

THE HORRIBLE IN NATURE REFLECTS OUR WORTH

THE HORRIBLE IN NATURE REFLECTS OUR WORTH:

**An investigation into the connection between
Kant's notion of the sublime and our moral personhood**

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate Immanuel Kant's experience of the sublime and its reference to our moral personhood. I argue that when we contemplate the infinitely powerful in nature manifest in hurricanes, raging seas, etc., we are moved toward our moral nature and our infinite moral vocation. We come to esteem our rational power for moral lawfulness and autonomy in contrast to our more basic physical being. I also investigate what possible path an individual might be expected to pursue given that they embrace their moral nature. I argue that we adopt a disposition that orients us positively toward others and seeks a community of shared ends that contribute to the welfare and promotion of humanity.

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List of Abbreviations

- WE* "An Answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?" (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963)
- I* "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963)
- G* *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981)
- CB* "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963)
- CpR* *Critique of Practical Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- CJ* *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987)
- R* *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- TE* "The end of all things" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- MM* *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- AN* *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978)

(Reference numbers refer to the volume and page number in the German *Akademie* edition of the works *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*)

Introduction

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant develops his account of the concept of the sublime. But this is not the only place that he refers to it. There are other instances outside of the third *Critique* where Kant makes reference to the sublime. Although these instances vary, what they all have in common, I hold, is that Kant uses them in reference to our moral being. For example, in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* he explains that "although in the concept of duty we think of subjection to the law, yet at the same time we thereby ascribe a certain dignity and sublimity to the person who fulfills all his duties" (G, 4:439-40). Again, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he states that there is "something very sublime in human nature to be determined to actions directly by a pure rational law" (CpR, 5:117). In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he explains that "[t]he majesty of law...rouses a *feeling of the sublimity* of our own vocation that enraptures us" (R, 6:23n). In the *Metaphysics of Morals* by contrast, it is the "consciousness of" our "sublime moral predisposition" that permits us to conduct ourselves with "dignity" as opposed to a "*servile spirit*" (MM, 6:435). I hold that the sublime developed in the third *Critique* can also be construed in a moral context. Kant explains that the feeling aroused in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime in nature has a "moral foundation" (CJ, §39, 5:292). With this in mind, the following paper has two overall objectives: (1) I want to develop the connection between an aesthetic experience of the sublime and our moral being; and (2) I want to show how this connection orients us to our moral vocation.

I begin in chapter one by explicating the aesthetic judgment of the sublime, more specifically, the dynamically sublime, in order to delineate what is disclosed in such a judgment. I choose to rely more frequently on the dynamically sublime over the mathematically sublime simply because I believe it is in this section concerning nature in its

might that the connection to our moral being is most noticeable. We will discover that Kant invokes concepts, such as "persons" and "courage," that are familiar to his ethics. Given this, my objectives for this chapter are: (1) to explain how an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, with its simultaneous feeling of displeasure and pleasure, reveals our moral personhood; and (2) to establish the similarity between the disposition induced in the judgment of the sublime and a virtuous disposition. Once we have seen *how we* experience the sublime and *what* it points to, our moral autonomous being, we can turn our attention to Kant's doctrine of evil in order to investigate two things.

First, why does Kant devalue our sensible being? He believes that if we are to be moral, we must suppress this aspect of our being. But why does he find it threatening? We will discover that if we place value on our own desires and happiness, it will, Kant believes, inevitably resist morals. He demands that we adopt a disposition that will adhere to rational principles instead of our animal urges. But given that we are sensible creatures, how are we ever to know that we have adopted the correct disposition that rejects our desires and happiness for rational principles? This brings us to our second point. I seek to discover whether or not the disposition induced by the aesthetic judgment of the sublime contributes to our belief that we are properly disposed. If we do come to the awareness of our moral personhood and our ability to morally improve our lives through an experience of the sublime, it appears that our disposition is oriented in the desired way.

The second chapter focuses on Kant's belief that human beings, given the power of free choice, are all susceptible to choosing moral evil over moral good. Such a choice is likely too because evil, Kant claims, is a consequence of our social comparisons and the anxiety of being perceived as unworthy in the opinion of others. In order to suppress this detrimental *way of thinking*, we need to restore our predisposition to the good. Each individual is, therefore, responsible for a change in disposition, i.e., a "change of heart," in which the moral law becomes the maxim of our power of choice. My objectives for the

second chapter are: (1) to explicate the *way of thinking* prior to our "change of heart;" (2) to show what is required to restore our predisposition to the good; and (3) to explain why I believe that an aesthetic experience of the sublime contributes to our conviction that we are in fact properly disposed. It appears that the feeling of respect generated in the aesthetic judgment of the sublime awakens our moral dispositions. For this feeling, Kant argues, is the very incentive to make the moral law, and not the principle of self-conceit, the maxim of our power of choice. Adopting the moral law in this way, Kant believes, is also a positive orientation toward others. We are thereby outwardly turned to our moral vocation.

In the final chapter, I explain that the consciousness of our moral autonomous being revealed in the aesthetic judgment of the sublime and the adoption of a virtuous disposition broadens into a vision for the whole human species. The individual cannot be considered in a vacuum. According to Kant, the very awareness of our rationality permits us to bestow this capacity on everyone else. We consider ourselves a part of a "kingdom of ends," hoping to advance shared ends that contribute to the welfare of humankind. As moral agents, Kant believes that we cannot be indifferent to this. He claims that from our moral being arises the hope of a "highest good." My objectives for chapter three are: (1) to establish the connection between our moral vocation and the sublime; (2) to highlight that our vocation is to be the ultimate purpose of nature provided that we have a final purpose; and (3) to explain, by way of Allen Wood's analogy, how an ethical community modeled on Kant's notion of moral friendship is the best expression of valuing others as ends-in-themselves and hence indispensable for approaching the "highest good." Though I invoke the concept of the "highest good," I do so *only* to point out that for Kant it is the final purpose which we strive for once we orient ourselves morally. In other words, as human moral agents governed by pure, practical reason, it cannot be a matter of "indifference" what the consequences of our "right" conduct amount to (R, 6:4-6). I am simply interested in investigating how human beings might best interact with one another in the hope of

approaching the "highest good," given that they are oriented morally and respectfully consider others as ends-in-themselves.

Chapter 1: The Sublime and Moral Personhood

"When we speak of the sublime in nature we speak improperly; properly speaking, sublimity can be attributed merely to our way of thinking, or, rather, to the foundation this has in human nature."

-Critique of Judgment

Given the immensity of things like the "*starry heavens above*" or a vast mountain range, or the sheer power of a hurricane or raging sea, when we judge such phenomena as sublime, at least two possible modes of orientation come to the fore. On the one hand, we can perceive mirrored in these awe-inspiring things an image of the capacity of our unconstricted imagination, a capacity that knows no restrictions and issues forth from ourselves. This way of orienting ourselves is empowering and generative, bestowing a great deal of liberty upon the individual, because they come to recognize the freedom of their imagination. This orientation is referred to as the psychological account. On the other hand, we can sense the insignificance, the infinitesimal smallness of our existence in comparison to such grand phenomena. What we are is but a trifle when we view the extensiveness of, and force in, the universe. Accompanying this position is the notion of an omnipotent Creator. Pious humility and submissiveness is the proper mode of orientation to adopt here, since we ought to have respect for a Being who demonstrates such power in nature. This orientation can be referred to as the theological account.

These two accounts, or modes of orientation, were commonly discussed among thinkers in the eighteenth century, including Immanuel Kant. Though neither actually dominates the literature, it was often the case that the psychological account, though it promoted a certain amount of self-emancipation, yielded to the theological account. Not

surprisingly, Kant expressed his dissatisfaction with both of these interpretations. He thought that judgments of the sublime were improperly imputed to the actual object in nature. Instead, he thought that a power residing in human nature was what we ought to judge sublime. He sympathized with the psychological interpretation, the freedom of our imagination, but sought to provide a more detailed account, absent any theological underpinnings.

In this chapter, I investigate Kant's aesthetic judgment of the sublime in order to demonstrate what this judgment reveals. In section 1.1, the two standard accounts introduced above are briefly highlighted to provide us with the backdrop for Kant's developed notion of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. It is historically interesting to see from which concepts Kant departed and how he chose to locate the sublime in the power of our mental faculties as opposed to in objects of nature. We will discover too, as we advance through the chapter, that he does not relinquish the moral underpinnings that were prevalent in the concept of the sublime. Indeed, Kant explains that the feeling aroused by an aesthetic judgment of the sublime is "a feeling which, however obscure it may be, has a moral foundation" (CJ, §39, 5:292). In section 1.2, I provide a technical account of the aesthetic judgment of the dynamically sublime. More specifically, I explain both what is revealed in this judgment, and how it is revealed. What we find is that we have a "self-preservation of a different kind," i.e., an autonomous legislating power, that values everything in nature as small in comparison to it. This, I argue, is our moral personhood. In section 1.3, I look at what Kant means by a "person." With this notion, we come to accept others as ends-in-themselves who consequently demand respect. The final section 1.4 addresses the issue of whether there is, as I suspect, a connection between the sublime and virtue. Is the disposition, the way of thinking we gain in making an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, upon revelation of our power for free self-legislation,

akin to virtue? I believe it is. But let us turn to our first objective, and consider the two prominent orientations in Kant's time.

1.1 Two Prominent Orientations.

As Paul Guyer explains in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, in the eighteenth century "the standard account of our pleasure in the sublime often *began* with a psychological description of the pleasure that the imagination takes in its unconstricted exercise."¹ He points out that a sense of pleasure arose because the imagination enjoyed both being free as well as contemplating "an *image* of its freedom." That is to say, confronted with the thought of such a spacious horizon as a mountain range, human beings felt the unboundedness of their imagination and at once pleasurablely relished in its freedom. Human beings experienced a sense of elation when they acknowledged the freedom of our imagination.

Such an account assumed two fundamental characteristics of human beings. First, human beings do not enjoy being restrained. Rather, we as a species revel in our freedom, our ability to roam outside strict parameters. We seek new ways of understanding and manipulating our world. We desire knowledge about how the earth and universe functions. And this requires a critical stance toward what we hold to be true. We must be able to posit alternative ways of understanding things, of doing things, which we cannot do if we are confined to a narrow view. The freedom of our imagination, on this account, ensures our access to worlds not yet discovered. It emphasizes a broadened view of perceiving the world.

The second assumption, which is more basic, is that human beings are, in fact, free. There enters into the mind no doubt that reflecting back at us, when we gaze into the

¹Paul Guyer. *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on aesthetics and morality*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1996. p. 239, emphasis added.

sky and follow the stars beyond our comprehension, is an image of our own freedom. We presume that we are not determined. Rather, we can change the course of our lives, our future, since we have the capacity to freely choose as well as the capacity to originate choices. Emerging from this account is a subject who can disengage from their situation, and utilize their unlimited imagination to bring forth new possibilities. In a judgment of the sublime of this sort, the subject experiences pleasure.

But this notion of an unconstricted imagination, the psychological account, more often than not collapsed into a theological account. Indeed, the standard conception of the sublime had a strong emphasis on theology and pious humility. As Guyer indicates, "the explanation of the concept of grandeur or sublimity did not usually remain confined to psychology; a turn to theology characteristically followed."² Since it was understood that any immensity of nature was a depiction of the all-powerful, all-pervasive ultimate creator of the universe, we must take a "worshipful" orientation toward the "magnificence of God" in lieu of celebrating our own freedom. Despite our initial pleasure in the freedom of our imagination, we attributed the cause of such elation not to anything characteristically human but rather something divine, something fortunately placed within us. We ought to be grateful for this capacity. Moralization, accompanying this account, was certain to follow.

In view of the vastness of the universe, those who are complacent in their own personal legislation concerning conduct or those who think themselves more important than others, are quickly warned, by advocates of the theological account, that they and the human race in general are nothing compared to the All-mighty. An experience of infinity ought to compel us to an attitude of personal humility, not self-glorification. As Guyer explains, "[t]he appropriate moral stance for one who fully understands the sublime immensity of nature is to regard himself as virtually nothing before God, as one who is

²*Ibid.*, p. 240.

allowed to live through no merit in himself but only because the goodness of God is as infinite as his power."³ It was held that God could annihilate the species at any moment, but chooses not to because He is good. God's decision rests on his kindness and generosity to spare humanity.

The human species, on this account, is not responsible for its destiny. In fact, the human species and its accomplishments are "nothing to be proud of." Our abilities are impoverished, rendered immobile. Instead, it is God's goodness that permits us to live and flourish. As a manifestation of God's omnipotence, the sublime in nature is simply a reminder of our futility and powerlessness as human mortals. It is an experience that impresses upon us a deep feeling of humility and reverence for the mercy of God. The theological thrust in this account demands that we ought to reduce our self-importance. We ought to feel humble and grateful that God has spared us. We ought to think of God's powers and not our own. We are at the mercy of God's will.

The theological account of the sublime in nature, however, is very different from what Kant holds. As we will see in what follows, Kant's concept of the sublime does not demand that we reduce our importance. He believes that representations of the mighty in nature ought to induce a feeling of pleasure at the recognition of our rational powers. We ought not feel humble. We ought to feel empowered. And yet, his analysis of the sublime like that of the theological account has a moral emphasis. As Ronald Beiner declares, "the moral problem that the idea of the sublime poses for Kant is that to regard objects of nature as supremely sublime is a kind of insult to our own nature as rational beings (beings whose dignity reposes *above and beyond* nature)."⁴ Kant is simply suspicious of religion, especially dogmatic religion, and the accompanying *slavish attitude* of its followers. He

³*Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁴Beiner, Ronald. "Kant, the Sublime, and Nature," in *Kant & Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*. Edited by Ronald Beiner and William James Booth. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. p. 281.

seeks to purge us of superstition and hierarchy since he believes that "religious incompetence is not only the most harmful but also the most *degrading*" to our humanity (WE, 8:41, emphasis added). Kant believes that this will guarantee our conduct will be legislated freely by our own reason. We will not be passive recipients - "domestic cattle" - concerning what we ought to do. We will have the courage to use our own reason.

However, Kant does believe in God. He is a religious thinker. As Wood explains, "his highest hopes for human history are pinned on religious values and religious institutions"⁵ of the Christian persuasion. We will discover that consequent upon having the appropriate disposition and the feeling of respect aroused in the aesthetic judgment of the sublime, we are oriented toward others and an ethical community. For Kant, this community is ultimately a religious apparatus meant to be universally inclusive. Suffice it to say that he simply finds *servility* to anything but our own power of reason morally reprehensible. Indeed, he holds in contempt any "religious discourse that recommends fawning and groveling...instead of recommending a vigorous resolve" (CJ, §29 Comment, 5:273) based on our own freely chosen principles. Consequently, Kant's alternative conception of the sublime follows more closely the psychological account, thereby empowering human beings with resources found within all of us.

With Kant's theory of the sublime, nature's vast wonders are not construed as God's demand for reverence, humility, and obedience. We are no longer committed to a view of impotence in the face of nature's infinite might. Instead, Kant redirects our awe towards our mental faculties. He emphasizes the power of our reason and its lawful capacity as that which we properly judge sublime. As Guyer aptly explains, "God's creation [i.e., the universe,] is humbled before our free reason, and even the sublimity of

⁵Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Ethical Thought*. New York: Cambridge Press. 1999. p. 318.

God himself can be appreciated only through the image of our own autonomy."⁶ But this demotion of humility and promotion of autonomy that Kant introduces in no way eradicates the moral significance of judgments of the sublime that were found in earlier theories. Indeed, a judgment of this sort, Guyer points out, expresses one "fundamental assumption" of his moral theory. The force of Kant's theory of the sublime, I shall argue, is the feeling of respect that accompanies the recognition of our autonomy and independence from the mere mechanistic determination of nature. In other words, we come to recognize upon reflection of the horrible in nature, our moral personhood. Let us proceed.

