

Kant on Irresistible Inclinations: Moral Worth, Happiness, and Belief in God

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Abstract

While Kant did not seem to believe that humans have, in fact, irresistible inclinations, he did not dismiss the logical possibility that matters might have been otherwise. We can infer from several of his discussions (mainly from the second *Critique*) what Kant believed could constitute an irresistible inclination, were such to exist. In fact, such comments suggest that, while we may not have irresistible inclinations, it is a matter of empirical convenience and, perhaps, divine plan, that this is the case. In this paper I argue that, for Kant, it is an aspect of our human nature that we could have irresistible inclinations and it is only because the world is set up the way that it is that we are able to be free from such inclinations. I argue that part of what is necessary to preclude irresistible inclinations and make morality and its rewards possible is a delicate preservation of a kind of cognitive state that is between mere hypothesis and certain knowledge.

The title of this paper should strike the reader as perplexing; after all, on most interpretations of Kant, there are no such things as irresistible inclinations. Most contemporary interpretations accept that, for Kant, ought implies can *and* we are all subject to moral demands that require that we set aside all inclinations in order to meet such demands with moral worth.¹ The standard definition of an irresistible inclination or desire entails that agents who experience such inclinations are powerless against them.² As contemporary free will theorists might say, having an irresistible inclination entails that there is no possible world such that the agent experiencing that inclination could willingly do otherwise, even if the agent were to recognize a sufficient reason to do otherwise.³ When applied to a Kantian schema, such a description would seem to imply that an agent experiencing an irresistible inclination could not *set it aside* and act on any other consideration when under its power, including even the moral law which reason gives itself. Therefore, if we ought to be able to set aside inclinations when faced with a duty, and this means that we *can* do so, there would

seem to be no room on Kant's program for irresistible inclinations.

I have no intention of arguing that Kant held that we have irresistible inclinations. However, I do believe that it can be inferred from several of his discussions what Kant believed could constitute an irresistible inclination. In fact, such comments suggest that, while we may not have irresistible inclinations, it is a matter of empirical convenience and, perhaps, divine plan that this is the case. In other words, it can be inferred from these discussions that, for Kant, it is an aspect of our human nature that we could have irresistible inclinations and it is only because the world is set up the way that it is that we are able to be free from such inclinations. As I shall argue, part of what is necessary to preclude irresistible inclinations and make morality and its rewards possible is a delicate preservation of a kind of cognitive state that is between mere hypothesis and certain knowledge.

In order to illustrate this interesting consequence of several of Kant's claims, I must first provide some context for how these discussions (namely that of moral motivation, happiness as a pseudo-goal, and God as he who grants happiness to the worthy) came about. First I shall address the issue of moral sense versus moral feeling in the context of preserving moral worth to establish that, though Kant's theory does oppose a common claim of moral sense theories that we can be morally moved by inclinations, it is not insensitive. Then I shall turn to the issue of the highest good, where Kant asserts that happiness has a practical role in our lives. A closer look into the preconditions for happiness as well as what could preclude happiness will reveal something fundamental about human nature in Kant's system: human moral motivation is essentially confused in that it requires a belief in the possibility of achieving one's goals but also a lack of certainty that one will accomplish the goal of a given action. This fact will become clear once we turn our attention towards certain matters that have practical roles in our lives though, speculatively, they cannot be proven. Finally, I shall address the interesting fact that the subject matter of the practical postulates is the same as the paralogisms of the first *Critique* that indicate reason's tendency to attempt to surpass itself. In

this discussion I shall conclude that it is not only a shortcoming of our nature that certain things are beyond the capacity of our reason, but that such impairment might be necessary for morality and, with it, happiness.

1. Moral Sense versus Moral Feeling

Kant's claim that moral motivation is distinct from inclinations received criticism immediately after it was made known to the philosophical community. For example, Kant's friendly adversary, Schiller, complained that for an act to have moral worth one must be utterly disinclined towards duty, and this results in a denial of happiness, friendship, sympathy, empathy, and other human pursuits and emotions.⁴ For our purposes, let us focus on the possible compatibility of moral worth and happiness. Indeed, since Schiller's remarks scholars have come to Kant's aid with attempts to reconcile happiness with moral obligation.⁵ Like them, I argue that Kant did not deny the importance of happiness, even though that importance lies outside of the realm of motivation. However, it is difficult to reconcile this claim with the apparent fact that the possibility of happiness, as per the postulates of practical reason, is necessary for motivation as well. Before attempting to reconcile these two claims, let us first see how scholars have managed to describe the type of sensitivity to human affairs and, in particular, desire for happiness that is compatible with Kantian motivation.

