest good, one would have to rely on theoretical reason. However, Kant has already set the foundation for the impossibility of such an argument. In addition, Kant offers some good indications that there is a hint of moral progress in history and that we ought to think of nature as having been designed by a moral author. If this is true, then there is simply no reason *not* to believe in the postulates, though we cannot command their belief. In fact, it would seem rather irrational to posit their impossibility given that there seems no adequate foundation to do so. Finally, regarding the fourth justification, while it seems somewhat weak, it surely must be acceptable. Its rejection would involve positing the ability of the person to be completely uninfluenced by his/her sensuous nature, an ability which seems doubtful, or by somehow proving that belief in the postulates would be simply inconsequential.

There are two more defenses, however, which seem appropriate. Neither of them name the highest good *per se*, although the second deals directly with the “ultimate” and “final purpose of creation” and thereby with the highest good. I have found nothing in the secondary literature linking them directly with the problem of justifying a belief in the postulates of practical reason.

E. The Moral Politician and the Political Moralist

I take my clue as to this justification from Kant’s distinction between the “moral politician” and the “political moralist” in “To[ward] Perpetual Peace.” Recall that the moral politician is the official who takes the moral law as his/her ultimate principle for all action and legislation. The political moralist is the person who attempts to make her/his actions and legislation seem moral, appealing to Right to justify otherwise immoral and even illegal actions. Now Kant makes the following point regarding these two ways to run a government:

the moralizing politician attempts, on the pretext that human nature is not *capable* of attaining the good as prescribed in the idea of reason, to extenuate political principles that are contrary to right, and thus these principles make progress *impossible* and perpetuate the violation of right.³⁴

Here, Kant maintains that the political moralist would guide the government in such a way that progress would be impossible and Right would be violated. Why might this be so? Because the political moralist has already decided that moral progress is not possible, and thus (wrongly) feels that s/he is under no obligation to attempt to guide the commonwealth toward a better constitution. What is important to note here is that by making such an assumption, Kant believes the natural consequence will be to actually *make* progress impossible, though presumably only for the time being. By enacting laws that are contrary to Right, and by ignoring the call of the moral law, the political moralist fails to bring about those situations which are necessary for Right and for the moral project.

In fact, if we allowed either politician his/her belief in the impossibility of progress, then what justification could possibly be given for trying to be a moral politician? One foundation³⁵ for the moral politician is the notion that morality and politics are not incompatible, and that guiding a government in terms of Right is actually the best way to legislate. This was the conclusion of "Theory and Practice." As Kant argues in "To[ward] Perpetual Peace":

Solving the first problem, namely, the problem that political prudence proposes, requires considerable natural knowledge so that one can use nature's mechanism to attain the desired end; yet it is uncertain how this mechanism will function as far as its consequences for perpetual peace are concerned... By contrast, the solution to the second problem, the problem of *political wisdom* [i.e., the bringing politics in line with morality] impresses itself on us, as it

³⁴ "To[ward] Perpetual Peace," Ak. 373.

³⁵ The second foundation is the moral law itself.

were, for it obviously puts all artificiality to shame, and leads directly to the end.³⁶

Kant's point here is that it seems impossible to control nature enough to be able to legislate happiness, while it seems a ruler could will to bring legislation into accord with Right. But if nature is simply unresponsive to moral considerations, and thereby unresponsive to the attempt to bring the commonwealth in line with morality and Right, then what justification could be given for the moral politician? At least the political moralist could point to some happiness which would have been obtained, even if his/her own. But the moral politician would have nothing to point to and little justification for ruling in a way that is not likely to satisfy the immediate desires of the ruled. S/he could indeed point to the moral law, but if nature is thought to be unresponsive, then it is likely that this defense would not convince the constituents.

Hence, here is another justification for the belief in the progress of the human species, for without it, Kant maintains that politicians will not steer the government in directions necessary for improved constitutions. The implications are obvious. If the politician does not enact laws in accord with Right (because s/he has already assumed no progress to be possible), then the constitutions are not improved, the structure of the commonwealth is not brought into accord with Right, and the foundation of social institutions is not laid for the beginnings of true moral progress. Clearly, we must take this to be a merely temporary setback, since we have already argued for the ultimate necessity of moral progress. Nonetheless, this seems to be an important justification for belief in the highest good, for without it, political moralists would feel no need to enact the legislation necessary for moving the State closer to Right.

³⁶ "To[ward]Perpetual Peace." Ak. 377-8.

Also, it seems that there would likely be a dangerous spiral which would develop under these circumstances. If the politician were convinced of the impossibility of progress and chose to enact legislation which is contrary to Right, then the result is a structure of a commonwealth which is likely to be prone to injustice, violence, and war. If this is the result, then individuals are also likely to become increasingly despondent regarding the prospects for betterment of the human race. Looking around, individuals see only counterexamples of moral progress. Hence, they too lose faith in the highest good. Given such a political climate, it is likely that the next ruler will also have lost faith, and begin to enact deficient legislation. Hence, the spiral.³⁷ Without the belief in the possibility of progress, it would become increasingly difficult to promote those structures which allow for the moral project to be taken up in full.

Coupled with a rejection of the moral law, such a situation would be devastating. Kant writes:

To be sure, if neither freedom nor the moral law that is based on it exist, and if everything that happens or can happen is mere mechanism of nature, then politics (as the art of using that mechanism to govern men) would be the whole of practical wisdom, and the concept of right would be a contentless thought.³⁸

If the moral law is rejected, then there can be no appeal to Right. At this point, the only guiding principle available would be what *is* and not what *ought* to be. In other words, rulers would be forced to look only at historical examples for help in drafting legislation, and would have no other legitimate interests than happiness. Such a situation would obviously be very destructive for morality. If belief in the possibility of the betterment of humankind is also rejected, the cultural situation would be devastating. Not only would Right play no part in political decisions, but there would be no

³⁷ Perhaps this is one additional reason for Kant's support of the French Revolution.

³⁸ "To[ward]Perpetual Peace," Ak. 372.

motivation to attempt to improve the situation of the members of the commonwealth. If a ruler was immoral and rejected the possibility of progress, s/he could feel free to pursue personal happiness or national glory at any expense. It seems likely that Kant's "Preliminary Articles for Perpetual Peace Among Nations" would not be adhered to. The situation would not improve until that point at which rulers believed that the rewards of conflict were ultimately not worth the expenditure. It would take a long time before anything like a perfect internal or external constitution would come to pass.

F. No Final Purpose

Time and time again, Kant argues that if the highest good is unattainable, then the world cannot have purpose or meaning. This is largely seen in the third *Critique*. If the existence of humans as moral agents is not the final purpose of creation, "then the existence of the world is either based on no purpose at all in the cause, or only on purposes without a final purpose."³⁹ This is Kant's conclusion from the "downward" proof of the link between nature and morality in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant's belief is that if moral willing is unable to be perfected, then reason is only (somewhat) effective at pursuing happiness, and thus is reduced to the level of every other animal; "it is only insofar as we strive toward that purpose [i.e., morality], that we may judge ourselves as conforming to the final purpose of an intelligent world cause (if there be such a cause)."⁴⁰ Mechanical nature itself is without value if it cannot be systematized by the rational, moral agent, "...for if indeed creation has a final purpose, then we have to conceive of it as harmonizing with the moral final purpose ([since] only the moral final purpose makes the concept of a[ny] purpose [of creation] possible)."⁴¹ But, given my

³⁹ Third *Critique*, Ak. 450.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Ak. 446.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 453.

arguments as to the proper nature of the highest good,⁴² the final purpose of creation as the continual improvement of reason is simply the highest good under a different name. Thus, Kant believes that if the highest good is not possible, at least as an object of continual progress, then all the members of the world have no purpose:

It cannot satisfy reason that the ultimate final purpose for which the world and man himself are there and were created is so that [man can] enjoy [the world], or so that [he can] behold, contemplate, and admire [it] (which, if that is all we do, is also nothing more than enjoyment of a particular kind). For reason presupposes a personal value, one that man can only give himself, as the condition under which alone he and his existence can be [a] final purpose.⁴³

The consequence of this supposition is that belief in the possibility of the highest good and those postulates necessary for its condition are necessary because without them, our own reason and humanity become worthless. If the highest good is impossible, we are reduced to the level of animals. Without the possibility of a moral end, “the moral law is completely degraded from its holiness.”⁴⁴

The degradation of humankind which would result from the impossibility of the highest good is a theme which runs throughout Kant’s political writings as well. In “Is the Human Race Improving?” we find the theme that a negative answer to this question would be “a subversion of the ultimate purpose of creation itself,”⁴⁵ and even the hypothesis of human stagnation is strenuously rejected, for “it is a vain affair to have good so alternate with evil that the whole traffic of our species with itself on this globe would have to be considered as a mere farcical comedy, for this can endow our species with no greater value in the eyes of reason than that

⁴² See Section Two, Chapter One and Two above.