1.2 The horrible in nature.

Kant focuses, in the account of the dynamically sublime, on nature in its might and our concomitant aesthetic judgment of it. He begins §28 of the *Critique of Judgment* with his usage of terms. He defines *might* as "an ability that is superior to great obstacles" (CJ, §28, 5:260). Moreover, "[i]t is called *dominance* if it is superior even to the resistance of something that itself possesses might" (CJ, §28, 5:260). He continues that an aesthetic judgment of the dynamically sublime is proper when we view "nature as a might that has *no dominance* over us" (CJ, §28, 5:260, emphasis added). Despite the representation of vast, destructive powers of nature that induces a sense of displeasure, Kant holds, we human beings become aware of *an ability within ourselves* to generate the courage to *think* we are capable of resisting such wrath. And since that which can resist might is considered dynamically sublime, we perceive our own ability to be dynamically sublime so long as we continue to believe that great obstacles, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, etc., cannot disvalue

⁶Guyer, p. 259.

or effect this ability. This produces the aesthetic pleasure, a feeling of great elation and respect.

Prima facie, we may consider this difficult to imagine and implausible. After all, how is it possible that human beings can resist something as vast and destructive as a tempestuous sea or a hurricane? Do we use our ability to build stronger boats? Or do we build homes that can withstand violent winds? To answer in the affirmative would be to miss Kant's point. Nature in its might will always triumph. And yet, Kant believes that we have dominance over nature as a result of our ability to determine our conduct according to practical reason alone. Moreover, he stipulates that nature must be presented as *fear-arousing* if we are to make an appropriate judgment of the dynamically sublime. This may appear paradoxical. However, such a condition will prove warranted.

Kant explains that "when we judge [something] aesthetically (without a concept), the only way we can judge a superiority over obstacles is by the magnitude of resistance" (CJ, §28, 5:260). Since anything that mobilizes our powers to resist is deemed "evil," and all the more an "object of fear" if we readily succumb to it, nature as might too must be considered an object of fear *but without our being fearful*. For the condition of fearlessness permits our judging nature in its might as dynamically sublime. Kant believes that we are incapable of making a judgment of this kind if we are afraid. Such a disposition would compel us *naturally* to run from a destructive source that terrifies us, as our instincts would force us to relocate at the sight of some looming natural destruction. Instances of this kind are immediately available: the impending force of a hurricane provokes massive evacuations; rough seas prevent boat sailings; volcanic eruptions cause the displacement of people. Instances such as these illustrate the quickness of our flight response when nature confronts us in its might. Kant does not want to deny this.

However, it is possible to find an object fearful without being afraid of it. As Kant explains, if we judge in such a way as to merely *imagine* an instance where we might

possibly attempt to resist, the realization of such a feat is deemed "utterly futile" (CJ, §28, 5:260). This causes us to be fearful of the object. But since there is no case in which we *actually* attempt to oppose it, he reassures us, we will not be afraid of it. Kant illustrates this point by way of an example. He explains that a virtuous person has no desire to resist God and his commandments and so has no reason to be afraid. But when she *thinks* of the intrinsic possibility of resisting God, through temptations, then she recognizes God as an object of fear. A thought such as this causes her anxiety and horror because God still retains a power that we as mortals cannot resist. But her *courage* arising from her *resolute disposition* acts as an antidote to such possible transgressions. The more fear-arousing the representation is, the more sublime we judge it to be, and so the more respect we tend to attribute to it.

But what, in fact, we are truly doing when making an aesthetic judgment of the dynamically sublime is not attributing sublimity to anything in nature. According to Kant, we are acknowledging a capacity in us that goes beyond any natural determination. That is to say, when we "consider bold, overhanging and...threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightening and thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean heaved up, the high waterfall of a mighty river," we glimpse that "our ability to resist" is "an insignificant trifle" in comparison (CJ, §28, 5:261). And yet, Kant continues, the perception of these is all the more dazzling, more exhilarating the more fearful they are, so long as we find ourselves in a "safe place." Away from the physical harm of these destructive forces, we feel a power residing within that cannot be affected by nature, even considered in its worst extremity. In an aesthetic judgment of nature represented as might, this power, *the ability for lawfulness*, is what we deem dynamically sublime. Consequently, we become conscious of our freedom from natural determination, and this is the source of an intense pleasure.

We could mistakenly predicate sublimity to unbounded natural phenomena. We could simply enumerate those phenomena that deserved the attribute sublime. For instance, if we looked at a raging sea, we could say: "*That* is sublime!" Kant, however, believes this to be inappropriate. Instead, he locates sublimity in the recognition of our mental capacities, more specifically, our practical reason and its law-giving power. He explains that "we like to call these objects sublime [hurricanes, etc.] because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, *and* which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence" (CJ, §28, 5:261, emphasis added). Immediately, we are reminded of Kant's moral theory.

The distancing, the very disengagement from nature emphasizes the requisite condition that when choosing what we ought to do, we must be free from private inclinations and personal desires. Rather than follow the voices of nature, i.e., natural causality and the promotion of our physical well-being and happiness, we must act according to the strict and formal laws of practical reason alone. We should avoid being slaves to our passions. All of this is a familiar understanding of Kant's ethics. Here too, in the analytic of the dynamically sublime, Kant asserts the significance in and primacy of humanity's moral stature in comparison to nature. Despite the magnitude or might of natural forces, we should neither be infected nor intimidated by such unlawfulness. For we can resist natural causality by virtue of our moral disposition, our subjective ground for determining the power of choice.

As Felicitas Munzel puts it,

[i]n and through aesthetic reflection we are 'returned' so to speak from looking without, to reflection upon ourselves within; in just this turn we

come to *feel* an appreciation for who and what we are, to feel the very dignity of our essential nature.⁷

The judgment of nature as dynamically sublime points to an ability of "a quite different kind," viz., our ability for practical self-legislation. Thus, Munzel continues,

[i]n the aesthetic contemplation of the starry heavens above us [or the raging sea], with its felt sense of being overwhelmed by the forces of natural necessity that they represent, we are turned to an appreciative awareness of having within ourselves the source of a necessity different in kind, and, so too, an entirely different domain of existence comes into view for us.⁸

This domain is moral.

Kant deliberately positions us beyond nature, in a realm that he believes cannot be seized by nature. Despite our finite corporeal being, returned to our moral being, we feel the power of our practical reason to be incomparably greater than everything but itself. Such an awareness of nature's might and our physical impotence to such a force is twofold. For we possess within ourselves a strength, an ability of a *quite different kind* that dominates over the physical world and all its peril, which we nonetheless still remain a part of given our physical constitution. But what exactly is this ability? In Kant's own words: "what is it in you that can be trusted to enter into combat with all the forces of nature within you and around you and to conquer them if they come into conflict with your moral principles" (MM, 6:483).

He explains that the feeling arising from the judgment of the sublime occurs when our imagination attempts to bring to intuition *ideas of reason*, such as the demand for absolute totality, but realizes its inadequacy for such an endeavour. In the face of an infinite power like a raging sea, the imagination is unable to bring what is beyond comprehension under the lawful confines of the understanding. Consequently, it seeks

⁷Munzel, G. Felicitas. *Kant's Conception of Moral Character: The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1999. p. 129.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 129-130.

unity from our reason. But again, the imagination does not succeed. For no idea of reason can be brought to the sensible world directly. The aesthetic judgment of the sublime can be construed then as a product of the imagination's unsuccessful attempt to bring ideas of reason to intuition.

Not surprisingly, the straining of the faculties in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime invokes a simultaneous, conflicting feeling of displeasure and pleasure. It arises from, on the one hand, the imagination's inadequacy as a faculty of sense to estimate absoluteness in terms of the magnitude or might of nature displayed in its vastness or power, and bring it into a coherent order. On the other hand, the fact that such an aesthetic judgment is itself in harmony with rational ideas, which, though they can never be exhibited in sensible intuition, are still law for us. Our mind is elevated when it judges itself contemplating such formless, intense natural phenomena, abandoning itself to a free imagination, which, connected to and in the service of reason, still recognizes its inadequacy in presenting pure, rational ideas. We have a feeling of frustration and displeasure with this inadequacy. Nevertheless, it arouses in us a pleasurable feeling of the supersensible power that resides within us and ultimately subsumes nature under its lawgiving power.

Therefore, Kant states that

a liking for the sublime...is a feeling that the imagination by its own action is depriving itself of its freedom, in being determined purposively according to a law different from that of its empirical use. The imagination thereby acquires an expansion and a might that surpasses the one it sacrifices; but the basis of this might is concealed from it; instead the imagination *feels* the sacrifice or deprivation and at the same time the cause to which it is being subjugated. (CJ, Comment, 5:269)

And the very awareness of our rational ideas as an unobtainable law, "an unfathomable depth of this supersensible power" that sparkles like a "jewel" with its own light, as something that has its full worth in itself, awakens our feeling of dominion, of superiority over *everything* sensible. Therefore, Kant concludes that

all we are entitled to say is that the object [of nature] is suitable for exhibiting *a sublimity that can be found in the mind*. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility. (CJ, §23, 5:245, emphasis added)

Our own limitations and the unsuccessful attempt "to adopt a standard [that is] proportionate" to resisting the might of "nature's *domain*," Kant goes on to state, permits nevertheless the discovery of "a different and nonsensible standard that has this infinity under it as a unit of measure" (CJ, §28, 5:261). As a result, everything we deem vast and powerful in nature that appears to dwarf human significance is small in comparison to the standard we locate in our own power of reason. It is the awareness of our practical reason and our autonomy that encourages Kant to conclude that a superiority to nature resides within our mental capacities. But again, this does not commit Kant to the view that nature cannot physically harm us.

As he explains, nature's might is irresistible when we consider ourselves simply as natural beings. Human beings as finite and material are not nature's "special darling[s]." We are subject to nature's degenerative forces just like anything else. Moreover, we recognize our physical impotence when we consider the devastation of nature's destructive forces. We are physically constituted and vulnerable to any force of nature, from hurricanes to diseases. And yet, such a powerful or insidious manifestation of nature "reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us" (CJ, §28, 5:261), or within us. We have a different kind of self-preservation. It is a higher aspect of our being, Kant holds, which functions apart from the causal necessity of nature. It is our moral nature, our morally principled mindedness. And as such, this self-preservation "keeps the *humanity* in our person from being degraded, even though a human being

would have to succumb to that dominance [of nature]" (CJ, §28, 5:262). What makes us essentially human, i.e., our moral nature according to Kant, cannot be affected by nature of any kind. We can always retain our moral integrity despite the horror nature hurls in our path.

He reminds us that when we aesthetically judge nature as sublime, we do so because it reveals to us a *strength* in resisting nature's might as well as regarding as small those natural concerns for "property, health, and life" that we all share as finite, tellurian beings. Although nature's wrath subordinates us with respect to these natural concerns, Kant holds that we "as persons," i.e., autonomous moral agents, do not have to relinquish our "highest principles" issuing from practical reason to this might, nor to our natural concerns for that matter. We have a power as well as a strength within that can determine whether we abandon or uphold these principles, regardless of nature's causes, grand or small. This refers to the "strength of resolution in a human being as a being endowed with freedom, hence his strength insofar as he is in control of himself (in his senses)" (MM, 6:384). We acknowledge through thoughts of tempests, hurricanes, or diseases a liking for our ability that stands above and beyond nature and its causal laws. The arousal of the sublime in nature, therefore, can be construed as a substitute for respect for our own humanity. The object makes intuitable the superiority of our vocation over the greatest power of sensible phenomena (CJ, §27, 5:257), insofar "as the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness" (CJ, §23, 5:246). This too fosters a resolve, a courage in following pure, practical reason.

We recognize our freedom to determine ourselves to action outside the causal necessity of nature, and the accompanying moral agency. As Guyer most aptly summarizes, "there is nothing nature can do to us which can force us to surrender our

ability to act freely under the guidance of practical reason alone."⁹ That is, "nature by itself can do nothing of *moral* disvalue to us."¹⁰ Hence, nature is only called sublime because "it elevates our imagination, [making] it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity" (CJ, §28, 5:262). The mind feels its own sublimity when it invokes the power to "cross the barriers of sensibility" to pursue a practical aim (CJ, §26, 5:255).

We need not abandon our humanity, "as persons," to vast natural phenomena. According to Kant, we are free, self-determining individuals. As such, we ought to be able to morally determine ourselves without the influences of natural phenomena. Instances in which we make judgments concerning the dynamically sublime awaken this ability of self-determination, our autonomy, and a strength within us. In other words, they point to our moral personhood and virtuous disposition. It is the principle of humanity and personhood that we must now briefly elucidate.

1.3 Moral personhood.

Kant's principle of humanity requires that we as rational, human agents never be treated *merely* as a means to someone's desires and ends. Rather, we have inhering in us a rational capacity that distinguishes us from other living things in the world - for instance, animals and plants - because with this capacity, we can freely determine ourselves to ends of our own making. As rational beings, Kant holds, we are free from natural necessity to choose our conduct. As such, we have the flexibility concerning the type of life we choose to live.

As biological creatures, animals, plants, and human beings, all seek to preserve their individual life. We readily succumb to our inclinations to satisfy our biological nature. If I am hungry, I will seek food to satisfy this need. The biological preservation of

⁹Guyer, p. 262.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

my life does not differ from that of any other living organism. We all naturally desire to stay alive. As Kant fittingly states, "[i]n the system of nature, a human being is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value" (MM, 6:434). In this description, we do not transcend natural determination, we simply slave for our survival. Hence, Kant holds, we have no value above and beyond other things in the world.

However, as rational human persons, we are the only species in this world that can properly set, i.e., freely "*have*," ends for ourselves. Such an end, in this sense, is making our own ends and constraining our own freedom accordingly to meet this end, thereby complying with the law issuing from our practical reason. This ability to set an end for itself, Kant argues, is what distinguishes rational nature from the rest of nature. Indeed, "*rational nature exists as an end in itself*" (G, 4:428). And it is this end that can be "nothing other than the subject of all possible ends" (G, 4:437). As such, human beings have an "absolute worth," and therefore can never be used merely as a means to someone's purposes.

Furthermore, the "determination to an *end* is the only determination of choice the very concept of which excludes the possibility of constraint *through natural means* by the *choice* of another" (MM, 6:381). What Kant means by this is that we can be coerced to comply with another's desire to obtain their end or we can be strung along by our sensible impulses. But this is obedience to *external* constraint, and it, Kant argues, necessarily denies our freedom of choice. He states that "[t]o have an end that I have not myself made an end is self-contradictory, an act of freedom which is not yet free" (MM, 6:381). In order to recognize our humanity, our true personhood according to Kant, we must determine our own ends from our pure, practical reason. For it is the very act of intending that is the source of our dignity as human beings, i.e., intending a course of action from freedom alone.

But simply setting ourselves ends through free rational determination does not automatically give us an *intrinsic* value. Rather, it only gives us an "*extrinsic* value" for our "usefulness." Kant likens this merit to economics: "it gives one man a higher value than another, that is, a *price* as of a commodity in exchange" (MM, 6:434). It is only when we are regarded as a "*person*" that we come into our true worth. As such, Kant explains, we are "the subject[s] of a morally practical reason" (MM, 6:434). We act according to our own maxims, i.e., "subjective principles of volition," in such a way that we would make them universal laws for everyone in similar situations to follow. More importantly, the moral law is the only incentive we have as the maxim of our power of choice. It is through this moral intending that I am considered worthy of dignity.

A person is one who is subjected to commands or prohibitions that he gives to himself by following the moral law. As authors of rational, moral self-legislation, we are never to be valued as a mere means, but as an end in ourselves. From this capacity, we incur "an absolute inner worth" that demands respect. So "personality," as Allen Wood explains, can be understood as "the rational capacity to respect the moral law and to act having duty or the moral law as a sole sufficient motive of the will."¹¹ In Kant's words, personality is "freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity of a being subject to special laws - namely pure practical laws given by" our "own reason" (CpR, 5:87). Practical laws here refer specifically to our highest intelligible being, i.e., our moral being.

According to Kant the idea of personality accomplishes two things. It "awaken[s] respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation) while at the same time showing us the lack of accord of our conduct with respect to it and thus striking down self-conceit" (CpR, 5:87). We gain a subjective feeling of respect, which is the

¹¹Wood, p. 118.

incentive to make the moral law the maxim of our power of choice, i.e., act morally, when we discover within us our power of practical reason. As Kant states, "the law within him unavoidably forces from him *respect* for his own being" (MM, 6:402-3). That it is possible to determine our moral conduct from this power alone, raises our self-worth to an end-in-ourselves. Furthermore, by conceding that human beings are ends-in-themselves, myself included, we are already placed in a moral realm. As Kant states, "morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself" (G, 4:435). With the feeling of respect, we acknowledge the fundamental worth in ourselves and others, thereby orienting us morally to others.