It is clear that Kant was educated in a long-standing tradition of moral sense theory. Moral sense theorists believed that the distinction between moral and immoral acts is one that human beings are capable of making based on reflection of feelings alone (Beck 1960). Before Kant had begun writing his ethical treatises, the world was shaken by David Hume's words "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions," (Hume 1978: 415). Kant, of course, denies that this is so when considering any dealings that are moral. Kant felt that for one to be morally accountable for his actions it is necessary that they be done freely. That he disagreed with Hume's statement is evident. However, that this means he does not wish for

rational beings to be happy does not follow.

On the other hand, Kant does mean to dispel the belief that happiness in any way can be a sufficient final cause to one's moral actions. In fact, he devotes some time to discussion of moral theorists who do allow for this possibility in the beginning of the second *Critique*. Here he addresses and dismisses their claims because, while these theories do formulate means to happiness, they fail to connect this pursuit in any way to a moral agenda.

The ethicists who have considered happiness the final cause or object of their philosophy that are most well-known are Aristotle, Epicurus, Hume, and Mill. Kant defines happiness as “a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence,” and he adds, “making this [happiness] the supreme determining ground of choice is the principle of self-love” (1996b: 156).⁶ Now, it seems that the theorists listed above would, in Kantian terms, have ethical systems that revolve around self-love. But Kant tells us that to have an ethics grounded in happiness is absurd, because it is a natural desire of human beings to be happy (1996b: 170).⁷ It is absurd to command that humans do what they, by nature, cannot avoid doing. To do so would be tantamount to commanding a lame dog to stay. If he cannot do otherwise, what is the point of commanding him to do so? Therefore, it would seem that Kant holds that the naturalness of a human desire precludes the object of such a desire from being a proper object of morality. However, there is something in addition to the indigenous nature of certain desires that Kant thinks renders such mental states irrelevant to an inquiry of morality.

Kant devotes some time to a discussion of Epicureanism and its distinction between higher and lower pleasures. The Epicurean follows a principle of happiness where the agent seeks to maximize pleasure and minimize or avoid pain. He also believes that some pleasures are higher because they are more in our control and more enduring. Kant writes, “The only thing that concerns him, in order to decide upon a choice, is how intense, how long, how easily

acquired, and how often repeated this agreeableness is” (1996b: 157). Kant then concedes that the Epicurean was correct to champion what was most in our control, but not anything empirical. What is rational and *a priori* is in our control. As it turns out, happiness is not in our control.⁸ Kant comments:

The principle of one’s own happiness, however much understanding and reason may be used in it, still contains no determining ground for the will other than such as is suitable to the *lower* faculty of desire: and thus either there is no higher faculty of desire at all or else [it is] *pure reason*... (1996b: 158).

In other words, Epicurus was simply mistaken when he thought that he had made a distinction of pleasures that were both rooted in the same empirical desires. Kant adds: “Then only insofar as reason of itself (not in the service of the inclinations) determines the will, is reason a true *higher* faculty of desire, to which the pathologically determinable is subordinate, and then only is reason really, and indeed *specifically*, distinct from the latter” (1996b: 158). Reason is, in fact, higher than inclinations; however, it is not a higher type of inclination, but rather a higher and more-distinguished influence on the rational being. However, as long as happiness is involved with inclinations, it cannot be rational or *a priori*. Given that Kant insists that moral judgments are *a priori synthetic*, happiness cannot be the determining ground of the will if an act is to be moral.

2. Happiness and Moral Action

The above discussion does not contain sufficient evidence for one to conclude that Kant disregarded happiness as a part of human life. He simply disregards it as a candidate for the moral determining ground of the will. Interestingly enough, Kant does not entirely divorce morality from a concept of happiness. He does preclude it from being a basis of decision-making, but not from being a result of morality.

