

Practice and Enlightenment:  
Aristotle and Kant on Moral Education

by

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Abstract:

Aristotle argues that moral virtue is a kind of habit, and that learning virtue involves a kind of practice and habituation. Some, like Kant, have worried whether this sort of account is really not more than mechanistic training. I argue that this worry is unfounded in Aristotle's case. Aristotle's account has otherwise come into favour in recent years as an attractive model for character and moral education. Kant's ethics have generally seemed less appealing in these areas. Kant argues that the moral law can be known *a priori* without special experience or education. Whether Kant can have an interesting or attractive account of becoming good is not obvious. Drawing comparisons to the favoured Aristotelian account, and focusing on Kant's conception of virtue and the highest good, I argue that he can and does.

List of Abbreviations Used:

EE *Eudemian Ethics*

EN *Nicomachean Ethics*

Rhet *Rhetoric*

AP *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*

CPR *Critique of Practical Reason*

G *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

LP *Lectures on Pedagogy*

MM *Metaphysics of Morals*

QE *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*

REL *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

CI *Categorical Imperative*

FUL *Formula of Universal Law*

FH *Formula of Humanity*

FA *Formula of Autonomy*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Eudaemonia*, as the true conception of human happiness, is seen on Aristotle's account both as our natural end as well as our highest moral good. The identification of moral perfection with happiness, human excellence, and living well is on Aristotle's account clearly attractive. This is an end that we can readily understand and accept without tension. Tied to this end, Aristotle's conception of virtue has an undeniably central place, and moral development a clearly vital role. Many have understandably seen in Aristotle's account of character and of how we learn to be good, an attractive model for the moral life and of how excellence in virtue is acquired<sup>1</sup>.

Kant's moral philosophy has traditionally not been found as appealing in this regard – among others. Kant's account of moral obligation is not necessarily in tune with our natural end of happiness; we do not become good and happy at the same time. The pursuit of the one will even often directly confound the other. Seemingly divorced from happiness, the moral life is not so obviously appealing. Character also is, at first glance, of lesser significance than the universal laws that we are each competent to know as a fact of reason and are responsible for following from duty alone; and so *becoming* moral seems not only somewhat unattractive (even if right) but also *inessential*, if the moral law can (in theory) be known and applied by everyone without exception.

In this thesis I reflect on Kant and Aristotle's relative conceptions of the moral life, by looking at what each of them thinks is involved in becoming good. My aim is not to challenge the merits of Aristotle's account. My explication of it here is also intended as a partial defence. My main purpose is to make Kant's account of moral development and the moral life more plausible; hopefully also attractive. By drawing comparisons to the favoured Aristotelian story, I hope to show that Kant can and does have a full and interesting account of character and moral maturity, and that both are central to his version of how we reason and act rightly.

This thesis is divided into four chapters: two on Aristotle, and two on Kant. The first chapter in each pair is groundwork in their respective projects in practical philosophy. In Aristotle's case, the preliminary account is meant also to show the central role that

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<sup>1</sup>See especially: Burnyeat (1980), Herman (1996), Sherman (1989). Works in Bibliography.

virtue plays in his account of living well. Addressing Kant's account, I focus on the derivation (rather than the application) of the *Categorical Imperative* to demonstrate its alleged accessibility through reason alone. In the companion chapters that follow, I offer in each case a more argumentative interpretation of the two philosophers, concerning the aims and details of ethical learning in their respective accounts. Each is a reading and a defense. I defend Aristotle against a worry, expressed by Kant among others, that his account of building character through *habituation*, is mechanistic. I defend Kant against the broad concern that moral education and character can have little or no place on his account.

Both Aristotle and Kant see moral education as contributing to what they take to be the *highest practical end*. For Aristotle this will be evident, for Kant it will be argued. The contrasting conceptions of moral education and its aim that I finally attach to Aristotle and Kant are, respectively, *practice* at being *excellent* as the essential element in *eudaemonia*, and together *discipline and cultivation* in becoming *virtuous and enlightened* as the requisite strength and understanding to think and act freely through respect for the moral law.

## Chapter 2: Eudaimonia

Aristotle, in the tradition of his teacher, held and would argue that human beings become good and happy at the same time.<sup>2</sup> A sound moral lesson is also a prudential one. To understand what it means to become good (and also why we should care to put in the effort) means seeing how these goals are united in Aristotle's conception of *virtue*, as the essential constituent of *eudaimonia* – the highest human good that can be realized in action. In this chapter I sketch Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* or “happiness” as the highest good, as a preliminary basis for taking a closer look in the next chapter at virtue and how it is learned.

What makes Aristotle's account unique is its insistence that *eudaimonia* is something *active* rather than a state of being. So although “happiness” seems to be the standard translation in English, it is worth pointing out from the beginning that what Aristotle has in mind is not what we might typically associate with that word. Aristotle tells us that *eudaimonia* is an *activity*. If we like to keep the translation “happiness”, we may have to extend our sense of the word somewhat and think of it not as a pleasant feeling or state of being, but as something that we do. For this reason, some commentators have thought it a better fit to translate *eudaimonia* as *flourishing* – as an account of what it means to actively and continuously thrive and prosper as a human being.<sup>3</sup>

### **I. The Highest Practical Good**

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is meant first of all to be practical. It is about becoming good, and also happy, and if these are rightly understood they are essentially the same. The good is certainly something to be analyzed and discovered, but our interest in this the ultimate end is not primarily that it be known or understood – as it were, merely cognized

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<sup>2</sup> Phrasing to and tribute Plato from *Fragments: X. Poems* – “he, alone or the first of mortals, showed clearly by his own life and by the courses of his arguments that a man becomes good and happy at the same time” [Oxford Complete Works F 650, F 673]

<sup>3</sup> I have myself left *eudaimonia* largely untranslated for the rest of this work when referring to Aristotle's account. Where I do speak of “happiness” for comparative purposes, as when Aristotle himself is considering competing views of the highest good, it should not be taken to refer to Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*. I will not use “happiness” in this work as a technical term, and I will try to make clear when I do use it what meaning I intend.

– but rather that it be achieved and realized in practice. As Aristotle has said, we inquire to know the mark so to hit it with greater precision in action.

Will not knowledge of [the good], then, have a great influence on life?  
Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. [EN 1094a19]

The mark he has in mind is a clear account of what it is for a person’s life to go best – and it will put us in the right frame of mind to think of his *Ethics* in this way as an inquiry into the good life, and a handbook for living well. The inquiry is framed as the search for a particular *good*, or to be exact, the *best* among practical goods. “The highest of all goods achievable in action”. [EN 11095a 15]

Aristotle describes human actions, choices, products, and goals as relating to one another in a kind of orderly system of ends. The *Ethics* begins in this spirit with the assertion that, “Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good” [EN 1094a1]. All human activity is, in this sense, intentional. It has a purpose, an aim, an *end*. Aristotle calls this purpose a “good”, and it becomes clear before long that what he has in mind are the various *ends* for the sake of which actions are performed. The good for any action is identified with the goal or purpose for the sake of which it is done. He says, for example at NE 1.7:

What, then, is the good of each action or craft? Surely it is that for the sake of which the other things are done; in medicine this is health, in generalship victory, in house-building a house, in another case something else, but in every action and decision it is the end, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does the other actions [EN 1097a 20].

There is not only one single good, but very many different ones. For as many distinct activities as there are to be performed, there are just so many goods to be realized. What medicine aims at is health, and this is why medicine is practiced. Health is the end of medicine and its object, its characteristic guiding good. About goods then Aristotle is a pluralist. He treats “good” as a homonym. He observes that people commonly use the same word, “good” to refer to various ends, but these differ widely not only in detail, but also in kind. Some will be states or qualities (like health) others will be finished products (a house) and some, Aristotle suggests, will be the activities themselves:



A certain difference exists is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities [EN 1094a5].

Two ideas are introduced in the passage above. First, there is the general introduction of a hierarchy of value that exists among ends. Some ends are *better* than others; and something makes them so. Second, when an action is performed for the sake of some other end than simply acting, the end is better than the action itself. So for example, Aristotle holds that health or a work of art would be “better” than the work itself that preserves or produced them; better, it seems, because the product is *more truly the end* of what had been done than the action itself. Some ends are not pursued for their own sake but are more like instruments or steps along the way to some higher goal. Some ends are subordinate to others.

The essential thought behind Aristotle’s classification is this: there is an apparent ordering to the ends that are sought in action. If we were to ask then whether there were not some final or highest end or ends to all that we do, so that these were sought entirely for their own sake and were also those for their sake of which alone we sought everything else, this or these would be “the good or the chief good”.

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good [EN 1094a19].

It is important to notice that this proposal is hypothetical. Aristotle has not yet demonstrated that there is a terminal good, but has only said that if there were such a thing - some end that was always pursued for its own sake and for the sake of which all other things were pursued – we could fairly call it the highest good achievable in action. This avoids the challenge at least for now that Aristotle has committed a simple fallacy in leaping from the premise that all action aims at some end, to the conclusion that all action aims at a common one. He hasn’t asserted the existence of a common end in the beginning, but he does offer an almost pragmatic argument in support of it. He is bothered by desire’s potentially infinite regress: if there were not some focal end, some final accomplishment towards which all of our activity was unified in purpose, “our

desire would be empty and vain”. [EN 1094a19]. Always to desire this for the sake of that, and never anything finally for itself, means admitting no final purpose or hope for satisfaction in what we do. If this thinking is right, then there is good reason at least to organize our pursuits towards such a single goal. There is also something to be said about the *irrationality* of action if all pursued goods were only useful to some other purpose, and nothing was chosen finally for its own sake as an end. But Aristotle does not seem to see the problem in these terms.

Now, it seems that there could very plausibly be several such terminal goods – several ends in themselves – and it is not immediately clear that desiring these would be in vain by the simple fact of their being several and so distinct. Aristotle keeps this possibility open in the first book, and it is not obvious at what point it is abandoned. He says for example, in resuming his discussion of the good at Book I Chapter 7, and keeping his hypothetical tone, that “if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action” [EN 1097a15]. This can be left to the side for now though, and it is enough to notice that the search for the human good has been given a structure. The human good(s) will be final; pursued for its own sake, and for its sake all else pursued.

## **II. Common Beliefs**

So what is it that everyone ultimately wants and works for? Aristotle takes it for granted that most people, if pressed, will answer in the same way: people want to live well, do well, and that this is what it means to be *happy* [EN 1095a17]. What people generally disagree about is what happiness really amounts to. So far there is only a name: happiness, *eudaemonia*. But what does the word describe?

Aristotle begins by considering certain popular and philosophical accounts of happiness, and offers some observations about how people typically come to their own conception of happiness and living well. On the one hand, he thinks that we (the unwise many) will tend to think of happiness as something uncomplicated and obvious, but will still disagree with one another about it, and likely won’t hold the same opinion either for very long; and he suggests that we might tend to identify happiness simply with what we most conspicuously lack in our own lives [EN 1095a30]. In this sense, the very sick will

identify happiness with health; the poor, with wealth; the confined, with freedom, and so on. And we will be prepared, conscious of our simplicity, to admire and accept as profound whatever grand definitions, seemingly above our comprehension, that are offered to us by those who seem wise.

Among the views of “the many”, as well as those offered by “the wise”, we should only consider “those that are most prevalent or that seem to be arguable.” [EN 1095a30] That is, we shouldn't bother with fringe views or un-argued opinions, but if some conception of happiness is held widely enough or has some argument offered in its favour it will be worth considering. He also suggests that “people quite reasonably reach their conception of the good, i.e. of flourishing, from the lives they lead” [EN 1095b15] and he considers broadly five lives that are widely enough or reasonably favoured to be worth considering: the lives of gratification (pleasure), of political activity, of business, of virtue, and of contemplation. These different ways of living are defined and distinguished from one another by their own distinct account of the good and of happiness. In this way, each of these ways of living is distinguished by a unique standard of value – what those who live them will characteristically strive for and against which they will measure the relative worth of other goods, activities, and decisions. Different views of what it means to live well are identified by what it is that we think we ought to live *for*. To those who lead the life of gratification, living well means living for what is pleasant; and the highest human good, “happiness”, is identified with pleasure. Those who pursue a life of political activity seem to conceive of the good as something different, and think that there is something else that we ought to live for. The good, to them, is *honour*, and happiness is being honoured. Likewise, those who lead the lives of wealth, virtue, and contemplation regard these goods as highest, and identify happiness with having or doing them.

Aristotle sees some merit in each of the common views he considers, but ultimately finds each of them lacking in some respect. Indeed, since there is something to be said for each of these goods, no one of them alone seems enough to make a life most fully worth living<sup>4</sup>; no one of them seems entirely *complete* of itself.

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<sup>4</sup> He arrives at this conclusion for each of the goods individually, but it does not seem necessary to discuss these here. Roughly pleasure is sometimes attached to base objects, and also alone cannot fully account for

#### IV. Completeness and Self-sufficiency

From these considerations, Aristotle concludes that the truly highest human good must satisfy two qualities: it must be both *complete* and *self-sufficient*. These are the two formal conditions that he identifies with the highest human good, which he will then argue that *eudaemonia* best satisfies. The two conditions together give us the clearest specification available to us of “the end we are looking for”. He describes the completeness condition in the following way:

We call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more complete than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more complete than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call complete without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else [EN 1097a 30].

On Aristotle's account, completeness admits of degrees. Least complete is an end that is chosen only as a means, more complete is one chosen as a means but also for its own sake, and most complete would be an end chosen for its own sake alone. An end could also be “complete without qualification” if it was always chosen for its own sake and never as a means to anything else. [EN 1097a30] Restricting our interpretation of this language merely to production and to an instrumental means to ends relationship might be misleading. Aristotle sees the subordination of ends in this way, but also as describing the contribution of a part in relation to a whole. In chess, for example, each good move is subordinate both to the goal of checkmating one's opponent and to playing a game that the players would agree had been good. Both of these forms of subordination describe a relation of relative *importance* or value, but not in the same way. As a means to checkmate, each good move is instrumentally subordinate; as an essential part of a good game, each good move is (for the sake of a word) compositionally so. The relationships are distinct, but relevantly in each, checkmate and the good game are better and more desired than any single good move.

Aristotle argues that *eudaemonia* “above all else” meets this condition. We always choose *eudaemonia* for its own sake and we never choose it for the sake of

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why intelligence seems good and choiceworthy (Book X); honour is contingent on the esteem of others while the highest good should be more fully within our control [EN 1095b24]; virtue and contemplation come closest, but still seem lacking in certain respects – see section on external goods below.

anything else.<sup>1</sup> Even virtue must be less complete than *eudaemonia* for this reason. Although virtue is chosen for its own sake, it is sometimes also chosen as a means to *eudaemonia*: “every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy.” Virtue is sometimes chosen for the sake of happiness, but happiness is never chosen for the sake of virtue (or anything else). Happiness is therefore more complete than virtue, and so is a better candidate for the highest good we are looking for<sup>5,6</sup>.

The highest good must also be *self-sufficient*. A good is self sufficient if it is “that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing” [EN 1097b 15]. A life that had nothing else but what was a self-sufficient good would still be desirable and worth having. Such a life would be “lacking in nothing”. Aristotle offers a simple argument to support the identification of the highest good with a self-sufficient one. To say that something is good, but that something else not contained within it was also good, would imply that those parts together would form a greater whole. *Eudaemonia*, if it is the highest good, must be lacking in nothing. If something could be added to improve it, it would not be best, and therefore not deserve to be called *eudaemonia*. By definition, *eudaemonia* must be uniquely self-sufficient [EN 1097b15]. The self-sufficiency condition seems to be closely related to the first one. This argument is intended to prove finally that the highest good must be singular, and not one good among many, since “if [*eudaemonia*] were counted as one among many, then, clearly, we think it would be more choiceworthy if the smallest of goods were added; for the good that is added becomes an extra quantity of goods, and the larger of two goods is always more choiceworthy” [ibid].

So *eudaemonia* must be self-sufficient, and the common view of happiness seems to be that it is so. That these conditions are essential to the concept of a highest good and that happiness alone is commonly thought best to satisfy them make up Aristotle’s first argument that happiness is the good we seek.

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Kant will later argue just the opposite, claiming virtue's priority and that one reason to pursue happiness is that it makes virtue easier: “...under a pressure of many anxieties and amidst unsatisfied wants, might easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty...”[G 4:399]

<sup>6</sup> That virtue is sometimes chosen for the sake of happiness is Aristotle’s first suggestion in *the Ethics* that virtue might stand to happiness in a causal or contributory relation. I will treat the place of virtue within Aristotle’s conception of *eudaemonia* more fully in the following section.

## V. The Human Function

This account is so far only formal, and the conclusion that *eudaemonia* must be complete and self-sufficient Aristotle regards as an as yet unsubstantiated conception of the sort of good we are interested in finding. In order to locate the highest good more precisely, Aristotle proposes to consider a possible human “function” or “characteristic activity”. His reason for thinking this is the right line of inquiry is roughly this: We understand what it means to say that someone is a good sculptor or musician or physician because we understand what it is that such a person characteristically does - what it is that they do which essentially makes them what they are – and moreover what it is to do that thing well. [EN 1097b 25]. For anything that has a function in this sense, its good will be measured by its performing that function well or poorly. It takes no stretch of intuition to recognize that we acquire certain functions by adopting certain roles or by assuming certain responsibilities. Becoming a medical doctor means taking on the task of preserving and restoring the health of your patients. Your function, as a medical doctor, is to heal; a good doctor is one who does a good job of it. You might, in addition to being a physician, be a father. Becoming a father means taking on the task of raising children. Your functions, as a father, are to raise children (to provide, care, educate and so on); a good father does these things well.

The argument from function is simple in spirit. If human beings qua human beings have a function – a natural work or activity which characterized our species, over-and-above any occupational or private functions a particular person might assume – we could expect that our good would likewise be measured by our performing that function well. *Eudaemonia*, human flourishing, would be the excellent realization of our species' natural task.

Now, Aristotle does not seem to give any direct argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that proves that human beings do or must have a natural function of our own. This much seems simply to be assumed. He asks, “do the carpenter and the leather worker have their functions and actions, but has a human being no function? Is he by nature idle, without any function?” [EN 1097b 30]. He is more explicit in his assumptions in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where he asks us to grant that “the work of the *spirit* [soul; psyche] is to cause life” and so that the work of the *human spirit* will be to cause the sort of life

proper to human beings [EE 1219a 20]. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he seems to take it for granted that the human function will be a certain way of living in this sense, He passes immediately from the question of what that function could be, to dismissing two such ways of life - of “nutrition and growth” and of “sense perception” - on the grounds that they are shared with plants and with other animals respectively. [NE 1098a].

Thinking about a possible uniquely human function, those of us with more naturalistic tendencies might like to tie it to something like survival or reproduction, both of which Aristotle rules out. His reason for doing so is that neither serves to distinguish the human animal in any way from animals of other kinds. The human function must be what marks us as essentially human, and so it must be one that is not shared. We might say then that human beings, *as animals*, share certain functions with others, but that *as human beings*, we will have some function unique to us. The lives of nutrition and sensuality do not distinguish the human spirit from that which causes the lives of plants or animals and “The remaining possibility, then” must be “some sort of life of action of the part of the spirit that has reason” [EN 1098a 5]. This argument by elimination will of course convince us only if we agree that these three options exhaust all reasonable possibilities, and that these lives-as-function must also be mutually exclusive.

The argument from function is the pivotal argument of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is unfortunately not clear that the assumptions needed for the argument to work - that there is such a thing as a characteristically human activity and that all functions are not merely assumed by the commitments we make and by ways of living that we define for ourselves - are ones we should readily accept. If we are willing to agree with Aristotle that there really is a human function, and that it is as he says, it will not be difficult to follow him in his account of the human good. The human good is *doing well*, or an excellence in the exercise of that function, and since that function for the human being is a way of living, it is *living well* in this way. These activities Aristotle had said are in agreement with the common understanding of happiness.

## **VI. Reason and the Divided Psyche**

I grant Aristotle the existence of a unique human function for the purpose of this work, so that we can follow his argument to its conclusion. The human function is defined this

way: “a life of action of the [part of the soul] that has reason” [EN 1098a5] or alternatively “activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason” [EN 1098a5]. What Aristotle means by “soul” [*anima*] (also roughly “psyche” or possibly “mind”) and by that part of it which has or requires reason are not clear, and require attention.

Aristotle does not give full treatment to the nature of the soul or its divisions in the *Ethics*, and takes it rather for granted that this is the model of human psyche that we should be working with. The model is roughly this: there are two elements of soul, one rational and one irrational, and the irrational element itself has two parts. One part of us that is irrational is shared with the other animals and also with plants, and with living things generally. Aristotle says of this element that it is, “widely distributed, and vegetative in its nature, I mean that which causes nutrition and growth” [EN 1102a14]. and he calls this alternatively “the nutritive faculty” [EN 1102b7]. Aristotle seems to think that the nutritive faculty has its own kind of virtue, but since it is shared by all living things, its virtue is likewise not one characteristically human.<sup>7</sup> So when Aristotle tells us that the intellectual and moral virtues exhaust the concept of “virtue” in its extentional reach, he means that all uniquely human virtues can be broadly classified as one of these two. The nutritive faculty has no share in reason, nor in choice, and has “by its nature no share in human excellence” [EN 1102b7].