⁴³ *Third Critique*, Ak. 477.

⁴⁴ *Second Critique*, Ak. 122.

⁴⁵ “Is the Human Race Improving?” p. 161.

which other animal species possess...”⁴⁶ We have already seen Kant’s statement from “Theory and Practice” that “allowing vice to mount upon endless vice in the real world... so that in days to come there can be plenty to punish is, to say the least, contrary to our conception of the morality of a wise creator and governor of the world.”⁴⁷ In “The End of All Things” Kant asserts that if the highest good “should not be attainable, creation itself would appear... as purposeless as a play that has no upshot whatsoever...”⁴⁸ The theme is clear, namely that without the ability of human beings to improve themselves morally, both they and world will lose any claim to meaning or value.

I think that this is a particularly strong justification for the necessity of a belief in the highest good and the postulates of practical reason. Such a belief cannot be commanded; “one must in a practical way believe in a concurrence between divine wisdom and the course of nature, if one is not to give up one’s cherished ultimate purpose.”⁴⁹ Its rejection might not result in a conflict within reason itself. However, the rejection of the possibility of moral progress would necessarily lower humankind’s self-estimation. The results could range from the minimal, merely a lessened desire to follow the commands of the moral law in all circumstances, to the maximal, a complete rejection of the moral law due to its prescribing a necessary condition which is thought to be impossible. But one thing is certain: the rejection of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁷ “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 308.

⁴⁸ “End of All Things,” Ak. 331.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Ak. 337.

highest good runs counter to rational self-esteem, a self-esteem which we are commanded (*Metaphysics of Morals*) to keep intact.

Chapter Six

Is the Existence of God a Necessary Postulate?

I.

In Chapter Two above, I argued that there is no reason to believe in a “worthiness equation,” i.e., there seems to be no legitimate justification for Kant’s assertion that virtue ought to be rewarded by proportionate happiness. I argued that we ought to think of morality as unconcerned with anything but minimal happiness.

However, in most of Kant’s writings, his arguments for the moral proof of the existence of God are premised on exactly this point; Kant argues that a belief in God is necessitated because virtue ought to be proportionately rewarded, and because human beings are unable to bring this about themselves. Having rejected the “worthiness equation” does there remain a need for the existence of God as a postulate of practical reason?

In this chapter, I will argue that this need remains, and that we can justify it from the point of view of an “earthly” highest good. In short, the existence of God needs to be postulated for two reasons. The first is that such a belief is necessary if disparate individuals are to form together into an ethical community, a manifestation of the invisible church. This argument has been set forth by Sharon Anderson-Gold and, to some extent, Philip J. Rossi. I will examine their defense, agreeing with its necessity, but rejecting it as a complete solution to Kant’s problem of evil and the problem of the attainment of the highest good. The second reason for the need of this postulate ought to be rather obvious at this point in the present work, namely the necessity of nature to be responsive to the needs of morality. The manifestation of the

highest good in the world, the culmination of moral progress, is a manifestation which takes place in nature. Governmental, social, and religious organizations must come up with empirical solutions to empirical problems, and that requires a knowledge of nature as well as a nature which is responsive to solutions. The outcomes of moral willing ought to be those which are reflective of our intentions. For these reasons there is a need to postulate a moral author.

II. Anderson-Gold's and Rossi's Ethical Commonwealth

Anderson-Gold takes as her starting point for this argument Kant's discussion of the problem of jealousy and rivalry in books One and Three of the *Religion*. In Book Three, Kant maintains that individuals have the duty to move beyond an "ethical state of nature" into an "ethical community" where each person would support the moral endeavors of others. However, standing in the way of this unification is the complication that, whereas individuals' "needs are but few and his frame of mind in providing for them is temperate and tranquil,"¹ individuals become jealous when in the company of others:

He [any individual] is poor (or considers himself so) only in his anxiety lest other men consider him poor... Envy, the lust for power, greed, and the malignant inclinations bound up with these, besiege his nature, contented within itself, as soon as he is among men. And it is not even necessary to assume that these are men sunk in evil...; it suffices that they are at hand... for them mutually to corrupt each other's predispositions and make one another evil.²

Here we can clearly see Rousseau's influence on Kant. Natural inclinations are, in themselves, good,³ but when individuals come into contact with

¹ *Religion*, p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ We receive a precise statement of this in on page 51 of the *Religion*, though this fact is one of the basic arguments of the *Religion*.

others, “we judge ourselves happy or unhappy only by making a comparison with others.”⁴

Anderson-Gold moves from these passages to assert that this is Kant’s general solution to the question of the existence of radical evil in human nature. She writes that “the preference we display for these ‘acquired desires’ [i.e., a good in comparison to something] is the very formula of the propensity to evil which... is... ‘rooted in’ our humanity,”⁵ and that “nature per se is no longer the targeted culprit and the hindrances to the realization of the highest good are located in the nexus of human relationships.”⁶ Thus, according to Anderson-Gold, evil results from “the exercise⁷ of reason and specifically a reason which compares,”⁸ that is, evil results from the natural disharmony which we feel when, in our associations with others, we feel inadequate or unhappy because of our comparison to others. Thus, “the propensity to evil, then, is not something that is simply ‘within me’ and ‘within you’ but something that operates *between us*.”⁹

Moving to a more in-depth explanation, Anderson-Gold argues that the source of evil is not simply self-love, but instead arises from an incorrect conception of ourselves as essentially unconnected to others. She argues that it is the “manner in which the self is conceived that the corruption of the will takes place and evil arises.”¹⁰ In essence, radical evil in human nature is a result of an improper way of thinking of our relationship to others:

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵ Anderson-Gold, “God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good,” p. 124.

⁶ “God and Community,” p. 127.

⁷ Misprint occurs in original.

⁸ Anderson-Gold, “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth: The Highest Good as a Social Goal,” p. 26.

⁹ “God and Community,” p. 125.

¹⁰ “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth,” p. 27.

It is not the mere force of the external world or the raw attractiveness of objects that underlies the subversion of the moral law... It is reason which bestows upon us our social nature and leads us to "compare" ourselves with others... The propensity to evil is identified with the principle of self-love, not insofar as the self is a physical being with material needs, but insofar as the self is a social being who refuses to recognize the intrinsic value of others.¹¹

According to this picture, individuals, in the use of their "comparative reason," think of others as merely means through which they (themselves) can obtain happiness. This comportment, however, misconstrues the essential fact that "autonomy, the affirmation of the self as an end, can only be expressed through the kingdom of ends,"¹² and thus overlooks the way in which each individual relies upon other moral agents for the realization of their own autonomy and the realization of the highest good. Kant emphasizes the necessary (moral) connection between individuals, and the fact that "the idea of a 'moral life' must include not only the unification of all of one's 'own' acts/maxims but also an essential referencing of these to the acts/maxims of other moral subjects."¹³

Thus, in her later writings,¹⁴ Anderson-Gold argues that belief in God becomes necessary in order for us to overcome this "ethical state of nature." Essentially, in order for us to overcome the problems of jealousy and rivalry which occur in our interactions with others, we require a way of unifying ourselves into a whole. This unification, Anderson-Gold argues, can only be had through an ethical community, and only through God as a symbol of unification; "but each [individual] being insufficient to stand assurance for his pledge must think or presuppose the existence of a perfect moral being *through whom* we are bound each to each."¹⁵ If we have no point for

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³ "God and Community," p. 123.

