11-10-1997

The Reemergence of Kantian Ethics: Have We Adequately Responded to Hegel's Objections?

Gwen C. Thompson
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Thompson, Gwen C., "The Reemergence of Kantian Ethics: Have We Adequately Responded to Hegel's Objections?" (1997). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 2413.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.2410>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Gwen C. Thompson for the Master of Science in Political Science were presented November 10, 1997, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

Craig Carr, Chair

Gary Scott

Sorca O'Connor
Representative of the Office of Graduate Studies

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL:

Gary Scott, Chair
Department of Political Science

ACCEPTED FOR PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY BY THE LIBRARY

by ✓

on

Jan. 20, 1998

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Gwen C. Thompson for the Master of Science in Political Science presented November 10, 1997.

Title: The Reemergence of Kantian Ethics: Have We Adequately Responded to Hegel's Objections?

The philosophies of Kant and Hegel have experienced a renaissance for the past thirty years, and a debate continues as to whether Hegel's objections to Kant's moral philosophy are sound, and/or whether Hegel's ethics are an improvement on Kant's. This debate takes many forms, and most recently, theorists have been interested in measuring Hegel's objections against contemporary theories following in the Kantian tradition. 'Critics,' (theorists defending Hegel's moral point of view) suggests such reconstructed theories leave themselves open to identical criticisms Hegel wielded at Kant almost 200 years ago. 'Defenders,' (theorists supporting Kant's moral philosophy, or a revised version) reply in one of two ways. They either suggest that Hegel's criticisms of Kant are unwarranted, meaning Hegel misinterprets Kant's ideas and/or purposes; or, they maintain that Kant's ethics are vulnerable to Hegel's objections, however some newer version of Kant's ethics is not because it has been purged of those Kantian elements which Hegel attacks. Clearly, both views render Hegel's critique of Kant obsolete. So, why are we

witnessing such an aggressive resurgence of Hegelian-styled arguments in the contemporary literature?

In seeking to answer this question, this thesis reconsiders Hegel's actual critique of Kant. In this way, the thesis falls into a specific category of political philosophy. It is a study in the 'history of ideas.' Rather than considering the question of whether contemporary Critics or Defenders have the better argument concerning the merit of reconstructed Kantian theories, I intend to re-evaluate the soundness of Hegel's objections to Kantian ethics.

Kant's moral and political thought on the proper ordering of society is deeply embedded in the pluralist democracies of the western world. As such, those Kantian ideas/elements should be defensible against Hegelian criticisms.

Following an in-depth consideration of Hegel's critique of Kant, I argue that whereas Hegel accurately identifies weaknesses in the system of Kant's moral philosophy, his critique does not successfully achieve its goal. It does not show that Kant's ethical theory is an inadequate prescription for the rational agent seeking to act morally. Rather, it serves as a warning of the dangers inherent in democratic liberal theory.

**THE REEMERGENCE OF KANTIAN ETHICS:
HAVE WE ADEQUATELY RESPONDED TO HEGEL'S OBJECTIONS?**

**by
GWEN C. THOMPSON**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**Portland State University
1997**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations.....	iii
1. Introduction.....	1
1 - The Project.....	1
2 - The Method.....	5
2. Kant's Moral Point of view.....	10
1 - Clarification of the Supreme Principle of	11
2 - Justification of the Supreme Principle of Morality.....	27
3 - Application - Kant's Political Philosophy.....	34
4 - Conclusion.....	43
3. Hegel's Moral Point of View.....	44
1 - The Background.....	44
2 - Hegel's Ethical Thought.....	46
3 - Self-Actualization.....	50
4 - The Idea of Spirit.....	53
5 - Absolute Freedom.....	56
6 - Sittlichkeit and Moralitat.....	58
7 - Conclusion.....	63
4. The Adequacy of Hegel's Critique.....	65
1 - The Question of Content.....	66
2 - The Kantian Agent (On The Possibility of Heteronomy.....	69
3 - The Hegelian Agent vs The Normativity of Morality.....	72
4 - Conclusion.....	76
Bibliography.....	79

ABBREVIATIONS

Kant's Works

- CPR* Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Smith, Indianapolis, 1956.
- GMM* Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (and What Is Enlightenment?) trans. Lewis White Beck, New York, 1959.
- CPrR* The Critique of Practical Reason, trans. Robert P. Gwinn, Chicago, 1990.
- MM* The Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Mary Gregor, New York, 1991.

Hegel's Works

- PR* Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford, 1942.
- PS* Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford, 1977.

1

Introduction

1. THE PROJECT

This is a work in political philosophy which considers Hegel's critique of Kant. The philosophies of Kant and Hegel have experienced a renaissance for the past thirty years, and a debate continues as to whether Hegel's objections to Kant's moral philosophy are sound, and/or whether Hegel's ethics are an improvement on Kant's. Indeed, this debate takes many forms, and most recently, theorists have been interested in measuring Hegel's objections against contemporary theories following in the Kantian tradition. 'Critics,' (as I shall refer to theorists defending Hegel's moral point of view against Kant's) suggest such reconstructed theories leave themselves open to the identical criticisms which Hegel wielded at Kant almost 200 years ago. 'Defenders,' (theorists supporting Kant's moral philosophy, or a revised version) reply in one of two ways. They either suggest that Hegel's criticisms of Kant are unwarranted, meaning Hegel misinterprets Kant's ideas and/or purposes; or, they maintain that Kant's ethics are vulnerable to Hegel's objections, however some newer version of Kant's ethics is not vulnerable to Hegel's objections because it has been purged of those Kantian elements which

Hegel attacks. Clearly, both views render Hegel's critique of Kant obsolete. So, why are we witnessing such an aggressive resurgence of Hegelian-styled arguments in the contemporary literature?

In seeking to answer this question, this thesis reconsiders Hegel's actual critique of Kant. In this way, the thesis falls into a specific category of political philosophy. It is a study in 'the history of political ideas.' Rather than considering the question of whether contemporary Critics or Defenders have the better argument concerning the merit of reconstructed Kantian theories, I intend to re-evaluate the soundness of Hegel's objections to Kantian ethics.

Kant's moral and political thought on the proper ordering of society is deeply embedded in the pluralist democracies of the western world. As such, those Kantian ideas/elements should be defensible against Hegelian criticisms. Indeed, I intend to argue that whereas Hegel accurately identifies weaknesses in the system of Kant's moral philosophy, his critique does not successfully achieve its goal. It does not show that Kant's ethical theory is an inadequate prescription for the rational agent seeking to act morally. I claim here: 1) Kant develops a remarkable, although imperfect, ethical theory which best serves as the dominant foundation upon which our system of Right, (or what is a matter of justice) is based, 2) Hegel's objections are very narrow and 3) Hegel fails to recommend an adequate alternative theory. As Wood suggests, Hegel's insistence that the 'state' should serve as the source from which moral duties arise runs counter to the sentiments of democratic

society then and now.¹ And, as Riley argues, Hegel simply fails to prove that the 'state' is a fit source for the derivation of a system of right; i.e., that *Sittlichkeit* is superior to *Moralität*.² Unquestionably, Hegel's ethics are not an improvement on Kant's, and Hegel's criticisms have been adequately responded to.

In order to clarify this further, I temporarily forgo a discussion of the thesis' outline and offer here a brief background to 'Hegel's critique of Kant.'

The Background

In several key works dating @ 1802 - 1821, Hegel challenges Kant's ethical theory on suggesting that Kant's concept of the person and the subject are abstractions. They are incomplete or one-sided images of the individual human self, and this is overcome only when individuals are considered in relation to 'ethical life,' (or *Sittlichkeit*). Further, Hegel associates Kant's ethics with *Moralität* (or 'morality,' as opposed to *Sittlichkeit*) where obligation is determined not by something which actually exist, but rather by that which ought to exist (something which we should all seek to make a reality, whether or not its actual achievement is possible). Hegel argues that with *Moralität* the gap between what *ought* to be and

¹ Allen Wood. Hegel's Ethical Thought. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990) p. 260

² Riley suggests, "Hegel is able to exhibit a concrete manifestation of reason in the form of an ethical community that will provide concrete duties. But it is doubtful, first, whether the state is a fit object for the "unconditioned self-determination of the will," to use Hegel's own phrase, and second, whether ethical duties will always be right, unless they are defined as necessarily right. So, it is hard to see how one is better off with Hegel than with Kant, particularly in view of the fact that Kant never pits morality against the state..." Patrick Riley. Will and Political Legitimacy. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 184.

what *is* (between *Sollen* and *Sein*) can never be closed, and he is very dissatisfied with this. He views Kant's elevation of autonomy,³ to a first order principle which is prior to the state, a grave misjudgment. And, his goal is to reverse Kant's ordering of these.

Indeed, as Wood suggests, it is in Hegel's conception of ethical life that he asserts the primacy of social life over the individual. He argues that ethical life is more concrete than abstract right and morality not because it emphasizes the collective over the individual, but because the ethical image of the individual is a more concrete one. It addresses every side of the individual self, and situates the self in a living social order.⁴ Wood suggests Hegel's ethical thought has an outward, social orientation. Its theory of personal morality stresses particular situations and social relationships, and Hegel's handling of these matters might well point us in quite a different direction from some standard liberal theories of individual freedom.⁵

As suggested earlier, contemporary theorists disagree regarding the soundness of Hegel's critique of Kant, and this thesis serves as an inquiry into the

³ Wick notes that autonomy is defined as "freedom under self-imposed law, according to which each person freely submits to self-discipline under the same rules he would prescribe for others, so that everyone would act as a law unto himself, or "autonomously," and yet also in cooperative harmony with everybody else." Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. Translated by James W. Ellington, Introduction: Warner A. Wick (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) p. xv.

⁴ Allen Wood. Hegel's Ethical Thought. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990) p. 260.

adequacy of Hegel's objections. In this undertaking, Kant and Hegel's moral and political philosophy are discussed concurrently as moral philosophy is treated as the normative ground for practical philosophy (positive law, ethics, and justice.)⁶ Also, this work is critical rather than speculative, and conceptual rather than empirical. Instead of trying to formulate a political theory, I will demonstrate that the Hegelian claim that Kant's ethical theory is vulnerable to Hegel's charge that it is an 'abstract universalism,' and leads to tautological judgments, does not prove Kant's thought to be irrational, or inadequate. It can still serve as the normative ground for theories of justice (or 'right'). To clarify this further, I now describe my method of analysis.

2. THE METHOD

My analysis begins in chapter two with a synopsis of Kant's moral world view. It is imperative that Kant's philosophy be properly interpreted here, so as to adequately measure Hegel's charge. In chapter three, I offer a synopsis of Hegel's moral world view. Here, I am particularly interested in interpreting Hegel's ethical thought as it relates to Kant, and as it relates to Hegel's practical philosophy. Indeed, as we find with Kant, Hegel's ethical thought serves as the basis for his

⁵ Ibid., p. 260.

⁶ As Kymlicka notes, one traditional aim of political philosophy was to find coherent and comprehensive rules for deciding between conflicting political values. ... And, "political philosophy, ... is a matter of moral argument, and moral argument is a matter of appeal to our considered convictions." Will Kymlicka. Contemporary Political Philosophy. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) pgs. 3 and 5.

political philosophy, i.e., his ideas on the proper ordering of society. In the fourth chapter I consider the adequacy of Hegel's critique of Kant. The criticisms which Hegel leveled against Kant's ethical theory are many, but they are also very closely related. For this reason, I single out the one which I find the most trenchant. This allows me to provide the proper depth of analysis required, while keeping the project to a manageable size, and avoiding redundancy of argument. The charge to which I refer is often titled the 'emptiness charge,' or 'the impotence of the mere ought.' Here, Hegel objects to the abstract universalism and the formalism of the Kantian system. As Hegel sees it, the moral principle of the categorical imperative⁷ requires that the moral agent abstract from the concrete content of duties and maxims, and therefore, its application necessarily leads to tautological judgments.⁸ Hegel adamantly expresses this concern in the Preface of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, stating (rather sarcastically) that Kant "maintains that such monotony and abstract universality are the Absolute, and we are assured that dissatisfaction with it indicates the inability to master the absolute standpoint and to keep hold of it.

⁷ An ethic is considered formal, or universalist, if it consist of an 'imperative' or 'principle of justification' which discriminates between valid and invalid norms in terms of their universalizability. For Kant this is offered in the form of the categorical imperative. As Baynes shows, in both Kant's moral and political theory, the criterion of legitimacy is related to a concept of practical reason that is normative in character. He sought to derive the 'supreme moral principle' (or categorical imperative) from an analysis of the structure of pure practical reason. And, the idea of the social contract, or notion that laws are legitimate only to the extent that they could receive the consent of citizens regarded as free and equal moral persons, is also introduced as an idea of pure practical reason. Kenneth Baynes, *The Normative Grounds of Social Criticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁸ G.W.F. Hegel. *Natural Law*. trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 76. (Quoted in: Jurgen Habermas, "*Morality and Ethical Life*." Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.321)

Time was when the bare possibility of imagining something differently was sufficient to refute the idea, and this bare possibility, this general thought, also had the entire positive value of an actual cognition."⁹ Hegel finds that the categorical imperative enjoins separating the universal from the particular. He argues that in this case, a judgment considered valid in terms of that principle necessarily remains external to individual cases and insensitive to the particular context of a problem in need of a solution.¹⁰ Further, “.. the content of the maxim remains what it is, a specification or singularity, and the universality conferred on it by its reception into the form is thus a merely analytic unity. And when the unity conferred on it is expressed in a sentence purely as it is, that sentence is analytic and tautological.”¹¹ Again, Hegel argues that since the categorical imperative enjoins a strict separation of ‘is’ from ‘ought,’ it necessarily fails to answer the question of how moral insight can be realized in practice.¹² Or, as Riley explains, Hegel rejects Kant’s ethic of ‘duty for duty’s sake’ and not for the sake of some real content, and insist as a

⁹ Hegel argues, “This monochromatic character of the schema and its lifeless determinations, this absolute identity, and the transition from one to the other, are all equally products of the lifeless Understanding and external cognition.” G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 9.

¹⁰ Jurgen Habermas, “*Morality and Ethical Life*.” Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.321.

¹¹ Ibid., p.321.

¹² Ibid., p.321. Habermas, in discussing this third critique, suggests: “Kant is vulnerable to the objection that his ethics lacks practical impact because it dichotomizes duty and inclination, reason and sense experience.” However, Habermas, concerned that his own theory should be similarly criticized, argues that the same cannot be said of his theory, for it discards the Kantian theory of the two realms.

result we never know what is in itself good “but only that some action would contradict a content that is no content.”¹³

It is a quite fair assessment of Hegel’s thought to suggest that it is very complex, as we will see in chapter three. Indeed, whereas it may now be clear that Hegel’s most trenchant charge results from his insistence that ethics be based on real life as opposed to purely abstracted ideals, its content must reflect upon that which is the ‘Absolute’ - meaning, nature itself, and ethics must never separate nature from morality, the universal from the particular, or the right from the good, this is admittedly a rather simplistic rendering of Hegel analysis. In fact, the literature contains many different versions of Hegel’s charges, each controversial.¹⁴ Therefore, it should be noted that the approach I take to understanding Hegel (referred to by Beiser as the ‘modern-positivistic approach’) basically discards much of his metaphysics, and is concerned mostly with his philosophical (moral and political) significance.¹⁵ Further, this final stage of the thesis (chapter four) attempts to bring together Kant’s and Hegel’s arguments on the necessary foundations of morality, eliminating critical elements of their thought which remains important to contemporary political theory, and to show that Hegel simply loses the battle to prove Kant’s ethics are ‘contentless.’ Whereas we can certainly

¹³ Patrick Riley. Will and Political Legitimacy. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) pg. 184.

