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The American Cairo  
الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

***Filling the Vacant Space: A Close Reading of Kant's  
Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason***

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

Mae Ashraf Ali Saafan

TO THE

*Master of Arts in Philosophy*

September 2022

*in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Philosophy*

# Declaration of Authorship

I, Mae Ashraf Ali Saafan, declare that this thesis titled, "Filling the Vacant Space: A Close Reading of Kant's Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason"

" and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.

Signed:

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Date: 06/09/2022

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# Preface

Kant's works on both theoretical and practical philosophy have been the focus of attention of many scholars over the past two hundred years. Yet, when it comes to his moral philosophy, there are some areas which have not been thoroughly discussed. This is probably due to the general impression that his systematic vindications of religious faith stand in a sharp contrast to Kant's far more important historical role as *the* modern critic of traditional metaphysics.

The focus of this dissertation is hopefully the beginning of a project with the aim of shedding light on some areas that have been left out of consideration, or at least treated with less attention. These areas, I believe, are the roots of what has been already thoroughly studied. As roots, however, these areas remain in the dark and are thus avoided.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore and discuss Kant's central notion of rational belief. Kant's account of rational belief is the ground on which rational moral agents assent to propositions that enable them to avoid any practical incoherence as they engage in their moral duty.

In order to fully grasp this subtle notion, a close reading of the dialectic of pure practical reason will be offered, in particular the doctrine of the postulates of practical reason.

In his doctrine of the postulates of practical reason, Kant argues that although there is no theoretical proof for or against freedom, God, and the immortality of the soul, moral rational agents ought to believe in their reality, as there are *practical* grounds to believe in them. The need to introduce these practical postulates – being part of what Kant calls 'practical cognition' – is the necessity of a hypothesis that can and must be formed by the subject only from a practical point of view and has nothing to do with a theoretical cognition of such hypotheses.

From this standpoint, not only could the postulates be viewed as a point of connection between what Kant conceives of as the phenomenal world of spatio-temporal appearances and the noumenal realm of things in themselves, but also as architectonic elements which – in their connection to the concept of freedom – are part of what "constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason" (KpV, 5:3 f.) and thus also crucial for the conceivability of the unity of the theoretical and practical *use* of reason in accomplishing the "highest vocation of reason" (5:108), i.e. the actualization of the highest good.

As Kant establishes the limits of knowledge and reason in its theoretical use in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he also argues that the vocation of reason will be complete through finding its (reason's) ideas in their *practical* use.

In the third antinomy, Kant provides a thesis (of the anti-naturalist) which says that causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can be derived. To explain these appearances, it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of spontaneity. While the (naturalist) antithesis says that: there is no spontaneity; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature.

Whereas the antithesis is essential to the theoretical interest of reason, the thesis is essential to its practical interest. Hence, with the third antinomy Kant reaches a stance from which, on the one hand, freedom becomes conceivable, while, on the other hand, the unity of reason is endangered by apparently conflicting interests.

Kant, however, attempts to show that this contradiction only arises as reason was led to err in assuming it can have knowledge of its own ideas (like those of freedom, immortality, and the existence of God). The solution for this error was the critique of reason to find the boundaries it can set for itself in its theoretical use and to reinstate or find a place for such ideas through the use of practical reason.

Kant announces that only through the use of practical reason, which has its own laws,

can we extend our rational capacity and reach beyond the limits of sensuous experience, not on the grounds of knowledge but on the grounds of morality and belief.

Practical reason fills the place theoretical reason left vacant after setting its limits, by postulating reason's ideas as *practical postulates* on the ground of morality, its law, and the belief presupposed by its actualization and hence a unity of theoretical and practical rationality could be established.

# Chapter 1

## On the Distinction of Theoretical and Practical Cognition

*Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith (KrV, B XXX)*

In the B-Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant announces one central goal of his critical project: "to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (B xxx).

At first glance, an announcement of this sort might seem strange or even confusing, especially in a work focusing on the question of how (synthetic a priori) knowledge is possible. Many questions can arise with a view on this quote: what is that knowledge which Kant has to deny? And why so? Why does Kant need to make room for faith? And: Which kind of faith?

In the following section (and the coming chapters), I will attempt to provide answers to these questions.

In the "Canon of Pure Reason," Kant contends that all "interest of reason" is united in the following three questions:

- “1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?” (A 805/B 833)

The critical thematization of our rational capacity is divided between the first two questions. The first one concerns the speculative, i.e. theoretical use of reason directed towards describing what *factually* happens (and might be known by us by understanding it in its necessity by relating it back to laws). The second question concerns the practical use of reason, which is directed at prescribing what *ought to happen* (and, therefore, what we are obliged to do) by determining the fundamental moral law directing all our actions. The third question concerns claims regarding the consequences of doing what we ought to do. More specifically, we may hope that our souls are immortal and that there is an author of nature.

In his First Critique, Kant draws the boundaries of knowledge or the limits of the theoretical use of reason. He famously distinguishes between considering things as objects of experience in cognition and considering the same things as things in themselves in pure thought (B xxvi n.).

For sensuous rational beings like us, things are transcendently constituted and thus empirically “given” (A 50/B74), namely “given” as related to us and to each other within a cognitive relation, i.e.: as “appearances” qua “indeterminate objects of a sensuous intuition” (A 20/B 34). Such appearances, i.e., objects of possible experience, are to be conceptually determined by the understanding (A 50/B 74 ff.), so as to be in the first place thought, understood and cognitively related to *as something* (A 79/B 105):

“Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*. If, however, I suppose there to be things that are merely objects of the understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition (as *coram intuitu intellectuali*), then such things would be called *noumena (intelligibilia)* (A 249).

Accordingly, we cannot *cognize* anything about the existence and nature of things considered

as things in themselves; i.e. as things considered independently of their being related to us within a *sensuous* cognitive relation, but can rather only *think* such things (cf. A 249 ff., B 306 ff.) to be the logical ground of our phenomenal experience, inasmuch as we are not capable of an intellectual cognition of these things, i.e. incapable of intellectually intuiting *noumena*.

“To **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason). But I can **think** whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities. But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required. This "more," however, need not be sought in theoretical sources of cognition; it may also lie in practical ones.” (B xxvi)

Accordingly, cognition depends on the real possibility of the object, or what Kant sometimes calls ‘objective validity.’ This ‘objective validity’ or ‘real possibility’ is a property of a concept to be instantiated in experience, however, as will become crucial to understand in detail, is not only brought about by a theoretical proof of its possibility (which is either inferential or perceptual), but also by a practical proof of its possibility. While thought depends on the mere logical possibility of the object.

We shall soon explain how cognition occurs in detail and the role of each of the faculties responsible for its occurrence, i.e., the faculty of sensibility and understanding.

Kant, however, recognizes reason as a distinctive faculty, which he calls the faculty of principles (A299/B355). Reason generates the metaphysical ideas of God, freedom, and immortality which we can conceive without, however, having the capacity to cognize and relate to them as objects of sensuous experience. The knowledge of such ideas therefore is denied for speculative reason.

“Now after speculative reason has been denied all advance in this field of the supersensible, what still remains for us is to try whether there are not data in reason's practical data for determining that transcendent rational concept of the unconditioned, in such a way as to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, in accordance with the wishes of metaphysics, cognitions *a priori* that are possible, but only from a practical standpoint. By such procedures speculative reason has at least made room for such an extension, even if it had to leave it empty; and we remain at liberty, indeed we are called upon by reason to fill it if we can through practical data of reason.” (B xxi)

Although Kant clearly declares that we cannot claim any knowledge of the supersensible metaphysical ideas of freedom, God, and the soul, he is also unmistakably clear about his intention not to dismiss such ideas. Thus, instead of proceeding dogmatically and attempting to address questions about possible knowledge of them, Kant wants these ideas to be "constructed according to the critique of pure reason" (B xxx). This critique, as Kant explains, demonstrates that theoretical reason cannot cognize the unconditioned; however, practical reason might still have ways to be considered from which a practical cognition of the unconditioned may be attempted.

This practical cognition, however, will not be of objects that we can *know*, but rather that we have a legitimate rational need to assume the existence of (cf. *KpV*, 5:143). In other words, practical reason *postulates* that God, freedom, and the soul exist because it (practical

reason) *demands* their existence.

Hence, according to Kant, only through the use of practical reason, which has its own laws, can we extend our rational capacity and reach beyond the limits of experience, not on the grounds of knowledge but on the grounds of morality and belief.

“Pure practical reason now fills this vacant place with a determinate law of causality in an intelligible world (with freedom), namely the moral law” (5:49)

Through addressing our role within the world as moral agents, Kant conceives of the three metaphysical ideas of the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul as *practical postulates*. The validity of such ideas will not be proven empirically, as they are beyond the limits of experience and, therefore, of knowledge. However, practical reason will postulate them in this "vacant place" beyond the limits of knowledge on the ground of morality, its law and the faith presupposed by its actualization.

In the next step, we shall now analyze in more detail how Kant differentiates between the components of theoretical and practical cognition.

## 1. Theoretical Cognition

Experience for us as rational sensuous beings is possible only as a composition of two capacities or powers of the mind, namely sensibility and understanding. Both capacities contribute to producing representations. The first requires an external prompt for this purpose, while the second supplies the faculty of knowledge with representations from itself. Knowledge for Kant then, is a combination of being affected by something that is *received* and thus, as such, is not produced by the mind; and by something that is contributed by the inner workings of the mind and thus is ‘spontaneous’, i.e. of originating from the mind’s own initiative and mode of operation.

In the First Critique, Kant determines cognition (*Erkenntnis*) as a type of representation by differentiating it from sensation. Whereas sensations refer to “the subject as a modification of its state”, cognitions are objective perceptions that refer to an object immediately or mediately (A320/B376). Although this quasi-definition reflects the most general meaning of the term, Kant uses it loosely in other places. Sometimes, he refers to different degrees of cognitions (Jäsche Logik, 9:64- 65; A 573/B 601). However, all the definitions, conditions, and degrees of cognition share the conceptual mark that the notion involves the *representation* of something.

“The genus is **representation** in general (*representatio*). Under it stand representations with consciousness (*perceptio*). A **perception** [Wahrnehmung] that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a **sensation** (*sensatio*); an objective perception is a **cognition** (*cognitio*). The latter is either an **intuition** or a **concept** (*intuitus vel conceptus*). The former is immediately related to the object and is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things. A concept is either an **empirical** or a **pure concept**, and the pure concept, insofar as it has its origin solely in the understanding (not in a pure image of sensibility), is called *notio*. A concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an **idea** or a concept of reason.” (A 320/B 376 f.).

