

Alexander T. Englert

THE REALITY OF THE IDEAL

A Study of Kant's Highest Good



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To Luise
For bringing so much light into my world.

Doctor How came she by that light?
Gentlewoman Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually. 'Tis
 her command.
Doctor You see her eyes are open.
Gentlewoman Ay, but their sense are shut.

—Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 1, 23–7

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Preface

Ode to the Highest Good

Despite what detractors might say, I find the highest good to be a masterfully crafted element of Immanuel Kant's philosophy. And its status as an ideal, placed at the heart of his critical system, brims with philosophical potential yet to be fully appreciated. This book's goal is to provide an extensive, meticulous study that does just that. However, given that a book requires a large investment of time on the part of the reader, and assuming that many will not know the highest good, it seems appropriate to motivate why a book-length study is warranted. To that end, after glossing over what the highest good is, I will present a philosophical ode in its honor.

To understand the *highest* good, one must first know what Kant meant by the *good* proper. Of course, there are many things that we call "good." We describe pleasurable states and things that elicit them as "good." A "good" knife can denote that, for a knife, it is a fine exemplar of one, doing all that a knife should. And we describe someone who follows rules or shows skill perhaps as a "good" person. None of these, however, gets to the root of what is actually *good* for Kant, that is, in an objectively necessary sense. They are too relative to feelings, varying standards, or shifting mores. For anything to deserve the title of the *good*, by contrast, Kant thought that every rational being must be able to deem it choice-worthy, regardless of whether one personally wants it or not. Whatever is good, in short, must be absolutely so. Therefore, for Kantians (though non-Kantians can easily endorse this too), the good is an unconditioned concept, which rises above individual whim, above group-think, above tribalism, above what is fashionable, above cultural norms—above even space and time.

But what then qualifies as good in this unconditioned sense? Kant is perhaps most famous for stating that the only unconditionally good thing is a good will. His thought, while bound up with complex arguments, is also highly intuitive. Take anything that one might typically call "good," like money, health, youth, or even virtues like courage and frugality. Now, think about them possessed by someone—picture a paragon of

maleficence—who uses them for nefarious purposes. Like a stain, the imprint of such a will taints these things and qualities, which on their own appear favorable at first blush. Consequently, Kant thinks that we—as individual agents—ultimately carry the burden of hatching goodness into the world, namely, as virtuous agents. It is only *once* we have done so, that these other sources of pleasure and positivity can be fully enjoyed or harnessed, and thereby made good.

Over the course of the study, I will discuss in more detail some of the argumentative moves that Kant takes from this starting position to build his moral theory. For brevity's sake, though, it need only be added that Kant thinks that a good will, rather than a mysterious notion, is a concept that can be articulated through precise, philosophical analysis, which he provides most fully in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

In this work, Kant quickly arrives at the concept of duty through an analysis of what makes a good will *good*. This concept of duty entails a principle of action, or form of deliberating that can guide action, which prioritizes *how* we think when acting (or the “form” of an action, as he calls it), as opposed to prioritizing the *goals* or *results* enacted (which he calls the “matter” of an action). Kant refers to this principle of action as the *moral law*, and it forms the supersensible bedrock of all morality.

Although it is nothing that we find chiseled on stone tablets, Kant thinks that we can discern it through a process of representing it by what he refers to as the *categorical imperative* (and three concomitant formulations thereof). The categorical imperative and its formulations communicate, in gist, that we ought to act based on intended actions that any rational agent could also adopt in a consistent manner, thereby giving our actions a universal form. This universality is discerned through testing, via the categorical imperative, whether by acting in a certain way, we would create an order in which we would stand in contradiction with ourselves or others. If contradiction is apparent, then the intended action is impermissible. If omission of a permissible action is impermissible, then it is obligatory. Moreover, the good will acts not from mere obedience to the moral law so expressed, but—as Kant puts it—from *respect* for the moral law. Someone acting from a good will is not merely conforming with the moral law as a principle of action but is also fully invested in the action because it is moral. In sum, the only unconditionally good thing in the world is a person acting dutifully for no other reason than that it is the morally right thing to do.

Before turning to the highest good, one more feature of the good proper must be mentioned, since it often is perceived as making the highest good's inclusion in Kant's system problematic. Because Kant thinks that the moral law is universal, necessary, and a conditioning element of all that we consider good, he refers to it as *a priori* (in contrast to *a posteriori*). *A priori* refers here to the good's status as determinable and in force prior to any experience, or—better perhaps—independent of any experience. Whatever is truly good is unconditioned and *pure* since it is discernible independent of what actually appears. Experience (a system of conditioned moments) cannot, by contrast, be relied on to show us what is good.

This thought, albeit highly technical, can also be made intuitive. Answer the question: Must one first experiment in the laboratory of experience (i.e., *a posteriori*) whether cold-blooded murder of innocents or slavery is wrong before one condemns them? Of course not. Just so with morality. All things considered, we need not wait to observe someone putting themselves in harm's way to save a friend before deeming it good. Kant, from this, concludes that morality must always be a pure exercise of reason determining what ought to be the case, regardless of what results or what has transpired. This requires an inversion of how we might naturally behave. Our own well-being and happiness (or that of loved ones) are often stumbling blocks to morality, learned habits of pursuing things in the world that support our well-being. But if motivated by our own interests, we can quickly become uncertain of whether the good is truly underlying our actions and, perhaps, intentionally subordinate the good for selfish reasons.

So much for a presentation of the good proper in Kant's theory.

What, then, is the *highest* good? One might think that the good, considered in an unconditioned sense, is already superlative. Still, Kant thinks that there is a higher state, which amplifies the good of morality. And the reason that Kant seeks out this higher state is due to a sensitivity that he has for what it means to have a will. For Kant thinks that every time we act, there must be an object that we are intending. And this object can be referred to in plainer language as one's final *goal*. Every time we act on the moral law, Kant thinks we must also have a goal befitting its unconditioned, universally obligating form.

What could qualify as the moral law's final goal? This sounds odd to many, Kantians included. Surely, when the good Samaritan, for example, reacts to the collapsed man on the road, *those* moments in which he helps the stranger constitute the goal of the Samaritan's moral striving. Are his dutiful actions

not enough to account for morality's goal? Kant would, of course, agree—but only partially. Determining concrete actions is, of course, the moral law's primary function. Yet, Kant thought that no particular moral action—on its own—is sufficient to match the moral law's demand on us. The problem arises from the fact that the moral law, as an unconditioned, formal way of deliberating can never find a sufficient goal in any spatiotemporally conditioned state of affairs. The moral law's scope, as a universal principle, determines more than any one particular state of affairs. Instead, it leads us to think of how the world as a totality ought to be structured, if the moral law were constitutive of how it must appear.

To make this more tangible: Consider if we saw someone piling lumber in a yard and hammering nails into planks of wood.¹ If we asked: "Why are you doing that?" The builder could answer: "I'm hammering this plank and that plank together, so that they are bound." Such a reply, while accurate, would not provide a satisfying answer. We are not seeking to know what the singular moments of action are, namely, the grabbing of this nail, the measuring, sawing, and so on, but instead what the whole project is, in which all these singular moments are contained. We might then reply to the builder: "Yes, but why are you doing all you're doing? What is the end goal?" If the builder then says, "I'm building a tree house," then we understand the true object of all these interconnected actions. We know what they are meant to accomplish. So too, Kant thought, with the moral law. The moral law, while determining each dutiful action, is never exhausted by any particular articulation of it, and instead invites speculation as to what the end goal would look like if *every* action were harmonious with the moral law and organized systematically such that a good will had complete control to shape the world.

It is this speculative maneuver, based on a real need (viz., that any moment of will have an object), which Kant thought demanded not merely the good expressible in a singular action, but rather a higher good that amplifies morality with goodness thought to a point of completion. What could qualify, then, as morality's goal, which contains every moral action and explains what a purely practical will would create out of the world? Kant's suggestion is that it is the combination of two ideas, which together form the *highest good*, which we need in order to account for the moral law's final goal and, consequently, why it is there in the first place.

¹ Kant is explicit that the highest good is needed to account for the "effect" that pure practical reason would produce (see, *RGV* 6:4, 7n; *TP* 8:280n). My example here is inspired by Kleingeld, "Kant on 'Good,'" 46.

The first idea of the highest good is *perfect virtue*. By perfect virtue, he means the attainment of a state in which there is no gap between one's behavior and duty's demands. In the words of T. S. Eliot from *Two Choruses* from "*The Rock*:"

I say to you: Make perfect your will.
I say: take no thought of the harvest,
But only to proper sowing.²

One does the right thing for the right reasons whenever one is called to stand with the good. The second idea is *happiness* in exact proportion to our moral worthiness (i.e., our virtue). And these two ideas, Kant thought, combine in our thinking such that we see one (virtue) necessarily conditioning and causing us to be deserving of the other (happiness) proportionately.

Happiness has struck many as a problematic fit with pure morality's final goal. But Kant thought it necessary to include happiness because just acting morally is insufficient to account for the complete good. Here we can imagine two worlds: one in which morally good people are unhappy in inverse relation to their degree of morality, such that the best suffer the most; in the other world, good people flourish and are happy in direct proportion to their character. One would hope that we all agree that the latter sounds more appealing. But Kant went further. Indeed, he claimed that much like we cannot help but apply the category of causation to events in the world, so too we cannot help but synthetically combine virtue with a proportionate worthiness to be happy. That is, when comparing these two worlds, we judge a necessary connection that obtains in the latter but is missing in the former.

And this necessary connection is grounded in the fact that happiness, as that which we find subjectively meaningful and fulfilling, *becomes* an undeniable good if grounded in a good will. A practical purpose of the will seeking the *total* good, then, seeks to combine virtue and happiness (based on one's worthiness) in a harmonious and necessary way.³ Kant thought that—after morality is achieved—we necessarily look for a correlation of morally conditioned happiness in the final state. We expect it, search for it, and hope for it to arrive when we detect a good soul.

² Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, 83.

³ To the skeptic, who thinks no such necessary connection obtains, I challenge that person to assess honestly whether they can consistently maintain that people of good character are in no way deserving of better lives than those who are vicious.

These two ideas, virtue and happiness, Kant thought could provide a supreme and complete account of what would result if all acted morally. The goal of morality would be one in which we all do our duty and—God willing—accrue happiness in proportion to our virtue. Such a state could answer the question sufficiently of which object is *the* final goal of the moral law. It is my hope that this suffices as a gloss on what the highest good is and why it arises in Kant's system.

How, though, can one claim that it is a masterfully crafted element of philosophy, worthy of extensive study? Here, the detractors will be quick to pipe up. Yes, certainly the highest good is central to Kant's ethics, as well as perplexing and divisive. But masterfully crafted? They may suspect that either my aesthetic sense is distorted or that I have been studying the highest good too long since only someone writing a book about it could find it so appealing. After all, the highest good has been a source of ongoing scholarly debate since Kant's own day. It requires effort to show that it can fit consistently within Kant's ethical system since it includes happiness. Is that not smuggling an impure element into his otherwise pure theory? Further, it is unclear how Kant saw it related to everyday experience and human moral psychology. And worst of all, for some, it is the lynchpin in Kant's moral argument for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. For perfect virtue requires that we be able to strive longer than a single lifetime (hence, immortality) and completely proportionate happiness requires a guarantor who oversees its appropriate distribution (hence, God). Throughout my study, I will draw attention to debated areas of scholarship.

To end this preface, however, I will share an ode in praise of the highest good (albeit in philosophical prose, as opposed to verse).

Why be fond of the highest good? Let me count the ways.

First, there is the elegant comprehensiveness of its seemingly simple synthesis of the two ideas: virtue and happiness proportionate thereto.

I think that Kant was right that these connect in a synthetic *a priori* manner and convey a fulsome conception of the good. Their synthesis tracks well a common causal link that we monitor between those we perceive as happy and their moral worth. Consider: If we notice someone who is nefarious, but by all outward appearances seems happy, we note an imbalance of value that—at the very least—bugs us as something ill-fitting relative to how the world *should* be. Vice versa, if someone is virtuous, we connect with this

idea the wish that the person flourish. Moreover, this link between virtue and a proportionately determined happiness is one that I think we could wish as a general state for the world. It bespeaks a sense of what a just state of affairs would approximate.