Of the remaining two parts of the soul, each has some share in reason, though one part has it more fully. It is to these elements that the human excellences belong. The intellectual virtues belong to the part of the human soul that is most fully rational; the moral virtues to the part which can be *governed* by or which “listens to” and obeys reason, but which is not the reasoning part itself. Since Aristotle identifies the human function (and its excellence) with the part of the soul that has or requires reason, and since there are in fact two such elements, there turn out to be *two* lives that could characteristically stand as the realization of the human function. Aristotle is in fact somewhat ambivalent about which of these lives is really best and proper to us, sometimes defending a conception of *eudaemonia* identified with a life of *moral virtue*, and sometimes a life of *contemplation*. This is again another area of significant scholarly

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<sup>7</sup> “Now, the excellence of this seems to be common to all species and not specifically human” [EN 1102a14].



debate, and one which I avoid treating further in this thesis. For my purpose here, I take it for granted that Aristotle simply identifies the human function with reason both in its exercise in intellectual contemplation and in its engagement with feeling and action in moral virtue. I make no claim about which of these is the more complete and self-sufficient end.

## VII. From Function to Virtue

For whatever thing is of a kind which has a defining work or function, a *good* member of its kind will have that function as well, and will be called good precisely because of its doing that work well. The function of a lyre-player, to use Aristotle's example is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well [EN 1098a10]. Aristotle's argument I think has its crucial turning point in the following passage, where he moves from the idea of a human function as a certain way of living, to locating the place finally of virtue within that way of life:

If this is the case, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or action of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is *performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence*: if this is the case, human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete [EN 1098a15].

Human beings characteristically live a certain way, this is what makes them human rather than something else. They live by exercising reason, or by acting according to a rational principle. A good human being lives this way too, but does so well. Speaking generally, Aristotle asserts that to do a thing well is to do it “in accordance with the appropriate excellence” [ibid] and this is to say that it is performed in accordance with virtue. The good human, therefore, exercises and follows reason in accordance with the *excellences* or virtues appropriate to that activity. He or she is excellently rational in thought and in action and, in being so, lives well and realizes the human good to its fullest.

In summary, then: human beings have a characteristic work or function. Their highest good is to perform that function well. This function is a certain kind

of activity. To perform an activity well is to perform it in accordance with the appropriate excellence. And this last premise shows us where to find the place of virtue within *eudaemonia*.

That last move needs to be motivated somewhat. What exactly does it mean to say that an action is well performed when it is “performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence”? Is this the same as saying that we do something well when we do it excellently? The difference is that “doing well” is a quality of action, and excellence (virtue) here describes by contrast a quality of the person who acts. To say that we act well when we do so in accordance with virtue is to say that we do it well, by having at the same time a certain quality about *us*. Jumping the gun a little, Aristotle will say that we act well by having at the same time a certain *state of character*, from and according to which the action is performed. A good harp-player then, as the analogy goes, is good because she plays the harp while at the same time *being* a certain way; having the excellence or excellences associated with playing well. What might these be? It seems intuitive to think that these would be certain acquired technical skills and habits; natural or practiced talents; or else capacities, say, for creativity, or for great feeling and expression. Aristotle's theory of virtue touches on all of these, but virtue is not quite so broadly defined. He locates virtue more precisely within the human psyche, classifying virtue by describing first its “*genus*” and its “*differentia*”.

According to Aristotle there are three *qualities* of soul – passions, faculties, and states of character. Aristotle treats the passions generally as something like *judgment sensitive attitudes*<sup>8</sup>. They are affective states or emotions like anger, fear and pity, but are understood as intentional and partly cognitive. They are emotions, directed towards some object or person, generally accompanied by either pleasure or pain, owing to some opinion or belief we have regarding their actions or qualities which causes us to feel as we do.<sup>9</sup> Thus, for Aristotle, passions are not altogether irrational, and do not simply

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase is Scanlon's - frequently in “What We Owe to Each Other”

<sup>9</sup> Believing that someone has slighted me, I become angry; this being, among other things, a desire to rectify the slight, accompanied by pain or discomfort until justice is done, but ultimately sensitive to my

bubble up in us without cause, but are sensitive to judgment and reasoned belief. A *faculty* describes an ability, or power, or capacity, to be passionate – the ability to become angry or to feel pity corresponds to some faculty in us, and this is distinct from the passion itself. In the discussion he is leading, faculties are described relative to the passions specifically, since these are the faculties which moral virtue might most appropriately concern. Concerning the intellectual virtues, the faculties describe instead powers and tendencies of thought, like cleverness in instrumental reasoning. [EN Book XI] A state of character then finally, is not a passion, nor is it a faculty, but it is “the thing in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions” [EN 1105b26]. Virtue belongs to one of these three qualities of soul<sup>10</sup>, and as we might guess, it belongs to the last of these. Anger is not a virtue, nor is a person’s ability to become angry. Anger is not itself bad or blameworthy, but a virtue or vice does describe whether a person is good or bad, worthy of praise or blame.<sup>11</sup> We call virtue that quality which a person has according to which he or she will be angry towards the right sorts of people, in the right way, and at the right time and so on. Being angry when it is appropriate is good, and we celebrate the person who becomes angry towards those who deserve anger – so long as he or she does so fairly, and to the right degree. And so virtue is not a passion. Neither is it a faculty, since faculties are in us “by nature” but we aren’t good or bad by nature.<sup>12</sup> So virtue is a state of character, again demonstrated by elimination: “If, then, the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character.” [EN 1106a9]

This, says Aristotle, is virtue’s “genus”; it is one kind among states of character. Next to consider will be its “differentia” – what will distinguish virtue from the other members of that genus, (i.e. from vice, *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, brutishness and divine

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belief that the slight was real. If I determined that I had not in fact been slighted, I should cease to be angry (maybe after a brief cool down period).

<sup>10</sup> “Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds – passions, faculties, states of character – virtue must be one of these” [EN 1105b28].

<sup>11</sup> “We are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices... the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way.” [EN 1105b30]

<sup>12</sup> More on this thought in the next section

virtue [EN 1145a15]) that is, from other states of character. It is this argument that brings Aristotle's discussion finally from function to virtue itself:

We must, however, not only describe virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well e.g. the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well... *the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well*" [EN 1106a17]

To call a thing "excellent" is to say two things about it: that it is in *good condition* and that it *does its work* well. It is capable of doing well in the performance of its function or characteristic activity. These two thoughts are related, since it will be the thing which is in best condition that will be best able to set to its task (i.e. it is in "good working condition") and it will be likewise that thing which is best able to perform its task whose condition we would be most apt to call good. In a word, to be excellent is to be a fine example of one's kind. The virtuous man or woman, the excellent human being, is one who approaches the ideal, flourishing as a fine example of his or her kind and worthy of emulation; being a master of his or her characteristic activity, in an active life guided by or of reason.

Can we say anything more specific about what it means for a thing to be in such a state? In order to find some standard for evaluating the state of a thing and for calling it good or bad, Aristotle suggests the following line of argument, and by it introduces his famous Doctrine of the Mean.

First, then, let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things); both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. [EN 1106b 6]

Health and physical strength, by analogy, are preserved by moderation, and destroyed by excess and by deficiency. In general we do well by getting things "just right" and putting things in good proportion. When we drink alcohol socially, we do best by drinking in

moderation, in right proportion for our size, and our experience, and our mood. An athlete will improve her skill and build her strength by exercising neither too much (so that she hurts herself) nor too little (so that she stays in place or lets her strength wane) and she does so by doing what is enough *for her*, and as is appropriate to her level.

Thus a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this – the intermediate not in the object but relative to us... and if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. [EN 1106b 6]

So virtue is a state of character and one which, by having it, a person is said to be in good condition and able to do her work well, and this in the sense that she will tend in her work to aim at the mean, relative to her.

Moral virtue, which is concerned with the irrational part of the soul that is sensitive to reason, and which is thus concerned with *passions and actions* [EN 1106b20] will be an excellence of these, and will be a stable disposition to hit the mean with regard to them. As for passions: we feel anger, and likewise fear, pity, envy, and so on, to greater and lesser degrees and this owes both to the situation and to the sort of person that we are. Some are quick to temper, some are slower but feel anger more intensely, and some never seem anything but annoyed. Aristotle's sense is that there is an appropriate way to feel anger in a given situation, and we say that a person gets it right who is angered neither *too* quickly, nor *too* slowly; neither *too* harshly, nor *too* mildly; and who in general avoids the extremes and has an even and balanced temper. Possessing the virtue with respect to anger does not mean never becoming angry, or never going above or below some specified level of intensity, but that the person who has the virtue relative to that passion will feel anger to a degree appropriate to him or her, and to the situation.

There can be no precise formula or rule for getting things right here, as Aristotle frequently insists, and as I will show more precisely in the following chapter, this is rather a matter of practiced judgement and even a kind of learned *perception* which can only come from experience. Moral development and education thus has a central place on Aristotle's account. Acting morally is not a matter of applying rules or ready decision procedures which could be passed down by rote instruction – knowing what to do means becoming the sort of person capable of sound judgement. It is of no small importance in

Aristotelian virtue ethics how virtue, moral awareness and good judgement can be acquired, and I turn to Aristotle's account of moral development in the following section.

### VIII. Closing Remarks: Fortune and External Goods

Aristotle identifies eudaemonia primarily with the exercise of virtue, with the human good defined as “activity of the soul in accord with [complete] virtue” [EN 1098a20]. But he tells us moreover that this will also depend on external goods to be complete, suggesting that we might best call the happy person “one whose activities accord with complete virtue, with an adequate supply of external goods, not just for any time but for a complete life”[EN 1101a 15].

There are according to Aristotle three classes of goods: goods of the body, goods of the soul, and external goods. He tells us also that of these three classes the goods of the soul are best. This he takes as granted, and as a premise that his account of the highest good must agree with. [EN 1098b 5]. With this in mind he feels he has done well to call eudaemonia a kind of action and activity. Activities belong to the class of goods belonging to the soul<sup>13</sup>. Conceived of as an activity then, *eudaemonia* can be called a good of the soul rather than one that is external or of the body, and since these goods are best, *eudaemonia* will appropriately belong to the class of what is best. Goods of body and soul are both opposed to external goods as belonging to the agent herself, rather than being objects external to be possessed or engaged with. So for example, wealth is an external good, but so are friends and reputation; beauty and fitness are goods of the body; and cleverness, courage, and *eudaemonia* itself are goods of the soul.

However, although *eudaemonia* is not itself identified with any particular external good, Aristotle argues that it requires external goods added to it to be complete. He seems to consider two ways that this might be the case. I briefly argue that external goods only directly contribute to flourishing in the first way, while the second only affects only our qualitative experience of it – as “mere additions”.

On the one hand, Aristotle seems receptive to the idea that human beings have certain basic needs which if unsatisfied would undermine any hope of living well. These

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<sup>13</sup> This is not argued in the *ethics*, simply asserted.

are considered in the first place as *additions* to virtuous action, as joint constituents of complete flourishing. Among these, he places as examples: good birth, good children, good friends, and beauty.<sup>14</sup> Lacking these external goods he says, “mars our blessedness” and we will in that way lack “the character of happiness”. [EN 1099b5 Irwin].

Quasimodo, Aristotle might think, could never fully flourish - even if he could act virtuously. Even more strikingly, it seems that Aristotle takes even the exercise of virtue itself to require the possession of certain external goods:

The liberal man will need money for the doing of his liberal deeds, and the just man too will need it for the returning of services...and the brave man will need power if he is to accomplish any of the acts that correspond to his virtue, and the temperate man will need opportunity; for how else is either he or any of the others to be recognized?

It is debated, too, whether the will or the deed is more essential to virtue, which is assumed to involve both; it is surely clear that its perfection requires both; but for deeds many things are needed, and more, the greater and nobler the deeds are. [EN 1178a 28]

Aristotle says here that “essential” to virtue is both “the will” and “the deed”. He declares that both are a part of virtue, but that “the deed” specifically is what requires external resources to be carried out. “The deed” refers to the performance of some particular action which best demonstrates some particular virtue. The deed, or deeds, essential to the virtue of generosity are acts of giving, and ones where a person succeeds in giving the right amount, to the right sorts of people, in the right situations. For these actions “many external goods are needed” Aristotle seems to be suggesting, intuitively I think, that to give well, one needs something that is one’s own to give, as well as other people and especially good friends to benefit<sup>15</sup> Good intentions or a willing disposition to do good (“the will” - broadly conceived) is essential to virtue, but virtue requires action both to be *recognized* and to be *perfected*, and it will not always be possible to act as we might be willing.

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<sup>14</sup> “For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary, or childless; and we have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died.” [EN 1099b5 Irwin].

<sup>15</sup> The sphere of generous action can of course be extended beyond the exchange of property – one might, for example be generous with one’s time – but it seems as though generosity will always mean giving or sharing something, and so also first having it.

One way to think about this in relation to external requirements might be worrying: perhaps the person who is able to give more has the opportunity to be more generous, and if he lives up to that possibility he will have that virtue to a greater extent, and so the fortunate among us have the opportunity to be *better* than those who have less. If we accept that virtue has need of certain resources it seems as though we are committed to the claim that the unfortunate will be less able to be good. The very poor will perhaps have one important way of being generous denied to them; the pariah, will be unable to be fully friendly; the enfeebled, unable to be fully courageous<sup>16</sup>. There is nothing like the “ought implies can” slogan present in this way of thinking. We aren't speaking about moral obligations that all people have, but about ways of being excellent, many ways of which could be unavailable to us.

If the thought that virtue is not always fully possible is a troubling one, there is at least one partially saving argument available to us through Aristotle's assertion that virtue consists in hitting the mean relative to us. The poor might be able to exhibit the virtue of generosity by giving the right amount *for them*, and this will be significantly less than the external cost of giving well for the wealthy; and courage might only require the simple act of rising from bed in the face of depression or hurt. Virtue is in the mean, and giving to excess of what we can reasonably afford would be a vice. The poor man who yet gave all that he had to another might not be generous, but foolish or “prodigal” instead: being one who “wastes his substance” and in doing so is one “who is ruined by his own fault” [EN 1119b25, Ross]. The difference depends on his reasons for giving, and on those to whom he gives and how, just as much as it does on the amount that he gives. “The liberal man, like other virtuous men, will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving” [EN 1120a20 Ross]. So although generosity requires some resource to give, the amount is not the central consideration. This seems clearly to be the line Aristotle takes: “The term 'liberality' is used relatively to a man's

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<sup>16</sup> Courage seems to pose the greatest challenge to this thought – since it seems really to require more an inner strength than anything else. What the expression of courage requires will be relative to the situation. There might be cases of confinement and coercion where all that is needed is the strength of will not to be intimidated to give up one's convictions. Unless we count imprisonment itself an external good, as an opportunity to express courage, it does not seem like courage requires external goods for all possible expressions.



substance; for liberality resides not in the multitude of the gifts but in the state of character of the giver, and this is relative to the giver's substance. There is therefore nothing to prevent the man who gives less from being the more liberal man, if he has less to give.” [EN 1120a31]. There is room for virtue yet for the least fortunate among us then, since what is right for him tracks his situation as well as the standard of moderation.<sup>17</sup>

So far it seems fair to say that if *eudaemonia* is defined through the exercise of virtue, there will be need of external goods as conditions to flourishing in this way. The underlying thought being that there are material conditions for flourishing as a human being, and that having and holding these will always be to some extent left to fortune. Now, Aristotle also seems to suggest that external goods are needed in a second way, needing to be added even to the full exercise of virtue, which otherwise seems to be identical with *eudaemonia*. (Recall the passage quoted above, discussing good birth, friends, and beauty as necessary to complete “blessedness” and the “character of happiness”)

If *eudaemonia* is an activity, it is not clear how these goods will be essential to it in the way seemingly suggested here, unless it is in the way we have just described above: as instruments, and grounds for the opportunity to perform well. It does not seem part of the human *ergon* to be beautiful or high class. It is worth considering whether, when Aristotle speaks of “marred blessedness” and the like, he is not speaking of something different than having fallen short of *eudaemonia*. Ross translates Aristotle here as saying that lacking these goods “takes the luster from happiness”, and Irwin translates him as saying that the man who lacks these lacks “the character of happiness” - neither quite suggesting that being ugly and alone make *eudaemonia* inaccessible (except as they

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<sup>17</sup> Some Aristotelian virtues, like magnificence, still seem to demand more than most of us will have the opportunity to express: “[magnificence] does not, like liberality [generosity – narrowly with wealth], extend to all the actions that are concerned with wealth, but only to those that involve expenditure; and in these it surpasses liberality in scale... it is a fitting expenditure involving largeness in scale” [EN 1122a23]. This largeness of scale is still also relative to the person who gives and spends, and to the circumstances in which he does so, but Aristotle’s examples don’t exactly suggest much latitude. It seems plain that magnificence as Aristotle saw it is confined to the wealthy: “The expense of equipping a trireme is not the same as that of heading a sacred embassy. It is what is fitting, then, in relation to the agent, and to the circumstances and the object” [EN 1122a26].

already contribute to its performance as instruments and options) but that these will affect the qualitative experience of it.

This is the interpretation suggested by later comments in NE I. There are two consequences that we might find regrettable with accepting the view that happiness depends on the fortunate possession of external goods, not merely as a means to virtue but as an essential part of *eudaemonia*. First, *eudaemonia* will then lack *stability*; nothing being quite so changeable as good fortune. And stability over a lifetime had been one of Aristotle's emphasized qualities of the human good.<sup>18</sup> Second, we might even need concede that no man could be called happy in his own lifetime, since his fortunes – regarding reputation, the wellbeing of descendants, the preservation and continuation of his life's work and so on – seem to survive him long after. Conceding these consequences, Aristotle reconsiders the place of fortune, and emphasizes his position: “Success or failure in life does not depend on [external goods and good fortune], but human life, as we said, needs these as *mere additions*, while virtuous activities or their opposites are what constitute happiness or the reverse.” [EN 1100b9]. Granting this concession, there is I think only the one way in which *eudemonia* itself depends on external goods and fortune, as a means and an instrument in the exercise of virtue. But, as I have suggested, these will also affect how our success is experienced, and so they are also needed as additions, *mere* additions, so that we can fully appreciate and take pleasure in our accomplishment. These goods are not the main constituents of flourishing, but without these added to it *eudaemonia* cannot be the called self-sufficient.

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<sup>18</sup> “For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy” [EN 1098a20].

### Chapter 3: Virtue Takes Practice

“I say that habit's but long practice friend  
and becomes man's nature in the end.”

– Evenus<sup>19</sup>

In the previous chapter, I tried to locate virtue as the essential component in Aristotle’s conception of the highest practical end. In this chapter I turn from Aristotle’s wider project to the more pointed question of how virtue is acquired. Aristotle insists that moral virtue is acquired by a kind of practice and habituation. This has stirred some concern over whether his account is not really *mechanistic*, such that it consists in primarily, as Nancy Sherman has described it, “a non-rational training of desires towards appropriate objects.” [Sherman, 157]. Kant himself has expressed this worry about habits and “training”:

The human being can either be merely trained, conditioned, mechanically taught, or actually enlightened. One trains dogs and horses, and one can also train human beings... but to have trained one's children is not enough, rather, what really matters is that they learn *to think*. [9:451]

One must see to it that the pupil acts from his own maxims, not from habit, that he not only does the good, but that he does it because it is good. [9:475]

In this chapter I sketch an account of Aristotle's habituation that acknowledges both of these points (maxims aside) as absolutely right. On Aristotle's account the child is not merely trained, but educated so that she learns to think; and when she acts from virtue, she does what is noble for its own sake and from the love of the good that is a stable part of her character. Briefly, I emphasize the central roles of a practiced and cognitively informed form of moral *perception* and *judgement* in Aristotle's conception of virtue which should I think dispel worries that his account is one strictly of training but rather of an educating that emphasizes that the student, to become virtuous, must learn to think.

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<sup>19</sup>Via Nicomachean Ethics [EN 1152a25], From M.F. Burnyeat's translation in *Aristotle on Learning to Be Good*

## I: Habituation

The essential focus for any Aristotelian account of moral development is the idea of a habit and the related process of habituation. Aristotle is famous for holding that moral virtue (though not intellectual virtue) is a state of character that is acquired by habituation, through repetition and practice. Though we are by nature able to become virtuous, we are not virtuous by nature. If it were part of human nature generally that we should be good or excellent, all men would be virtuous. And if it were of an individual's nature specifically, no man would ever change his character. Instead, we become virtuous by a kind of learning and perfection. On Aristotle's account this means, like the carpenters apprentice, repeatedly doing what the virtuous do, imitating their example until we ourselves reach that state. We look to experts, and are guided by an ideal, becoming brave by repeatedly acting as would the brave; temperate, as would the temperate; just, as would the just. In each case we begin clumsily but (hopefully, with the right examples – the *phromimoi*) we slowly learn to get things right. The acts become second nature, and though they may at first have been awkward, difficult, and even painful, by habituation we learn to do them well, and easily, and with a certain pleasure.