As noted above, inclinations cannot serve as the determining ground of the will when acting morally since all inclinations are empirical and therefore not necessary. Since any moral principle will be *a priori* (i.e., necessary), such grounds for moral decision-making are not plausible. What, then, will be the determining ground? It is clear that for an action to have moral worth it is done from duty, but what exactly does that entail? How is it done, if not by motivation of an inclination?

Kant tells us that we become conscious of the moral law by setting aside all empirical conditions to which reason directs us (1996b: 163). For Kant, “What is essential in every determination of the will by the moral law is that” the will is “a free will—and so not only without the cooperation of sensible impulses but even with rejection of all of them and with infringement upon all inclinations insofar as they could be opposed to that law” (1996b: 199). Therefore, by setting aside all inclinations, we are in a state where we may freely choose to fulfill duty. When we achieve this state, the awareness of the moral law produces in us a kind of humiliation that entails a respect for the moral law. The humiliation is an effect of disregarding all inclinations. Kant adds:

For, all inclination and every sensible impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (by the infringement upon the inclinations that takes place) is itself feeling ... the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain (1996b: 199).

In so doing, “Pure practical reason merely *infringes upon* self-love, inasmuch as it only restricts it” (1996b: 199). This phenomenon occurs as a result of pure practical reason’s keeping our inclinations at bay. When practical reason does this, the moral law is experienced as “an object of the greatest *respect* and so too the ground of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin” (1996b: 199). When we are able to set aside all of our inclinations, the recognition that we are susceptible to them is humiliating while at the same time the

realization of the objective necessity of what the law commands elicits respect. In a sense, this respect, or *reverence* for duty, is a *feeling*; however, it can be distinguished from all other feelings in that it is not an empirical inclination, but rather one cognized from reason alone. It is the result of practical reason reflecting on its own law. Kant writes, “This feeling is the only one that we can cognize completely *a priori*” (1996b: 200).

Kant is careful to clarify that though such feeling may occur, it is not a compulsion towards the law, but rather, a result of the law:

There is indeed no feeling for this law, but inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way, in the judgment of reason this removal of a hindrance is esteemed equivalent to a positive furthering of its causality. Because of this, this feeling can now also be called a feeling of respect for the moral law (1996: 201).

Therefore, the law is still *a priori* in that it is not cognized as a result of a feeling, and this respect for the law, though a feeling, is also not *a posteriori* since it is generated from pure reason. The most important aspect of the concept of reverence for duty is the following: though reverence for the law may be a feeling, and may assist practical reason in infringing upon inclinations, it is *not* the motivation of a moral action. The motivation for an action that has moral worth is always simply that the act is required. Kant clarifies, “There is here no *antecedent* feeling in the subject that would be attuned to morality: that is impossible, since all feeling is sensible whereas the incentive of the moral disposition must be free from any sensible condition” (1996b: 201). Though this feeling is not a motivating factor, it is yet another indication that Kant does not have an entirely insensitive view of acting from duty.

One might object that, while the previous discussion shows that Kant had an element of sensitivity in his theory of acting with moral worth, the type of feeling entertained is a negative feeling, and could serve as evidence for the position that acting from duty entails

being disinclined (or at least, disgruntled). So far, this would appear to be the case. However, reverence for the moral law is not entirely a negative feeling. In fact, such reverence can be the efficient cause of a positive feeling: *satisfaction with oneself*. Kant clarifies:

As *submission* to a law, that is, as a command (indicating constraint for the sensibly affected subject), it therefore contains in it no pleasure but instead, so far, displeasure in the action. On the other hand, however, since this constraint is exercised only by the lawgiving of his *own* reason, it also contains something *elevating*, and the subjective effect on feeling, inasmuch as pure practical reason is the sole cause of it, can thus be called *self-approbation* (1996b: 205).

Kant continues to explain that self-approbation is a type of satisfaction one can have with oneself when reflecting upon one's own virtue. Therefore, there is a positive feeling that ensues as a result of acting from duty that differs significantly from the inclinations we set aside and the humiliation the law elicits (1996b: 234). However, one must be cautious not to allow that future desires to repeat this contentment with oneself become a motivating aspect of later action, for to do this would surely result in heteronomy. Therefore, the contentment a moral agent might experience is a complacency that will still have to be set aside the next time duty presents itself.