Next—despite some fuzziness about how the highest good should be incorporated into our human moral psychology—I think that it captures a deep truth about us. One of my favorite passages from the *Critique of Practical Reason* illustrates this deep truth well. Kant writes:

For, the moral law in fact transfers us, according to the idea, into a nature in which pure reason, if it were accompanied with suitable physical power, would produce the highest good, and it determines our will to confer on the sensible world the form of a whole of rational beings. (*KpV* 5:43)

I read this passage as communicating the following: When we encounter the moral law, we surely are involved in an activity that is highly particular, in that we are facing a concrete moment of moral deliberation and action. But Kant also sees—and this is the deep truth—that this highly particular moment is imbricated with how we conceive of the whole of reality. It sets off, as it were, a movement in our thinking that extends beyond the immediate—the here and now—and “transfers us, according to the idea, into a nature” where pure reason is imagined as having complete control. Put another way, the very existence of the moral law in us points us to ponder how such a law is possible and how it fits with the world of experience. Morality moves us to ponder. It presents us with an ideal as a point of comparison against which we measure ourselves and the world. And because we have the ideal, we have grounds to hope that the crooked ways of our world are not set in stone. For we can think of a logically possible maximum of goodness as an alternative. And while complete attainment of this ideal is not practically possible in any person’s lifetime, progress in its direction quite simply *is*.

The highest good, in short, presents us—through the moral law—with an alternative to what we perceive. What appears is not the only game in town. And out of this contemplative turn of thinking, we can grasp onto hope. Why? The only hopeless scenario would be one in which the way things appear allows for no imaginable alternative. If what we see were logically all we can think, then there would be no place for hope. And I like hope. In sum, the deep truth about us—one that Kant sees—is that how we ought to act

influences not only the world but indeed our contemplation of it, such that the moral theory we adopt informs our worldview.

Finally, in the spirit of Plato, there is a boldness in trying to think of a good that surpasses and grounds its finite expressions, which I find invigorating and liberating. If dealing with cynical and hardened “realists,” reference to the highest good might elicit at best a blank stare, or perhaps eye-rolling. For many today, especially those who are not steeped in the history of philosophy or religion, talking about a “highest good” might sound antiquated, alien, and abstract. In public and private, we might wrestle daily with moral questions—questions of goodness, justice, rights, and so on—but seldom, if ever, utter or think about whether there is a single *highest* good. Indeed, even for those scholars, in whatever field, who do study it, it might seem to be merely of professional interest. It is just not a term that we regularly trade in the square of human discourse. It might not seem common or practical to ponder such things today.

But for precisely these reasons, the highest good calls out to be revisited. Indeed, I think it would be a collective loss if we never were able to ponder whether there is a superlative good, and if so, what it is and how it might connect with quotidian life. While for some scholars the ideal is often cast as a heuristic fiction or misguided approach to real life, Kant thought of ideals like the highest good in a unique sense. Many might assume that we dream up ideals and then apply them to the world. But a truer picture of Kant’s theory reveals a fascinating alternative. An ideal, on a Kantian model, is a universal and necessary condition of certain modes of contemplation. It grounds experience and contains it, rather than experience grounding and containing it. And part of the argument for the ideal’s reality (in a qualified sense, which will become clearer as the study progresses) arises from an unexpected place. For we notice this reality of the ideal not in a universally accepted, manifest goodness, but rather in a universally discernible dissatisfaction with the fundamental imperfection of the world, which seems to persist despite our efforts. We all (i.e., even cynics) appeal to such an ideal maximum in moments when we note how things are perpetually off to varying degrees. Ironically, it’s precisely then, when one invokes reality to speak against the ideal—for how could the highest good *ever* come about in such a terrible, rotten place as this—precisely then, in discerning how the world falls forever short, the ideal becomes evident. For relative to what standard is the world falling short? In its fundamental nature, the ideal simply goes unrecognized.

So ends my ode to the highest good. May my study bring its deeper qualities to light.

* * *

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Some of my ideas in this book appeared earlier in print. My paper, "How a Kantian Ideal Can Be Practical," in *Inquiry* (2022) is the foundation for my first two chapters, though I have modified and honed my position in important respects to be less sweeping. And some passages have been adapted from my paper, "Kant as a Carpenter of Reason: Systematic Coherence and the Highest Good," from the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (2024), as well as "The Conceptual Origin of Worldview in Kant and Fichte," from *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy* (2023). I thank these journals and their editors for allowing me to reuse some material from them. That said, I have revised and modified most of these in significant respects to fit the flow of the book.

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Introduction

The Highest Good in Contemplation

The highest good, or *summum bonum*, represents an essential, indeed ineliminable feature of Kant's philosophy. It is Kant's concept for the complete object of all moral striving. It is a perfect world, a realm in which universal virtue harmonizes with complete happiness. In short, it would be a state in which we all do our duty and flourish.

This idealized world is an essential feature of Kant's philosophy, because it and it alone—Kant thinks—can qualify as the only object toward which we can all strive when acting morally. And it is ineliminable, because every time we fulfill our duty, we face the philosophical puzzle of answering why the moral law is there in the first place. As rational beings who always want to know the “why” of things, Kant thought that the answer to this question cannot be that the moral law is just there for merely any particular action. Rather, the reason why the moral law is there in the first place must point beyond any such isolated moral moment. The moral law, after all, persists as long as we live. Hence, it must point to a grander project of which we become cofounders whenever we and other rational beings fulfill our duties. No conditioned, singular moment of moral triumph—as important as these are—could provide the full answer for why it is here.

Insofar as this ideal arises from the moral law and takes center stage in the practical application of reason in all three *Critiques*, the dominant question about the highest good has been: Why and how is it important for action? And: What role does it play in practical reasoning about what we ought to do? However, restricting the highest good's importance solely to the moral-practical dimension of life leads to many controversies and puzzles that I think obfuscate a deeper, transcendental function for the doctrine that evolves as Kant's system develops. Rather than for action, I argue that the highest good's central function should be read as related to contemplation—in a capacious sense of the term. By *contemplation*, I will mean certain forms of thinking and reflecting related to how we adjudge value in the world and how the various parts of experience can fit together coherently, resulting in

the construction of a worldview. My purpose is to articulate, motivate, and unpack this undertheorized, contemplative function of the highest good among other ideals. In the process, a new appreciation for the ideal and its reality in our lives arises.

This reading requires a fresh perspective on the highest good. For while some inquiries seek out the highest good's status in relation to its systematic importance,⁴ the major debates and assessments of the doctrine's place in Kant's theory have taken it up, first and foremost, from the perspective of its practical utility. That is, they are mostly concerned with how to justify the highest good's place within Kant's theory of action and practical reason. And this concern is central to proponents and detractors of the doctrine alike.

Many proponents of the highest good's importance seek ways of fitting it into the moral deliberative process of acting on the moral law when facing a particular scenario. Some interpreters, for instance, think the highest good is important and useful because it keeps us morally engaged or secures our moral motivation and commitment. John Silber, for example, while finding Kant's own arguments to be "completely unsatisfactory,"⁵ thinks that the highest good is important nonetheless because it keeps us striving. It "transcends our capacities"⁶ and, thus, pushes us to never stop, never rest. For Henry Allison, it is also important for the way that the highest good—as a moral *fata morgana*—elicits ever-renewed moral effort. We need it, that is, for pursuing morality rather than achieving it.⁷

A related family of views on the highest good's importance and function agrees that it serves some auxiliary capacity for bringing about a full moral life. Kristi Sweet notes, I think quite rightly, that one crucial aspect of the highest good is the way that it sets virtue in the world, bringing it to bear on aspects of one's lived everyday: "The highest good can be seen, then, to be the gathering point of practical life for human beings, insofar as it holds together the totality of ends that we must pursue in order to be good."⁸ And David Sussman sees a way that the highest good might enrich our moral

⁴ See, e.g., Düsing, "Das Problem," 155–194; Förster, "What Is the 'Highest Point,'" 257–71; Loudon, "The end of all human action," 112–28; Rossi, "The Final End of All Things," 132–64; Sweet, "Mapping the Critical System," 301–19; and Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's*, 323–41.

⁵ Silber, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," 474.

⁶ Silber, "Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," 479; see also Silber, "The Importance of the Highest Good," 179–97.

⁷ Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 172. Similar views, which naturally vary in detail, are, e.g., Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, 363–5; and Sussman, "The Highest Good," 220.

⁸ Sweet, *Kant on Practical Life*, 106.

perspective through the inclusion of others: “The highest good answers our need for a goal that allows us to conceive of our agency that reconciles the individual perspective with that of the collective, the ‘I’ with the ‘we.’”⁹ Barbara Herman also has argued that the highest good might be important along these lines: “It is about securing our confidence in our moral identity and finding a home for moral life in community with others.”¹⁰ And still others think that it is not primarily in how it connects us to others, but rather primarily in how it grounds important theological implications, which support our striving through establishing faith in a good outcome.¹¹ While each interpretive view is distinct, they harmonize with a general trend of seeing the highest good as offering moral-psychological support, namely, as fortifying our striving within a community or through hope that our efforts will not be in vain and, thereby, refocusing us on the moral task at hand.

For other supporters of the highest good, the importance is not in how it benefits our moral striving, but rather in the way it validates the rationality of moral action. If this validation were lacking, they maintain, then moral action would become irrational. That is, if I do not believe my end—the highest good—is possible, then I am irrational and “according to my own beliefs I *should* (in a logical, but not a moral sense of ‘should’) give up my pursuit of the highest good and my obedience to the moral law.”¹² If truly convinced that the highest good were an illusion, we might go about our lives as usual while becoming moral nihilists, feeling no pangs of remorse while prioritizing our own well-being at the expense of others. But this leads to a practically absurd consequence, for such a life appears, *prima facie*, absurd. Morality cannot be so easily abandoned.

This is what Allen Wood—in reference to a phrase in Kant’s lectures on religion from the early 1780s—calls the *reductio ad absurdum practicum* argument. But others, as well as Wood more recently, see the main point of the highest good as serving to provide the unconditioned totality for practical reason, without which there would be no (end) point to any of the conditioned moments of morality if lacking such a system.¹³ And if—supposing

⁹ Sussman, “The Highest Good,” 227.

¹⁰ Herman, “Religion and the Highest Good,” 229.

¹¹ E.g., Adams, “Moral Faith,” 75–95; Chignell, “Demoralization and Hope,” 46–60; Beiser, “Moral Faith,” 588–629; and Lawrence Pasternack, “Restoring Kant’s Conception,” 435–68.

¹² Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, 30.

¹³ Wood remains explicitly committed to it in later work, stating that he thinks his earlier interpretation “was largely right.” See Wood, *Kant and Religion*, 31n7. See also, e.g., Bader, “Kant’s Theory,” 210–12; Watkins, “The Antinomy of Practical Reason,” 149; and Willaschek, “Must We Believe,” 224–5.

the highest good is impossible—acting morally were ultimately good for nothing, then each conditioned moment of morality would, in turn, become pointless. There is nothing rational about bothering with impossible ends; hence, why bother acting morally at all? But we must act morally, and thus we must maintain a moral faith in the highest good and its conditions.

Meanwhile, for detractors of the highest good, it is also the practical relevance of the doctrine that draws their ire. This bugbear of Kantian ethics, they say, has been getting readers worked up since Kant's day, but ultimately does so for nothing. It is utterly unimportant. Lewis White Beck contends famously that Kant simply fails to substantiate the need for the highest good: "The truth of the matter is that the concept of the highest good is not a practical concept at all, but a dialectical Ideal of reason. It is not important in Kant's philosophy for any practical consequences it might have."¹⁴ It may perhaps be "psychologically necessary" or "important for the architectonic purpose of reason in uniting under one Idea the two legislations of reason,"¹⁵ but these do not—according to Beck—grant warrant for including it in Kant's system. The reason: it is practically redundant and adds nothing to moral life that the moral law cannot provide, expressed by the categorical imperative and its various formulations.

Thomas Auxter agrees with Beck's assessment and argues that it is harmful to moral striving since its connection to deserved happiness ultimately sneaks unwanted Greeks into Troy. After all, Kant's ethics is special because it submits that the moral worth of actions depends on a complete abstraction from consequences and necessitates that we find motivation exclusively in doing things for the right reasons. This self-determining quality of morality, that is, our autonomy, should not seek to combine with a concept that is heteronomous. Or as Auxter puts it: "This heteronomous conception of moral motivation would certainly undercut the freedom and special worth that Kant has attributed to the will."¹⁶ Bernard Williams could also be included in this chorus. For he thinks that Kantian ethics in general, including the unconditioned ideal of the highest good, ultimately rings hollow, since it ignores "an account of a fully developed life" and focuses instead on "certain structural or formal features of ethical relations."¹⁷ And Hegel would chime

¹⁴ Beck, *A Commentary*, 245. Murphy, "The Highest Good as Content," 107–10, agrees with Beck's main objections but adds further reasons for its unimportance, since Murphy thinks that realizing it would require special epistemic access about our characters that Kant says we cannot, in principle, possess and that it, further, does not seem to align with common experience.

¹⁵ Beck, *A Commentary*, 244.

¹⁶ Auxter, "The Unimportance of Kant's Highest Good," 130.