¹⁴ In "Kant's Ethical Commonwealth" Anderson-Gold seems content to have the idea of an ethical commonwealth (the highest good) itself be the point of unification. See: pp. 30-32.

¹⁵ "God and Community," p. 128.

unification, we will continue to act at odds with each other, and, as Kant says, individuals will act “just as though they were *instruments of evil*.”¹⁶ If we are to unite into a single, moral community for the purpose of promoting the highest good, then the idea of God as moral governor is necessary for us to overcome our natural distance between one another.

This idea concerning the need of God as a symbol for social unification is supported by Rossi as well. Rossi, like Anderson-Gold, emphasizes the necessary social component of moral maxims. He focuses on the “world constructing” nature of reason and, as I discussed above,¹⁷ agrees that the necessary object of moral willing is the construction of the highest good on earth. He is interested in moving beyond the “textbook picture” which “has the agent in lofty and lonely moral solitude” and which “fails to capture... the fact that Kant quite clearly also characterizes... [moral willing] as an introduction into a ‘realm’ or ‘world’, i.e., into a connected and ordered totality or relations to the moral agency of all others who constitute the human moral community.”¹⁸ We have a duty, Rossi argues, not only to bring our will into accord with the moral law, but also to promote an ethical community for all human beings. In this respect, God is the appropriate symbol for moral persons because

the moral future pictured under the form of community through the representation of the highest good stands in need of a future ground for its completion, which must also serve as ground for confidence that our own present moral endeavors, truncated though they may be, nonetheless will effect the attainment of that future. God is the effective symbol for the attainment of that future: representing him as the ground for ordering human moral purposes in

¹⁶ *Religion*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Section Two, Chapter One.

¹⁸ Philip Rossi, “Kant as a Christian Philosopher: Hope and the Symbols of Christian Faith,” p. 28.

harmony through all time and at any moment of time provides surety sufficient for the satisfaction of reason's interest.¹⁹

Rossi is not clear in any of his articles as to whether the "harmonious ordering of moral purposes"²⁰ functions as an analogy between God and one's *own* ordering of purposes or somehow between God and the ability of an ethical commonwealth to order their collective and at times disparate purposes to moral considerations.²¹ However, what Rossi makes manifest is the limitations of our ability to unite with others in the construction of the highest good, and, to this extent, God becomes an appropriate symbol for moral comportment.

III. Problems with Anderson-Gold's and Rossi's commentary

In general, the issues which Anderson-Gold and Rossi have brought to the attention of Kantian scholarship are extremely important. Their insistence on the "social" nature of moral willing and their arguments as to the highest good as the necessary object of moral willing have allowed us to move beyond the "textbook" picture of the solitary and unconcerned moral agent. In accepting their picture of the moral agent, it allows us to move on to more interesting and, I believe, important questions. However, I think that their specific arguments as to the nature of evil and the need for a belief in God are incorrect.

According to my interpretation of Kant's *Religion*, Anderson-Gold has vastly misconstrued the source and nature of evil as Kant spells it out. On the one hand, Kant eliminates nature or natural inclinations as the possible

¹⁹ Rossi, "Kant's Doctrine of Hope: Reason's Interest and the Things of Faith," p. 237. For this need of God as symbol, see also Rossi's: "Kant as Christian Philosopher," pp. 28-29 and "Autonomy and Community: the Social Character of Kant's 'Moral Faith'," p. 171.

²⁰ "Kant's Doctrine of Hope," p. 28.

²¹ In this respect, Rossi's later article, "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," brings this tension to the fore (pp. 148-151), and thus the lack of clarity may simply be inherent in Kant's formulation. Also, however, at times Rossi claims that God is necessary simply because of the need to apportion happiness to virtue.

source. If nature were the cause of radical evil, then we would not be responsible for our evil. Evil, then, just as in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, results from the subordination of the moral law to sensuous inclinations; “the proposition, Man is *evil*, can mean only, He is conscious of the moral law but has nevertheless adopted into his maxim the (occasional) deviation therefrom.”²² More specifically, given Kant’s focus in the *Religion* on our “character” (*Gesinnung*), evil is the subsumption of *individual* maxims to a willfully chosen overarching maxim which subordinates the moral law to natural inclinations. Kant notes that all human beings always have two incentives operating on our will, that is, moral and sensuous incentives,

hence the distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the difference between the incentives which they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of the maxim), but rather must depend upon *subordination* (the form of the maxim), *i.e.*, *which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other*.²³

Thus, in the case of evil, we willfully choose to act as if sensuous inclinations controlled us.

On the other hand, however, while this is Kant’s account of the nature of evil, he ultimately concludes that *why* we should choose one overarching maxim over the other will *forever remain a mystery*. Kant states this very clearly:

the rational origin of this perversion of our will whereby it makes lower incentives supreme among its maxims, that is, of the propensity to evil, remains inscrutable to us... Evil could have sprung only from the morally-evil (not from mere limitations in our nature); and yet the original predisposition... is a predisposition to good; there is then for us no conceivable ground from which the moral evil in us could originally have come.²⁴

²² *Religion*, p. 27.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Kant's conclusion follows from his analysis of what it would mean for human beings to have a propensity toward evil. If we are responsible for evil, then nature cannot be its cause. And if such responsibility is a free choice of the will, then we must have made this choice ourselves. Yet, precisely because we can never have access to the grounds of our freedom in general, that is, access to how freedom itself is possible, we can never know why we have this "propensity of the will which belongs to it by nature (although actually the disposition is grounded in freedom)."²⁵ In short, "the subjective ground or cause of this adoption cannot further be known..."²⁶ "for it is a question wholly transcending the speculative capacity of our reason."²⁷

Thus, if we are concerned with Kant's solution to the problem of evil, Anderson-Gold cannot be correct in her interpretation. Whereas the problem of jealousy and rivalry is certainly a hindrance to morality, it cannot be *the* problem of evil. If Kant is correct, then it cannot be the case that radical evil reduces to the particular situation of human beings coming into contact with one another which subsequently somehow *causes* the subordination of moral inclinations to sensuous inclinations. On the one hand, we can still question *why* it is the case that such contact leads us to this subordination, and the answer to this question has to do with a free choice and, ultimately, the grounds of any free choice must remain a mystery. On the other hand, this cannot be the only circumstance which gives rise to the problem of evil. It seems counterintuitive to Kant's position to say that if this one situation could (hypothetically) be removed, then there would no longer be evil. Kant's solution to the problem of radical evil is to point to a free choice which can never be witnessed, not simply to say that evil is a product of a self which

²⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

feels inadequate or unhappy when it compares its (sensuous) standing to others.

There are several additional points which can be made to support my argument. The first is simply to examine the part of the *Religion* in which the talk of “comparative” reason originates. In this section of Book One, the evils of jealousy and rivalry are only two main “stems” of many vices. On the one hand, Kant notes that jealousy and rivalry are indeed “inclinations.”²⁸ But, if these are indeed *inclinations*, this already indicates that they cannot be the source of evil. Evil cannot be reduced to an inclination, for, as Kant makes clear, we always have two competing inclinations (moral and sensuous), and the puzzle is to discover why it is that we willfully choose (as a “disposition”) to follow one set as opposed to the other. This cannot be the source of radical evil. On the other hand, Kant states very explicitly that “nature, indeed, wanted to use the idea of such rivalry (*which in itself does not exclude mutual love*) only as a spur to culture.”²⁹ What this indicates is that these inclinations, like all sensuous inclinations, are not in themselves evil. It is only the subordination which is evil. Indeed, such inclinations as a “spur to culture” can be extremely useful in the advance of our moral project.