Two essential passages can bring this out:

Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit. [EN 1103a15]

It was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them; but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. *For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them*, e.g. Men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. [EN 1103a20]

The first important distinction here is between the virtue and its exercise, analogous to the distinction between *being* a builder and the *act* of building. Virtue is a state of being character [*hexis*] whose exercise is an associated activity. Being brave is one thing; doing brave acts is another. But these are essentially connected, just as being a builder is

essentially connected with actually building. By building and doing brave things, we become builders and brave persons. Finally, to be such a person means being one who characteristically does these things. The acts both produce and define the state. Now, the essential argument in the passage above is this: “*the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them*”. We are not brave until we have learned how to be so, and this in turn means learning to do brave things, and by actually doing them repeatedly, until we get it right. Hence the summary: “Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities.” [EN 1103b20]. This appears truistic. It is in the details here that the account becomes interesting, and also difficult.

It is taken by Aristotle to be a primary concern of early education that we should learn to love and take pleasure in the right things and in the right way. The point is clearly stated in a famous passage on education: “we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education” [EN 1104b15]. Although there does seem to be some role played in early education by parents and the state in aligning a child's natural inclinations with what is fine and noble, we should not be tempted to take the shaping of “delight” and pleasure, or desire quite generally, to necessarily involve a merely mechanistic form of conditioning. The acquisition of virtue does not involve a habit of acting, but a habit of *choice*. The full definition of virtue finally reads:

a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. The mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. [EN 1106b35]

Thus it is on Aristotle's account a matter not simply of doing the right thing, but of acting for reasons. Virtue as a habit is the regular choice of the noble, as the result of *deliberation* towards acknowledged moral ends, identified by practiced *perception* and from a steady character attuned to matters of moral salience. If we accept, as I think we must, that for Aristotle mature virtue is a state that essentially involves both reason and deliberate choice, any account that minimizes the role of these elements in its development must seem at least on its face implausible.

Standing between the early student and the person of fully developed virtue is experience in the acts that mould the one finally into the other. We should study the actions then, and what they look like, both for the early student and for the person of mature character, in order to understand what it means to acquire and finally have virtue. With this approach in mind, I start by looking at Aristotle's preliminary remarks about the student who is suited to undertake the study of ethics, and then look to his account of the actions that are thought to produce virtue and those which flow from it. In this way I want to give an outline of the basic Aristotelian account of moral development as a kind of habituation and practice that is non-mechanistic. I then consider the development of two essential aspects of virtue: moral judgement and moral perception. I am guided in this by a deeper reading of Aristotle's account of habituation developed by M.F. Burnyeat, which treats habituation as a form of knowing or awareness, being itself of a kind with induction and sense perception.

## **II. Starting points and the Student**

Aristotle holds that not all persons will be prepared to understand or to benefit from the study of moral philosophy. In his preliminary remarks in the first book of the *Ethics*, Aristotle comments on the nature of practical philosophy as an object of study. He offers in outline what he takes to be its aims, its subject matter, its method and limits, and the nature of the student to whom his lectures are directed. On the matter of ready students he has the following to say:

“... a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these; and, further, since he tends to follow his passion, his study will be vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference whether he is young in years or youthful in character; the defect does not depend on time, but on his living and pursuing each successive object, as passion directs. For to such persons, as to the incontinent, knowledge brings no profit; but to those who desire and act in accordance with a rational principle knowledge about such matters will be of great benefit.” [EN 1095a6]

It seems clear that “youth” signifies two things in this passage: a lack of experience “in the actions that occur in life”, and a tendency to follow passion rather than “a rational

principle”. Being this way the youthful student will be - because inexperienced - unable to understand the theory, and also - being ruled by passion - unlikely to benefit from its prescriptions.

As for the first point, Aristotle seems to be making a fairly simple claim that since we are learning what it means to act well, we will need some experience with action to begin with in order to understand the theory. The actions that these lectures concern and begin with are those that accord with and are relevant to virtue; those by which virtue is produced and which flow from it as from their source.

If these are the actions that the beginner must be familiar with, what must he know about them? Burnyeat suggests, following “ancient commentators” on the *Ethics*, that what the beginner should know is that these actions are fine that is, he should already have some sense of what actions are good and bad before he is able to hear Aristotle's lectures giving him the *reasons* why they are so (Burnyeat, page 71). In supporting this reading, Burnyeat draws on an obscure passage in the first book, which also treats the necessary beginnings to the study of ethics. That passage reads as follows:

...while we must begin with what is known, things are objects of knowledge in two senses- some to us, some without qualification. Presumably, then, *we* must begin with things known to *us*. Hence anyone who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science [ethics] must have been brought up in good habits. For *the fact* [“the that” - Burnyeat] is the starting-point, and if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not at the start need *the reason* [“the because” - Burnyeat] as well; and the man who has been well brought up has or can easily get starting-points. [EN 1095a 25]

So again, our education in moral philosophy will have begun well before we hear the lectures. Those who will understand should have been brought up well, having already *good habits* and a knowledge of the starting points – here referred to as “the fact”, or in the translation considered by Burnyeat, “*the that*”. The starting point for study was previously said to be “the actions that occur in life”, knowing these is presumably to have at minimum the “that”, for which Aristotle's lectures will provide the reason. What is needed at the beginning is an unreasoned conviction about the facts concerning which actions are fine and noble. We need some basic moral sense, some idea of which actions are base and which are noble, and we should be brought up in good habits to have that

knowledge and to have presumably some disposition towards choosing what is noble. Without this, and especially also a willingness to heed Aristotle's reasoned argument over passion, these being arguments about what precisely is noble and why, the student is unprepared and unable to benefit from hearing it. These general remarks about the student are repeated in various places throughout the *Ethics*. Consider one at last where this message is again made clear:

Argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed. For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does; and how can we persuade one in such a state to change his ways? And in general, passion seems to yield not to argument but to force. The character, then, must somehow be there already with a kinship to virtue, loving what is noble and hating what is base" [EN 1179b27]

The student must already want to do right, if arguments telling him how to do so are going to have any effect. Aristotle is not concerned to convince the amoralist or the antisocial or the wanton individual ruled by passion. There will always be those who simply cannot be reasoned with, who "will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does" [ibid]. Reasoned argument about what is noble and about how it is to be pursued will fail to move us unless we are already disposed in a certain way towards what is noble. Said by Confucius, "one cannot carve rotten wood" [Analects 5.10]. From all of this it is obvious that our moral education begins long before we ever begin or are qualified to begin studying theory. Our early development is absolutely essential. As Aristotle himself puts it, "It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference." [EN 1103b25].

This suggests a kind of puzzle though; since what seems to be suggested is that the student must at least to a certain degree be *already virtuous* before he or she is able to learn from Aristotle's lectures. The student must already have been brought up in good habits, must be already disposed to love what is noble, and must know and hate, at least roughly, which actions are such and which are base. If Aristotle's lectures are directed primarily at practice and at learning to be virtuous, he seems to be accepting only those



students who are already most of the way there – we might think that the difficult work had already been done. Aristotle almost seems to suggest this at the end of the passage above, telling us that “The character, then, must somehow be there already with a kinship to virtue” but kinship is not identity, and Aristotle's narrative turns on this distinction. [EN 1179b27]

This question can be partially resolved by considering the role of *shame* in the character of the very young, and that this feeling is what is most significantly present in the student who has a “kinship” to virtue. Shame is considered by Aristotle to be a kind of quasi-virtue, being “more like a feeling than a state of character” [EN 1128b12] and it is defined as a fear of dishonour [EN 1128b12] and a kind of pain at the thought of what might involve us in discredit. So it seems primarily to be a concern with how we appear in the eyes of others, with seeking approval and good reputation, and avoiding blame and disappointment. Shame is appropriate to youth, who are guided most strongly by their own passions, and it is instrumental in their moral development. Aristotle praises the young who are prone to that feeling. Shame is not suited to the mature, nor especially to the virtuous, who simply ought to know better than to do what would warrant it.

“We think young people should be prone to the feeling of shame because they live by feeling and therefore commit many errors, but are restrained by shame; and we praise young people who are prone to this feeling, but an older person no one would praise for being prone to the sense of disgrace, since we think he should not do anything that need cause this sense.” [EN 1128b18]

Shame is an important emotion, then, in the early and formative stages of character growth, correcting the errors committed from passion, and attuning them to what is noble. It also marks the youth who is on the right path. Shame and also a *fear of punishment* seem especially to characterize early education and especially the correction of bad behaviour. Aristotle regards shame as laudable and as having a closer affinity with virtue than fear. The suggestion is that in acting out of a sense of shame, the student displays an awareness of a standard of nobility and badness which, though he may not understand it fully, affects him in an immediate way. This is apparently most conspicuous when seen in opposition to the student who is moved only by fear of punishment:

“[arguments] are not able to encourage the *many* to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do

not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment” [EN 1179b5]

The student moved by shame appears to respond directly to what is noble and base, though out of feeling rather than established character and understanding. In a word, he appears to be among those students who have “the that” - a conviction or at least an awareness of what acts are noble - if not “the because”. He is concerned with getting things right but relies on others to guide him, responding strongly to praise and blame and being deeply affected and motivated by these. This feeling will correct those mistakes committed by youth by moderating his naturally impulsive and passionate behaviour, and so will mark the early stages in the establishment of good habits. In this way the student has a kinship to virtue, loving what is noble and hating what is base, and being disposed to the development of good habits in choosing among these. Eventually though, the student will need to learn to see what is noble for himself and shame is no longer appropriate to one who has a deeper familiarity and knowledge of the causes of nobility. Shame must somehow give way to moral perception and this, we should guess, will occur through practice in choosing rightly; first simply by imitation, doing *as* the virtuous *would* – then ultimately from a steady and established character of our own.

Let's return now to the lecture hall, and assume on the part of the student a fledgling and eager love of the good, and a desire to know it better. She already has some experience in acting and making choices and she is aware of a standard of value called “noble” and “base” which does not align perfectly with her immediate desires and pleasures. She comes to Aristotle wanting to understand, wanting “the reason” or “the because” that determines the facts of that standard. Aristotle turns her attention to action, and to the various acts associated with human virtue, and offers an account of how they can be roughly known:

we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states of character that are produced, as we have said. Now, that we must act according to the *right rule* [the correct reason<sup>20</sup>] is a common principle and must be assumed... [EN 1103b30]

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<sup>20</sup>Irwin translation – I do not rely in any arguments on Aristotle's calling this a “rule” or “principle” but generally regard him to thinking more generally, as Irwin prefers to suggest, of reason and reasons

That we should act according to a rational principle, or else generally according to right reasons, is essential to virtuous action. Though we must, as youths moved more by passion than by reason, begin by habituation and correction through shame to learn to appreciate noble acts, Aristotle insists that we do not acquire full virtue until mature reason is joined to this state. Aristotle reserves discussion of the rule and of the place of reason, of “what it is and how it is related to the other virtues” until the 6<sup>th</sup> book where he takes up intellectual virtue. I will also take it up as a second consideration, after we have looked at the acts of moral virtue in this initial stage of habituation and correction.

So he continues:

But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely... matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health... the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation. [ibid]

Like the physician who prescribes different medicines with the aim of promoting the health of different patients, Aristotle, aiming at promoting the good conduct of his students, cannot offer a general prescription for action which will apply to all cases equally well. There may be general standards that we can appeal to in abstraction, but what precise acts these standards prescribe in particular contexts must be determined appropriately to fit the situation. In this sense the acts cannot be precisely settled in theory, but we might still quite generally notice how it is that they tend to be appropriately guided.

Aristotle's basic insight is that in matters of good action, as in matters of health and fitness, there are extremes of deficiency and of excess, which distort and corrupt our behaviour's worth and quality. [EN 1104a25]. By analogy, looking to prescribe the regimen appropriate to the patient or athlete, we prescribe food, exercise and medicine in measures appropriate to the individual. There are uncountable ways that we might go wrong but in general, so the idea goes, we always do so by prescribing these either in deficiency or in excess to what the situation calls for. We get things right, by contrast, by *hitting the mean*, by avoiding the extremes and recommending things in just the right amount, at the right time, and in the right way. We cannot specify more precisely from

our position of abstract theorizing what this will look like, and especially what it will mean doing in particular cases, but the prescription we can give is at least this: when deciding how to act, avoid the extremes of excess and deficiency.

So too is it, then in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean. [EN 1104a25]

Virtue concerns passions and actions, and in its exercise we feel and act in moderation, in the sense of adjusting our behaviour appropriately to context. This means, concerning action, doing some certain act which is characteristic of the virtue in question (facing danger for courage; abstaining from bodily pleasures for temperance etc.) at some times but not others; neither passing up every opportunity for it, nor taking up every opportunity without exception. Practicing action with the mean or the moderate in our sights then suggests, primarily, exercising *discretion* at each opportunity to act; asking ourselves whether we may have gone too far or not yet far enough. But so also it means *perceiving* in each case that there is a chance for such exercise; in this case, to act with bravery, in that case to restrain our appetites, and so on. Each of these, accuracy of our moral discretion, and the keenness of our moral perception, we should think will be developed as our virtue matures – and that this will characterize the Aristotelian account of moral development.

So we partly understand Aristotle then, when he says that the man who flies from and fears everything becomes a coward by doing so, and the man who fears nothing but meets every danger becomes rash. In one sense, his faulty state of character arises out of his tendency to act always in the same way, regardless of that action's appropriateness to the situation. He thus forms the wrong *sort* of habit, a vicious one, which is precisely the sort of mechanical tendency to carry on in the same way without thinking with which Kant and others had been concerned. He develops a virtuous character by contrast, by acquiring the habit of exercising judgement in determining in each case how to act, and by developing through reason's repeated exercise a better ability to perceive and evaluate

what is relevant.

What is also essential is that by doing these acts virtue is produced, but that a person does virtuous acts is not by itself enough to say that that person actually has achieved the virtue. The virtue is produced by and will generate them, but is still not fully *defined* by the acts appropriate to it. A person may do brave or temperate or just acts but be not yet brave, temperate, or just themselves. Perhaps he does these things at the instruction or command of another, or perhaps from the feeling of shame. Recalling the struggling *akratic*, he might do them (as Kant might say) in the face of strong competing inclinations; choosing rightly, but reluctantly, and with discomfort. In each case what has relevance to virtue is that he does not truly *choose the acts for their own sake*, nor does he act *from his own state of excellence*. This is what primarily distinguishes the good actions of the learning student and the *akratic* from those of the fully mature virtuous individual. The former practices the acts, and perhaps gets them right now and again, but the second performs them because he deliberately chooses to, because of what they are, and because doing them is in a sense part of who he is.

if the acts that are in accordance with the virtue have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent must also be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his actions must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character. [EN 1105b1]

In order to be good one must be in a certain state when one does the several acts, i.e. One must do them as a result of choice and for the sake of the acts themselves. [EN 1144a18]

Contrary to Kant's criticism of habits, Aristotle's virtuous individual doesn't just act rightly, i.e. by doing as the virtuous would do. She *knows* that she is doing what is fine and noble and why it is. She *chooses* noble actions themselves and for their own sake, and she does so from an established and *steady character*. Each of these points is relevant to Aristotle's understanding of virtue and we should give each some consideration.

Aristotle rather surprisingly says that of these three elements, virtue depends rather little on knowledge, but more, even entirely, on the choice and on the steadiness of the condition he was in when he acted. Continuing the passage just cited, he says

[knowledge, choice, and steady character] are not reckoned in as conditions of the possession of the arts, except the bare knowledge; but as condition of the possession of the virtues knowledge has little or no weight, while the other conditions count not for a little but for everything, i.e. The very conditions which result from often doing just and temperate acts. [EN 1105b3]

By denying a place for knowledge and insisting instead on what seems to be just a steady disposition to choose the right thing, we might well share Kant's worry about mechanism. But the kind of knowledge to which Aristotle is specifically denying a central place in virtue here is precise. It is the kind of knowledge associated with the arts, and this is what makes art and virtue essentially distinct. An art is later defined by Aristotle as “a state or capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning.” [EN 1140a10]. It involves primarily a product apart from the act itself. The act is concerned with that product's “coming into being”. Making [*poiesis*] is seen by Aristotle as quite essentially different from acting [*praxis*]; and art concerns making, and virtue acting. The difference, as we had discussed in consideration of *subordinate ends* seems to be primarily the end for which the act is performed. Art aims at production, and virtue involves the choice of an action for its own sake. The knowledge that is involved and central to art I think can only be knowledge of how a thing is to be made and made well, and this sort of knowledge has no place in moral virtue. However, there may yet be an important connection between other forms of cognition and acting well. What he is denying effectively, in denying knowledge a place in virtue, is *technique*; the kind of technical know-how that is involved in art and skill generally. Cognition generally still has its place. What virtue involves instead is skill in deliberation about appropriate means to good ends, as a kind of practical wisdom; and an acute *perception*, in recognizing what features of a situation have moral weight and relevance.

### **III. Moral Perception: Habituation, Salience, and The Passions**

The ability to recognize that some fact of a situation has moral significance requires a unique kind of skill and judgement. Before ever deciding how to act, there must be some recognition that a moral decision needs to be made at all. This kind of moral awareness, the ability to pick out from among the mass of insignificant facts that one might be

presented with in a given situation those features which have *moral salience*, is one that arguably is not naturally possessed in equal share by everyone, and that must be cultivated.

That ability I refer to here as moral perception, or the perception of moral salience. It has been common to argue, (for example, by Burnyeat, Sherman, and Herman) that Aristotle's theory of virtue and relatedly his model of moral education places moral salience and perception at the heart of character development. On Aristotle's model at least, moral perception of salience is a skill tied to virtue, and it takes practice. Whether this view is shared by Kant, for whom there is some reason to think moral perception is to a greater degree innate, is something that I will take up in later discussion.

Aristotle often employs the language of perception, especially of sight and of targeting, to describe the relationship between virtue and the recognition of moral value. He says, for example, that “virtue makes us aim at the right mark” [EN 1144a1], that “its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions” [EN 1109a25] and he suggests that discerning whether we have hit the moral mark in a given situation is a matter more of a kind of perception than of reasoning: “But up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate [from the mean] before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception” [EN 1109b20]. To say whether a man has acted well, here and now, depends on our being able to pick out the facts of the particular situation which have moral relevance, and this is in some sense a kind of perception. But although the recognition of moral salience does not seem to belong to the same intellectual faculty as moral judgement or deliberation, we should not go so far as to think that for Aristotle the recognition of the noble is a matter of sensation.

In an interesting passage<sup>21</sup>, Aristotle discusses “*starting-points*”, roughly the data, or what is given, that begins a particular line of inquiry. Inquiries of different kinds also have starting-points that are different in kind, and these are established also by different faculties:

we must not demand explanation [sc. Any more than precision] in all

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<sup>21</sup>It was Burnyeat who pointed out the importance of this passage, and I follow his reading.

matters alike, but it is sufficient in some cases to have “the *that*” shown properly, just as in the case of starting points. “The *that*” is a first thing and a starting point. Of starting points some are seen by induction, some by perception, some by a certain habituation, and others in other ways again [EN 1098a33-b4]

I read the argument as a contextualist insight: we cannot doubt everything at once; an inquiry needs a starting point which can be taken as a given. For the purposes of *this* inquiry, it is enough to have “the *that*” well enough established without having to explain or justify it – we could ask about the causal or the normative “because”, but this would begin a different inquiry altogether. But still, it is necessary “to have ‘the *that*’ shown properly”, so how is this done? It depends on the question. In some cases, the starting point is shown by induction, in some cases by sense perception, and in some cases by “a certain habituation”. This last one seems like a strange assertion. Burnyeat borrows some examples from ancient commentators to illustrate the point and to suggest Aristotle's meaning. The idea is something like the following: “we learn by induction that all men breathe, by perception that fire is hot. In ethics the appropriate mode for at least some starting points is habituation...” [Burnyeat 73]. So for example, to learn that certain acts are base and others noble is a matter, not of reasoning by induction from examples, or of sensing – by direct appeal to pain and pleasure possibly – but is a matter of being habituated to doing them. The conviction that overindulgence and cowardice is base will act as our starting point in the inquiry into why this is so. We come to this conviction, and most significantly, the ability to recognize instances of overindulgence and cowardice, through experience in confronting situations that call for this sort of judgement. We learn to recognize cowardice by repeating, in the face of fear, the choice to fight or to run. The more experience we have in making this choice, the more able we are to see rightly that the choice needs to be made; that this is a situation where good judgement about fear is called for.

The knowledge that experience with acting is supposed to give is knowledge of the *minor premise* in a practical syllogism. The major premise can presumably be given abstractly, like geometrical laws, but recognizing the minor premise is a matter of an attuned perception that admits of no precise rules but can only come from experience and practice. So for example, and by analogy, Aristotle says that “error in deliberation may be



either about the universal or the particular; we may fail to know either that all water that weighs heavy is bad, or that this particular water weighs heavy” [EN 1142a20]. This perception does not belong to the senses, but is “akin to that by which we perceive that the particular figure before us is a triangle” [EN 11142a25]. The major premise concerned with each virtue is that it lies in the mean between excess and deficiency. Whether our actions and passions in a particular context in fact hit the mean is a matter that can be settled only by recognition, and so we must be familiar and practised in acting and feeling.

If we take Aristotle's remark above about starting points seriously, we acknowledge that our habits inform our perception of moral salience. The recognition that a certain situation calls for a certain kind of action or of analysis and deliberation is informed by experience; it depends on a practiced ability to discern the noble, and to see the intermediate in passion and action. When Aristotle says that virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and to recognize the mean, the sense is that through the virtues, as the result of good habituation and experience, the world is presented to us rightly.