¹⁷ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 54.

in as well that such a concept is not merely a distraction, but leads to a “*whole nest of thoughtless contradictions*” that are more likely to confuse than help the moral agent.¹⁸ In short, for these Kantian friends and foes alike, the determinations of our willing ought to be cleared of any and all reference to the highest good as a formal ideal of reason.¹⁹

My study stands in neither of these camps because, contrary to its proponents, I think the highest good’s key importance is not in the way it helps us in action, but rather in how it helps us in contemplation. And I think that this is especially evidenced in Kant’s reflections about the place of the highest good in experience as he was writing the third and final *Critique*. Thus, I agree with the detractors in so far as I think that the highest good should ultimately be treated as irrelevant in practical deliberations and actions. And thus, I disagree with the proponents who seek to establish its importance for motivating us, securing our commitment, or validating the rationality of our behavior. Indeed, I argue that Kant’s considered view even mandates that we set the highest good aside completely when facing a particular moment of action—or at least does so when Kant is at his best. Nevertheless, I disagree with the detractors too in that I think that the highest good is far from otiose. Indeed, I think that it is hugely important for our lives and that it possesses a reality without which experience would lose coherence on a Kantian account. In this way, I agree with proponents about how Kant’s doctrine of the highest good contains deep truths. But this requires a new approach to understanding the reality of this ideal, an approach that this study provides.

But what then is the highest good actually good for in human experience?

To answer this question, I think that one must first answer a different, more basic conceptual question that is almost entirely overlooked or taken for granted, namely: What does it mean for a Kantian ideal to be practical in the first place? It is when one answers this question that one discovers that the reality of the ideal is of primarily epistemological and metaphysical importance. This answer provides a different starting point for an analysis of the highest good. And it is, I argue, true to both the letter and spirit of Kant’s works, while pioneering a new path of interpretation for the highest good’s

¹⁸ See, §617 in Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357.

¹⁹ Of course, for each of these objections, there have been replies. Replying in particular to Beck’s and Auxter’s charges that the inclusion of happiness is heteronomous, Engstrom, “The Concept of the Highest Good,” 759, notes that pursuit of happiness for self-loving reasons as morally conditioned need not subvert the unconditioned status of the moral law since it is the same rationality that must establish the good of happiness as does the good of moral actions. In short, only autonomously validated happiness can qualify as a good. See also Bader, “Kant’s Theory,” 185–6.

importance. The doctrine's significance lies in how it serves us as contemplative beings. And it contributes to flourishing as the sorts of beings we are. In the pithiest of summaries: while involved in our moral lives, the highest good's primary importance is in how it serves us in judging ourselves, the world, and how the whole of experience fits together coherently. Its real importance, in other words, is in how it grounds experiencing goodness as more than an empty fiction, as well as contemplating a philosophical worldview, or a systematic outlook, through the activity of philosophy.

But it is not only the missing of this conceptual angle that has obscured this function of the highest good and Kantian ideals in general. Indeed, Kant himself must carry his part of the blame. Take, for example, this statement by the preeminent Kant scholar Klaus Düsing in his seminal paper on the highest good: "Granting, however, that the highest good is accepted as a coherent content for the moral will leads to the alternatives that one can either take it as a fiction that can never be realized or as a real possibility that we should work to effect."²⁰ Düsing is pointing out that the key metaphysical question for the highest good turns on whether we view it as a useful fiction or as a real possibility. And depending on where one looks in the literature, Kant is interpreted as having endorsed both.

For instance, Hans Vaihinger, in his famous work, *The Philosophy of "As If,"* interprets Kant as meaning the former and claims that ideals are nothing but heuristic fictions. We know that they are false but utilize them anyway as noble falsehoods in navigating the world. Alas, there are—*pace* my own reading—some instances in lecture notes where Kant is reported as saying that, for example, "All ideals are fictions" (*V-Mo/Mron II* 29:605). And yet, as I will show, there are equally many statements (the preponderant majority in fact) in both published and unpublished works where he proclaims precisely the opposite, including in the first *Critique*.²¹ Kant's claim is that while ideals are not existing entities in a realm apart, they are a fixed feature of experienced reality, albeit in a special sense that is patently distinct from fictions (as I argue in the Conclusion). Meanwhile, Andrews Reath claims that Kant's

²⁰ Düsing, "Das Problem," 155 (my translation).

²¹ I think those instances where Kant waffles on whether to call an ideal a fiction or not derives from his own views of Plato, which were mediated through Brucker's reception, see Mollowitz, "Kants Platoauffassung," as well as his concerns of avoiding what he viewed as common pitfalls of rational dogmatism and mystical enthusiasm. If hypostatized, that is, the ideal *does* become a fiction for Kant, in the sense that such (particularly) neo-Platonic views claim to access an alien plane of *existing* entities. But if one avoids the existence claim, then the unique reality of the ideal can come into view, which says nothing of existence (i.e., in spacetime or some supernatural alternative thereof). Reality is not exhausted by that which exists.

theory confuses two conceptions of the highest good, one realizable in nature (a secular conception) and the other belonging solely to a future, heavenly world (a theological conception). And the former points not necessarily to a useful fiction but to a this-worldly task that we ought to treat as true and in the offing. Reath thinks Kant, while not himself getting “completely clear about, or have fully resolved, the ambiguities of his thought,”²² should have simply favored the secular conception.²³ Thus, we see Kant’s theory being pulled in two directions. Does he endorse ideals as useful fictions? Or are they actually coming about in the world once freed from their theological implications? Or is neither extreme correct?

What does this standoff indicate? Nothing short of mixed messaging, I think, from the very source. Indeed, one finds in Kant’s texts claims like the following from the first *Critique* in which he states that the ideal of the highest good as “a system of self-rewarding morality is only an idea” (*KrV* A810/B838). And: “Owing to our here leaving out of account all conditions (ends) and even all the special difficulties to which morality is exposed (weakness or depravity of human nature), this world is so far thought *as an intelligible world only*. To this extent, therefore, it is a mere idea” (*KrV* A808/B836, my emphasis). But fast forward to the second *Critique*, and suddenly the highest good cannot be an impossible, mere idea: “If, therefore, the highest good is impossible in accordance with practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore in itself be false” (*KpV* 5:114). And zoom ahead to the third *Critique*, and one discovers that because of the moral law: “we have a ground for assuming, from a practical point of view, that is, in order to apply our powers to realize it, its possibility, realizability [*Ausführbarkeit*], hence also a nature of things corresponding to that end” (*KU* 5:455). From these later remarks, we see that the highest good as a pure realm of reason is, indeed, made for this natural world and connected to our ends, while the initial position kept the highest good as an ideal totally separate from particular ends in the world, as a *mere* ideal. One might then agree with Reath here and consider Kant as confused.

But such a view is mistaken. Such a view could only work if Kant were treated one-dimensionally, as constituting a single mind that never changed

²² Reath, “Two Conceptions,” 607.

²³ Guyer, “Kant, Mendelssohn, and Immortality,” 168–78, has a similar view about the real possibility actually coming about through the immortality of the species, as opposed to the individual.

his point of view during the critical period. Of course, few scholars would go that far. But they also often too quickly assume a continuity in the doctrine of the highest good that I think Kant's development belies.²⁴ Thus, what is often lacking in explorations of the highest good is a historical reconstruction that accounts for its conceptual unity *as an evolving ideal* in Kant's thought. As Nietzsche remarked, "only that which has no history is definable."²⁵ And the highest good does have a history. It evolves through Kant's thought. Thus, to grasp the unity of the highest good, one must take up its whole development in a way that is not overly localized in one period or another.

This need, in a sense, exculpates all interpreters for inconsistencies between their interpretation and other passages from earlier or later phases of Kant's works. The divergence of views often arises from a choice of perspective on the period in Kant's thought that one takes to be *the* key phase. But just as it would be both true and false to define Charles Dickens's Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* as a "bad man," so too it is problematic or underdetermining of the highest good to define it as essentially fixed in a single work or set of works from a particular phase in his career. The truth of the highest good requires a tracing of its development. This does not reveal that the highest good represents multiple concepts. This too would make the mistake of locking in a stable definition, albeit simply doubling or tripling it. Instead, the highest good's unity reveals itself as a growing doctrine throughout the maturation of Kant's thought. And while grasping the highest good requires an appreciation of the process of its development in Kant's thinking, it is more or less fully matured by the third *Critique*, even while incorporating elements that were present in the very beginning of the critical enterprise.²⁶ Thus, in a way akin to the Hegelian dialectic, one must comprehend the highest good through its immanent conceptual development via

²⁴ E.g., Vatansever, "Kant's Coherent Theory," 264, believes that Kant's theory is "univocal," but spread across "two different domains," one related to the individual human being and the other the species.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 80.

²⁶ Many will think that the *Opus Postumum* is where one should look for the highest form. And while it is certainly the final form temporally, as the last work that Kant actively worked on, I believe that the view I develop here is consistent with his views there. Because of the tricky interpretation of the *Opus Postumum*, however, I leave the work of interpreting the highest good there as a future companion project to this one. I do not think that the highest good vanishes as a final end in the world. My view is that it continues there as a practical ideal in the sense detailed in this book and indeed continues to provide the grounds for a coherent philosophical worldview (as much support for my view is substantiated by passages from that work). Hence, I disagree with those who see it as removed or diminished by Kant in that work, for example, Adickes, *Kants Opus postumum*, 720; Guyer, "Review of Karl Ameriks and Otfried Höfe," 824; or—to some extent—Loudon, "The end of all human action," 124.

close historical-exegetical analysis. Its truth is not in any one of its partial moments of development, but rather in taking up the whole.

It is when one takes up these two angles together, the conceptual and the historical-exegetical, that fresh philosophical consequences of Kant's developed view come to light. For it is in the course of the historical analysis and thanks to the conceptual clarification that one discovers a Kantian view of the highest good as important in how we discern value in the world and take up the philosophical mission to construct a coherent worldview. And coherence, it turns out, is not merely a matter that Kant held to be important logically, but rather is existentially important. In Part I, *Practical Ideals*, I explore the conceptual angle of the ideal, after which I detail the historical-exegetical development in Part II, *The Evolution of a Practical Ideal*. I then explore the persisting, existential value of this ideal relative to constructing a worldview in Part III, *Ideals and the Construction of a Worldview*.

The result of this study is that the Kantian theory implies—if the moral law is truly unconditioned and if moral experience is a fact—that we ought to treat practical-moral ideals as possessing an objective reality, which is more than a mere fiction and stronger than an analogical model with an uncertain relation to lived experience. And while the whole study is a quest to establish the reality of the ideal,²⁷ it is particularly in the Conclusion, *The Reality of Kantian Ideals*, where I address how this is to be understood in juxtaposition to theories that take Kant to be arguing for fictionalism when it comes to ideals.

Admittedly, it is hard to nail down Kant textually. Kant's texts have a habit of bursting the molds of many an arduous interpreter. That said, this book makes the case that a strong, to my mind, dominant pattern emerges that supports seeing the ideal as possessing a reality that is much stronger than fictionalist readings would have. Take, for instance, this line from the first *Critique*:

Plato very well realized that our faculty of knowledge feels a much higher need than merely to spell out appearances according to a synthetic unity, in

²⁷ As an important note, I focus here almost exclusively on the practical domain of ideas and ideals. That said, I think that a similar case can be made for the reality of the ideals in theoretical matters. Spagnesi, "Regulative Idealization," 7, explores a Kantian implementation of idealizations in natural science and argues: "Idealizations are not to be conceived of as mere fictions or as hypotheses. Rather, they are necessary rules governing the (i) construction and (ii) assessment of scientific explanations." As I understand practical ideals, though, their role in experience is far more metaphysically and epistemically robust.

order to be able to read them as experience. He knew that our reason naturally exalts itself to modes of knowledge which so far transcend the bounds of experience that no given empirical object can ever coincide with them, but which must nonetheless be recognized as *having their own reality*, and which are by no means mere fictions of the brain. (KrV A314/B371, emphasis added)²⁸

And, from the third *Critique*, Kant continues to speak of the objective reality of the doctrine of ideas, in particular regarding the highest good:

In contrast [to objects of knowledge, “facts”], the highest final end that is to be realized by us, that through which alone we can become worthy of being ourselves the final end of a creation, is *an idea that has objective reality for us in a practical relation* [*praktische Beziehung*], *and is a thing* [*Sache*], but since we cannot provide objective reality for this concept from a theoretical point of view, a mere *Glaubenssache* of pure reason, together with God and immortality. (KU 5:469–70, emphasis added)

As these passages indicate, there is something about practical ideals—and I think this is particular to the practical ideals as determined through the moral law—that is objectively real in a completely unique sense of the term. Of course, it is not that we can find them as objectively real existents in experience. We cannot. And yet they are also universal possessions of reason without which we could not comprehend morality in the first place, both as it is in the world and as it might become manifest in the world. And because it is a universally shared feature, I will make the case that it supplies, as other a priori elements of experience, a “common ground, deeply buried in all human beings” (KU 5:232). If we can say that the categories of understanding are real in an ideal sense, then the same goes for ideals.