The previous famous passage from the “Transcendental Dialectic” of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is considered one of the very few places where Kant unravels a number of technical terms related to cognition and lays down their relation to each other. Kant says that *the genus* representation contains sensations, intuitions, and concepts. Sensibility, the faculty that

provides sensory representations, generates representations when being affected by the object, namely as a response to *the affection* by the object. On the other hand, we have the faculty of understanding, which generates conceptual representations spontaneously – i.e., without the need for affection. Reason, however, is that spontaneous faculty which in inferential processes of reasoning generates representations (certain concepts and principles concerning totalities, (A299/B355), which Kant calls 'ideas' or 'notions' and which are irreducible to the representations of sensibility and the understanding. These ideas, as we shall see, are, the ideas of God, the world-whole, and the soul.

Each faculty (*Vermögen*) or “source” of our representations, i.e., sensibility, the understanding and reason, play a distinct role in the generation and systematization of theoretical cognition. Let us, however, focus on the *generation* of knowledge for the moment:

“Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (**the receptivity of impressions**), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of these representations (**spontaneity of concepts**); through the former an object is given to us, through the latter it is thought in relation to that representation (as a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition. (...) It comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. (...) Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding, none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts).” (A50/B74 f.; cf. A15/B29; B 146; RP 20:296, 325)

Starting with *sensibility*, when an object is given to us through affection, (A 19/B 33), it becomes the matter of a conscious representation for the subject. This affection is a prerequisite for the production of a representation that stands in a cognitive relation to the object. Kant calls such representations through which the mind relates immediately to objects *intuitions*. He distinguishes between the form and the matter of such representations. For the objects of intuition are given to us through two forms of relating sensuous impressions (the matter of intuition) in temporal and spatial relations: Space and time, being *forms of* intuiting (the acts), intuition (the representations) and receptivity (the mode of mental operativity) (A 20/B 34).

The immediacy of sensible intuitions means there is no other representation mediating between thing and intuition. It refers to its object directly. In this sense the affection is that which functions as the material condition of the intuition's referring to its object.

The forms of the intuition, on the other hand, “grounds the validity of a set of determinate a priori principles for experience.”<sup>1</sup> This is so because we, as rational sensuous subjects, can only differentiate objects from ourselves and intuit them by sensing their matter as being related in spatio-temporal relations. Therefore, these forms are considered a priori principles that can determine any experience.

Similar to the faculty of sensibility, Kant introduces the faculty of the understanding in the narrow sense in terms of its function, as the faculty in charge of producing spontaneous representations or as the “active or spontaneous faculty through which objects are thought, or determined, by concepts in judgments.”<sup>2</sup> He contends that the understanding spontaneously functions in relation to the sensual perceptions in accordance with the twelve categories that he introduced. These categories are the basic rules of the understanding, and they reside in our

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<sup>1</sup> Kain (2010), p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Watkins and Willaschek (2010), p. 95.

minds as part of the necessary structure of a representational system that does not produce but thinks the objects given to in intuition. Hence, they are pure a priori concepts that are not derived from experience.

“[T]he **combination** (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses and therefore cannot already be contained in the pure form of sensible intuition; for it is in an act of spontaneity of the power of representation; and since one must call the latter understanding, in distinction from sensibility, all combination, whether we are conscious of it or not, whether it is a combination of the manifold of the intuition or of several concepts, and in the first case either of sensible or non-sensible intuition, is an action of understanding, which we would designate of the general title **synthesis**, in order at the same time to draw attention to the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves and that among all representations **combination** is the only one that is not given through objects but can be only executed by the subject itself since it is an act of its self-activity (B 129-30).

In the previous quote, Kant claims that there must be a reason for the relatedness of the representations and how we receive them as unified manifolds, for this unity does not come to us through the senses. Therefore, sensibility is not capable of acting as the ground of possibility of the combination of manifolds. For Kant, this act of synthesizing the representations given to us in intuition must be a “spontaneous” act, which the subject itself quasi autonomously (*sua sponte*: out of its own initiative, thus not prompted by something else) *produces* (in accordance with the principles of the pure understanding). This capacity to combine the manifold in general is the categoriological form of the a priori of the understanding (B 146).

Hence, sensuous intuitions and spontaneous conceptual representations entertain different relationships with the object and the subject. Whereas both are independent of the matter of experience *as to their form*. Sensuous representations are constrained by matter of experience *as to their contents*, for the matter of experience causes them by causing a sensation in the subject. While spontaneous conceptual representations are not constrained by the matter of experience *as to their contents*, for they are not caused by the former but rather produced by the subject. To one and the same object of thought, potentially, an infinity of concepts applies. We are thus free in our formation of concepts, but not in our formation of intuitions, as the latter are completely determined by the object.

From this brief sketch, it is evident that for theoretical cognition to be possible, and more broadly for knowledge and systematized knowledge (science), it is necessary to refer representations to *objects* that are given and for these representations to be valid (i.e. capable of being true or false) of these objects to which they refer. “All of our cognition is in the end related to possible intuitions: for through these alone is an object given. Now an *a priori* concept (a nonempirical concept) either already contains a pure intuition in itself, in which case it can be constructed; or else it contains nothing but the synthesis of possible intuitions, which are not given *a priori*, in which case one can well judge synthetically and *a priori* by its means, but only discursively, in accordance with concepts, and never intuitively through the construction of the concept.” (A 720/ B 748)

## 2. Practical Cognition

The understanding (in its broader sense comprising reason) is, as suggested earlier, not merely concerned with conceptually determining empirical objects, but it is also concerned with determining the grounds of the will. In the latter case, human reason follows, or rather: ought to follow the a priori objective principle of rational willing, namely the Categorical Imperative.

Theoretical cognition is the cognition of “what exists”, whereas practical cognition is the cognition of “what ought to exist” (A 633/B 661, emphasis deleted). The auxiliary verb ‘ought’ expresses the practical necessity of the action, but in referring to ‘necessity’ we are here not talking about the physical necessity of efficient causality; rather, we refer to a necessity, the source of which is the compelling nature of reason itself. We thus refer to a rational causality. Kant agrees with the traditionalist view that an act could be viewed as rational insofar as it is good; however, for Kant, an action is not rational *because* it is good; it is good because it is rational (*GMS*, 4:413).

The capacity to engage in practical reasoning is only available to beings who have a will. A will is a capacity to act in accordance with principles (representations of laws) (4:412). These principles are objective principles (4:414) that all of our ordinary moral judgments ought to be based on. Such judgments are supposed to be accepted by any rational being upon rational reflection. Therefore, having a will means that we are aware we have rational constraints or laws that we should act upon, whether or not we choose to act in accordance with them.

The uncertainty regarding the conformity to the principles of reason is because human beings are not only rational beings; they are also *sensible* beings who have natural inclinations or subjective incentives. Therefore, a human will does not always subjectively will what is objectively necessitated by reason. What necessitates this imperfect will to act in accordance with laws is the thought that we are morally required to do so, even if we might not want to. “The representation of an objective principle, insofar as it is necessitating for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an imperative (4:413).

Kant distinguishes between imperatives which our actions conform to only as means to achieving something else; he calls those hypothetical, and those which represent an action as objectively necessary of itself and without reference to any other end, and calls them categorical (4:414).

Moreover, the determining grounds for the hypothetical imperatives can be either pathological (empirical), i.e. originating from particular desires or inclinations, or pure (non-empirical). If the determining ground of a will is pure, then the act is moral; not because of its specific purpose, end, or intention – to all of which Kant refers as “the matter of the maxim” (5:34) – but because of the *form of* its maxim (its generality or universality, according to the Categorical Imperative). A maxim, however, is a subjective rule or principle of action according to which the will is determined, thus broadly corresponding to what in normal parlance is referred to as an ‘agent’s intention’.

Due to the formal nature of the Categorical Imperative, there must be a single universal one, and only this categorical imperative of morality concerns all rational beings. For the other imperatives differ according to their universality and normative status; for example, what makes people happy will differ from one person to another at different times.

The Categorical imperative or the supreme principle of morality is then the objective, rationally necessary, and unconditional principle that we, as rational beings, must follow despite any natural inclinations we may have to the contrary. This principle, according to Kant, can justify all the specific moral requirements; this is also to say that all immoral actions are irrational because they violate the Categorical Imperative.

### 3. The Primary Distinction between Theoretical and Practical Cognition

While we have seen Kant comparing theoretical and practical cognition in several perspectives, he draws the following crucial distinction in a passage of the B-Introduction to the First Critique:

“Insofar as there is to be reason in these sciences, something in them must be cognized *a priori*, and this cognition can relate to its object in either of two ways, either merely **determining** the object and its concept (which must be given from elsewhere), or else also **making** the object actual. The former is **theoretical**, the latter **practical** cognition of reason.” (B x)

In this passage, Kant establishes the two ways through which cognition, most generally speaking, could *relate* to its object and, by doing so, he differentiates two kinds of cognition, namely theoretical and practical. Every cognition, generally speaking, determines the object and its concepts. By this, Kant means that something needs to be added to the concept of the subject that enlarges it (A 598/B 626). This suggests all cognition presupposes a concept of its object, which it determines by synthetically judging it according to the principle of its determination.

Nevertheless, theoretical cognition and practical cognition are distinguished mainly in relation to the existence or actuality of the object they relate to. As we have seen earlier, our theoretical knowledge depends on the object being given to us from elsewhere (in intuition) through the senses and their affecting the mind; and we can never have any affection of the mind, and consequently, no theoretical cognition, if this object did not exist or were not actual, or at least the object of a possible experience.

On the other hand, practical cognition does not begin from sensible data, and their objects are certainly not given in intuition. Hence, S. Engstrom argues that it does not only produce the form of its object but also produces its existence.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of ‘producing the form of the object’ is Engstrom’s way of explaining what Kant means by saying that cognition, be it empirical or *a priori*, determines its object and concepts logically. Engstrom contends that although Kant clearly says that a representation cannot produce its object in respect to its existence, Kant was also clear when he says that “[t]he representation is still determinant of the object *a priori* if it is possible through it alone to cognize something as an object”(A 92/B 125), which for Engstrom suggests it can actually produce the form of this object.

Moreover, saying that a representation can determine the object *a priori* may suggest that it could also determine the object *empirically*, that is to say, that cognition determines its object only under empirical conditions, empirical intuition, or the possibility of a direct perceptual encounter with the object it determines.

On the other hand, to say that practical cognition produces the object’s existence does not equate it with intellectual intuition, or divine cognition. The first starts from concepts or general representations of the general description of an intended state, unlike the latter, which proceeds from *single* representation or intuitions of individual entities. In addition, the object of practical cognition is consists in an actualization operating on given matter and certainly not *ex nihilo*, while in the case of intellectual intuition, there is no matter needed for the production to be possible.