This last quotation regarding culture leads me to the second point which supports my interpretation of Kant. Put simply, Anderson-Gold’s account would eliminate culture, which, as I have argued extensively above, is a necessary condition of moral progress. She writes that the ethical community, which is required by us to promote, “entails minimally the abandonment of aggressive and competitive attitudes toward others, and maximally the adoption of cooperative and supportive networks.”³⁰ Now, while I

²⁸ The full passage reads: “vices, however, which really do not sprout of themselves from nature as their root; rather are they inclinations, aroused in us by the anxious endeavors of others to attain a hated superiority over us...” *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Italics added for emphasis.

³⁰ “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth.” p. 30.

agree with the later half of that statement, I think we must reject the first half. For while it certainly must be admitted that it is necessary for us to join together in the pursuit of moral progress, Kant makes it very clear that we must indeed remain antagonistic. I take this to be precisely what he means by his statement that rivalry “does not exclude mutual love” and is a “spur to culture.” On Anderson-Gold’s model, we seem to run into an extreme level of cooperation which, if it were achievable, would mean the death of culture and the life of the Arcadian shepherd.

A third point of contention is simply to note Kant’s statement that radical evil is an “invisible” enemy, thus implying that we cannot have an experience of its source. Concerning the source of radical evil, Kant writes that “it is not surprising that an Apostle represents this *invisible* enemy, who is known only through his operations upon us and who destroys basic principles, as being outside us and, indeed, as an evil *spirit*.”³¹ In a footnote on this page he adds, again, that “reason’s ability to master all opposing motivating forces through the bare idea of a law is utterly inexplicable; *it is also inconceivable, therefore*, how the motivating forces of the sensuous nature should be able to gain the ascendancy over a reason which commands with such authority.”³² I take this all to indicate that the source of evil has to do with an utterly unknowable disposition of the will to subordinate moral maxims, and is not, therefore, the result of “comparing reason’s” interaction with other individuals.

Finally, as a last counterexample to Anderson-Gold’s position, Kant’s claim that this subordination of the moral law does not occur in time shows that evil cannot be attributable to the experience of interacting with others. Kant maintains in several sections of Book One that this free determination of the will occurs “not in time but merely in rational representation... [and

³¹ *Religion*, p. 52.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52 n. Italics added for emphasis.

h)ence it is also a contradiction to seek the temporal origin of man's moral character."³³ Thus Kant argues that there must be two senses of the word "act" when we talk about this one act wherein we choose a single overarching maxim:

The term "act" can apply in general to that exercise of freedom whereby the supreme maxim... is adopted by the will, but also to the exercise of freedom whereby the actions themselves (considered materially...) are performed in accordance with that maxim. The propensity to evil, then, is an act in the first sense... The former is intelligible action, cognizable by means of pure reason alone, apart from every temporal condition; the latter is sensible action, empirical, given in time...³⁴

Thus, according to Kant, this freely chosen, overarching maxim which guides all action and is equivalent to character (*Gesinnung*) is not an event which takes place in time, though this provides the ground for all individual (phenomenal) acts of willing. Therefore, again, I do not think the source of evil can be attributed to our empirical dealings with others as Anderson-Gold would have it.³⁵

Finally, then, one might be concerned with how it is that I interpret Kant's strong remarks concerning the "evil" which occurs in the interaction of individuals. To begin with, note that Kant writes that when the individual "looks around for the causes and circumstances which expose him to this danger and keep him in it, *he can easily convince himself* that he is subject to these not because of his own gross nature... but because of mankind to whom he is related and bound."³⁶ Already I take this to be a good indication that

³³ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

³⁵ Let me simply mention one additional problem with Anderson-Gold's argument. Kant writes that the proposition "He is evil *by nature*, means but this, that evil can be predicated of man as a species; not that such a quality can be inferred from the concept of his species (that is, of man in general) - for then it would be necessary..." (*Religion*, p. 27). Anderson-Gold's account would seem to violate Kant's prohibition, because it puts the cause of evil as a necessary condition of an individual simply by means of being a human being.

³⁶ *Religion*, p. 85. Italics added for emphasis.

this is not, in fact, the source of evil. Now, certainly such interactions do provide an occasion for evil, but as Kant writes in an earlier section, “those inclinations merely make difficult the *execution* of the good maxim which opposes them; whereas genuine evil consists in this, that a man does not *will* to withstand those inclinations when they tempt him to transgress...”³⁷ Ultimately what I take Kant to be saying in these passages is that the inability of individuals to come together because of jealousy and rivalry is certainly a hindrance to the moral project, but it is not the source of evil. Kant is indicating the necessity and the difficulty involved in establishing the ethical commonwealth or “kingdom of God on earth.” And, while we remain in the ethical state of nature, we are not able to support each others’ struggles against the invisible enemy of evil. He writes that only with the establishment of a society “in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue,” “only thus can we hope for a victory of the good over the evil principle.”³⁸ I consider it very telling that Kant does not write that “only thus can we *achieve* a victory,” but writes only that we could then “*hope*” for a victory; the implication is that the elimination of jealousy and rivalry is not in itself the solution to the problem of evil, but only a first, though crucial, step.

IV. Four Reasons for God as a Necessary Postulate

We are left, therefore, with our original problem: is God a necessary postulate of practical reason? I have argued that God’s existence cannot be postulated to reward virtue with happiness. And, if my interpretation is correct, then God’s existence cannot be postulated in order to overcome evil. Evil is a result of our own choosing, and we cannot hope to be saved by God from this choice. While Anderson-Gold may have given us good reasons as to why we must move out of our ethical state of nature in order to form an ethical commonwealth, she has ultimately given us no convincing reason why

³⁷ Ibid., p. 51 n.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

belief in God is the only means we have of uniting together.³⁹ Thus, Anderson-Gold has not given us a clear reason for the need of this postulate. And, while Rossi's articles have the making of an argument, they do not provide anything more than reasons as to why God is an appropriate *symbol* for moral willing. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Rossi is not directly addressing God's existence as a postulate. Despite the reasons, we still do not have a decisive argument as to the need for such a postulate.

But surely these two writers are correct to note the essentially social and worldly nature of moral willing. More exactly, they are right to note that the effects of moral willing concern a given society in time, and thus these effects are to be met with in history. The highest good, they argue, is a goal which concerns the establishment of a moral community of rational agents on earth. But, precisely because reason does have an interest in its *effects*, there are important features concerning the outcome of this willing which are beyond reason's immediate control. If God's existence is a necessary postulate, it must be this feature of the moral project which mandates its assumption.

I think there are four specific reasons for the necessary postulate of God's existence. In general, we need this postulate because of two facts, discussed at length above. The first is that moral willing can be influenced by external, empirical situations. On the negative side, while difficult situations do not preclude moral willing, they may make its execution more difficult. On the positive side, culture advances situations which promote moral willing. The second general fact is that moral willing does aim at certain historical effects, but these effects are ultimately beyond our control. The establishment of particular social, political, educational, and religious institutions is an empirical problem with many possible solutions. In addition, we are often met with examples when our simple, everyday

³⁹ Indeed, as noted above, in her first article on this matter, Anderson-Gold altogether leaves out this need of belief in God, relying only on the idea of an ethical commonwealth to unite our disparate interests.

attempts at favorable outcomes of moral willing are met with disappointments for any number of reasons.