¹⁴ As Beiser notes, few thinkers in the history of philosophy are more controversial than Hegel. Not only contemporary philosophers have difficulty coming to terms with Hegel’s [writings]: Hegel scholars also remain deeply divided over its status and worth. Frederick Beiser. The Cambridge Companion to Hegel. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 2.

appreciate Hegel's critique of the abstract universalism in Kant's thought (and these features are difficult to justify) the best defense of the Kantian position has always been, and remains to be, a review of that which constitutes its 'opposite'- or, a more 'Hegelian' prescription.

Ronald Beiner points out that the fate of grand philosophical edifices is that the elaborate articulations binding their various parts are eventually dissolved and those now-detached elements appropriated according to the interests of the times.¹⁶ Considering Beiner's comments, both Kant's and Hegel's philosophy seem to have fared very well. (Apparently, only fifty years ago the influence of Kant's moral and political philosophy extended scarcely further than a few German professors and their disciples.)¹⁷ Today, we are witnessing an enormous tribute to their thought. The current debate, recognizing our dominant political theory as 'Kantian liberalism,' is concerned with its deontology (the prioritization of 'right,' or what is a matter of justice, over the good.) However, as I claim here, a reconsideration of Hegel's critique of Kant does not resolve this concern.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁶ Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.1.

¹⁷ W.A. Galston, "*What Is Living and What is Dead in Kant's Practical Philosophy?*" Ibid., Beiner and Booth, p. 207.

Kant's Moral Point of View

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*” KANT

In examining history, Kant found that the moral philosophers preceding him had failed to account for our most basic moral concepts. What was needed was to make explicit what is present in “common sense” moral knowledge. Indeed, Kant associated the lack of success of moral philosophers preceding him to their failure to recognize these three tasks:

- 1) to clarify “the supreme principle of morality,” the principle on which a rational agent is thought to act insofar as his action is morally good,¹⁸
- 2) to justify this principle, that is to show that it actually holds for or is binding upon imperfectly rational agents such as human beings; and
- 3) to apply this principle in a “metaphysics of morals,” so as to obtain “the whole system” of human duties.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kant characterizes persons as being both “reasonable” and “rational” in a full-bodied conception, “*Vernunftig*.” As Rawls explains, this German term can have the broad sense of “reasonable” as well as the narrower sense of “rational,” as we use these terms. Further, “It is useful, then, to use “reasonable” and “rational” as handy terms to mark the distinction that Kant makes between two forms of practical reason, pure and empirical.” John Rawls, “*Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*,” *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 296.

Also, as Hoffe notes, the important point here is that Kant finds that only rational beings have the capacity of acting according to conceptions of laws, and thus morally. Outfried Hoffe. *Immanuel Kant*. (New York: State University Press, 1992) p. 170.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, translated with an introduction by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.1.

In taking up these tasks himself, Kant is faced with tremendous challenges, evidence of which is witnessed in his many works.²⁰ Whether or not he succeeds at these continues to be debated. However, as many of his basic conclusions on ethics presently serve as normative grounds for contemporary liberal democratic political thought (i.e., the self is today viewed predominately as an ‘autonomous’-self-legislating- individual, worthy of equal concern and respect), I am inclined to view this as the type of success Kant sought.

1. CLARIFICATION OF THE SUPREME PRINCIPAL OF MORALITY

In the *GMM*, Kant explores the possibility of morality, and concludes that pure practical reason can yield moral knowledge. Since he assumes human beings recognize duties prescribed by moral laws, he investigates, first, the manner of “willing” that distinguishes a morally good action from a merely lawful one and, second, what is presupposed by the principle prescribing this sort of volition.²¹ Therefore, as Beck shows,

²⁰ There is no simple, short or authoritative statement of Kant’s ethical theory as a whole. (Kant, like Hegel, issues several encyclopedic works in order to explicate his moral point of view.) The two works which are commonly used for that purpose, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785 (hereafter *GMM*), and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788 (hereafter *CPrR*), are not well suited for it as they form an incomplete picture. Both of these works are important, however, as it is here that Kant introduces his key analytical concepts, pure practical reason and the categorical imperative. However, his substantive moral doctrine (or what many philosophers today refer to as “normative ethics”) was expounded primarily in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, 1797 (hereafter *MM*). It is often suggested that this portion of Kant’s moral philosophy is not generally known, or is known in sketchy and distorted forms, due, as far as the English speaking world is concerned, to the lack of available translations of the *MM*, and/or the fact that many theorists mistake the *GMM* to be Kant’s definitive work in moral philosophy. The *GMM*, the first work of his Critical philosophy, is offered as a preliminary to the eventual *MM*. Yet, it is much more than an introduction to Kant’s ideas on morality, or a precursor to the *MM*. It is a major work in moral philosophy in its own right, and contains in-depth reviews of many of the critical concepts. As such, I rely on this work a great deal here.

²¹ Thinking in terms of separate faculties of the mind, Kant attributes the initiation of action to the will, responding to desires. J. B. Schneewind, “*Autonomy, obligation and virtue: An overview of*

“The [*GMM*] is intended for the general reader who possesses “common rational knowledge of morality” but lacks a philosophical theory of it. The ordinary man knows very well in most cases what he ought to do, but may not be able to defend his views against criticism. Hence Kant begins with the commonly held Christian-humanistic ideals of Western civilization, and examines them to determine their presuppositions so that he can construct a system of moral precepts which can be intellectually defended.”

22

Again, Kant held that the proper way to proceed in moral philosophy is to start with what we know about morality and see what principles underlie it. Thus, the *GMM* begins with an examination of what Kant believes to be common sense opinion.

Kant writes,

“Nothing in the world - indeed nothing even beyond the world- can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a *good will*. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resoluteness, and perseverance as qualities of temperment, are doubtless in many respects good and desirable. But they can become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good.” (*GMM*, 9)

From this, Kant extracts the motive that is central to morality as well as the basic principle of decision making. His claim is that we all recognize a kind of goodness different from the goodness of wealth, power, talent, and intellect; even

Kant's moral philosophy.” The Cambridge Companion to Kant. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 315.

²² Immanuel Kant. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. trans. Lewis W. Beck. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959), p.vii.

different from goodness of kindly or generous dispositions.²³ Under certain conditions any of these might turn out not to be good. This special kind of goodness is shown most clearly, Kant thinks, when someone does what she believes is right or obligatory for its own sake. The special sort of merit we attribute to this person is the goodness central to morality, and it is best thought of as the goodness of a good will.²⁴

Thus, we find that for Kant, the moral motive is equivalent to doing that which is right, and this is the basic principle of moral decision making. Additionally, it is the person in possession of a good will who acts in this manner. Kant finds that our reason is not competent to guide the will safely with regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs. "To this end an innate instinct would have led with far more certainty." Thus, reason is given to us as a practical faculty. It is only meant to have an influence on the will, and its proper function must be to produce a will good in itself and not good merely as means. As he puts it,

"This will must indeed not be the sole and complete good but the highest good and the condition of all others, even of the desire for happiness. In this case it is entirely compatible with the wisdom of nature that the cultivation of reason, which is required for

²³ Kant refers to these as "gifts of nature" and states, "Power, riches, honor, even health, general well-being, and the contentment with one's condition which is called happiness, makes for pride and even arrogance if there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind and on its principles of action so as to make it universally conformable to its end. It need hardly be mentioned that the sight of a being adorned with no feature of a pure and good will, yet enjoying uninterrupted prosperity, can never give pleasure to a rational impartial observer. Thus the good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy." (*GMM*, 9)

²⁴ Kant suggests that the good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end. Rather, it is good only because of its willing, i.e., it is good of itself. Also, he states, "...regarded for itself, it is to be esteemed incomparably higher than anything which could be brought about by it in favor of any inclination or even of the sum total of all inclinations." (*GMM*, 10)

the former unconditional purpose, at least if this life restricts in many ways- indeed can reduce to less than nothing - the achievement of the latter conditional purpose, happiness. For one perceives that nature here does not proceed unsuitably to its purpose, because reason, which recognizes its highest practical vocation in the establishment of a good will, is capable only of a contentment of its own kind, i.e., one that springs from the attainment of a purpose which is determined by reason, even though this injures the ends of inclination.” (*GMM*,12)

In defining the idea of good will, and its relation to reason, Kant’s theory of how morality is possible begins to take form. He finds that the self is not only in possession of reason and a will, but also the product of the two; good will, “dwells already in the natural sound understanding and does not need so much to be taught as only to be brought to light.”²⁵ And, again, Kant finds that “in the estimation of the total worth of our actions it always take first place and is the condition of everything else.”²⁶ In order to clarify this further, Kant introduces the concept duty.

Duty

Kant shows that to be kind where one can is duty, and there are many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy, and rejoice in the contentment of others which they have made possible. (*GMM*, 14) Yet, however dutiful and amiable this may be, it has no true moral worth. Instead, it is on a level with actions arising from other inclinations, such as the inclination to honor. He

²⁵ Ibid., p. 12

²⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

offers an example of action resulting from duty, and thereby having moral worth as one in which a man - laden with horrible sorrow - tears himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of this dead insensibility to help someone else. Since there was no selfish motivation involved, and the man acted purely from what he believed was his duty, this beneficent act was a moral act.²⁷

To tie this together with our previous concepts (reason and good will), we might say that where our reason shed light on our good will, we will recognize and respond to duty, absent inclination. This conclusion receives unrelenting criticism, which takes several forms. However, most reflect the concern that Kant's conclusion contradicts itself in practice, i.e., in considering actual society we find that people often act from inclination alone, rather than from duty alone, so why should anyone believe that all men possess such a good will? Additionally, Kant's prioritization of duty over our natural inclinations proves problematic as it is found to be merely 'constructivist' and nothing more, i.e., where Hegel criticizes Kant's moral thought as formalist and empty. (I review this criticism further in the following chapter.)

The Propositions

Kant then derives these propositions of morality. The first proposition (or principle) is: "To have moral worth an action must be done from duty." The second proposition is: "An action performed from duty does not have its moral worth in the

²⁷ Kant refers to this kind of action as "beneficence from duty," and suggests, "...beneficence from duty, when no inclination impels it and even when it is opposed by a natural and unconquerable aversion, is practical love, not pathological love; it resides in the will and not in the propensities of feeling, in principles of action and not in tender sympathy; and it alone can be commanded." Ibid., p.16.

purpose which is to be achieved through it but in the maxim²⁸ by which it is determined.” The moral value of the maxim, therefore, does not depend on the realization of the object of the action but rather on the principle of volition from which the action is done, without regard to the objects of the faculty of desire. The moral worth of the act, therefore, lies in the principle of the will.

“For the will stands, as it were, at the crossroads halfway between its a priori principle which is formal, and its a posteriori incentive which is material. Since it must be determined by something, if it is done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such since every material principle has been withdrawn from it.”
(*GMM*, 16)

The third proposition is: “Duty is the necessity of an action executed from respect for the [moral] law.”²⁹ Here, Kant is suggesting that one cannot respect any inclination whatsoever. Respect is only given in the case where the activity is a result of the will. One can approve of it, or even love it (i.e., see it as favorable to one's own advantage), he suggests. However, that which is connected with one's will merely as ground and not as consequence, i.e. law itself, can be an object of respect.³⁰

The concept of “law,” specifically the idea of respect for this practical law, has now entered the picture. From here Kant moves to suggest that acting out of respect for law, acting from this pre-eminent good (the moral law), can be present

²⁸ Kant states: “A maxim is defined as “the subjective principle of volition.” Ibid., p.17.

²⁹ Ibid., p.16.

³⁰ Kant is particularly interested in that which commands, as, again, his goal is to clarify “the supreme principle which commands morality.”

only in rational beings.³¹ Also, this pre-eminent good, which we call moral, is already present in the person who acts according to this conception, and we need not look for it first in the result (it exists *a priori* - in the will.) We can now understand what Kant means by “*acting in accordance with the moral law.*”

One may wonder what remains of our inclinations in regards to this law? The answer is - nothing remains at all. Kant states defiantly that he has robbed the will of all impulses which could come to it from obedience to any law, and that nothing remains to serve as a principle of the will except universal conformity to the law. “That is, I should never act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be a universal law.” (*GMM*, 18) Also, “the common reason of mankind in its practical judgments is in perfect agreement with this and had this principle constantly in view.”³² (*GMM*, 18)

Kant concludes this section of the *GMM* suggesting that “to duty every other motive must give place.” Duty is the condition of a will good in itself, whose worth transcends everything. “Thus, within the moral knowledge of common human reason we have attained its principle.”³³ Kant allows that common human

³¹ As Rawls notes, we must keep in mind that Kant is concerned solely with the reasoning of fully reasonable and rational and sincere agents. John Rawls, “*Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*,” *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 292.

³² This suggestion, again, begs criticism - and receives a great deal of it. As we saw earlier, such criticisms generally suggests that were mankind to have this principle constantly in view, it is unlikely that we would witness so much ‘non-moral’ behavior. However, I am inclined to agree with Kant, that the rational person *does* have this principle constantly in view, although we do not understand it in such an abstract and universalistic form. Further, for the purpose of *practical* moral philosophy, I find it understandable that Kant’s arguments may be viewed as too speculative to serve as the basis for normative ethics (politics). And, it is unfortunate that Kant cannot get beyond this speculative reasoning.

³³ *GMM*, p. 20.

reason does not think of it abstractly in such a universal form, but it always has it in view and uses it as the standard of its judgments.³⁴

Another concern which naturally arises at this point (one which Kant anticipates) is if everyone has the ability, and is morally required, to act from pure practical reason, what purpose does the moral philosopher serve? Why is a metaphysics of morals needed? Kant's response is that it would be wise to have philosophy ascertain the moral from common rational judgment in order to make the system of morals more complete and comprehensible and its rules more convenient for use (especially in disputation) than to steer the common understanding from its happy simplicity in practical matters.³⁵ Further, he shows

³⁴ Regarding our judgments, I should point out that Kant prioritizes practical reason over theoretical reason. He finds that knowledge contains both forms of reason. However, "Here, we cannot but admire the great advantages which the practical faculty of judgment has over the theoretical in ordinary human understanding. In the theoretical, if ordinary reason ventures to go beyond the laws of experience and perceptions of the senses, it falls into sheer inconceivabilities and self-contradictions, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. In the practical, on the other hand, the power of judgment first shows itself to advantage when common understanding excludes all sensuous incentives from practical laws. It then becomes even subtle, quibbling with its own conscience or with other claims to what should be called right, or wishing to determine correctly for its own instruction the worth of certain actions. But the most remarkable thing about ordinary reason in its practical concern is that it may have as much hope as any philosopher of hitting the mark. In fact, it is almost more certain to do so than the philosopher, because he has no principle which the common understanding lacks, while his judgment is easily confused by a mass of irrelevant considerations, so that it easily turns aside from the correct way." (*GMM*, 20 - 21).