The idea of personality, moreover, calls forth a comparison with the perfect moral law as opposed to social comparisons. We will see the full implications of this when we explore Kant's doctrine of radical evil in the second chapter. For now, however, it is important to note that worthiness arises not from external comparisons, but rather from comparing ourselves to the moral law. Since we can never realize the demands issuing from pure, practical reason, we find ourselves humbled. This, Kant explains, "follows unavoidably from our sincere and exact comparison of ourselves with the moral law (its holiness and strictness)" (MM, 6:436). We can never attain to this law perfectly, being endowed sensibly. Proper "humility, therefore, is nothing else than comparison of one's worth with moral perfection," and not with any comparison to others by way of power, wealth, happiness, etc. Humility in the face of the moral law prevents one individual from having an inflated opinion of himself. The ability for self-determination is not therefore cause for *self-aggrandizement*. Rather, our rational moral determination is to be understood as that which raises us all, *as a species*, above everything else in the sensible world. As such, we have reason to feel elated.

Kant explains,

from our capacity for internal lawgiving and from the (natural) human being's feeling himself compelled to revere the (moral) human being within his own person, at the same time there comes *exaltation* and the highest self-esteem, the feeling of his inner worth, in terms of which he is above any price and possesses an inalienable dignity, which instills in him respect for himself. (MM, 6:436)

A similar feeling of *exaltation*, we have revealed, occurs during an aesthetic judgment of the sublime. We shall return to this and locate the connections between Kant's theory of the sublime and ethics. For each, the immediacy of our autonomy is prevalent. But what is more significant is that in both cases we gain a feeling of respect for our moral personhood.

1.4 Virtue in the theory of the sublime.

As we have seen, when judging nature to be dynamically sublime, we feel within us a *strength* that can resist nature in its might. A judgment of this sort raises our "vital powers," our "soul's fortitude" to profound heights so that we discover our power to determine and conduct ourselves morally independent of any interference from natural causality. Consequently, we gain the "courage" to believe that we can resist such intense obstacles like tornadoes or diseases that affect us physically when we perceive and value ourselves as free, moral subjects. Indeed, I believe that what Kant is expressing here is a mode of orientation, a disposition, when thinking of such horrific dangers, that is akin to his notion of virtue.

Virtue is the strength of mind needed to adhere to rational principles in the face of adversity. That is to say, it is "the firmly grounded disposition to fulfill one's duty strictly" (R, 6:23n). And as we saw in section 1.2, we are able to hold steadfastly to our highest, moral principles despite the force of the natural adversary we confront. The idea of resisting an adversary of such extreme power may cause us to surrender to the belief that we are helpless. But this way of thinking, as Kant reveals, is improper and ultimately

degrading to our own humanity, even if we considered this power to be an illustration of God's wrath. Let us see why he thinks this.

Kant argues that those people who fear God and are terrified because they construe nature's destruction as God's anger simply do not have the correct "frame of mind." Prostration, humility, and fear "accompanied by contrite and timorous gestures and voice" is no way of thinking suitable even "to divine greatness" (CJ, §28, 5:263). This way of thinking, Kant believes, presupposes transgressions against God and the fear of divine punishment. In other words, they do not maintain a virtuous disposition. Kant suggests that the correct way of thinking, i.e., the proper disposition to have toward God and ourselves is assured contemplation and judgments that are, more significantly for our purposes, "completely free."

The very thought of God and God's sublimity, in Kant's view, arises only by accepting the fact of the primacy of our practical reason and our freedom, viz., our capacity to govern ourselves freely from rational principles alone. Such acceptance, he believes, will coincide with God's commandments. Kant explains that only if an individual is

conscious that his attitude is sincere and pleasing to God, will the effects of might serve to arouse in him the idea of God's sublimity, insofar as he recognizes *in his own attitude* a sublimity that conforms to God's will, and is thereby elevated above any fear of such natural effects, which he does not regard as outbursts of God's wrath. (CJ, §28, 5:263, emphasis added)

So we respect God, Kant concludes, because *we* are endowed with an ability that provides us with the courage to judge nature as sublime without being afraid. And, I believe, this courage that we gain is a *way of thinking* akin to virtue.

For courage, Kant argues, "rests upon principles and is a virtue" (AN, 7:256). An individual is thought to be courageous if she uses her mind and does not flee from danger. Though courage is an emotion, Kant believes that it can be generated by reason. Indeed, he explains that if nature denies us the temperament courage, reason will provide the individual the necessary strength and resolve to overcome a perilous adversary (AN,

7:256). As such, it is considered "genuine bravery," viz., "virtuous strength." To hold to one's course "steadfastly," despite what obstacles act as barriers to our highest principles, is "moral courage." And this demands a virtuous disposition.

Thus, for Kant, virtue signifies "the moral strength of a *human being's* will in fulfilling his *duty*, a moral *constraint* through his own lawgiving reason, insofar as this constitutes itself an authority *executing* the law" (MM, 6:405). Moral strength is the aptitude in acting from freedom and subjectively perfecting our rational choices for ends. We have already elucidated briefly the self-legislating capacity of our reason above. We can, Kant holds, freely determine ourselves to ends from the rational principles established by our pure, practical reason. However, what is necessary to insure the continued pursuit and fulfillment of these ends is virtue. For it is difficult to follow rational principles. Indeed, we readily face obstacles, most often from natural forces, i.e., personal desires, that prevent us from fulfilling those duties. Such "obstacles," or "vices," Kant claims, are the "monsters" we must resist and slay, or at least capture and subdue, in order to comply with the moral law. And "because this constraint is to be irresistible, strength is required, in a degree which we can assess only by the magnitude of the obstacles" (MM, 6:405). So what better obstacle than nature in its most immense and destructive force to invoke this feeling of respect for our power, and the accompanying virtuous disposition, the strength required to subordinate any adversity to our moral being?

An illustration of "moral strength as *courage*," Kant believes, constitutes the very worth and "true honour" that human beings gain in struggles: "practical wisdom" (MM, 6:405). In its possession, Kant continues, an individual is "free," "healthy," "rich," and most importantly can never succumb to "chance or fate," since he is in control of himself. We realize our "inner freedom," and we gain the *courage to believe* that we can be our own masters and thus rule over ourselves according to rational principles. But as we have already noted, such a way of thinking does not promote a sense of self-aggrandizement.

Kant states that "[t]o be *contemptuous* of others, that is, to deny them the respect owed to human beings in general, is in every case contrary to duty" (MM, 6:463). Indeed, being a master simply means "subduing" our "affects" and "*governing*" our "*passions*" in virtue of being a moral subject.

So aesthetic judgments of the dynamically sublime not only reveal reason's power of lawfulness and hence absolute worth over anything sensible, what they also do is remind us of the power of reason over our inclinations and our natural being. For these are always construed as an obstacle to moral fulfillment. In fact, we cannot gain a sense of superiority over nature in its might without first having a sense of superiority over our own inclinations. As Kant points out, in more than one place, "we [feel] the superiority to nature within ourselves, *and hence* also to nature outside us insofar as it can influence our feeling of well-being" (CJ, Comment, 5:269, emphasis added; §28, 5:264). As mentioned above, in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, we come to see those natural concerns - "property, health, and life" - as small in comparison to the moral determination originating from our practical reason. That is to say, the feeling of our personal well-being, or self-love, is displaced by a greater, more *intense feeling* for our absolute worth as moral persons, capable of self-legislation. This "infinitely raises my worth." We will see this intense feeling and its significance again reemerge in the second chapter. What I believe merits our attention here is Kant's continuous insistence to subordinate nature and its causal laws to practical reason and its moral laws.

Ethically speaking, Kant wants to detach us from everything that is merely empirical, viz., all natural and social phenomena, since any influence from these realms pose a threat to our rationally free, moral determination. Kant's onslaught of nature continues here in his conception of the sublime. As Guyer points out,

[t]he real threat from external nature would not be our physical destruction but rather nature's effect, whether by threat or gratification, on the

inclinations within us, which could lead to the heteronomous rather than autonomous determination of the will.¹²

It is the freedom to subordinate the whole natural realm to the dictates of our rational lawfulness, and the virtuous disposition that accompanies this disclosure that is, I hold, truly sublime and cause for great respect. As Kant states, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, "it is something very sublime in human nature to be determined to actions by a pure rational law" (CpR, 5:117). Practical reason, therefore, must be pure, i.e., unaffected by natural mechanisms. And the imagination's inability to exhibit ideas of reason in the sensible world indicates just that purity.

It is not surprising that aesthetic judgments of the sublime, in revealing our capacity for our autonomy and the courage that accompanies this revelation, arouse in us a feeling of respect, which orients us to our moral being. If we look back to the concluding remarks of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, we witness a reorientation in Kant's thought.¹³ He states there that "[t]wo things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" (CpR, 5:161). But with Kant's theory of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*, predicating sublimity to objects and the deserved respect that comes with this is, as we just saw, incorrect. It is the *feeling* that comes when we are made conscious of our inner freedom and its subjection to ideas of reason, viz., our capacity for following the demands of pure, practical reason, that is properly deemed sublime. So though nature in its vastness or might "annihilates...my importance as an *animal creature*," the recognition of my practical reason, Kant explains,

infinitely raises my worth as an *intelligence* by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even the whole sensible world, at least so far as this may be inferred from the purposive determination of my existence by this law, a determination not restricted to

¹²Guyer, p. 263.

¹³Beiner, p. 281.

the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaching into the infinite.
(CpR, 5:162)

As Makkreel explains, "[w]e tend to be more impressed with the infinity of physical nature than with the infinite destiny of moral nature, and the consciousness of the sublime is necessary to reverse this distorted evaluation."¹⁴

We can conclude that the starry heavens above me, or nature in its might, do two things. First, they reveal to me my power for lawfulness, more specifically, my power of moral self-legislation, that is independent of nature. And second, they downplay my significance as an "*animal creature*," which includes my feeling of physical well-being, by raising me to my moral stature and its "infinite destiny." But what is this "infinite destiny," or moral vocation as Kant calls it? In the following two chapters, I hope to provide an adequate answer to this question. For though the aesthetic judgment of the sublime appears to be the proper experience to orient us to this vocation, we need to understand how the feeling of respect that accompanies it contributes to the assurance that we have the suitable disposition for a positive reorientation to others. I have already outlined how the *way of thinking* in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime is akin to virtue. We will see, in chapter two, how this way of thinking reappears in the restorative process of our predisposition to the good. For Kant believes that we all have a susceptibility to evil and self-conceit, which must be censured by embracing the moral law and turning toward the good. We do this through the feeling of respect.

¹⁴Makkreel, Rudolph A. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical import of the Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1990. p. 87.

Chapter 2: Radical Evil: What we must overcome to be morally good

"Often to arouse this feeling of the sublimity of our moral vocation is especially praiseworthy as a means of awakening moral dispositions, since it directly counters the innate propensity to pervert the incentives in the maxims of our power of choice."
-*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

We saw in chapter one *how* it is possible to experience the *feeling* of elation when we aesthetically judge the dynamically sublime. The imagination, in an effort to oblige the law of reason and comprehend a specific object in its absolute power, i.e., bring an idea of reason to intuition, recognizes its limitations and inadequacy for this demand. This is an immediate moment of displeasure. And yet, in this impotency of the imagination, we feel *simultaneously* the potency of our reason and our supersensible vocation to obey reason's laws. Because there is no standard in sensibility that can adequately intuit its ideas, this invokes a pleasurable feeling of respect. Seeking an "objective correlate," i.e., a "sensible illustration" in nature of reason's ideas, demonstrates not the idea of an absolute totality, but "the process of reason itself" and "the limitations of the merely phenomenal presence of nature."¹⁵

As Kant explains,

by a certain subreption¹⁶ (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves, as] subject[s]) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, *makes intuitable* for us the *superiority* of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers *over* the greatest power of sensibility, (CJ, §27, 257, emphasis added)

¹⁵Zammito, John H. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992. p. 300.

¹⁶It is "the intellect's trick of slipping in a concept of sense as if it were a concept of an intellectual characteristic." Pluhar's note in the *Critique of Judgment*.

whatever it may happen to be. Consequently, we turn our awe away from nature's destructive power toward the power that resides within us. We no longer cower at the thought of nature in its might. Rather, we feel exalted discovering that our power of legislation transcends the determination of the natural realm, and can initiate its own causal series in that very same realm. This, for Kant, is an indication that we have a power to resist any natural mechanism we may face, despite its force, by obeying the laws set forth by our reason. More specifically, we have a moral nature that is above and beyond the natural realm. We are not merely determined by nature's laws. We are free, rational agents capable of beginning our own series of actions and subordinating our sensible being to them. However, our recognition of our moral nature, and as I hold a judgment of the dynamically sublime *enlivens* and *strengthens* our feeling for this, is not enough. Kant requires more of our freedom.

Our freedom, in Kant's philosophy, is coupled with an underlying sense of moral responsibility, i.e., duty. Indeed, we are only aware of our freedom, he maintains, when we put ourselves under moral obligation. He anticipates that we are more than simply free from the hindrances of nature's causal grip. This is merely his conception of negative freedom. The freedom he refers to is lawful, i.e., lawgiving, and not some arbitrary lawlessness we might mistakenly presume. It is "the ability of pure reason to be of itself practical," i.e., the ability to determine itself in accordance to its own law (MM, 6:214). It is our ability to morally govern our actions according to maxims that we believe can translate into universal laws.

A definition of freedom such as this is not paradoxical. For example, when we combat natural impulses to comply with the demands of morality and constrain ourselves, Kant explains, we become ironically conscious of our "restored freedom" (MM, 6:485). For in obedience, we recognize that we can choose otherwise. In addition, we feel neither burdened nor sullen when we choose this way. Instead, what follows is a sense of

courage and hence joy (MM, 6:485; R, 6:25n). This is the correct aesthetic constitution of the virtuous disposition. So Kant's notion of positive freedom necessarily includes a moral disposition and the sense of joy that accompanies it.

However, we are not always oriented in this way, despite the fact that we are, for Kant, fundamentally moral beings. Indeed, we often ignore the responsibility that we have for ourselves and others, and pursue our own advantage and happiness. This Kant believes is succumbing to moral evil. Such self-conceit, we will discover, arises not so much from our natural constitution, but rather from our social being *and* our susceptibility to favour physical well-being ("property, health, and life") over moral duty. In short, we compare ourselves to others and their social standing. This produces a feeling of anxiety thinking that we might be seen as unworthy in the eyes of others. We thereby act to promote our personal advantage, concerning ourselves mainly with a good rank among our fellows. But if this state of being is an inevitable consequence of our being among other people, as Kant supposes it is, then does it require an experience which will redirect our disposition to the good and our moral responsibility? Kant believes that it does.

In the following chapter, I propose three things. In section 2.1, I look at Kant's notion of radical evil. He argues that all human beings have an innate propensity for it.¹⁷

¹⁷Kant argues that human beings have an "innate propensity" for evil. Yet he also claims that human beings become evil only when they are among others seeking worth through the opinion of others. This suggests that evil is manifest through their social comparisons with others and not through an "innate propensity." It is difficult to reconcile this contradiction and I make no attempts in this paper to do that. He should never have claimed that human beings have an *innate* propensity for evil.

The problem is worsened by Kant's claim that human beings have a "predisposition" to the good. His distinction between "predisposition" and "innate propensity" is not absolutely clear. What he means to say concerning the latter, I hold, is that assuming human beings have free choice, they are all susceptible to adopt a morally evil maxim since they have the subjective ground for this choice lying within. According to Kant, they make the choice to act contrary to the moral law. Consequently, the propensity to evil renders a human being's commitment to morality conditional and contingent. He also does not want any human being to be exempt from this predicament of evil. In other words, though they are predisposed to the good, Kant does not want human beings to simply let the seed of the good take its natural course. He does not want human beings to

In fact, evil is so broadly construed in Kant's doctrine that it appears unlikely that we will ever be free of it. Nevertheless, he also insists that we have an original predisposition to the good. Unfortunately, Kant argues that it is concealed by our evil tendencies. In section 2.2, I examine the source of evil. We will discover that it has a social dimension. What begins as a desire to be seen as an equal in the opinion of others, according to Kant, degenerates into an anxiety that we are perceived as worthless. Consequently, we find ourselves focused upon our own personal goals and success in order to gain a reputation and respect. But our vocation in life becomes narrowly confined to a system of personal desires. Kant believes that we need a revolution in our disposition, a "change of heart," in order to be restored to our original predisposition for the good, and our moral vocation. In the final section, I explicate this "change of heart." What becomes apparent is that it is rather elusive. In other words, we can never know with any certainty that we continue to be a morally good human being. I suggest that an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, because it produces in us a *way of thinking* that is akin to virtue, recalls us to our disposition to the good. Let us begin with Kant's notion of evil.