3. Happiness, the Highest Good, and the Practical Antinomy

Via the antinomy of practical reason, Kant attempts to establish the practical possibility of the highest good. However, given that the concept of the highest good is ambiguous, he must first address what he means by "highest good" before posing the antinomy. He declares that the highest good is essentially the object of a finite moral will, and it is practical in that it involves the faculty of desire of rational finite beings. He postulates that the highest good can either be supreme or perfect. If it is supreme, then it is an "unconditional condition which is subordinate to no other condition" (Kant 1996b: 228). If it is perfect, then it is a "whole

which is not part of any larger whole of the same kind” (ibid.). Essentially, it is either the best of a series, or the totality and whole of a series.⁹

Kant claims in the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason* that virtue is the supreme good. He then declares that happiness and virtue combined constitute the perfect good. Therefore, unlike other concepts that were ambiguous in theoretical antinomies, the former concept is contained in the latter (and not opposed to it).

Kant declares that the highest good is the perfect good because a supreme good would be inadequate to serve as the object of the wills of rational finite beings. Some scholars, such as Victoria S. Wike (1982), interpret this claim to mean that the supreme good was inadequate for Kant since it ignores desires and inclinations typical of practical beings. While it is the case that Kant felt it necessary for happiness to be included in the concept of the highest good because of our empirical and imperfect nature, he is not committing a naturalistic fallacy in doing so. Kant is not saying that since we do desire things, inclinations must be an aspect of morality. In fact, it is quite the contrary for Kant.

First, Kant held that the causality of freedom entails a disassociation from the sensible world. For Kant: “reason does not call upon something else” to determine the will when it is free (1996b: 224). Since morality is grounded in freedom, the moral aspect of the object of the will must be exclusively *a priori*. Therefore, Kant will not allow our empirical nature to be part of our morality. However, Kant is saying that since we experience desires, a highest good suitable to humans will involve both the passions and reason. Even so, while the highest good may be the object of a rational being’s will, this does not make it an appropriate element in motivation of that will. Here it is evident that for Kant, being an object of a will and being the determining ground of a will are different stations. Though the highest good may be the object of a pure will, it ought not be equated with the moral object. The moral object is duty. The highest good is not duty, but virtue (which, indeed, entails regular respect for duty) plus

happiness. For this reason, Kant writes, “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*” (1996b: 227-228). If it were the case that the highest good were all that a *moral* object entails (and no more), then the moral object would entail heteronomy; for happiness entails inclinations sure to corrupt the moral worth of an act. Such a result would be absurd and contrary to Kant’s project. Kant warns us that not only would the highest good result in heteronomy, but *any* object selected as the determining ground of the will prior to establishing the moral law will lead to heteronomy: “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” (1996b: 228). Therefore, the object of the will includes morality and happiness, but what determines the will must only be what duty commands, for this is the moral law. With this concept of the highest good established, Kant is able to postulate the antinomy of practical reason.

He begins by claiming that the maxims of virtue and the maxims of happiness jointly make possible the highest good. Then he poses the antinomy as follows: “the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue, or the maxim of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness.” First one should note that unlike other antinomies, this antinomy makes claims about causal relations. For this reason, Kant will claim that these matters are synthetic. In addition, these two disjuncts are not necessarily logically opposed; the “or” here is not exclusive. It is possible that the desire for happiness motivates one towards maxims of virtue and, when this happens, acting virtuously grounds the necessary and sufficient conditions of happiness. However, for other reasons, Kant will not accept this interpretation.

Ironically, Kant initially “resolves” this antinomy by showing that both propositions are impossible. The first proposition, that happiness motivates virtue, is false given the idea of the highest good and the goal of practical reason. If it were true that happiness motivated virtue, it would hardly be virtue. This idea undermines the moral law, which entails that there

exist duties that everyone ought to fulfill, not for his own sake or desire, but simply because it is morally obligatory. If happiness were the motivation to being virtuous, then fulfilling duty would be a result of inclinations. If this were the case, then one could not achieve the supreme good, let alone the perfect good. The second proposition, that virtue is the efficient cause of happiness, is also presumably false. Kant's reason is that this proposition contradicts the laws of the sensible world. It simply is not the case that being virtuous will make one happy in this lifetime. It is quite possible that one might fulfill duty regularly and with virtue and be quite unhappy.