³⁵ "Man feels himself a powerful counterpoise against all commands of duty which reason presents to him as so deserving of respect; this counterpoise is his *needs* and *inclinations*, the complete satisfaction of which he sums up under the name *happiness*. Now reason issues inexorable commands without promising anything to the inclinations. It disregards, as it were, and holds in contempt those claims which are so impetuous and yet so plausible, and which will not allow themselves to be abolished by a command. From this a natural dialectic arises, i.e., a propensity to argue against the stern laws of duty and their validity, or at least to place their purity and strictness in doubt and, where possible, to make them more accordant with our wishes and inclinations. This is equivalent to corrupting them in their very foundations and destroying their dignity - a thing which even common practical reason cannot ultimately call good. In this way common human reason is impelled to go outside its sphere and to take a step into the field of practical philosophy. It is impelled on practical grounds in order to obtain information and clear instruction respecting the source of its principle and the correct determination of this principle in its opposition to the maxims which are based on need and inclination. (*GMM*, 22. My emphasis)

(our) reason seeks this information in order to escape from the perplexity of opposing claims and to avoid the danger of losing all genuine moral principles through the equivocation of that in which it is easily involved. For example, he suggests,

“Innocence is indeed a glorious thing, but on the other hand, it is very sad that it cannot maintain itself, being easily led astray. For this reason, even wisdom - which consists more in acting than in knowledge - needs science, not to learn from it but to secure admission and permanence to its precepts. ...Thus, when practical reason cultivates itself, a dialectic surreptitiously ensues which forces it to seek aid in philosophy, just as the same thing happens in the theoretical use of reason. In this case, as in the theoretical, it will find rest only in a thorough critical examination of our reason.”(*GMM*, 22)

Transition From Common Moral Philosophy to a Metaphysics of Morals

As we have seen, Kant finds that everything in nature works according to laws, and only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to a conception of laws, i.e. according to principles. Also, we have seen that this capacity is called “will.” Kant now emphasizes that since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will (*Wille*) is nothing else than practical reason. Also, the conception of an objective principle, so far as it constrains the will, is a command (of reason), the formula of which is called an *imperative*.³⁶

³⁶ Kant shows that “All imperatives are expressed by an “ought” and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which is not in its subjective constitution necessarily determined by this law. This relation is that of constraint. Imperatives say that it would be good to do or to refrain from doing something, but they say it to a will which does not always do something simply because it is presented as a good thing to do. Practical good is what determines the will by means of the conception of reason and hence not by subjective causes but, rather, objectively, i.e. on grounds which are valid for every rational being as such. .. A perfectly good will, ..would be

The Categorical Imperative (CI)

As Hoffe explains, imperatives respond to man's basic practical question, "*What ought I to do?*"³⁷ Kant distinguishes between a *hypothetical* and a *categorical* imperative, suggesting all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The hypothetical imperative presents the practical necessity of a possible action as a *means* to achieving something else which one desires. By contrast, categorical (or moral) imperatives are those which present an action as absolutely necessary, without regard to any other end. The hypothetical imperative, therefore, says only that the action is good to some purpose, possible or actual. However, the categorical imperative declares that the action is objectively necessary, without making any reference to a purpose. Kant also finds that imperatives which refer to the choice of "means to one's own happiness" are still hypothetical (although he does associate significant importance to happiness³⁸). Therefore, the one imperative which directly commands a certain conduct without making its condition some purpose to be reached by it, is the categorical imperative. It concerns not the material of the action and its intended result but

equally subject to objective laws (of the good), but it could not be conceived as constrained by them to act in accord with them, because, according to its own subjective constitution, it can be determined to act only through the conception of the good. Thus no imperatives hold for the divine will or, more generally, for a *holy will*. The "ought" is out of place here. (*GMM*, 30-31. My emphasis).

³⁷ Outfried Hoffe. Immanuel Kant (New York: State University Press, 1994) p. 146.

³⁸ As Schneewind shows, Kant is often thought to hold that happiness is not valuable, and even to have ignored it wholly in his ethics. This is a serious mistake. It is true that for Kant moral worth is the supreme good, but by itself it is not the perfect or complete good. To be virtuous, for Kant, is to be worthy of happiness. And the perfect good requires that happiness be distributed in accordance with virtue. ..Happiness, or the sum of satisfaction of desires, is a conditional good. It is good only if it results from the satisfaction of morally permissible desires. J. B. Schneewind, "*Autonomy, obligation and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*" The Cambridge Companion to Kant. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 333.

(similar to Kant's description of the concept duty) the form and the principle from which it results. Kant says of the *CI*, "What is essentially good in it consists in the intention, the result being what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality." (*GMM*, 33)

Importantly, Kant also shows that the *CI* alone can be taken as practical law, while all the others may be called principles of the will, but not laws.³⁹ The categorical imperative is thus: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law." (*GMM*, 39) And, this then is the principle contained in our "common rational knowledge of morals" or, "the moral law."⁴⁰

Finally, we then find that categorical obligations, which rely on no presuppositions, thus obligating without qualification; are therefore valid universally: necessarily and without exception. Also, strict universality thus

³⁹ As Wick notes Kant's conclusion is that there is one supreme principle for the whole field of morals, including his philosophy of law as well as the ethical demands of personal integrity and social intercourse, and this is the famous "categorical imperative." Further, "Kant's conclusion is that morality demands that we act on the sort of policies which, if adopted by everyone, would generate a community of free and equal members, each of whom would in the process of realizing his own purposes also further the aims of his fellows. As an ideal such a community is not fully realizable, but it both defines the objective of the moral law, and is at the same time applicable to everyday situations in that we ought never act in a way that would be incompatible with it. Its basis is the *idea of autonomy*, or freedom under self-imposed law, according to which each person freely submits to self-discipline under the same rules he would prescribe for others, so that everyone would act as a law unto himself, or "autonomously," and yet also in cooperative harmony with everyone else." Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. Translated by James W. Ellington, Introduction: Warner A. Wick (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) p. xv. (My emphasis.)

⁴⁰ Importantly, Kant shows that the *CI* can be formulated in several ways, yet, all are equivalent. He insists that the first formulation, (stated) is basic, and, although the others bring out various aspects of the moral law, they cannot tell us more than the first formula does. It concentrates on the agent's point of view. The second formulation draws our attention to those affected by our action: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." And, the third formulation instructs us to look at the agent and recipient of action together in a community as we legislate through our maxims: "All maxims as proceeding from our own law-making ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature." (*GMM*, 39)

constitutes the hallmark and the criterion for morality.⁴¹ The universalization present in every maxim is subjective (relative) universality and not objective (absolute or strict) universality, which holds for any rational being whatsoever.⁴² The *CI* tests whether or not the subjective perspective given by a maxim can also be conceived and willed as an objective perspective for a community of persons. And from the broad variety of subjective principles (maxims), the moral ones are separated from the non-moral ones, and the agent is enjoined to follow the moral maxims.⁴³

The Realm of Ends

As we have seen previously, the will is thought of as a faculty of determining itself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws, and such a faculty can be found only in rational beings. Kant expands on this idea showing that which serves the will as the absolute ground of its self-determination is an end, and, if it is given by reason alone, it must hold alike for all rational beings. Also, that which contains the ground of the possibility of the action, whose result is an end, is called the means. (*GMM*, 45)

Kant's discussion of ends and means is a very important part of his ethics, as here Kant further clarifies his idea of moral motive. He finds that the subjective ground of desire is the incentive, while the objective ground of volition is the motive. Thus arises the distinction between subjective ends, which rest on incentives, and objective ends, which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Further, he shows that practical principles are formal when they disregard

⁴¹ Outfried Hoffe. Immanuel Kant (New York: State University Press, 1994) p. 148.

⁴² Ibid., p. 151.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 151.

all subjective ends, and they are material when they have subjective ends; and thus certain incentives, as their basis. The ends which a rational being arbitrarily proposes for himself as consequences of his action are material ends and are without exception only relative, because their relation to a particularly constituted faculty of desire in the subject gives them worth. And this worth cannot, therefore, afford any universal principles for every volition. Meaning, they cannot give rise to any practical laws. All their relative ends are grounds for hypothetical imperatives only.

Kant's purpose in clarifying the distinction between ends and means is also to show that if there were something which had absolute worth, something which existed as an end itself, it could be a ground of definite laws. In it and only in it could lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, a practical law. Further, since every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, "In his actions, whether they be directed to himself or to other rational beings, he must always be regarded at the same time as an end." (*GMM*, 46) Such a being is therefore an object of *respect* and restricts all arbitrary choice.

Further, regarding the idea of respect, Kant shows such beings are not merely subjective ends whose existence as a result of our action has a worth for us, but are *objective ends*, i.e., beings whose existence in itself is an end. And, such an end is one for which no other end can be substituted, to which these beings should serve merely as means. "For, without them, nothing of absolute worth could be found, and all worth is conditional and thus contingent, no supreme practical principle for reason could be found." (*GMM*, 47)

Kant is now in position to show that if there is to be a supreme practical principle, a *CI* for the human will, it must be one that forms an objective principle of the will from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself. He states, "This objective can serve as a universal practical law, therefore, and the ground of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself." (*GMM*, 47) And, its practical imperative (or a second formulation of the *CI*) is therefore: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only." (*GMM*, 47)

Kant suggests if we now look back upon all previous attempts which have been undertaken to discover the principle of morality, it is not to be wondered at that they all had to fail.

"Man was seen to be bound to laws by his duty, but it was not seen that he is subject only to his own, yet universal legislation, and that he is only bound to act in accordance with his own will, which is, however, designed by nature to be a will giving universal laws. For if one thought of him as subject only to a law (whatever it may be), this necessarily implied some interest as a stimulus or compulsion to obedience because the law did not arise from his will. Rather, his will was constrained by something else according to a law to act in a certain way. By this strictly necessary consequence, however, all the labor of finding a supreme ground for duty was irrevocably lost, and one never arrived at duty but only at the necessity of action from a certain interest. This might be his own interest or that of another, but in either case the imperative always had to be conditional and could not at all serve as a moral command. This principle I will call the principle of *autonomy* of the

will in contrast to all other principles which I accordingly count under *heteronomy*.”(GMM, 51)⁴⁴

Autonomy

In Kant's terminology, we are autonomous, and this involves two components. The first is that no authority external to ourselves is needed to constitute or inform us of the demands of morality. We can each know without being told what we ought to do because moral requirements are requirements we impose on ourselves.⁴⁵ The second is that in self-government we can effectively control ourselves.⁴⁶ Schneewind shows that for Kant, the obligation we impose upon ourselves override all other calls for action, and frequently runs counter to our desires. Yet we nonetheless always have sufficient motive to act as we ought. No

⁴⁴ Schneewind points out that Kant's attribution of autonomy to every normal adult was a radical break with prevailing views of the moral capacity of ordinary people. “The natural law theorists whose work was influential through the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries did not on the whole think that most people could know without being told, everything that morality requires of them. The lawyers were willing to admit that God had given everyone the ability to know the most basic principle of morality. But they held that the many are unable to see all the moral requirements implicit in the principles and often can not grasp by themselves what is required in particular cases. Further, the natural lawyers viewed God as the legislator of moral law. They viewed humans as God's subjects, in need of tremendous discipline. Kant rejected this low estimate of human moral capacity, however. He offered, instead, a theory of moral obligation based on the Rousseau notion of *freedom*. In reading Rousseau, Kant became convinced that everyone must have the capacity to be a self-governing moral agent, and that it is this characteristic that gives each person a special kind of value or dignity.” Schneewind also shows that, “Culture in its present corrupt state conceals this capacity of ours, Rousseau thought, and society must be changed to let it show and be effective. In the *Social Contract* he called for the construction of a community in which everyone agrees to be governed by the dictates of the “general will,” a will representing each individual's truest and deepest aims and directed always at the good of the whole. The general will would have to be able to override the passing desires each of us feels for private goods. But, Rousseau said, “the impulse of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is freedom.” Schneewind notes that previous thinkers had frequently used the metaphor of slavery to describe the condition in which we are controlled by our passions, but for them the alternative was to follow laws that God or nature prescribe. Rousseau held that we make our own law and in doing so create the foundation for a free and just social order. This thought became central to Kant's understanding of morality. J.B. Schneewind. “*Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy*.” The Cambridge Companion to Kant. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 314.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 309.

external source of motivation is needed for our self-legislation to be effective in controlling our behavior.⁴⁷ He also shows that Kant thinks autonomy has basic social and political implications. “Although no one can lose the authority that is a part of the nature of rational agents, social arrangements and the actions of others can encourage lapses into governance by our desires, or heteronomy.”⁴⁸ Kant found it difficult to explain just how this could happen; but he always held that the moral need for our autonomy to express itself was incompatible with certain kinds of social regulation.⁴⁹ Further, as Kant sees it, there is no place for others to tell us what morality requires; nor has anyone the authority to do so - not our neighbors, magistrates or their laws, not even those who speak in the name of God. Because we are autonomous, each of us must be allowed a social space within which we may freely determine our own action. Also, this freedom cannot be limited to members of some privileged class. The structure of society must reflect and express the common and equal moral capacity of its members.⁵⁰

Having now clarified those basic concepts which structure his ethical theory, Kant can now fully define “*morality*,” and states:

“Morality is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, i.e., to possible universal lawgiving by maxims of the will. The action which can be compatible with autonomy of the will is permitted; that which does not agree with it is prohibited. The will whose maxims necessarily are

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 310.

⁵⁰ Schneewind points out that in the works *What is Enlightenment?* (1784) and *Perpetual Peace* (1795) (two of Kant’s political works), Kant discusses the social and political implications of autonomy. In brief, (as a substantive review of these works goes far beyond the limits of this essay) Kant’s message is that each person should refuse to remain under the tutelage of others, and, for all states to be organized as republics wherein every citizen can express his moral freedom publicly in political action. Ibid., p. 311.

in harmony with the laws of autonomy is a holy will or an absolutely good will. The dependence of a will not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy (moral constraint) is *obligation*. Hence obligation cannot be applied to a holy will. The objective necessity of an action from obligation is called *duty*.” (GMM, 58)

Kant acknowledges that the next step is for him to justify the idea that autonomy of the will is unavoidably connected with this “synthetic practical *a priori* proposition,” the *CI*, or rather that it is its foundation. He refers to all discussion covered prior to this justification as merely analytical and suggests proof that morality is not a mere phantom of the mind, requires that a synthetic use of pure practical reason is possible.⁵¹

2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY

Schneewind explains the problem, as Kant sees it, is to discover something through which we can join the subject of the moral law - the “perfectly rational agent” - and its predicate - “acts only through universalizable maxims.”⁵² Kant sees a possible solution in the idea of freedom of the will. In the third and final section of the *GMM* (and throughout the *CPrR*) Kant suggests the concept of freedom is

⁵¹ Hoffe points out, the idea of goodness, the categorical imperative, and the principle of autonomy constitute necessary elements of a philosophical ethics, but they do not suffice to complete it. Unless Kant can demonstrate the existence of morality, as the object of investigation shared by all three elements, he does not achieve his goal of overcoming ‘ethical skepticism.’ “The latter view can only be refuted if morality proves to be an actual “fact” and does not ultimately rely upon personal, cultural, historical, or genetic illusions.” Outfried Hoffe. Immanuel Kant (New York: State University Press, 1994) p. 161.

⁵² J. B. Schneewind. “*Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*” The Cambridge Companion to Kant. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 328.

the key to the explanation of the autonomy of the will and its relation to the moral law. He finds that no theoretical proof (or disproof) of free will can be given. Yet, in the *GMM* Kant thinks he can give at least indirect support to the claim that we are free.⁵³ He says that when rational beings act, we must take ourselves to be free, and by this he means that whenever we deliberate or choose we are presupposing freedom, even if we are unaware of the presupposition or consciously doubtful of it.⁵⁴ More broadly, whenever we take ourselves to be thinking rationally (even about purely theoretical matters) we must take ourselves to be free, because we cannot knowingly accept judgments determined by external sources as judgments we ourselves have made.⁵⁵ Now anything that would follow about us if we were really free still follows for practical purposes if we have to think of ourselves as free.

Kant continues to develop his idea of freedom in the *CPrR* as he is not yet satisfied with this justification. This leads him to his notion of “*the fact of reason*.”⁵⁶ Rawls, who offers a rather clear interpretation of Kant’s quite obscure

⁵³ Ibid., p. 328.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 329.