Two final notes are important, one exegetical and one philosophical. First, throughout my study, I draw on both Kant’s published works and lecture notes to exegetically establish my reading. Using the lecture notes, however, is controversial since Kant’s students wrote them as opposed to Kant himself. As a result, one must be cautious when referring to them since they do not bear Kant’s own imprimatur. While I draw on them extensively, I always

²⁸ I take it here that this is also not merely Kant nodding in the direction of precritical rationalists, but rather speaking of his own view.

do so in a way that I think is grounded in Kant's canonical, published works. The reason for using them is that they often contain deeper examinations of points that Kant sometimes leaves in an inchoate form in his publications or add lines of support for interpreting positions that receive scant mention in his publications. If done with care, I think drawing on them provides for a more nuanced philosophical account of Kant's thinking.

Second—and this is important—I think that Kant was a moral realist. By moral realist, I mean that morality is an objective feature of reality and that its value obtains independently of what we contingently will or take to be good. For instance, there are moral facts of the matter, such as the moral law itself, the unconditioned worth of a good will, and the absolute dignity of persons, which all stand as objectively valuable regardless of our contingent thoughts and actions as individuals.²⁹ The opposing view sees Kant's ethics as constructed or antirealist in that autonomy, and autonomy alone, should be the only value-conferring standard with which we operate. Otherwise, heteronomy (or heeding other sources of value) might result, which undermines freedom as the true source of morality in the world.³⁰ While I agree that autonomy remains, of course, the hallmark of morality for Kant, this does not entail that all value is determined by or limited to the contingent choices of us. In this study, I offer up evidence in favor of a realist framework for reading Kant and articulate a unique way of conceiving ideals within such a framework. My work should be seen, therefore, as an effort within the realist camp to further articulate how such a view can work well without sliding into a heteronomous sort of rational dogmatism or divine command theory, both of which Kant opposed.³¹ And while he was certainly *not* a rational dogmatist, I think he advances a subtle position. This subtle

²⁹ Those who have already made a good case for this are, e.g., Hills, "Kantian Value Realism," 186–9; Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 159–71; Langton, "Objective and Unconditioned Value," 180–5; Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation*, 26–40; Watkins and Fitzpatrick, "O'Neill and Korsgaard," 349–67; and Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 108.

³⁰ This antirealist reading is a dominant strain of interpretation thanks to, e.g., Rawls, *Lectures on the History*, 230; Korsgaard, *Creating a Kingdom of Ends*; O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*; and Rauscher, "Moral Realism," 155–68.

³¹ I think that Kant's relation to the so-called rational dogmatists, like Leibniz and Wolff, is complicated. Rather than disagreeing with their position entirely, I think Kant thought they were correct in their conclusion that morality is real and can be intuited, but thought their account of moral obligation inadequate. See the *Groundwork* (GMS, 4:443) for Kant's view that rational dogmatism is the superior of the two approaches since it at least rightly sends morality to the "court of reason" and is superior to "theological" ethical systems. Its problem, so Kant says there, is not in its stance relative to morality, but rather in its "empty" and "indeterminate" contents that appear justified by reasoning in a "circle." For a masterful account of why Kant was a moral realist, see Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation*, 26–40.

position posits certain rational ideals as universal substrates of reason, or objective maximums of perfection, which must be presupposed to account for certain contemplative experiences. And even though he thinks these ideals must all be in line with the categorical imperative, I will contend that he thought they nonetheless functioned in unique and independent ways beyond it. For realist interpretations, it is my hope that this book opens up a new way of interpreting how ideals might play out in Kantian theory. For any view that takes itself as nonrealist or constructivist, all I can say is that this might not be the book for you.

To summarize, this book will make the case for seeing the highest good as a Kantian ideal, which serves a compelling contemplative function for human experience within the ambit of Kant's transcendental idealism. And I think that historical analysis provides an important check against errant assumptions and interpretive misunderstandings that might generate puzzles where there are, actually, none or none that ought to be of great concern. With luck, that is enough to pique the interest of readers, both Kantian and non-Kantian alike. Here, the introduction ends, and the real work begins.

Abbreviations

With the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, all other references are to the *Akademie Ausgabe* (AA) of Kant's collected works in 29 volumes by the *Königlich-Preußische* and later *Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1902–). I use the standard German abbreviations for Kant's titles within the brackets, listed below. The first number after the title abbreviation refers to the volume and the number(s) after the colon to the AA pagination. As is standard, I refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* by the A/B pagination. Unless otherwise noted, all translations refer to the Cambridge editions of his works. When necessary, I offer my own translations when there are no standard English translations or those available call for modification.

<i>Anth</i>	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i> (AA 07)
<i>Br</i>	<i>Correspondence</i> (AA 10–13)
<i>EEKU</i>	<i>First Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> (AA 20)
<i>FM</i>	<i>What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?</i> (AA 20)
<i>GMS</i>	<i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (AA 04)
<i>IaG</i>	<i>Idea of a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent</i> (AA 08)
<i>KpV</i>	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (AA 05)
<i>KrV</i>	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (cited according to original A/B pagination)
<i>KU</i>	<i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> (AA 05)
<i>Log</i>	<i>Jäsche Logic</i> (AA 09)
<i>MAM</i>	<i>Conjectural Beginning of Human History</i> (AA 08)
<i>MS</i>	<i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> (AA 06)
<i>OP</i>	<i>Opus postumum</i> (AA 20, 21)
<i>Päd</i>	<i>Lectures on Pedagogy</i> (AA 09)
<i>Prol</i>	<i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> (AA 04)
<i>Refl</i>	<i>Reflections</i> (AA 14–9)
<i>RezHerder</i>	<i>Review of J.G. Herder's "Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History"</i> (AA 08)
<i>RGV</i>	<i>Religion with the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i> (AA 06)
<i>SF</i>	<i>Conflict of the Faculties</i> (AA 07)
<i>TP</i>	<i>On the Common Saying: That Might Be Right in Theory, But it Doesn't Work in Practice</i> (AA 08)
<i>ÜE</i>	<i>On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one</i> (AA 08)

ÜGTP	<i>On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy</i> (AA 08)
V-Anth/Busolt	<i>Lectures on Anthropology</i> , Winter Semester 1788/89 Busolt (AA 25)
V-Anth/Mrong	<i>Lectures on Anthropology</i> , Winter Semester 1784/85 Mrongovius (AA 25)
V-Lo/Dohna	<i>Dohna-Wundlacken Logic</i> , Summer Semester 1792 (AA 24)
V-Lo/Wiener	<i>Vienna Logic</i> (1780–?) (AA 24)
V-Met-L2/Pölit	<i>Metaphysics L2</i> , Pölit, Original (1790/91?) (AA 28)
V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt	<i>Metaphysics K3 (Ergänzungen)</i> , Winter Semester (1794/95) Arnoldt (AA 29)
V-Met/Mron	<i>Metaphysics Mrongovius</i> , Winter Semester (1782/83) (AA 29)
V-Mo/Collins	<i>Lectures on Ethics (Collins)</i> , Winter Semester (1784/85) (AA 12)
V-Mo/Mron II	<i>Lectures on Ethics</i> , Winter Semester (1784/85) Mrongovius II (AA 29)
V-MS/Vigil	<i>Metaphysics of Morals Lectures</i> , Winter Semester (1793/94) Vigilantius (AA 27)
V-Phil-Th/Pölit	<i>Lectures on Religion (Pölit)</i> , Winter Semester (1783/84) (AA 28)
VT	<i>On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy</i> (AA 08)
WDO	<i>What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?</i> (AA 08)
WA	<i>Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?</i> (AA 08)
ZeF	<i>Towards Perpetual Peace</i> (AA 08)

PART I

PRACTICAL IDEALS

Ideas Versus Ideals

In Kant's philosophy, not all concepts are created equal. They differ greatly in how they relate to experience. Certain concepts follow from experience (as contingent and *a posteriori*). They are learnable as those created to mark things in the world, for example, the concepts "grizzly bear" or "quark." Others, Kant thought, precede or are independent of experience (as necessary and *a priori*). These, Kant argued, must belong innately to our minds since, without them, we could not make sense of the necessity, regularity, and universality of certain experiences. Kant's critical works are attempts, among other things, to identify, justify, and specify the use of this latter kind of concept, examples of which are "cause" and "purposiveness." And even among these innate concepts, there are many important differences and nuances.¹ Because much hinges on the kind of concept in play for Kant, a crucial question in understanding the highest good is: What sort of concept is it?

This question, while simple to pose, is not easy to answer. At times, Kant refers to the highest good as an "idea" and at others as an "ideal," which are discrete technical terms. But which is it: an idea or an ideal? This goes beyond semantics. It concerns the very fit between certain experiences and the experiencer, enabled by the concept in question. Kant is clear that idea and ideal, respectively—even while both arising from reason (and, hence, *a priori*)—serve unique functions. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87), Kant writes: "Thus just as the idea gives the **rule**, so the ideal in such a case serves as the **archetype** [*zum Urbilde*] for the thoroughgoing determination

¹ For Kant, cognition has two key elements, namely concepts and intuitions. "Intuitions" are singular and immediate representations, or—for our human understanding—raw content received passively by the senses. This is a technical term, not to be confused with the sense of the term in "my intuition tells me something is amiss." Once we sense something, the raw data receive firm shape by an active cognitive faculty (the "understanding") via concepts. A "concept" in general is a universal form of thinking, enabling the raw data of experience to obtain an objective, interpersonally agreed-upon form. For actual experience to occur, Kant thought we must have both an intuition and a concept combined in a fitting manner. Certain concepts enable us to perceive and represent actuality as it is experienced in the first place (categories), others are derived from experience and learned through linguistic transmission (empirical concepts), and more—the subject of this study—are of totalities and range over all experiences in a way that never adequately fits any sensible intuition (ideas and ideals).

of the copy” (KrV A569/B597).² Many questions arise at this point. What does it mean for an idea to be a rule? How are we to understand an ideal qua archetype? And how are the two connected?

Moreover, one must consider that Kant distinguishes between ideas and ideals in terms of whether they are theoretical or practical. While Kant explicates the nature of theoretical ideas (e.g., the concept of “unconditioned” or “soul”) as well as the theoretical ideal of the *ens realissimum*, or “God” thoroughly in the first *Critique*, he brackets extended discussion of practical ones for systematic reasons.³ Nevertheless, in the same sections in which he introduces the notion of an “idea” and “ideal” in general, Kant provides discussion of practical ideas (*praktische Ideen*) and practical ideals (*praktische Ideale*) as technical terms. He states, in fact, unequivocally that reason must be thought of as possessing practical ideas and ideals, claiming that they “have **practical** power (as regulative principles) grounding the possibility of the perfection of certain **actions**” (KrV A569/B597). Alas, at this point where he is the most explicit, he is all too brief. While this brevity is unfortunate, I think he offers enough material—supplemented by other texts and lecture notes—to reconstruct their respective functions in a coherent and Kantian enough fashion to deserve the title. It is the purpose of Part I to deliver this conceptual reconstruction of practical ideas and ideals and explain how the highest good is best understood as the latter. In this chapter, I first clarify what the differences are between an idea and an ideal, respectively, so as to avoid the risk of blurring them together into a fuzzy, fused concept. As I think the highest good is clearly an “ideal,” when distinguished properly, I focus mostly on practical ideals.

Outside of the exegetical hurdles, deciphering how these terms function in the moral-practical⁴ sphere presents a challenging philosophical puzzle. Albeit complex, Kant’s moral theory ultimately seeks to streamline and declutter our moral psychology in order to justify a direct line between the moral law and action (including all that entails). As a result, in the secondary literature, the idea-ideal distinction, while acknowledged, is most

² Translation altered to replace Guyer and Wood’s “original image” with “archetype.”

³ The systematic reasons are that he does not think in 1781 that morality can undergo a critique, which means that all discussion of practical reason “does not belong in transcendental philosophy” (KrV A15/B29; see also A329/B386).

⁴ There is a distinction between moral rules and prudential rules, the former categorical in nature, the latter hypothetical and ends-directed. When it comes to ideas and ideals, although I refer to their “practical” nature, I will be focusing exclusively on their *moral-practical* employment. Indeed, ideals are prior to all contingent ends, hence, I do not think there could be technical-practical ideals.

often treated as nugatory. A practical ideal, for example, is referred to as a “model to guide moral action”⁵ or a standard that “governs practice”⁶ or an empty “framework [to leave] room for creativeness (. . .) of human will,”⁷ without exploring what any of this means in detail since it is viewed often as a repackaging of the moral law. Sometimes, it is also treated as subjectively variable (in contrast to the moral law) in that it is treated as a product of one’s imagination, thereby differing from another person’s ideal.⁸ In short, it is easy to take for granted a meaning and spring ahead of analyzing what it would mean, say, for an ideal to be practical.⁹ The philosophically hard work shows how it can fit into his moral theory well without adding unnecessary redundancies or conflicting with basic tenets.