Aristotle sees an important role here for emotion. I have already hinted at how perception might find its roots in early education by consideration of Aristotle's conception of shame. Guided in early life by a desire to please and to be honoured by authority, the young child attunes herself to the noble by heeding the affects of the (hopefully virtuous) elders answering to her behaviour. In the way a child learns to be wary of spiders when she notices a parent's aversion to them, a child moved by shame picks up on the moral responsiveness of those around her. If a parent is overtly disapproving of lies, the child comes to appreciate that there is something aversive about the act. Ultimately though, Aristotle thinks that shame should be cast aside and relieved by passions that are appropriate to maturity. The passions that seem appropriate to mature virtue are not only concerned with having done wrong because it upsets the esteem others have of us, but are direct reactions to other morally salient facts.

The passions are affective states, involving pains and pleasures, often accompanied by related desires to relieve or to satisfy; but as discussed earlier in this work, they are also sensitive to judgement. The passions are intentional, they are ways of being directed towards the world, and involve seeing it under a certain description. They

have an object. To be angry is to be angry *at*, or *with*, and so is necessarily informed by our beliefs about what things are like here and now, as well as by learned evaluative attitudes towards certain kinds of persons, acts, and states of affairs.

So, for example, Aristotle defines *pity* as a kind of pain or disturbance which is caused by our perception of “an apparent evil, destructive or painful, which befalls someone who does not deserve it” [Rhet 1385b] and gives similar accounts of fear, anger, as well as shame, among others. Pity thus involves a conception of desert – of deserved or undeserved pain or misfortune – and also the belief that something unfortunate has presently occurred. Without digressing too far, Aristotle's sense of desert here is tied to character, and the sort of evil he has in mind are more those concerned with fate than with deliberate human acts, which would be grounds instead, say, for anger or indignation: “In order to feel pity we must also believe in the goodness of at least some people; if you think nobody good, you will believe that everybody deserves evil fortune” [Rhet 1386a1]. When bad things seem to happen to good people, we pity them; so Aristotle thinks. To elicit pity, it is enough that an undeserved evil be *apparent*. The emotion tracks our own powers of perception, not the way things really are. A neighbour, who always struck us as just, generous and friendly, sees his business begin to fail. We pity the misfortune, maybe feel stronger passions too, if we think someone responsible had done him a deliberate injustice; but if we find that the failure was deserved, owing really to poor management or underhanded dealings and bad reputation, the feeling passes. The passions are thus informed by our perceptive abilities, and by our practiced ability to distinguish *real* occasions for pity, anger, and fear, from the merely apparent. There is no easy rule for determining what are real occasions, and it is a matter of experienced perception and judgement in each particular case to say.

#### **IV. Marks of Virtue: Ease and Pleasure**

Let's summarize the basic account of moral habituation by emphasizing two ways that the relationship between the acts and the agent will change as virtue is developed. It seems characteristic of habits generally that through repetition a particular activity will tend to come to us more easily, requiring ever diminishing conscious effort. Taking exercise in the morning, or studying at regular hours generally takes considerable effort

when we first start out, but become less strained as they become routine. The ease that comes with practice is nothing surprising. So Aristotle suggests, noting that the actions that produce a certain virtue in us are also those actions that will come to those of us most easily who count that virtue to our name:

... by abstaining from pleasures we become temperate, and it is when we have become so that we are most able to abstain from them; and similarly too in the case of courage; for by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave, and it is when we have become so that we shall be most able to stand our ground against them. [EN 1104a25]

We can take it as a mark of excellence then that we are not strained in performing the actions that we associate with a particular virtue, but instead find that they come to us easily. We will also be better prepared and able to make greater and more impressive displays of courage and temperance and so on, being able to stand without fear against greater dangers and to remain unmoved by stronger temptations than most. We should take ease as a *mark of virtue*, as a sign that we have finally attained that state of excellence. And we should do so similarly with pleasure:

We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts; For the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent, and he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward.

Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education. [EN 1104b4]

The sorts of things we ought to take pleasure in are action in the exercise of the virtues – abstaining from bodily pleasure and delighting in it; standing our ground against the terrible and delighting in it – and learning to take pleasure in these and to be pained in failing to do them rightly, is what defines a proper moral education. It is not enough that we rightly identify what is noble, that we have the fact, or even the reason why it is so. The acts of virtue themselves need to become somehow dear to us, and the fully virtuous person is easily singled out from the pretender by the fact that the latter finds acting nobly difficult and unbearable.

In this way the student parallels, in her inner constitution, Aristotle's famous conflicted *akratic*, the individual who through “weakness of their conviction” [EN 1146b30] acts against his own acknowledgement of the good and is moved instead by pleasure and strong feeling.

*Akrasia* and *enkrateia* – generally translated as incontinence and continence respectively - are states of character, like virtue and vice, though they are states of a different kind (same genus, other differentia, to continue with Aristotle's classification). *Akrasia* is a faulty state of character that is distinguished from vice, not in action, but in how and why that action had been done. The *akratic* person sees that what she is doing is base, but out of a kind of weakness acts against that recognition. The vicious person chooses the base as if it was good. In a word, vice and *akrasia* are distinguished in this: “Incontinence is against one's decision, but vice accords with decision. All the same, incontinence is similar to vice in its actions” [EN 1151a5].

This is somewhat cryptic, and what it can mean to act “against ones decision” is certainly not obvious. Aristotle's explanation is that the *enkratic* “abides by his rational calculation” while the *akratic* abandons it [EN 1145b10]. At minimum, it is clear that the *akratic* arrives at some conclusion through reasoning, but fails to act on it. But this is not the whole of Aristotle's picture of it. *Akrasia* addresses a particular conflict, between a rational calculation and choice of the *good* or the *noble* on the one hand, and non-rational desires or appetites on the other.

The incontinent person knows that his actions are base, but does them because of his feelings, where as the continent person knows that his appetites are base, but because of reason does not follow them. [EN 1145b10]

To be continent is to follow one's own best ethical judgement in the face of an opposing appetite. The *akratic* judges that something is good, but because he is tempted by immediate pleasures (most often bodily pleasures) he does not pursue it. For the *akratic*, reason, feeling, and appetite do not properly align. In placing too much stock in pleasure, his fault in action is similar to the vicious intemperate but he is distinguished from him in character.

The incontinent and the intemperate person are similar too; though they are different, they both pursue bodily sources of pleasure. But the

intemperate person [pursues them because he] also thinks it is right, while the incontinent person does not think so. [EN 1152a5]

The intemperate person has a true vice. He not only pursues bodily pleasures immoderately but does so from the conviction that he is doing right in doing so. He consciously takes his own immediate pleasure to be the standard of right and wrong. The akratic person by contrast is not vicious, but weak, or “soft”. He judges rightly that his proposed indulgence is base and that he ought to pursue the noble, but because he has not yet fully internalized the recognition, he acts badly. The appreciation of the noble is not yet fully his own. Like the early student, choosing the noble is not yet second nature, and it is neither easy nor pleasant. It is worth noting here that what ultimately differentiates incontinence and the vice of intemperance is a fault, not of action or of feeling, but in *reasoning*. Both the intemperate and the incontinent take pleasure in the wrong sorts of acts, and this leads both of them astray. But the intemperate person commits an even greater error in judging wrongly. And he is the worse for it, because he is less easily cured. He has no regret, since he acted just as he thought was best [EN 1150b30] and he will not admit that he has a problem.

As Aristotle rightly points out, there is a puzzle contained in the very idea of *akrasia* that we might think applies similarly to the student. He attributes the puzzle to Socrates, who thought that no one could be akratic, because each person always necessarily pursued what he or she judged was “good” [EN 1145b25]. If the so called akratic chose to indulge again in his self-acknowledged “bad” behaviour, it must have been because on some level he really saw the behaviour as good – otherwise he would not have pursued it. So long as we assign for “the good” a single object – that which the subject chooses to pursue as the result of a calculus inclusive of both pleasure and nobility – *akrasia* is impossible. For *akrasia* to be real, there must be disunity of values. As Burnyeat has pointed out, Aristotle explicitly proclaims there to be three such standards of value, three “objects of pursuit”, which can be either in harmony or conflict. This both answers Socrates' puzzle over incontinence and gives some insight into the nature of both *akrasia*, and of virtue and vice:

There being three objects of pursuit and three of avoidance, the noble, the advantageous, the pleasant, and their contraries, the base, the injurious, the painful, about all of these the good man tends to go right, and especially about pleasure; for this is common to the animals, and also it accompanies all objects of pursuit; for even the noble and the advantageous appear pleasant. Again, it has grown up with us all from infancy; which is why it is difficult to rub off this feeling, dyed as it is into our life. [EN 1104b30]

Regarding the *akratic's* puzzle<sup>22</sup>, as long as we identify only a single object of pursuit – call it “the good” - no one could ever act, as Aristotle would have it, “against one's decision”. The busy worker abandons his post to compulsively address himself to an immediate pleasure in distraction. Judging his decision by only by a single standard means necessarily taking him to have regarded that action more highly than working. Given three standards though, and in this case a clear distinction between the pleasant and the advantageous (maybe the noble, depending on his work) seems fitting, we can account for a genuinely conflicted will. He sees that it would be to his advantage to continue working hard, but that it would also be more pleasant not to.

The vicious person's problem runs deeper. For the intemperate (or the coward) there is an agreement, and not a conflict, between these standards of value. It is not an agreement between their sound judgement about the noble and their well-habituated sense of pleasure (as would be the case for the properly brought up virtuous individual) but rather between faults in both. They judge wrongly and take their pleasures badly. There is unity, and a steady character, but a vicious one. For the virtuous individual there is also a unity of values, but in each of them and together “the good man tends to go right”. Moral perfection as full virtue is a matter of bringing these standards of value into agreement. Through habituation in the early years, the student learns to bring their conception of pleasure in line with the noble. The third standard, the advantageous, which must also be united to the other two in full virtue, is best understood in light of Aristotle's conception of *practical wisdom*, or prudence. I illustrate the role of this final part in virtue and its relation to *the right rule* before turning finally to Kant.

## V. Practical Wisdom

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<sup>22</sup> Here I am directly following Burnyeat's insight, who attributes the solution's origin to Plato's Protagoras [Burnyeat, 87 – Plato, 351bff]:

I spoke previously about *the right rule* or *correct reason* being a major part of virtuous action. This condition is described alternatively at the end of *NE 2* as the action's being determined by a *rational principle*, and this being just as the person of *practical wisdom* would determine it [EN 1006b36]. Aristotle tells us again in the 6<sup>th</sup> book that “The right rule is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom” [EN 1144b25]. Since it is only necessary that the rule be given “in accordance” with practical wisdom, it is not necessary that it always be “from” our own state of wisdom [EN 1006b36]. When the student is beginning this is surely the case, but as she acquires full virtue the rule must become her own. So Aristotle adds, “we must go a little further. For it is not merely the state in accordance with the right rule, but the state that implies the *presence* of the right rule, that is virtue; and practical wisdom is a right rule about such matters” [EN 1144b25]. The “rule” according to which we should act is then identified quite generally with the addition of reason to the already learned habitual selection of the noble, as the new principle that should now take over in the choice of the good. The addition of reason to natural or habituated virtue is what finally completes it.

from the very moment of birth we are just or fitted for self-control or brave or have the other moral qualities; but yet we seek something else as that which is good in the strict sense... for both children and brutes have the natural dispositions to these qualities, but without reason these are evidently harmful.

Only we seem to see this much, that, while one may be led astray by them, as a strong body which moves without sight may stumble badly because of its lack of sight, still, if a man once acquires reason, that makes a difference in action; and his state, while still like what it was, will then be virtue in the strict sense. Therefore, as in the part of us which forms opinions there are two types, cleverness and practical wisdom, so too in the moral part there are two types, natural virtue and virtue in the strict sense, and of these the latter involves practical wisdom. [EN 1144b5]

Virtue, in the strict sense, is completed by *practical wisdom*.

Aristotle tells us that practical wisdom and virtue play distinct roles in the service of noble ends, and that they complete each other in a certain way. Practical wisdom – alternatively and tellingly translated as “prudence” [Irwin] - is defined as “a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man” [EN 1140b5]. The person of practical wisdom is able to deliberate well “about what sorts

of thing conduce to the good life in general” [EN 1140a25]. This is taken to be an intellectual virtue, but Aristotle is adamant that without corresponding moral virtue, especially of temperance (as a right attitude towards pleasure and pain), practical wisdom is distorted and undermined<sup>23</sup>. We cannot be practically wise unless we are also morally virtuous, so that we will not confuse the pleasant with what is really good in life. Practical wisdom involves always and only pursuing ends that are “good for man” - thus, rightly conceived, *eudaemonia* and the virtuous activities that comprise it - and these ends are recognized by the person of moral virtue. So he says, “it is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good.” [EN 1144b1] Because “virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means.” [EN 1144a1]

*Cleverness* is an apparently distinct faculty<sup>24</sup> of instrumental reasoning, which constitutes our skill in determining the most expeditious course of action to the realization of whatever goal we happen to set for ourselves<sup>25</sup> [EN 1144a29]. We can be clever in pursuing good ends as well as bad. Clever thieves and hustlers make their mark, and perhaps with some regret we partly admire their skill and ingenuity. But Aristotle would not call them wise. “Now, if the mark be noble, the cleverness is laudable, but if the mark be bad, the cleverness is mere smartness; hence we call even men of practical wisdom clever or smart. Practical wisdom is not the faculty, but it does not exist without this faculty” [EN 1144a18 Ross]. The practically wise must be clever, but cleverness is not practical wisdom. Not without virtue. Aristotle says that cleverness is to practical wisdom as natural virtue is to virtue proper [EN 1144b1]. Cleverness and natural virtue are valued qualities of mind and character which are with some of us “from the very moment of birth” [EN 1144b5], but neither of them is quite laudable without qualification,

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<sup>23</sup>“This is why we call temperance by this name; we imply that it preserves one's practical wisdom... it is not any and every judgement that pleasant and painful objects destroy and pervert... but only judgements about what is to be done” [EN 1140b10]

<sup>24</sup>More specifically, as distinct from practical wisdom which is an intellectual virtue, not a faculty [EN 1140b25][EN 1143b17]

<sup>25</sup>Ross translates cleverness as a “faculty” Irwin as a “capacity” :

“There is a faculty which is called cleverness; and this is such as to be able to do the things that tend towards the mark we have set before ourselves, and to hit it.”[EN 1144a29 Ross]

“There is a capacity, called cleverness, which is such as to be able to do the actions that tend to promote whatever goal is assumed and to attain them.” [EN 1144a25 Irwin]



and each falls short of real excellence. Interestingly, what it seems each of them lacks is the other.

Because practical wisdom requires the setting of a good end for which it will determine the means, the addition of moral virtue to cleverness is what completes that virtue of mind. Likewise, as we said, Aristotle contends that full virtue requires practical wisdom (which gives the guiding rule or principle) to be completed [EN 1144b20]. If the roles of virtue and wisdom are really distinct in the way described above, and practical wisdom concerns exclusively the right selection of means, practical wisdom is close to being the excellent state of that faculty of instrumental reasoning called cleverness. Better though to say that practical wisdom is the excellent *employment* of cleverness, since excellence in strictly instrumental reasoning does not presuppose any particular end, only exceptional skill in selecting means, while practical wisdom has as its end the human good.

The necessary ends of practical wisdom are those which are conceived of as *advantageous* or which comprise one's conception of "the good life". As we saw in the first section of this work, Aristotle recognized that people generally identify the good with their own happiness, but that they differed in their conceptions of what this would amount to. Engaging with the "three objects of pursuit" model of value that Aristotle introduced to solve the problem of *akrasia*, we have some insight into how this disagreement broadly occurs. By conflating these different standards of value, different conceptions of the practical good, whether harmonious or conflicted, are generated. The good might be identified with the pleasant and practical wisdom becomes clever (merely smart) hedonism. This is what happens to the intemperate, and to "the many, the most vulgar" who like the life of gratification [EN 1095b20]. The pleasant might, to the contrary, be habituated to align with an original conception of *the good*. But Aristotle clearly recognizes of this conception that it is, to borrow Kant's phrasing "an ideal of the imagination, not of reason". Hence, some conceive of the good as honour [EN 1095b25] and practical wisdom is reduced to politics [EN 1141b5]; some regard the good as the pursuit of wealth [EN 1096a10], and so wisdom would be but business and thrift. Aristotle's aim in moral education is primarily to lead the student to recognize that the proper conception of the good as *eudaemonia* and so to align their conception of the good

with that of the noble. Thus Aristotle's account of moral education emphasizes the importance of forming *a unified and moral conception of happiness* in which pleasure, advantage, and nobility are in agreement. On his account this means overturning false ideals and coming to recognize that flourishing is what it means for our lives to go best, and that achieving human excellence in the exercise of reason is how this accomplished. Aristotle's telling of moral perfection is optimistic. Each of us can hope to achieve the highest human good in this lifetime by learning to see and act rightly, and with a little luck in securing a few necessary external goods. Moral perfection is a matter of unity, and a harmony of values, and this is a harmony that we can hope to realize with the right upbringing and under moderately favourable circumstances.

## Chapter 4: Kant and Moral Obligation

In this chapter I sketch a simplified workable account of the foundations of Kant's program in practical philosophy. This parallels the first chapter on *eudaemonia*. Each account focuses on the foundations of the relevant system, and interesting parallels as well as the important contrasts are brought out in comparison. The differences in Aristotle and Kant's thinking over what it means to become good will be more readily understood after first understanding the differences in their overall projects.

This chapter is a reading which focuses primarily on the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [*Groundwork*] and on the derivation there of the *Categorical Imperative* in its progressive formulations. I focus on these proofs and not on the application of the imperative to action. My aim is to show how Kant imagines the law is discovered and can be drawn out *a priori*, from reason alone, without appeal to experience. So I describe Kant's validation of the categorical imperative as a progression involving three critical steps. This progression involves the derivation of three principle formulations of the imperative: *the formula of universal law* (FUL), *the formula of humanity* (FH), and *the formula of autonomy* (FA).<sup>26</sup>

Kant tells us that these three major formulations of CI are “at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law” and that “one of them of itself unites the other two in it<sup>27</sup>.” [G 4:436] They are not however perfectly equivalent, but differ in certain respects which seem to correspond to the structure of subjective practical principles in general. He makes following the claim of equivalence:

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<sup>26</sup>Following Allen Wood, I treat the final two formulations, of the *law of nature* (FLN) and of *the realm of ends* (FRE) as variants of (FUL) and (FA) respectively, “which are intended to bring the law 'closer to intuition' and make it easier to apply” [Wood, I will touch on them briefly as such, but I do not primarily focus on them here. FRE will play a larger role in the chapter which follows this one.

<sup>27</sup>There is apparently some significant dispute of translation here – some taking Kant's phrasing to be “any one of them of itself unites the other two in it.” [Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge ed. *Practical philosophy*]. Here I defer to Wood's translation which takes the combination to be unique, supported by the interpretation that Kant is here re-emphasizing the already argued for [GW 4:431] synthesis of FUL and FH in the third formulation of FA. [Wood 2008, pg. 80]

There is nevertheless a difference among them, which is indeed subjectively rather than objectively practical, intended namely to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby to feeling. All maxims have, namely,

1. A *form*, which consists in universality; and in this respect the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus: that maxims must be chosen as if they were to hold as universal laws of nature;
2. a *matter*, namely an end, and in this respect the formula says that a rational being, as an end by its nature and hence as an end in itself, must in every maxim serve as the limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends;
3. a *complete determination* of all maxims by means of that formula, namely that all maxims from one's own lawgiving are to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature. [G 4:437]

Kant tells us that the different formulas represent a certain progression through categories, as he considers the concept of a categorical imperative systematically – in terms of its *form*, its *matter*, and finally by consideration of the condition of harmony which all principles in keeping with these formulations would achieve in their “*complete determination*”.

I suggest that these three formulations also correspond respectively to Kant's progressive analysis of the concept of an *obligation as such* and of two concepts that he takes as implicitly connected to that one – of the possibility of a subject's being motivated to *obedience* to such an obligation, and of a possible *authority* that could ground it.

The reading I have of Kant is this<sup>28</sup>: From the idea of obligation, Kant derives the form of universality; from the connected concept of a subject motivated to obedience, the positive value which that obligation preserves – humanity as an unconditional material end in itself; and from the idea that of every rational being giving these obligations to themselves, being themselves the only possible authority which could bind them to it unconditionally, Kant proposes a central place for of the idea of autonomy – of a will that is self-legislating – and the idea of all wills together willing these laws to a harmonious kingdom of ends.

A useful comparison would be with Aristotle's method in the early stages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he had begun to analyze the concept of a possible highest

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<sup>28</sup> I am indebted strongly to Allen Wood's interpretation of Kant in coming to this reading. My sense is that this account is close to his, but I am not confident to what extent we are in sync here.

practical human end, in order to determine what such an end must be before answering as to whether any such end truly existed. He thus proceeded analytically, from common beliefs towards its principled specification, in the examination of the concept itself. He set out certain conditions for its satisfaction (that it must be complete and self-sufficient) before finally offering positive arguments (through a human function and its excellent performance) to the assertion that those conditions could be met, and by *eudaemonia* alone. Kant proceeds in similar fashion, though the foundational concept – obligation – that he is interested in is quite different than the one Aristotle had considered; and in his method, the analytic of concepts dominates to a much greater degree, at least in the *Groundwork*, the substantive arguments toward their satisfaction. Aristotle had been interested primarily in the ultimate end of human action and in deriving from its specification an account of human excellence and character. Though virtue and “the highest end” ultimately occupy cardinal roles in Kant's ethical theory in its final form, the study of practical philosophy begins from a very different place on Kant's system.