This supposed "resolution" of the antinomy creates a serious problem—*prima facie*, it would seem to undermine morality. Practical reason has what Kant calls a "moral interest" in its nature. Practical reason wants to obey the objective moral law, as it is its own law. According to Kant, considering both propositions of the antinomy of practical reason to be false results also in considering the moral law itself false. For obvious reasons, Kant cannot accept this consequence.¹⁰ Given both the "interest" of practical reason and that denying both propositions results in an absurdity for Kant, he resolves to claim that at least one of the propositions may be conditionally false, but not false without exception.

Recall that the first proposition by definition is contrary to the moral law. Since the second consideration of this antinomy seeks to preserve the moral law, the first proposition remains false. However, the second proposition, that virtue results in happiness, is now considered only conditionally false. Kant claims that it is certainly not necessarily true in the sensible world, however; if rational beings have a supersensible aspect to their being and are able to have experiences beyond the sensible via an intelligible realm, then it is possible that being virtuous in the sensible realm may be an efficient cause of happiness in an intelligible realm. Kant concludes that if this is the case, the fact that happiness resulting from virtue is not a clear impossibility reopens the possibility for there to be a highest good, and therefore also the moral law which strives towards the highest good. To support this idea, Kant refers back

to the concepts of a noumenal existence, the moral law, and an intelligible Author of nature, all of which he believes he established a possibility for in either the first *Critique* (1997) or earlier in the second (1996b) (the third *Antinomy of Theoretical Reason*, the *Analytic of Practical Reason*, and the fourth *Antinomy of Theoretical Reason*, respectively). In other words, if there is such a thing as an objective reality outside the realm of sensation as well as an objective universal moral law that was written by an intelligible author of nature, then happiness in a supersensible sense might result from being virtuous.

4. Postulating God's Existence: what you don't know won't compel you

While an intelligible author of nature and the immortality of the soul do seem to solve the practical antinomy, reliance upon such ideas would seem to create a new problem. If we recognize that there is a God who will save our souls on the condition that we act virtuously, is it possible that our attempts to follow the moral law will be corrupted by a desire for this end? If this is the case, then the second proposition in the practical antinomy can be reduced to the first. One might try to act virtuously and with moral worth *so that* he can be happy in an afterlife guaranteed by a divine being. Kant recognized this problem, and agrees that, indeed, knowledge of an intelligible author might yield such a predicament.

Before discussing Kant's solution to this predicament, let us first review his reasons for postulating the existence of God. First, Kant discusses the existence of God in the first *Critique* (1997). Since speculative reason oversteps its bounds in this discussion, the existence of God cannot be demonstrated, and the discussion is therefore a *paralogism*. In fact, Kant holds that the subjects of these paralogisms of the first *Critique* (1997) (those of immortality, freedom, and the existence of God) end up being postulates in the second critique (1996b: 246). Practical reason is then able to continue the work of speculative reason, not as proofs of actuality, but rather as demonstrations of possibility. Therefore, practical reason and morality will require the assumptions of immortality, freedom and the existence of

God, even though these may not be proven logically.

In the current discussion, all three are necessary assumptions according to Kant. Previously, I noted that freedom is necessary for morality. One cannot be judged accountable if one's actions are not free, and even in choosing to follow empirical impulses we must assume that we first freely choose not to follow reason. Kant incorporates the remaining two postulates based on his idea of the highest good. Even though happiness cannot be the determining ground of moral decisions, Kant does say that promoting the highest good, one which includes both morality and happiness, is also required of us. He holds this view based upon the resolution of the practical antinomy:

From this resolution of the antinomy of practical pure reason it follows that in practical principles a natural and necessary connection between the consciousness of morality and the expectation of a happiness proportionate to it as its result can at least be thought as possible (though certainly not, on this account, cognized and understood) (1996b: 235).