Finally, it requires mentioning that, beyond the philosophical puzzle and the paucity of passages to work from, further layers of confusion arise because of Kant’s own frequent inconsistencies in how he employs the terms “ideas” or “ideals” in practical contexts. And this, despite reiterating in many works from different times in his critical period that there *is* a distinction. Sometimes it seems as if practical ideals truly do have unique domains and functions¹⁰ and at others Kant uses them interchangeably as if they were synonymous.¹¹ If the terms were equivalent, then we need not dig deeper. However, Kant clearly differentiates the two as technical terms with independent meaning in the first *Critique*, the third *Critique*, and elsewhere throughout his works.¹² Perhaps this sloppiness is the most serious demerit that leads many interpreters to see the relation between practical ideas and ideals as requiring no detailed philosophical examination. A simpler path

⁵ Silber, “Kant’s Conception of the Highest Good,” 478. Or as he says elsewhere: an ideal is “necessary in order to give concrete direction to moral volition” (Silber, “The Importance of the Highest Good,” 195).

⁶ Auxter, “The Unimportance of the Highest Good” 122. He also refers to it in the same paper as that which “regulates conduct” and as a “guide” (128).

⁷ Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, 187.

⁸ For example, Timmermann, *Kant’s Will at the Crossroads*, 16.

⁹ Exceptions are Cureton and Hill, “Kant on Virtue;” Dean, “Humanity as an Idea;” Englert, “How a Kantian Ideal;” and Wike and Showler, “Kant’s Conception of the Highest Good.” On the theoretical side, there has been significant work on ideas and the transcendental ideal as regulative, prescriptive rules, see, e.g., Bennett, *Kant’s Dialectic*; Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*; Kraus, *Kant on Self-Knowledge and Self-Formation*; Massimi, “What Is This Thing Called ‘scientific knowledge;’” Spagnesi, “Regulative Idealization;” Walden, “Reason Unbound;” and Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources*.

¹⁰ See, e.g., A569/B597; KU 5:232; and RGV 6:60.

¹¹ See, e.g., KpV 5:32, 127n; RGV 6:60; and V-MS/Vigil 27:610.

¹² See, e.g., KU 5:232; also in RGV for where he refers to the “ideal of moral perfection” as the “personified idea” (RGV 6:60–1); SF 7:91; OP 21:81: “Transcendental *ideas* are different from ideals;” V-Mo/Mron II 29:605; and V-Met-L2/Pölitiz 28:555.

to exegesis, that is, might collapse the distinction entirely. However, even if one were to ditch the terminology and settle, say, on just “idea”: the puzzle, I think, would remain as to why Kant distinguishes the terms and identifies with each unique functions that persist over the course of his career.

These are just a few reasons why a specific account of *what* ideas and ideals are and *how* they respectively manifest in the practical domain is either skipped over or presupposed. Ideals—for some—might not be a part of Kant’s theory worth salvaging due to his haphazard execution. Or ideals might appear at odds with other central tenets of Kant’s theory, and thus viewed as unfortunate dangles. Such a position, however, is unfortunate since a cogent account of the ideal in practical terms is lost as a result. And this account, I will argue in subsequent chapters, has philosophical advantages and heretofore unappreciated functions in certain moments of contemplation.

1.1. Ideas as Practical Rules

To understand the difference between a practical idea and ideal, I will analyze both in turn. But it is helpful to identify first how they are similar, as that might be to blame for their frequent conflation (indeed, even by Kant himself).

Both are pure concepts that arise from our highest mental faculty, namely, reason (*Vernunft*). And they both, in this respect, go “beyond the possibility of experience” (A320/B377). Because of this independence from the sensible world, he chose the terms “idea” (*Idee*) and “ideal” (*Ideal*) based on Plato’s choice of the term “*ἰδέα*” for his pure forms. At the beginning of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, when introducing ideas in general, Kant notes:

Plato made use of the expression *idea* in such a way that we can easily see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it. Ideas for him are archetypes of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences. In his opinion they flowed from the highest reason, through which human reason partakes in them; our reason, however, now no longer finds itself in its original state, but must call back with toil the

old, now very obscure ideas through a recollection (which is called philosophy). (*KrV* A313/B370)

Kant, then, refers to Plato as the “sublime philosopher” and strikingly asserts:

I note only that when we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him even better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention. (*KrV* A314/B370)

Kant finishes by asserting that he understands Plato’s thinking in precisely such a way. And what Kant thinks correct in Plato’s theory—albeit insufficiently developed—is, first, that “our power of cognition feels a far higher need than that of merely spelling out appearances according to synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience” (*KrV* A314/B370–1). Second, that “our reason naturally exalts itself to cognitions that go much too far for any object that experience can give ever to be congruent” (*KrV* A314/B371). And, finally, that they “nonetheless have their reality and are by no means merely figments of the brain” (*KrV* A314/B371). Out of these true insights, Kant thinks there is a need to identify concepts of pure reason that extend past what any particular experience has to offer, but which play a role in organizing how various particular experiences form a unified totality of experience.

With humility, I will seek to know Kant better than he knew himself. Ironically, this is necessary in relation to the exact same topic that elicited the comment from Kant vis-à-vis Plato in the first place.¹³ For when we examine the idea-ideal distinction, Kant’s own messy discussion and sloppiness require reverent corrections to revive his original intention of distinguishing the terms, one as a rule and the other as an archetype. To begin, I analyze how an idea, as a concept of reason, can serve as a rule.

¹³ As Mollowitz, “Kants Platoauffassung,” 22, shows, this line by Kant, namely, of understanding Plato better than he knew himself arises from a work by Jakob Brucker, *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (1742), in which Brucker writes that Plato, “does not seem to see clearly enough, what he actually wanted to say” (my translation). Much (if not all) of Kant’s reception of Plato, Mollowitz goes on to demonstrate, is intermixed with Brucker’s views on Plato’s thought.

It would be wonderful if one could immediately find Kant, in the first *Critique*, clarifying these in a consistent manner. Obstacles arise, however, which block an easy ascent. One obstacle is that Kant's initial stance in the first *Critique* excludes a thorough discussion of practical reason: "In accordance with our plan we leave aside practical ideas, and consider reason only in its speculative, or rather, [...] only in its transcendental employment" (*KrV* A329/B386).¹⁴ At this crucial origin of his conceptual distinction in the critical period, we are left alone to decipher how ideas and ideals can be practical based on his limited comments. Another issue is one of consistency. In the section detailing ideas in general, Kant refers to many practical ones that he approvingly discusses as real ideas of reason. The problem, however, is that in his discussion, which is intermixed with references to Plato, he seems to play with two separate meanings of how ideas function, one of which sounds very rule-like and parallels theoretical ideas as rules, and another that fits better with his later discussion of what makes a practical *ideal* an archetype. Hence, one must proceed with interpretive caution.

Since we are offered so little in the way of direct definitions of practical ideas, it is perhaps best to search for clues about the function of ideas as rules in theoretical cases. In theoretical employment, Kant claims that ideas give structure to experience, help provide an architectonic for natural scientific exploration, and arise as beneficial *foci imaginarii* once the antinomial conflicts of reason have been resolved. A Kantian idea as a rule—in contrast to concepts of the *understanding* (i.e., the categories as worked out in the transcendental logic)—does not aid us, therefore, in the immediate cognizing of possible objects in experience. This is unsurprising, given that Kant takes ideas to be "still more remote from objective reality than categories" (*KrVA* 567/B595). They exceed the limits of experience in giving it form and "contain a certain completeness that no possible empirical cognition ever achieves" (*KrV* A568/B596). The completeness is "a systematic unity, to which [reason] seeks to approximate the unity that is empirically possible, without ever reaching it" (*KrV* A568/B596).¹⁵ Rather than constitute what is given in experience through judgments, they *regulate* the overall

¹⁴ I use the Norman Kemp Smith translation for this passage, which translates the line more precisely than the Guyer/Wood translation, due to their adding words to make it sound like it is only the "current" aim that requires this bracketing. In the original German, there is no such explicit reference.

¹⁵ Norman Kemp Smith translation, for the elegant clarity of this line.

unity of experience. They stand in for wholes that we must think, but which sensible experience never fully provides in examples.

But what, in precise terms, is the rule that an idea expresses to serve in this experience-unifying function? Kant clearly identifies the rule at the beginning of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, which is referred to—in keeping with a *rule*—as a “logical maxim,” namely: “when the conditioned is given then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which itself is unconditioned, also given” (*KrV* A307–8/B364). Or as he phrases it in the same portion of text: “the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed” (*KrV* A307/B364). Theoretical ideas, then, as rules function in investigations of nature by marking each experience, as it were, with signposts pointing beyond it, signaling that there is more to discover since it is part of something greater. They prescribe “a regress in the series of conditions for given appearances, in which regress it is never allowed to stop with an absolutely unconditioned” (*KrV* A509/B537). The theoretical rule prescribes that we never forget to treat the parts as parts and gives us indirectly the notion of the whole in which they fit. Let us take how ideas function in theoretical employment as our backdrop now for working through what could make them practical.

How does this regulative utility of ideas relate to practical-moral matters? We would expect, in analogy to the theoretical use of ideas, that practical reason, instead of cognitions, would guide the formation of volitions. And while not seeking to *know* an unconditioned through the conditioned, we would expect a different approximation. According to practical ideas, we would seek to *will* an unconditioned through conditioned moments that it contains.¹⁶

Here is where Kant is frustratingly sloppy when it comes to describing how an idea of reason can be practical. In a manner that blurs the distinction between ideas and ideals, respectively, Kant sometimes treats practical “ideas” as regulative in that they are action-guiding via prescriptive rules, which cause us to seek an unconditioned pattern of behavior. At other times, however, he treats them as pertaining to how we judge states of affairs, which bespeaks his later discussions of ideals as standards of evaluation. I will refer to the regulative, action-guiding sense as *Meaning One*, which fits well with the rule function that he explicitly claims for ideas. Then, I will refer to the

¹⁶ See, e.g., *KpV* 5:107.

second sort of function in judging as *Meaning Two*, in which a rule function is obscure.¹⁷ Since the former works better as a rule and the latter sounds very much like an ideal according to Kant's definition, the simplest solution is to disambiguate the two, which I will suggest after analyzing what Kant says when first describing practical ideas in the first *Critique*.

Meaning One: Though Kant at the time of the first *Critique* did not have a fully worked out theory of morality as part of his critical system, he makes clear in the chapter on *The Ideas in General* of the *Dialectic* that "it is most reprehensible to derive the laws concerning what I **ought to do** from what **is done**, or to want to limit it to that" (*KrV* A319/B375). Our morality cannot be organized by nature, but must find organization through its own ideas, through its own unconditioned rules. Further, these practical ideas should bear an immediate influence on our actions and relate our conditioned moments of volition to an unconditioned maxim that we should seek to achieve:

Accordingly, the practical idea is always fruitful in the highest degree and unavoidably necessary in respect of actual actions. In it practical reason even has the causality actually to bring forth what its concept contains; and hence of such wisdom we cannot likewise say disparagingly: **It is only an idea**; rather just because it is the idea of a necessary unity of all possible ends, it must serve as a rule, the original and at least limiting condition, for everything practical. (*KrV* A328/B385)

They guide us to bring about what the idea contains whenever we set ends for action. Or consider when Kant writes in reference to the "idea of virtue": "That no human being will ever *act adequately* to what the pure idea of virtue contains does not prove in the least that there is something chimerical in this thought" (*KrV* A315/B372, my emphasis). In these cases, the rule guides us to seek an unconditioned form for our conditioned actions that they will never fully attain.

Further, Kant refers to practical ideas as guiding action such as to achieve universality and find consistency between different wills. For instance, Kant

¹⁷ Kant is not clear as to the number and nature of practical ideas. Indeed, Kant refers to many practical ideas throughout the first *Critique*, such as the "idea of virtue," the "idea of humanity" (*KrV* A318/B374), "human wisdom" (*KrV* A569/B597), the "moral law, which is a mere idea" (*KrV* A812/B840), the idea of a "perfect [legal] constitution" (*KrV* A316/B373), and the "idea of a moral world" (or the "highest good") (*KrV* A808/B836), many of which I think should ultimately be called "ideals."

notes that one practical idea, which we can adopt from Plato's *Republic* as indeed "a necessary idea" (to establish a just constitution), is that of "*greatest human freedom* according to laws that permit *the freedom of each to exist together with that of others* (not one providing for the greatest happiness, since that would follow of itself)" (*KrVA*316/B373). Thus, there is a sense in which the unconditioned status of the practical idea qua rule is one that also enables it to serve as a common ground for uniting many conditioned wills.