⁵⁶ As Rawls shows, it is *pure* practical reason which needs to be authenticated. He states, “..we long to derive its law, as Kant did for many years, from some firm foundation, either in theoretical reason or in experience, or in the necessary conditions of a unified public order of conduct, or, failing all of these, from the idea of freedom itself, as Kant still hopes to do in the *Grundlegung*. But none of these authentication’s are available within Kant’s critical philosophy. In the second Critique, Kant recognizes this and accepts the view that pure practical reason, with the moral law as its first principle, is authenticated by the fact of reason ... only from a practical point of view.” He suggests additionally, “.. by the time of the second Critique Kant has developed, I think, not only a *constructivist* conception of practical reason but a coherentist account of its authentication. This is the significance of his doctrine of the fact of reason and of his abandoning his hitherto vain search

notion “the fact of reason,” suggests Kant shows that the moral law can be given no deduction, that is, no justification of its objective and universal validity, but rests on the fact of reason. Additionally, Rawls points out that this fact is the fact that in our common moral consciousness we recognize and acknowledge the moral law as supremely authoritative and immediately controlling for us. Also, Kant shows here the moral law needs no justifying grounds; to the contrary, that law proves not only the possibility but also the actuality of freedom in those who recognize and acknowledge that law as supremely authoritative.⁵⁷

for a so-called deduction of the moral law. ...this doctrine may look like a step backward into intuitionism, or else into dogmatism. ...Here I think Kant may be ahead of his critics. A constructivist and coherentist doctrine of practical reason is not without strengths as a possible view; and as such it is part of the legacy Kant left to the tradition of moral philosophy.” John Rawls. “*Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*.” *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 308. (My emphasis)

Indeed, Kant shows, “(while) the objective reality of the moral law can be proved through ... no exertion of the theoretical reason, whether speculative or empirically supported ... Nevertheless, it is firmly established of itself. ...Instead of this vainly sought deduction of the moral principle, however, something entirely different and unexpected appears: the moral principle itself serves as a principle of the deduction of an unscrutable faculty which no experience can prove but which speculative reason had to assume as at least possible (in order not to contradict itself...) “This is the faculty of freedom, which the moral law, itself needing no justifying grounds, shows to be not only possible but actual in beings that acknowledge the law as binding upon them” (CP 5:47) (See also Rawls. “*Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*” p. 312.)

⁵⁷ The Antinomy of Freedom and Necessity - As Paton suggests, if morality is to be derived from freedom, and if, morality must be valid for all rational beings as such, it looks as if we have got to prove that the will of a rational being as such is necessarily free. This can never be proved by any experience of merely human action, nor indeed can it be proved at all from the point of view of philosophical theory. For purposes of action, however, it would be enough if we could show that a rational being can act only under the presupposition of freedom; for if this were so, the moral laws bound up with freedom would be valid for him just as much as if he were *known* to be free. Also, reason as such must necessarily function under the presupposition that it is free both negatively and positively: it must presuppose that it is not determined by outside influences and that it is the source of its own principles. If a rational subject supposed his judgments to be determined, not by rational principles, but by external impulses, he could not regard these judgements as his own. This must be equally true of practical reason: a rational agent must regard himself as capable of acting on his own rational principles and only so can he regard his will as his own. That is to say, from a practical point of view every rational agent must presuppose his will to be free. Freedom is a

Transcendental Freedom

As Wick suggests, the validity of the *CI* implies that reasons for action may be independent of empirical influences.⁵⁸ If there is any justification for what we assume whenever we make a practical decision, it is that we can act on grounds of reason alone. Also, if the same overt act can have both empirical and a priori grounds, how are we to understand the relation between these two levels of determination? For Kant, this is a question of transcendental freedom, concerning how, as rational agents, we can be free from determination by empirical causes, while products of nature we are still subject to natural causes. Kant's solution is to say that for practical purposes we can be sure that we are free; but we cannot fully understand how transcendental freedom is possible, for we are able to understand only what we can explain according to the canons of empirical science. Beyond that, human limitations are such that we can know only that transcendental freedom is not impossible.⁵⁹ Also, Wick shows that the long argument of the *CPrR* is devoted to these two points, one positive and one negative.⁶⁰ We know we are autonomous, capable of acting according to rules we conceive for ourselves, so that the *CI* is vindicated as a guide for action; but since knowledge too is an expression

necessary presupposition of all action as well as of all thinking. Immanuel Kant. The Moral Law. Translated by H.J. Paton. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961) p. 42.

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. Translated by James W. Ellington, Introduction: Warner A. Wick (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) p. xxxiii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.

of the transcendental autonomy of intelligence, we cannot lift ourselves up by our bootstraps and achieve full knowledge of the ultimate grounds of both knowledge and action.

Indeed, as Kant shows in the first *Critique*,

“Theoretical knowledge has limits: It applies only to the world as we experience it, the phenomenal world. We cannot say that the determinism holding in the realm of phenomena holds beyond it as well, in the noumenal world. If we think of ourselves as belonging to the noumenal as well as the phenomenal world, then we can see how in one respect we may be beings bound in a web of mechanistic determination, while in another respect we are the free rational agents morality supposes us to be. Our theoretical beliefs and our practical presuppositions of freedom do not come into any conflict.” (*CPR*, 30)

Thus, justification of the moral law is located in the idea of freedom.

Autonomy and Freedom Leads to “Duty and Obligation”

Again, Kant finds that the “fact of reason” is what shows us that we are free, and, importantly, it shows that we have moral obligations.⁶¹ His claim is that because the fact of reason is revealed to us through our moral awareness, it also shows that we are bound by unconditional obligations. As Schneewind suggests,

“Because we know we are bound by such obligations, we know also that we can do what we are obligated to do. This means that we can do it, no matter what the circumstances and no matter what has gone on

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. xxxiii.

⁶¹ There are many interpretations of exactly what Kant means by “fact of reason.”

before. In other words, awareness of categorical obligations contains awareness of freedom.”⁶²

Kant therefore treats freedom as the ground of our having moral obligations, and our awareness of categorical imperatives as the ground of our knowledge that we are free.⁶³ Also, in the morality through which we govern ourselves, we notice that there are some actions we simply have to do.⁶⁴ We impose a moral law on ourselves and the law gives rise to obligation, to a necessity to act in certain ways. Also, Kant does not see morality as springing from virtuous dispositions that make us want to help others. He sees it as always a struggle. Virtue itself is defined in terms of struggle. It is “moral strength of will” in overcoming temptations to transgress the law.⁶⁵ Law (or Right) is prior to virtue, and must control desires to help others as well as desires to harm.⁶⁶

⁶² J. B. Schneewind. “*Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 330.

⁶³ Allison, too, interprets Kant's idea of the fact of reason in this way. He suggests Kant is here arguing that this idea can serve as the basis for a deduction of freedom. Allison, a true Kantian, is sympathetic to the Kantian enterprise. However, like many critics and other Kantians, finds that Kant's idea of “the fact of reason,” or the “conceivability” of freedom, has serious difficulties.

Henry Allison. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 233-236.

⁶⁴ This becomes problematic also. It is the problem of “ought” vs “must.” The criticism wielded at “Kantians,” is that their theories lack practicality because the principle(s) upon which it rests requires a strict separation of “have to” and “is or ought.” As suggested in chapter one, the critics find that the separation necessarily fails to answer the question of how moral insight can be realized in practice.

⁶⁵ J. B. Schneewind. “*Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 332.

⁶⁶ Similarly, Rawls shows that in the *CPR* Kant finds that writers who do not regard freedom as a transcendental predicate of the causality of persons who have a place in the natural order but are not entirely of it, “...deprive us of the great revelation which we experience through our practical reason by means of the moral law - the revelation of an intelligible world through realization of the otherwise transcendent concept of freedom; they deprive us of the moral law itself, which assumes absolutely no empirical ground of determination. Therefore, it would be necessary to add something here as a protection against this delusion and to expose empiricism in its naked superficiality.” Further, Rawls shows Kant as suggesting, “If by some philosophical or other doctrine we were to be convinced that the moral law is a delusion, and our moral sensibility simply an artifact of nature to perpetuate the species or a social contrivance to make institutions stable and secure, we would be in danger of losing our humanity, even though we cannot, Kant thinks, lose it

Finally, in order to further justify his principle (he no longer seeks proof of it), Kant shows there are two matters, other than freedom, on which practical reason requires us to accept beliefs that can be neither proven nor disproven theoretically. One concerns our hopes for our own private futures, the other concerns our hopes for the future of humanity. In one case we are led by morality to have certain religious beliefs; in the other, to have certain views about history and progress. In the *CPrR* Kant argues not only that we must think of ourselves as free moral agents but also that we must see ourselves as immortal, and as living in a universe governed by a providential intelligence through whose intervention in the course of nature the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious punished.⁶⁷ We must have these beliefs, Kant holds, because morality requires each of us to make ourselves perfectly virtuous - to give ourselves a character in which the dictates of the categorical imperative are never thwarted by the passions and desires. It also requires that happiness be distributed in accordance with virtue. The former cannot be done in a finite amount of time, so we must believe that we each have something like an infinite amount of time available for carrying out the task, or at least for approaching closer and closer to completion. The latter is not possible if the mechanisms of nature are the sole ordering force in the universe, nature being indifferent to virtue and vice. Hence we must believe that there is some nonnatural ordering force that will intervene to bring about what morality requires.⁶⁸

altogether. The empiricist "delusion," must not be allowed to take from us the glorious disclosure of our autonomy made known to us through the moral law as an idea of pure reason. Philosophy as defense ... is to prevent this loss." John Rawls, "*Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy*," *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 317.

3. APPLICATION - KANT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The discussion so far has been mostly philosophical. Kant now sketches the outlines of moral philosophy as a substantive intellectual discipline. (As Wick points out, in moral philosophy, some empirical concepts are needed in order to relate the fundamental law to "the human condition."⁶⁹) This is the business of the *MM*.⁷⁰ Gregor, suggesting that this is the area of Kant's philosophy receiving the greatest criticism, shows that it also receives the least attention. By considering the relation of laws to ends, to the capacity for free choice, Kant explains the application of the categorical imperative.⁷¹

Gregor notes that the will, as pure reason applied to the capacity for choice irrespective of its objects, does not have within it the matter of the law "so ... there is nothing it can make the supreme law and determining ground of choice except the *form*, the *fitness* of maxims of choice to be universal law."⁷² However, maxims contain objects of choice, both in the sense of ends (central to the *Doctrine of Virtue* in the *MM*) and in the sense of what can be put to use in effecting whatever ends one has (central to the *Doctrine of Right* in the *MM*). Thus:

"Applied to the capacity for choice with respect to its objects, the will gives rise to laws enabling us to put different kinds of objects to use - that is, determining what rights we have or can acquire - and laws prescribing what ends we ought to set for ourselves -

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 332. (*CPrR*, 5:122-32/126 -36)

⁶⁹ Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. Translated by James W. Ellington, Introduction: Warner A. Wick (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) p. xxxix.

⁷⁰ As with many areas of Kant's moral philosophy, an in-depth review far exceeds the limits of this essay. I have elected, therefore, to briefly discuss the purpose of its two parts, *Right* and *Virtue*.

⁷¹ Immanuel Kant. The Metaphysics of Morals, translated with an introduction by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.6.

⁷² Ibid., p.6.

that is, what virtues or moral dispositions we ought to acquire. Whether Kant's moral philosophy is an "empty formalism" can be decided only after a careful study of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and this is not the work one would have expected on the basis of the *Groundwork* alone. In fact, Kant's references there to his future "metaphysics of morals" would suggest that he had not given serious consideration to how he would go about applying the formal principle of all duties so as to obtain "the whole system."⁷³

Indeed, in this final work in the critical moral philosophy, Kant attempts to give content to the *CI*. This work comprises two parts, the *Doctrine of Right* (or Justice), which deals with the rights that people have or can acquire, and the *Doctrine of Virtue*, which deals with the virtues they ought to acquire. Also, as Gregor points out, the importance of the *MM* is that here Kant shows although the will is pure practical reason, within the will there must be some structure, and hence some differentiation expressed in "obligation." Further, Kant's use of "humanity" throughout the *MM* suggests that duties are to be derived from the *GMM*'s treatment of humanity as an "objective end," that the subject of all ends never be treated as a mere means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but also as an end in itself.⁷⁴ If pure reason is to be practical it must be able to

⁷³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁴ As Rawls notes, Kant's aim is to convince us that as purely natural beings, endowed with the powers of the rational but not the reasonable, we cannot oppose the love of life, nevertheless we can do so as natural beings endowed with humanity, that is, the powers of the reasonable in union with moral sensibility. "Moreover, our consciousness of the moral law discloses to us that we can stand fast against the totality of our natural desires; and that in turn discloses our capacity to act independently of the natural order. Our consciousness of the moral law could not do this unless that law was not only unconditional and sufficient of itself to determine our will but also had all the features of a principle of pure practical reason. These features must be exhibited in our moral thought and feeling in some such manner as the *CI*-procedure represents them. Knowledge that we can act from a law of that kind - a law that is a principle of autonomy-is what discloses our freedom to us." John Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 317.

determine actions (as the *CPrR* showed). “But it can do so only through the agent’s maxims, the principles on which he proposes to act; and whereas laws issue from his will, maxims issue from his “capacity for free choice.””⁷⁵

“This is to say that practical reason has two functions or activities: that of giving laws and that of adopting maxims of action. It is because of these two activities that Kant can speak of practical reason putting itself under obligation. ..Thus pure practical reason as lawgiving merely presents to an agent the formal principle expressed in the categorical imperative, “So act that your maxim could become a universal law,” and thereby exercises constraint upon his capacity for choice.””⁷⁶

The Doctrine of Right (Justice)

Kant defines the Doctrine of Right as the sum of laws for which an external lawgiving is possible. Yet, what is Right? Kant answers,

“The concept of Right, insofar as it is related to an obligation corresponding to it (i.e., the moral concept of Right), has to do, first, only with the external and indeed practical relation of one person to another, insofar as their actions, as facts, can have (direct or indirect) influence on each other. ..second, it does not signify the relation of one’s choice to the mere wish

⁷⁵ Gregor shows that Kant’s definition of a “thing” taken from *CPrR* introduces the term “capacity for free choice” (*Willkur*), which was absent from the *GMM* but is essential to its cardinal concept of obligation. She shows the distinction between “will” and “willkur” as “..the subject imposing obligation is a person regarded as having pure practical reason, whereas the subject put under obligation is the same person regarded as having a capacity for free choice.” Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, translated with an introduction by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 4.

⁷⁶ A capacity for free choice is, then, a capacity to set ends for yourself.

(hence also the mere need) of the other, as in actions of beneficence or callousness, but only a relation to the other's *choice*. Third, in this reciprocal relation of choice no account at all is taken of the matter of choice, that is, of the end each has in mind with the object he wants; it is not asked, for example, whether someone who buys goods from me for his own commercial use will gain by the transaction or not. All that is in question is the *form* in the relation of choice on the part of both, insofar as choice is regarded merely as *free*, and whether the action of one can be united with the freedom of the other in accordance with a universal law. Right is therefore the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choice of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom.”
(*MM*, 56)

Summarily, the Doctrine of Right brings out freedom under laws. People's compliance with the system of laws brings the external use of their free choice into accord with that of every other. In the *Doctrine of Right* Kant derives empirical content for the formal principle of Right by considering objects of choice (i.e., property, contract, etc.), and determining, to the extent possible in “metaphysical first principles,” what rights human beings have or can acquire. By contrast, in the *Doctrine of Virtue* he derives empirical content for its formal principle by considering what ends can hold for everyone or what virtues are required of a human being.