One must assume freedom for the sake of morality, and the immortality of the soul and the existence of God for the sake of the highest good (i.e., for the sake of happiness).¹¹ In addition, Kant writes:

On the other hand, principles of the pursuit of happiness cannot possibly produce morality; that, 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 necessary result of the former. Only with this subordination is the *highest good* the whole object of pure practical reason, which must necessarily represent it as possible since it commands us to contribute everything possible to its production (1996b: 235-236).

Therefore, while it might be required that we pursue the highest good, (and via this pursuit, happiness) morality must be of primary importance. The reason that the supreme good must be superior to the remaining aspect of the highest good is that if an agent were to pursue happiness first (or as the ultimate end) then the supreme good would be rendered impossible. If the supreme good is rendered impossible, the highest good is certainly no longer possible either. However, paradoxically, we must consider the highest good to be possible in order to be motivated to pursue the supreme good. This seems paradoxical because, on the one hand, we cannot be motivated to pursue the supreme good without considering the highest good possible, but on the other hand, we cannot pursue the supreme good *so that* it secures the highest good without undermining both goods. Indeed, Kant warns that the way we promote the highest good requires care in both preserving morality and also remaining realistic about the power our freedom has:

We shall try to set forth the grounds of that possibility, first with respect to what is *immediately* within our power and then, secondly, in that which is not in our power but which reason presents to us, as the supplement to our inability, for the possibility of the highest good (which is necessary in accordance with practical principles) (1996b: 236).

As noted earlier, following morality is within our control, while achieving happiness is not. Therefore, we must take care not to apply our motives towards goals that we cannot secure. Strangely, the *having* of one object of desire (happiness) that is also an object ill-suited as a goal (since we do not control whether we attain it) is, somehow, mysteriously required in order for us to have the will or motivation to pursue those goals that are within our power (acting with moral worth). This psychologically paradoxical state and the care that the pursuit of the highest good requires is also related to the way that we conceive of the existence of God.

For Kant, since we have a duty to promote the highest good and part of this good is not in our control, we must postulate what is necessary for this remaining aspect's possibility. He writes:

Now, it was a duty for us to promote the highest good; hence there is in us not merely the warrant but also the necessity, as a need connected with duty, to presuppose the possibility of this highest good, which, since it is possible only under the condition of the existence of God, connects the presupposition of the existence of God inseparably with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God (1996b: 241).

Since God is the being that is adequate for bringing about both the immortality of the soul necessary to achieve a perfect will and happiness, we must assume that He exists. Kant is careful to qualify the above claim regarding this necessity, claiming that our requirement is not like a typical duty, but rather a kind of subjective psychological necessity: "It is well to note here that this moral necessity *is subjective*, that is, a need, and not *objective*, that is, itself a duty; for, there can be no duty to assume the existence of anything" (1996b: 241). Therefore, while we need to assume God exists, we are not morally obligated to assent to the belief.

If one does believe in God, and this contributes to his hope for an achievement of the highest good, he must be careful not to allow such mentality to corrupt his actions into the type that are heteronomous. In his discussion of the practical laws that postulate immortality and the existence of God, Kant adds, "The same law must also lead to the possibility of the second element of the highest good, namely *happiness* proportioned to that morality, and must do so as disinterestedly as before, solely from impartial reason" (1996b: 240). Though we need to assume the existence of God for our pursuit of the highest good since we are dependent on him for the realization of happiness, we cannot be in a position where this belief compels us towards a consequentialist morality.¹² We cannot act in accordance with duty because we

believe God will reward us for it someday. If we do this, we are acting in mere accordance with duty and from an inclination. Our actions have no moral worth, and we cease to be pursuing the highest good since we can only genuinely pursue the highest good if the supreme good takes precedence over happiness.

Kant was aware of this problem, and considers it indicative of why we can only postulate God's existence. We can never *prove* it. The fact that we cannot *know* that there is a God is actually conducive to our ability to act with moral worth.¹³ Kant tells us that if we knew for certain that God exists, we would only act on the consequences that we would expect from such knowledge. Kant imagines that if we knew that God exists, "most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty" (1996b: 258).