Obviously these two facts are connected and intertwined, though for the purposes of explanation, I will try to separate them and make them more distinct than they perhaps are. Thus, given these two empirical factors involved in moral willing, we require a nature, including a *human* nature, that is responsive to moral needs. In the last section, I will address the connection between a morally responsive nature and God *qua* moral author of this nature, but for the purpose of this section, I will simply equate the two. Let me then present the four specific reasons for the necessity of the postulate of God's existence. I will keep these explanations brief, as they can largely be inferred from my discussions above.

A. Empirical influences

As I have argued at length above, moral willing can be effected by external, empirical factors. On the "negative" side, some situations can make the execution of moral willing more difficult. There seem to be three definitive cases where this is true: poverty, war, and non-republican systems of government (particularly those which restrict the "private" use of reason). In extreme cases of these instances, basic moral willing becomes nearly impossible because of certain needs surrounding sensuous inclinations. In less extreme cases, we are at least tempted to forgo moral willing. On the "positive" side, culture, understood broadly, promotes moral willing in general, through antagonism, the culture of skill, and the culture of discipline. As Kant points out in "What is Enlightenment?" we should also consider the need of reason to perfect itself through public dialogue, a factor which can be more or less restricted by political institutions. Each of these factors influences moral willing.

It should perhaps be noted that this picture of the ability of the will to be influenced by empirical circumstances gives us a very strong reason to

believe that the moral destiny of each individual is actually intertwined with the destiny of others. This conception may be even stronger than Anderson-Gold and Rossi have understood it, for if factors such as political institutions and social unsociability play a key role in the formation of our moral abilities, then our own moral capabilities are contingent upon a certain level of society around us. Whereas I may well be able to achieve the proper moral character (*Gesinnung*) through the adoption of the proper overarching maxim, it may be the case that I cannot achieve some levels of moral perfection through the sheer force of my will. We shall see this further in "B" below. In addition, it should be remembered that we are all vulnerable to a "frailty"⁴⁰ of the will, and we all make poor judgments regarding moral matters. In all these respects, moral willing is connected with empirical situations.

Thus, the existence of God as the moral author of the world is a necessary postulate because these factors are largely beyond our direct control, yet are necessary for moral progress. If it is true that correct moral willing is connected with empirical factors, and that we do not control all of these factors, then we must believe that, eventually, nature will be responsive to moral needs. On one hand, this is a question concerning nature in general. Can we solve the problems of poverty? Will drought, famine, floods, and earthquakes increasingly devastate populations? How long will the human species be allowed to inhabit the earth? Will crucial moral leaders live or die? Or, considering the other extreme, one which is an ever-increasing danger in these times in first-world nations, will we be lulled into a state of complacency? Will we, in effect, discontinue the use of our reason to become Arcadian shepherds? Nature must walk the narrow line between war and complacency, always pushing human beings to antagonism but not pushing them to annihilation. On the other hand, the constitution of

⁴⁰ *Religion*, p. 24.

necessary empirical factors is more often than not a question about the natural, empirical side of human beings. Will human nature ever be able to relinquish its thirst for war? Will national leaders allow their citizens freedom of expression, take up the task of perfecting the constitution, and work with other leaders for an international state of peace? Will horrific events like ethnic genocide impact our sensibilities to the extent that we lose (almost)⁴¹ all of our motivation for moral willing? Both sets of questions require faith in a nature which will allow for the moral project to continue its progress.

B. Reason and Practice

The second reason for the postulate of God's existence has to do with the fact that Kant says that reason takes time and practice to perfect. In all of his writings, Kant maintains that the moral use of reason takes time to improve. Put simply, "one cannot straightway do whatever he wills if he has not tried and exercised his powers beforehand."⁴² We have seen this notion at several points above, especially Chapter One. In the "Idea," Kant claims that "reason itself does not operate on instinct, but requires trial, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress ..."⁴³ In the *Metaphysics of Morals* he argues that the very concept of virtue necessitates that it must be acquired with practice since "the moral capacity of man would not be virtue if it were not actualized by the strength of one's resolution in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations;"⁴⁴ in other words, since one aspect of the term "virtue" means the ability to dominate or master (sensuous) inclinations, and since we take this to be something which requires a struggle of sorts, virtue

⁴¹ Kant, of course, argues that the moral law as *Wille* always remains a source of moral motivation. This is how "pure" reason can be "practical." Thus we can never lose *all* our motivation for moral willing.

⁴² *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 477.

⁴³ "Idea," Ak. 19.

⁴⁴ *Metaphysics of Morals*. Ak. 477.

must be something which is perfected through time. All of this indicates that reason takes time to develop.

But such development does not take place in a vacuum; thus, much of this development depends on empirical surroundings. Will one be spurred by culture to exercise one's reason, or will one slip into a state of complacency and not attend to the perfection of reason? And what level of culture will be available to challenge one's thinking? Will one be able to develop and discipline one's moral abilities, or will one be shipped off to war? Will money which could be available for education be wasted on the war chest? Will effort which could be spent on developing a moral religion be spent instead on crusades or perhaps wasted by wrangling over unimportant matters of faith? These questions and many more can be asked regarding the conditions which influence and guide the development of reason.

Because many of these conditions are not under our direct control, we must hope that nature will be of a sort that allows for reason to continually improve. We must hope that nature will indeed continue to move us toward higher levels of culture, toward intra- and international peace, and toward an elimination of poverty. Again, it is crucial to keep in mind the fact that, as we discussed in Chapter Three above, whereas occurrences such as war do seem to be primarily events which we ourselves control, we must find a *guarantee* that they will not occur. Recall that this is due to the fact that we are dealing with human beings as sensuous and rational, *both sides of which can cause a (temporary) reversal of progress*: one the one hand, the sensuous aspect of humans can lead us astray because of inclinations which, if followed, can obstruct morality, and, on the other hand, the rational aspect is precisely free, and thus there always remains the possibility that we can change our minds. Thus, we need a guarantee that the empirical conditions required as the basis for moral progress will indeed come to fruition. Nature is the guarantor of peace because it alone can produce those conditions in which we

would not want to go to war again. Nature is also the spur to culture, for without it, we would naturally desire a state of total complacency; “man wills concord; but nature better knows what is good for the species: she wills discord.”⁴⁵ Thus, it must be a postulate of practical reason that nature will indeed cooperate with our moral needs to bring about the highest good.

This argument seems particularly important since it has the following corollary: even if every single individual willed to will in accord with the moral law, this would not automatically lead to the highest good. What this shows is that, while a lack of desire to have a good will is certainly an immense impediment to the highest good, it is not the only one. It would take time and practice to move toward the perfection of each individual’s reason and virtue, even if all individuals chose the proper overarching maxim. What is necessary, then, are the empirical structures which will enable us to move toward this progression, to begin the universal moral project in earnest.

C. Ecclesiastical Faith

While this does not necessarily deserve its own heading, it is such an important factor in Kant’s account of the highest good that it should be further discussed. Recall (from Chapter Three) that Kant insists in the *Religion* that the highest good in the world would take the form of an “invisible church,” an ethical commonwealth with God as the law-giver. Thus, this church would be a “pure religious faith” based on moral laws. But, recall also that Kant believes this *invisible* church to be impossible, and “it remains true once for all that a statutory *ecclesiastical faith* is associated with pure religious faith as its vehicle and as the means of public union of men...”⁴⁶ “because of the natural need and desire of all men for something *sensibly tenable*, and for a confirmation of some sort from experience of the highest concepts and

⁴⁵ “Idea,” Ak. 21.