Thus, the Right is located where an end is found to have the required form. As Gregor notes, the will, which is “a capacity for desire that, in adopting a rule,

also gives it as a universal law,” contains a law prescribing the adoption of that end. Also, with regard to ends as the “matter of choice,” Kant's procedure is to begin with ends that we would adopt merely on the basis of inclination and submit our maxims of pursuing such ends to the test of whether they could qualify for giving a universal law.⁷⁷ Also, as Kersing notes,

“Kant shares the conviction, common to all variants of natural right theory, that there is an objective, timelessly valid and universally binding principle of right, which is accessible to human knowledge, which draws an irrevocable boundary between that which is right and that which is not that obligates everyone, and which contains the criterion with the assistance of which the correctness of human action can be judged. But in distinction from all his predecessors, in the determination of the concept and principle of Right he appeals neither to empirical human nature nor to the nature of a teleological worldview that includes reason, but solely to the legislative reason, purified of all anthropological features and excluding all elements of nature, of a metaphysics of freedom. In the philosophy of right and in the political philosophy that is grounded upon it, exactly as was already done in moral philosophy, the way is thereby barred to every application of natural purposes, human needs and interest, and substantive ethical considerations in Kant's argument.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Kant suggests the reason for dividing the *MM* into two parts is that the concept of freedom requires a division of duties into those of “outer” or “external” freedom and those of “inner” or “internal” freedom. From this, Kant distinguishes two kinds of duties, duties of Right and duties of Virtue - the first being directly ethical and the former being indirectly ethical. Immanuel Kant. The Metaphysics of Morals, translated with an introduction by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 6.

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Kersting. “*Politics, freedom, and order: Kant's political philosophy*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.342. We can now see clearly that this is what causes many to split with Kant, finding his moral point of view cold, unsubstantive

As Schneewind points out, only the properties of reason itself are available to make determinate the nonempirical concept of Right: lawfulness, universality, formality, and necessity.⁷⁹ And, as far as its structure and potential value as a criterion are concerned, the principle of Right cannot be distinguished from the categorical imperative. Like the latter, it must contain a universalization argument.

Indeed, Kant's sphere of Right is equivalent to his "theory of justice." (*Recht*, can be translated either 'right' or 'justice'). Thus, technically, Kant's doctrine of Right is a theory of justice. And, justice concerns that which is universally Right for everyone.

The Doctrine of Virtue (Material or Normative Ethics)

Briefly, and as suggested above, the *Doctrine of Virtue* brings *inner freedom* under laws. As Gregor suggests, compliance with the system of laws comprising it brings one's capacity for free choice into accord with one's will. One's inner freedom is in direct proportion to the responsiveness of one's choice to moral constraint and in inverse proposition to its responsiveness to constraint by natural means. Only a virtuous disposition can lead one to adopt ends on the basis of their being duties and, in turn, fulfillment of duties of virtue strengthens one's virtuous disposition. Kant gives many examples of how this applies. In each example he shows the CI as setting limits to the maxims it is permissible for us to adopt and to

or empty of the kind of content which, essentially, applies to those "communal" realities which so badly need such attention.

⁷⁹ J. B. Schneewind, "*Autonomy, obligation and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*" *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 332.

act on, and he explains his meanings by showing that (deceit, malevolence, sloth and other vices) could not be made into rules of conduct for everyone.⁸⁰

The State, Political Authority, and Coercion

It should now be clear that Kant derives his universal principle of Right independently of distinctively ethical considerations, i.e., merely by specifying the condition under which one agent's external use of his freedom can be compatible with that of every other, that is, the condition under which his actions, as means to whatever end he has adopted, will leave all others free to act for whatever ends they have set for themselves. By force, threats, or deception others may compel someone to perform actions that are not means to his own ends but only to theirs. Such compulsion is wrong or inconsistent with the external exercise of everyone's freedom. As Carr shows, "... Kant argues that the defense of a condition of justice

⁸⁰ It is unfortunate that this thesis cannot accommodate an in-depth review of Kant's all important examples, as they indeed often provide sufficient persuasion for his ideas. Also, his critics often apply their criticisms of his ethical theory directly to his examples. However, I shall mention here that such criticisms commonly note that it is a pity Kant has so little to say about ideals of conduct. As Action points out, Kant does not explore the field of maxims that are not excluded by the test of universal legislation. Action also argues that Kant is a rigorist in that he thought that the claims of duty are always absolute against inclinations and against ideals that violate the moral law. Further, he suggests Kant is a rigorist in that he believed that there can be no exceptions to any basic moral rules. "He seems not to have given due weight to situations, much discussed by philosophers since his day, in which one moral claim conflicts with another. Thus he argued that it is wrong to tell a lie even if it appears to be the only way of saving the life of a man who is being pursued by a murderer." H. B. Action. Kant's Moral Philosophy. (St. Martin's Press, Macmillan, 1970) p. 63. Action also suggests that it should be noticed that Kant's account of the CI does not require him to adopt this most implausible view. In discussing this problem Kant says that even if the lie might help the threatened man - and it might not - it would harm humanity as a whole. But if he had applied the Principle of Universal Law to this case he would have asked whether the maxim of

permits the use of coercion and therefore that 'right' or 'justice' means the same thing as the 'authorization to use coercion.'⁸¹ From the concept of right Kant immediately concludes that human beings, merely by virtue of their "humanity," have one and only one innate right: the right to freedom of action. That anyone is authorized to use coercion against someone who would interfere with those actions which are compatible with everyone's external use of freedom follows directly from considerations of what is right in accordance with an external law. All other rights must be acquired by acts of choice... and Kant is far more concerned with how someone can rightly be coerced to refrain from doing what would not interfere with anyone's innate right to freedom of action. ("Granting one's innate right to freedom of action, one is in rightful possession of one's own person and of objects one is holding or possesses physically: No one can hinder him in his exclusive use of them without wronging him by infringing upon that outer freedom of his which is compatible with everyone's use of free choice.")

Again, as Schneewind points out, Kant's interest in the social and political implications of autonomy is shown in many places (i.e., in his essay "*What is Enlightenment*" and also in the work "*Perpetual Peace*."⁸² He suggests that what stands out in Kant's vision of the morality by which we must govern ourselves is that some actions we simply have to do. Again, we impose a moral law on

telling a lie when an innocent man is threatened in such circumstances could be universalized, and it seem obvious that it could be. Ibid., p. 65.

⁸¹ Craig L. Carr, "*Kant's Theory of Political Authority*." History Of Political Thought. Vol. X No. 4. p.719.

⁸² J. B. Schneewind, "*Autonomy, obligation and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy*." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 310.

ourselves, and the law gives rise to obligation, to a necessity to act in certain ways. Law is prior to virtue, and must control desires to help others as well as desires to harm.⁸³ Further,

“A society built around the virtues of benevolence and kindness is for Kant a society requiring not only inequality but servility as well. If nothing is properly mine except what someone graciously gives me, I am forever dependent on how the donor feels toward me. My independence as an autonomous being is threatened. Only if I can claim that the others have to give me what is mine by right can this be avoided. ..Kant did not deny the moral importance of beneficent action, but his theoretical emphasis on the importance of obligation or moral necessity reflects his rejection of benevolent paternalism and the servility that goes with it, just as the centrality of autonomy in his theory shows his aim of limiting religious and political control of our lives.”⁸⁴

Also, Kersting notes that in the *MM*, Kant demonstrated that his formal principle or morality justifies the use of coercion in the state yet simultaneously places strict limits on the ends the state can justifiably pursue by coercive means, and the same principle implies a detailed series of ethical duties to ourselves and others that go beyond the limits of positive legislation in such a state.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., p. 310.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 311.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Kersting. “*Politics, freedom, and order: Kant's political philosophy*,” The Cambridge Companion to Kant. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.342.

4. CONCLUSION

Through his moral philosophy, Kant provided an entirely new theoretical foundation for justification in practical philosophy, which has come to be predominant today. As Wolfgang Kersting notes,

“In the previous history of practical philosophy foundations and first principles were sought in objective ideas, in a normative constitution of the cosmos, in the will of God, in the nature of man, or in prudence in the service of self-interest; but Kant was convinced that these starting points were without exception inadequate for the foundation of unconditional practical laws, and that human reason could only concede absolute practical necessity and obligatoriness to norms that arose from its own legislation.”⁸⁶

Further, Kant found that we are subject to the laws of reason alone, and with this recognition, he freed us from the domination of theological absolutism and the bonds of teleological natural law, and, likewise elevated us above the prosaic banalities of the doctrine of prudence.⁸⁷ In finding that human beings may and must obey only their own reason; Kant finds that in this lies their dignity as well as their exacting and burdensome moral vocation.⁸⁸

Having now considered Kant’s moral point of view, we are better able to review Hegel ideas on morality. The issues between Kant and Hegel are undoubtedly few, especially when one thinks of the enormous base of their moral and political thought. Yet, as I have attempted to emphasize, those differences which do exist are very important.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 342.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 342.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 342.

Hegel's Moral Point of View

"What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational. On this conviction the plain man like the philosopher takes his stand, and from it philosophy starts in its study of the universe of mind as well as the universe of nature. ..To comprehend what is, this is the task of philosophy, because what is, is reason." HEGEL

1. THE BACKGROUND

In the realm of political philosophy, the works of G.W.F. Hegel are among the most important of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. This alone makes it important to understand him. Yet, Hegel's profound ideas led him to some conclusions that strike the modern reader as bizarre, or even absurd. So, although Hegel's thought has been experiencing a renaissance since the 1960's, Hegel remains suspicious in the eyes of many. This is due not only to his notorious obscurity, which has put him at odds with the premium placed upon clarity in contemporary philosophy, but also to his indulgence in metaphysics. However, as Allen Wood suggests, Hegel's philosophy retains its force to the present day and is often summoned by protractors of liberal political theory. This chapter serves to explicate some of Hegel's arguments and insights.

A synopsis of any sort should be straightforward. However, as Hegel's philosophy is indeed obscure and challenging, this task is especially difficult.⁸⁹ Part

⁸⁹ Dante Germino suggests the problem arises from the fact that Hegel's writings are so rarely read in the English speaking world, and when read, hardly taken seriously enough, so that his most complex arguments are difficult to comprehend. Additionally, he shows this fate is attributable in

of my strategy for making the lofty heights of Hegel's thought introductory is to gently approach three basic features of his philosophy: self-actualization, absolute "Spirit," and absolute freedom. Though deeply complex, these features are foundational to Hegel's thought, and so it is wise to unpack them early. Following this, I can further clarify these ideas in later chapters where Hegel's philosophy is discussed more fluidly. Obviously, this order, and/or strategy, is not intended to suggest anything about how Hegel himself would have chosen to present his ideas. Rather, it provides an opportunity to evaluate separately several critical parts of his philosophy.

A Note On Hegel's Development

The most significant of all of Hegel's development was the state of German philosophy in the period in which he worked, particularly as it was being influenced by the philosophy of Kant. Indeed, we find that both philosophers were reacting to the philosophical trends of their day. Kant in his search for a middle ground between the positions of the rationalists and the skeptics, sought to achieve a precise understanding of the possibilities and limits of reason, and Hegel, in his reaction to the romantics that followed Kantian influences, sought a similar end.⁹⁰ Also, as Taylor notes, we find evidence that Hegel repeatedly read Kant, undertaking a full review and criticism of Kant's philosophy.⁹¹ His early writings show that he was a devoted follower of Kant. (Hegel is indebted to Kant for many of the ideas contained in his works.) Later, Hegel splits with Kant. His 'mature'

part to Hegel's predilection for system construction and his fondness for needlessly ponderous jargon. Dante Germino. Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972) p.320.

⁹⁰ Charles Taylor. Hegel and Modern Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 11.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 11.

writings directly criticize Kant's philosophy, and the advantage of this is that Hegel's critiques or treatments of Kant's philosophy are in-depth, so that we can witness Hegel's thought pitted against Kant's. Their differences, although few, prove to be of very considerable importance, as we shall see.

2. HEGEL'S ETHICAL THOUGHT

In the Preface of the *Philosophy of Right* (Hegel's major work in ethics, hereafter *PR*) Hegel states:

“..the truth about Right, Ethics, and the state is as old as its public recognition in the law of the land, in the morality of everyday life, and in religion. What more does this truth require - since the thinking mind is not content to possess it in this ready fashion? It requires to be grasped in thought as well; the content which is already rational in principle must win the *form* of rationality and so appear well-founded to untrammelled thinking. ... A [serious] difficulty arises, however, from the fact that man thinks and tries to find in thinking both his freedom and the basis of ethical life. But however lofty, however divine, the right of thought may be, it is perverted into wrong if it is only this [opining] which passes for thinking and if thinking knows itself to be free only when it diverges from what is universally recognized and valid and when it has discovered how to invent for itself some particular character.”⁹² (*PR*, pf.3)

Likewise, Allen Wood shows that ethics must be grounded in a knowledge of human beings that enables us to say that some modes of life are suited to our

⁹² G.W.F. Hegel. Philosophy of Right (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942) Translation: T.M.. Knox, Pf. 3.

nature, whereas others are not.⁹³ And, in that sense, ethical theories generally may be regarded as theories of human self-actualization.⁹⁴ Further, the common pitfall of ethical theories is that their conception of human nature is too thin, one-sided, and abstract, or else too much dictated by the needs of some convenient theoretical program.⁹⁵ By contrast, Hegel's ethical theory is based on a complex conception of human nature which systematizes a number of different human self-images, and Hegel grounds this conception in his theory of history which attempts to show how the different elements arose through a process of cultural development.⁹⁶

Wood also shows that Hegel's philosophy cannot be comfortably classified either as a teleological theory, like Aristotle's, based on an end or good to be pursued, or as a deontical theory, like Kant's, based on a commandment or principle to be followed.⁹⁷ Instead, it is an agent-oriented or self-actualization theory, based on a conception of the human self to be exemplified or instantiated.⁹⁸ The theory recommends principles when they are the principles such a self would follow, and

⁹³ Allen Wood. Hegel's Ethical Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.17.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.17.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.17. It should be noted that within the literature there exists a discrepancy as to whether or not Hegel actually has an *ethical* theory or not. That too much of what Hegel has to say about ethics is actually 'borrowed' from Kant. My response to this is that Kant, too, 'borrows' a great deal from those philosophers whom he credits as having "inspired" or "corrected" his own moral point of view. Such 'borrowing' is the nature of political philosophy. Also, where Hegel's philosophy is found to be fundamentally a speculative metaphysics, whose aim is to overcome, through philosophical insight, the alienation of the modern mind from itself, nature and society. I support this claim. Certainly, Hegel's philosophy is more a speculative metaphysics than is Kant's, since Hegel posits a super-transcendental individual (Geist) which man can know only as 'spirit.' However, Kant's positing of a 'reality' which can not be known to man is almost equally metaphysical. Primarily, it is because Hegel's philosophy includes his own critical consideration of the relationship or practical application of 'morality,' as well as 'abstract right,' in the spheres of the family, civil society and the state, that I am inclined to view this as his own ethical and his own political philosophy.

⁹⁷ Allen Wood. "*Hegel's ethics*," The Cambridge Companion to Hegel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 217.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 217.

ends when they are the ends it would pursue.⁹⁹ Further, Hegel's theory is based not on one conception of the self, but on a system of such conceptions, which determines Hegel's "system of right" in the *PR*. He notes:

"Hegel sees these conceptions as the results of a long historical development, in which the human spirit collectively has successively deepened its knowledge of itself. In the sphere "abstract right," the individual is conceived as a "person" ..a free volitional agent, capable of abstracting completely from its desires and situation, and demanding recognition for an external sphere in which the dignity of its personality can be actualized .. Within this sphere, including the person's body and life (but extending to all its property), the person's right of arbitrary freedom must be recognized by others."¹⁰⁰

Indeed, Hegel identifies and defines the two spheres '*abstract right*' and '*morality*' early on in *PR*, and attaches tremendous significance to both.