2.1 Are human beings wicked at the core?

Strife and turmoil surround us today no less than it did in Kant's day. Despite the advances made in science and technology, we are still beset by injustices, war and misery.

begin from innocence. Nature does not serve as a guide for human beings. They must develop and come to rely on their own reason. This will help to censure the corruption in society. Moreover, this shared predicament of evil and moral immaturity, Kant believes, provides the incentive for human beings to come together in an ethical community in the hope of promoting a shared highest good.

For our purposes, it is important to recognize that Kant believes human beings are all predisposed to the good because they come from the hands of God. They become corrupted when they are immersed in society. The source of evil should be understood as a characteristic of humanity's social interaction. And given that human beings are all a part of a social milieu, they are all susceptible to it. I will continue to use Kant's terminology "innate propensity" as simply a susceptibility to evil (given our free choice) brought about by human beings acquaintance with one another in society.

Perhaps the continued social antagonism and tragedy rampant in the human condition is one indication that human beings have a propensity to evil that (1) must be overcome through our power of choice and (2) it is never entirely extinguished, but merely censured. Kant certainly held this view in 1793 when he wrote *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Moreover, he believed that it was unnecessary to provide a "formal proof" for this "corrupt propensity," since experience itself "parades before us" a "multitude of woeful examples" (R, 6:32-3). Nevertheless, he remained quite optimistic. For human beings, he argued, have a natural *predisposition* to goodness since we are created by the hands of God. Unfortunately, we also have a *propensity* to evil once we are acquainted with others.

Kant observes that in society we corrupt one another such that no one is spared. As he explains,

human beings mutually corrupt one another's moral predisposition and, even with the good will of each individual, because of the lack of a principle which unites them, they deviate through their dissensions from the common goal of goodness, as though they were *instruments of evil*, and expose one another to the danger of falling once again under its dominion. (R, 6:97)

We are *all* susceptible to this tendency to evil. Even the most seemingly virtuous individual, given the weakness of the human agent, will succumb to this Sirenic call. Indeed, it is the very reason why we need virtue. For "nobody is born without vice" (R, 6:32n). But this does not mean that we are necessarily *naturally* evil.

Though Kant does title one section in the first book of *Religion* "The Human Being is by Nature Evil," it is not to be construed as a *natural* "quality" that "may be inferred from the concept of [our] species, i.e., from the concept of a human being in general" (R, 6:32). As such, it would be considered necessary. Rather, when Kant speaks of the human being as "evil by nature," he is referring to its *subjective* necessity in all of us. In virtue of being human, we have a subjective ground, our pure practical reason, from whence all actions are legislated by maxims, good or evil, *antecedent* to every deed. What I understand Kant to be saying here is that we all have the ability to choose freely. That is to

say, the subjective ground must always be, Kant holds, a "deed of freedom" which can be imputed to an individual, thereby attaching responsibility. What we can infer from "experiential demonstrations" of evil actions is an underlying evil maxim adopted by the individual via their power of choice. Thus, Kant concludes, to say that someone is "by nature good" or "by nature bad," simply put, "means that he holds within himself a first ground for the adoption of good or evil (unlawful) maxims, and that he holds this ground *qua* human, universally - in such a way, therefore, that by his maxims he expresses at the same time the character of his species" (R, 6:21). So evil is "not a natural predisposition" at the core of human beings. Instead, Kant claims, it is "a natural propensity to evil," i.e., "a *radical* innate *evil* in human nature," which each individual "can be held accountable for" (R, 6:32). It is best understood as a susceptibility to evil that all human beings have *qua* human beings.

For Kant a *propensity* is "the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual desire)," viz., the possibility "to desire an enjoyment which, when the subject has experienced it, arouses *inclination* to it," "insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general" (R, 6:29, 29n). I have a propensity to something, if, upon acquaintance with it, I develop through habit a compulsive desire for it. For example, Kant believes that I have an innate propensity for drug addiction, if upon acquaintance with a drug, I develop a compulsive desire for more of that drug (R, 6:29-30n). But as such, we in no way relinquish our authorship. It is, Kant holds, incorrect to consider this type of compulsion an instinct like eating. For we do not have this compulsion by necessity. We are either morally good or morally evil on account of our being rational and having free choice. Good or evil lies in the maxim held by our free will, which ultimately depends on the choice of the individual. The self-legislating power of practical reason is "constantly

confronted by its own *possibility* for evil."¹⁸ To speak of our *innate* propensity simply means that we are all, as human beings, susceptible to evil, especially since, as we will see, it is so broadly construed by Kant.

So when he speaks of an innate propensity for "moral evil," because it determines our free power of choice and it is judged evil according to its maxims, it "must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law" (R, 6:29). Conscious of the obligations of the moral law, we fail to conduct ourselves morally. Though practical reason commands our adherence to the moral law and its moral incentives for conduct, we often prefer nonmoral incentives to determine our action. After all, we have natural needs and desires that often conflict with and supersede our moral principles. Thus, human beings have a "*natural* propensity" to evil because we are all likely to adopt this habit temporally.

Kant believes that there are three "grades" of this inclination. That is, there are three ways in which we are considered guilty for transgressing the moral law. They are the following:

(1) He believes that human beings are generally weak, i.e., *frail*. For though I "incorporate the good (the law) into the maxim of my power of choice," which is "ideally" an "irresistible incentive," when I compare it with inclinations, it is "subjectively the weaker whenever the maxim is to be followed" (R, 6:29). In other words, though I have made the right choice to follow rules issuing from the moral law, I do not follow it through, at least not consistently. For example, if I believe that I ought to tell the truth under all circumstances, but in order to remain in a favourable light I tell lies, then I am deemed weak. For I maintain that truth-telling is ideally a correct maxim to adopt,

¹⁸Rossi, Philip J. "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*. Edited by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. p. 154. Emphasis added.

however, subjectively it is more important for me to look good. I pursue some other course of action that has a desire and not the moral law as its incentive. It is not, therefore, a random deviation, but a maxim contrary to a good one.

(2) Kant also recognizes that human beings often comply with the moral law only if nonmoral incentives accompany it. He explains "that although the maxim is good with respect to its object (the intended compliance with the law) and perhaps even powerful enough in practice," it remains *impure* if an individual has not "adopted the law *alone* as its *sufficient* incentive but...needs still other incentives...to determine the power of choice for what duty requires" (R, 6:30). The individual obliges the moral law, though not purely from duty. For example, I may act beneficently toward others, which for Kant is a duty, by making a charitable donation. Although I complied with the law and fulfilled my duty, I only did so knowing that I will receive a tax break. Obviously the action itself cannot be considered culpable. Nevertheless, in the intention, it remains impure, because compliance to the law required an auxiliary incentive. Although it is a good action, it is not commendable.

(3) Finally, we are considered *depraved*, Kant believes, if we adopt a maxim of the power of choice which subordinates the incentives of the moral law to nonmoral ones. In this instance, we usually choose our pleasure, viz., our happiness, over our duty, thereby subordinating the latter to the former. Such a "reversal" of the "ethical order," Kant expounds, may have "legally good actions, yet the mind's attitude is thereby corrupted at its root, so far as the moral disposition is concerned" (R, 6:30). As such, a depraved individual does not have a virtuous disposition at all. She chooses her maxims without the moral law in mind. She is, simply put, morally indifferent.

As Allen Wood notes, the "highest" grade, i.e., being depraved, "exhibits evil openly and directly," whereas the other two "are cases of evil lurking" around "even in

conduct that is good [i.e., obliging the law] on the surface."¹⁹ So we can gather two points from Kant's "grades" of evil. First, no human being is protected from its seduction. Even when we adopt norms that we believe are the correct ones to follow, subjectively we can be frail. We are easily lured away from what we accept as obligatory. Or sometimes we require an extra, nonmoral incentive to convince us of our obligation to others. Either way, evil is pervasive.

Second, and more importantly, there is a difference between an individual who has "good morals" and a "morally good" individual. As Kant specifies, regarding actions that concur with the law, there ought not be any difference between a well-behaved human being and a morally good human being, *except* that the latter's actions always have the moral law as their "sole and supreme incentive" (R, 6:30). In so doing, he acts "according to the *spirit*" of the law as opposed to acting merely from its "*letter*." For the latter, Kant believes, simply means that his compliance with the law is "accidental," since incentives not invoked by the moral law could just as easily provoke its "violation." So though the action happened to conform with duty, it was not done from duty. And hence, the disposition itself is not moral (CpR, 5:82). In law giving, Kant emphasizes, it is essential to possess the appropriate disposition. He states that "[e]verything good that is not based on a morally good disposition...is nothing but pretense and glittering misery" (I, 8:26). The disposition, with its *sense of spirit*, is really what is fundamental in order to support the *feeling for* and *belief in* the moral good. This assures the purity of intentions.

As the preceding analysis shows, each individual has the power to adopt the morally good disposition, since a person is evil when, "conscious of the moral law," he incorporates "into his maxims the (occasional) deviation from it" (R, 6:32). The ground of evil, Kant holds, cannot be attributed to our sensuous nature, nor the inclinations arising

¹⁹Wood, 1999, p. 285.

from it, i.e., evil does not arise from anything natural. For *natural* inclinations, "[c]onsidered in themselves," are "good" (R, 6:58), viz., "impulse serves a good purpose" (CB, 8:117), and we have no direct authorship regarding their existence. It is only when we choose to favour them over morality that we consider them bad. But then the evil lies in our inability to resist them, and not in the inclinations *per se*. This does not, however, imply that the ground of evil resides in the ultimate "*corruption* of the morally legislative reason" either.

Kant argues that reason can in no way "extirpate within itself the dignity of the law" (R, 6:35). For this would be a contradiction since "a freely acting being...exempted from the one law commensurate to such a being (the moral law), would amount to the thought of a cause operating without any law at all" (R, 6:35). Even the most heinous of criminals, Kant believes, can never forfeit the moral law entirely. Indeed, it "imposes itself on him irresistibly, because of his moral predisposition" (R, 6:36), viz., in the very idea of a human being as a moral being, he retains the predisposition to the good (MM, 6:464). It is simply a question of favouring another incentive, more accurately, the principle of self-love, in place of the moral law that deems someone morally evil. As Kant concludes, "the difference, whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not in the material of the maxim) but in their *subordination* (in the form of the maxim): *which of the two he makes the condition of the other*" (R, 6:36).

Evil is, therefore, our capacity to *reverse* the order of our incentives so that our moral being is conditional upon our principle of self-love, something Kant condemns as reprehensible. He asserts that it cannot be simply understood as a limitation to our nature, since we have a predisposition to the good, which is latent if it is not brought out. For "[t]he human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil" (R, 6:44). Simply by virtue of our predisposition to the

good, "the human being is not thereby good as such" (R, 6:44). It requires applying our own "workmanship." We choose our maxims, and whether or not the principle of the maxims is good or bad is ultimately in the power of the individual. No one can ignore the responsibility of a free agent in Kant's philosophy. This being said, I will now address the anthropological source of radical evil as that which can and, in Kant's view, must be overcome in order to realize our personhood.

2.2 The social dimension of evil.

From the preceding discussion, we have seen how the individual is responsible for being either a "morally good" or a "morally evil" human being. Evil cannot arise from our natural impulses, according to Kant, because if so we would not be held accountable for our action, which, given our status as autonomous agents, is necessary. Instead, moral evil is imputable to individuals, Kant declares, because it manifests itself in a maxim that the power of choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom. Therefore, evil is not a natural predisposition. Again, it is a propensity characteristic of the human species, and yet, only contingent for humanity in general.

So where does the corruption originate? Kant claims that we can never successfully answer this question. He states that "[t]he rational origin...of this disharmony in our power of choice...remains inexplicable to us," especially since the "original predisposition" is for the good as opposed to evil (R, 6:43). It seems likely, therefore, that we are *enticed* away from this original "germ of goodness" by the competitive forces in society. Indeed, the propensity to evil, Kant believes, pertains to human beings only within the context of our social being. So though we may not be able to locate the *origin* of evil, because the subjective ground of our maxims remains wholly unknown to us, we can reveal its *source*

in an anthropological reading of *Religion*.²⁰ From this we will be in a position to understand what exactly must be overcome, if we are to restore our predisposition to the good. But to begin, let us understand the nature of our predisposition.

As stated above, Kant holds that we have an original predisposition to the good in human nature. This consists of the three following distinctive stages that are to be understood as a progression:

(1) To begin, as living beings, Kant declares that we are predisposed to what he refers to as "*mechanical self-love*," i.e., our *animality* or the instinctive urge to do what is necessary for survival. As we saw in chapter one, we have a physical nature that is determined by natural mechanisms fulfilling our basic needs. This basic self-love for one's survival and overall well-being has three main drives: self-preservation, propagation of the species, and communion with others. There is no difference between the human species and other life forms regarding our animality (except perhaps variations on social behaviour). That is to say, all living organisms vie for their survival and propagation in some form of milieu. Further, this stage, Kant informs us, does not require the use of reason. Instead, we use the pleasure principle and instinct to determine our well-being.

(2) Our predisposition to *humanity*, on the other hand, is "self-love which is physical" like that of the first stage, but also "involves comparison" (R, 6:27). This comparison requires both reason and the consciousness that reason extends beyond the immediate confinements of our animality (R, 6:27; CB, 8:112). So we do not simply achieve well-being from the satisfaction of our basic drives. Instead, Kant holds, we gain a sense of our own happiness or unhappiness by comparing ourselves to others. Consequently, "[o]ut of this

²⁰Wood, 1999, p. 286-290. He makes use of Sharon Anderson-Gold's insight concerning the anthropological reading of radical evil. I adopt this view as well. Anderson-Gold, Sharon. "God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*. Edited by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen, 113-131. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

self-love originates an inclination *to gain worth in the opinion of others*" (R, 6:27). Kant anticipates that, though we only seek "equal worth" in the beginning, nevertheless, this inclination degenerates into a passion to be preferred over others as well as superior to them. As such, Kant believes that this inclination grows stronger unless it is assailed by reaching the third stage, our moral being.

(3) The predisposition to *personality*, as we saw in chapter one, is the "subjective ground" for "incorporating" the moral law and the feeling of respect that accompanies it "into our maxims." Once we have entered this stage, Kant argues, we refrain from gaining a sense of self-worth from comparisons to others. Instead, we compare ourselves against the compliance with the moral law. As we have just revealed through the predisposition to humanity, Kant holds that any other comparison will inevitably lead to the contempt of others and an affront to the respect they deserve. In order to overcome this, we need to adopt the appropriate disposition. But before we can do this, we must return to the stage of humanity to further develop the source of evil. For this will determine what it is Kant believes we must combat and hopefully suppress.

Kant asserts that these three predispositions are "*original*." That is, "they belong to the possibility of human nature" necessarily (R, 6:28). Moreover, they "are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions *to the good* (they demand compliance with it)" (R, 6:28). Nevertheless, concerning our animality and humanity, we more often than not use them "inappropriately." Many vices, Kant posits, can be grafted onto both in the context of our relationships with other human beings. For instance, with respect to animality, Kant calls "gluttony, lust, and wild lawlessness" the "vices of the *savagery* of nature" (R, 6:27). Whereas the "vices of *culture*," insofar as they surpass humanity, i.e., seek more than the equal worth of humanity, are "envy, ingratitude, [and] joy in other's misfortune" (R, 6:27). Kant grants that though a human being has the capacity to reason, this will not guarantee that she will

determine the power of choice unconditionally as is requisite for the ethical way of thinking. Indeed, he believes that she is more likely to yield to the propensity to evil, if she compares herself with others, a general consequence of our social world. This being said, we can further elucidate the source of evil in Kant's philosophy.