What could Kant mean by this passage? On the one hand, he could be making one of his famous cynical comments concerning the frequency of morally worthy acts. Perhaps it is not the case that humans *cannot* act for duty's sake, just that they *would not* if furnished with such knowledge. But given the nature of human freedom Kant supposes we must have, such a claim would be misleading. After all, the above quotation is quite exclusive. Terms such as "most", "a few" and "none" seem to cover all possible terrain. Indeed, I contend that this passage is more telling about our essential nature and psychology than it is a cynical prediction. I suggest that this passage suggests a pertinent characteristic of Kant's view of human nature: absolute certainty or knowledge that one will achieve certain goods generates irresistible inclinations.¹⁴

But what kind of irresistible inclination? After all, Kant suggests that there are at least two possibilities: hope and fear. It would seem to be that whichever one it is would depend on other dispositions of a given agent. Persons with "mother-Theresa type" dispositions might be necessarily inclined towards doing the right thing in hopes that it yields happiness, while

other “normal” people would be necessarily inclined towards doing the right thing as a mechanism for avoiding certain misery. Perhaps even this is too moralistic; for it might just be the case that some people are naturally more positive while the majority of us (I’m supposing Kant is included in this group) are naturally more pessimistic. In either case, it would not seem to matter, for as we have already seen from earlier discussions, one’s natural dispositions are excluded from the realm of that which deserves praise or blame, reward or punishment. What matters here is that, regardless of one’s natural inclinations and dispositions, *something among them will take over* and prevent one’s reason from motivating one towards fulfilling duty.

It would seem as though the relationship between knowledge and human motivation is essential to a human being’s potential for moral behavior and, therefore, happiness. I wish to offer the following description to capture this tenuous relation: subjectively certain knowledge of any kind settles reason (as a united entity—both theoretical and practical¹⁵) and, in so doing, prevents it from moving; when this happens, other motivating mechanisms take over. This works both for subjectively certain doubt as well as subjectively certain assertion. Consider the second type. If I know that a) death is a bad goal for me to pursue and that b) jumping off of the top of the Empire State Building is sure to result in my death, I *cannot* be motivated to do it. Likewise, if one were to suggest to me that I jump off of the Empire State Building because it is the best way to learn how to fly, and I *wholeheartedly* doubt that I am capable of learning to fly under any circumstances, then I *cannot* be motivated to do it. This is importantly distinct from failing to have a reason to do something. In contemporary philosophy, it is often said that one cannot be motivated to do something if one does not personally have a reason to perform that action. I am not applying this contemporary dogma to Kant’s schema. Instead, I am suggesting that subjective certainty of the consequences of an action (either positively (I know that X will follow) or negatively (I know that X will not follow) entails that reason is stable and also *stagnant*. It is no longer moving in its own apprehensive nature and practical reason surrenders all rights to move the

will to inclinations. However, this surrender is not itself willful or free. It would seem that the reason that, according to Kant, all actions in accordance with the law would result from some inclination is that practical reason is *involuntarily* overtaken. If this were not the case, Kant might have surmised that it was still possible to act for duty's sake. The fact that he excludes this possibility suggests that the deferment to inclinations is itself, *irresistible*.

5. Human Nature—the necessity of the bad for the sake of the good

If the above discussion is correct, it would seem to reveal something about human nature according to Kant. Certain knowledge in practical matters, at least concerning the highest good that all humans naturally pursue, undermines our rational freedom and, with it, the possibility for both the supreme and the highest good. If we were certain that there were no God to reward our virtue, we might not be capable of respecting duty and acting for its own sake. If we were certain that there is a God who is righteous and rewards the good, we might be incapable of setting aside inclinations (and, again, acting for duty's sake). Therefore, we must assume that God exists because practical reason has an interest in the highest good, which is concerned with morality and only indirectly concerned with happiness (that it is achieved through a worthiness of it that we earn through being virtuous). However, so that we may be moral in this lifetime and work towards the highest good, it is necessary that this idea of God not be certain (i.e., our assumption is somewhat hopeful and not taken to be a fact). Fortunately, Kant adds, we are constituted such that we *cannot* fully know that God exists:

Now, when it is quite otherwise with us; when with all the effort of our reason we have only a very obscure and ambiguous view into the future; when the governor of the world allows us only to conjecture his existence and his grandeur, not to behold them or prove them clearly; when, on the other hand, the moral law within us, without promising or threatening anything with certainty, demands of us

disinterested respect; and when, finally, this respect alone, become active and ruling, first allows us a view into the realm of the supersensible, though only with weak glances; then there can be a truly moral disposition, devoted immediately to the moral law, and a rational creature can become worthy of the highest good in conformity with the moral worth of his person and not merely with his actions (1996b: 258).