Abstract Right

Wood states abstract right is based on a distinctive human self-image: the *person*, "a being capable of arbitrary free choice and demanding respect for this capacity in the form of an external sphere within which to exercise it."¹⁰¹ Further, a person is therefore a subject of rights, .. "the sort of rights that the tradition calls "natural rights" and today usually go by the name of "human rights."¹⁰²

Additionally, Hegel identifies abstract will, consciously self-contained, as *personality*. As Hegel states,

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁰¹ Allen Wood. Hegel's Ethical Thought. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 22.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 22.

“Man’s chief glory is to be a person, and yet in spite of that the bare abstraction, ‘person,’ is somewhat contemptuous in its very expression. “Person” is essentially different from ‘subject’, since ‘subject’ is only the possibility of personality; every living thing of any sort is a subject. A person, then, is a subject aware of this subjectivity, since in personality it is of myself alone that I am aware. A person is a unit of freedom aware of its sheer independence.” (*PR*, p. 235)

Morality

The second, but less abstract sphere to which Hegel refers, is “morality.”¹⁰³ Here the individual is conceived as a subject, an agent possessing moral responsibility and a distinctive good or welfare of its own, which makes claims on the subjective will of others.¹⁰⁴ As Wood states, Hegel shows that morality is concerned with our responsibility for actions and their consequences, with the values of subjective freedom (rather than “objective freedom” as found in the sphere of abstract right), and the right of individuals to determine the course of their own lives and to take satisfaction in their choices.¹⁰⁵ Thus, self-actualization in the moral sphere consists in the actualization of the subject through the conformity of its insight and intention to the good. He shows that in the sphere of morality the will is infinite, not merely in itself but also for itself. Also, this reflection of the will into itself and its explicit awareness of its identity makes the person into the subject.

¹⁰³ Allen Wood, “*Hegel's ethics*,” The Cambridge Companion to Hegel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 217

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217

3. SELF ACTUALIZATION

As suggested earlier, Hegel's ethical theory is based on a complex conception of human nature, which systematizes a number of different human self-images. And, these images manifest themselves at different "stages of consciousness." Hegel offers his most in-depth discussion of the different forms or stages of consciousness in which his "system of right" is based in his work *Phenomenology of Mind*. Here, he views each one from inside and shows how more limited forms of consciousness necessarily developed into more adequate ones.¹⁰⁶ He describes this as 'the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon' because he sees the development of consciousness as a development toward forms of consciousness that more fully grasps reality, and that culminates in 'absolute knowledge,' or the actual knowledge of what truly is.¹⁰⁷ Singer defines these as:

1) "Sense-certainty" - this is the most primitive form of consciousness which does nothing but grasp what is in front of it at any given moment.¹⁰⁸ Sense-certainty seems to have a strong claim to being genuine knowledge, for it is directly aware of the "this" without imposing on it the distorting filters of a conceptual scheme involving space, time or any other categories.¹⁰⁹ However, the simple recognition of "things" does not allow one to describe it very well. To do so presupposes a general ordering of things, including our concepts of time and space, although, for Hegel these terms are also problematic because "here," "now" and "this" are universals and there are of course more than one of each of these. Singer

¹⁰⁶ Peter Singer. *Hegel*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 48.

¹⁰⁷ Singer does not expound further here on the idea of "absolute knowledge." I shall review this quite complex idea in the fifth section of this chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Singer. *Hegel*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p.53.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.53.

suggests that with this, Hegel believes he has established the impossibility of knowledge without universal concepts. To achieve knowledge, Hegel suggests, we must allow our mind to play a more active role in ordering the information received by our senses.¹¹⁰

2) "Perception" - at this stage consciousness classifies objects according to their universal properties. However, this proves inadequate, and so at the next level, "understanding," consciousness imposes its own laws on reality.¹¹¹

3) "Understanding" - concepts employed in this process, notions like gravity and force, are not things we see existing in reality, but constructs made by our understandings to help us grasp reality. In this stage, consciousness is in effect trying to understand its own creations. It has itself for its object, and this means that consciousness has reached the point at which it can reflect upon itself.¹¹² It is latent self-consciousness. Further, Hegel shows:

"..at this stage, knowledge of the Thing is still not complete; it must be known not only from the standpoint of the immediacy of being and of determinateness, but also as essence or inner being, as Self. This occurs in moral self-consciousness. This is aware that its knowledge is a knowledge of what is absolutely essential, it knows that being is simply and solely pure willing and knowing; it is nothing else but this willing and knowing; anything else has only unessential being; i.e. not intrinsic being, only its empty husk."¹¹³ (*Phen*, 482)

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.54.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.56.

¹¹² "The laws Hegel has in mind are Newton's laws of physics, and the view of the universe that came to be based on them. Although these laws are commonly regarded as a part of reality that Newton and other scientists have discovered, Hegel sees them as no more than an extension of the classification by consciousness of the raw data of sense-experience." Ibid., p.56.

¹¹³ G.W. F. Hegel. Phenomenology of Spirit, Trans. Miller and Findlay (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 482 (par. 792).

4) "Self-consciousness" - this idea, though greatly anticipated after reviewing the previous stages, is the most difficult to grasp. However, Hegel's primary message here is that self-consciousness can only develop in a context of social interaction. So, a child growing up in total isolation from all other self-conscious beings would never develop mentally beyond the level of understanding, or mere consciousness, because self-consciousness grows out of a social life.¹¹⁴ It is by recognizing ourselves in others that we become self-conscious. This may be thought of as a process of "synthesizing" (always important to Hegel) the self and the other.

Terry Pinkard explains,

"Universal self-consciousness" is thus a key category for Hegel's theory. He also characterizes this abstractly as "the affirmative knowing of one's self in the other self." Universal self-consciousness is thus the idea of a shared and reflective understanding of what we as agents essentially are; it is opposed to the earlier inarticulate self-understanding that characterized 'life' and the incoherent self-understandings that characterize the forms of domination of masters and slaves, and lords and servants. The important step for Hegel is to see that universal self-consciousness does not denote any metaphysical entity standing behind appearance that determines it (as would the Kantian notion of self-consciousness synthesizing its experience) but rather the kind of reflective self-understanding articulated in the essential categories of particular linguistic and cultural communities."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Peter Singer. *Hegel*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p.56.

¹¹⁵ Terry Pinkard, "*Self-Understanding and Self-Realizing Spirit in Hegelian Ethical Theory*," *Philosophical Topics* (Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1991) p.83.

Hegel calls those principles of self-understanding that structure human communities *spirit*, and this, for Hegel, is the basic categorical structure of communal subjectivity, or, the human community itself.¹¹⁶ As Pinkard shows, in practical terms, this becomes the idea of a self-conscious individual rational agent taking himself as the absolute ground of appearance, owing respect to no law not autonomously given to himself by himself.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Hegel is suggesting that we should look only to the common appearing world that we as persons share, and understand that world in terms of the various conceptually expressible systems in which the world is described and thought about by the human community.¹¹⁸ Behind that world there is no hidden metaphysical substructure determining things. There is only the system of “Spirit,” the inferential social space constituting the essential self understandings of the people of a particular linguistic and cultural community, and the world they inhabit.¹¹⁹

4. “SPIRIT”

As Taylor notes, Hegel's idea of “*Spirit*” or *Geist*, although he is often called ‘God’ and although Hegel claimed to be clarifying Christian theology, is not the God of traditional theism.¹²⁰ On the contrary, It is a spirit who lives as spirit only through men, and men are the indispensable vehicles of his spiritual existence, as consciousness, rationality and will.¹²¹ Further, he states:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹²⁰ Charles Taylor. Hegel and Modern Society. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 11.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

“But at the same time *Geist* is not reducible to man; he is not identical with the human spirit, since he is also the spiritual reality underlying the universe as a whole, and as a spiritual being he has purposes and he realizes ends which cannot be attributed to finite spirits *qua* finite, but which finite spirits on the contrary serve. For the mature Hegel, man comes to himself in the end when he sees himself as the vehicle of a larger spirit.”¹²²

Thus, to recognize *Geist* is to recognize that the spiritual functions of thought, perception, understanding, etc., are all attributed to it. Spirit is the Idea, it is the Absolute, and, (following Singer's more contemporary interpretation) it is “mind.”

Wartenberg suggests that some view Hegel as an idealist because he asserts this single supra-individual entity, *Geist*, and shows that everything which exists is to be thought of as part of the development of this single, supra-human individual.¹²³ (*Geist* has the structure of a subject and is something that has consciousness.) Also, since *Geist* is a trans-individual subject, this interpretation shows how Hegel rejects the subjectivist tendencies of earlier European philosophy by developing a metaphysics that goes beyond the individual subject, thus making Hegel's idealism ‘non-assimilable’ to the subjective idealism that asserts that things are dependent upon the individual mind of the human knower.¹²⁴ Wartenberg also shows that the dominant tendency among contemporary interpretations of Hegel, however, is away from this “spirit monist” interpretation. These other, primarily non-metaphysical interpretations, are predominant among interpreters influenced by

¹²² Ibid., p. 11.

¹²³ Thomas Wartenberg, “*Hegel's idealism: The logic of conceptuality**,” The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 118.

¹²⁴ Wartenberg states there is a general consensus among interpreters that there is something to this interpretation of Hegel. Ibid., p. 118.

analytic philosophy.¹²⁵ And, these interpretations show Hegel finding that the various strivings of individual human selves are collectively the expressions of a single historical tendency or movement with an intelligibility of its own.¹²⁶

The self's awareness of its "self-relation" to *Geist* is what Hegel calls "*subjective spirit*."¹²⁷ And, Wood suggests it is nothing over and above the consciousness that individuals have of *Geist's* activity. In so far as human beings give *Geist's* strivings after self-actualization the external, substantial shape of a functioning social order, Hegel calls this social order "*objective spirit*."¹²⁸ Additionally, it is only in individuals that the powers of *Geist* becomes conscious and actual; and, (similar to the earlier discussion of self-actualization) upon recognizing this, the individual has knowledge of the absolute, or absolute knowledge, which is equivalent to knowledge of reality itself.

Clearly, Hegel's conception of *Geist* is quite challenging. Yet, it is the crux of his philosophy. Like Kant, Hegel seeks to salvage "faith" (in God), and with it morality. Recall, Hegel is offended by Kant's belittling of man's capacity for reason. However, he recognizes that Kant's purpose in creating a wedge between "thought" and "being" is to show how God can exist, and yet, not be 'knowable.' In this way, Kant preserves faith. Respecting Kant's intention, Hegel still believes his theory of *Geist* is preferable, because it not only is the "Absolute" (truth), but also it esteems man's reasoning capacity, and thereby, philosophy as well. Indeed, Hegel speaks harshly against Kant's dualism where he finds that it is damaging to

¹²⁵ Wood shows that in analytic philosophy, the goal is to precipitate out from the confused solution of the philosophers' texts the core philosophic positions that are of contemporary interest. Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p.19.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.19.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.19.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.19.

the practice of philosophy. He suggests that where man does not believe he can know the world, he will not seek to know it. With his own metaphysical theory, Hegel intends to synthesize Kant's dualisms, and restore our recognition of the "rational as the actual."¹²⁹

5. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Hegel's ethical theory is intended to show how history, itself, has a goal. As Germino puts it:

"Man to Hegel is a being of reason and will, potentially capable of grasping in his consciousness the principles and structures of reality and of articulating his experiences in philosophically valid symbols. The audacity of Hegel's philosophy stems from his supreme confidence in the capacity of human thought to comprehend and portray the reality in which man finds himself. ...As a person man is free. Freedom for man as such, and not only for one or a few, is the goal of world history."¹³⁰

Through the process of self-actualization, becoming self-conscious- or conscious of *Geist* (the strivings of a functioning social order) man becomes free. And, Hegel finds that history is at its deepest level nothing other than the actualization of freedom through the instrumentality of the modern state.

¹²⁹ Recall, Hegel needs to prove that Kant's dualism is unreasonable. His goal is to prove that morality must be based on 'what is,' not 'what ought to be,' as Kant prescribes. Therefore, he must refute Kant's assertion that man cannot know 'what is' with any certainty, for what man understands is only constructs of his own mind.

¹³⁰ Dante Germino. Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972) p. 323.

I want to suggest here that a more contemporary interpretation would show Hegel viewing “modernity,” generally, as the epoch which “actualizates freedom for all.”¹³¹

The Modern State

Hegel states:

“The state in and by itself is the ethical whole, the actualization of freedom; and it is an absolute end of reason that freedom should be actual. The state is mind on earth and consciously realizing itself there. In nature, on the other hand, mind actualizes itself only as its own other, as mind asleep. Only when it is present in consciousness, when it knows itself as a really existent object, is it the state. In considering freedom, the starting-point must be not individuality, the single self-consciousness, but only the essence of self-consciousness; for whether man knows it or not, this essence is externally realized as a self-subsistent power in which single individuals are only moments. The march of God in the world, that is what the state is. ...In the state everything depends on the unity of universal and particular. In modern times, however, we make claims for private judgment, private willing, and private conscience. ...In Plato’s state, subjective freedom does not count, because people have their occupations assigned to them by the Guardians.” (*PR*, p. 279-280)

Hegel found that the modern state must recognize the rights of individuality, and these include variations in property and wealth. Following Kant, he suggests that as a person, man is set off from the world of things. It is “unjustifiable and unethical” to view and treat persons as things. Hegel also finds that with respect to

¹³¹ For an insightful review of Hegel’s political philosophy, see Charles Taylor, Hegel and Modern Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

things, man possesses 'the absolute right of appropriation.'¹³² Personality receives itself through the possession of rights and the subjective recognition of moral obligations. Rights and duties go together, and, a man who was assigned only duties and was not seen as the bearer of rights would be a slave.¹³³ Further, he finds that slavery is contrary to the dignity of human personality, and men are equal "in respect to their personality."¹³⁴ He suggests man may alienate his property, may abandon it to another, insofar as it is a thing external to nature. However, man may not legitimately alienate those goods, or rather substantive characteristics that constitute his own private personality and the universal essence of his self-consciousness for these are "inalienable," and one's right to them is "imprescriptible."¹³⁵ The individual as person remains inviolable with respect to his ethical life, religion, and "universal freedom of will."¹³⁶

6. SITTLICKEIT

Hegel's notion of the "self" is not very far from Kant's, as we shall see. However, their differences are of major importance. As with "self-actualization," Hegel finds that the "*good life*" is achieved not in isolation (i.e., Kant's radical individualism) but rather in community with others.¹³⁷ Indeed, he finds that the individual is initiated into the very concept of the "moral life" in the community. So, although it is possible that clashes may occur between the community's demand

¹³² Dante Germino. Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972) p. 323.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 323.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 323.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 324.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 324.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 324.

and those of the individual conscience, and the individual conscience may err; Hegel finds that in principle there should be no conflict between the moral aims of the individual and those of the state.¹³⁸ The ends of man and the political community (which is after all not something alien to the life of its citizens) is the same: the realization of freedom in the world.¹³⁹ Further, it is in *ethical life* (what Hegel refers to as *Sittlichkeit*), the good life in the context of the state that true freedom is realized and the harmonious integration of the claims and obligations of the person occurs.¹⁴⁰ Within the political order it is possible for man to become aware that duty, far from constituting a restriction or hindrance to man, is the essence of freedom. Essentially, it is in duty that the individual finds his liberation.¹⁴¹ Thus, we find that the modern state has a more central role in Hegel's ethics and political philosophy. (I will return to this shortly.)