The purpose of the *Groundwork* is described by Kant as being “nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*” [G 4:392] This he ultimately identifies with the Categorical Imperative as examined from different perspectives (essentially those three pointed to above) grounding its various formulations. Kant thus begins his study of morals from a different perspective than Aristotle, beginning from the idea of a possible supreme *practical law*, rather than from the idea of an ultimate *practical end*<sup>29</sup>.

Kant's philosophic argument to the supreme principle of morality begins:

Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. [G 4:413]

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<sup>29</sup> Kant does in fact recognize a central place for the highest practical end in his account of human morality; “the highest good” is in fact not so different in its conception from Aristotle's conception of *eudaemonia*, and it plays a similarly key role in determining the importance of character and moral education. I will argue this in the final chapter.

The will is practical reason, and this in turn is importantly connected<sup>30</sup> to a rational being's capacity to act on principle, in accordance with the representation of laws. Since these are principles of action, they are called practical.

Combining the identification of the will with practical reason and the assertion that opens the first section that nothing is good without qualification but a will that is good [G 4:393], Kant's moral theory is seen to be continuous with his theory of rational deliberation. Morality principally involves good willing, or the proper employment of practical reason. We get an account of right action then from an account of actions that are rationally chosen, and this seems importantly related to deliberate action according to principle. Only a rational being is capable of acting on principle, of deriving, by the employment of the will, actions appropriate to laws that it gives or “represents” to itself. Morality for Kant is little more than this capacity to act on principle and its sound employment.

“Nothing other than *the representation of the law* in itself, which can of course occur only in a rational being, insofar as it and not the hoped-for effect is the determining ground of the will, can constitute the preeminent good we call moral...” [G 4:401]

Kant further distinguishes between practical principles which are *subjective* and those which are *objective*, calling the former a *maxim* and the latter *the practical law*. [G 4:402 footnote]. His early characterization of the difference is that what it means for a principle to be *subjective* – and thus a *maxim* – is that it is the one “according with which the subject acts” [G 4:422 ft. Note]. He also describes maxims as being simply “rules imposed upon oneself” [G 4:438].

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant describes maxims more fully and in contrast to practical law:

Practical principles are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or *maxims*, when the condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will; but they are objective, or practical *laws*, when the condition is cognized as objective, that is, as holding for the will of every rational being [CPR 5:19]

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<sup>30</sup>It does not seem to be asserted here that this capacity *exhausts* or is identical to the concept of the will or of practical reason, but only that these are related.

Consider one of Kant's examples: the maxim of a prudent shopkeeper might be to “serve customers honestly when it is good business practice to do so”. This principle is a maxim if it is taken up as the keeper's guiding principle in choosing to serve honestly, if this principle is the one according to which he acts. Drawing on the language above, if the *condition* – that fair treatment were good business – is seen by the shopkeeper as “holding only for his will” rather than “for the will of every rational being” the principle is subjective. If the principle which recommended fair treatment were not conditioned upon its being good practice for that individual, but were instead recognized to be grounded by some condition which held for all rational beings, this would amount to the recognition of that principle as a practical law.

What had been characterized previously as a rational beings’ unique capacity to act *in accordance with the representation of laws*, can now be put more explicitly as the capacity to act according to maxims; Kant says plainly that the moral worth of all action is found here “in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon” [G 4:400]

Kant teaches that human beings are not perfectly rational. We are not the sort of beings for whom “reason infallibly determines the will”, and we do not always do what reason requires or recommends. Instead, troubled and excited by “certain incentives”, what choice or course of behaviour our better judgement might determine to be necessary, we follow only contingently. Like the physician who makes sound prescriptions to an unheeding patient, reason does not necessarily move human beings directly to action. So, when a human will recognizes that a certain course of action is necessarily required or recommended by reason, it represents that course in terms of a certain principle which describes a kind of restriction or positive obligation, while at the same time also implying the possibility of dissent. Such an obligation is called a “*command of reason*”, which expresses itself as a kind of *ought*. These commands are also called *imperatives* [G 4:413]. To see some certain action as commanded by reason, by an imperative, is essentially to perceive that the balance of reasons fall in its favour, while at the same time perceiving that we still might do otherwise. This is also, according to Kant's system, the same as regarding that action as *good*.

“[imperatives] say that to do or to omit something would be good, but they say it to a will that does not always do something just because it is represented to it that it would be good to do that thing. [G 4:413]

An imperative is a principle of action, whereby an agent represents to himself that some sort of action is, on the balance of reasons for and against it, *good*; and that because it is so it is rationally *necessary* that he should do it. It is expressed in that familiar thought, “I really ought to...” Simply, the judgement which concludes in an “ought” represents the superiority of a certain choice, and also the possibility of choosing otherwise.

Recognizing that some choice is superior, but choosing to do otherwise, is irrational. The recognition of an imperative is the recognition of our being rationally bound to act in certain ways. As Kant says, “to do something from duty means to obey reason” [LP 9:484] and this is the meaning of obligation and obedience that he is working with. There are three sorts of imperatives which Kant distinguishes in the Groundwork, two of which he calls *hypothetical* and the third *categorical*.

Taken together, the two varieties of hypothetical imperative exhaust the domain of what is sometimes referred to as instrumental reasoning; the rational derivation of means to proposed ends. A hypothetical imperative “says only that the action is good for some *possible* or *actual* purpose.” On this basis, they represent that action as a necessary one “as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for one to will).” [G 4:412 – 413] A certain action is seen as good, not in itself, but for the sake of something else that one wills or might will. Because the action is only represented as good as a means to an end, it is only good hypothetically, on the condition that we, the ones preparing to act, have that end set in mind.

Among hypothetical imperatives there are 1) imperatives of *skill* and 2) of *prudence*. Imperatives of skill are very numerous, and they essentially describe principles of action that represent the means to whatever ends we happen to set for ourselves, as necessary to their accomplishment [G 4:415]. There is no question in these matters as to whether the end that is considered is itself morally good, or ultimately beneficial to us or others, only that if we will it as an end, this, that or the other needs to be done. There is also no requirement that we actually set the end before ourselves in order to recognize what would be necessary to bring it off. So the healer and the assassin agree about what one ought to do if one wanted to heal or to poison, though each imperative of skill is only validated and made binding for the agent in question once those ends are set. The



imperative: “If you want to cure him, you ought to give him this.” Given that end, this is what it would be rational to do. Otherwise, not.

There are as many imperatives of skill as there are possible goals to be set, and what particular ends a person sets for him or herself are idiosyncratic. So no imperatives of skill are necessarily binding for all persons. Kant thinks though that there is one end that all human beings share:

There is, however *one* end that can be presupposed as actual in the case of all rational beings (insofar as imperatives apply to them, namely as dependent beings), and therefore one purpose that they not merely *could* have but that we can safely presuppose they all actually *do have* by a natural necessity, and that purpose is *happiness*.

The hypothetical imperative that represents the practical necessity of an action as a means to the promotion of happiness... may be set forth not merely as necessary to some uncertain, merely possible purpose but to a purpose that can be presupposed surely and *a priori* in the case of every human being, because it belongs to his essence.

Skill in the choice of means to one's own greatest well-being can be called *prudence* in the narrowest sense. Hence the imperative that refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness, that is, the precept of prudence, is still always *hypothetical*; the action is not commanded absolutely but only as a means to another purpose. [G 4:416]

All human beings want to be happy. We all share that goal as a matter of “natural necessity”. It is a natural part of what we are. Kant even asserts that it is part of our *essence* as human beings to seek that end; that is, it is by *definition* part of what it means to be human that we seek it. There is an imperative of *prudence*, which describes as necessary those actions that would secure our own happiness. “If you want to be happy, you ought to...” This imperative, seemingly singular or unitary, is actually complex, as will become clear once we recognize that, though we all want to be happy, happiness is an *idea* whose content varies person to person. Aristotle saw this, just as Kant did, though what they do with that recognition is somewhat different. Aristotle sees disagreement, and optimistically proposes a definitive answer. *True* happiness is virtuous activity, or else contemplation. Depending on our allegiance, we might call Kant a pessimist, or else the more realistic:

“it is a misfortune that the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate concept that, although every human being wishes to attain this, he can still never say determinately and consistently with himself what he really

wishes and wills. The cause of this is that all the elements that belong to the concept of happiness are without exception empirical, that is, they must be borrowed from experience...” [G 4:418]

“happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting merely upon empirical grounds, which it is futile to expect should determine an action by which the totality of a series of results in fact infinite would be attained” [G 4:419]

Essentially, all human beings want to be happy, but we are also all terrible at predicting what will do the trick. We are as a rule indecisive, uncertain, and unclear about what we want, and even knowing it cannot always guarantee that it will really make us happy in the end. As with pleasure, we can make sound guesses about its causes, and we can give prudent *counsel* to act in ways likely to bring them about, but happiness is not something that can be willed directly. It is an ideal of the imagination, so is importantly individual, and subjective, and many. If there is “a good for Man”, it is by contrast singular and unique. It might seem to follow from this that happiness cannot be the good, but it does not – it only follows that, as with love, each will find it by a different path. But this is not Kant's argument.

Kant regards the prudential imperative, which counsels us to take the necessary means to our own necessarily private conception of happiness still as hypothetical. This, even though all of us necessarily have that end without exception. The prudential imperative is hypothetical for two reasons: 1) because, as I have noted, happiness is for Kant not a clear and determinate concept, but more importantly because 2) the imperative still only regards the action in question as good and necessary because it is recognized as a necessary means to the production of some other end - “the action is not commanded absolutely but only as a means to another purpose”. Even if happiness *were* definitive, the imperative of prudence would still be hypothetical. Because it would not command the action as necessary and good *in itself*, and that we ought to do it *for its own sake* but only as a means to happiness. A categorical imperative prescribes *unconditionally*, and so fully describes a true obligation. It could only be grounded by an end which held unconditionally. “One ought to do x” is only binding for all rational beings if they share an already existing end which motivates them to follow it – really what a categorical imperative says is “because e, one ought to do x”. The reason must already be there.

The groundwork is the search for such an imperative. It asks what a categorical imperative would be if there were one, and sets out the necessary conditions that it would have to satisfy. The formulations that result are meant to be concepts that serve as the groundwork for any system of morals. The groundwork is an analytic clarification of essential moral concepts that are not yet being applied to human beings. We might think of the groundwork in this way as a work of metaethics, which answers the question: “what does moral obligation mean?” The application of this concept to human morality is considered in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

The inquiry contained in the *Groundwork* is divided into three sections. In the first section, Kant begins from “common moral cognition”, roughly what Kant takes to be common and uncontroversial beliefs about morality, and from these hopes to lead us towards his own philosophical account [G 4:392]. The supreme principle of morality is arrived at there for the first time, and is characterized as nothing more than *conformity to universal law* as such [G 4:401 – 4:402] and provisionally in terms of the Formulation of Universal Law. In the second section (which I give most consideration to here) Kant attempts a systematic analysis of the concept of a categorical imperative. The argument there is progressive and transcendental. Each formulation builds upon those which came before it, and each generally corresponds to a concept which Kant regards as implied as necessary to the possibility of the one's which preceded it. Thus essentially, the concept of an obligation implies, but does not contain, the concept of a subject possibly motivated to obedience and of a legitimate authority to determine its content. The connection between these is therefore *a priori*, in that the connections are not found in experience, but in reason alone through the abstract analysis of concepts, but are also *synthetic*, in the sense that obedience is not part of the *meaning* of obligation, though it is implied by it as necessary to it. A simple example might be illustrative: the concept of a “father” is not contained as part of the meaning of “son”, though the former is implied as necessary to the possibility of latter.

## **I: Obligation, the Categorical Imperative, and the Formula of Universal Law**

“The categorical imperative, which as such only affirms what obligation is, is:  
act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law” [MM 6:229]

The first formulation of the categorical imperative is derived twice and distinctly in the Groundwork. In Section I of that work, the *formula of universal law* is provisionally derived from what Kant takes to be common views on what morals consists in, and from “the common use of our practical reason” This, I think, in much the way Aristotle draws his first provisional definition of the human end as happiness, and as living and doing well, from common views about that end [EN 1095a20] before proceeding to a more philosophic derivation to similar (though more robust) conclusions. Kant likewise derives FUL a second time in Section II, where it is presented in the context of a more fully developed and progressive argument as the first and merely formal stage of CI's full derivation.

I will not give much consideration to the first section here, as I find it largely incidental to my purposes. The first derivation of FUL proceeds from the concept, taken from “common” moral understanding, of a *good will*, and by its clarification through the *motive of duty*, finally to the concept of a *moral law* and its necessary characterization as a categorical imperative. In this way, Kant means to lead us in the first section from what he considers common beliefs about morality to the introduction of his own conception of it. Presuming our ready acceptance of the claim that nothing is good without qualification but a good will [G 4:393] and our identification of morality with obligation and duty, what I think Kant essentially hopes to achieve in the first section is little more than to confirm these concepts as sound and to demonstrate that we are already committed by our common beliefs to some conception of moral law as he understands it. This concept is then properly elucidated in the second section, by a critical analysis of that concept in abstraction to the demonstration of what it must be and what such a concept would necessarily imply. He thus argues the conditions for its possibility, before finally attempting to demonstrate in Section III that the concept is in fact instantiated and not merely ‘chimerical’.

Kant regards the formula of universal law as proceeding from “the mere concept of a categorical imperative” [G 4:420], that is, from the concept of an obligation as such

[MM 6:229]. The first formulation does not presume therefore to tell us anything about what obligations we might have, but only “affirms what obligation is”; this is what obligation – and if this is our understanding of it, morality too – *means*. That FUL proceeds directly from that concept seems to Kant almost obvious:

When I think of a *hypothetical* imperative in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain; I do not know this until I am given the condition. But when I think of a *categorical* imperative I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents as necessary. [G 4:421]

What we can know about a categorical imperative, before knowing anything else about the content of the obligation or obligations it specifies, is that it requires that we not violate that obligation. We know right away that it “contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law” and that this requirement is *unconditional*. A hypothetical imperative is binding only so long as we set for ourselves an end that grounds that principle as necessary: if one wants to win, one ought to compete; if one wants to compete, one ought to train. If the ends haven't been set, the reason for adopting maxims in conformity with those imperatives dissolves, and the merely conditional imperative is not binding. A categorical imperative on the other hand contains “no condition to which it would be limited”, and the reason for adopting maxims which conform to it must hold for all rational agents as such. If there were a categorical imperative it would be, by definition, valid for all unconditionally. Because it is *unconditional* in form, it is also *universally* valid.

If we consider a categorical imperative as such, in abstraction from the content of any specific obligation, what is left which is essential to the meaning of that concept? Kant's assertion is that what remains will be the *form of universality*, which any categorical imperative must have. If we proceed from the presumption that there is such an imperative, we can already from its necessary form alone infer the *minimum* requirement that we only adopt maxims which conform to it. To put

it plainly: let's say there is a moral law. I don't know what it says, but I know it's a law. What does the law require? I don't know, except that whatever it says, it says that no one should violate it - "nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such." I will therefore only act, will only adopt principles of action, which would not violate any possible law. I will only adopt a maxim of action that conforms to universal law as such [G 4:421]. But without knowing the content of such a universal law, how could we know whether our maxims conformed to it? With this question in mind, Kant immediately follows the passage quoted above with a provisional test of right action.

FUL: *act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*" [G 4:421]

What CI requires is that we act always in conformity with unconditioned obligation. FUL is a proposed test for determining whether we do so act, by assessing the validity of *maxims* against that concept. It is therefore a test of permissibility of action according to that maxim. The assertion is that we should only act on a maxim if we can "at the same time will that it become a universal law". It is valid if it can be so willed, and acts according to it are permissible only if this is so. The categorical imperative describes an obligation as such, and FUL a test of permission against it.

What it means to will a maxim to become a universal law, and so how the test is actually applied will take further explanation than is possible here. I turn instead to an argument from Allan Wood according to which the inference from CI to FUL is invalid.

Wood argues that what actually follows from the concept of a categorical imperative is only "that our maxims ought to conform to whatever universal laws there are" and that "it does not tell us how to discover these laws... it does not follow from the mere concept of a categorical imperative that *the will of a rational being* – what a rational being wills or can consistently will – has any role at all to play in determining the content of universal laws." [Wood, 81] He suggests that Kant in fact presupposes one of his later formulations, the formula of *autonomy*, in inferring the importance of what a rational being can consistently will. "We would

have reason to accept the will of a rational being as such a criterion [for determining the content of universal laws] if we knew already that this will is the *author* of objective practical laws, hence that the moral law is a principle of *autonomy*.” [81] As a self-standing principle then, FUL is invalid; though Wood believes that it can be inferred validly from the Formula of Autonomy, the arguments to which “do not depend in any way on the fallacious derivation of FUL” [81]

If this is right, then we make a serious misstep by any reading that takes Kant too seriously when he says that there is “only a single categorical imperative” and that it is described by FUL [4:421]. My sense is that, contrary to what Kant seems explicitly to suggest, FUL is *not* the categorical imperative, but that universal willing is only a proposed test of permissibility against it. We do better to identify CI, as Kant does himself, with the simpler formulation “act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law” [MM 6:229] and this with the concept of an obligation as such.

## II: Obedience, Value, and the Formula of Humanity

“The chief commandment is that you should love with all your soul the Lord your God in whose power you are; and the commandment to love your neighbour follows from it, for the same Lord God is in him also.”

- Tolstoy, *Gospel in Brief*

The derivation of Kant's second major formulation of the categorical imperative has two stages. Connecting the concept of a categorical imperative to that of *the will of a rational being* which could be motivated to obey it [G 4:427], Kant argues the implied necessity of an *end* which would hold for all rational beings as such. Only such an end “*the existence of which in itself* has an absolute worth” and which would be *an end in itself*, could possibly ground a categorically binding obligation over all rational beings and motivate their obedience to it [G 4:428]. The second stage is substantive, and by it Kant will argue positively that *humanity*, conceived as *rational nature* itself, and *only* humanity as such, could be such an end.

From the concept of an obligation as such, Kant is able to derive the concept of a categorical imperative and the first formulation of a possible moral law. He is able to derive only the *form* of that law – the unconditioned necessity of action in conformity with it – and a provisional first attempt at specifying how that law might be practical. The derivation of this test may not be valid at this stage in the argument. In fact, it seems plainly not to be. Unless the agent who wills that his principle be universal has also the authority to determine the content of the law, what *he* can will seems irrelevant to whether he wills in conformity with it.

This is not the only respect in which the FUL is incomplete at this stage. Truly choosing to act from the idea of a categorical imperative – something we ourselves perceive that we ought to do – is not simply to act in conformity to it, as from fear of punishment should we break with it, or by staying within its bounds only accidentally. It means being *motivated directly* to follow it by the recognition of some positive value or from the appreciation of some recognized good in doing so. In Kant's terms, it means being motivated to act from duty, or by a pure and immediate “respect for law” [G 4:400]. Necessarily connected then to the idea of an obligation is that of a subject which could *follow* it; a rational will who could be motivated to a possible *obedience*.

Having suggested the possibility of a categorical imperative as describing the concept of moral obligation as such, Kant wonders about the conditions under which such a law could exist:

Is it a necessary law *for all rational beings* always to appraise their actions in accordance with such maxims as they themselves could will to serve as universal laws? If there is such a law, then it must already be connected (completely a priori) with the concept of the will of a rational being as such. [G 4:427 - 428]

Like the need for a legitimate authority which could ground it, the possibility of obedience is not contained within the concept of an obligation, but it is necessary to it as a condition for its reality. It is by this *synthetic* connection of concepts, of the concept of obedience to that of obligation, that we pass from the first purely formal specification of the categorical imperative to the determining ground of the will to follow it.

Now, what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end, and this, if it is given by reason alone, must hold equally for all rational beings. [G 4:427 - 428]



For Kant, all action involves the setting of an end [MM 6:385]. He says that, although “the will itself, strictly speaking, has no determining ground” [MM 6:213] the end “serves the will as the objective ground for its self-determination” [G 4:428]. That is, though nothing moves the will directly (the will is, strictly speaking, neither free nor unfree, but is practical reason itself), the end is the reason according to which the will “determines” itself.