⁴⁶ *Religion*, p. 97.

grounds of reason..."⁴⁷ Thus Kant concludes that we must always have some "visible" church or other in order to unify persons into an ethical commonwealth, that "some historical ecclesiastical faith or other, usually to be found at hand, must be utilized."⁴⁸

What this indicates, then, is the extremely empirical character of the "vehicle" which is to unite all individuals of separate faiths. In fact, Kant goes so far as to state that "it is also possible that the union of men into one religion cannot feasibly be brought about or made abiding without a holy book and an ecclesiastical faith based upon it,"⁴⁹ and goes on to claim that it is an act of "a gracious Providence"⁵⁰ that we have such a book which might accomplish this goal. Kant emphasizes that, regarding the ethical commonwealth, "all we know is the duty which draws us toward such a union; the possibility of the achievement held in view when we obey that duty lies wholly beyond the limits of our insight."⁵¹ How will it be possible to find an empirical "vehicle" which will be able to unite us all? How will the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim faiths all join together? For Kant, this is not simply a question of moral willing, for according to him, there will *always* be an empirical component to religion; while the invisible church ought to be based on pure reason alone, religion and the church must always manifest itself empirically in one way or another.

Thus, the question remains as to what this empirical manifestation might look like, and thus we look to nature to provide the answer. The invisible church, "a moral commonwealth, requires a *public* covenant, a certain ecclesiastical form dependent upon the conditions of experience. This form is

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

in itself contingent and manifold...⁵² We do not know what contingent form it should take, and “it would be as great self-conceit to deny peremptorily that the way in which a church is organized may perhaps be a special divine arrangement, if, so far as we can see, it is completely harmonious with the moral religion...”⁵³ God’s existence as the moral creator of nature is a necessary postulate for this important reason that the achievement of the highest good depends upon an ethical commonwealth, which, in turn, depends upon a contingent ecclesiastical faith that is of a nature we cannot envision. It will be up to nature, working with moral needs, to guide us to the correct form of this church.⁵⁴

D. Effects of Moral Willing

While the first three points focused more on the conditions of moral willing, this point concerns the effects of such willing, though, of course, the two are often in fact the same.⁵⁵ In short, whereas the highest good requires certain empirical effects to come about, nature may be ultimately unresponsive to our will. For instance, we are required to draw up a republican constitution. But what form should this constitution take? How will it solve all the empirical problems which necessarily arise? How will it be possible for a race of devils? And what of all the problems concerning a constitution which would allow for the peaceful coexistence of all nations.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ In connection with the discussion of ecclesiastical faith, there is also the suggestion in the *Religion* of an additional, fifth reason as to why God’s existence may be a necessary postulate. In short, the suggestion is this. Kant makes the analogy between a “juridical” and an “ethical” commonwealth in that they are both a collection of individuals united in accord with laws and *under a law-giver* (p. 90). If we recall Kant’s discussion in the “Doctrine of Right,” we note that any juridical commonwealth must have a law-giver who is not him/herself directly subject to these laws; without this separation, Kant believes the law-giver would not logically have any authority. Following this analogy, then, God is a necessary postulate because the ethical commonwealth needs a law-giver who is not directly subject to these laws, and “there must therefore be someone other than the populace capable of being specified as the public law-giver for an ethical commonwealth” (p. 90). This “someone” must be God.

⁵⁵ As I noted above, I have tried to separate the two aspects of conditions and effects for the purpose of elucidation whereas they do not seem to be quite so separable.

Consider the problems which face the United Nations. How is it possible to construct an agreement which would allow each nation to maintain its own, individual sets of laws while not only working together in peace, but possibly also unifying to enforce this international agreement? The problems such an organization faces are monumental. But, again, they must not only be faced, but solved.

What these few examples show is that nature must be cooperative if solutions are eventually going to be forthcoming. And this indicates the need for a postulate of practical reason. Reath's depiction of this condition is helpful:

in many situations, it may become (or appear to become) irrational for individuals to act from what they recognize as their duty... It might be irrational in the sense that individuals who act from moral principles leave themselves liable to being taken advantage of by others, or manipulated so that their actions have consequences which they do not intend. Or it may simply be that moral conduct, as a rule, is ineffective and fails to achieve any good results. The recognition of either kind of fact can be detrimental to moral motivation and erode the individual's commitment to the moral life. Moral conduct will appear pointless, at best, if nothing, or the wrong thing, comes of it more often than not.⁵⁶

Despite Reath's emphasis on the problem of motivation, his point is well taken: nature could be of such a constitution that the consequences of moral willing would be either inefficacious or, at worst, detrimental. We must hope that nature is not constituted in this fashion. Thus, we must postulate that God has created nature -- and especially human nature -- in such a way that it will be responsive to moral willing.

⁵⁶ Reath, Andrews, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," p. 618. For reasons I have argued in Chapter Five above, I think this statement is too strong as it stands, though it is helpful in this instance.

IV. God or Nature?

In this last section I want to raise a question to which I do not see an immediate answer: granted that we must have faith in a nature that will be responsive to moral willing, does this require a belief in God *per se*? In other words, does this nature have to have a moral creator? Or is it possible that nature simply *is* responsive to human, moral needs, and that it did not have a moral author? What, exactly, must one *postulate* in order to continue the pursuit of the highest good without encountering the problems discussed in Chapter Five above?

Recall that, as made evident in the *Critique of Judgment*, nature is not *itself* moral, it is merely responsive to moral willing (in a greater or lesser degree). Thus, while nature may require a moral author, certainly it does not require such an author because it has, say, moral characteristics. Nature can only promote moral willing *in* human beings, and primarily through antagonism and culture, neither of which are moral traits. I can see no immediate way to resolve this question satisfactorily.

The *Critique of Judgment* does not seem to give us an answer. On the one hand, as we saw above in Section One, Chapter Five, the solution to the antinomy⁵⁷ of the third *Critique* forces us to “think” of an intelligence different than ours, a non-discursive intelligence which would be able to see the *necessity* of contingencies. In this respect, we are not forced to think of nature as created in order to understand what we conceive of as a “purpose” in nature, for such purposes would disappear for a non-discursive intelligence. Thus, it would not seem necessary to think of a creator of the world, let alone a moral creator. On the other hand, the solution to the antinomy also showed that while we are able to “think” of such a non-discursive intelligence, we are not able to “conceive” of it, thus we are forced to turn to the conception of a creator who would have a purpose in mind. In other words, in

⁵⁷ I am taking there to be only a single, underlying antinomy.

order to make a *judgment* about nature, we must judge *as if* it were created with a purpose in mind. Thus, from this point of view, we must judge nature as having been created, and this would require that the postulate of pure practical reason concern God as the moral author of the world. I can see no solution to this quandary, and leave it as a puzzle to be solved.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

I.

A proper analysis of the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” is absolutely essential for understanding Kant’s conception of the relationship between morality and politics. It gives us the necessary foundation for the interdependence of moral progress and political institutions, and presents us with a richer notion of political theory than we receive from an analysis of the *Metaphysics of Morals* alone. The “Idea” represents the beginning of an element of Kant’s philosophy which persists throughout all his later writings. It helps us to fill in details which would otherwise be unclear, such as why constitutions are so important, why peace needs to be guaranteed by nature, how the highest good on earth can be defended, and how we ought to think about the future of humankind. Far from being an immature and unessential piece of Kant’s philosophy, it ought to be reevaluated as an important foundation.

Several traditional interpretations of Kant ought finally be put to rest. The first is the dismissal of the “Idea” as involving a simple and naive conception of teleology which Kant overturns in the *Critique of Judgment*. I have addressed this problem at length in Section One. There is every reason to think that Kant knew the limitations of the notion of teleology before he began work on this piece, and thus every reason to think Kant is up to something different in the “Idea.” When we begin to ask questions with this frame

of mind, I think we will make important discoveries, some of which I have tried to point out.

Second, I think we ought to accept, once and for all, that Kant believed there to be two locations for the highest good. I think it is absolutely clear that Kant does not intend moral progress for humanity to be achieved only in an afterlife. In addition, Kant gives us several reasons why this might be so, chief among which is his belief that if no progress is possible on earth, then the world as a creation can have no value whatsoever. While the next world might be a better world, this is no excuse for “allowing vice to mount upon endless vice in the real world.” The world as morally responsive, a belief also justified by the conclusions of the third *Critique*, must exist specifically for the sake of morality if it is to have any meaning or value.