It is often commented that Hegel hopes to “turn Kant’s moral thought on its head,” or flip it upside down, in that Hegel finds Kant’s prioritization of ‘right’ (or justice) over the ‘good,’ (or what the state or community aspires to) needs to be reversed. Hegel argues that because the good must serve as the content or basis for positive law or principles of justice, it is therefore ‘superior’ to law. And, like Kant, Hegel has faith in the rational persons willingness to consider his judgments in relation to abstract right. Man will, on his own, ensure that his judgments align with those norms and behaviors which the community has identified as necessary. And, where someone does not act in this manner, state coercion is an reasonable response. The state, or community, is the embodiment of *Geist*, and thus, it is a

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 324.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 326.

moral entity. And, as such, it is justified in asserting such coercion. As we have seen, the important difference in Kant's moral thought is that he assigns morality to the individual, and its' *practical* use (ethics, or political philosophy), is located in "law." Also, whereas Hegel adamantly opposes this view, contemporary liberal society supports it. (Returning to in the following chapter.)

Morality and Sittlichkeit

As Taylor suggests, for Hegel morality can only receive a concrete content in politics, in the design of the society we have to further and sustain.¹⁴² And, this set of obligations which we have to further and sustain a society founded on the *Idea* (what actually exists) is what Hegel calls "*Sittlichkeit*." This refers to the moral obligations I have to an ongoing community of which I am part. These obligations are based on established norms and uses, and the crucial characteristic of *Sittlichkeit* is that it enjoins us to bring about what already is. Taylor suggests that this is a paradoxical way of putting it, but in fact the common life which is the basis of my 'sittlich' obligation is already there in existence. "It is in virtue of it being an ongoing affair that I have these obligations; my fulfillment of these obligations is what sustains it and keeps it in being, and, hence, in *Sittlichkeit* there is no gap between what *ought* to be and what *is*, between *Sollen* and *Sein*."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Charles Taylor, "*Hegel: History and Politics*," *Liberalism And Its Critics* (New York: New York University Press, 1984) p. 177.

¹⁴³ This logic fueled criticisms of "Prussianism," fascism and more. As mentioned earlier, however, analytic philosophers "purge" those ideas which "no longer relate" in an attempt to "preserve" those which may offer insight to the continual problem of conflict in modern society. And, in considering Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*, analytic philosophers investigate Hegel's arguments in favor of 'unifying' visions of 'the good' with 'principles of justice.' The same method is applied to Kant's philosophy.

With *Moralität* (which Hegel associates with Kantian ethics) the opposite holds. Here we have an obligation to realize something which does not exist.¹⁴⁴ What ought to be contrasts with what is. Connected to this, the obligation holds of me not in virtue of my being part of a larger community life, but as an individual rational will.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Hegel finds that since Kant identifies ethical obligations with *moralität*, he cannot get beyond this. He finds that since Kant presents an abstract, formal notion of moral obligation (the *CI*), which holds of man as an individual, and which being defined in contrast to nature (i.e., the state) is in endless opposition to what is.

And, very importantly, we have now seen how all of Hegel's reproaches against Kant's moral philosophy are systematically connected to the dualism between self and nature. For each idea Kant presents in justification of his principle of morality (the *CI*) Hegel will argue that because it remained with a purely formal notion of reason, rather than the 'particulars' (realities) of society, it could not provide a content to moral obligation. Because it would not accept the only valid content, which comes from an ongoing society to which we belong, it remained an ethic of the individual. And, because it shied away from that larger life of which we are all apart, it saw the right as forever opposed to the real; morality and nature are always at loggerheads.¹⁴⁶ The fulfillment of freedom is when nature (here society) is made over to the demands of reason.¹⁴⁷ Thus, in the end, the fulfillment of morality comes, only, in a realized *Sittlichkeit*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

As eluded to earlier, we find that this is the point where Hegel runs counter to the moral instincts of liberalism then and now; between obligations which are founded on our membership in some community and those which are not so contingent which we tend to think transcend the former. *Moralität* transcends *Sittlichkeit* as the truly universal moral obligations. And, again, as Taylor notes, “Hegel's reversal of the order and his exalted view of political society is what has inspired accusations of “Prussianism”, state worship, and even proto-Fascism. And we can already see how wide of the mark these are.”¹⁴⁸ Germino, who comments similarly, shows that for Hegel the state is not a whole apart from society; it is society in all its diversity plus the regulative and unifying structure of government.¹⁴⁹ “This is not an arbitrary government, but a government of laws.”¹⁵⁰ For Hegel, the underlying principle, or essence, of the modern state is the synthesis of individuality and universality.¹⁵¹

As Hegel states:

“The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over their own accord into the interest of the universal, and for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interests and through the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁴⁹ Dante Germino, Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972) p. 323.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 323.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 329.

co-operation of particular knowing and willing; and individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in light of the universal, and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end. The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.”¹⁵² (PR, 160/1)

7. CONCLUSION

Let's consider again a few features of Hegel's system. First, consider the metaphysical being *Geist*. In the history of ideas, this one is not regarded approvingly. There is no reason for anyone to take this seriously, although it is unlikely that anyone has. However, I think Hegel's notion of *Geist* would strike a cord in many religious people. Oddly, *Geist*, as a supra-individual spirit, containing the 'truth' about our 'inner strivings,' and separated from us only by our 'undeveloped' consciousness, resembles the God of our separate theisms. However, this idea does not 'get us where ultimately Hegel intends,' which is the proof of God's existence. The surrounding ideas constructed for this purpose, however, have served political philosophy very well. Hegel's criticism of the atomism, and the misrepresentation of the 'self' in Kantian liberalism, serves well today as a reminder of the dangers inherent in democratic liberal theory.

¹⁵² G.W.F. Hegel. Philosophy of Right, p. 160-61 (par. 260).

Also, before turning to the analysis of the effectiveness of Hegel's critique, it is wise to consider again the object of Kant's and Hegel's moral thought, the rational person, willing to consider his judgment in relation to 'right,' or justice. This is important as it answers the question of why anyone should take the idea of morality seriously. And, as I understand the thought of these two philosophers, their answer to this question is that where political conflict (i.e., war or injustice) cannot be transcended (done away with entirely) it must be 'managed,' i.e., positive law *developed* from morality (in the case of Kant) or 'ethical norms and behaviors which the community has identified' (in the case of Hegel). Where such laws are not obeyed, both philosophers support the use of state force (coercion).

Thus, whereas the important similarity between these philosophers is the 'agent' each recognizes, the important difference is the 'content' each grounds for the idea of moral obligation. For Kant, the rational person is autonomous - self-legislating - and proof of our freedom lies in the fact that we must take ourselves to be free in order to act morally. For Hegel, this reasoning is abstract, and an ethical theory based on this premise is empty. For him, the 'ethical whole' (a synthesis of the universal and the particular) must serve as the content for ethics. And, this synthesis is the 'actualization' of freedom.

The Adequacy of Hegel's Critique

“Rationality, taken generally and in the abstract, consists in the thorough-going unity of the universal and the single. Rationality, concrete in the state, consists (a) so far as its content is concerned, in the unity of objective freedom (i.e. freedom of the universal or substantial will) and subjective freedom (i.e. freedom of everyone in his knowing and in his volition of particular ends); and consequently, (b) so far as its form is concerned, in self-determinating action on laws and principles which are thoughts and so universal. This Idea is the absolutely eternal and necessary being of mind.” HEGEL

It is now time to consider the adequacy of Hegel's arguments, a task which not surprisingly presents less of a challenge than did ascertaining the core difference between Kant and Hegel's philosophies - each similar in purpose, context and method. I have suggested in previous chapters that we locate this core difference in Hegel's objection to the categorical imperative. Hegel repeatedly argues that the *CI* is a tautology, or an empty formalism. The success of Hegel's critique is therefore dependent upon 1) his successfully illustrating how it is that the *CI* can not provide content to moral obligation, and/or 2) his successfully showing why it is irrational for others to accept the only content which the *CI* can supply to moral obligation.

I shall argue in this chapter that although Hegel's political theory presents a powerful argument for seeing our practical laws as based on societal norms rather than abstract universalism, Hegel has not provided us with an ethical theory which adequately grounds this argument. Rather, Kant's ethics of 'autonomy,' the idea that external principles or normative considerations cannot be brought in or made to give content to obligations, provides us with an ethical theory which acknowledges our individual freedom and expresses our concern for all of humanity instead of concern for that of the state.

1. THE QUESTION OF CONTENT

For Hegel Kant never shows that any particular moral content is valid; he only shows that certain kinds of action would be wrong if certain content were presupposed. Kant produces an ethical theory that is empty of content. Or, similarly, Hegel argues that since the *CI-procedure* requires a strict separation of 'is' (the particular) from 'ought' (the universal), it necessarily fails to answer the question of how moral insight can be realized in practice. It then appears that for Hegel to have approved of Kant's ethics, Kant would have needed to provide a 'directory' of unacceptable (or, acceptable) actions, (i.e., 'do no kill because killing is evil, and 'evil' is destructive to society'). This then could have been used as a 'guide' for the agent who seeks to act morally. However, as O'Neill explains, the

CI is nowhere proposed as a principle that will by itself generate or entail a universal moral code.¹⁵³

“It is not a moral algorithm (unlike a Principle of Utility) but (supposedly) a criterion of moral action for agents who act freely, so may start with various possible proposals for action. The common assumption of the three [formulations of the *CI*] is that there is some way by which agents can filter these initial proposals to check whether they are morally acceptable. Each formulation of the *CI* is offered as an answer to the agent’s question “What ought I to do?”, on the assumption that agents will have certain tentative plans, proposals and policies which they can consider, revise or reject - or endorse or pursue.”¹⁵⁴

In the contemporary literature we find that the arguments presented by Critics, theorists such as Sandel, Taylor, and Gadamer, are very similar (if not identical) to Hegel’s. These theorists argue against the “abstract universalism” in the Kantian system. For example, Gadamer shows that the *CI-procedure* has a clear methodological meaning. And, like Hegel, he views it as a form of ‘law-testing reason,’ which is decidedly a good thing.¹⁵⁵ However, as Gadamer argues, “Yet the question still arises: Considering the empirical dependence of human reason and its ingrained “tendency to evil,” how does such a test of the law ever

¹⁵³ Onora O’Neill, “*Universal Laws And Ends-In-Themselves*,” *The Monist* (Vol. 72, No. 3. July, 1989), p. 343.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 343.

¹⁵⁵ O’Hagan shows that Hegel views this ‘law-testing’ to be a positive element in formalism, the ‘unity of thinking and willing’ and praises Kant for this. Timothy O’Hagan. “*Kant’s Moral and Political Philosophy*.” In Stephen Priest. *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p. 140.

come about?"¹⁵⁶ Further, he notes that Kant's moral philosophy already presupposes a recognition of the moral law.¹⁵⁷ (And the formulas - for example, those of the law of nature or the end in itself- that are given in the faculty of judgment, are so unreal that they do not have any persuasive power in themselves.¹⁵⁸) Gadamer finds that Kant's formula seems to have only a methodological relevance for reflection insofar as it instructs us to eliminate all obfuscation stemming from "inclination."

Gadamer, along with Sandel and Taylor argue that the autonomy of moral reason certainly has the character of intelligible self-determination. However, that does not exclude the empirical conditionedness of all human actions and decisions. As Gadamer states,

"The recognition of human conditionedness (in forbearing judgment) is fully compatible with the sublime unconditionality of the moral law. It seems to me characteristic of Kant's reflection that he is not interested in the distinction between judgments of conscience about oneself and ethical judgments about others. For this reason, Kant's response to our

¹⁵⁶ Hans- Georg Gadamer. *"On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics,"* Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.366.

¹⁵⁷ Recall, Kant suggests that everyone possesses a good will - which itself recognizes the moral law. It need not be taught, but only brought out.

¹⁵⁸ Gadamer refers to Kant's example of the person who is considering suicide, of whom Kant says, "if he is still sufficiently in possession of reason that he can test his decision to commit suicide according to the model of such a formula, then he will recognize the untenability of his decision." Gadamer states, "That is obviously a mere construction. The person with thoughts of suicide does not have that much reason. Even if the moral prohibition against suicide could thereby be understood, it is still the case that the willingness to reflect, and even more the motivation to test conscience, would also have to be presupposed. In what is it suppose to lie?" Hans- Georg Gadamer. *"On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics,"* Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.366.

question about the moral meaning of moral philosophy is, in the end, unsatisfactory.”¹⁵⁹

It is clear that Hegel (and other Critics) have correctly identified certain features of Kant’s ethics, i.e., its ‘formalism,’ ‘universalism’ and ‘abstraction.’ However, it remains questionable whether or not these qualities actually render Kant’s ethics ‘empty.’ And, here, we find that resolving this deep criticism (if that is possible) requires the familiar examination that all questions of political thought require. The questions of ‘who’ is the agent and/or “what is his world view?” I suggest that we find two separate moral world views in play in Kant’s and Hegel’s thought.

2. THE KANTIAN AGENT (ON THE POSSIBILITY OF HETERONOMY)

As Reath explains, Kant’s insistence on deriving morality from reason is a rejection of influential empiricist theories that ground moral obligation in empirical facts about human beings, including both psychological facts and facts about the needs of human society and the structure of social interaction.¹⁶⁰ Further, the empiricist may assume some principle of prudential rationality; but he will avoid *a priori* principles or *normative standards* whose motivation cannot be supplied by desires and behavioral tendencies people are generally observed to have. Kant’s general criticism is that by deriving moral principles from empirically given

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 366.

desires, such theories are unable to ground the notion of a practical law.¹⁶¹ If the validity of a principle depends on the presence of a desire or interest that one may lack, then there may be agents without that motive, to whom the principle would not apply. And, such an agent could only be subject to criticism for lacking the motive which the principle presupposes. “But that is to depart from the empiricist viewpoint, by introducing an *a priori* normative standpoint to which an individual’s desires ought to conform.”¹⁶²

So, Kant insists on ‘abstract universalism’ in order to secure the purity of the rational moral decision, in naive as well as in philosophical consciousness, against all tarnishing by the viewpoints of inclination and interest.¹⁶³ The *CI-procedure* requires that the moral agent abstract from social and political realities in choosing maxims which can be universalized. The moral actor must use this ‘law-testing reason’ procedure in order to be certain that 1) he is acting from duty alone (absent inclinations, since these can prejudice his choice), and 2) his actions correspond with the moral law.¹⁶⁴ *Pure practical reason*, in the form of the autonomous will, chooses that maxim which best fits the form and essence of the moral law. And, the actor follows this chosen imperative not because it is pleasing

¹⁶⁰ Andrew Reath. “Kant’s Conception Of Practical Rationality,” *The Monist* (Vol. 72, No. 3. July, 1989). p. 393.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹⁶³ Hans- Georg Gadamer. “*On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics*,” Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 364.

¹⁶⁴ O’Hagan suggests, Kant’s deontology is radical in its purity. According to it, the moral worth of an action is derived from the fact that it is performed ‘from duty’ (aus Pflicht). Timothy O’Hagan.

to him, but rather because when tested for its universalizability, it proves itself to be adequate.¹⁶⁵

As Kant states,

"The categorical imperative, which as such only affirms what obligation is, is: Act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law. You must therefore first consider your actions in terms of their subjective

"*Kant's Moral and Political Philosophy*." In Stephen Priest. *Hegel's Critique of Kant*. (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1987) p. 141.

¹⁶⁵ Hoffe shows, "the universality present in every maxim is a subjective (relative) universality and not objective (absolute or strict) universality, which holds for any rational being whatsoever. Universalization, the second aspect of the categorical imperative, tests whether or not the subjective perspective given by a maxim can also be conceived and willed as an objective perspective for a community of persons. From the broad variety of subjective principles (maxims), the moral ones are separated from the non-moral ones, and the agent is enjoined to follow the moral maxims. According to a popular objection, Kant's ethics is indifferent toward the actual welfare of concrete human beings and is thus inferior to utilitarianism, which (at least) defines morality in terms of general well-being. At first glance, this objection appears to be justified. Kant's idea of universalization explicitly excludes the consideration of effects and the assessment of actions in light of their influence upon well-being. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, the objection proves to be unjustified. The consideration of effects is excluded from the justification of moral maxims but not from their application to concrete action. Here they are not just legitimate but usually indispensable. Not in opposition to but quite in agreement with utilitarianism, Kant considers the promotion of the well-being of his fellow men. Outfried Hoffe. *Immanuel Kant*. Translated by Marshall Farrier. (New York: State of New York Press, 1994) p.18.