The difference in the object-relation between theoretical and practical cognition could be even traced back to the difference in *the nature of the object* of each (*KpV*, 5:57). We will come back to this later on, but for our purpose now, we can say that the most distinctive

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<sup>3</sup> Engstrom (2002), pp. 59 ff.

characteristic between theoretical and practical reason is that the first depends on the actuality or the existence of its object, while the latter makes the actuality of the object possible by acting, i.e. by actualizing an intention that – qua general – is logico-conceptual in nature.

At the beginning of the section on the “Canon of Pure Reason”, Kant in the First Critique basically declares that the whole point of reason lies in the practical or moral use. He also explains how the theoretical project is supposed to fit in or rather lead up to and find its completion in that of practical philosophy:

“It is humiliating for human reason that it accomplishes nothing in its pure use, and even requires a discipline to check its extravagances and avoid the deceptions that come from them (...). The greatest and perhaps only utility of all philosophy of pure reason is thus only negative (...). Nevertheless, there must somewhere be a source of positive cognitions that belongs in the domain of pure reason, and that perhaps give occasion for errors only through misunderstanding, but that in fact constitute the goal of the strenuous effort of reason. For to what cause should the unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience otherwise be ascribed? Pure reason has a presentiment of objects of great interest to it. It takes the path of mere speculation in order to come closer to these; but they flee before it. Presumably, it may hope for better luck on the only path that still remains to it, namely that of its **practical** use.” (A 796/B 824).

For Kant, something is missing in discussing pure reason and theoretical cognition, unless we engage with the practical use of reason. Reason has been striving to comprehend its own ideas (like those of freedom, immortality, and the existence of God), though never been succeeding in grasping them and was thus led to err and believe it can have knowledge of them until it could find the boundaries it can set for itself in its theoretical use. However, there is hope *to complete the vocation of reason in finding these ideas in their practical use* to achieve “the final aim of reason in its transcendental use” (A 798/B 826).

Following Kant's footsteps, the completion of the ideas, concerning practical reason and practical cognition, adumbrated here will take place in the next two chapters. We will present Kant's claims that practical reason could have practical cognition of the moral law and freedom (AA 5:4) and how this cognition grounds the rational belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, to better understand how Kant reinstates or finds a place for such ideas within his critical system of reason.

## Chapter 2

# Navigating Kant's Second Critique

### 2.1 «The Critique of Practical Reason»:

#### General Purpose, Importance, and Relations to Other Works

Arguably, Kant laid out most of his ideas on moral theory in his first book on this matter, namely, in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*GMS*, 1785). That is why it is sometimes questionable why he had to write a second critique. In this first section of this chapter, we will attempt to answer this question by showing the purpose and relationships of the Second Critique (*KpV*, 1786) to *GMS*, and finally to *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*MdS*, 1797), being the last work Kant devoted to Ethics.

While the *Critique of Practical Reason* is (supposed to be) presenting Kant's moral theory, it also deals with two other main questions, namely, the freedom of the will, which was thoroughly discussed in *The Groundwork* (Groundwork III), and the doctrine of the postulates of practical reason, through which practical reason provides grounds for assuming the metaphysical ideas of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, which Kant declared could not be established through theoretical reason. It might be clear then that the book establishes some essential connections between themes earlier discussed in both *GMS* and the First Critique, or in other words, between Kant's epistemological/metaphysical systems and his moral theory.

Since the *Critique of Practical Reason* plays such an essential role, we might need to inquire into/ reconstruct its primary purpose, as Kant articulated it. In the "Preface" and the "Introduction", Kant declares multiple aims for this work; the most general aim, however, consists in "show[ing] that there is pure practical reason" by "criticiz[ing] reason's entire practical faculty" (both pure and empirical) (5:3).

We shall now very briefly discuss some thematic overlaps and differences between the three major works of Kant's moral philosophy.

The *Groundwork* basically connects Freedom with morality and establishes the relationship between rational agency and Freedom. The work's main aim is to establish the validity of the moral law and connect it to the conception of freedom (4:454). He presents an analysis of the concept of duty which leads to announcing the basic principle of duty. Moreover, in the third section of the book (*GMS* III), Kant provides a "deduction" of the validity of the moral law. With this deduction, Kant attempts to say that it is entirely rational to accept the moral law as our fundamental principle of action by deriving it from a conception of Freedom that we are allowed to attribute to ourselves on the grounds that are independent of morality.

In the Second Critique, however, Kant, arguably, states that the moral law **does not need or allow for a deduction**, for its authority is already **given through the fact of pure reason**. That is our immediate consciousness of the moral law as the authoritative law (5:31). "However, in order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as given, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving (*sic volo, sic jubeo*)"(5:3). By doing so, Kant announces that the moral law cannot be grounded in anything outside of our ordinary moral consciousness.

To complete this brief discussion about the trilogy, unlike the case with the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant dealt with the pure principles of morals

and tried to elucidate these basic principles in the abstract form, the examination of the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, takes the form of applying these principles. As Kant does also deduce duties from the Categorical Imperative in the *GMS*, one might also say that in the *GMS* Kant shows how the Categorical Imperative functions as the foundation of a doctrine of duty and doctrine of right.

The work involves a doctrine of virtues and vices and the foundations of law and rights. The book is divided into two main books; the Doctrine of Right, which deals with the rights that people have or can acquire, and the Doctrine of Virtue, which deals with the virtues they ought to acquire. In other words, even if it is concerned with the same moral principles, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant applies these principles in the concrete.

Kant did not initially plan for a Second Critique. He added a remark in the *Groundwork* saying that there is no pressing need to have a critique of practical reason, as it does not require a critical examination. Unlike theoretical reason, practical reason can be easily brought "to a high degree of correctness and precision" and that the *Groundwork* is sufficient for this purpose as a preparatory work (*GMS*, 4:391). He also introduces a third section in the *Groundwork* that announces the "Transition from Metaphysics of Morals to the Critique of Pure Practical Reason", which was believed to suffice for this purpose, and in the Second Critique itself, Kant mentions that he is going to reply to some criticisms of the *Groundwork* (*KpV*, 5:6-7).

Based on the above, a legitimate question might come to mind: what made Kant decide to publish the Second Critique as a self-standing book and not as an appendix to the second edition of the First Critique, as was initially planned, if all he cared about was to reply to his critics? The answer to this question might give us some sense of the systematic purpose and importance of this book for Kant and his critical project as a whole.

In his paper "The Origin and the Aim of the Critique", Heiner F. Klemme argues that the discovery of an 'antinomy of practical reason' was what induced Kant to write a separate critique of practical reason and that this dialectical problem is what really distinguishes the *Second Critique* from the *Groundwork*. Unlike Allen Wood, and many who join him in believing that the second critique was only written for pragmatic or technical reasons as a defense to criticisms concerning arguments of the First Critique and the *Groundwork*<sup>4</sup>, Klemme contends that the discovery of an 'antinomy of practical reason' reflected a new development which, therefore, is not discussed in any of Kant's previous work and thus also redirects our attention to understand the aim of the *Critique of Practical Reason* primarily through the "Dialectic of pure practical reason", without, however, disregarding the "Analytic of pure practical reason".

Whereas Kant in the "Analytic" claims that the moral law is given to us as a fact (5:31), he raises suspicions about this fact in that section of the "Dialectic" entitled "The Antinomy of practical reason" and puts this fact in question, as Klemme explains:

"This suspicion of an antinomy obviously suits Kant because only thus can he assign the criticism of the validity of the categorical imperative a place within the system of pure reason, and at the same time prove that this criticism is unfounded. As he had already done in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant searches for the 'rational' occasion of our doubts about the reality of pure reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* as well. Whether he was able to remove it remains debatable in view of the tension discussed."<sup>5</sup>

The resolution of this intentionally raised suspicion then might be of great importance, not only because it might include the answer to the question why Kant had to write a Second Critique,

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<sup>4</sup> Wood (1970), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Klemme (2010), p. 30.

but also because it might provide an answer to the question how parts of Kant's system before 1790 could be connected.

From this brief discussion, it should be clear that the answer to many questions concerning the role of the Second Critique within Kant's whole project, its aim, as well as its relationship to the other works on moral philosophy, particularly the *Groundwork* and the First Critique, is still not clear. Accordingly, in the following section, we will attempt to provide a detailed analysis of how each part of the text of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is (or is not) in harmony with all other parts and how the systematically more fundamental parts connect to form the unity of the whole work. Only then the aim of the whole work will become apparent, thus granting us an outlook on its role in the context of Kant's critical project as a whole.

## 2.2 The Compositional Structure of The Critique of Practical Reason

Kant's organizational structure in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is similar to that of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment*. Like any Kantian critique, therefore, the Second Critique is divided into a "Doctrine of Elements" that constitutes the bulk of the text and a much shorter Doctrine of Method. Moreover, the elementary doctrine is subdivided into the "Analytic" and the "Dialectic".

Kant explicitly states the task of the **Analytic**, that is, "The distinction of the *doctrine of happiness* from the *doctrine of morals*" (5:92). Kant does so, as we shall see, by starting from the establishment of the principle of the moral law, proceeding to the concepts of the object of practical reason, i.e., the moral good and evil, and finally going to the senses or how rational agents perceive the effect of their recognition of the authority of this moral principle.

The **Dialectic** introduces the concept of the highest good, i.e. the idea of a final end of human moral conduct and exposes the antinomy of pure practical reason. It does, however, as Kant reminds us, build up on what had been accomplished by reaching the stance of the solution of the third antinomy in the first Critique:

"[T]o investigate this illusion – whence it arises and how it can be removed – (...) can be done only through a complete critical examination of the whole pure faculty of reason; thus the antinomy of pure reason, which becomes evident in its dialectic, is, in fact, the most beneficial error into which human reason could ever have fallen, inasmuch as it finally drives us to search for the key to escape from this labyrinth; and when this key is found, it further discovers what we did not seek and yet need, namely a view into a higher, immutable order of things in which we already are and in which we can henceforth be directed, by determinate precepts, to carry on our existence in accordance with the highest vocation of reason." (5:108)

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We shall talk about both sections in detail shortly.

The **Doctrine of Method** is often taken not to play a central role in the book's argumentation. Accordingly, most commentators have neglected this part of the Second Critique.<sup>6</sup> However, the doctrine of method has recently been revisited by some scholars who see it as belonging to the very core of the project and as providing essential considerations for a better understanding of the unity of the work as a whole.<sup>7</sup> As Kant states at its beginning, this second main part of the work is concerned with determining "the way in which one can provide the laws of pure practical reason with access to the human mind and influence on its maxims, that is, the way in which one can make objectively practical reason subjectively practical as well." (5:151) Accordingly, Kant in this closing part of the Second Critique seems to be focused on methodological questions concerning moral education, i.e. concerning the crucial *pedagogical* aspect how to make human beings *moral* beings.