Recall Kant's insistence that we mutually corrupt one another's moral predispositions as if we are ourselves instruments of evil. He strongly believes that we "will make one another evil" as a result of both social comparisons and antagonism. As Allen Wood indicates, "Kant explicitly attributes the corruption of human nature to the *social* condition of human beings, and more specifically to the concern over comparative self-worth."²¹ With the advent of our humanity, we are inclined to seek worth in the eyes of others. Moreover, Kant claims that we are worthless, or think ourselves to be, only to the extent that we are *anxious* that others will label us worthless and despise us for it (R, 6:93). But because the human condition is antagonistic, indeed, "nature itself wanted to use the idea of such competitiveness...as an incentive to culture" (R, 6:27), thereby propelling human beings to cultivate their talents (I, 8:21-2), anxiety appears inescapable.

Kant explains that the desire to be seen as an equal in the eyes of others means "not allowing anyone superiority over oneself, bound up with the *constant anxiety* that others might be striving for ascendancy" (R, 6:27, emphasis added). This anxiety, however, drives us to achieve a "rank" among our fellow human beings so as to avoid being perceived as worthless. After all, everyone desires a basic respect from others. But, as mentioned above, "from this arises gradually an unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others" as a "preventive measure" (R, 6:27). That is to say, we do not want to be possessed and enslaved, treated merely as a means to someone else's ends. Instead, we want to be secure and, if not revered, at least valued in our humanity. Since our overall

²¹Wood, 1999, p. 288.

sense of well-being is also fundamental, we must make attempts to alleviate this anxiety. However, such attempts commonly lead to further corrupt, delusional attitudes, or what we can denote as social passions, and consequently a narrow focus concerning our vocation in life, if we only have our happiness and prosperity in mind.

Kant argues that to gain a sense of self-worth from the opinion of others while diminishing our anxiety, we must ourselves be able to influence other people. It is only in this way that we manage to obtain the respect and admiration we seek. For a human being "cannot expect that others respect him," and thereby pursue only his intentions, "because of his inner (moral) values" (AN, 7:272). Influence requires more. Indeed, we presume that what begets respect and reverence is our "striving for a reputation." Under the conditions of social comparisons and antagonism, reputation is thought to be established through wealth or power. We already fear the ascendancy of others over us. Consequently, we "want wealth in order to rule others in their self-interest, and power in order to rule them by means of their fear."²² Either way, we hope to achieve *honour* in the opinion of others. But, for Kant, this does not imply a state of power. Rather, it implies a state of servitude.

What began as an inclination for self-love and equality has degenerated into an ambitious pursuit for honour through power and wealth. This, Kant reminds us, inflicts the greatest assault upon our predisposition to goodness because we lose the mastery of our reason (R, 6:93).²³ *Passionately* compelled by fear and rivalry, we hope to control "the

²²*Ibid.*, p. 290.

²³For Kant, passions are "cancerous stores for pure practical reason" (AN, 7:266). More specifically, a passion is construed as an "[i]nclination, which hinders the use of reason to compare, at a particular moment of choice, a specific inclination against the sum of all inclinations" (AN, 7:265). It is a singular focus that impairs the use of our reason. Indeed, a passion can creep stealthily into our minds, rooting itself beside reason, and form its own narrow principles. It can, Kant concludes, coexist with reason and even be substituted for reason, since a "[p]assion always presupposes a maxim of the subject, namely, to act according to a purpose prescribed" by our "inclinations" as opposed to the moral law (AN, 7:266). Passions are "without exception bad," because we relinquish the authority of freedom and self-control, and permit one purpose to be our sole purpose.

inclinations of other people in order to direct and manage them according to one's own intention" (AN, 7:271). Our ends are of singular importance. Moreover, they are "techno-practical" and never moral. We do not perceive others nor their ends to be of equal value to our own interests. Taking little heed of others, we are in conflict with them. We do not attest their needs in comparison to our own. People are simply perceived as threats to our ends as well as our security, i.e., hostile obstacles that must be manipulated. We thereby reduce them to "mere instruments" of our own design. And as we know, using someone as a mere means is debasing to their humanity.

By pursuing ambitiously wealth and power, we hope others will denigrate themselves and fulfill our desires in lieu of their own. We believe that having this type of success will secure the honour we seek, "the final end of all the social passions."²⁴ But ultimately we surrender to "the root of all evil," ambition, or, as Wood equates, self-conceit. Wood further articulates that we adopt a maxim that subordinates the moral law to our inclinations, i.e., our inclinations legislate for all willing in general.²⁵ And this, as "an unconditional principle of the power of choice," Kant states, "is the source of an incalculably great resistance to morals" (R, 6:45n) and the necessity attributable to morality.

Moreover, ascribing greater self-worth to ourselves in comparison to others is delusional, because we falsely believe ourselves to be more important and better than others. The ambition "to be always *on top*," the "*arrogance*...in which we demand that others think little of themselves in comparison to us" (MM, 6:465), is contrary to the respect we owe ourselves as ends capable of self-legislation. Strictly speaking for Kant, "[a]rrogance is...a solicitation on the part of one seeking honour for followers, whom he thinks he is entitled to treat with contempt" by demanding a respect for himself that he does not return to those revering him (MM, 6:465). But if this is to have any force, Kant

²⁴Wood, 1999, p. 290.

²⁵*Ibid.*

reasons, the one who is arrogant would not demand others to surrender their dignity "unless he knew that, were his fortune suddenly to change, he himself would not find it hard to grovel and waive any claim to respect from others" (MM, 6:466). Moreover, can one truly claim respect from those whom he believes are beneath him? Is their opinion going to hold any deep value? Self-conceit, in both directions, is insolence toward humanity. It is, for Kant, the very root of evil and obstacle to morality.

Self-conceit is a "perilous state" of our own making that can and must, Kant demands, be minimized. However, given the state of the human condition and Kant's grades of evil, it seems implausible to believe that we could ever completely restore our original predisposition to the good. Nevertheless, Kant believes that we can. After all, if we can make ourselves evil, we can make ourselves good no matter how difficult this orientation might prove. But it requires a "change of heart."

2.3 Restoring the predisposition to the good.

In section 2.1, we saw that Kant's conception of evil was not a necessary attribute of the human species in general, but a tendency to adopt maxims that have inclinations as the incentive to act and not the moral law and duty. What is significant is that moral evil does not arise from anything natural that would free us from responsibility. Again, it comes from the subjective ground of our power of free choice. Moreover, on Kant's strict definition, evil lurks behind all of our intentions. We must, therefore, readily alert ourselves to how we are intending, to avoid subordinating morality to other incentives. Kant insists that we should do whatever we can to attain the purity of our motives for actions, even if we can never be absolutely sure that our incentives are pure.

He expresses the epistemological uncertainty with virtue in more than one place. Kant states that "a human being cannot see into the depths of his own heart so as to be quite certain, in even a *single* action, of the purity of his moral intention and the sincerity of his

disposition" (MM, 6:392). For "[t]he depths of the human heart are unfathomable" (MM, 6:447), viz., we cannot behold the subjective first ground of our maxims (R, 6:51). We never know this elusive part of our being thoroughly enough to guarantee that our incentive to act dutifully derives unconditionally from the representation of the moral law alone. Kant explains that "[i]n the case of any deed it remains hidden from the agent himself how much pure moral content there has been in his disposition" (MM, 6:393). All the more reason why we need to "strive" with all our "might" so that "the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty" (MM, 6:393). That is, we orient ourselves *valiantly* thinking that we are free agents who ought and hence can comply with the moral law, i.e., our pure practical reason, without simultaneously believing that we can attain absolute moral purity. We must orient ourselves thinking that we have within us a power to transcend all that is naturally compelling, in this case self-conceit, and act according to our reasons and the principle of duty alone, hoping to morally improve. But the question still remains: how are we to reassure ourselves of our moral goodness, of the correct disposition, given that (1) the "human heart" is elusive and (2) we are constantly embattled with our tendency to evil?

In section 2.2, we found the very source of radical evil. We discovered that when human beings are in communion with others, they fiercely compete with one another to gain respect and glory. Indeed, Kant has it that nature itself propels us by vainglory, greed, and desire for power so as to instigate the cultivation of our powers (I, 8:21), but *only* to such an extent as to improve our abilities (R, 6:27). Unfortunately, Kant elaborates in his essay "The End of All Things,"

[i]n the progress of the human race the culture of talents, skill and taste (with their consequence, luxury) naturally runs ahead of the development of morality; and this state is precisely the most burdensome and dangerous for morality just as it is for physical well-being, because the needs grow stronger than the means to satisfy them. (TH, 8:332)

As Kant realizes, corruption will ensue if we ignore our moral being. For we are replete with unnecessary desires and "unnatural inclinations" (CB, 8:111), without the ability to satisfy them all. Moreover, though we become cultured in the ways of art and science, as well as "*civilized...in all sorts of social grace and decorum*" (I, 8:26), as for maturity in morality, he argues, we are fearfully "lacking." To repeat, civility and science without a virtuous disposition is "pretense and glittering misery." However, Kant remains hopeful that one day "the moral disposition" will triumph. For though competition and comparison with others ultimately leads to self-denigration and disrespect for humanity, given that self-conceit belongs to us insofar as we associate with others in society and is contingent, it is something that can be censured, thereby restoring our predisposition to goodness.

The present section is an attempt to disclose the restorative process of our predisposition to the good as well as address the questions raised above. That is to say, I want to reveal what this restoration consists in, according to Kant, and how we know that we have been restored? We will discover that this is not an insignificant transformation, but it involves a greater vitality for life through the commitment to our moral being. Moreover, it is meant to be a permanent conversion. This does not mean, however, that once we are oriented in this way we are automatically good. What it means is that we continue to *orient* ourselves to the good *despite the possibility* of deviating from the moral law from time to time. It is likely that we will make mistakes. Nevertheless, we retain the necessary *attitude* because we consider the subject of this restoration to be the moral life *as a whole* and not just particular actions. In order to reorient ourselves, i.e., adopt the proper attitude, Kant believes that we must give up our self-conceit. This entails a denial of the self and a feeling of displeasure, on the one hand, while sustaining a greater sense of living life from our own internal legislation and a feeling of pleasure, on the other. Through this, we might discover that the *spirit* necessary for the morally good disposition is akin to the feeling we experience in the aesthetic reflection of the sublime.

Indeed, the aesthetic pleasure that enraptures us when we judge the sublime in nature can be construed as a feeling of our "autonomous spirituality,"²⁶ when we locate the very worth of our being within our moral legislative power. The sense of courage and elation that arises from this experience is, Kant holds, the necessary "*aesthetic constitution*" for a truly virtuous disposition (R, 6:25n). It, therefore, proves fruitful to raise the soul's fortitude and arouse this feeling of respect in order to combat our lapse into self-conceit. For, as we have uncovered, a representation of nature in its chaotic power awakens a moral preservation that goes beyond our own physical health and well-being. Let us proceed with Kant's emphasis on restoring a dormant predisposition, rather than a lost one.

He claims that we need not acquire a lost incentive for the good. For it inheres in the human species as a predisposition. If it were ever to be lost, Kant implicates, it could never be recovered. However, it may remain silent or concealed, since "[t]o become a morally good human being it is not enough simply to let the germ of the good...develop unhindered" (R, 6:57). As we have previously indicated, the propensity to evil is an active opponent that must be continuously fought. For it is "an invisible enemy, one who hides behind reason and hence [is] all the more dangerous" (R, 6:57). Furthermore, Kant believes that nature does not will contentment. Instead, it wills discontent. The process of restoration is "only the recovery of the *purity* of the law, as the supreme ground of all our maxims, according to which the law itself is to be incorporated into the power of choice, not merely bound to other incentives, nor indeed subordinated to them (to incentives) as conditions, but rather in its full purity, as the *self-sufficient* incentive of that power" (R, 6:46). In other words, our maxims, when raised to the concepts of duty and law, ought to be holy. But this holiness is impossible for us. So it means an endless and arduous journey of improvement.

²⁶Zammito's interpretation for *Geistesgefühl*.

The restoration of our predisposition to goodness demands two things. First, we *subjectively* must seek the purity of our disposition to duty. What this entails, Kant furthers, is that the moral law, free of all "admixture of aims derived from sensibility," is the only incentive for our compliance to duty (MM, 6:446). He holds that all action done in conformity with duty must be done solely "*from duty*." The absolute command is "be holy." Since the moral law itself is holy, we must attempt to act purely from the moral law. This is an imperative for human beings because as is well understood we are not holy. Second, Kant argues that we have an *objective* duty to our entire moral end. What this demands is that we fulfill all of our moral obligations, whatever they may be, thereby attaining our moral status with respect to our personhood. In other words, we ought to be morally good human beings and not simply human beings with good morals. The absolute command is "be perfect."

But being finite and fallible creatures, susceptible to different grades of evil, problems fulfilling these two conditions naturally follow. For between maxim and deed, there is a large gap (R, 6:47). Moreover, we can be lulled into thinking that we are righteous, when in *disposition* we are not. So we must persevere. Indeed, Kant emphasizes his rigorism in stating that this is always "a progress from *one* perfection to another" (MM, 6:446). This is why, for moral improvement, we need to summon virtue. For virtue, as we have seen in Kant's definition, is the strength to adhere to rational principles.

Virtue has, in Kant's view, a peculiar characteristic that follows from his doubts concerning pure incentives and the sincerity of our disposition. He explains that, on the one hand, virtue is an infinite journey "in progress because, considered *objectively*, it is an ideal and unattainable" (MM, 6:409). And yet, Kant believes we ought to approximate this ideal, since to be morally good human beings, we must have a virtuous disposition. On the other hand, virtue always "*starts from the beginning*" because, given human nature, we are

always affected by inclination, viz., we are always liable to adopt maxims that satisfy our baser urges, no matter how much we believe we can transcend our natural urges.

Therefore, he states, "virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all but, if it is not rising, is unavoidably sinking" (MM, 6:409). As such, virtue is never static. It cannot be construed as a habit. For this would be a "loss to that *freedom* in adopting his maxims which distinguishes an action done from duty" (MM, 6:409) as opposed to action done from habit or external authority, such as custom or natural mechanisms.

Indeed, Kant holds that if virtue becomes a habit "in a legal sense, in its *empirical* character," whereby an individual acquires better mores "through gradual reformation of conduct and consolidation of his maxims," he experiences no "*change of heart*" (R, 6:47). What this means to Kant is that an individual "considers himself virtuous whenever he feels himself stable in his maxims of observance to duty - though not by virtue of the supreme ground of all maxims, namely duty" itself (R, 6:47). Kant believes that the result of someone moving from vice to virtue without the necessary change of heart, the true awakening of our predisposition to the good, is nothing more than a resolve to conform *prudentially* for the sake of the principle of happiness. Recall, however, it is the change of heart, the virtuous disposition, which is essential and thereby fundamental for restoration. Kant desires an individual who is not simply legally good, but who *is* morally good. That is, someone who accords with "the intelligible character [of virtue]" and hence recognizes that "the representation of duty itself" is the only necessary incentive to comply with duty. And this issues forth from our practical reason.

But given the frailty, the impurity, and especially the depravity corrupting the subjective ground of our maxims, Kant asserts, no gradual reform is adequate for restoration. Rather, he insists that what is necessary to combat the propensity to evil in human nature, "the perverted attitude of mind" (R, 6:48), is "*a revolution* in the disposition

of the human being," i.e., "a transition to the maxim of holiness of disposition" (R 6:47). The emphasis on the word revolution points to both the "rebirth" of a "new" human being from the carnage of the human social condition as well as the consequent restoration of the predisposition to the good. It is a revolution in the sense that we always start with the assumption that our disposition is corrupt (R, 6:51). The individual is said to have a change of heart. As Anderson-Gold explains, "[w]hat is at stake is a reorientation of the self, a positive act of identification with others which moves beyond the ordinary social condition."²⁷

But is it plausible to trust that the individual can achieve such a change, since he is after all corrupted in the very ground of his maxims? Kant himself poses this very question: Do we have the capacity, the force, to originate a revolution and become a good human being with no external assistance, given the inevitability of evil (R, 6:47; 50)? His immediate response is affirmative. For "duty commands that he be good, and duty commands nothing but what we can do" (R, 6:47). He further explains that we can have a revolution in disposition because it is of an inner nature. That is to say, it is a necessary change "in the mode of thought" and not "in the mode of sense," or sensuous nature, which alters gradually. He explains that with respect to the former, the reversal of the supreme ground of our maxims from corruption, is a change in "principle and attitude of mind" and is permanent. As such, the individual orients himself to the good. This does not, however, automatically make him a good human being. Such a judgment must be earned on an arduous trail of becoming. All an individual can "hope" for, Kant states, is "to find himself upon the good (though narrow) path of constant *progress* from bad to better" (R, 6:48; see also 51), in view of the purity and strength of the principle that he has adopted. So though the change transforms the way of thinking, i.e., our disposition and

²⁷Anderson-Gold, Sharon. "Kant's Ethical Commonwealth: The Highest Good as a Social Goal." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986), p. 28.

attitude, and is permanent, it is nevertheless a constant striving toward the better and away from the propensity to evil. Again, the subject of the revolution is the moral life as a whole and not particular actions. What I take Kant to be saying is that we do not have to forfeit our disposition, our attitude, simply because we are vulnerable to mistakes. This tension appears to be an expression of Kant's rigorism. He does not want us to succumb to moral complacency. Nor does he want us to believe that we are naturally good. For Kant, we must always be suspect concerning our conduct.