Notwithstanding the sloppiness and some blurring with another function (Meaning Two), which I will turn to next, it is all but impossible not to connect his discussion of a practical idea qua rule with the categorical imperative as an expression of the moral law. Indeed, herein we see the ingredients that will become essential for articulating the categorical imperative four years later in the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785): namely, universalizability and consistency. The categorical imperative is a rule that guides us to seek perfect virtue in our actions and character.¹⁸ And Kant himself refers to the categorical imperative and moral law many times as an "idea."¹⁹ In the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant describes the categorical imperative as "a practical rule" (*MS* 6:222), that is "contingently" internal to our wills, since we are free to obey or disobey it. Moreover, because in his mature thought, Kant treats the categorical imperative (and its various formulations) as the *only* unconditioned moral rule for action, it would seem the closest both to the letter and spirit of his texts to view the categorical imperative as *the* quintessential practical idea qua rule.²⁰ I suggest, therefore, that we retroactively establish that the categorical imperative and its formulations are the only practical idea, the only rule of practical reason in moral matters.²¹

¹⁸ For specifying the application of the categorical imperative, we might need to appeal of course to its further specification in the formula of humanity, as well as think of it conditioning certain moments of action often associated with other virtues (see also note 21 below). Spelling this out, however, goes beyond the scope of this book.

¹⁹ In the first *Critique*, Kant refers to the "moral law, which is a mere idea" (*KrV* A812/B840); in the *Groundwork*, he writes of the categorical imperative as "the idea of reason" that we would follow if purely rational (*GMS* 4:420n); in the second *Critique*, the categorical imperative is a "practical rule," which "accordingly here is a law" (*KpV* 5:31), as well as his earlier discussion: "A practical rule is always a product of reason because it prescribes action as a mean to an effect, which is its purpose" (*KpV* 5:20), as well as from the *Mrongovius II* lectures on ethics: "All **practical** rules consist of an **imperative**, which says what I should do" (*V-Mo/Mron II* 29:605, my translation).

²⁰ For an example of where he refers the categorical imperative as a practical rule in different applications, see, e.g., the *On the Common Saying* essay, where the idea of right plays a role in determining other ideas of justice, such as the "idea of equality" (*TP* 8:292), and the "idea of the original contract" (*TP* 8:302).

²¹ Of course, one might speak of the "idea of courage," but such a rule need not mean that we have further moral-practical ideas beyond the categorical imperative. For all virtues (e.g., courage,

Meaning Two: In the midst of articulating practical ideas as rules, which prescribe and guide action, Kant also refers to them in a capacity that is less obviously so. In the same vicinity as the passages above, Kant refers to ideas as serving a function that enables the possibility of certain kinds of moral knowledge and descriptions of value in the world. Akin to how Kant refers to ideals as archetypes or *Urbilder*, Kant calls, for example, the “idea of virtue” a “model” whose “true original” we carry “in our own mind alone,” and “in regard to which all possible objects of experience do service as examples” (*KrV* A315/B372). He goes on to explain that: “For it is only by means of this idea that any *judgment* as to moral worth or unworth is possible; and so it necessarily lies at the *ground* of every approach to moral perfection” (*KrV* A315/B372, my emphases). Here, an “idea” helps us judge. In contrast to Meaning One, a practical idea in this sense is *indirectly practical* in that it plays an epistemic role by revealing moral states of affairs without commanding action. In the next section, I will spell out this function more clearly. Important to note is that as an original or standard of comparison, no rule is evident, no extra command. And this sounds similar to the function that he singles out in the definition of ideals as serving as archetypes important “for the thoroughgoing determination of the copy” (*KrV* A569/B597). Precisely here, I think we must correct Kant’s word choice and direct him toward his own terminological distinction; namely, we must say that he is actually speaking here of ideals, not ideas.²² That is, even after defining the terms explicitly in the same text, he inconsistently refers to an ideal—an archetypal pattern by which we can cognize and assess copies through comparison—as an “idea,” a term which should instead be applied only to cases in which a rule is at play.

To make the parallel clear between a practical and theoretical idea as a rule, we can summarize as follows: Just as the theoretical idea of systematic unity (i.e., of seeking the unconditioned through the conditioned) brings us to *search*

generosity, wit)—as I read Kant—can only count as *virtuous* if morally conditioned. Thus, it seems cogent in Kantian ethics to speak of one moral-practical idea, with many employments in various situations in which the expression of virtue might differ. The nature of the situations and the actions required to fit them will naturally require modifications and further notions that after the fact one might call “virtues.” But these need not, in themselves, be considered ideas in the unconditioned regulative sense that Kant puts forth in the first *Critique*.

²² Occasionally, while referring to ideas that serve as examples in this epistemic sense, Kant refers to them as “archetypes.” I think Kant slips in this context because he is excavating the term “idea” from Plato, who, Kant asserts, took ideas to be the “archetypes of things themselves” (*KrV* A313/B370). For discussion of this portion and Kant’s employment of a Platonic *Urbild*, see Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 34–6, as well as White, “Kant on Plato,” 67–9, and especially Mollowitz, “Kants Platoauffassung,” 46–50, for the ways this reading is due to Brucker’s reception of Plato.

for what the idea contains beyond one conditioned moment, so too a practical idea as the categorical imperative influences us to *bring about* what this idea contains by forming a maxim to fit a universal standard. We approximate theoretical ideas in our investigations of nature; we approximate the practical idea of the moral law whenever setting maxims to act in morally apt moments. In both attempts, we can be sure that our approach is asymptotic. Theoretically and practically, ideas never lose their force. They persist no matter what we have found in nature and no matter how virtuously we think ourselves to be. While Kant is not perfectly consistent with his employment of “practical idea,” the interpretation that presents the most consistent picture is to treat practical ideas (qua rules) as all referring to but one idea: the moral law, as representable through the categorical imperative and its various formulations. It is regulative in that it presents the agent with an unconditioned and direct rule of conduct that we should follow but can simultaneously refuse, and which drives us ever onward when facing particular moments of action.

1.2. Ideals as Practical Substrates

I will now analyze practical ideals. As I did in Section 1.1 and since one has little to work with when it comes to explicit detailing of practical ideals, I place the investigation against the backdrop of the concept of a theoretical ideal. Then, I turn to Kant’s examples in the first *Critique* of practical ideals to mine for relevant elements.

The general form of ideals is as follows: Determined by “ideas,” Kant employs the term “ideal” to refer to one or more ideas conceived as a completely determined individual: “*Idea* properly means a rational concept, and *ideal* the presentation of an individual being as adequate to an idea” (*KU* 5:232). An ideal is not simply a rough approximation given *in concreto*,²³ but rather the formal, systematic whole conceived “*in individuo*” (*KrV* A568/B596), and which we all ought to be able to think of in virtue of us all basing it off the same idea, practically speaking: the moral law. The ideal is “an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone” (*KrV* A568/B596). An ideal for us, Kant states, “was to Plato an **idea in the divine understanding**, an individual object in that understanding’s

²³ For example, if one were to encounter the Good Samaritan, it would be an example of virtue “given *in concreto*, though only in part” (*KrV* A328/B385).

pure intuition, the most perfect thing of each species of possible beings and the *original ground* of all its copies in appearance” (*KrV* A568/B596, my italics). This outermost conceptual reach “seems to be even further removed from objective reality than the idea” (*KrV* A568/B596). Why? They designate the *objects* of ideas at their highest degree of completion or “perfection” [*Vollkommenheit*] (*KrV* A568/B596). And, thus, an ideal is an individuated object based on an idea of reason, shared by rational beings, but which—while partially exemplifiable—never finds a corresponding object in sensible experience.

This general form of ideals, though, is odd. For how we can represent such an entity of thought as perfect presents many puzzles. How could something that we never see or perceive be determined completely in the first place? And must it be perfect? Or would simply a superior standard to anything that we could ever achieve suffice? These are deep questions, which I will return to in the next section.

Because Kant brackets the practical form of ideals, it is helpful to set it against the backdrop of what he says about the theoretical ideal, which he also refers to as an “archetype” or *Urbild* (*KrV* A578/B606). In the theoretical sphere, Kant claims there is but one ideal: namely, the “*ens realissimum*” (*KrV* A576/B604) or “God” (*KrV* A580/B608), a “transcendental substratum, which contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken” (*KrV* A575/B603). Based on the theoretical idea (as a rule), it represents the unconditioned totality as an individual, which the rule instructs us to pursue. And Kant insists that the ideal is necessary for us. Without some unconditioned reality posited that underlies all conditioned elements (a presupposed reservoir of being), Kant thinks we would lose the systematic grasp of experience as a whole. The transcendental ideal not only offers an unconditioned foundation, which he refers to as a transcendental substrate and “*ground*” (*KrV* A579/B607) for our knowledge, but it also acts as a model for the concept of wholes as such.²⁴ As I transition to his limited discussion of practical ideals, I would like to highlight the *theoretical* ideal’s function as an unconditioned and intelligible substrate, which we presuppose for the possibility of systematic and thoroughgoing predication of reality in the first place.

²⁴ See *KrV* A576/B604: “It is, however, also the one single genuine ideal of which human reason is capable, because only in this one single case is an—in itself universal—concept of one thing thoroughly determined through itself, and cognized as the representation of an individual.”

When it comes to the *practical* employment of reason, he maintains that there are many practical ideals: “Without venturing to climb as high as that [i.e., as Plato], however, we have to admit that human reason contains not only ideas but also ideals [*Ideale*], which do not, to be sure, have creative power like the **Platonic** idea, but still have **practical** power” (*KrV* A569/B597). What is a practical ideal for Kant as of the first *Critique*? Kant offers two examples: The first is humanity in its entire perfection, and the second is the perfect will of Stoic philosophy, which acts in complete conformity with the moral law. What becomes clear from both is that a practical ideal’s central function is in enabling us to estimate and measure the degrees of imperfection between the copy (ectype) and original (archetype).

In the second example, Kant offers the most that we receive in terms of an explicit definition of an ideal in its practical sense. He refers to the ideal as the “divine man within us” or, as Kant refers to it, the “sage (of the Stoics)” (*KrV* A569/B597).²⁵ It is an ideal in so far as it is “a human being who exists merely in thoughts, but who is fully congruent with the idea of wisdom” (*KrV* A569/B597). The idea of wisdom is shorthand for the moral law, which is here thought of as individuated into a single subject, one individual to whom we can predicate no selfish or weak moment. The key lines come, though, in explaining why the ideal serves an important function:

[W]e have in us no other standard for our actions than the conduct of this divine human being, with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard. (*KrV* A569/B597)

And:

[Practical ideals] provide an indispensable standard for reason, which needs the concept of that which is entirely complete in its kind, in order to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete. (*KrV* A569–70/B597–8)

²⁵ Many will wonder about Kant’s appeal here to Stoicism since in the second *Critique* he is quite critical of their take on the highest good. As I read him, Kant is relating his point to a Stoic concept as a heuristic for the reader’s reference as opposed to endorsing the view of Stoicism. I.e., the ideal of a will that never deviates from virtue is historically represented in the Stoic view.

Thus, a practical ideal offers a standard for *estimating* and *measuring* the degree of imperfection in copies. It does not tell us how to act here and now. Albeit certainly tethered to what will eventually be articulated as the categorical imperative, or moral law, its scope extends beyond any moment of choice and serves the epistemic function of enabling us to have certain experiences of moral deficiency (or nuance). As such, it is not merely an outgrowth of reason, but further a necessary move of the moral law to provide grounds for comparison.

Kant's other example is of the ideal of humanity "in its entire perfection" (*KrVA*568/B596), which combines not only:

the extension of all those properties belonging essentially to this nature and constituting our concept of it to the point of complete congruence with its ends, which would be our idea of perfect humanity, but also everything besides this concept that belong to the thoroughgoing determination of the idea. (*KrVA*568/B596)

Everything required for the complete determination of an idea is further clarified: "for out of each [pair of] opposed predicates only a single one can be suited to the idea of the perfect human being" (*KrVA*568/B596). As a practical-moral ideal, Kant seems to mean here something like the following: We are not concerned with predicates that are conditioned (e.g., eye or skin color, height, weight) but those that contribute to humanity's unconditioned nature as an end and end-seeker. In this, we can again (retroactively) think of this ideal object as an individuation of the categorical imperative, albeit this time via its third formulation, the so-called formula of humanity, which commands to treat every rational being always as an end and never as a means.²⁶ We need to determine the idea further so that we can universalize beyond the partial sample of human beings in experience to *every* being sharing this form.²⁷ The ideal of humanity serves then as a standard for identification and comparison. Kant at this point does not articulate the predicates that belong to the ideal of humanity, but we can assume that they will be those properties that make us worthy of moral respect or determine how that respect will take shape universally, for example,

²⁶ It will also have teleological implications related to our moral predisposition and its complete realization.