### 2.3 The Analytic of Pure Practical Reason and its Main Results

"This Analytic shows that pure reason can be practical – that is, can of itself, independently of anything empirical, determine the will – and it does so by a fact in which pure reason in us proves itself actually practical, namely autonomy in the principle of morality by which reason determines the will to deeds." (5:42)

To say that pure reason is "practical" or that it is sufficient to determine the will, means that reason can prescribe **objective practical principles** that would apply universally to any agent who as a sensuous rational being has reason and a will that is "not in itself completely in conformity with reason" (GMS, 4:413), as it is "not by its nature necessarily obedient" (4:413)

Before we attempt to explain the structure and results of the Analytic, we might need to take a step back and explain some of the most fundamental terms of Kant's theory of moral action.

Reason is the faculty of systematic thought.<sup>8</sup> It does so by directing our search for the absolute conditions of all contingent conditions or the unconditioned conditions (5:107) in Kant's terminology. As the titles of the first two critiques suggest, there is a difference between theoretical and practical reason, or rather: between the practical and the theoretical *use of* reason (cf. 5:5, 5:15, 5:20, 5:43, 5:69, 5:120). For Reason to be practical, there must be imperatives. These imperatives command the will to conform to reason either "hypothetically" or "categorically" (GMS, 4:414), i.e., conditionally or unconditionally. However, the will, or our choice of actions, is not necessarily determined by reason. A **will determined** by practical reason is the will that, in acting from duty determines its decision exclusively in accordance with and for the sake of the moral law, i.e. on the basis of the categorical imperative according to which reason assesses the morality of its motivations for action.

Now the sequence and the announced results in the introductory quote will be unraveled in the same sequence in which Kant introduces the three main sections of the Analytic: I. Principles II: Concepts III: Incentives.

To say that pure reason is practical, there must be a practical principle or law and some motive or cause (the will as directed or determined by reason) for our actions. These actions will not be based on desire or inclinations, but rather on the practical moral principles of Reason, and so pure reason is taken to be an efficient determining ground.

"The first question here, then, is whether pure reason of itself alone suffices to determine the will or whether it can be a determining ground of the will only as empirically conditioned."

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<sup>6</sup> A paradigmatic indication of this, is the omission of the "Doctrine of Method" from Beck (1984).

<sup>7</sup> For more on this, cf. Bacin (2010) "The meaning of the Critique of Practical Reason for Moral Beings: The Doctrine of Method of Pure Practical Reason".

<sup>8</sup> Beck (1960) p. 23.

(*KpV*, 5:15) Suppose the answer to the first formulation of this question is yes. This means that reason can generate the practical principles, and reason alone, without being subject to the empirical conditions, can motivate our actions and determine our will.

Kant starts to investigate this possibility in the first chapter of the “Analytic”. In this chapter, entitled “On the Principles of Pure Practical Reason,” he establishes the authority of the basic principle of morality, namely of the Categorical Imperative as “The Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason” (5:31). By establishing this fundamental principle, in the form of an imperative – “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law” (5:30) – reason can now set the limits to its empirical practical use. That is, it alone can motivate our actions and determine our will.

Furthermore, Kant claims that “freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other” (5:29). By saying this, Kant establishes two things: 1) If an agent acts from maxims in accordance with the moral law and abstracts from his empirical or desire-based interests, then this agent satisfies Kant's understanding of transcendental freedom, meaning, this agent must be free in choosing his actions and not subject to the laws of nature. 2) If an agent is endowed with free will, then the categorical imperative is the basic principle or the principle that determines his will. That is because this agent will act from a will guided by reason and independently of the “matter” of the maxim, being the subjective principle of action, namely his empirical interests. Freedom and the unconditional, i.e. categorical practical law are then, for Kant, two sides of the same coin.

After Kant establishes the relationship between the moral law and Freedom and gives it the form of the imperative, he declares the moral law as “a fact of reason”. This fact of reason is our immediate consciousness of the moral law as the authoritative law (5:31). The content of the fact of reason has some ambiguity and has, in fact, puzzled many scholars, for it is sometimes being presented as the moral law itself or our consciousness of it or even the consciousness of Freedom (5:42); however, it also has some distinguishing features. First, the law contained in the fact of reason is an objective and imperative one that can determine our will. “This law, though formal, has genuine content, content sufficient, at least in principle, to deliver a verdict of permissibility or impermissibility on any maxim. It is a certain a priori principle for determinate use in practice that makes possible the cognition of the moral status of particular maxims.”<sup>9</sup> Unlike the content of theoretical cognition, the content of this principle cannot come from intuition or sensible data; instead, Kant argues Kant meant for the fact of reason to be in itself something “given” or a unique sort of data that is immediately given to us moral beings.

Last but not least, Kant establishes the central notion of Autonomy. He claims that the moral law is a principle of Autonomy or the only source of authority for the will (5:33). Kant also declares the moral law to be the only ground for moral requirements. It demands all our reasons to be based on the legislative form of one's maxims so that we become motivated by the characteristic of this practical principle which makes it a law, without submitting to any external authority or empirical conditions (5:27).

In the second main part of the “Analytic”, entitled “On the Concepts of an Object of Pure Practical Reason”, Kant turns to the concept of the good. While the elementary doctrine of the First Critique progressed from the a priori forms of sensibility to the a priori concepts of objects and finally to the a priori principles of the understanding, and also unlike the traditional approach of moral theorists, the “Analytic” of the Second Critique would be in the reverse of this order. Kant's method in the second critique progresses from the basic principle or law of pure practical reason to the object of practical reason, the good, and finally proceeds to

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<sup>9</sup> Kain (2010), p. 8.

considering how the moral law motivates or affects sensibility or that which he calls “the moral feeling”:

“It follows that a critique of the Analytic of reason, insofar as it is to be a practical reason (and this is the real problem), must begin from the *possibility of practical principles* a priori. Only from these could it proceed to *concepts* of objects of a practical reason, namely, to the concepts of the simply good and evil, in order first to give them in keeping with those principles (for, prior to those principles, these cannot possibly be given as good and evil by any cognitive faculty), and only then could the last chapter conclude this part, namely the chapter about the relation of pure practical reason to sensibility and about its necessary influence upon sensibility to be cognized a priori, that is, about *moral feeling*.” (5:90)

Having established the principle of morality and the concepts of practical reason, Chapter III entitled “On the incentives of pure practical reason,” concludes the “Analytic” with a detailed discussion of the respect for the moral law as the moral motive. This chapter explores how rational agents experience the feeling or effects of their recognition of the authority of the moral law and how the principle of morality functions as a motive, considering that the moral law is the only ground for the moral requirements.

## 2.4 The Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason

In his introduction to the book of the Dialectic of pure practical reason, Kant first introduces the problem of a dialectic of pure practical reason by pointing out its similarity with the dialectic of theoretical reason. As he does so he leads us to the concept of the highest good and points out its central role and dignity for philosophy. Kant reminds himself and his readers that the moral law is the determining ground of the pure will, moreover he also identifies the highest good (*summum bonum*) as the *total object of practical reason*.

Kant reminds us that a dialectic of practical reason is no special case, for we have earlier seen a dialectic of pure reason in its theoretical use. Although, as we shall see, the antinomy exposed in the dialectic of pure practical reason is of a much subtler nature than those presented in the case of theoretical reason<sup>10</sup>. Kant wants to affirm that pure reason in general, in both its theoretical and practical use, has the natural inclination to seek the unconditioned or the totality of conditions. An inclination or demand that reason cannot dismiss but also not achieve. This interest, however, Kant claims, results in some errors (in fact, the most beneficial errors reason could fall into, as we shall see, since it forces reason to critically examine its own capacity), and the remedy for them could be said to lie in his doctrine of Transcendental Idealism (5:107).

The failure to distinguish between appearances and things in themselves results in what Kant calls an “unavoidable illusion” (5:107). Kant reaffirms that reason can only have access to the sensible world of appearances, and the totality of conditions it seeks can only be found in the things in themselves. However, in its pursuit of the unconditioned, reason applies the idea of the totality of conditions to appearances as if they were things in themselves, causing itself to fall into a labyrinth which *it* (reason) can only provide the way out of. Hence, Reason now becomes responsible for investigating this illusion, pointing us to the key of how it can be removed, and the only way to this is through “a complete critical examination of pure reason” (*eine vollständige Kritik des ganzen reinen Vernunftvermögens*) (5:107)

Pure practical reason also seeks and generates the idea of the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, which Kant calls the “highest good” and to which he devotes

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on what some commentators view as structural similarities between the antinomy of theoretical and practical reason, see Watkins (2010).

the whole long second main section of the Dialectic entitled “On the dialectic of pure reason in determining the concept of the highest good” (*KpV*, 5:110-148).

He, however, distinguishes between the highest good as the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, on the one hand, and the determining ground of the pure will, which he repeatedly identifies with the moral law (5:108 f.), on the other hand. That is to say; he distinguishes between reason in its material and formal employment in determining the motive and the objects of the will.

In the Analytic, Kant argues at length that no object, regardless of how good this object is, can be made the determining ground of the will, for this would lead to heteronomy, and this should be rejected.

On the other hand, the highest good is the totality of the matter or the totality of the object of pure practical reason. The overarching object that could be thought of as attainable as a result of all of our actions or the final end of human actions from which all other ends could be derived. An idea under which we conceive a moral state. To be in a world where everyone would act according to the form of the moral law.

“Hence, though the highest good may be the whole *object* of a pure practical reason, that is, of a pure will, it is not on that account to be taken as its *determining ground*, and the moral law alone must be viewed as the ground for making the highest good and its realization or promotion the object. This reminder is important in so delicate a case as the determination of moral principles, where even the slightest misinterpretation corrupts dispositions. For, it will have been seen from the Analytic that if one assumes any object under the name of a good as a determining ground of the will prior to the moral law and then derives from it the supreme practical principle, this would always produce heteronomy and supplant the moral principle.” (5:109)

The concept of the highest good and its representation by practical reason then determine the object of the will, however, only with having the moral law as its determining ground. Therefore, the highest good is the realization or the result of the promotion of the moral law. Given that it is inseparably bound up with the moral law, assuming the validity of the moral law requires us to assume the highest good as the object of pure practical reason to be possible.

## 2.5 The Composition of the Highest Good

In his introductory analysis of the concept of the highest good, Kant contends that the highest good not only consists of virtue – “the supreme condition of whatever can even seem to us desirable” – but also of happiness, for the former (virtue) is not “the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings” (5:110). Accordingly, Kant, in a first step distinguishes between virtue as the **supreme good** (*das oberste Gut*) – which, as such, is the *bonum supremum* in the sense of a *bonum originarium* acting as the condition of the goodness of any other good – and the **complete and whole good** (*das vollendete Gut*), which, as such, is the *bonum consummatum* in the sense of a *bonum perfectissimum*, being that good which is not part of a still bigger whole. As the supreme good, however, “is not yet, on that account, the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings”, Kant conceives of the **highest good** as a conditional relation between the **supreme good** and the **complete and whole good**, inasmuch

“as virtue and happiness together constitute possession of the highest good in a person, and happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy) constitutes the *highest good* of a possible world, the latter means the whole, the complete good, in which, however, virtue as the condition is always the supreme good, since it has no further condition above it, whereas happiness is something that, though always pleasant to the possessor of it, is not of itself absolutely and in all respects good but always presupposes morally lawful conduct as its condition.” (5:110 f.)