Deliberation and the ultimate choice to act involves “the representation” of both an object of choice that we hope to bring about (the end) as well as of diverse imperatives of skill, prudence, and morality which either guide us to or away from that end. We think, “I choose this” and ask ourselves whether we really ought to pursue it and if so, how. To “ground” an imperative is to make that principle of action valid for a particular agent; to give sufficient reason for them to follow it. But a categorical imperative cannot be grounded in quite this way:

The ends that a rational being proposes at his discretion as *effects* of his actions (material ends) are all only relative; for only their mere relation to a specially constituted faculty of desire on the part of the subject gives them their worth, which can therefore furnish no universal principles, no principles valid and necessary for all rational beings and also for every volition, that is, no practical laws. [G 4:427 - 428]

Kant makes a sweeping and somewhat surprising statement here. He asserts that no ends which we as rational beings might *produce in action*, being possible “effects” at our discretion to cause, could legitimate any practical laws. All such ends are “relative” and are valuable only insofar as they are desired. The action that a categorical imperative prescribes cannot be good because of some end that it effects or produces. If this were the case, the action would not be represented as good in itself, but only insofar as it was productive of something. This parallels Aristotle's idea that action [*praxis*] is distinct from making [*poiesis*], and that while “making” is good because of what it produces, “action” alone can be good in itself. Kant is I think touching on a similar idea. An imperative represents a certain action as good, and a categorical imperative, which says simply “you ought to so act”, represents a certain action as good *in itself* and for its own sake. Yet he has also asserted that all action necessarily has an end. This seems paradoxical. Kant's solution is that the end which grounds a categorical imperative cannot

be one which is effected or a merely possible consequence of human action, since that would reduce the action that the imperative binds us to do to one which is only instrumentally good. In order for the action to be good in itself and yet still also grounded in a reflectively chosen end, it must be grounded in a value “whose *existence* in itself” already has absolute worth and is an end in itself. It must be grounded in an *existent end*; some object or state of affairs that, not only possibly to be produced by action, already exists or is the case. As an end, it exists as something to be preserved and protected, honoured and respected, or otherwise to be treated as a value which restrains or guides our action in certain ways. Certain ways of treating an existent end, like preservation and protection, seem obviously still to aim at a certain effect or consequence; namely the continuing good condition of the object of value. But others, like treating something with honour and respect, do not obviously aim at some effect beyond the special treatment itself. Allen Wood describes this kind of treatment as consisting of actions that are good because they *express* a certain relationship to that value:

We are also familiar with existent ends in cases where there is no end to be effected, or at least none detachable from the existent end. When people kneel, bow their heads, or doff their hats to something (such as a flag or a religious object), they may have no end to be effected except the successful performance of the gesture of veneration itself. But they do act for an end, namely, for the sake of the revered object itself or the value it represents to them...

From [Kant's] standpoint, all conduct is regarded fundamentally from the standpoint of what it *expresses* about the agents attitude toward humanity. Morally good conduct expresses respect for humanity as an existent end, while bad conduct is bad because it expresses disrespect or contempt for humanity.

[Wood 117]

There is a similar apparent double aspect to the choice of good action in Aristotle's teachings. He tells us that virtuous action is good in itself and must be chosen for its own sake, but also that it is chosen “for the sake of the fine and noble”. I think that the ideas of the two philosophers here are very close, and that Allen Wood's suggestion that morally good conduct is expressive of certain attitudes and values applies well to explaining both. Moral acts are good in themselves and chosen for their own sake, but they are so because of what they reveal about us and our relationship with certain values. For Aristotle, what

the actions express is nobility; the action is good in itself because it expresses a certain high mindedness and a love of human excellence. For Kant they are good in themselves because they express a certain kind of respect for humanity itself as something of deep value.

So there is a similar idea here that moral acts for both philosophers are good in themselves, not because they produce something or will likely have a certain effect, but because they are expressive of our standing in an appropriate relation to certain values. That expression is a quality of the action itself, and it is that quality of the action that makes them good.

An end that could ground a categorical imperative must be one whose value is unconditional. It must be valuable whether or not it is desired or valued, and it must be one which is not merely a possible consequence of the action, but one which already exists as something of objective value. So Kant suggests that only such an end could ground a categorical imperative:

But suppose there were something the *existence of which in itself* has an absolute worth, something which as *an end in itself* could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it, and in it alone, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, of a practical law [G 4:427 - 428]

If an end were discovered and given purely by reason alone, it must be one which would “hold equally for all rational beings” [G 4:427-4:428] For Kant, the inquiry into the discovery of an end in pure reason means demonstrating the conceptual necessity of its existence. This is at this stage of the argument provisionally established as a condition to the possibility of a categorical imperative. A subjective end, conditionally adopted by particular agents, can only ever serve as the ground for hypothetical imperatives. To ground an unconditional “ought” and the motive to act on it, there must be likewise some unconditioned end: something of “absolute worth” as an end in itself. Such an end could not be some merely possible effect of action, but must be something the existence of which already has value. If there were such a thing, it would be the ground for an unconditional obligation for all rational beings, as a law which preserved some existing positive value. Only such an end could ground a categorical imperative, and it is now up to Kant to provide an argument that such an end really exists.

I am working here especially in this derivation through a reading of Kant argued for by Allan Wood, whereby Kant begins from the premise that 1) nothing can be an obligation “so long as they are not subordinated to an end which is necessary in itself” [DG 2:298-299] 2) the ends, to which obligations are ultimately subordinate, are established by “*indemonstrable* material principles of practical cognition” [ibid] and therefore that 3) no positive argument can be given which *proves* the necessity of any ultimate value; we can only argue that what we have in mind is already treated as such a value, or that this treatment is implied by our treatment of other values.

An example of an argument of this kind: 1) living requires continually choosing to pursue the means to life, 2) each day you choose to pursue these means rather than die, 3) To habitually renew your choice of something is to treat it as a value, and to treat something as a value is to value it, 4) Therefore you value your own life. I don't mean to suggest this argument is faultless. It's not, but nothing hinges on its being sound. I present it as an example of the kind of demonstration I think Kant must offer, according to Wood, for the ultimate value of humanity as an end in itself. It is an argument that “humanity is something we already (perhaps tacitly or implicitly) acknowledge to be an objective end or end in itself” [Wood 114]

The derivation of the Formula of Humanity is, I think, the pivotal argument of the Groundwork. Its place in Kant's system is similar to the place of the function argument in Aristotle's. Having both set out a set of conditions that describe, respectively, the complete and sufficient highest end achievable in action, and an existent end in itself of absolute worth, Aristotle and Kant offer their respective substantive arguments to demonstrate what could satisfy those concepts. If we find their arguments convincing here, their systems seem to follow without provoking much resistance. These two arguments are also the most difficult, and neither is obviously incontrovertible. The difference in the outlook of the two philosophers is at any rate never more simple and clear than in the distinction between the concepts each takes as the foundation of moral value. Aristotle asks after perfection, and a purposeful point on the horizon of human activity to be achieved, effected, and realized. Kant looks to dignity, and an already standing value to be preserved, appreciated, and above all respected.

And so in this fashion, Kant argues:

*Rational nature exists as an end in itself.* The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that also holds for me; thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will.

The practical imperative will therefore be the following: *So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means* [G 4:429].

How should we interpret this passage? The outline of it is simple in spirit, and I have found the parallel in the above quotation from Tolstoy instructive. The first law is to respect rational nature, which is in you as that part which has dignity and confers value on everything else; and the second law to respect others in the same way follows from it, since that same source of dignity is in them as well. But the twist is that Kant does not stop at simply pronouncing this first law as a commandment. His most fundamental assertion is that we *already* and *necessarily* give it to ourselves: “the human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a *subjective* principle of human actions”

So Kant argues that human beings already do, and indeed somehow *must*, treat their existence in a certain way. In action, in all “human actions”, human beings represent their own existence according to a “subjective principle” which treats rational nature as an existing end in itself.

As I understand Kant's argument: To set an end is to make a value judgement; this is what it means to say that something is good. The *capacity* to set ends, and so our ability to make value judgements, resides in reason – in our own rational nature. In order for our own subjective value judgements to be *legitimate*, the part of us which makes that judgement must itself have some authority to do so. When I treat the ends that I set *as* legitimate, as truly good, I at the same necessarily represent myself as having that authority. In setting an end, I at the same time declare myself a *de facto* judge about what is valuable. I say, “this is good, and I am fit to judge that it is so.” I implicitly treat my judgements about what has value as legitimate whenever I act to pursue ends. But to take myself seriously as a judge of value in this way, I have to believe that there is something about me which makes me qualified. That quality is rational nature. It is my ability to set

ends at all, and to act for reasons. So Kant infers, I therefore treat myself, and especially that faculty in me which allows me to judge what is good and what is bad, as the final reason for treating that thing as good, as the *end* which itself provides whatever reason there is for treating whatever else as ends.

Human action is always intentional (Aristotle and Kant agree) in the sense that it always involves the setting of an end. It is therefore a “subjective principle of human actions” always also to represent one's own existence – the existence of one's legitimate end- setting power – as an end in itself, and as that which has ultimate worth. In a word, we treat *ourselves* as worthy whenever we treat something that we value as something truly valuable.

This is Kant's first premise. The law is only to respect rational nature, in whose power you are, and indeed, you already implicitly do whenever you employ that faculty and treat the ends you set as real values. The second “commandment” to respect your neighbour follows from this, since that same rational nature is in him also. It is the first moral law to always respect that part of us which we *already implicitly treat with respect* whenever we act. It would be *inconsistent* ever to act without doing so. If I regard my own end setting as legitimate, on the grounds that my capacity to set ends is authoritative, I ought to act with respect for that capacity, since failing to do so would be to undermine that authority and the legitimacy of the end which I set. If that capacity which I respect is found not only in myself, but in others also, I ought to respect it there no less. If my reason for thinking that my ends are legitimately set is that I have a certain capacity which makes them so, it would be again irrational to not recognize the legitimacy of those ends set by others who have that same capacity.

every other rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that also holds for me; thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will.

Each person, in setting ends, treats their own ability to do so as legitimate. Self-regard as authoritative in setting legitimate ends is therefore an *objective* – perhaps we should say *inter-subjective* – principle according to which all end setters act. Because this principle is also an *unconditional* principle of all human action – since it is implied by all action on

the ends we set - it is possible to derive from it laws of practical reason; categorical principles of rational action. The categorical imperative is therefore this:

FH: *So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.*

[G 4:429]

Since humanity is an *existent* end and not one to be produced or achieved in action, the prescription to use it as an end in itself is primarily negative, that is, it prescribes a *limiting condition* on what can be willed and done.

### **III: Authority, Complete Determination, and the Formula of Autonomy**

“I am the law” - Judge Dredd

Kant argues that only the *autonomy* of the will can provide the authority required to bind us unconditionally to the law. An autonomous will is one that authors the law to which it is subject; a law which had any other origin but that will itself would be *heteronomous* by contrast, and no law given in this way could be a categorical imperative. Autonomy of the will therefore is the for the third formulation of the moral law, which requires that we act from “the idea of the will of every rational being as a will *giving* universal law” [G 4:431 my emphasis].

Kant offers two major arguments to support the third principle. He argues that as a final condition for the possibility of a categorical imperative, the formula of autonomy is implied by and follows from the two formulations that preceded it. The third formula “of itself unites the other two in it” [G 4:436]. He then argues that this third formulation “would be very *well suited* to be the categorical imperative” because it confirms and is consistent with one final major requirement of such an imperative: namely, “to indicate in the imperative itself the renunciation of all interest.” [G 4:432] That is, it conforms to the idea that we must in following the categorical imperative do so from an immediate respect for the law itself, and not simply as incentivized by some further thought or desire.

After digressing briefly to consider examples of how the formula of humanity might be applied as a principle of action [G 4:430 - 431], Kant returns to the main line of his argument in the analysis of a categorical imperative. He reminds us of what he has so far discovered, and from this infers a new idea:

The ground of all practical lawgiving lies (in accordance with the first principle [FUL]) *objectively in the rule* and the form of universality which makes it fit to be a law...

*subjectively*, however, it lies in the *end*; but the subject of all ends is every rational being as an end in itself (in accordance with the second principle [FH]);

from this there follows now the third practical principle of the will, as supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea *of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law* [G 4:431].

In this way Kant apparently derives the essential thought behind the Formula of Autonomy [FA], which he insists follows from the two formulations which preceded it.

Kant says that “all practical lawgiving” has its “ground” in the two first formulations of the categorical imperative. By that which “grounds” practical lawgiving, I understand him to mean that which establishes its legitimacy. Practical lawgiving is legitimate, grounded, if it gives legitimate, grounded, laws. The practical law is the categorical imperative, which can only rightly be so called if it is (a) universal in form and (b) preserves an end which is unconditionally taken as such by all possible *subjects* of that law – they have no reason to follow it otherwise. This is what he means when he says that all practical lawgiving has its ground *objectively* in the form of universality, and *subjectively* in humanity as an end in itself. (a) and (b) are each conditions that a proposed law must meet in order to be a categorical imperative. (a) is what form it must be in order to be an obligation. (b) is what end it must respect in order to motivate obedience. The “third practical principle of the will” which is supposed to follow from these two conditions of a possible categorical imperative, is a third condition (c), called the “supreme condition of [the will's] harmony with universal practical reason”.

Recalling that the will is itself identified with practical reason [G 4:413], this third principle seems to be regarded as a condition of the harmony of (presumably individual)



practical reason with its universal counterpart. It represents the harmony between an individual's will and the will of others.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, this final principle is also supposed to represent the “*complete determination* of all maxims” [G 4:437] by means of the categorical imperative, as seen from the combined perspectives of its universal form and the unconditional material end it preserves. So it is in this way that the third formulation of the categorical imperative is based on “the idea of *the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law*” [G 4:431]. This seems in any case to be how FA relates to the first two principles. It is based just on the idea of all rational beings taking the law seriously as it has already been described in FUL and FH. They follow it as subjects, because they necessarily value humanity as an end in itself, and they are at the same time each of them the *authors* of that law, each willing it for themselves.

In accordance with this principle all maxims are repudiated that are inconsistent with the will's own giving of universal law. Hence the will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author) [G 4:438]

As both the author and the subject of the law, the will is *autonomous* or self-legislating. As rational beings who set ends, we are the ultimate source of value, and belong to humanity; as autonomous we are also the ultimate authority in establishing the law. Kant teaches that it is the legitimacy of our own lawgiving which makes us an end and which ultimately gives us *dignity as persons*:

it is just this fitness of his maxims for giving universal law that marks him out as an end in itself; it also follows that this dignity (prerogative) he has over all merely natural beings brings with it that he must always take his maxims from the point of view of himself, and likewise every other rational being, as lawgiving beings (who for this reason are also called persons). [G 4:438]

Autonomy of the will, or the capacity of the will to be self-legislating in giving laws to itself, is seen by Kant as a condition, the essential condition, to humanity's being an end in itself; and this legislation is only legitimate if the laws which we impose on ourselves (maxims) are fit also to stand as universal laws in accord with FUL. A rational being, who alone sets ends and so necessarily regards himself as an end in itself [FH], must

regard himself and others of his kind (humanity) as also lawgiving beings, or *persons*. Kant apparently takes the will of the subject to be also the only possible authority that could bind him to the law. It seems that some argument is still needed to show why this must be the case. Following his proposal that the idea of all wills as authors of their own law is the consequence of taking CI in its current form to its natural conclusion, Kant provides an argument to establish the legitimacy of a formulation based on that idea:

When we think of a will of this kind [autonomous], then although a will that *stands under law* may be bound to this law by means of some interest, a will that is itself the supreme lawgiver cannot possibly, as such, depend upon some interest; for, a will that is dependent in this way would itself need yet another law that would limit the interest of its self-love to the condition of a validity for universal law.

Thus, the *principle* of every human will as *a will giving universal law through all its maxims*, provided it is otherwise correct, would be very *well suited* to be the categorical imperative by this: that just because of the idea of giving universal law *it is based on no interest* and therefore, among all possible imperatives, can alone be *unconditional*. [G 4:432]

So the argument seems to be just this: 1) any imperative which was based on an external interest in something other than the law itself would only be conditionally binding. I find myself bound to a law in such a way when, for example, I follow it from fear of punishment, or from some hope for reward. My being moved to follow the law is in these cases conditional, and requires “yet another law” – e.g., “seek reward”; “avoid punishment” – to bind me to it. No categorical imperative therefore can be based on external interest. 2) If the law had any other author but the will itself that would be its subject, it would need to be based on some external interest as just described. If God were the author of the law, (say: thou shalt have no other God before me) we would be bound to it only by external interest (love of God, fear of God, hope for divine reward) and so would be bound to it only conditionally.

If one thought of him only as subject to a law (whatever it may be), this law had to carry with it some interest by way of attraction or constraint, since it did not as a law arise from *his will*, in order to conform with the law, his will had instead to be constrained by *something else* to act in a certain way [G 4:433].

On the other hand, the idea that the will is autonomous, as being the author of the law as well as its subject alone conforms to the “renunciation of all interest”. Considered in itself, “the idea of giving universal law is based on no interest” [G 4:432] – no interest, that is, other than our respect for rational nature, which respect is nothing other than the law itself.

Against this background, we might wonder what place there could be on Kant’s account for character and moral education. The Categorical Imperative is an *a priori* moral principle implicit even in common moral understanding, and so it does not seem necessary to tell the kind of developmental story involved in an Aristotelian account of coming to see rightly. Since the moral law is (partly) constitutive of people’s capacity for practical reasoning, it would seem from the *Groundwork* that Kant hasn’t much to say about character, moral education and happiness, precisely because there is nothing truly important *to* say about them. I will argue that this suspicion is unfounded, and that, surprisingly, Kant has much to say about these topics.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In his reading of Aristotle, M.F. Burnyeat suggests that “any tolerably explicit view of the process of moral development depends decisively on a conception of virtue. This dependence makes it possible to read a philosopher's account of moral development as evidence for what he thinks virtue is.” [69] Taking this thought as sound advice, I propose making a reading of this sort of Kant. Looking more closely at Kant's theory of moral education and by noting occasions for favorable comparison to Aristotle's account, I hope to uncover a part of Kantian morality that is closer to earth - one that adds empirical and social detail to the otherwise abstract rationalistic picture of the moral life drawn in the previous chapter.

As one potential obstacle to such a reading, there is an apparent tension - well stated by Kate A. Moran - “between Immanuel Kant's model of moral agency and his often-neglected philosophy of moral education.” [Moran, pg 471] Putting it simply, Kant seems to believe that it is in each of us to know and apply the moral law without being taught, but he also seems to think that moral education has some vital importance. So, what's to learn?

I argue that this apparent tension can be resolved without much difficulty. First, as I think Moran herself fairly does, by considering the role of education from the standpoint of the moral community, as contributing to the realization (of one version) of what Kant calls “the highest end”. But seen also through the eyes of the individual, I argue that although our awareness of the moral law is essentially innate, moral education plays a significant role in the cultivation of virtue - that is, in Kant's distinct conception of it. We are, so it goes, less than perfectly rational beings. So although we might know what is morally required of us, we often don't follow through on our best judgement. The cultivation of *virtue* as a kind of moral strength of will has, in this context, a central place in Kant's view of moral education – and indeed his picture of the moral life quite generally.

So I begin by locating the source of Moran's tension, before turning to an account of Kant's pointed, though occasionally disordered, theory of moral education as outlined in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*. I trace there the progress of the Aristotelian account in parallel, while tracking the lessons involved in virtue's progress. Finally, I argue that

Kant's view of human nature and our moral perfectibility gives a distinct place to education in its contribution to the highest practical good.

### **I: The Source of the Tension**

Having arrived for the first time at the thought of a categorical imperative in the first section of the *Groundwork*, Kant offers some optimistic praise to moral common sense:

Thus, then, we have arrived, within the moral cognition of common human reason, at its principle, which it admittedly does not think so abstractly in a universal form but which it actually has always before its eyes and uses as the norm for its appraisals.

Here it would be easy to show how common human reason, with this compass in hand, knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty, if, without in the least teaching it anything new, we only, as did Socrates, make it attentive to its own principle... [G 4:404]

The categorical imperative is presented in the *Groundwork I* as a clarification of what is already implicit in common moral thinking. Without having had the law yet clarified for them, people are already able to make moral judgments and are already able to tell right from wrong: people, for the most part, know their rational duties. They are already committed to principles of morality, though without having reflected on what could be their ultimate ground or why they ought necessarily to commit to them. To draw one noticeable parallel to Aristotle, Kant thinks that most people already have some commitment to “the fact” of morality, for which the *Groundwork*, like *The Ethics*, is intended to supply “the reason”. Kant seems somewhat more optimistic about the common man's ability to know right from wrong than Aristotle, who worried whether his students would gain this insight before coming to him.

What is clear from these passages is Kant's confidence that with “the compass of common moral cognition” in hand, we many are already well attuned to our duties. But he does not expect that we will be necessarily aware of the law that is their underlying principle. He does say that this can be *drawn out* from common reason by Socratic questioning without teaching them anything new. The moral law is in this sense only revealed to us as a principle to which we already attend unawares. This suggests that the

moral law is something that we already implicitly employ, though also suggesting the need or at least the expediency of having our attention drawn to it by an enlightened guide.

But although there is a certain place for guided reflection tuning in to the law, there is nothing in this thought comparable to Aristotle's thorough conception of *becoming* moral. Moran's concern about the limitations of a Kantian moral education seems fairly motivated. The concern more precisely hangs on Kant's "fact of reason" arguments, where in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he asserts that "Pure reason is practical of itself alone and gives (to the human being) a universal law which we call *the moral law*." and that "Consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason" [CPR 5:31]. These arguments are notoriously obscure, and I will not attempt a systematic interpretation of them here. It is enough for our purpose here if we accept the conclusion and ask whether the fact of reason argument amounts to the claim that, as Moran puts it, "we learn the content and application of the moral law on our own." [Moran, pg 471] It seems fantastic to suggest that we could determine for ourselves the formulations of the categorical imperative after an only gently guided reflection. I do not understand Kant as making this claim. Rather, I read him here as arguing that 1) common moral cognition employs the categorical imperative as its principle, however much it does so unawares and 2) pure reason is practical and contains a universal practical law, which is what we have commonly called morality without quite knowing what it was we were speaking about. In this sense, our awareness of this law that we called moral is really a fact of reason.