Third, if we accept two locations for the highest good, regardless of our analysis of the “afterlife” we ought to concentrate on the defense for its achievability here on earth. And if we desire such a defense, how is it to be spelled out? We ought to recognize that a defense will have to involve postulates of practical reason, for reason cannot accept that moral progress is impossible before we even begin to try. We ought also to recognize that such a defense is going to have to be more concrete than the postulates required for the “other-worldly” highest good; we will have to spell out in some detail how moral progress might take place in light of possible empirical evidence to the contrary. Kant tackles one side of the dilemma by maintaining that real moral progress on earth concerns the species alone, and barring natural disasters, we ought to think that it is possible. The details of how it might be possible represent the other side of the dilemma, and Kant offers us two excellent possibilities for its solution, namely “social unsociability” and the thinking of the spectators of the French Revolution. Of course, these details could be wrong: perhaps a messenger from God will come to earth, and with widespread television coverage of his/her miracles, we will all be convinced

never to war again. The possibilities are endless, of course, but not likely. The best explanation we have for its possibility is a nature which is responsive to morality. But such an explanation has to be given in order to account for the possibility and to give reason the necessary clearing for enthusiastic moral willing.

Fourth, I think it is about time that we not only reject the interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy as an empty formalism, but also reject an interpretation of it as concerned with only the (good) will of the individual. We ought to reject interpretations in which our *sui generis* duty is overlooked, for even based upon a reading of the *Metaphysics of Morals* alone it ought to be clear that we have a duty to be concerned with the well-being and cultural education of other people. In fact, what we learn from an examination of the idea of moral progress is that, even being selfishly concerned only with our own moral constitution, we have to be concerned with our natural surroundings, for there exists an important reciprocal relationship between the two. If Kant is right, and I believe he is, then we cannot even begin our own moral project in earnest if the external conditions are not set up correctly. Moral progress requires antagonism, but forbids war. If we are not to have our moral, economic, and cultural resources drained, we must establish those external conditions whereby war is prevented. If we are to all have an equal chance at morality, we must eliminate poverty and other overwhelming incentives to violate the moral law. And if we are not to fall into a state of bovine contentment, we have to make sure that (peaceful) antagonism is retained and that an emphasis is placed on moral and cultural education. Beyond the fact that other individuals ought to be ends in themselves, and beyond the conclusions of the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Religion*, our environment, particularly our political environment, has an impact on moral striving.

Fifth, we ought to reject Kant's insistence that morality ought to be rewarded with proportionate happiness. There seems to be no justification for the claim that morality ought to be rewarded at all, nor that somehow we have a right to happiness. Certainly morality allows us to systematize the two ends of virtue and happiness, but the conclusion simply leads to permissible happiness. And I think we ought to be morally concerned with a minimal amount of happiness for all persons. But Kant's equation ought to be rejected.

Sixth, I think we now have a stronger argument for a justification of the postulates of practical reason. It is difficult to see why God is needed in the afterlife, given our lack of any knowledge as to its nature. I think an argument is certainly possible, though it would have to be founded on something other than the "worthiness equation." However, concerning the highest good on earth, we see the immediate need for postulates. Here, God seems to be needed so that nature can be responsive to and even productive for morality. Not immortality of the individual, but of the species is needed. And, the simple premise of some type of immortality of the species is not enough, for immortality without progress would render pointless the world as a creation. Thus, the moral progress of the species must be postulated as well, and I think can be justified as a postulate of practical reason.

II.

With this account of Kant's philosophy, I think some beneficial conclusions can be drawn, and the philosophy enriched. Let me point out just a few of these.

To begin with, one result which I take to be a benefit of such an analysis is that we are brought back to a level of political discussion and activity which is familiar and mostly traditional. The concern with Kant's political philosophy might be that it is too formalistic or that it is too concerned with morality to be of much use in "practical" applications. The "Theory and

Practice” article aside, I think we can put some of these concerns to rest. Certainly, morality must be the foremost concern of a politician. But let us keep two things in mind. First, politicians ought never to legislate morality. The separation of church and State, of ethics and State remains complete. One ought never to attempt to tell a person how to think. The State concerns Right, not virtue. Second, wise politicians ought to recognize that slow change is to be preferred to rapid revolution. Obviously history presents us with many examples of this, though Iran’s “White Revolution” springs immediately to mind. Even when the politician recognizes a deficiency in the constitution, such changes must be made slowly so as not to overly upset the constituents. Thus, some empirical knowledge of people must come to bear on this question.

Likewise, many political problems must have *empirical* solutions. For example, take the need for a minimal state of requisite well-being. How can we feed and clothe a nation of people? This is clearly an empirical question. How do we balance, say, the need for freedom of speech with the need to protect some members and institutions of society in accord with Right? Or what about the federation of nations; how are we going to get all parties to agree on some form of legal organization for the aversion of war? This too can only be solved with some knowledge of nature. Yovel puts it this way:

since the political organization is the embodiment of morality in legality, there may be a considerable overlap between the political institutions advocated by the utilitarian approach that Kant rejects, and those required by purely rational motives. Indeed, the highest practical principle states that reason must always also be an end in itself and not just an instrument for increasing utility; but this does not exclude the possibility that these two approaches will produce partly similar results on the level of empirical institutions.¹

Hence, despite Kant’s emphasis on the need to focus on morality and not happiness, and despite the sharp contrast between the moral politician and

¹ p. 173. Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*.

the political moralist, I think there is room for a traditional understanding of politicians, rulers, and statesmen who would have to employ several aspects of empirical knowledge in order to be effective leaders.

Next, as I mentioned above, I think we have an enriched conception of Kant's political theory. We see why it is that internal and external constitutions are so important. We see the exact relationship between political institutions and morality. We see why nature, not individuals, is to be the guarantor of the foundations for moral progress. We see why political institutions are necessary but not sufficient for moral progress. We see how we can return to our more "everyday" conception of political action and legislation.

The "critique of Modernity" has been particularly devastating for those philosophies which espouse what we might call the "Grand Narrative" of progress. A "Grand Narrative," to use the terminology provided by Kenneth J. Gergen in *The Saturated Self*, is typically concerned with science and technology, and often sees them as allowing for an improved life-style. Gergen explains that "the grand narrative is one of continuous upward movement -- improvement, conquest, achievement -- toward some goal,"² and characterizes Modernity as the period

in which it was possible to believe that because reason and observation can reign superior, a single form of government -- democracy or fascism -- or a single economic system -- capitalism or communism -- might finally solve the accumulating and intractable problems dogging the steps of the species as it lurched through history.³

The critique of Modernity attacks the effectiveness of science and technology from several different points of view, arguing, among other things, that it simply has not improved our well-being or quality of life.

² Gergen, Kenneth J., *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, p. 30.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Now, if we are right to reject the “worthiness equation” as I think we are, then we see that Kant remains clear of this objection. I think we ought to read Kant’s philosophy as being unconcerned with all but the most minimal accounts of happiness. As far as I understand Kant, humans are *simply not designed for happiness*. Nor should this be of primary concern to them. The “Copernican revolution” in ethics sets the stage for a reason which has a duty to improve morally, not a reason that can perfect theoretical knowledge or physical well-being. If the future state of human existence is one of high-tech buildings and devices, or if it is of simple rural farm communities, this is not important. Overall well-being is not important. In fact, too much satisfaction with our physical condition can lead either to a subordination of the moral law to concerns of happiness, or to the dangerous condition of bovine contentment. Kant’s moral philosophy and his understanding of progress should have nothing to do with any but minimal happiness, and that from a moral point of view.

The critique of Modernity’s attack on reason itself is of much more concern. The “Postmodern” insistence on “perspectivalism” and “relativism,” if accepted, would likely mean the end of moral progress as Kant understands it. If there can be no development of reason, then moral progress is threatened, due to the fact that morality is pure practical reason. Indeed, postmodern critiques would deny the very notion of “progress” itself because it would deny any possible knowledge of a “better” or “worse” set of values with which to judge progress. Clearly these are issues which would take another book to investigate in detail.