This combination, thought in the idea of the highest good, accordingly, does not suggest that the highest good has two competing aims or ends – namely: virtue as our rational end and happiness as our sensible end – and that, moreover, the reconciliation of both takes place through pursuing our natural or sensible end of happiness within the limits of virtue (which would give mere legal, though not moral behavior). This reading strongly contradicts what Kant announces earlier when he says: “The moral law is the sole determining ground of the pure will. But since this is merely formal (that is to say, it requires only that the form of a maxim be universally lawgiving), it abstracts as determining ground from all matter and so from every object of volition” (5:109). Also, since the highest good is an idea generated by reason, the relation between its components must be a rational one and must rest solely on a priori grounds of cognition. Moreover, the basic formulation of the moral law, inasmuch as this law and its articulation in the categorical imperative neither concerns the possibility of realizing the objects of moral acts nor the happiness brought about by them.

### 2.5.1 How could Virtue and Happiness be combined under the concept of the highest good? Or, in Kant’s words: How can the highest good be »practically possible«?

Kant famously distinguishes two ways through which concepts could be connected to each other in a judgment, namely either *analytically* or *synthetically*. He was clear in the Analytic of the second critique and emphasized in the Dialectic that Virtue and Morality are two quite

different elements of the highest good<sup>11</sup>; neither could happiness be contained in the state of striving to be moral, as the Stoics argued, nor would one discover that in seeking his own Happiness, he is already virtuous, as Epicurus taught. “*It must instead be a synthesis of concepts,*”<sup>12</sup> Kant declares. The only way for these elements of the highest good to be synthesized is through a causal relation, i.e. either (a.) happiness would be the cause of virtue, or (b.) virtue would be the cause of happiness, and only by synthetically relating these concepts according to the category of causality *as* cause and effect could the highest good be conceivable.

The first is *absolutely* impossible because (as was proved in the Analytic) maxims that put the determining ground of the will in the desire for one’s happiness are not moral at all and can be the ground of no virtue. But the second is *also impossible* because any practical connection of causes and effects in the world, as a result of the determination of the will, does not depend upon the moral dispositions (*Gesinnungen*) of the will but upon knowledge of the laws of nature and the physical ability to use them for one’s purposes; consequently, no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected from the most meticulous observance of moral laws.” (5:113)

Therefore, both relations, *prima facie* turn out to be impossible. In aiming at the realization of the highest good, striving for happiness cannot be the cause of virtue, as such aim is not a moral motivation in the first place. Conversely, the striving for virtue cannot be the cause of Happiness, inasmuch as man’s moral dispositions – i.e. the general character of his maxims as expressed in an agent’s conduct<sup>13</sup> – are not the sole determining factor in this, rather our causal power is restricted by the knowledge and the laws of nature and our physical ability to use them for our purposes.

Thus, the synthetic unity of virtue and happiness cannot be possible, and consequently, the necessary object of our will, which is inseparably bound up with the moral law, is impossible. Reason, therefore, is now tormented between two contradictory propositions. It is the *consequence* of this doxastic state which Kant refers to as ‘the antinomy of pure practical reason’, inasmuch as (a.) the highest good is impossible as a synthetic unity of happiness and virtue, because the synthesis of its components is impossible, while, on the other hand, (b.) the highest good must be possible as a synthetic unity of happiness and virtue, unless the moral law is not to be considered as disproved.

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<sup>11</sup> *KpV*, 5:113.

<sup>12</sup> *KpV*, 5:111.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *GMS*, 4:435 (emphasis mine): “Now, morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself, since only through this is it possible to be a lawgiving member in the kingdom of ends. Hence morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity. Skill and diligence in work have a market price; wit, lively imagination and humor have a fancy price; on the other hand, fidelity in promises and benevolence from basic principles (not from instinct) have an inner worth. Nature, as well as art, contains nothing that, lacking these, it could put in their place; for their worth does not consist in the effects arising from them, in the advantage and use they provide, but in dispositions [*Gesinnungen*] that is, in maxims of the will that in this way are ready to manifest themselves through actions, even if success does not favor them.”

## Chapter 3

# The Critical Resolution of the Antinomy and The Postulates of Pure Practical Reason

### 3.1 The Critical Resolution of the Antinomy of Pure Practical Reason

The resolution of the antinomy of practical reason could be said to lie in showing in which sense and under which conditions the realization of the SB is conceivable.

Like the antinomy of pure speculative reason, Kant finds his answer to this question in distinguishing between the world of appearances from the world of things in themselves. Kant argues that it is true that the relationship he wants to establish between virtue and happiness to make the highest good possible, i.e., that virtue would lead to happiness cannot be found in the world of appearances. However, this relation could be possible, through the mediation of the author of nature, in the world of things in themselves, where the restrictions of the laws of nature do not apply. As a result, the proposition which caused the antinomy of practical reason, that the highest good was not possible, won't be more than "a misinterpretation, because the relation between appearances was held to be a relation of things in themselves to those appearances" (5:115).

Before reconstructing the argumentation, Kant unfolds to show how the highest good could be possible, it will be useful to first sketch how Kant sees the order of concepts, of virtue and happiness, in this relationship in the first place.

The relationship between happiness and morality, where happiness is supposed to be in precise proportion to virtue, has been investigated since Socrates. Kant specifically appreciates the fact that both Epicurus and the Stoics conceive of morality as a development required by man through his actions, they were both, according to Kant, confused in answering the questions of how morality is possible in the first place, for they presupposed virtuous disposition to provide the incentive for virtue, or in Kant's words they "take the moral incentive for a sensible impulse" (5:117).

Unlike these ancient philosophers, Kant argues that the pleasure derived from performing a moral action (our consciousness of the determination of the faculty of desire or satisfaction of oneself) is not what makes the act possible; rather, the determination of the will directly by reason alone is the ground both of the moral action and of the feeling of pleasure (*resulting* from the performance of the act):

“[O]nly by this way of representing things, however, can one attain what one seeks, namely that actions be one not merely in conformity with duty (as a result of pleasant feelings) but also from duty, which must be the true end of all moral cultivation.” (5:117)

Hence, inclinations and the pursuit of happiness cannot produce morality, even those inclinations which conform with duty. On the other hand, the consciousness of virtue can produce the expectation of happiness proportional to morality as its result. This means that happiness is considered good for morality only insofar as it is conditioned by it. “Accordingly,

the supreme good (as the first condition of the highest good) is morality, whereas happiness constitutes its second element, but in such a way that it is only the *morally conditioned* yet necessarily *result of the former*.” (5:119, my emphases)

On the relationship between virtue and happiness, Pauline Kleingeld sees that the causal language Kant uses to describe this relationship is usually overlooked and could be viewed in the light of including happiness in the highest good on the the ground of duty to pursue happiness (We shall come to explain which kind of happiness and how is it a duty soon). Kant refers to happiness, as the component of the highest good as a moral world, an “effect” or “result” of virtue (*KpV*, 5:115, 119; *RGV*, 6:7n.), as being “caused” by virtue (*KpV*, 5:111, 114). These expressions suggest that happiness is indeed conceived as the end and the result of virtuous action.”<sup>14</sup>

The possibility of this connection between happiness and morality, as Kant announced earlier, belongs to the world of things in themselves, however, its realization requires actions in the sensible world. Kant presents us with two sets of “actions” for the realization of the highest good: a) those which are “immediately in our power” (5:119), which could be identified with our striving towards moral perfection (the postulate of the immortality of the soul) and b) the necessary presupposition presented by reason to us “as the supplement to our inability to make the highest good possible”, which Kant articulates with the postulate of the existence of God (5:119).

### 3.2 The Primacy of Pure Practical Reason

Now, before exploring in detail these actions/conditions that Kant identifies for the realization of the highest good, it is necessary to see how Kant justifies the use of reason’s concepts and the assertion of objects outside the realm of possible experience, without, however, falling back into a dogmatically apologetic mode of philosophical thought.

As we have seen in the first chapter, Kant argues that a practical extension of reason is needed and actually possible. Practical reason can go beyond the limits of experience and those of theoretical reason and permits us to have faith in the ideas the knowledge of which was impossible for reason in its theoretical use, although it has an interest in them.

Kant argues that reason has different interests in both its theoretical and practical use. While the interest, i.e., “the principle that contains the condition under which alone its exercise is promoted” (5:120) of theoretical reason consists in the cognition of all objects and principles as well as the restriction of speculative mischief (5:121), practical reason is interested in the determination of the will (5:120). As a result, theoretical reason is not capable of extending its boundaries to affirm certain propositions and principles (outside the realm of experience) which practical reason needs to pursue as its ends.

This, however, Kant argues, doesn’t mean that reason is accepting principles and affirmations that are contradicting or that there are two conflicting interests in reason, otherwise the condition for having reason as such is denied. In contrast, both uses belong to one and the same reason, for Kant has already established in the *Analytic* that pure reason is practical

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<sup>14</sup> Kleingeld (2016), p. 41 f.

according to the moral law, and hence, it is still pure reason that judges according to these a priori principles.

It is then a matter of putting things in order according to the capacity of each use, or in other words to subordinate one interest to the other instead of having the two interests “merely juxtaposed” (5:121), and also to be clear about the interest of both uses to avoid having any contradicting principles. The interest of theoretical reason won’t contradict that of practical reason, if the former didn’t claim it can confirm or deny any knowledge in the world of things in themselves. Similarly, the interest of practical reason will not contradict that of theoretical reason if the practical reason didn’t claim knowledge of its objects since they are only determinations of actions.

“Thus, in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in our cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*” (5:121)

Kant justifies this stance by saying that we cannot expect the reverse order, i.e. for theoretical reason to have primacy over practical reason because “all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone” (5:121).

As a result, although some of the practical principles and propositions will not be accessible for theoretical reason, the latter must accept them according to its own concepts, for not only they are still being provided by pure reason, despite being handed over to its theoretical use as *an extension*, but also because these judgments do not contradict with the theoretical interest (they are just beyond its limits). The acceptance of theoretical reason to such judgements or propositions will not, however, be as if they were cognitive or true judgements, rather they would only be represented by theoretical reason as *postulates*.