²⁷ See also *KU* 5:235 and *MS* 6:434–5; Dean, "Humanity as an Idea," 172–8; and Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense*, 155–69.

something akin to our embodiment and capacity (though not necessarily enactment) to think, act, and feel. Though we—as heterogeneous, spatio-temporal instantiations—all differ, we can find grounds for comparison in such an ideal to which we and other embodied rational species all stand in relation. This practical ideal, again, does not tell us directly *how* to act in the here and now, but rather anchors our understanding of all those to whom any rational being owes respect when acting.²⁸ And while none of us individually exemplify *the* perfect human being, we all are imperfect members of a set exemplifying the key traits of a paradigmatic ground of comparison.

From these examples, the key elements emerge. Above all else, an ideal is a standard for *assessing* and *measuring* the moral progressing of individuals (of various kinds), a tool for recognizing the moral state of affairs in terms of the degree of something's imperfection. Paralleling the theoretical ideal (*ens realissimum*), the practical ideal presents substrates in reason that enable us to comprehend morality's expressions in the world, albeit as deficient exemplars—just as parts of experience in theoretical reason represent deficient parts of an unconditioned whole. It does not give us a rule for action but rather represents a background concept for self and world appraisal that we carry in our reason at all times. These original models of perfection show how the rules constituting them are applied in a fashion such that one could see them if one only had eyes to see perfection in the same way that we see the rough copies (*ectypa*). And though we never perceive practical ideals as individuated adequately in ourselves or the world—just as we never see but only think of the theoretical ideal underlying all conditioned reality—they nevertheless count as individuals in that we can automatically exclude any and all predicates that are not consistent with the categorical imperative or moral law. And, further, they represent wholes, because for all rational beings, there can be only one of each ideal.²⁹

Ideals as technical terms, therefore, are far from how they are commonly referred to in colloquial or even philosophical settings. Far from dreamy

²⁸ Kant's point, as I read him, is not that we are all deficient in terms of our dignity, but rather our dignity points toward perfect individuation of a moral subject that would include other rational beings.

²⁹ Kraus, *Kant on Self-Knowledge*, 207, views the idea of the soul as providing a "presentation of a mental whole," which enables us to provide a "context of intelligibility" (Kraus, *Kant on Self-Knowledge*, 173) for thinking of a unified self. This shares a family resemblance with my view, but only a passing one. Ideals, on my account, do not provide us with means to think of ourselves or anything else as wholes in the absence of schema, but (as will be expounded below) rather work by revealing a permanent deficiency between the world of appearances and the maximum standards they represent. Yet, that said, their key function is similar in that it is intelligible-making.

castles in the sky concocted in as many ways as there are imaginations, they are rigorously determined and constrained by their relation to concepts of reason. And these qualities are important.

Regarding their rigorous determination, Kant thinks ideals are not simply the arbitrary combinations of qualities (this would make them fictions). Rather, they offer a stable standard to measure ourselves against because they are determined from ideas via “thoroughgoing determination in accordance with *a priori* rules” (*KrV* A571/B599). This offers a much-needed constraint when it comes to their formation: Ideals never arise independently of the rules used to conceive them. And—for Kant—only *a priori* rules form ideals in the philosophically technical sense.³⁰ Still, because the standard function of an ideal can range beyond particular moments of action, there is a need to treat ideals as unique concepts.

And in regard to the number of ideals being constrained, there cannot be an explosive expansion of infinite ideals on Kant’s account. Taking as an example, the sage of the Stoics, we imagine the moral law determining a moral subject agent. As a complete being who would never act immorally, we would only determine that this subject is an embodied being, with a will and intellect and one who always freely chooses the moral path. Do we need to know whether this person is married or has raven-black hair? The answer is “No” on both counts. Such determinations are, first, empirically contingent and, second, irrelevant to morality. We could not distinguish in any morally relevant way an equally virtuous, but numerically distinct subject, since both individuals would follow the moral law in all cases.

Important for the purpose of this study, one could equally determine an ideal *object* through an individuation of what the moral law would determine as its complete object. To put things proleptically here: It would be a world in which any state of affairs is exactly as it should be, where the moral law determines reality along the lines of a natural law. This would lead—for Kant—to the highest good or a world in which every event is determined by the moral law and moral beings are completely happy based on their worthiness. As was the case with the moral subject, we need not know the number of continents,

³⁰ For this reason, some but not all ideals that we commonly refer to would qualify in the Kantian sense. The ideal, say, of a White nationalist state, could not qualify as an ideal in a Kantian sense, because its creation is tied to the contingent, racial biases of certain groups in history. It is an ideology, not a Kantian ideal. In contrast to Kantian ideals, ideologies are actually a fiction that is used by one to navigate the world. It is important to distinguish ideals from ideologies. What of less easy cases, like free-market capitalism, say? At least any practical case that is not an individuation of the moral law will count as an ideology, fiction, or construct in a neutral sense. Whether such fabrications are positive or negative is ultimately an empirical question, I suspect. A Kantian ideal is special because it is an *a priori*, shared feature of mental life.

and so on, with this moral object. I will return to discuss how the highest good functions in this capacity at the end of the next chapter.

Before moving on, however, I would like to linger over the unique contribution that individuation might introduce into Kant's ethical metaphysics. Here, I offer a preview of why individuation is important beyond a mere rule function, which I further detail in the next chapter. In short, if we have an individuated entity of thought, then we have something—in a loose, nonspatiotemporal sense of the term—to serve as a point of comparison with other individuated entities, namely, us as persons, the world as a shared arena of action, and—perhaps—the key contracts and formal relations that hold these together.³¹

In his *Metaphysik L₂* (probably delivered in 1790–1791), Kant distinguishes between ideas and ideals in a way illuminating for this reading. He maintains that an ideal is an object of thought determined through an idea and that it is distinct in how it *grounds* the possibility of imitation. Not only does this demonstrate his commitment to the distinction beyond the early critical period, but it also illuminates ideals' functionality from a different angle. An “archetype” based on an idea of reason is:

actually an object of intuition, insofar as it is the **ground** of imitation. Thus Christ is the archetype of all morality. [. . .] But if we have an idea of something, e.g., of the highest morality, and now an object of intuition is given, someone is represented to us as being congruent with this idea, then we can say: this is the archetype, follow it! (*V-Met-L2/Pölitiz* 28:577)

And: “The model is a **ground** of imitation. [. . .] In morality one must assume no model, but rather follow the archetype which is equal to the idea of holiness” (*V-Met-L2/Pölitiz* 28:577, my emphasis).³² But what does Kant mean when he speaks of “grounding”? And what role does grounding play in this use of ideals as points of comparison?

To the first question, Kant is quite explicit in his *Metaphysik L₂* that ground (as of something's possibility) and cause are distinct.³³ A ground in this sense

³¹ Even if these entities differ since the latter have sensible correlates in spatiotemporal experience.

³² As a case in point where Kant—to my mind—is clearly referring to the moral law individuated into an original substrate of goodness that serves as a standard of comparison, consider this passage from the second *Critique*: “as archetypes of practical perfection, serve as the indispensable rule of moral conduct and also as the *standard of comparison*” (*KpV* 5:127n).

³³ Kant's use of grounding in his metaphysics lectures is complex and I am simplifying it to focus on his notion of a real, non-causal, ground of possibility. Although Kant distinguishes cause from ground, he also refers to cause as a type of grounding in a more general, primitive sense. See Stang, “A Guide to Ground,” for an in-depth analysis of grounding in Kant's metaphysics lectures.

is the “principle of being” for something, while cause is the “principle of something’s becoming” (*V-Met-L2/Pölitz* 28:571).³⁴ One example he offers is of a triangle. Its grounding—its principle of being (*ratio essendi*)—is the presence of three straight lines as well as the ideal pattern, which communicates the set of complete properties of a triangle. Without these, its possibility to *be* in the first place vanishes. Its cause—its principle of becoming—is the act of bringing these lines together at intersecting angles to actually form the triangle.

With this distinction in mind, one can answer the second question as follows: A practical ideal as a ground of imitation is presupposed by any act of imitation. The ground of imitation—namely, the very presence of something with which comparison is possible in the first place—must come prior to the act. Through comparison, if one of the compared objects reveals something that the other lacks, this can be the inspiration for the other to amend its deficiency. The further behavior to align oneself with the item is then the act of imitation. Take this example: when I say, “I ought to imitate Jesus Christ,” then I am talking about the act of imitation. But I cannot act to imitate Christ without first possessing the ideal of Christ in comparison with which I recognize or grasp my deficient nature in the first place.³⁵

The Kantian thought here is that an ideal is not the *cause* of becoming moral, for which the categorical imperative as a rule and my concomitant freedom suffices. Instead, it has to do with representing the grounds for why imitation is necessary in the first place: namely, an indirect awareness of our and the world’s moral potential as imperfect works in progress. The ideal provides the ground of possibility for an individual to *be* a certain way and acts as a substrate for one’s practical life taken as a whole; while the categorical imperative—as the rule—provides the rule for *becoming* a certain way in the moment, a multitude of which forms a moral life.

³⁴ “Cause and ground are to be distinguished. What contains the ground of possibility is ground <*ratio*>, or the principle of being <*principium essendi*>. The ground of actuality is the principle of becoming <*principium fiendi*>, cause <*causa*>” (*V-Met-L2/Pölitz* 28:571).

³⁵ This sort of comparative grounding is evident in a passage from the *Anthropology* where Kant states (albeit in the original handwritten draft) that only based on the ideal of perfect humanity can we judge its true nature: “The human being is conscious of himself not merely as an animal that can reason (*animal rationabile*), but he is also conscious, irrespective of his animality, of being a rational being (*animal rationale*); and in this quality he does not cognize himself through experience, for it <would> can never teach him the <objective> unconditional necessity <of the determination of his will> of what he is supposed to be. [. . .] [W]ith respect to himself the human being cognizes from pure reason (*a priori*) <the humanity also as a>; namely, the ideal of humanity which, in comparison to him <with which he> as a human being through the frailties of his nature as limitations of this archetype, makes the character of his species recognizable and describable <and thus can show the pure character of his species>. However, in order to appreciate this character of his species, the comparison with a standard that can<not> be found anywhere else but in perfect humanity is necessary” (*Anth* 7:321, footnote of the *Cambridge Academy Edition*).

In Kant's theory, the idea as the rule is conceptually prior, yet this rule extends and fills in a picture of the whole that should arise as a result. And this whole—present in our thinking—reveals how we and the world fall short in such a way that then, in experience, can operate independently of the rule that determined it originally.³⁶ This individuation of the moral law, that is, fills in our picture of the world morally, even when the moral law is not commanding us to act. That is, though the idea is conceptually prior, it need not be temporally prior in lived, rational experience. Indeed, the unique function of ideals is precisely called for to fill out this dimension of experience in which we do not necessarily feel called by duty to act in a certain way, but nevertheless discern values and deficiencies. We can treat others as ends and see the world as a sphere of moral possibility because we carry practical ideals that reveal its current deficiencies and, indirectly, its potential. And without ideals, there would be merely a world of representations darkened by a lack of any moral judgments about the state of things.³⁷

In line with this reading of an ideal as a grounding substrate, I will argue below it is this primarily epistemic function that will come to the fore when Kant searches for some ideal grounding in which to settle a philosophical view of the whole (as I detail in Chapters 6–8). Whether Kant remembers to remain consistent throughout the intricacies of his whole corpus seems to me less important so long as the functions behind the terminology can be connected in a cogent and consistent fashion.

It would be an interesting project to go further down this rabbit hole and identify the number of ideals that one can properly determine via the moral law. It will ultimately depend on what can be meaningfully individuated and what is pertinent to morality. I suspect that individuable forms might be limited by general patterns of individualization. For now, I can think of six types of individuals that Kant references explicitly and repeatedly, namely, the archetypal patterns of the moral subject (the sage of the Stoics or Jesus Christ), the moral patient (humanity), the moral relation (perfect friendship), the moral world (highest good), the moral contract between subjects in the world (perfect civil constitution), and the moral absolute ground

³⁶ Though different in substantial respects, my view shares the same thrust as Firestone and Jacobs's view when they detail the prototype of humanity from Book Two of Kant's *Religion*. I think they are correct to see the ideal archetype (or prototype) in that work as not bringing us via some influence from God to *become* moral. Rather and as they state, the prototype provides only the "availability" to be moral in the first place, as opposed to a "mystical stirring of the will to become like the prototype" (Firestone & Jacobs, *In Defense*, 167).

³⁷ Note, I do not mean here "practical judgments," as Kant often refers to them as the process of determining a particular moment to act in accordance with the moral law.

(God). They each represent the moral law as determining a unique, singular pattern.³⁸ For my purposes, however, I will bracket the rest and focus mainly on the moral subject (perfect will) and moral object (perfect world) as the main topics for the rest of the study, with a focus on the latter as the highest good.

1.3. Further Clarifications

Four features of practical ideals call for further exposition: (i) how to conceive of their perfection, (ii) why individuation is an important feature, (iii) the limits of practical ideals' use, and (iv) a general tension within Kant's system that arises from individuating a concept.