Kant's attempt to demonstrate the law as a practical fact of reason is to bring it out by analogy to "postulates of pure geometry" as "practical propositions" [CPR 5:31]. These postulates, (for example: that a straight line can be drawn by connecting two points) provide the basis for geometric reasoning and are also immediately, though hypothetically, practical: they tell us "that one *could* do something if it were required that one should do it." In this sense the postulates give *problematic* directions to the will, but are in a sense still laws that one cannot violate. Though hypothetical, "the rule says: one ought absolutely to proceed a certain way." What these laws illustrate, Kant argues, is that "pure reason, *practical of itself*, is here immediately lawgiving." [ibid] In the way

that the propositions of formal logic are, as they say, “laws of thought”, (such that non contradiction is a law that is a fact of reason) *practical* reason is similarly lawgiving. What this law ultimately discloses I have argued in the previous section. For our purposes here though, what seems to be essential to Kant’s thought is that we can come to know the moral law in much the same way as we can come to know principles of formal logic, or matters of pure geometry, as principles already implicit of reason itself. We also roughly abide by the moral law in practice as we do logic in thought and argument; we do better once the law that is reason’s fundamental principle is fully revealed to us.

It is in us to know the law; it can be derived from reason itself. Human beings also generally act from some vague awareness of its existence without quite knowing it clearly. They do not all have the law before them. Again, they have the fact, but not the reason. Their judgments are generally sound, but they do not know the principle.

Moran concedes this much, and argues that on Kant's program, moral judgment is supposed to develop naturally. It does so alongside and as essentially part of the development of practical reason. Basic moral judgment, as a kind of rational judgment, does not need special teaching; it comes to maturity as part of the natural progress in becoming rational:

Of course, this does not mean that Kant thinks we are born with fully formed awareness of the moral law or specific moral rules... moral reason is not fully developed [in children] because practical reason itself is not fully developed.

The important point to remember, however, is just that practical reason and the awareness of the moral law that comes along with it are capacities that develop naturally with normal human experience. A special kind of moral education seems to have no essential place in this picture. [Moran, page 473-474]

By emphasizing simply that we are not born with “fully formed awareness of the moral law” and that the reason children do not have this awareness is because their rational faculties are themselves underdeveloped, Moran suggests – not implausibly – that for Kant full awareness of the moral law is something that we can expect to develop over time.

I think we can allow that Kant has confidence in common rational judgment, and in the average person's ability under unexceptional circumstances to become reasonable and to acknowledge the Categorical Imperative and the fact of our being bound to its authority. The formulation of the Categorical Imperative is Kant's attempt to discover the principle already at work in common judgment.

Moran ultimately puts the point rather gently,

To be sure, our common cognitions need to be analyzed, ordered, and systematized, but the 'raw material', so to speak, of moral knowledge is the common awareness that each of us (assuming a normal upbringing) already has [Moran 473].

And if this is the case, the role of the teacher might only be to spell out for the student what she already knows. Looking to Kant's theory of virtue however, it becomes clear that there is a much deeper story to be told.

## II. Virtue

Over the course of his career Kant offers several definitions of virtue, which though not obviously in complete agreement, do share certain distinct features in common. Several formulations are offered in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and elsewhere. So virtue is described as: "the moral strength of a human being's will in fulfilling his duty, as a moral constraint through his own lawgiving reason" [MM 6:405]; "self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom" [MM 6:394]; "an aptitude for free actions in conformity with law" though only when it is added, "to determine oneself to act through the thought of the law" [MM 6:407].

The common thread running through these descriptions is that Kant regards virtue as a kind of requisite inner strength of will to act from duty. This seems confirmed by his claims about character in general. He quotes Horace with approval: "*Vir propositi tenax* [A man firm in his resolutions]... this is a good character" [LP 9:487] and firm resolution is a matter of acting on principle, on maxims and not from inclination, "The man of principles of whom one definitely knows that he acts not from his instinct but from his will, has a character" [AP 7:285].



To be firmly resolved to act on principle is character, though of course this resolution only has so much worth as the maxim itself. A strong will is not yet a good one<sup>31</sup>, and so is not yet full virtue – “Virtue is not merely a self-constraint, but also self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom” [MM 6:394] and “through law giving reason” [MM 6:405] – that is, self-constraint to act in accordance with the categorical imperative. Thus I take this to be his principal definition of human virtue:

the moral strength of a *human being's* will in fulfilling his *duty*, a moral *constraint* through his own lawgiving reason, insofar as this constitutes itself an authority *executing* the law [MM 6:405].

Virtue is a moral constable; an internal executor of the laws that an autonomous agent gives to itself. It is the strength of will which is required to constrain oneself to fulfill one's duty. And since “to do something from duty means to obey reason” [LP 9:483] virtue is the strength of our rational conviction.

The similarity of Kant's virtuous agent to Aristotle's conception of the *enkratic* as one who “abides by his rational calculation” [EN 1145b10] in the face of opposing appetite and feeling, is quite close. I do not wish to argue that the concepts perfectly align, but the similarity is telling.

Kant's virtue is most evident in conflict. As Kant suggests, there is “no way to measure the degree of a strength except by the magnitude of the obstacles it could overcome” and that “in us, these are inclinations” [MM 6:397]. It is precisely in overcoming the limitations and hindrances of an imperfect, conflicted human character that virtue is most evident.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle saw full virtue as necessarily a matter of unity of character – an agreement between one's right conception of the noble, the good and the pleasant. That Kant identifies virtue with a moral disposition that is necessarily most apparent in conflict already suggests a contrasting view of character. Full virtue, in

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<sup>31</sup> Kant says for instance in the opening of the Groundwork that “courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's plans, as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution is therefore called *character*, is not good” [G 4:393]

<sup>32</sup> Virtue is strength in combating inclination, but this is not to say in combating all desire. Kant distinguishes between *rational* and *empirical* desires; roughly, between ones that have sensuous feeling (natural or habitual) at their base and those for which feeling follows a rational determination of the will to act in pursuit of an end. [G 4:414 Ft. note](see also Wood 2008, pg. 36)

courage or temperance or justice, meant for Aristotle no longer having to overcome – as an akratic still would – those errant pleasures out of line with one’s sound conception of the good and the fine. For Kant, this conception of virtue demands more of human beings than we are capable. This would be the quality of a perfectly rational or holy will, for which no virtue would be necessary.

The ultimate basis for their disagreement here lies in the philosophers’ fundamentally distinct conceptions of human nature and of the moral life in general. Aristotle saw no deep conflict between our natural end of happiness and acting for the sake of the noble. Instead, happiness was best defined and realized in the exercise of virtue as a kind of human excellence and flourishing. What was essential was that we be shown that the pursuit of the noble constituted the better part of our true highest end, so that our pursuit of happiness could be thus guided more surely to its goal. Aristotle thus counsels us to act morally from our own interest in being happy. Kant, to the contrary, holds not only that our natural end does not always align with morality, but that when “the principle of one’s own happiness is made the determining ground of the will, the result is the direct opposite of morality” [CPR 5:35]. By the principle of one’s own happiness – or of “self-love” – Kant has in mind a material principle, by which one irrationally takes as the determining ground of the will, “the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations” [CPR 5:25][G 4:399]

“The sum of inclination” is of course not the happiness Aristotle advises that we pursue – and would seem perhaps to compare most aptly to the intemperate individual who identifies pleasure with what is best and noble – but the difference is not thereby resolved. Aristotle does see a difference between good and bad self-love [EN 1168a30-1169b1] advising that one kind, “who awards the biggest share in money, honors, and bodily pleasures to themselves” and generally those who “gratify their appetites and in general their feelings and the non-rational part of the soul” are clearly reproachable, and are like the vulgar many. But their error is not that they act from self-love, but that by pursuing external goods as if they were the best things in life, they mistake its true object. The person who does brave and just and generous acts is also a self-lover, even more truly so, since he awards himself what is “finest and best of all”. When you give charitably, you come out ahead. And ultimately that is why you do it, because you

recognize that generosity and virtue is the better part of flourishing. Self-love is still the guiding principle.

As I showed in the previous section, Kant held that prudence could only ever generate hypothetical imperatives, and so could not be the basis for the moral law. But there *is* a categorical law of practical reason, which therefore places limitations on whatever prudential maxims we might generate. The maxims that we give to ourselves on the basis of the categorical imperative represent the results of our best rational deliberation, but they do not always align with our conception of happiness. So far however there is no *necessary* conflict between the maxims generated by principles of happiness and morality, since our conception of happiness might well be in agreement with duty. Kant does not hold that acting from self-love is always necessarily immoral. He holds only that self-love, which is “natural and active in us even prior to the moral law” [5:73] can not of itself generate any moral principle. Only reason can do that. Self-love must be constrained to agreement with the practical law “and then it is called *rational self-love*” [ibid] Self-love is not being guided towards a more noble object, it is denied its position of first principle in favor of respect.

The “principle self-love” names only the willful pursuit of inclination – of pre-critical desires. For Kant, human nature is such that we are both *passive or receptive* with regard to the world we inhabit and also *active or spontaneous* with regard to both the theoretical and practical employment of reason.<sup>33</sup> By the active employment of reason in understanding, we give conceptual order to the uninterpreted phenomena presented to us by way of the senses. Concerning motivation, we are in the same way both passive and active. Human nature is such that we are presented with *impulses*, which incline us to act in one way or another. But these incentives do not *cause* us to act directly; because we are also rational and have will, we can not only actively choose whether or not to act on them, but by a higher order kind of choice in the employment of will, we choose whether or not to make these incentives *the determining ground* of choice of action. Kant describes this position and its significance to the possibility of freedom. He says,

That choice which can be determined by *pure reason* is called free choice.  
That which can be determined only by *inclination* (sensible impulse,

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<sup>33</sup> See Korsgaard p. 175 for a more in depth discussion.

*stimulus*) would be animal choice. Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will [MM 6:214].

We are, as finite sensual beings, inclined towards various ends and acts; but as participating in reason we are free to the extent that we are able to choose whether or not to take up those incentives as our grounds for decision. This second aspect involves the adoption of a *principle of volition* dictating that we act as incentivized or else on other grounds. Our inclinations and their maximal unity under ideal conception of happiness are not on their face reprehensible, and neither do they move us directly. Rather it is by taking these inclinations as our ultimate reason for acting – effectively ‘because I feel like it’ – that the will is found without moral worth.

It is our natural propensity to make this principle the ground of choice, but in each of us also is an awareness of the formal constraint imposed on that ground by the moral law. We are thus ruled by two masters – the principle of our own happiness, of *self-love*, and the law of morality, which, though they can be brought into agreement, cannot be both of them at the same time the ultimate determining ground of the will [CPR 5:22]. Seen against this context of conflict, moral education takes on a new character. Two lessons are essential. First, the student should acquire, through discipline, the strength of will necessary to virtue, and second, the disposition to constrain his or herself to act through moral maxims, from respect for the moral law.

### **III: Kant's Theory of Moral Education**

Kantian character is tied to the strength of our rational convictions, and if the process of building character in this sense through moral education has a name, it is most properly called *enlightenment*:

*Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding! Is thus the motto of enlightenment. [QE 8:35]*

To enlighten is to encourage free and independent thought, and to foster courage in *autonomy*; to act from self-given principle, without relying on the direction of others. The contrast term “minority” describes what is essential to Kant’s conception of immature character: either a lack of understanding (by which I understand and describe presently as a lack of *culture, civility, or morals*), or else a lack of courage – a weakness of will. So moral education for Kant essentially means two things: becoming cultured through a growing appreciation of *principles*, whether technical, prudential or moral, and a certain “hardening” of character through discipline.<sup>34</sup>

Kant divides the education of human beings into developmental stages. Their division is outlined in several works, but is most fully discussed in the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, a collection of lecture notes and transcriptions of Kant’s University teachings on that subject in Königsberg. There is an unfortunate sense of disorganization to the lectures, which makes the project of putting together a definitive reading of Kant’s thoughts more difficult. There are inconsistencies both in the taxonomy of the stages and in terminology. Robert B. Louden offers a detailed attempt to reconcile some of these issues, and for the most part I follow his lead in my presentation of the stages of education here.

Without immediately committing to any major interpretive assumptions<sup>3</sup> I broadly outline Kant’s account of education as consisting of 5 stages. These are, in progressive order: *care, discipline, cultivation, civilization, and moralization*. Kant segregates care and discipline from the latter three stages, sometimes calling the former a “physical” education and the latter “practical”; sometimes respectively, “negative” and “positive” education. The negative/physical, positive/practical division is confused somewhat though by the fact that Kant sometimes likes to talk about physical education as having both negative and positive parts. Drawing up one account of the taxonomy, we might divide the stages in this way:

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<sup>34</sup> These aims strike me as good ones, though some of Kant’s practical suggestions to these ends turn out somewhat disappointing, and cannot always be taken as seriously as we might like.

**A) Negative/Physical Education**

1. Care (sometimes as pre-education)
2. 2. Discipline and Training

**B) Positive/Practical Education**

4. Cultivation
5. Civilization
6. Moralization

*A) Physical Education*

The first stage of education, “care” or “nurture”, involves primarily the proper way to treat and bring up infants and very young children. Kant seems to assign three goals to this stage. First, to help the child develop his or her “powers” naturally and without harming itself [LP 9:441]. Second, to prevent children from becoming “spoiled” or “soft” [LP 9:459]. Third, to allow, as much as possible in conformity with the latter two, that the child should experience and place value on its own freedom [LP 9:464].

For the most part, and exclusively so in the earliest stages of a child's development, Kant thinks that physical education ought to be *negative*; leaving the child to develop “naturally” with minimal interference. His feeling is that the best course is generally to allow children to express themselves freely, and to intrude on their natural exploration only so that they not harm themselves. So the first stage of education, “care”, is little more than “the precaution of the parents that children not make any harmful use of their powers” [LP 9:441] and he advises that “the first stage of education must be merely negative, i.e., one should not add some new provision to that of nature, but merely leave nature undisturbed” [LP 9:459].

This advice seems generally motivated by two concerns: First, Kant imagines that nature will generally be a more effective teacher than any artificial program we might devise. Children are naturally equipped with what they need to become basically capable human beings. So the use of artificial devices (like using “leading-strings and go-carts” to teach children to walk, “as if any human being could not have walked for lack of instruction” [LP 9:461]) is seen as less effective, and also runs the risk of undermining the child's independence - “the more artificial tools are used, the more dependent on tools the human being becomes” [LP 9:462]. This second worry is part of a broader concern that we should not negatively affect the child’s natural disposition (not yet character, which requires mature reason). So we should see to it that children not become “spoiled”

– by becoming “soft” or “accustomed to ease” or else “mercantile”, “slavish”, “shy”, “servile” etc. He calls protection against these faulty dispositions “hardening”. This is the one case, besides protection from harm, where positive intervention is justified. “The only art permitted in the educational process is that of hardening” [LP 9:459].<sup>35</sup>

“Hardening” is supposed to signify “merely the prevention of ease” [LP 9:464]. Kant considers the practice as analogous to the strengthening of the body [LP 9:464], though it is a lesson whose aim is clearly psychological. Kant's somewhat manipulative purpose is to insure that his children not become “accustomed to having all of their whims fulfilled” [LP 9:460] which undercuts their “natural disposition” – which sounds, in the context of the discussion, something like natural virtue.

To be sure the child does not yet have any concept of morals, but its natural disposition is thereby spoiled in such a way that afterwards very strict punishment must be applied in order to repair that which has been spoiled [ibid].

Among Kant's favorite recommendations with this in mind is that we not attend to the crying child unless we think that they are in physical danger, “The first spoiling occurs when one complies with the despotical will of children by having them get everything by their cries” [LP 9:461], “when they cry merely from indignation, one should let them lie” [LP 9:479]. Kant's practical suggestions in these matters generally need to be taken with some humour. His thinking in any case seems to be that that by responding too readily to the child's demands, she learns to place too much importance on herself and on her immediate inclinations. Later, she will be less able to accept the inevitable frustration of her desires and less able to delay or reject immediate gratification for the sake of other ends “for so long they needed only to call, and everything came to them; they ruled entirely despotically... even grown-up human beings who have been in possession of power for some time find it very difficult to wean themselves suddenly from it.” [LP 9:460].

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<sup>35</sup>Here “education” really has to be qualified, at least as “physical education”, and probably better just as “care”, to keep Kant consistent with his other writing. Especially the repeated flat assertion that education is itself an art: “education is an art” [9:446] “one principle of the art of education...” [9:448]

One theme that deserves special attention as an ostensibly direct reaction to Aristotle's early pedagogy is Kant's (obviously over-strong) declaration that "as a rule all habits are reprehensible" [LP 7:149]. As I mentioned in my previous discussion of Aristotle's theory of virtue, Kant explicitly denies that virtue could be a habit. In his discussion of moral education however, he takes an even stronger position against them, concluding rather shockingly (and, well, ridiculously) that "the child must therefore be prevented from getting accustomed to anything; it must not be allowed to develop any habits" [LP 9:463].

Kant I think makes three distinct criticisms of habits: first is the familiar assertion that virtue cannot be a habit. Put another way, it is clear that an action performed merely from habit cannot have moral worth on Kant's theory. Moral worth is found in maxims. Like action performed from an immediate inclination (which is, after all, only a "habitual desire") acting from habit might conform to duty, but the action lacks moral worth if it is not performed through moral maxims. An agent is moral not simply because he does what is good, but because he does so deliberately, through a principle that is itself moral. Aristotle and Kant agree on this point: that the action, to be moral, needs to be chosen for its own sake, and from the recognition that it expresses something of deep value. So if we accept a mechanistic account of habits, they cannot ground moral worth on either Kant's system or Aristotle's. We should not worry at this point whether Aristotle holds such a view of virtuous action.

Second, Kant asserts that habits directly oppose inner freedom: "the more habits someone has, the less he is free and independent" [LP 9:463]. I will not engage with Kant's theory of freedom directly here, but his thinking seems to be this: for an action to become habit is for it to become in a sense a kind of necessity – "A mechanism of the way of sense rather than of the way of thinking" [MM 6:479]. To act out of habit is thus precisely not to act for reasons. Being so compelled to act on Kant's view not only deprives the actions of moral worth but, and what really amounts to the same, "impairs the freedom of the mind" [LP 7:149].

Finally, Kant asserts that habits oppose inner freedom indirectly, by inhibiting the *experience* and appreciation of free and deliberate action. This is especially worrying, Kant thinks, for young students, in whose education it is the essential task that they be



made to experience freedom<sup>36</sup> [LP 9:464]. Through this experience, the child is supposed to come also to value it and to view freedom with a certain esteem, which will later be cultivated into a similar appreciation of that same freedom in others. As Moran has nicely put it, “it will be easier for the child to understand the duties he has to himself and others if he has had this experience of his own freedom, and, in a certain sense, understands the value of such a capacity” [Moran, page 476].

It is clear that Kant thinks of habits in mechanistic terms in a way that Aristotle did not. He sees in the formation of a habit the threat of a certain way of acting becoming a kind of physical necessity. To act from habit is to carry on in the same way as we have become accustomed to do, and in this there is a certain loss of intention. When a person acts “merely” from habit, their behaviour is neither considered nor deliberate; it is in this way exactly contrary to the way an agent acts when acting on maxims, from reflective self-given principle. Seen in this light, habits are a threat to both reason and freedom in action, and so are directly opposed to that which Kant's ethics holds in highest esteem. This is not the sort of habit that Aristotle had in mind. His habits were not the mechanical repetition of a certain definite act, but a habit of *choice* and more like a practiced judgement and perception with respect to certain spheres of activity. We should have no doubt that Aristotle would agree with Kant when he says that training is not enough, and that children should learn to think, and to do what is good because it is good. Their disagreement here is diminished further by Kant's appreciation that, in fact, virtue does take practice, though perhaps what this practice amounts to is a difference to be left unconsolidated: “[virtue] as *strength* is something we must acquire; and the way to acquire it is to enhance the moral *incentive* (the thought of the law) both by contemplating the dignity of the pure rational law in us and by *practicing* virtue.” [MM 6:397]. For Aristotle practice meant becoming familiar with the actions and feelings associated with the different virtues to develop an attuned perception and judgement, for Kant this seems more a matter of building strength through resistance and through contemplation of the goodness of the law. As we next consider discipline, this kind of formation becomes an explicit task.

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<sup>36</sup> I will discuss this concern in more detail below in consideration of *discipline*

Kant defines the essential aims of discipline as to “change animal nature into human nature” [LP 9:441] through the “restriction of lawless freedom”. Rejecting an apparently familiar dictum that discipline should mean “breaking the will of children” [LP 9:461] Kant emphasizes in his account that the aim should be to encourage the experience of freedom through its lawful restraint. The aim should only to prevent the child from “deviating by means of his animal impulses from his destiny: humanity” [LP 9:442]. What he has primarily in mind is socialization, but he addresses a deeper concern with character as well, including especially the importance that through external correction the student himself should learn to appreciate the importance of inner constraint and strength of will. Discipline ultimately aims to undermine the oppression of pleasure and inclination, teaching the child that she becomes free only through rational constraint.