### 3.3 What is a Postulate?

Though Kant used the term ‘postulate’ already in the First Critique, particularly in the chapter entitled “The Postulates of Empirical Thinking in general”(CPR A 218/B 265 – A 235/B), Kant’s primary usage of the term ‘postulate’ could be found in what is often referred to in the literature as “the moral arguments” of *The Practical Postulates of God and the Immortality of the Soul*.

Kant uses the term ‘postulate’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly in the chapter entitled “The Postulates of Empirical Thinking” (A 218/B 266), in which he describes the principles of modality, i.e., the last set of principles in his “System of all principles of pure understanding” (A148/B187 – A 235/B 294). Unlike the other three set of principles presented in this system, Kant doesn’t provide a proof for these principles, he only provides an “Elucidation” (A 219/ B 266).

In the conclusion to the aforementioned chapter, Kant explains that the usage of the term ‘postulate’, concerning the application of the modal categories to objects, is in accordance with the practice of mathematicians. In Kant’s understanding of the Euclidean sense of *aitémata*, the term ‘postulate’ can give us the knowledge about how objects are constructed in relation to the concept, but they cannot provide us with knowledge about the nature of these objects. Similarly, the postulates of empirical thought do not tell us about the nature of the

object of appearances, but they can only show us how the concept is “subjectively synthetic” (A 233/B 286f.), i.e. consists in the connection of a cognition with a determinate cognitive power (understanding, perception, reason) as such.

“Now in mathematics a postulate is the practical proposition that contains nothing except the synthesis through which we first give ourselves an object and generate its concept, e.g., to describe a circle with a given line from a given point on a plane; and a proposition of this sort cannot be proved, since the procedure that it demands is precisely that through which we first generate the concept of such a figure. Accordingly we can postulate the principles of modality with the very same right, since they do not augment their concept of things in general, but rather only indicate the way in which in general it is combined with the cognitive power.” (A 234/B 287)

As Gardner summarizes Kant’s exposition and use of the term in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a postulate is “a proposition advanced without proof, which we are invited to accept on the basis that nothing speaks against it, and that promises to lead to results which will recommend the proposition to us”.<sup>15</sup>

In the second Critique, however, Kant gives us different explanations for what he means by a postulate of pure practical reason. Starting with the “Preface”, Kant warns us against confusing his postulates with that of mathematicians, for the postulates of pure practical reason, do not have the apodictic certainty of those of Euclid (5:11). The Euclidean postulates here are defined as the indemonstrable propositions that postulate *the possibility of an action*. The object of this action, however, was already theoretically cognized a priori and is certainly possible.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand,

“[The postulates of pure practical reason] postulate the possibility of an *object* itself (God and the immortality of the soul) from apodictic *practical* laws, and therefore only on behalf of a practical reason, so that this certainty of the postulated possibility is not at all theoretical, hence also not apodictic, i.e., it is not a necessity cognized with respect to the object but is, instead, *an assumption necessary to the subject’s observance of its objective but practical laws*, hence merely a necessary hypothesis. I could find no better expression for this subjective nevertheless unconditional rational necessity.” (5:11, emphasis mine)

As we have seen, theoretical reason cannot provide any knowledge of the objects of the supersensible, hence, for pure practical reason to conceive of these objects as possible, which is a necessary condition for making the realization of the highest good possible, practical reason needs to postulate their possibility, in accordance with its practical principles. These objects then, could only be said to be postulated or presupposed on practical grounds as practical reason needs but cannot have any theoretical cognition of them. Similar to a Euclidean postulate, a practical postulate is an indemonstrable proposition, however it is “a theoretical proposition (...) insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical law*” (5:122).

Kant believes that practical postulates of God and the immortality of the soul can act as the needed *conditions*, which – once postulated –, would allow the highest good to be

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<sup>15</sup> Gardner (2017), p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Beck (1960), p. 251.

conceivable for pure reason. In providing such arguments, Kant is believed to establish the connection between religion and morality. In other words, Kant proposes that the *belief* in the existence of God and a future life, is, for reason, the resolution of the antinomy introduced earlier, or the way to make the highest good possible.

We will tackle the function of the postulates in detail after we discuss the so-called moral arguments.

### 3.4 The Postulate of the Immortality of the Soul

Kant presents us with two conditions through which the necessary promotion of the highest good ought to take place. This means that these two conditions must also be possible in order for their object, i.e., the highest good to be possible. The attainment of the first of these two conditions as the supreme good, i.e. the complete moral perfection or what Kant calls “the holiness of the will” requires by definition that no obstacles could hinder the achievement of complete conformity with the moral law. Kant himself admits that this state is impossible for any rational finite being to achieve at any moment of his existence. For in the world of senses, this will require him to overcome all his subjective desires and natural inclinations in order to conform to the moral law, which can’t happen in a man’s lifetime.

To resolve this, Kant introduces the postulate of the immortality of the soul. Instead of arguing that the holiness of the will could become possible in a future life, Kant insists that any knowledge of the supersensible world is as such still not possible for a finite rational being. However, since the attainment of holiness is both practically necessary and impossible for man in the sensible world at one and the same time, he establishes that an *endless progress* towards holiness is the real object of the will and is necessary to assume, and holiness is to be "found" in this endless progress. This, in turn, requires that man consider himself *immortal* to be able to complete this striving.

“The endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul). Hence the highest good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul, so that this, as inseparably connected with the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason” (5:122)

Nevertheless, this does not mean that holiness is attainable at the end of a progress which, as *infinite*, has no end. Kant explains this as follows:

“For a rational but finite being only endless progress from lower to higher stages of moral perfection is possible. The eternal being, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in what is to us an endless series the whole of conformity with the moral law, and the holiness that his command inflexibly requires in order to be commensurable with his justice in the share he determines for each in the highest good is to be found whole in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings.” (5:123)

Therefore, this nontemporal endless progress is regarded by the eternal being (God) in some sense as *the moral equivalent* of the attainment of holiness and thereby fulfilling the necessary condition for attaining the highest good; an *endless progression towards* holiness, however, is practically not equivalent with actually *having attained* holiness.

### 3.5 The Postulate of the Existence of God

Now that Kant has provided a possible state of things fulfilling the first condition to make the highest good possible, he also tries to fulfill the second requirement, which was rendered impossible in this world, that is, the enjoyment of happiness by finite rational beings insofar as they have made themselves worthy of it, i.e. happiness proportioned to their morality.

But what is happiness in the first place, and can it be considered a moral good? And how could this connection be possible? Kant defines happiness as:

“the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will” (5:124)

The inclusion of the concept of happiness in the highest good has been viewed at least as problematic by many commentators, if not as a failure. For some commentators, happiness is believed to be individual happiness, and hence Kant is sometimes accused of introducing “non-moral good” into the concept of the highest good<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, some might argue that Kant, in several places, holds that there is a duty – albeit an indirect one – to promote one’s own happiness as long as it is necessary for morality (*KpV*, 5:93; *GMS*, 4:399).

In the meantime, Kant provides us with the above definition, while discussing how to make the highest good possible, so it might be legitimate to assume he speaks of a particular kind of happiness. The highest good is said to be the ultimate end of moral actions or “the goal of all *moral* wishes” (5:115, emphasis mine), to which reason refers us to. Accordingly, the happiness involved in this concept must be far from being conceived as the individual happiness or the satisfaction of our empirical needs. Although when Kant talks about the connection of the two distinct concepts in the highest good, he seems to be talking about the virtue and happiness of one person (5:110), this position should in fact, be extended to a world of rational beings, a moral world or a “kingdom of ends”, as he puts it in other different places (cf. e.g. *GMS*, 4:439).

As rational beings, we are not only concerned with our own happiness but also interested in the happiness of others. Seeking the happiness of others should not be viewed as the sum of natural ends that finite beings have; it is the objective goal that virtue requires, and therefore happiness could be said to be the result of morality (5:119).

Following the duty to realize the highest good, which Kant calls for in different places in the second critique (5:113,114,125,129), it is, therefore, our duty not only to promote one’s moral perfection but also to promote the happiness of others.

Different readings for defending Kant’s inclusion of happiness in the highest good were also offered in the literature. Andrews Reath, for example, argues that the inclusion of happiness in the highest good is limited only to the satisfaction of the morally permissible ends (Reath 1988), which means that happiness doesn’t contradict the moral requirements. Others, like Frederick C. Beiser, have argued that virtue alone could be regarded as less good than

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<sup>17</sup> Beck (1960), p. 242.

when we include happiness with it since we, after all, desire happiness.<sup>18</sup> Both interpretations however do not explain how happiness could be viewed as a moral good and also do not give reasons for how this makes it a duty to promote the highest good.

Pauline Kleingeld, on the other hand, suggests a different strategy by arguing that in the definition Kant offers for happiness in the discussion of the highest good, he is suggesting a harmony between the agent's end and the state of the world. Moreover, when Kant refers to the "essential determining ground of the will" in his definition, he might intend to show that happiness is not the satisfaction of the contingent but of the morally permissible desires. Still, it also includes realizing their *moral* ends since this is the happiness of virtuous agents. Consequently, as the morally good is the object of pure practical reason and the highest good is the totality of this object, then the highest good could be viewed as the moral world, which the moral agents, under the guidance of practical reason, would make possible, when this is in their power to realize the object of their actions. What morality demands us to do is what constitutes the components and the duties in this world: their own moral perfection as well as the promotion of the happiness of others, which Kant repeatedly argues is a duty (*KpV*, 5:34–5; *GMS*, 4:423).

“[The] highest good, when conceived as a moral world, is the world that moral agents would bring into existence if their agency faced no obstacles, that is, if all moral agents were fully virtuous and their actions would achieve their moral ends. The highest good includes happiness because morality demands that we make the happiness of others our end, while making it a duty on the part of others to promote ours (as part of their duty to promote the happiness of others). Thus conceived, the idea of the highest good as comprising both virtue and happiness is defined completely in terms of that which is morally good, that is, in terms of action under the guidance of the moral law.”<sup>19</sup>

Moving on to the second moral argument, as we have seen earlier, man is not the cause of the natural laws, and the principles of his will are quite independent of the laws of nature and that of the faculty of desire. Therefore, the connection between happiness and virtue cannot be clearly and fully established in the sensible world.

However, such a connection is needed to make the highest good possible. Hence, Kant contends there must be *a moral purposiveness* or *a purposive harmony of nature* under which virtue would lead to happiness. If we establish that this purposive harmony exists, there should be a cause or an intelligent author/designer for it. “Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being that is the cause of nature by *understanding and will* (hence its author), that is, **God** (5:125).

By postulating the existence of God, we assume there is a supreme or leading cause of nature that is capable of what is beyond man's limit, that is, giving efficacy to moral pursuit.

The postulate of the existence of God does not, however, provide an explanation for how this author makes such a connection possible, for this would claim we can have knowledge of the supersensible, which Kant repeatedly denied. However, Kant argues that to postulate the

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<sup>18</sup> Beiser (2006), p. 595.