The transformation of our disposition is a subjective orientation to morality and the belief in the intrinsic value of morally good conduct. As Kant expounds, an individual gains "a greater respect for dutiful action the more he removes from it, in thought, other incentives which might have influence upon its maxim through self-love," i.e., self-conceit, and instead represents to himself duty for its own sake as his proper incentive (R, 6:48). Kant admits that anyone can undergo this transformation, "even the most limited," by virtue of being human. But we are never in a position to know with certainty that we have actually transformed. It seems we must take it on faith. As Kant plainly states, "[a]ssurance of this cannot of course be attained by the human being naturally, neither via immediate consciousness nor via the evidence of life he has hitherto led," since the "subjective first ground" is "inscrutable" (R, 6:51). Indeed, "from the time of his adoption of the principle of the good and throughout a sufficiently long life," in which the "efficacy of these principles" appear to manifest in his improved behaviour, he can only courageously *hope* through conjecture that he remains in his virtuous disposition (R, 6:68).

But could we not assume a greater sense of certainty that this disposition has been adopted through a *moving* experience, that we are oriented toward the good, if this experience enlivened and strengthened our feeling for and commitment to our moral being? Could we not come to realize our virtuous disposition through a heightened *state of being* induced by a sense of awe and serious contemplation? I have already pointed out, in

chapter one, that the way of thinking in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime is akin to virtue. As well, there occurs a reversal of conditions within the subject. She no longer perceives nature as sublime. Instead, she is returned to her moral personhood *and* infinite moral vocation. It seems plausible then to conjecture that the aesthetic feeling aroused by a judgment of the sublime, reassures us that we do uphold the appropriate disposition demanded in this revolution, and that we can be expected to act according to the *spirit* of the law. For though the subjective first ground, the unfathomable depth of our supersensible power, is inscrutable, we come to feel this ground in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime.

The "aesthetic pleasure" itself, Makkreel explains, "heightens" the sense of our "existence" and advances the "feeling of being alive."²⁸ An aesthetic judgment in general concerns itself with the state of the judging subject's existence and how she feels in the contemplation of certain objects in nature. While judgments of the beautiful establish a feeling of harmonious equilibrium, a sense of complacency in the world, judgments of the sublime invoke a feeling of agitation and violence, which undermines the playful feeling of beauty. As Barnouw construes it, "[t]he experience of the sublime is meant to disrupt and transcend harmonious interaction at all levels,"²⁹ in order to prevent lulling ourselves into moral complacency, or worse, self-conceit. This is consistent with Kant.

He states that "to arouse the feeling of the sublimity of our moral vocation is especially praiseworthy as a means of awakening moral dispositions, since it directly counters the innate propensity to pervert the incentives in the maxims of our power of choice" (R, 6:50). For this arouses the feeling of the respect for moral lawfulness that is, Kant holds, so fundamental to restoring "the human heart to the good" because it prevents

²⁸Rudolf A. Makkreel. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1990. p. 92.

²⁹Barnouw, Jeffrey. "The Morality of the Sublime: Kant and Schiller," *Studies in Romanticism* 19 (1980), p. 506.

any empirical incentive from entering our power of choice. But how do we arouse this feeling of respect for our moral vocation? One way to do this is through an aesthetic judgment of the sublime in nature.

As we saw in chapter one, when we aesthetically judge the dynamically sublime, "natural objects or scenes are sensed to be physically overpowering and threaten to overwhelm the vital sense of our body."³⁰ As such, we could simply succumb to the feeling of impotency and cower in terror. But according to Kant, we will not feel a sense of horror because the concept of the sublime does not indicate anything purposive in nature itself, since the ideas of the sublime arise most often when nature is represented in "disarray and devastation." Rather, the relative purposiveness of the sublime provides us with an opportunity to *feel* a deep and significant "purposiveness within ourselves entirely independent of nature" (CJ, §23, 246). Nature, as a chaotic force, is simply a foil for a "higher purposiveness." It incites us to abandon sensibility for pure ideas of practical reason. More specifically, the aesthetic judgment of the sublime, Makkreel declares, ultimately "forces us into ourselves and discloses a more fundamental kind of power - a moral-rational power to *improve our life* rather than merely to preserve it."³¹

Kant explains that

in judging a thing sublime it refers the imagination to *reason* so that it will harmonize subjectively with reason's *ideas*...i.e., so that it will produce a mental attunement that conforms to and is compatible with the one that an influence by determinate (practical) ideas would produce on feeling. (CJ, §26, 5:256)

It is the representation of lawfulness, i.e., raising our reason to concepts of law and duty which is stimulated in the aesthetic judgment of the sublime, that induces the feeling of respect. The judgment of the sublime "always" has "reference" to this "*way of thinking*," i.e., to maxims directed to providing the intellectual [side in us] and our rational ideas with

³⁰Makkreel, p. 96.

³¹*Ibid.*, my emphasis.

supremacy over sensibility" (CJ, Comment, 5:274). As Barnouw puts it, the judgment of the sublime "throw[s] us back on an awareness of our rational selfhood as incommensurable to, and never to find adequate realization in, whatever is empirical in ourselves and our world."³² As such, it invokes a feeling of respect, the necessary feeling that encourages us to act morally from the moral law alone.

As well, the aesthetic pleasure in the experience of the sublime is suitable to awaken our moral dispositions because it is an intensely profound and moving experience. As Kant explains, the pleasure "is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger" (CJ, §23, 245). This outpouring of vital forces, the sensations that "pervade the entire system of the body" and are not merely organ specific,³³ is a feeling of elation resulting from the recognition of the power of our practical reason over nature. As such, Makkreel points out, it "*deepen[s]* our sense of life."³⁴ Indeed, it enriches our very existence by turning us away from the pleasures of our physical well-being and returning us to our autonomy and moral vocation that remain wholly independent of nature.

The social condition and the unnecessary inclinations and passions that arise from it cannot be trusted as motivations for our ethical life. We must rely, therefore, on our pure, practical reason if we are to restore our predispositions to the good. But because we are immersed in a world of corruption and selfishness, Kant argues, we need a "change of heart," which will raise the representation of the law of duty to the fore, thereby making the moral law the primary maxim of our power of choice. Unfortunately, he points out, we can never be absolutely certain that such a change of heart has occurred. Nevertheless, I suggest that, despite the fact that virtue is epistemologically problematic, an aesthetic

³²Barnouw, p. 506.

³³Makkreel, p. 95.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 96.

judgment of the sublime can reassure us that we are oriented to the good. Though I do not want to claim that Kant's concept of the sublime *is* the revolution itself, I believe it contributes to our hope that we are following upon the good path. For it intensifies the feeling and value of our lives by producing a way of thinking akin to virtue as well as a deep feeling of respect, which is, for Kant, the incentive to follow the moral law. An aesthetic judgment of the sublime returns us to our moral personhood, and the commitment to our moral vocation that follows from this. In the final chapter, I want to address just what this commitment might possibly be, keeping in mind Kant's stress on reorienting ourselves to others in a more positive respectful way.

Chapter 3: Moral Orientation: What we might hope for

"It is man's vocation to be the ultimate purpose of nature,
but...he must have...a final purpose."
-*Critique of Judgment*

The first two chapters have been predominantly concerned with individuals and their moral disposition. In chapter one, we discovered that an aesthetic judgment of the sublime is one way of *revealing* our moral personhood. When we represent to the mind the might or immensity in nature, we are returned to our self-legislating power of pure, practical reason, i.e., our autonomous power. We believe that we have the ability to pursue practical aims free of any sensible barrier (CJ, §26, 5:255). Indeed, the pleasure in the judgment of the sublime arises through "its resistance to the interests of the senses...for the purposes of practical reason" (Comment, 5:267). What this amounts to, as we have seen, is that our physical well-being is valued less in comparison to our moral being, a strict polarity upheld in Kantian ethics. We feel a superiority to nature both within ourselves and outside of ourselves insofar as it can influence our well-being. For we are, Kant argues, made aware of a "self-preservation of a different kind" that remains independent of and more important than nature. This is our moral rational preservation. We do not, therefore, perceive ourselves as passive instruments of nature. Instead, Kant holds that we are free, rational beings capable of originating a causal series.

Moreover, we consider objects in nature sublime because they raise the "soul's fortitude" to a greater height. At the same time, we gain *strength* and *courage* to believe that our rational ability supersedes nature (CJ, §28, 5:261). In other words, the recognition of our reason in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime permits us to accept our

own law-giving power that we believe to be unaffected by nature in *any* physical capacity. This is cause for the feeling of elation. That is, we have a great feeling of respect at the consciousness of our freedom and the laws of reason.

However, the awareness of our autonomy implies more than our freedom to determine practical aims and rules. As I outlined in the beginning of chapter two, freedom for Kant has moral responsibility. We are only free when we morally obligate ourselves. And morally obligating ourselves only makes sense in communion with others. The recognition of our autonomy and our presumed independence from the effects of nature in practical self-legislation is also reason to concede it to all other human beings. Indeed, "[t]his legislation must be found in every rational being" (G, 4:434). Consequently, we partake in a moral realm of legislating individuals, a "kingdom of ends," which is "a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws" (G, 4:433).

Kant supposes that, as rational agents who have purposes and assign value to those, we each possess an "absolute worth" simply by virtue of this intending (G, 4:428-9). We have seen this in chapter one. The capacity for intending is why we are thought of as an end-in-ourselves, and why we demand respect. Absolute worth, the autonomous power of reason legislating for itself, i.e., supplying the "representation of law" that makes it possible to have independent purposes, is thought to belong to everyone.³⁵ For Kant, this self-awareness of our practical reason, viz., our immanent rationality manifest in the pursuit of practical aims, is the only proof necessary for us to assume it in others.

³⁵Zammito, p. 317. As Zammito explains, Kant "went to such lengths about the validity of finding reason in oneself that he left undeveloped the problem of the recognition of other rational beings. For him that was so obvious that it did not occasion practical concern." But Zammito concludes that it is not obvious. p. 418, 56n. For our purposes, however, we will make the same assumption as Kant. Once we recognize our power for rational legislation, we attribute this power to everyone.

It follows then that the awareness of my autonomy ultimately commits me "to the community of all ends-in-themselves."³⁶ For "[t]he concept of every rational being as one who must regard himself as legislating universal law...leads to another very fruitful concept...a kingdom of ends," where we have a "share" in the legislation of moral laws (G, 4:433-436). As Anderson-Gold declares,

[a]utonomy, the affirmation of the self as an end, can only be expressed through the kingdom of ends. The moral law as the pure form of reason, operates as an incentive by positing this idea (the kingdom of ends) as the regulative condition of our interaction with others.³⁷

The consciousness of our autonomy, therefore, does not halt at the individual. Rather, it extends beyond it, into a kingdom of ends that encompasses all human beings. The awareness of our autonomy is also an awareness of our moral participation in a community of ends. In this sense, our autonomy turns us outwardly toward others.

Similarly, in chapter two, I outlined Kant's doctrine of evil in order to establish what disposition is necessary for the individual *to be* a morally good human being. Kant holds that we are susceptible to evil, i.e., we have an innate propensity to evil. Thus, we need a revolution in our disposition, our way of thinking. What remains uncertain, however, is how we are ever to know that the necessary revolution has occurred. I conjectured that the *feeling*, the state of being, aroused in the experience of the sublime significantly contributes to the belief, or hope, that we actually *are* virtuous. Virtue is epistemologically problematic, viz., we can never see into the depths of the human heart to know with any certainty that we truly are virtuous. We never know if our intentions are "pure." And yet, the aesthetic feeling of the sublime, Kant claims, awakens the disposition necessary to directly combat the propensity to evil, thereby restoring us to the good. This

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 318.

³⁷Anderson-Gold, 1986, p. 27.

feeling of courage and respect, this heightened state of being, I hold, reassures us that we *are* oriented the necessary way.

Recall, the revolution in our disposition required a change in the *way of thinking*. More specifically, it required that we reverse the ordering of our incentives of the free power of choice. For this to occur, we need to raise our reason to concepts of law and duty above our own physical well-being, thereby initiating our reorientation to others away from our own private system of needs and desires. Corresponding to this, Kant claims that the sublime always has a reference to our *way of thinking*, i.e., to thinking that our rational ideas are more superior to and supersede sensibility. Indeed, there is something sublime in "any case of setting aside our needs" (CJ, Comment, 5:275). What is at stake is that we prioritize our reason and the moral law in lieu of the principles of happiness and its accomplice, self-conceit.

In addition, the resulting strength and courage summoned in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, Kant argues, provides us with the belief that had we to choose between upholding or abandoning our "highest principles" in the face of adversity, we would uphold them (CJ §28, 5:261-2). This experience, the elevated state of being arising out of the aesthetic judgment of the sublime, generates the feeling of courage needed to hold steadfastly to rational legislation and universal moral law and resist natural impulses and self-interest. As virtuous persons, we have the resolute disposition to strictly fulfill our obligations despite what forces we may confront.

However, the doctrine of radical evil is an anthropological concept and therefore involves not merely the individual, but the whole human species in communion with one another. We saw that transgressions against the predisposition to the good were committed as a consequence of people in association with others vying for a worth bestowed upon them by external opinion. To restore our predisposition, Kant suggests a "change of heart" in the individual. But he also points out that diminishing evil in the world and promoting

what he refers to as the "highest good" is not simply the effort of one individual. Indeed, the "highest moral good will not be brought about solely through the striving of one individual person for his own moral perfection but requires rather a union of such persons into a whole toward that very end, i.e., toward a system of well-disposed human beings" (R, 6:97-8). Again, what began as the focus of the individual and her disposition, broadens into a vision for the whole human species: "the ideal of a totality of human beings."

In light of this, what I propose in this chapter is to address two main issues. The first concerns humankind's moral vocation. We have seen it emerge in association with the sublime, without ever elucidating this connection. In section 3.1, I want (1) to point out the significance of this connection, which I believe lies in the feeling of respect for our capacity for moral lawfulness; and, (2) to show how our moral vocation is to be the ultimate purpose of nature, which is made possible, Kant believes, through the establishment of an ethical community based purely on the laws of virtue. This leads us to our second issue, the ethical community itself. In section 3.2, I point out that in order for us to achieve full moral improvement, Kant believes essentially that we must subordinate nature to our reason. More specifically, we must give up our aims for personal pleasure and well-being, for they are valueless, and orient ourselves toward others, thereby developing our moral being. Consequently, we have the proper orientation to enter into an ethical community in hope of establishing the "highest good." In section 3.3, we will see that the ethical community cannot be implemented by political means. Instead, it requires free individuals who perceive each other as intrinsically valuable based on the acceptance of their autonomous power. With this in mind, I adopt Allen Wood's suggestion that the best model for the ethical community is friendship. For it requires a deep sense of respect and trust among people that can foster the supportive and cooperative relationships so vital in minimizing the propensity to evil.

3.1 The connection between the sublime and our moral vocation

In more than one place, Kant refers to our "vocation" in the context of the sublime. For instance, in presupposing the idea that sublimity is contained only in the mind insofar as we are conscious of our superiority to nature's influence by virtue of our autonomous power, we accept that we can "judge nature without fear" because we "think of our vocation as being sublimely above nature" (CJ, §28, 5:264). Moreover, "when the mind can come to feel its own sublimity," this in fact "lies in its vocation," thereby elevating it "above nature" (CJ, §28, 5:262). In other words, as physical beings with natural needs and desires, we are humbled at the thought of nature in its destructive force. And yet, as rational beings with the capacity for lawfulness, more specifically moral lawfulness, we are elated believing that we possess a pre-eminence above all nature. For "reason...is a might [that allows us] to assert our independence of natural influences...and so to posit the absolutely large [or great] only in" the individual's "own vocation" (Comment, 5:269). Consequently, "the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation" (CJ, §27, 5:247), i.e., our power for lawfulness.