Of course, some of these questions were a problem in Kant’s time as well, and led to the debate between Jacobi, Mendelssohn, and Kant, and the challenges of the Romantic *Sturm and Drang* movement. Of importance then, as now, is the question of whether a disposition given over entirely to reason will destroy the very aspects of life that it hoped to save. Does Kant’s

perhaps overly-reasonable approach to life lead us to the land of the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels*, a place seemingly devoid of feeling, color, and meaning? Again, these are complicated questions. But I do not believe that it is reason alone which is causing or has caused such problems. Take, for example, the current loss of popularity of Christianity. A proper (Kantian) interpretation of Christianity is harmonious with the needs of practical reason. Christ as the model for human moral perfection and the need of God as the moral creator of the world support Christianity. Kant's conclusions from the first *Critique* clear the way for religion, and his conclusions from the third *Critique* force us to think of the world as created. Perhaps a better understanding of the workings of nature has contributed to the downfall of religion, but it is hard to see how this touches the core of Christian belief or Kant's philosophy. If anything, the postulate of practical reason ought to bolster such faith. In my opinion, it is not reason which is to be blamed for the current trend, but an excess of information: it seems to me that the problem lies in mass overexposure to so many different lifestyles, religions, faiths, individual choices, etc. in too short of a time and with few tools to digest this information.

Finally, we should not try to make Kant into a precursor of Hegel. We have good reason to think that nature may be responsive to morality. But this is not to say that we could know this, that conflict leads to some type of synthesis, or that the "world" is becoming more rational. Let us not criticize Kant for not having a structure that is undesirable in the first place. I think Kant's position saves us both from a critique which toppled Hegel's philosophy of Right and a critique which takes Kant as saying more than he does about the progress of reason.

In addition, a thorough understanding of Kant's philosophy saves us from the following type of objection: one ought to constantly wage war in order to bring about a condition where people become sick of war, in other

words, wage war to prevent war. While something like this might prove a good objection to Hegel, I think it is a gross misreading of Kant. First, we do not know if nature will be responsive to this type of tactic, for we do not know if nature will ultimately cooperate with morality. Nor do we know that the nature of human beings is such that they will ever actually become convinced of the evils of war. We hope, but we do not know. Second, this procedure would destroy many areas of positive, not necessarily moral, cooperation, particularly trade. Third, it will surely create situations where the moral project is overwhelmingly difficult to pursue, such as poverty. Fourth, it would might make it more difficult to love or respect other persons, and thus would violate the duties of virtue towards others as spelled out in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, any action of this type is in direct violation of the moral law, a law which it was the intent to aid in the first place. Killing is clearly against the moral law, and it is difficult to see how such a transgression could be justified. Even the French Revolution, its success so hoped for by the spectators, cannot be something which is approved for each moral agent; while the outcome may be advantageous, the means are deplorable.⁴ I think any argument which validates the use of violence in the name of (Kantian) morality is likely to be grossly misconstrued and probably insincere.

III.

The immediate concern which may well remain is whether Kant has presented us with a position that is so dependent upon faith under so many circumstances that it is impervious to criticism. I am reminded of Freud's theory of the unconscious which is, *ipso facto* unable to be discredited by mere definition of being unconscious. Is Kant's position like this? In many ways it seems that it is. It seems unlikely that we could come up with vastly

⁴ And, of course, the final bloody and dictatorial outcome of the French Revolution only serves to prove Kant's belief that constitutional reform ought to be brought about slowly, and from the top down.

overwhelming evidence which would show once and for always that moral progress is impossible. If morality “may well be occasionally *interrupted*, but... never be *broken off*,”⁵ and if “we are dealing with beings who, from the feeling of self-inflicted evil, when things disintegrate altogether, know how to adopt a strengthened motive for making them even better than they were before that state,”⁶ then it seems unlikely that the question could even be given a final judgment. But is this fact a problem?

I think we must keep several things in mind. The first is that, if Kant is correct in his thinking that republican constitutions must be the foundation for moral progress, then I think we have some good reasons to believe in this progress. If we read the texts carefully, Kant says that moral progress can be “seen” through political development, regardless of how we judge our moral development alone. If we accept this, then Kant seems to have been a good predictor of the political climate of the past two centuries. We have indeed seen the rise, but, for the most part, also the fall of communism. We have seen nations trying for peace. Most importantly, we have seen a large development of republican constitutions. Kant seems to be correct in his assessment of the spectator’s attitudes regarding the French Revolution; it was indeed an event that was not to be forgotten, a will for a constitution which moved closer to Right and to respect. Since that time, the growth of such constitutions have far outweighed dictatorships.

We ought also keep in mind what Kant says regarding how far along he considers the human race. While there are few statements directly concerning this issue, Kant does offer some thoughts. In the “Idea” he writes, concerning a universal civil society, that

its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned... That it is also the last task to be solved also follows from this: it requires the correct concept of the nature of a possible constitution, great

⁵ “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 309.

⁶ “Is the Human Race Continually Improving?” p. 149.

experience during much of the world's course, and above all else a good will prepared to accept that constitution;... when it happens, it will only be very late, and after many futile attempts.⁷

He goes on to claim that “however fanciful this idea may seem to be -- and it was laughed at as such when advanced by an Abbé St. Pierre or a Rousseau (perhaps because they believed its realization was too near) -- it is nonetheless the inevitable outcome...”⁸ Also in the “Idea” Kant maintains that “this last step (the federation of nations)... is no more than halfway in mankind’s formation...”⁹ Clearly this shows that Kant does not think that these crucial stages of moral progress are near at hand. This is particularly so since it is the perfect solution of the *political* problem which will take such a long time, not to mention the moral problem. A final definitive quotation comes from the *Lecture on Philosophical Theology* where Kant writes that humankind “will perhaps not attain this idea for millions of years.”¹⁰ I think we ought to take this as a fair sign of Kant’s somewhat skeptical thinking. These quotations, coupled with his many statements to the effect that “in this earthly world, there is only progress. Hence in this world goodness and happiness are not things to be possessed, they are only paths toward perfection and contentment,”¹¹ ought to protect Kant from an overly optimistic interpretation.

Finally, let me present this interesting quotation from “Theory and Practice”:

One can also offer evidence showing that the cry over the irresistible growth in human depravity is due to the fact that, when man attains a higher stage of morality, one can see further still and can make more rigorous judgments regarding what man is in comparison with what he ought to be; consequently, our self-censure will always be the more rigorous the more stages of morality have been ascended in the known course of the world.¹²

⁷ “Idea,” Ak. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Ak. 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Ak. 26.

¹⁰ *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, p. 117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹² “Theory and Practice,” Ak. 310.

Here, Kant argues that things really ought to seem worse at exactly that point when they are getting better. An increased critique of the current state of morality, and a judgment that things are not as good as they could be, indicate a certain awakening of moral judgment, and a progression of reason's ability to take stock of the situation. This is, of course, a much-debated issue, whether things have always been this bad or whether it is just that we are witnessing and recognizing more of it now.

Ultimately, in evaluating Kant's position, the question comes back once again to the question of moral progress in history and its future. What can we say about the many bloody wars to which Kant was not witness? How can this possibly represent moral progress? It seems that we *can* say any one of a number of things. We can take either a skeptical or optimistic approach to this question. Ultimately, I'm not sure what kind of experience would let us definitively answer this question from within the bounds of knowledge rigorously defined. But what *ought* we to say? This, it seems, is the more important question of the two. If Kant is correct, we seem to have no way to decide this question theoretically. Can we decide it practically? I think that Kant gives us many reasons to think that we can, and to think that we may have something like a duty to do so. Moral progress must be affirmed, if only as a postulate of practical reason.

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