Kant's insistence that the child should be made to experience its own freedom had already begun to manifest itself in the earliest stages of care. This was explicit in his attempt to prevent children from becoming habituated to any practice, and was also present in other more specific recommendations. (As in his somewhat bizarre concern with swaddling - “Just let a grown human being be wrapped up and then see whether he does not also scream and fall into anxiety and despair.” [LP 9:458].) Indeed, Kant insists that at all stages of education the experience and positive appreciation of freedom should always be present [LP 9:464]. But he is always also concerned with enforcing and bringing the child to understand justified restrictions on that freedom. In caring for infants, the restriction was primarily a matter of physical protection. Concerning discipline, what is essential is rather that the child will learn that its freedom should be restricted by the equal freedom of others.

The child must always feel its freedom; in such a way however, that it not hinder the freedom of others. Therefore it must find resistance. [LP 9:464] From earliest childhood the child must be allowed to be free in all matters (except in those where it might injure himself, as, for example when it grabs an open knife), although not in such a manner that it is in the way of others' freedom; as, for example, if it screams or is merry in too loud a way, it already burdens others. [LP 9:454]

In order to teach this lesson, Kant recommends first and most naturally that children should be educated in public so that they can “feel early the inevitable resistance of society” [LP 9:453] this being the most natural way of becoming accustomed to the relative consequences of social restraint and “savageness” [LP 9:449]. More actively though, Kant wonders how he might teach children constraint while at the same time experiencing their maximal freedom. To this end he considers methods of correction which will most effectively realize what ought to be the moral instructor's maxim: “I shall accustom my pupil to tolerate a constraint of his freedom, and I shall at the same time lead him to make good use of his freedom” [ibid].

Kant imagines two methods of punishment which a parent or teacher might employ as a method of correction and education. A student can be disciplined either *physically* or *morally*. As a rule, Kant favours “moral punishment” – similar to Aristotle’s “shame”, I will argue - to physical punishment, which “must be merely supplements to the insufficiency of the moral punishments” and thinks that nature's own punishments are better still: “*natural* punishment, which the human being brings upon himself by his behaviour – for example, that the child becomes sick when it eats too much” [LP 9:483]. He is generally dismissive of the idea of rewarding children for good behavior, which he thinks makes them selfish and mercenary [LP 9:483].

In Chapter 2, I argued that Aristotle regarded shame as a passion with a kinship to virtue that corrected and led early students to recognize the noble before they were able to attune themselves to it directly. I suggest that Kant advances a similar idea in his conception of moral punishment. Moral punishment is taken as essentially an overt showing of disapproval and withholding of esteem. It is tied essentially to a sense of honour [LP 9:484] and thus effectively involves the student, as Aristotle said, in “a kind of pain at the thought of what might involve us in discredit” [Rhet 1383b15]. So Kant says on this topic,

One punishes *morally* by harming the inclinations to be honoured and loved, which are aids to morality; for example when one makes the child feel ashamed and treats it frostily and coldly. The inclinations to be honoured and loved are to be preserved as far as possible. Therefore this kind of punishment is the best, since it comes to the aid of morality; for example, if a child lies, a look of contempt is punishment enough and is the most appropriate punishment [LP 9:482 - 483].

Some of the language here is already close to Aristotle's. Moral punishment depends on the student's "inclination to be honoured and loved"; for Aristotle, shame is "a fear of dishonour" [EN 1128a0]. Kant calls these inclinations "aids to morality"; and (at least if my arguments above are accepted) Aristotle's shame has its "kinship to virtue". The main benefit to shame on Aristotle's conception of it was that it more directly attuned the student to the baseness of the act itself than would a simple fear of punishment. Kant seems also to have this thinking in mind, warning especially that one's affect when giving correction will importantly suggest to the child the reason for their punishment. "Punishments which are carried out with signs of rage have the wrong effects. Children then regard them merely as consequences of someone else's affect, and they regard themselves as the objects of such an affect" [LP 9:483] rather than seeing themselves culpable for having acted badly.

Kant is suspiciously indirect about what he means by physical punishment. He defines it as either the withholding of something desired (which he says is really a kind of moral punishment) or else involves "the infliction of punishments" [LP 9:483] without going into greater detail of what that means. Even where he seems disapproving of abuse, there is a shadow of acceptance that might be concerning "To make children express thanks when they have been punished and to make them kiss their parents' hands and so forth is foolish and makes the children slavish" [LP 9:483]. At his most direct he at one point says that ultimately "to talk to children about duty is futile labor. In the end they regard duty as something the transgression of which is followed by the rod" [LP 9:484]. This may be one more place where the philosopher fails to live up to his potential. Though he saw a place for this sort of punishment, Kant in any event clearly regards physical punishment as ineffective and only to be used as a last resort. "If moral punishments do not help any more at all and one proceeds to physical punishment, this will no longer form a good character. However, at the beginning physical constraint must take the place of reflection, which is lacking in children." He goes on to insist that physical punishments should always be understood by the child to be for the sake of their improvement, and that they should never be carried out in anger [LP 9:483-484].

Kant outlines three goals as essential to early education. First, as noted, the child primarily should be allowed to experience its maximal freedom consistent with the freedom of others. It should be encouraged to internalize this appreciation of freedom itself generally as an object of value and of respect [LP 9:454]. Second, “the child must be shown that it can only reach its goals by letting others also reach theirs” that is it should learn that sociability is also *prudent*, and that his greatest happiness is most consistent with allowing the freedom of others to pursue that same end [LP 9:454]. I will argue below that this attitude will play a role in Kant’s essentially communal conception of the highest end. And third, “one must prove to it that restraint is put on it in order that it be led to the use of its own freedom, that it is cultivated so that it may one day be free... so that it need not depend on the care of others” [LP 9:454-455]. The child must come to recognize that it is only through self-constraint that it can become fully independent, as a productive and happy member of society. Kant sees this as the most difficult task of early education, and as both a prudent measure – as self-discipline in combating inclination against the counsels of prudence – and as a moral one as a pre-condition for virtue as strength of will.

### *B) Practical Education*

“Physical education”, as the care and discipline of young students, was primarily *negative* and preliminary to practical education, whose goals are finally a real instruction and the *positive* part of learning. Practical education has three stages, *cultivation*, *civilization*, and finally, *moralization*.

“Cultivation” describes generally what we would think of as education in the conventional sense. It includes the teaching and instruction required in becoming *skillful*; understood as the ability to cause the means to whatever ends we might set for ourselves. It includes *scholastic-mechanical formation* or instruction, and our learning of the human arts, sciences, and techniques. Kant also refers to this as becoming cultured.

Culture includes instruction and teaching. It is the procurement of skillfulness. The latter is the possession of a faculty which is sufficient for the carrying out of whatever purpose. Thus skillfulness determines no ends at all, but leaves this to the later circumstances... Because of the multitude of purposes, skillfulness becomes, as it were, infinite [LP 9:449-450].

Paralleling the hypothetical *imperatives of skill* that were described in the Groundwork, cultivation presupposes no particular end or purpose but the pursuit of ability itself and for its own sake. Because there are infinite purposes that we might possibly pursue, there is no limit to ways of being skillful, or what we might learn through culture.

Kant tells us that “Everything in education depends on establishing the right principles throughout and making them comprehensible and acceptable to children” [LP 9:493]. The essential purpose at this stage in education is that the student should learn basic *instrumental reasoning*; she should learn to understand basic principles of utility and how to act on them.

This level of reasoning is still only shallow. “Cultivation”, like Aristotle’s “cleverness”, says nothing yet about which ends to pursue. Thinking only in terms of skill, a person could become cultured without presupposing that they be either prudent or moral. Kant uses the term culture both broadly and narrowly. Narrowly, it refers to the development of skillfulness and the basic instrumental reasoning which we encourage through cultivation, but broadly it also includes “a certain kind of culture which is called *civilization*” [LP 9:450]. “Civilization” is learning to be prudent, and especially learning to live prudently in society with other human beings. So Kant describes it:

It must be seen that the human being becomes *prudent* also, well suited for human society, popular and influential. This requires a certain form of culture, which is called *civilizing*. Its prerequisites are manners, good behaviour and a certain prudence in virtue of which one is able to use all human beings for one's own final purposes [LP 9:450].

It might seem problematic that Kant would recommend that we learn “to use all human beings” for our purposes, but as a prudent and not a moral lesson, it is not really surprising. Certainly, there are moral and immoral ways of using others, but (barring considerations of long term strategy) this involves applying a different standard than prudence as such. And besides this, the categorical imperative only requires that we not treat human beings *merely* as a means, but as also ends in themselves; it is not impermissible to pursue our ends through others, so long as we also respect them. What is really captured here is the idea that we learn to be social, to cultivate manners and customs that allow us to carry on well and be successful in our local setting. Prudence

presupposes skillfulness, but more than this means “the faculty of using one’s skills in a socially effective manner” [LP 9:455].

As already noted, there is a not insignificant tension in making the transition from culture and prudence to the final stage of moral education itself. We come to know culture and skill, societal norms, happiness and worldly prudence empirically, through experience. Our capacity for morality is on the other hand supposed to be innate to rational nature; something that we can come to know through reflection alone. How then does Kant account for moralization?

Although Kant's presentation of the different stages of education generally suggests a definite progression (so that civilization presupposes culture and morality, civilization) this is not always altogether the case. Moral education has in fact already begun long before we have become fully cultured and civilized, and is apparently involved in some way at each stage of learning. So, for example Kant says that “reverence and respect for the rights of human beings must be instilled into the child at a very early age, and one must carefully see to it that the child puts these into practice” [LP 9:489].

In caring for infants and young children, the parent insures against habits which run contrary to duty, and instills in the child an appreciation for its own freedom. This appreciation and the minimization of (at least bad) habits form a foundation for an eventual *good disposition*; training the child to act deliberately rather than mechanically and to rebel against constraint. Through discipline, the student learns however that in society with others, the freedom which she values and the things which she desires can only be fully realized in concert with an equal consideration for the freedom of others. She learns to constrain *herself* when necessary, and acquires the strength of will necessary to such constraint; which strength, when later combined with a mature judgement, is essential to virtue.

In these early stages, the aims related to character seem generally only to make doing one's duty easier; more natural. This seems to be the heart of Aristotle's account as well. As Kant disciplines and cares for his young student, Aristotle is meanwhile at this stage encouraging the early development of good habits, so the student gets used to acting rightly. He agrees with Kant as well that the student at this stage has an

underdeveloped faculty of judgement and perception, and needs to rely on a different standard for guidance. Before the development of personal moral judgement is really possible, Aristotle encourages a healthy sense of honour and shame as early escorts towards recognizing what is noble; Kant similarly recommends that we encourage the feelings of honour and love as conducive to a moral disposition in later life. Though they cannot ultimately ground a truly moral maxim (as only respect can) they have, as also Aristotle thought, a kinship to virtue, and help in its cultivation.

*Moralization* is also treated by Kant as a distinct and final stage in education. This education begins with a moral *catechism*, though not in the sense of indoctrination. Rather, it consists in exactly the sort of Socratic questioning that Kant said was all that would be required to lead the student to recognize the moral law [G 4:404]. A “fragment” of one such catechism is offered at the close of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where the direction is that the teacher should, through pointed questioning, “elicit from his pupil’s reason... what he wants to teach him” [MM 6:480]. In the discussion that follows, the teacher does seem to be somewhat leading, but the point is taken. Kant’s vision of catechism aims at drawing out basic moral principles, laws innate to reason waiting only to be specified.

Following catechism in coming to basic principles, Kant encourages educators to discuss particular practical questions and problems, and to look to historic examples of moral lives and acts. He imagines such would be trading on a “propensity of reason to enter with pleasure upon even the most subtle examination of the practical questions put to them” in order to sharpen judgement and to “activate their pupils’ appraisal” of the relative moral worth and importance of the various lives and acts. This sort of deliberation about applying principles to cases “would make a good foundation for uprightness in the future conduct of life” [MM 5:154 - 5:155]. So Kant thinks that a certain good can come from classroom discussion, and that this (though not likely a substitute for experience) will give us a foundation in moral deliberation which will have real practical worth.



## II. Moral Education and the Highest Good

I said in the beginning of this chapter that Moran's tension could be partially resolved by considering Kant's idiosyncratic conception of virtue as a practiced and disciplined inner strength to act from duty, but that a fuller answer would be given in the demonstration of Kant's view that moral education plays an essential role in contribution to *the highest good*. In this final section I argue to that conclusion. "The highest good" is, in a sense, Kant's answer to the question to which Aristotle had answered, "*eudaimonia*". It is the highest practical good that can be conceived as a possible object of human action.

Kant begins his discussion of the highest good by distinguishing the concept of the moral law as the formal determining *ground* of practical reason (the will), from "the whole object of practical reason" that is the highest good [CPR 5:109]. Practical reasoning has in all cases both an object and a determining ground. The object of the will is the *end*, and the determining ground is either *material* (the same as the end) or else *formal* (only the law).

That the will must have the law and not a material end as its ultimate determining ground and also have moral worth is Kant's essential tenet; the good will is good because it wills from respect for the moral law (seen in the various subjective formulations of that respect, *FUL, FH, FA*), not in its final purpose or expected consequence [G 4:400]. Here again Kant reminds us that it is essential that our respect for moral law must be our final reason (ground) for pursuing the highest end; it must not be the case that our reason for following the law is to procure the good [CPR 5:109]. Kant continues then to point out that the concept of a "highest good" is ambiguous. He supposes that the highest good could refer to two distinct concepts: a *supreme* good, or a *complete* good [CPR 5:110 – 5:111].

The *supreme* good is unconditionally good or good without qualification; and is subordinate to no other good.

The *complete* good is one such that it is "not part of a still greater whole of the same kind"; and that further will be without question, "the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings" [ibid]

Kant began the *Groundwork* by telling us that only the good will was good without qualification, that is, the supreme good. Asserting also that all other goods were

only so on condition of their association with the good will [G 4:393]. In his discussion of the highest good, the supreme good is identified with *virtue*. I take this as evidence that Kant identified character directly with the will and its good condition as full virtue – being both will power and disposition to act on moral maxims.<sup>37</sup>

The good will; that is, good character, or *virtue*, is the supreme good. It alone is good without qualification and it is on condition of its possession that all else can be called good. Virtue, however, is not the highest good in the sense of being *complete*, and he says, “for this, happiness is also required”. The complete good is virtue and happiness together; and Kant determines to apply the name of *highest good* to this unity. So finally the highest good is defined for the individual as “virtue and happiness together”, but he also adds that we can conceive of the highest good being of a *possible world*, and this would be defined as a kind of perfect justice – as “happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality” [CPR 5:111].

These conceptions of the highest good suggest some necessary connection between virtue and happiness. Kant rejects the idea that this connection could be logical or *analytic*; one of identity. The pursuit of happiness is not identical with virtue (no bindingness, no universality); and the possession of virtue is not identical with being happy (since happiness is subjective and so not a determine concept, though morality is). Thus their connection, he concludes must be *synthetic*, or “real” – that is, as cause and effect [CPR 5:111-5:113]. They must be! Except, this is impossible. As a “cause” of virtue, the pursuit of happiness is unfit. Virtue’s “cause” if it has one is the moral worth of our maxims, and prudence gives no moral worth to maxims. Virtue likewise cannot guarantee happiness as an effect: the universe is indifferent, and people are cruel and unkind.

To this problem, *the antinomy of practical reason*, Kant proposes two solutions. In the Critique of Practical Reason, his suggestion is religious: virtue doesn’t guarantee happiness in this life, but this is not to say that it is inconceivable that it might guarantee it in some other reality. We of course can’t know any reality but this one, so we could only hold the highest end before us as an ideal supported by faith [CPR 5:114-5:115]. He

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<sup>37</sup>This I think is consistent with his opening words – “talents...temperament...can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will... whose distinctive constitution is called *character*, is not good” [4:393]

seemingly abandons this solution in later works, where it is replaced by a secular conception of the highest good as a kind of cosmopolitan end, [REL 6:95 - 6:100] though of course still only as the highest object and not the ultimate determining ground of the will.

In both cases, it is clear that the individual highest good can only be guaranteed on the condition of enjoying the highest good of a possible world – at first an only mystical possibility, but finally an end conceivably realized in this lifetime, under conditions of mutual respect – the realization of a kind of kingdom of ends on earth. And it is in the context of this second conception of the highest good as a communal end that moral education has its ultimate place. Moral education aims, more so than at the moralization of the individual, at the moralization of the human species: an end of history that we have not yet realized. “We live in a time of disciplinary training, culture, and civilization, but not by any means in a time of moralization” [LP 9:451].

[We] human beings are... in the second grade of progress to perfection, namely cultivated and civilized, but not moralized. We have the highest grade of culture that we can possess without morality; civilization also has [reached] its maximum. The need in both will eventually force moralization, namely through education, a political constitution, and religion.” [15:641; Louden, pg. 42]

Moran argues that

“Kant's notion of the highest good suggests that we have a duty to strive towards a kind of realm of ends... If we have a duty that goes beyond simply perfecting ourselves morally and extends, rather to working toward this kind of community, we must necessarily ask ourselves what kinds of actions will help bring about this end of ours” [Moran, 483].

On one reading, this seems like the kind of question Kant wouldn't want us to be asking. The highest good might be the logical determination we could hope for in willing from duty – the world that might be, if only duty were universally the determining ground of each person's will – but we should not take on the nearly utilitarian aim of directly promoting the highest end as a desired state of affairs. Still, it would be unfair to pin that view on Moran. Although she prefers a “new duty” model for taking the highest good seriously, she is careful to put the point gently, “Another feature of the later, 'immanent' [not the spiritual] model of the highest good is that it *does* add a duty – or at least a new

and more urgent way of looking at the duties that we already have” [Moran, 482]. My sense is that only this second way of considering the highest end is available to us, especially if we are considering moral education as Moran does [ibid], as an institution to realize the highest end as a goal.

One reason to think this is right is to reiterate Kant’s insistence that we not make the object of practical reason our will’s determining ground. We act from respect for law, and the highest end is promoted through that lawful action. We do not will this end directly, taken as the ground of action. Instead, the sense is that when we choose to act from duty, we also choose to live in this sort of world. And these are essentially two ways of considering the same choice.

With regards to duties of education themselves, we should recall Kant's assertion that although we have duties to our own moral perfection, we could not have any duty to make the moral perfection of others an end of our own. “It is a contradiction for me to make another's *perfection* my end and consider myself under obligation to promote this” [MM 6:386]. We have a duty to perfect ourselves, but not to perfect others; that is not something that is in our hands to do. This limitation might also prompt a stronger worry, if we see it as another impediment to the very possibility of moral education on Kant's account. While I think the limitation on perfecting others is a good reason not to take moral education as a *new duty* in service of the highest end, I think moral education remains possible and that it does serve the highest end in another way.

Two replies can be brought against the stronger worry: First, there is a difference between perfecting others and encouraging them to perfect themselves or creating conditions favorable to that end. The moral education Kant prescribes could do both of these without claiming to have as its aim the moral perfection of his students, which only they can ultimately realize. Kant’s instructions throughout the *Pedagogy* aim at leading the student to morality, but not at making him moral. This cannot be guaranteed. It is finally up to him, and so cannot be our duty. But we can create conditions favorable to his making that decision – training him in self-discipline and leading him to appreciate the worth of freedom.

Second, there is a difference between having a duty to do something, and recognizing that it has merit. We might recognize the merit in encouraging others towards

morality without claiming a strict duty for ourselves to do so. Finally, and apologies for the spin, but we might think that Kant's theory of moral education is really only education that is itself moral. Each stage is characterized throughout with the emphasis that we lead but do not force, instruct but do not train, do not indoctrinate but encourage free thought, and generally allow students as much as possible to learn and to see for themselves. All of this is consistent with Kant's repeated insistence that we treat humanity with, negatively, respect (by encouraging free expression and thought, and by making no attempts at training or indoctrination), and also positively, *meritoriously*, as an end to be promoted by contributing to the happiness of others through instruction within the bounds of respect.

Ultimately then, I would suggest that the duty to educate others is an indirect extension of our wide duty to promote their happiness, [MM 6:388] not a direct duty towards the perfection of their character. This former duty is already prescribed by the Formula of Humanity, which requires that we treat humanity with respect and also positively as an end in itself. So there is no special duty beyond this to promote the highest end, whose *completeness* condition through the addition of happiness is beyond our control [CPR 5:111- 5:113]. Trying to directly promote this result would be not only futile, but without the moral worth that comes from acting from respect alone. We have duties to ourselves and others, acting through which we are virtuous, and so satisfy that supreme part of the highest good in ourselves that is within our control.

Although individual virtue on this final account makes us worthy of being happy, we cannot guarantee that every individual will receive the happiness they deserve. As with Aristotle, misfortune sometimes prevents us from “getting our due”. There will always be good people to be pitied (and helped). Kant is optimistic however that by each of us striving towards our own moral perfection, and so at the same time mutually towards a harmony of ends,

No doubt this is a somewhat utopian vision. This is what Kant imagines life would be like under mutual respect for the moral law. This is the highest end, and the whole object of practical reason.

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