The only way for us to act from duty so that our actions have moral worth is to do so in a disinterested fashion. Such interest corrupts the act and reduces it to one of heteronomy. For this reason, Kant had to be cautious about the place happiness held in his philosophy. Though it is the case that morality could lead to the highest good, we mustn't think of it that way. For if we do, we will not achieve the highest good. But even this mentality is consequentialist! Therefore, all Kant could have said is that his system has a place for happiness, but it is not our place to expect it. All we should ever do is hope to become worthy of happiness, for that is morality and all we can ever control (1996b: 244). But the very fact that our nature has been so delicately constructed makes at least this much within our control. As Kant concludes the first part of the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Thus what the study of nature and of the human being teaches us sufficiently elsewhere may well be true here also: that the inscrutable wisdom by which we exist is not less worthy of veneration in what it has denied us than in what it has granted us" (1996b: 244). Indeed, the best thing that a divine author of nature granted us, the possibility of achieving the highest good, seems to depend on precisely that which the divine author of nature left out.

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NOTES

¹ This is a standard way to read Kant in recent scholarship. Several decades ago, there was a trend to view Kant as saying that one can only act with moral worth if one is *disinclined* towards one's duty. For an example of such a discussion, see Henson (1979). I have argued elsewhere Anton (2006) that Kant's requirement of freedom for moral action precludes this alternative reading.

² See Mele (1990, 457-463).

³ See, for example, Mele (1990, 455-6) Fischer and Ravizza (1998, 35, 48-9, 231-2) as well as Arpaly (2006, 22, 113-14).

⁴ If it were the case that moral worth requires being completely disinclined towards duty, then it would seem that the morally upright person would be disgruntled all the time since he would never feel like doing anything that he actually does. According to Schiller, this also entails that one could not even exhibit true kindness and sympathy since these emotions entail one's own interest in the object of such feeling. Schiller even goes so far as to suggest that Kant's position implies that human relationships such as friendship are impossible. He writes a brief dialogue to illustrate the ridiculousness of a moral theory that requires agents to loath acting well. His first speaker says that he serves his friends with pleasure, and for that reason doubts that he is a virtuous person. The second responds that the only way to resolve the issue is to despise them entirely so that the only reason for treating them well would be duty (*Cf.* Gauthier (1997)).

⁵ In particular, see Wike (1994). Like I shall argue, Wike asserts that Happiness' role in Kant's ethics does not result in consequentialism. See Cummiskey (1996) for an opposing view.

⁶ I shall refer to the page numbers of the English translation of Kant's works in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant for all citations of Kant's own works.

⁷ See also Johnson (2006).

⁸ Even Aristotle admits this, and concedes that one must be both virtuous and blessed with external goods, the latter being left up to chance.

⁹ This is similar to the objects of theoretical antinomies, since, as Wike points out, the “unconditioned” in the first Critique referred to either 1 a part to which all other parts are subordinated, or 2 to the entire complete series.

¹⁰ Kant feels that he has sufficiently proven the objectivity of morality in the Analytic of Practical Reason.

¹¹ For an interpretation of Kant as a metaphysical skeptic who pushes a belief in God simply because of the limits of theoretical reason (as well as the needs of practical reason), see Friedman (1992, esp. 774-776) and Rescher (1999, 188-200).

¹² For an interesting argument that Kant ultimately fails at distinguishing his view from consequentialism, see Cummiskey (1996).

¹³ For a discussion of whether a belief in God is theoretical on Kant’s program, see O’Leary-Hawthorne and Howard-Snyder (1996, 240-247).

¹⁴ For a discussion of how Schiller, in contrast to Kant, described grace as related to our voluntary movements, which are an expression of our moral feelings, see Deligiorgi (2006, 4-8).

¹⁵ See Neiman (1994) and Nuzzo (2005).

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