Another usage of vocation comes later in the *Critique of Judgment* and is more direct. Kant states that "the ultimate purpose" of human "existence" is "our moral vocation" (CJ, §42, 5:301). The "moral vocation" is also connected to the sublime. In *Religion*, Kant explains that the "majesty" of the moral law "instills awe" and "rouses a *feeling of the sublimity* of our own vocation" (R, 6:23n). Here, our vocation is the capacity for moral lawfulness. Moreover, as we have seen, to "arouse this feeling of the sublimity of our moral vocation" awakens our slumbering disposition so as to battle the propensity to evil, and restore the ethical ordering of our incentives to the good (R, 6:50). For, as we have previously attested, judging a thing sublime produces a way of thinking

that is compatible with the one that an influence of determinate practical ideas would produce on feeling (CJ, §26, 5:256), i.e., respect for our moral law-giving power.

So we can see that there is a definite connection between the sublime and our moral vocation. I believe that we come to feel respect at the consciousness of our power for lawfulness. The aesthetic pleasure in the sublime produces a deep sense of respect which, again, is the very incentive to make the moral law the maxim of our power of choice. In this sense, I believe that we are turned toward our moral vocation. The feeling of respect is so fundamental in Kant's ethics because it prevents us from treating others as *mere* means. Indeed, upholding the respect and dignity of others, we will see, is going to be of central importance in the pursuit of our moral vocation, and the hope of an ethical community. Kant's morality requires that we put aside our personal interests and idiosyncrasies, viz., we subordinate our natural being to our moral being, in order to adopt morals suitable for everyone to oblige. Wood explains that this abstraction helps us to *exclude* "ends that *in principle* cannot be shared between rational beings (such as those requiring deception or coercion)" and *advance* "ends that unite people (such as those involving mutual respect and mutual aid)."³⁸ What is vital is the respect we bestow upon others by virtue of their power for lawfulness and the acceptance of their participation in legislating universal moral laws.

But one might be lead to believe that rationality itself is our vocation. Though this is true, it is not the complete story. For though rationality is an end-in-itself, it is "not an end to be produced."³⁹ Therefore, it cannot be our vocation, since our vocation does not only include our rational, self-legislating power, it also includes conduct set and organized by reason into a system. It is an end that is, if not fulfilled, at least promoted and established by our action. Our vocation, according to Kant, is to be the ultimate purpose of nature insofar as we can set a final purpose, where the whole of nature is thought to be

³⁸Wood, 1999, p. 169.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 309.

simply instrumental to that purpose (CJ, §83, 5:431). This is only possible because we believe ourselves, in our rational self-legislating capacity, to be free of "the despotism of desires," viz., "free enough to tighten or to slacken, to lengthen or shorten them, as the purposes of reason require" (CJ, §83, 5:432).

Moreover, Kant holds that human beings are to be understood as the ultimate purpose of nature because we are the only beings who demand the unification of all natural things into a "system of purposes" (CJ, §83, 5:431). Without going into detail concerning this demand for unification, we can assume, for our purposes, that it is consequent upon our rational nature, and since human beings are the only rational beings we can speak of, this provides us with the status of being the ultimate purpose. However, this is possible only on condition that we set a final purpose. Before we reveal what this final purpose is, let us impart the distinction between an ultimate purpose and a final purpose. Allen Wood differentiates this succinctly.

He explains that for a purpose to be ultimate, it can be so only in *relation* to other purposes in order to avoid the incompleteness of an aggregate of purposes.⁴⁰ He states that "[w]ithout an ultimate end, there would have to be either a plurality of ends in which teleology [itself] terminates, or else every member of the aggregate had a further end somewhere else within the aggregate."⁴¹ We risk, Wood concludes, either unity in the former or an endless chain of purposes without a conclusion.

Whereas, "[a] final purpose is a purpose that requires no other purpose as a condition of its possibility" (CJ, §84, 5:434). It differs from an ultimate purpose, Wood explains, because the relation between a final purpose and all other purposes is simply negative.⁴² It presupposes no purpose outside itself that it serves.⁴³ As Wood points out,

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴³*Ibid.*

a human being cannot be regarded as a *final* purpose because, for Kant, belonging to a kingdom of ends we *relate* "to one another as ends *and* means" (G, 4:433, emphasis added). This necessarily precludes us as being the final purpose of nature. However, what distinguishes the human species from the rest of nature is that, as mentioned above, we can *set* a final purpose.

Nature seems to proceed on its course irrespective of human beings. It is our ability to have purposes, set goals, etc., that makes nature on analogy appear purposive. For Kant this indicates that our self-legislative power is independent of nature insofar as we set purposes. We are, as human beings, the ultimate purpose of nature because nature itself, and this includes our instinctive animal nature, "has no ultimate end at all *until human beings give it one* by setting a final end."⁴⁴ This final purpose, the object that we set before ourselves, is what Kant calls "the highest good," or rather, the appropriate combination of virtue and happiness within an ethical community. There are two points that are pertinent for our discussion.

First, it is not necessary, for us, to muddle through the concept of the highest good. The ambiguity of this concept is beyond the scope of this paper. What is important, however, is simply to recognize that it is an object of *human striving*, a final purpose, that provides our "virtues" with "a special point of reference for the unification of all ends" (R, 6:5). Better still, as Zammito explains, the highest good can be understood as an "expanded notion of the 'kingdom of ends,'"⁴⁵ which is "the synthetic totality of all achievements in the actual world which are compatible with the moral law and conducive to the welfare of [hu]mankind."⁴⁶ It is a final purpose that all virtuous human beings seek as

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Zammito, p. 319

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 325. Here Zammito summarizes Mary-Barbara Zeldin's interpretation of the highest good. "The *Summum Bonum*, the Moral Law, and the Existence of God." *Kant-Studien* 62 (1971), 43-54.

a universally shared purpose (R, 6:5). As Wood explains, "[f]or Kant it is crucial that human beings think of themselves as belonging to a moral community, of which all rational beings could regard themselves as members...united through the concept of a single final end that its members consciously pursue *in common* as a *shared* end."⁴⁷ The highest good, for Kant, is an "idea" arising "out of morality" that we hope for simply because we orient ourselves morally.

Second, our moral vocation, our ultimate purpose, is essentially to lord over *nature* both inside and outside of us and develop our practical reason in the hope of our moral improvement. Natural desires and private inclinations are of little value, according to Kant. Indeed, private inclinations, if they are not mastered by reason, will interfere with the progress of our moral personhood. He explains that private "inclinations...being sources of needs, are so far from having an absolute value...that the universal wish of every rational being must be...to be wholly free of them" (G, 4:428). Instead, worthiness, Kant informs us, arises *only* from what we do "purposively" through pure, practical reason and therefore "independently of nature" (CJ, §83, 5:434n). Reason must dominate nature and our quarrelsome selfishness so as to express our moral vocation. As we shall see, what this requires, Kant believes, is climbing out of what he calls an "the ethical state of nature" and into the "ethical community."

3.2 Climbing out of nature.

For Kant, the stirring of reason, with its consequent features of comparison and choice, is the impetus that demarcates the realm of humanity from the realm of animality. Our capacity to reason, Kant argues, necessarily implies "the transition from an uncultured, merely [instinctive] animal condition to the state of humanity," i.e., "a state of freedom"

⁴⁷Wood, 1999, p. 313.

(CB, 8:115). As such, human beings are no longer to be understood as confined to a single "way of life" dictated by the "voice of nature." Indeed, human beings discover within themselves "a power of choosing" and comparing alternative lifestyles that permits us to go "beyond the limits to which all animals are confined" (CB, 8:112). But, Kant warns us, this is not a smooth transition into moral personhood.

Instead, what occurs is that we are confronted with many "artificial desires," i.e., "a whole host of unnecessary and unnatural inclinations" (CB, 8:111). Kant refers to this as a state of "luxuriousness." It inevitably produces disparity and tension among people (CJ, §83, 5:432). He believes that, since we strive for those needs that are dispensable, our associations with others are *fiercely* competitive and selfish. We have come across this sentiment in chapter two, where self-conceit and the desire for power and wealth become our sole incentives for action because it is the only means of achieving the respect and honour in the eyes of others. We understand our happiness or unhappiness purely in terms of social comparisons. Our self-perception and worthiness is bestowed upon to us by the opinions of others. When in fact we should gain respect and worth from how closely we comply with the moral law.

So though the tension between people is, Kant argues, inevitable and purposeful for the development of our skills, it also underscores the detriments of nature, more specifically, our relentless pursuit of narrow and private desires, if we fail to discipline them. Nature acts "purposively" because "it strives to give us an education that makes us receptive to purposes *higher than* those that nature itself can provide" (CJ, §83, 5:433; emphasis added). We should come to see the crude and vehement inclinations, i.e., the inclinations to personal fulfillment and self-conceit that perpetuates conflict and inequality, as worthless in view of our rational, moral being. Therefore, to surpass this discordant social condition, where value lies in the opinions of others, we need to reorient the self through "a positive act of identification with others."

We need to point out further that, though we seek power and wealth in order to overcome anxiety and obtain honour, this situation is not simply a "state of nature." Recall, it is not nature *per se* that incites our passion which disregards our predisposition to the good, but our comparative associations with other human beings. We find ourselves in corruption simply by being surrounded by other human beings (R, 6:93-4). Nevertheless, we have not been able to suppress our private desires since we manipulate others for our own purposes, in the hope that we will gain a sense of respect and honour through our reputation. Thus, we are improperly oriented to our personal well-being. So though what might appear *prima facie* to be in a "state of nature," where everyone claws their way to the top, it is, on the contrary, an "ordinary social condition." Indeed, for Kant, evil is a combined product of our freedom and belonging to a society.

As Anderson-Gold explains, this ordinary social condition, what Kant refers to as the "ethical state of nature," is inclusive of the civil condition within which we fulfill our duties of justice and such obligations of benevolence as follows from our individual conceptions of our *personal good*.⁴⁸ We are obligated, but only narrowly so. As Kant interprets it, this ordinary social condition remains a battle ground "between the principles of virtue and a state of inner immorality" (R, 6:97), viz., a tension between acting in accordance with the moral law or the principle of self-conceit. In essence, it is a conflict between the morally good will and nature as a personal system of desires motivated by the principle of happiness. We either orient ourselves positively toward others and their ends, recognizing the intrinsic worth of their autonomy, or we conceive ourselves narrowly and privately, such that the ends of others are construed instrumentally for our own purposes. The latter conception of the self is to be understood as a social being who refuses to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of others. As such, it is a betrayal of virtue, "[s]ince the

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, emphasis added.

orientation toward virtue is, according to Kant, an orientation to others as 'ends,'"⁴⁹ accompanied by a deep feeling of respect for them.

Kant believes that it is up to each individual to restore their disposition to the good. The struggle between the principle of either the good or evil, and the adoption of one over the other, ultimately resides within the individual. This struggle requires that each person forfeits their personal desires in order to pursue purposes that are more inclusive of others, and essentially respect others as morally autonomous agents. However, Kant holds that it is truly futile to think that an individual, on her own, can successfully escape the "incessant danger of relapsing" into evil. Since evil arises out of our social relations, it too requires a social solution, viz., a united "ever expanding society...which has for its end the prevention of this evil and the promotion of the good in the human being" (R, 6:94). The moral improvement of the individual and that of the human race is, therefore, connected.

Kant states that "the dominion of the good principle" is only "attainable...through the setting up and the diffusion of a society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue," insofar as it encompasses the "entire human race" (R, 6:94). The orientation to virtue is "first and foremost the formation of a common bond, a community, a supportive network within which anonymity is overcome and personal relationships established."⁵⁰ What this entails, Anderson-Gold expounds, is the abandonment of social relationships that are based on "willful isolation and [a] condition of 'inner immorality,'"⁵¹ which result from the primacy of the self and personal desires. Instead, Kant hopes for social relationships that show respect for others and promote a shared purpose.

Moreover, this orientation toward others as ends also serves to prevent the inconstancy of our disposition, the sustainability of which is so vital for Kant. In contrast

⁴⁹Anderson-Gold, 1986, p. 29.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 30.

to the lust for power, wealth, and honour that, as we have seen, leads to treating others instrumentally and degrades humanity in both ourselves and others, a person with a virtuous disposition perceives others with proper respect. Positively orienting ourselves to others, Kant believes, will safeguard our treating people as mere means. Anderson-Gold explains that we narrow the division between moral agents and commence a "positive integration" of all ends that promote the welfare of humankind.⁵² But as stated above, if human beings do not have a principle that unites them, Kant argues, they deviate from the pursuit of the common goal of goodness (R, 6:97). So "long as individuals remain isolated in their endeavour to overcome the propensity to evil and attain to a virtuous disposition their achievements will remain subject to frustration."⁵³ Without a commitment to a shared, social union, the individual's disposition will always remain threatened.

Therefore, the remedy is that we crawl out of the ethical state of nature. For Kant construes this as a social condition which is hindered by the distancing of individuals from one another, and the fostering of their concern with personal well-being and reputation. If our purposes are not unified with others, he claims, we will pursue our own personal system of desires to the detriment of both our moral being and society at large. For these desires are mere luxury and hence dispensable. The cultivation of our reason, according to Kant, ought to be the effective means to master and suppress these. We thereby disvalue our physical well-being and its servility, and raise the worth of our rational, moral being. However, this cannot occur without the appropriate disposition.

We need virtue, since it is not only the strength to adhere to moral principles over natural desires, but also, as Anderson-Gold puts it, an attitude "toward others which precede[s] any specific acts of benevolence and provide[s] the context in which needs are

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵³*Ibid.*

assessed and fulfilled."⁵⁴ Because the context is one of a deep felt respect for others, we abandon our avaricious and manipulative urges for more generous and supportive relations. With the feeling of respect and a virtuous disposition, Kant believes, we are able to enter into an "ethical community."

3.3 The ethical community modeled on moral friendship.

As we have uncovered in the previous section, the disposition to the good is not only a struggle between an individual's practical reason and her unruly inclinations. The hostile social situation that she finds herself in constantly challenges the stability of her virtue. Consequently, her moral improvement depends upon a union of well-disposed persons, an ethical community, striving together for the dominion of the good and moral improvement. Kant believes that we have a unique duty not simply to one another as mere individuals, but a duty "well-grounded" in the "objective reality of human reason" to the "human race" itself. He states that "every species of rational beings is objectively - in the idea of reason - destined to a common end, namely the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all" (R, 6:97). Because an ethical community requires more than simple transactions between people, we must "set goals for group interaction and collaboration (as members of moral associations) to articulate shared purposes."⁵⁵ The moral improvement that Kant envisions consists in a free and ever expanding "association" of moral agents restrained only by laws of virtue that seek the inclusion of the *whole* human species toward a shared, final purpose (R, 6:94-6). Such a free and ever expanding association, however, cannot be sought in a political realm. For it differs from the ethical community in the following two ways.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 31.

First, he argues that the ethical community differs from the political community because a duty of right, which falls under the latter, can involve "external constraint," whereas this is impossible for a duty of virtue because it "is based only on free self-constraint" (MM, 6:383). Kant states that it is a "contradiction for the political community to compel its citizens to enter into an ethical community, since the latter entails freedom from coercion in its very concept" (R, 6:95). The political community, on the other hand, regulates conduct by common *coercive* laws. Since the "[ethical] community involves the collective pursuit of ends set in common with others," and, as we saw in chapter one, to set an end requires the freedom of the individual, the political community, in Kant's mind, "cannot be an institution in which people share ends or live a common life."⁵⁶ Instead, it should simply protect our freedom and prevent conditions that violate this. Thus, no fixed creeds, no statutory laws, no authority resting on "historical grounds" will suffice for the ethical community. Rather, it depends on the laws of virtue, which are, Wood summarizes, "purely ethical, *universal* in scope, comprehending all humanity, and are *purified* of everything alien to rational morality."⁵⁷ That it includes *all* humanity is relevant for the second distinction.