<sup>19</sup> Kleingeld (2016), pp. 41-42.

existence of this intelligible author or this moral purposiveness to exist (only on practical grounds) is a necessity, a need connected with the duty to promote the possibility of the highest good (5:125, 5:133).

The necessity of postulating the postulate of God (and also that of immortality) is a *subjective practical necessity*, not an *objective duty*, i.e., it is *not cognized* in relation to the actuality of the object. This means that we are not assuming the existence of this intelligible being per se (or the existence of anything, including a special kind of soul, in the case of the first postulate), but we are assuming that ‘we’ as rational beings need to assume the existence of an author of nature out of the duty to make the highest good possible. It is our *action of believing*, as rational moral agents, in such existence, to make the highest good possible that is demanded from us by the moral law. This belief, then has the criterion of being rational and also has a motive for it, i.e., the realization of the highest good.

“What belongs to duty here is only the striving to produce and promote the highest good in the world, the possibility of which can therefore be postulated, while our reason finds this thinkable only on the presupposition of a supreme intelligence; to assume the existence of this supreme intelligence is thus connected with the consciousness of our duty, although this assumption itself belongs to theoretical reason; with respect to theoretical reason alone, as a ground of explanation, it can be called a *hypothesis*; but in relation to the intelligibility of an object given us by the moral law (the highest good), and consequently if a need for practical purposes, it can be called *belief*, and, indeed, a pure *rational belief*, since pure reason alone (in its theoretical as well as in its practical use) is the source from which it springs.” (5:126)

Moreover, assuming this purposive harmony that would allow for the highest good to become possible requires *man’s moral striving through his actions*. Nevertheless, man would never know how his actions contribute to the attainment of this world order. He can only know his duty and his end and strives to achieve it to his best knowledge. “The moral law commands me to make the highest possible good in a world the final object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to produce this except by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world” (5:129).

Differently from what L.W. Beck suggests, namely that it is not man’s task to strive to realize the second condition of the highest good but it’s only the task of God,<sup>20</sup> Kant in the previous quote and in the continuation of the passage it is located in seems to declare that the connection between happiness and virtue is a result of the possible cooperation between the purposiveness of free human action and the will of God. To be able to think of this harmony as possible, and despite man’s limitation to establish such connection on his own, he needs to postulate 1) the necessity of his moral striving and 2) the belief in the existence of God.

Now, due to the postulates, Kant believes that the concepts that were problematic to theoretical reason, that of the immortality of the soul, freedom, and the existence of god, could have “objective reality” (5:132), but how is such claim possible if we know these objects are beyond the limits of our experience?

First and foremost, when we say that a concept has objective reality, it means that this concept has determinate representational content that relates it to (really possible) objects (cf.

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<sup>20</sup> Beck (1960), p. 244 f.

A 155/ B 194). However, this latter sort of connection is not possible in the case of the postulates of practical reason, for here, we are concerned with the existence of supersensible objects, and any reference to them is beyond the limits of theoretical reason. Kant has been clear about this in several places in the second critique (5:135 f.) and particularly in the First Critique when he writes:

“This use of the transcendental idea would already be overstepping the boundaries of its vocation and its permissibility... This latter is a mere fiction, through which we encompass and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as a particular being; for this we have no warrant, not even for directly assuming the possibility of such a hypothesis” (A 580/ B 608)

Kant’s statement that objects are ‘given’ by means of the postulates could be read as saying only that “the practical point of view must represent its representations as having objective reality, not that there really exist objects conforming to the representations.”<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Kant himself concludes that “this extension of theoretical reason is no extension of speculation, that is, no positive use can now be made of it for theoretical purposes.” (5:134) and then resorts to asserting the logical possibility of the highest good and its grounds based on the principle of non-contradiction, when he writes: “The above three ideas of speculative reason are in themselves still not cognitions; nevertheless they are (transcendent) thoughts in which there is nothing impossible” (5:135). This assertion actually leaves us with the question of why the postulation of the actual existence of the conditions of the possibility of the highest good is even needed if the highest good itself could be conceived as possible, insofar as it is not a self-contradictory concept?

As we have seen, the necessity of postulating the postulates is a *subjective* practical necessity (5:146) and not one that is cognized in relation to the actuality of the object. In his introductory remarks on the concept of a postulate of pure practical reason, Kant makes it clear that it is not a necessity cognized with respect to the object but is, instead, an assumption necessary with respect to the subject’s observance of its objective but practical laws of reason, hence merely a necessary hypothesis” (5:11). The postulates then, are the ‘necessary assumptions’ through which we as rational beings *unify* the concepts of God, freedom and immortality under the concept of the highest good, as the object of our will. The practical extension of our cognition takes place ‘only for practical purposes’ and these metaphysical ideas have reality only from a practical point of view.

On the most basic level, our self-understanding as moral beings who have moral duties requires us to commit to certain acts. As moral agents, we believe that our commitment to the attainment of the object of our will, through our actions, according to the moral law, shall make the highest good possible. Suppose our powers were sufficient to achieve our ends. In that case, this implies that the highest good could only be brought about through moral action, with the moral law as its supreme condition. The postulates could then be conceived *as the conditions presupposed for the performance of the necessary actions for the attainment of the object of my will*. Such conditions, if believed in, they will make certain acts possible – and thus become

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<sup>21</sup> Gardner (2011), p. 192.

practically real in their realization – which would not be possible were the believe in them not there. They only have an effect on conviction insofar as we are aware of our nature as *moral* beings. For example, conceiving myself as a moral being requires me to have a particular vision of the world, one that is purposively structured. This directs me, as a rational moral agent, to presuppose an author for this purposiveness. This reading, in fact, paves the way to understand the propositional attitude Kant assigns to the practical postulates as 'beliefs.' For the rationality of the belief in these postulates will be in line with one's rational efforts to make sense of the world based on his moral commitments.

We shall get into more details about this belief state in the following chapter.

# Chapter 4

## Practical Rational Belief

As we have seen, Kant has attributed an epistemic mode to the postulates of pure practical reason, referred to as "practical, rational belief." In assigning this mode, Kant argues from "a need" of pure practical reason to the objective reality of the conditions of its object (5:134). This move has been viewed by many as problematic.<sup>22</sup> Not only because some view Kant as bringing back the ideas of speculative metaphysics without sufficient justification but also because there are many ambiguities around the features Kant ascribes to this belief.

Kant's remarks on moral belief in general (*Glaube*)<sup>23</sup>, however are very central to his whole system though difficult to find. They are scattered throughout his writings and are often surrounded by ambiguity. Belief, for Kant, has a very *personal/subjective* character or nature which is hard to capture in the language of critical philosophy or abstract philosophizing. This is far from saying that Kant presented belief in any "mystical" or "irrational" way, though he was aware of this side.

When Kant talks about *Glaube*, i.e. belief or moral faith, he tries to provide a 'rational' account of what this is, in alignment with his primary objective to define the capabilities and limitations of reason. That is to say that Kant's account of rational belief, though it has non-epistemic value, makes it possible for rational moral agents to assent to propositions that enable them to avoid any practical incoherence as they engage in their moral duty.

### 4.1 The Right to Argue from a Need

Although Kant established that the postulates provide objective reality to the propositions of the soul's immortality and God's existence, he also makes it clear that this reality has *limited validity*, i.e., it is only for *practical purposes* or the use of practical reason. This means that the moral proofs do not provide any knowledge of such objects or determine anything from the theoretical point of view. A *need* for pure practical reason, however, is what makes the agent postulate such objects.

“[A] need of pure practical reason is based on a duty, that of making something (the highest good) the object of my will so as to promote it with all my powers; and thus I must suppose its possibility and so too the conditions for this, namely God, freedom, and immortality, because I cannot prove these by my speculative reason, although I can also not refute them.” (5:142)

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<sup>22</sup> Wood (1970), pp.182 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Many scholars believe the term *Glaube*, as Kant uses it, is difficult to translate. In this thesis, I am using the term *belief*; as a translation for *Glaube* however, in some quotes, the translations refer to faith; but, both terms are used with the same meaning.

The moral law, as we have heard repeatedly, is apodictically certain, which means it does not need a theoretical opinion to prove it is true/possible; however, the subjective effect of such law on our moral pursuit of promoting the highest good, as the object of the pure practical reason, demands from us that we view the highest good as possible, to believe it is attainable through the commitment to determinate actions. Otherwise, practical reason would be seeking an impossible object, and that would be an *irrational* pursuit. As a result, the need to postulate the conditions that make the highest good possible, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God are necessary from a practical point of view, i.e. for the sake of performing certain acts that would otherwise be impossible to conceive of and to perform.

"[G]ranted that the pure moral law inflexibly binds everyone as a command (not as a rule of prudence), the upright man may well say: I will that there be a God, that my existence in this world be also an existence in a pure world of the understanding beyond natural connections, and finally that my duration be endless; I stand by this, without paying attention to rationalizations, however little I may be able to answer them or to oppose them with others more plausible, and I will not let this belief be taken from me; for this is the only case in which my interest, because I may not give up anything of it, unavoidably determines my judgment." (5:143)

To avoid any confusion, Kant emphasizes that the promotion of the highest good is a practical objective commanded by practical reason. It is a duty. From this duty emerges "a need *having the force of law* to assume something without which that cannot happen which one *ought to* set unflinching as the aim of one's conduct" (*KpV*, 5:5), i.e. the *rational* need to assume both the possibility of the highest good and of its conditions, i.e. the existence of "God, Freedom and Immortality" (*KpV*, 5:142).

Kant thus clarifies that there is no command, but rather a *rational need* to believe in the conditions that make the highest good possible, "as a belief that is commanded is an absurdity" (*KpV*, 5:144). It is, however, a *theoretical* choice for us to believe in them the way presented earlier, according to which there is an exact harmony of the realm of nature with the realm of morals, and that there is an author of this harmony. The ground for the rational possibility of this choice is due to the fact that any objections raised vis à vis the ontological commitments of these moral arguments, any claim of the impossibility of such propositions would be as well springing from a subjective belief that there is no such connection and author (5:145). Theoretical reason cannot prove that there is no such author or that this harmony is impossible. This might perhaps prompt the thought that there is no need for these *particular* postulates, i.e., to postulate the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, as long as I can believe in any other procedure that makes the highest good possible. What ultimately matters according to this reading, is not to deny the possibility of the object of pure practical reason.

Now, since the promotion of the highest good, and consequently the supposition of its possibility, is an objective, practical necessity, however, the way in which we would think this possibility depends on our choice:

"[I]t follows that the principle that determines our judgment about it, though it is *subjective* as a need, is yet, as the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically)

necessary, the ground of a maxim of assent for moral purposes, that is, a *pure practical rational belief*." (5:146)

Pure rational belief, then, is an assent on grounds that are subjectively sufficient and needed to satisfy a rational duty. Nevertheless, one may ask, how is this belief different from any other belief? Moreover, how is it different from illusion?