As Priest interprets the charges, Hegel is dissatisfied with Kant's ethical philosophy and criticizes it "for its illicit externalization and universalization of contingent features of given societies." Hegel finds that such (empiricist) theories 'abstract' singular aspects, i.e. the drive for self-preservation, give them the 'form' of unified concepts, and elevate them to the rank of fundamental principles. Also, he finds that the empiricists lack the necessary vision of reason, developing historically and finding social embodiment, and so fail to give a satisfactory picture of society as a structured relational system founded upon rational principle. Priest quotes Hegel in arguing that "The confusion of essential and contingent, of a priori and a posteriori, is itself a function of the absence of the requisite concepts of reason, development and actualization." And, Priests points out that the great advance of the formal over the empiricist variant of natural law doctrine is that it elaborate a normative rather than merely descriptive conception of self-consciousness, in which the essence of right and duty and the essence of the thinking and willing subject are one and the same. "Of course, this union of thinking and willing is theorized by Kant in the conception of the CI, according to which a rational being endorses a universal principle of consistency to govern his practical as much as his theoretical life. But this, Hegel suggests, is both the summit and the limit of formalism: the summit in that it develops to its fullest extent the concept of the autonomous, self-conscious will; the limit, in that it is infected by the vices of abstraction (emptiness) and dualism." Stephen Priest. *Hegel's Critique of Kant*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p. 135-6.

principles; but you can know whether this principle also holds objectively only in this way: That when your reason subjects it to the test of conceiving yourself as also giving universal law through it, it qualifies for such a giving of universal law."¹⁶⁶

Certainly, Kant recognizes that the moral law recommends 'ideal' behavior. And, he acknowledges that as imperfect beings, it is unlikely that we will always succeed in acting 'perfectly.' However, he sees nothing wrong with keeping this ideal constantly in view. And, as shown in chapter two, he further finds that it benefits society to do so.

3. THE HEGELIAN AGENT vs THE NORMATIVITY OF MORALITY

The agent of Hegel's world view is one who requires that practical laws be based on societal norms rather than abstract universalism and who views abstraction as empty. Such criticism, however, seems especially specious upon review of the infamous examples Kant offers in applying the formulas to situations of everyday life. Korsgaard explains why the Hegelian argument is inadequate.

Korsgaard states that for Kant an 'external' principle or normative consideration cannot be brought in (or made) to give content to obligations.¹⁶⁷ The analysis here is complex. Yet, I understand her to mean that the principle of the moral law (where "do that which is perfect" is the form) IS by itself - empty. Yet,

¹⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.51.

¹⁶⁷ Christine Korsgaard. "Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Foundations I," Philosophical Topics. (Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall '91) p. 330.

it is because Kant identifies the 'self' as autonomous (where nothing except my own will can make a law normative for me) that his ethics has content. It is the actual willing - or the choosing of the *CI* as an objective end for oneself, that renders the principle intrinsically normative, rather than extrinsically normative.¹⁶⁸

Korsgaard explains that content brought in from external normative sources violates Kant's analysis of 'autonomy.' She states that a law in the nature of things, if it is understood as a theoretical or metaphysical principle that is external to the will, gives rise to exactly the same problem that divine law does. Laws in the nature of things can only make our maxims extrinsically, not intrinsically, normative. But the Kantian laws of autonomy are positive laws: moral laws exist because we legislate them.¹⁶⁹ Further, Korsgaard points out that this, as the Rationalists (of the eighteenth century) had argued all along, is what an obligation must be. Autonomy is the only possible source of intrinsic normativity, and so of obligation.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Note: Kant holds that while the objective reality of autonomy cannot be demonstrated, it must nevertheless be presupposed as the "conditio sine qua non" of conceiving oneself as responsible, good, or just; that a being that could not conceive itself as an autonomous moral cause could never imagine itself responsible or good or just. For Kant then autonomy is a necessary point of view, or a *necessary hypothesis*, in explaining the possibility of the common moral concepts that we actually use; but autonomy is not itself a substantive moral duty. It is rather the *hypothetical condition* of being able to conceive any duties. Patrick Riley. *Will and Political Legitimacy*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 184.

¹⁶⁹ Christine Korsgaard. "Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Foundations," *The Monist* (Vol. 72, No. 3. July, 1989). p. 330.

¹⁷⁰ Korsgaard shows that the Rationalists opposed the Sentimentalists in the eighteenth century. Further, "One of the debates of recent moral philosophy concerns the question whether moral judgments express 'internal' or 'external' reasons. According to internalists, if someone knows or accepts a moral judgment then she must have a motive for acting on it. The motive is part of the content of the judgment: the reason why the action is right is a reason for doing it. According to externalists, this is not necessarily so: there could be a case in which I understand both that and why

Today we find that this same background reasoning continues to provide the normative content to contemporary democratic liberal theory in America, and Communitarians object to this.¹⁷¹ Yet, I find that Taylor (a Critic) makes the most penetrating argument in favor of Kantian content. He states if one views Hegel's objections as suggesting that "ethical theory has to comprehend given practice; it cannot just abstract from it" then, we find that Kant's ethical thought remains sound - to those who agree with, or desire such an abstracted, formal system of Right, or

it is right for me to do something, and yet have no motive for doing it. Since most of us believe that an action's being right is a reason for doing it, internalism seems more plausible. It captures one element of our sense that moral judgments have *normative* force: they are motivating. But some philosophers believe that internalism, if correct, would also impose a restriction on moral reasons. If moral reasons are to motivate, they must spring from an agent's personal desires and commitments. This is unappealing, for unless the desires and commitments that motivate moral conduct are universal and inescapable, it cannot be required for everyone. And this leaves out the other element in our sense that moral judgments have normative force: they are *binding*. Some internalists, however, have argued that the force of internalism cuts the other way. If moral reasons must motivate, and I show you that an action is morally right, I have *ipso facto* provided you with a motive for doing it. Moral reasons motivate because they are perceived as binding. A good person, according to these internalists, does the right thing because it is the right thing, or acts from the motive of duty."

Korsgaard also shows that the term "obligation" is a source of confusion, because "an obligation" is sometimes used loosely as synonym for "a duty," a required action. But "obligation" refers not so much to the action as to the requiredness of the action, to its normative pull. Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁷¹ As Kymlicka shows, Communitarians or Hegelians, are more concerned with the particular practices of actual communities than with 'justice' itself. And, the liberal finds that given the multiplicity of religious and moral values in modern societies, where a variety of conceptions of the good compete for allegiance, a 'just' society is one which is governed by democratically adopted principles of right, in the form of positive law (or, a deontological political theory such as liberalism). And, the clear goal for the liberal is stability - a tolerant political structure where competing conceptions of the good can compete in peace - as far as is practically possible. Essentially, the Kantian rejects the Communitarian ideal of 'a common good,' and therefore advocates a 'system of justice' which allows for the fair competition of competing visions of the good. A society governed by principles of the good (such as Hegel's) would inevitably lead to heteronomy. Will Kymlicka. *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 262.

even justice.¹⁷² “However, contemporarily, we find an increased desire for a system of Right, or justice which concerns itself increasingly, with the particulars of the society.”¹⁷³

Taylor is exactly right, on both points. First, Taylor is correct in pointing out that Hegel’s charges are proclaimed unsound by those who share Kant’s moral world view. By those who view society as a collection of sufficiently “unembedded” individuals such that society ‘naturally’ embodies a plurality of competing visions of the good. By those for whom a ‘theory of the good’ (based on ‘a commonly shared vision of the good’ - the Hegelian and Communitarian prescription) is equal to ‘a theory of totalitarianism.’ And, for those who desire a theory of justice based on democratically adopted laws in order to ensure the stability of our social and political institutions. Second, Taylor is correct in showing that contemporarily we find an increased desire for a theory of justice which concerns itself more with the particulars of the society. Liberal theory today is deeply concerned with concepts such as ‘equality of life chances,’ ‘distributive justice,’ ‘the autonomy of the family’ and ‘the principle of merit.’ And, as Fiskin notes, each of these has produced a vast literature.¹⁷⁴ However, it is quite safe to

¹⁷² Charles Taylor, “*Hegel: History and Politics*,” Liberalism And Its Critics (New York: New York University Press, 1984) p. 352.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p 352.

¹⁷⁴ Fiskin shows that equal opportunity is the central doctrine of modern liberalism for legitimating the distribution of goods in society. He states, “The family is the crucial source of inequality in modern society that has gone largely unexamined in the theory of distributive justice. Inequalities between the races, between the sexes, between states, between generations, inequalities that result from market forces, from genetic differences, from the political process – all of these inequalities

suggest that we are not willing to risk the replacement of autonomy as our guiding principle with a theory of the good.

4. CONCLUSION

Hegel has reentered the dialogue of political philosophy with intense urgency. In fact, the title of this thesis, 'The Reemergence of Kantian Ethics..' seems somewhat of an insult to Hegel's revival. I have attempted in several places to show that contemporary theorists supporting a more Hegelian prescription provide arguments resembling his own against Kantian ethics. However, I have not yet stated that I credit Hegel and such Critics with what I view to be a profound move toward more 'culturally sensitive' political thought. I want to argue here that contemporarily we find the dialogue between liberals and their counterparts (Critics - including feminists, socialists and communitarians) coming closer together. Although the liberals' thought is still deontological (it prioritizes what is a matter of justice to which all persons have a claim, over the 'good' or what is a matter of one's individual pursuit of a particular conception of the good life within the limits of justice)¹⁷⁵ we find both liberals and non-liberals confronting the issues of 'dominance' 'equal opportunity' and 'fairness.' This, however, has always been the case for the Critics. Liberals, on the other hand were often more concerned

have become familiar issues in recent moral and political theory. James S. Fiskin. Justice, Equal Opportunity, And The Family (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) p. 1-3.

¹⁷⁵ Kenneth Baynes. The Normative Grounds of Social Criticism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) p. 7.

with defending a particular theory of justice than with battling such issues. As Waltzer points out in arguing for the reduction of dominance, “..this line of argument, though it is not uncommon historically, has never fully emerged in philosophical writing. Philosophers have tended to criticize (or to justify) existing or emerging monopolies of wealth, power, and education. Or, they have criticized (or justified) particular conversions-of wealth into education or of office into wealth. And all this, most often, in the name of some radically simplified distributive system. The critique of dominance will suggest instead a way of reshaping and then living with the actual complexity of distributions.”¹⁷⁶ And, as Fiskin shows, equal opportunity and the fair distribution of goods is now the central concern of modern liberalism.¹⁷⁷

This chapter attempted to bring together some of the conclusions reached in the previous chapters to show that whereas Hegel attacks the subjectivistic, atomistic, and moralistic foundations of Kant’s ethical thought, his efforts do little more than serve as a warning of the dangers inherent in democratic liberal theory. Therefore, Hegel’s objections to abstract universalism need not be resolved contemporarily. As Riley notes, Kant’s practical philosophy offers a coherent and consistent conception of volition in which free will is a “necessary hypothesis,” a

¹⁷⁶ Michael Waltzer. *Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. (USA:Harper Collins/Basic Books, Inc., 1983) p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ James S. Fiskin. Justice, Equal Opportunity, And The Family (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) p. 1-3..

“moral cause” that makes duty, responsibility, and the like intelligible.¹⁷⁸ This hypothetical free will serves as the foundation of a moral order that is meant to be paralleled one day in an external social system (universal republicanism) in which man will be as socially autonomous as he was always morally autonomous. Further, Hegel’s fear of subjectivism led him to make a distinction between private morality and social ethics.¹⁷⁹ However, the desire for concreteness, for transcendence of the never ending Kantian ought-to-be, appears to lead Hegel to acceptance of whatever level of ethics has been reached at a given point in history.¹⁸⁰ Thus, we find that although a perfect political philosophy has not resulted from Kant’s ethical theory, it presents the best option.¹⁸¹ Riley suggests of Kant, “..the answers are not all correct, but the scope of the inquiry is.”

Hegel’s alternative ethics, *Sittlichkeit*, is in the end, insufficient. However, his philosophy proves to be enormously beneficial as it calls attention to the all important ‘realities’ of society. Hegel’s critique of Kant also proves quite concretely, that the problem of defining “Right,” a task for all generations, IS the quintessential problem of political philosophy, and, as we find here, the source of its’ greatest historical battles.

¹⁷⁸ Patrick Riley. Will and Political Legitimacy. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 203.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 205.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

H. B. Action. Kant's Moral Philosophy (St. Martin's Press, Macmillan, 1970)

Henry Allison. Kant's Theory of Freedom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Kenneth Baynes. The Normative Grounds of Social Criticism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992)

Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth. Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

Hans- Georg Gadamer, "*On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics.*" Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth, Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

W.A. Galston, "*What Is Living and What is Dead in Kant's Practical Philosophy?*" Ronald Beiner W.J. Booth. Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

Dante Germino. Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972)

Jurgen Habermas, "*Morality and Ethical Life.*" Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth. Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

G.W.F. Hegel. Natural Law. trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975. (Quoted in: Jurgen Habermas, "*Morality and Ethical Life.*")Ronald Beiner and W.J.Booth Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

G.W. F. Hegel. Phenomenology of Spirit. trans. Miller and Findlay (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977)

G.W.F. Hegel. Philosophy of Right. trans. T.M.. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942)

Outfried Hoffe. Immanuel Kant (New York: State University Press, 1992)

Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. translated by James

Immanuel Kant. Ethical Philosophy. The complete text of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and Metaphysical Principle of Virtue. translated by James W. Ellington, Introduction: Warner A. Wick (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983)

Immanuel Kant. Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals. trans. Lewis W. Beck. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959)

Immanuel Kant. The Metaphysics of Morals. translation and Introduction by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Immanuel Kant. The Moral Law. trans. H.J. Paton. (London: Hutchingson & Co., 1961)

Wolfgang Kersting. "*Politics, freedom, and order: Kant's political philosophy.*"
Paul Guyer. The Cambridge Companion to Kant (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Will Kymlicka. Contemporary Political Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

Christine Korsgaard, "*Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Foundations I.*" The Monist (Vol. 72, No. 3, July, 1989)

Onora O'Neill, "*Universal Laws And Ends-In-Themselves.*" The Monist (Vol. 72, No. 3, July, 1989)

Timothy O'Hagan. "*Kant's Moral and Political Philosophy.*" Stephen Priest. Hegel's Critique of Kant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

Terry Pinkard, "*Self-Understanding and Self-Realizing Spirit in Hegelian Ethical Theory.*" Philosophical Topics (Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1991)

Stephen Priest. Hegel's Critique of Kant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

John Rawls, "*Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy.*" Ronald Beiner and W.J. Booth. Kant and Political Philosophy (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

Andrew Reath, "*Kant's Conception Of Practical Rationality.*" The Monist (Vol. 72, No. 3, July, 1989)

Patrick Riley. Will and Political Legitimacy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)

Peter Singer. Hegel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983)

J. B. Schneewind, "*Autonomy, obligation and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy.*" The Cambridge Companion to Kant (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Charles Taylor. Hegel and Modern Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Charles Taylor, "*Hegel: History and Politics.*" Michael Sandel. Liberalism And Its Critics (New York: New York University Press, 1984)

Thomas Wartenberg, "*Hegel's idealism: The logic of conceptuality**." Frederick Beiser. The Cambridge Companion to Hegel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Allen Wood. Hegel's Ethical Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Allen Wood. "*Hegel's ethics.*" The Cambridge Companion to Hegel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)