As Kant states, "since the duties of virtue concern the whole human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community" (R, 6:96). Consequently, "a multitude of human beings" associated on political grounds are to be understood as "a *particular* society that strives after the consensus of all human beings in order to establish an absolute ethical whole of which each partial society is only a representation" (R, 6:96, emphasis added). All political communities, Kant believes, remain in the ethical state of nature, and are burdened with all of its "imperfections." For

⁵⁶Wood, 1999, p. 315.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

example, it is not universal in scope because it belongs to a particular group in a particular time. According to Kant, a norm must be universally applicable, i.e., ahistorical and atemporal, if it is to be obligatory. His reluctance to include the political community as a possible candidate for an ethical community, therefore, is based not only on its use of coercive laws, but also its particularity. So what does Kant have in mind?

The ethical community is a necessary communitarian feature for staving off the inevitable corruption following from social comparisons and our susceptibility to evil. The desperation of our social condition, Kant claims, demands a shared, common end. Moreover, the ethical community appears to be the only way we can hope to morally improve ourselves. Indeed, as Wood points out, "our vocation as moral beings cannot be fulfilled without it."⁵⁸ However, this does not mean that a moral agent comes to rely on the ethical community to overcome evil, since this still remains the sole deed of an individual's free power of choice.

Instead, the ethical community eliminates negative attitudes towards others as a result of a developed feeling of respect. Ideally, this new way of thinking encourages the full participation and cooperation of its members as recognized autonomous, moral agents. The ethical community can be understood as an expression of "our intentions to value persons as ends in themselves."⁵⁹ As such, it "is a context within which members can reveal the personal dimensions of their needs in an atmosphere of equality and trust, a context of friendship wherein another's goals can be fostered and supported as a part of our own happiness and sense of well-being."⁶⁰ Kant likens this ethical community to that of the family.

He explains that the constitution of an ethical community is comparable to that of

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁵⁹Anderson-Gold, 1986, p. 31.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

a family under a common though invisible moral father, whose holy son, who knows the father's will and yet stands in blood relation with all the members of the family, takes his father's place by making the other members better acquainted with his will; these therefore honour the father in him and thus enter into a free, universal and enduring union of hearts. (R, 6:102)

But as Wood conjectures,

the best Kantian model for the ethical community, based on his [Kant's] own theory of social relations is not domestic...It is instead the relation of friendship, though extended beyond the confines of two individuals to a community that is ultimately to encompass the entire human race.⁶¹

Although Kant's writing on friendship is scant, there is cogency in Wood's interpretation.

Friendship is, Kant defines,

an ideal of each participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's well-being through the morally good will that unites them, and even though it does not produce the complete happiness of life, the adoption of this ideal in their disposition toward each other makes them deserving of happiness. (MM, 6:469)

In order to delineate the necessary conditions of friendship and indicate the importance of this for Kant's ethical philosophy, Wood identifies five "elements of friendship."

The first, *reciprocal benevolence*, requires that "[t]he ground of friendship is always the general or philanthropic love that we rationally feel for every human being as a rational nature."⁶² That is, when we acknowledge that others too are ends-in-themselves, we have a feeling of respect that, Kant believes, transforms into a reciprocal love. As Wood explains, reciprocal benevolence "identifies the ultimate foundation of friendship in the objective value of persons who enter it."⁶³ If we did not feel this fundamental respect, for Kant, there could be no true friendship at all.

Kant holds that the second element, *equality*, is also necessary because without it one will feel himself "a step lower" than the other. This "inequality between friends,"

⁶¹Wood, 1999, p. 316.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 280.

Wood explains, "undermines the fragile trust required by the intimacy that makes it possible for friends to 'possess one another' and share their thoughts, feelings, and lives with one another."⁶⁴ A friendship should not have as its end and determining ground "mutual advantage." For Kant holds that the gratitude owed in this type of relationship will likely bring about inequality and deny respect. A friendship then should be "a purely moral one," founded on nothing more than "the outward manifestation of an inner heartfelt benevolence," where "each [is] generously concerned with sparing the other his burden and bearing it all by himself, even concealing it altogether from his friend" (MM, 6:471). In such a relationship, we help others without them incurring any debt, thereby preserving equality.

The third element, *reciprocal possession*, is sharing in the experiences of others as though they were our own. Or as Kant puts it, we "feel in possession of each other in a way that approaches fusion into one person" (MM, 6:471). But for this to occur, we need to surrender our self. We cannot be preoccupied with our own ends and advantages, our private desires and happiness. Rather, we take an interest in other's ends, viz., we participate and share "sympathetically in the other's well-being." Wood concludes that "[i]n this way, friendship is also the clearest real model in human life for the ideal realm of ends, in which the ends of all rational beings are united into a single system."⁶⁵ Our happiness, Wood explains, results not simply through our personal striving, but arises from the "common striving toward an end," where the happiness of everyone has been included.⁶⁶ This "self-surrender" can be furthered in a different way as well.

Intimate communication, the fourth element, requires that we expose our inner "secrets" and "feelings" to another. Again, this is an act of self-surrender. But in this case

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 279. Here Wood summarizes a passage from Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.* p. 279-80.

we have more to lose than simply personal ends and advantages. For others can use the information we provide them concerning our thoughts and feelings against us. But as Kant explains, because we are social beings and we seek to enhance this part of our being, we feel the need to expose ourselves to others (MM, 6:471). Indeed, we desire companionship and "openheartedness" with others. "Moral friendship," Kant admits, is one that demands courage and "mutual respect," so that participants can reveal "their secret judgments and feelings to each other" (MM, 6:471). This requires a disposition willing to risk personal exposure, without fear of indiscretion and self-incrimination .

The final element of friendship is *love toward reciprocal well-pleaseness*. In a friendship, we come to feel love for one another. But as Wood explains, we "also cherish (or love) something of great moral value that friendship instantiates."⁶⁷ It is the culmination of all the elements of friendship in their perfection. Indeed, it is "the fact that...human beings really do reciprocally esteem one another, show benevolence toward one another, communicate intimately, and unite their ends, swallowing up the happiness of each into a shared end."⁶⁸ But this can be sustained only if the individual seeks to be virtuous and acts virtuously in relation to others, i.e., positively orient themselves to others. Ideally, we are thereby perceived as worthy of trust, benevolence, and happiness. This element is, Wood indicates, the final end of friendship "from the standpoint of morality" and makes it an ethical duty to pursue.

However, friendship has its limitations too. In fact, Kant states that "friendship is only an idea and unattainable in practice," since it is "the union" among people "through equal mutual love and respect" (MM, 6:469). As human beings, we cave too often to our own self-conceit. Surrendering the self is a difficult order. Kant even cautions about giving too much of our self away in friendship for fear of exploitation (MM, 6:472). For

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

the sake of prudence, we ought to keep our thoughts and feelings hidden. Moreover, nature, as we have seen, guides us into competitive relations with one another for the sake of cultivating our talents and rational capacities. As a result, there is an increase in the inequality among people. Kant believes that inequality should be *reduced* as much as possible so that people will not feel indebted to others. Inequality, he holds, fosters the hierarchy and slavishness that he hopes to eliminate, or at best minimize. All of these deterrents are difficult to reconcile and make moral friendship seem implausible. It is hard to imagine a world where we do not think of our own interests, where we openly divulge our thoughts, and where there is equality. Nevertheless, it remains the best model for an ethical community.

As Wood explains, the "free union of hearts" is meant to parallel "the voluntary self-surrender and mutual possession of friends by one another."⁶⁹ Moreover, with the proper disposition attributed to our "change of heart," we can enter into an ethical community with others, bearing in mind the terms indicated in the five elements outlined above, without fear or anxiety. The ethical community, Wood believes, involves a relationship that seeks greater intimacy and self-revelation, mutual sharing, a strong appreciation for equality, and mutual trust, all of the qualities that we discover in moral friendship.

But though we can advance Kant's notion of friendship as the best model for the ethical community, we cannot overlook the fact that this moral association is ultimately "an idealized Enlightenment version of the Christian church," devoted to uniting the entire human race under it.⁷⁰ Kant's hope is that moral religion, that which is purified by reason, will supplant those vocations founded on tradition, superstition, and enthusiasm. He believes that applying "enlightened reason" will ease people's attachment to practices,

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p.316-7.

beliefs, doctrines, and authorities whose basis is parochial and exclusive in the hope of establishing a pure, rational moral religion that includes all free thinking members of the human species. For Kant, the uncritical compliance to dogma, ritual, or mysticism is simply a demonstration of the individual's passive way of thinking, which reveals the individual's need to be steered by others (CJ, Comment, 5:273; §40, 5:295). "Statutes and formulas" are nothing more than "those mechanical tools" of rational "misemployment" and "fetters of an everlasting [self-incurred] tutelage" (WE, 8:36).

What is important for our purposes is that Kant seeks an ethical community that is made up of well-disposed individuals capable of thinking for themselves. Further, this ethical community is neither sectarian nor based on external laws. Rather, he hopes for a moral community that is based on duties of virtue, which are *internally legislated*. But he also believes that these laws can only be made *public*, if they have a common legislator, this being God. Kant explains that "[i]f an ethical community is to come into being, all individuals must be subjected to a public legislation, and all the laws binding them must be capable of being regarded as commands of a common lawgiver" (R, 6:98). In other words, we must understand these laws as though they are commands of God.

But as Wood clarifies, "[v]iewing moral duties as divine commands" simply gives "the moral law a public status it could not otherwise have."⁷¹ Consistent with this, Kant himself declares that whenever we "fulfill" our duties to other human beings, duties that come from following the moral law, by that "fact," we "conform to God's commands" (R, 6:103). However, we ultimately remain the authors of the moral law, i.e., "each individual can recognize by himself, through his own reason, the will of God" (R, 6:104). So all that is required to be "well-pleasing" to God's commands, and we have come across this in

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 410, 42n.

chapter one, is that we maintain a "steadfast zeal in the conduct of a morally good life" (R, 6:103). It follows, therefore, that

[t]he point of religion is that we may think of the human species as a single community united by a common set of principles and ends, even though their content may remain somewhat indeterminate, open to controversy and correction, and thus a matter of each individual's conscience."⁷²

For Kant, religion acts as a vehicle for achieving the unity of morally good human beings under universal laws of virtue to improve what he sees as our diabolical social condition. These laws, of course, arise from the autonomous, individual participants themselves who ideally all share in their legislation. It is vital, however, that individuals express their intentions to value each member as an end-in-themselves, capable of rational moral lawfulness, by positively orienting themselves to others and the overall welfare of humankind. Individuals must be willing to set aside their personal system of purposes, Kant claims, if they are to comply with the moral law and promote the idea of the "highest good," an idea that looks beyond simply sensible interest. So participants must be willing to view their sensible desires and needs as valueless in comparison to the absolute worth attributed to moral rational personhood. Only in this way can we establish an "ethical community that is capable of gradually reshaping our deeply corrupt social life by revolutionizing and uniting the hearts of individuals through the free power of reason."⁷³

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 320.

Conclusion

This paper has been not only an effort to establish the connection between Kant's concept of the sublime and his moral philosophy, but also an attempt to provide a possible path that an individual might be expected to follow having become conscious, in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, of their infinite moral vocation. In other words, I have tried to illustrate what we might promote (the idea of the "highest good") and how this could be achieved (through an "ethical community" modeled on Kant's notion of moral friendship), given that we are oriented morally. But for this to succeed, Kant holds, we must come to perceive ourselves, by virtue of our pure practical reason, as the lord of nature. For nature, in Kant's philosophy, conflicts with our moral resolve. And there is no better expression of this privileged position than that demonstrated in Kant's experience of the sublime.

What we truly see emphasized, in his elucidation of this concept, is his incessant abasement of nature, and consequently our animal being, in contrast to our moral stature. Where we once might have experienced displeasure and horror at the representation of nature in its most powerful, we now come to see it as pleasurable. For we come to believe that we have within us an autonomous power that remains unaffected by the influences of nature. In an effort to estimate absoluteness, the imagination, as an instrument of reason, fails to exhibit a law of reason. But at the same time, this great effort of the imagination, refers to something that is "*large absolutely*." An aesthetic judgment of the sublime is pleasurable simply because we discover that every standard of sensibility is inadequate to the ideas of reason. We call those things sublime, Kant argues, because they rest on ideas that look beyond all sensible interest for the purposes of practical reason. It is in the experience of the sublime, confronted with the greatest of all natural phenomena, where we come to recognize our superiority over nature as moral rational subjects.

In addition, an aesthetic judgment of the sublime "calls forth" a strength that makes it possible for us to consider our physical well-being and personal desires as valueless in comparison to our moral rational purpose. For this well-being would simply succumb to the destructive powers in nature. Rather, through an enhanced feeling of life - an intense, serious outpouring of our vital powers - we come to perceive ourselves, our "autonomous spirituality," as more than the developed form of our natural capacities. Indeed, we come to see ourselves as moral persons, capable of self-determination. The revelation of our power of rational lawfulness induces the feeling of respect toward ourselves as moral subjects. For Kant, this feeling *is* the very incentive for us to comply with the moral law and abandon our dependence on natural necessity. When we represent to the mind the vast magnitude or power in nature, we become conscious of our law-giving capacity and our infinite moral vocation. And this vocation, we discovered, is to be the ultimate purpose of nature provided that we have a final purpose. But we can have a final purpose only if we are oriented positively toward others.

Through our investigation of Kant's doctrine of evil in chapter two, we found that human beings are generally concerned with their own physical well-being, and that the ordinary social condition is corrupt as a result. Kant explains that the source of this corruption grows from our dissatisfaction with our own happiness and physical well-being in comparison to others. Because of the inevitable inequalities that arise from gaining respect from others through power and fear, and the fierce competitiveness that this fosters, we tend to pursue purposes that are exclusively focused to satisfy our personal inclinations. For Kant, this level of our humanity is slavish and remains confined to the dictates of natural necessity. We are still susceptible, in other words, to the demands of nature and not our pure practical reason.

What is required, therefore, is a "change of heart," a way of thinking that raises our reason to the concepts of law and duty, thereby restoring our predisposition to the good.

In so doing, we come to recognize the power of lawfulness that resides within us. A power that can determine our conduct free of sensible influence. Kant's relentless onslaught of nature reemerges. He argues that we gain a great sense of respect for dutiful action provided we set aside incentives of self-conceit, view nature and its seductive desires as worthless, and acknowledge the moral law, a law our reason commands us so compellingly to follow. Consequently, we will set aside our personal desires and needs, and orient ourselves positively toward others.

However, according to Kant, we can never be assured that we have changed, that we are truly following the moral law, and that we continue upon the road of the good. The virtuous disposition that he seeks always remains elusive. Indeed, there is a sort of mysticism that shrouds it. But, as I conjectured, we saw that the aesthetic judgment of the sublime is an experience that contributes to this assurance. For what we come to feel is a deep sense of "unconditional respect" for our lawful power, which is the incentive to make the moral law the maxim of our power of choice, and reverse the perverted ethical order of the incentives where self-love took precedence. Furthermore, as the vital powers intensify, we gain a strength, a "steadfast zeal," that convinces us that nature is nothing in comparison to our higher, moral purposes. We come to perceive ourselves as a moral being that has absolute worth and a vocation sublimely above nature. It appears then that, in an aesthetic judgment of the sublime, we come to discover and embrace the way of thinking, the disposition that Kant desires of the morally good human being.

But with this disposition and the orientation to our moral being, Kant believes, comes a certain commitment to an ethical community in the hope of our moral improvement and the highest good. Because the sublime is relatively purposive in that it indicates an autonomous moral subject, it thereby commits us to our moral vocation. For the consciousness of own autonomy is enough, Kant argues, to lead us to the further concept of a "kingdom of ends." As such, we recognize that all rational beings are ends-in-

themselves who ought to be treated with respect, i.e., treated as ends and never merely as means. Moreover, Kant believes that once we adopt ethical principles, or orient ourselves morally as I have attempted to point out in this paper, we strive toward the idea of the highest good. We cannot achieve this, however, unless we enter into collaborative relations with others modeled on Kant's notion of moral friendship. We saw that the moral associations between people consist of an honest expression of benevolence, self-surrender, sharing, and intimate communication, which demands that we must put aside our own personal needs and desires. It is in this way, Kant believes, that we can hope to reshape a deeply corrupt social world and permit the fostering of moral improvement.

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