In fact, Kant was well aware of the possible objections concerning his proposed belief being an illusion, and he even dedicated a footnote to confront this potential counterargument. Wizenmann's objection to Kant's belief, criticizes the cogency of Kant's argumentation when he argues where he argues from the need of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God to the reality of the object of that need. The objector simply finds it *irrational* and *unjustifiable* to take this path, to the extent that some would see it *as pathological and illusioning* in character.

But, does moral belief, in the Kantian sense, have to be viewed as illusionary and uncritical for reason? The answer is no. If Kant's philosophy has one distinguishing characteristic, it would be *the pivotal role of reason*, though, as we have seen, this is not in the strict modern sense of neglecting everything else. However, he certainly refuses any uncritical or unquestioned account of authorities and dogmas. We shall then have a look at the role of *reason in human desire* to try to understand Kant's reply to this.

Kant's account of reason is a very subtle one, for it is not only restricted to limiting our irrational wishes. Kant does not deal with all desires as irrational wishes that need to be cured, for not all desires come from our sensible nature and instincts. Reason itself, in fact, provides us with a final moral end, i.e., the highest good, and makes it our task to pursue it through our free action. Wood describes this capacity of reason as he says: "Reason (...) provides man with the destination of transforming reality itself, desiring and striving for the attainment of a rational ideal in his own person and in the world as a whole."<sup>24</sup>

In his reply to Wizenmann, Kant emphasizes this last point, when he asserts man's *rational need* to realize the moral final end due to our *rational* moral duty. Kant puts it as if man would say: this is the only case in which *my interest* in the moral law (as a rational agent) and the attainment of the unconditioned object of it "determine my judgment" (5:143,146). Hence, this unconditioned object of desire is not only *motivated* by reason, but its pursuit is *also inescapable*.

"I grant that he (Wizenmann) is perfectly correct in this, in all cases where *the need is based upon inclination, which cannot necessarily postulate the existence of its object even for the one affected by it, much less can it contain a requirement valid for everyone*, and therefore it is a merely subjective ground of the wish. But in the present case, it is *need of reason arising from an objective determining ground of the will, namely the moral law, which necessarily binds every rational being* and therefore justifies him a priori in presupposing in nature the conditions befitting it and makes the latter inseparable from the complete practical use of reason. It is a duty to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible; hence it is also unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary

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<sup>24</sup> Wood (1970), p. 186

for its objective possibility. The assumption is as necessary as the moral law, in relation to which alone it is valid.” (my emphasis 5:143 n.)

The need then to have a rational commitment to *believe* in the existence of God and immortality of the soul indeed comes from a personal choice to conform with the moral law through the attainment of its unconditioned object. However, this choice is not based on an individual’s sensuous desire that the highest good is possible; rather, we believe it is possible because *we have to*, if we are to continue our rational pursuit of it. The hope that the highest good is possible, though comforting, is not what justifies and motivates our moral belief in it; rather, it is our *rational* pursuit of it that does so.

Now suppose that we can have knowledge of the supersensible and of the objects that were rendered impossible to know in the world of phenomena. Suppose that rational metaphysics was founded on this elevated knowledge instead of belief, what would be the results of that?

In the last section of the dialectic of practical reason, Kant discusses the previous suppositions and argues that if all these suppositions became possible virtue would be impossible.

“[M]ost actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty, and the moral worth of actions, on which alone in the eyes of supreme wisdom the worth of the person and even that of the world depends, would not exist at all. As long as human nature remains as it is, human conduct would thus be changed into mere mechanism in which, as in a puppet show, everything would *gesticulate* well but there would be *no life* in the figures.” (5:147)

Hence, only when our pursuit of virtue is out of respect for the moral law that we can be truly moral in Kant’s view and we become worthy of it.

## 4.2 What is Belief?

“Taking something to be true, or the subjective validity of judgment has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing, and knowing. Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone) (A822/B850)

Kant distinguishes between three grades or attitudes of epistemic justification: opining (*Meinen*), believing (*Glauben*), and knowing (*Wissen*). Belief is viewed as what is true only on subjectively sufficient grounds however, it is not objectively sufficient. “Only in a practical relation, however, can taking something that is theoretically insufficient to be true be called believing” (A 822/B 850). Hence, we can say that if knowledge requires a kind of “epistemic

justification”<sup>25</sup>, or objective grounds, belief, on the other hand, is only justified *in relation to action*, i.e., requires *non-epistemic justification or practical grounds*.

The criteria Kant uses to distinguish between the three modes, i.e., subjective and objective sufficiency, or in particular, what Kant means by the subjectively sufficient and objectively insufficient grounds of belief, is a debated topic.<sup>26</sup> Although the three modes involve *assent*, or what Kant calls 'holding to be true', most commentators agree that their formulation is puzzling. Many see that Kant's description of the grounds of belief in terms of two features (subjective sufficiency) and (objective insufficiency) contradict his claim that the grounds of belief count as non-epistemic grounds.

For example, Andrew Chignell suggests that Kant provides two notions of subjective sufficiency. In the first, the agent decides what qualifies for him as objectively sufficient ground for his assent after reflecting on the propositions. At the same time, the second notion is based on having "non-epistemic merits" for the agent as a result of assenting to certain propositions. Such belief would play a role in the agent's effort to make sense of his pursuit of the demands of reasons.<sup>27</sup> This reading, however, leaves some unresolved ambiguity because Kant never suggested he uses the notion in two ways and never state when to consider one or the other.

Thomas Höwing, on the other hand, suggests there is no actual contradiction in what Kant attributes to belief. For him, this very same combination of the two features (the subjective sufficiency and objective insufficiency) reflects Kant's account of non-epistemic justification.

Höwing sees that Kant's non-epistemic justification is a rational requirement grounded on both the *lack of strong epistemic support* and *the agent's choice to act in a certain way*. It is the decision or the choice of the agent to act in a certain way that increases the force of such not-so-strong propositions, and only then do the propositions in question “*rationally* require the agent to form the assent in question.”<sup>28</sup> This, for Höwing, justifies Kant assigning two features for the ground of belief, a corresponding ground of knowledge (the subjective sufficiency), which requires the agent to form a particular assent, and a corresponding ground of opinion (objective insufficiency) that does not require everyone to do so. “For if we take away the agent's decision to act in a certain way, what is left are facts that provide only insufficient epistemic support to the assent in question. And this opens up space for possible scenarios in which these facts are available to some other agent but fail to impose a rational requirement on them.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Watkins and Willaschek (2010), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Höwing (2016), p. 202

<sup>27</sup> Chignell (2007 b), pp. 333–335; Chignell (2007 a), pp. 50–57, esp. p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Höwing (2016), p. 220

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 221.

### 4.3 Rational Sensible Creatures

Moving back to the discussion of the postulates, Kant, as we have seen, suggested that the essential role of the postulates of practical reason does not consist in any kind of theoretical knowledge or duty to believe in certain objects but rather in *helping us perform and fulfill our moral duty*.

“[T]he principle that determines our judgment about it, though it is *subjective* as a need, is yet, as the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically) necessary, the ground of a maxim of assent for moral purposes, that is, a *pure practical rational belief*. This, then, is not commanded but – being a voluntary determination of our judgment, conducive to the moral (commanded) purpose and moreover harmonizing with the theoretical need of reason to assume that existence and to make it the basis of the further use of reason – it has itself arisen from the moral disposition; it can therefore often waver even in the well-disposed but can never fall into unbelief.” (5:146)

In other words, all that the postulates of practical reason do for us is *to help us form practically effective moral intentions*. However, how can this role of the postulates explain their effect on rational agents if we know we can never have sufficient evidence of them?

In a previous section (cf. *supra*, 4.1), we had seen the role reason plays in controlling and originating our desire; now we will direct our attention to understanding how our sensible nature can contribute to morality. In other words, the answer to the above question could lie in Kant’s view of the distinct human nature as *creatures of both sensibility and reason*. This view has been present throughout Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy, but I believe the postulates of practical reason are the actual manifestation of this claim.

Kant repeatedly says that we are rational creatures who can and must act according to the moral law, but we do not do this through the acts of reason alone; we are still, after all, sensible creatures. To say that reason and inclinations are two irreconcilable natures of man is a very simplistic view of Kant’s theory. Indeed, inclinations do not always point in the same direction of our moral duty, but they can and actually sometimes do, like in the case of the postulates. Hence, we must cultivate them when they do so and restrict them when they do not.

Kant has made it explicit that the need for the postulates arises from the limits of our sensibility to perceive the possibility of the highest good in accordance with the laws of nature.

“I said above that in accordance with a mere course of nature in the world happiness in exact conformity with moral worth is not to be expected and is to be held impossible, and that therefore the possibility of the highest good on this side can be granted only on the presupposition of a moral author of the world. I deliberately postponed the restricting of this judgment to the subjective conditions of our reason so as not to make use of it until the manner of its assent had been determined more closely. In fact, the impossibility referred to is *merely subjective*, that is, our reason finds it *impossible* for it to conceive, in the mere course of nature, a connection so exactly proportioned and so thoroughly purposive” between events occurring in the world in accordance with such different laws, although, as with everything else in nature

that is purposive, it nevertheless cannot prove - that is, set forth sufficiently on objective grounds - the impossibility of it in accordance with universal laws of nature." (5:145)

As a result, it becomes for us a subjective necessity to *compensate* for this inability by introducing these ideas as the ground for the possibility of the highest good. This separation between reason and sensibility can actually justify that although for reason, we do not have sufficient theoretical grounds for the assertion of these postulates, they can still have an effect on us and force their sensible incentive to action. That is to say that for any rational-sensuous being capable of and striving to learn from experience, to be virtuous, it is not a matter of reason alone.

Paul Guyer offers a compatible reading with this when he remarks that "just in the case of aesthetic experience and symbols, the religious ideas can have the same subjective power to affect human emotions and impel human actions – from the theoretical point of view, they are illusions but from the psychological point of view they remain natural."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, what makes this effect in the case of the practical postulates is the *representation of the propositions*, but this should make no difference, even when the truth of these representations cannot be confirmed by pure reason. The postulates, Guyer concludes, "must ultimately be understood as natural products of teleological judgment that can and must be put to work in the interest of reason to allow sensibility to cooperate with the interests of reason."<sup>31</sup>

From the above discussion, it should be clear that despite the many objections they faced about their need in the system, Kant's practical postulates could be seen as a point of connection between not only his two worlds of appearances and the things in themselves, and the use of both theoretical and practical reason but also between our sensibility and reason.

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<sup>30</sup> Guyer (2000), p. 367.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 367.

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