(i) First, what does it mean to speak of a morally *perfect* individual? By *perfect*, Kant meant the most complete of something that is conceivable. For anything that is perfect in this sense, it follows that there can be only one for every rational being. Kant makes this explicit in the *Vienna Logic*: "Such an ideal is the greatest, and for that reason only one; for the greatest is only a single one" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:905). If we considered the most perfect being to mean a being that greatly surpasses what we could ever be capable of, then there might be a different ideal for another rational species that is unsurpassed by our superlative "ideal." Kant wants to have the maximum conceivable, though. We all—and, Kant insists, every rational being equipped with our form of perception—experience universal, graded imperfection. But this would not occur if there were no singular, complete, and never faltering point of reference against which this imperfection stood in measurable contrast. Kant also points this out in the second *Critique*, where he notes that there can be only a "single" (*einzig*) archetype of a holy will that serves as an "*Urbild*" or archetype against which we all forever fall short, but all share as a common point of reference (*KpV* 5:32, as well as 5:83). If unified and singular, then it must be self-contained. And if singularly complete based on a rule, or *vollkommen*, then it contains every possible good.

³⁸ My focus here is on practical ideals. But Kant refers to other ideals, e.g., the "ideal of beauty" (*KU* 5:314–8) as well as an ideal of "happiness" as arising from the imagination, rather than from rules of reason. While the ideal of beauty it seems *is* singular for us, that of happiness is not: "happiness is an ideal, not of reason, but of imagination—an ideal resting merely on empirical grounds, of which it is vain to expect that they should determine an action by which we could attain a totality of a series of consequences which is in fact infinite" (*GMS* 4:418–9).

And, connectedly, the ideal is perfect in the sense of being morally superlative, and thus everything pales in comparison. Any whisp of actual goodness in the world, while precious and worthy of appreciation, is transient and stands relative to an ideal for which nothing can ever reveal it as established, moot, or now redundant. Goodness is abundant in the world—but this abundance always points beyond itself. For could we ever have too much of the good? And if not, we have an infinity of searching before us to keep us at work. Yet, we know in some—through a glass darkly sense—*that* this infinite good stands ready before us, as part of a singularly good system.

(ii) Why is individuation important? Kant is explicit that individuation is one element that an ideal possesses but ideas lack. Individuation is based on the principle of thoroughgoing determination of all predicates that belong to something, demarcating what obtains for it in contrast to everything else. These totalities remain as *intelligible* individuals only since no schematism is possible for them via an adequate corresponding intuition. We infer they are there because something must be there to enable our comparative awareness.

As a helpful point of contrast, consider that for pure concepts like the categories, there is no need for any ideal precisely because there is no individualized model in relation to which every empirical example of causation is deficient. The category of causation, which Kant notes in the *Vienna Logic*, is also a “pure concept,” albeit of the understanding, can find instantiations such that “it can be represented *in concreto*” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:905), and indeed *adequately*. There are plenty of singular intuitions that adequately express causation. Take any two events, for example, a boat denting a dock or hammering a nail, and in both one has two adequate, concrete representations that exhibit causality. Neither is a deficient expression of causation; neither one, that is, might be judged as closer in degree to *perfect* causation. Hence, one needs only a concept in the form of a rule function for such cases. But in moral experience, we are aware of goods and evils that are *not* all adequately equal representations. We notice that this person appears more virtuous than that person or that the world seems perhaps more just on the whole in one period when compared to another. It is this comparative evaluation that is unique and which requires, I think, a different conceptual form that Kant sought in ideals. As individuations, their commonality with other individuals enables comparisons of other features. I explore and argue for this in Chapter 3.

(iii) Practical ideals play a role in how we experience morality in the world. They enable comparative moral knowledge that reveals degrees of

imperfection, which is purely descriptive relative to the ideal. Thus, they are essential for a specific type of moral knowledge, which is unique from how a practical idea as a rule regulates our actions. They show the degree to which someone or something (the world) exemplify virtue or fall short of it in relation to their singular perfection. I think it is a philosophical mark in favor of Kant's theory of ideals (as I read them), that they underlie an epistemology of moral *imperfection*. They also, present us—indirectly—with indications of morality as a real reservoir of possibility that this world *can* inadequately represent to lesser and greater degrees. But moral phenomenology is rich and complex, and the practical ideal remains an individuation tied to the moral law.

That is, ideals are not responsible for *all* moral knowledge. Knowledge of what qualifies as forbidden action, for instance, requires a rule (the practical idea qua moral law). But there will be other areas of evaluative experience, which will fall outside the scope of what this Kantian account of ideals provides as well. For instance, while we might become aware of somebody falling morally short through Kantian ideals, we may not say that a practical ideal grounds the possibility of calling someone “refreshingly optimistic,” or so. I am thinking here of accounts like Iris Murdoch's in *The Sovereignty of the Good*, where she provides the example of a mother (“M”) whose evaluations of her daughter-in-law (“D”) evolve for the better:

M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile.³⁹

These negative qualities, with the exception perhaps of rudeness, as well as M's eventual changed perception of D as, “not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on,”⁴⁰ are not the sort of moral knowledge that Kantian ideals play a role in revealing. There is so much that shapes how we evaluate persons and the world. The practical ideal, however, will be responsible for only certain experiences of moral imperfection. But the ideal is special because, ultimately, it is uniquely suited for enabling moral experiences that—if Kant is right—are universal for all rational beings and,

³⁹ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty*, 17.

⁴⁰ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty*, 17–8.

hence, immune to fluxes of norms that might be culture-specific. Who, for example, could not be “insufficiently ceremonious” by today’s standards if thrust back into Victorian high society without proper instruction? The practical ideal, by contrast, will identify those experiences of specifically moral shortcomings that have a universal scope.

(iv) For Kantians, my reading of practical ideals will raise alarm bells. Indeed, Kant is explicit that any concept is always general and never singular: a concept, pure or not, “is common to many things” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:904), and it “differs from intuition by virtue of the fact that all intuition is singular” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:905). And it will seem here that ideals, as individuated, are singular objects without intuitions. It is this sort of assertion that Kant also wants to argue against when it comes to those made by rational dogmatists like Leibniz and Wolff. Take, for example, Kant’s statement in the first *Critique*: “Without an intuition to ground it, the category alone cannot yield any concept of an object; for only through intuition is an object given, which is then thought in accordance with the category” (*KrV* A399). As a result, it will seem patently un-Kantian to treat an idea, as a pure concept, as capable of determining a further *concept*, which is an individual or singular representation. Indeed, it appears to amount to an oxymoron within Kant’s system. Nevertheless, despite these claims about the logical form of concepts in cognition, Kant refers at many points to *singular* practical ideals, and to there being at least one singular theoretical ideal, namely, the transcendental ideal of pure reason. As I read Kant, these are not targets of his critique of traditional rationalism, but rather parts of his positive theory.⁴¹ All this to say, while certainly controversial and perhaps inconsistent with certain parts of Kant’s theory, I think the bullet is worth biting to see where his positive statements of ideals might lead.

1.4. Extending Kant’s Conceptual *Stufenleiter*

Kant presents his own taxonomy of concepts (or *Stufenleiter*⁴²) in the first *Critique*, after introducing ideas as technical terms. Beginning with the basic genus, namely, *representation* in general (*Vorstellung*), he presents the basic subsidiary distinctions that comprise how we access the world moving

⁴¹ Thanks to Maya Krishnan for discussion on these topics.

⁴² See *KrV* A320/B376–7.

from sensations and direct perceptual experiences of given phenomena to the pure concepts that undergird all objective experience, and then on to those concepts that never find adequate representation in any particular experienced object. It is in these latter kinds of concepts that I am interested of which Kant shares only one line of description: “A concept made up of notions [that is, a pure concept of the understanding—or categories], which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an *idea* or a concept of reason” (*KrV* A320/B377). Based on the above analysis, I offer here an extension of the taxonomy to distinguish ideas and ideals, further fleshing out Kant’s taxonomy. This will also serve to settle the concepts for the remainder of my study.

An *idea* is a concept of reason that expresses a rule. Practical reason has but one idea, namely, the moral law expressible through the categorical imperative and its concomitant formulations.

An *ideal* is an entity of reason determined when an idea is thoroughly individuated. *Archetype* (less frequently, *prototype*) is the English translation of *Urbild*, literally, ur-picture, which is a term Kant employs as a synonym for “ideal.” *Substrate* is another term that Kant employs to describe “ideal.” Because the term “archetype” has many non-Kantian usages (e.g., in Jungian psychology), I will—when useful—mainly refer to ideals as “substrates” in our reasoning, as this also I think better articulates their function. Practical reason possesses multiple ideals determined through the moral law, depending on how morally relevant features are fit for individualization. For example, the perfect moral agent would be if the moral law completely determined a subject with a will, and the perfect moral object would be if the moral law completely determined a world.

An idea’s relation to experience is *regulative* in that it provides guiding principles (in different ways depending on whether we are speaking of theoretical or practical ideas). The practical idea, as the categorical imperative’s expressions of the moral law, regulates our actions as a supreme rule of morality.⁴³

⁴³ The moral law (via the categorical imperative) does not necessarily determine our wills. If it were to do so, we would always act morally (i.e., be holy wills) and it would cease to be an imperative at all (see, e.g., *KpV* 5:32 and *MS* 6:222). Generally, “ideas” Kant treats as regulative. That said, Kant notes in the second *Critique* that the transcendental ideas of freedom, immortality, and God also “become *immanent* and *constitutive* inasmuch as they are grounds of the possibility of *making real the necessary object* of pure practical reason (the highest good)” (*KpV* 5:135). Kant also in the *Metaphysics of Morals* notes that the “concept of *freedom*” as a “pure rational concept” is “merely regulative” in speculative use, but “proves its reality by practical principles” (*MS* 6:221). Hence, it might

An ideal's relation to experience is *grounding* in that it provides a background condition that makes certain experiences possible in the first place, but *indirectly* in that it provides grounds of comparison as opposed to direct constitutive determinations of objects of possible experience. To represent this relational role, I will speak of ideals in their grounding capacity as serving a *substrate function*, or as acting as *substrates*.

Ideas and ideals, I posit with Kant, are *real* in the sense that they are universally valid conditions of the possibility of certain, foundational moral experiences. Hence, they are not merely invented—as fictions—for the sake of heuristically serving a role, the fulfillment of which explains their existence (since they were invented for that very purpose).⁴⁴ Ideals in the Kantian sense are not invented. But they are not real in the same sense as actual objects are, that is, as existing somewhere in representable spacetime (this will ward off any charge of rational dogmatism).⁴⁵ They are, however, immediately discernible in an indirect manner, in that imperfections of experience make us aware of them as substrates, elements of our collective reason in a way akin (but not perfectly analogous) to the categories, as universally valid conditions of the possibility of representing objects.

To summarize: both “ideas” and “ideals” (or “archetypes” [*Urbilder*]) represent a priori concepts of reason for Kant. They do not play a direct role in the formation of cognitions as do empirical concepts and the categories of the understanding. Their function is to help combine and relate individual moments of experience into one experiential whole. And while an idea serves as a general rule, ideals go a step beyond ideas. They are ideas thought of as thoroughly determined to the maximum degree so that they constitute fully determined individuals. An idea explains an ideal, and yet the function of an ideal goes beyond ideas without explaining them. And an ideal's function is not a reason for acting, but rather grounds experience in so far as it serves as a maximal point of comparison.

seem that some ideas are also *constitutive* under a certain point of view. Since on my reading, only the moral law qualifies as a practical idea, and ideals serve a grounding function, which has a constitutive quality (albeit in a novel way compared to other pure concepts), such passages call out all the more for a clean, precise delineation between ideas and ideals. Ideals are immanent and constitutive for us, but only revealed through their deficient expressions in experience.

⁴⁴ This sounds perhaps dogmatic. It is, however, in line with Kant's own critical view as long as the indirect nature of its use is understood. I also think it corrects an errant interpretation of Kantian ideals that began with Hans Vaihinger (see my Conclusion).

⁴⁵ The only possible exception to this would be Jesus Christ as the second person of the Holy Trinity.

And for practical reason, ideas and ideals together are the source of all morality in the world for Kant. As he states unequivocally in the *Vienna Logic* (1780s), “The whole of morality rests on ideas” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:906). And in the first *Critique*, reason is where we need to look for morality’s origin, “since it contains within itself the source of certain concepts and principles, which it does not borrow either from the senses or from the understanding” (*KrV* A299/B355). The practical idea (moral law) is the call to hatch goodness in the world. Practical ideals are grounds for noting potential moral improvement through the ability to assess degrees of moral inadequacy.

2

Practical Ideals as Grounds of Contemplation

In the previous chapter, I made the case for seeing ideals as distinct from ideas. An ideal's function hinges on its ability to individuate the rules articulated by ideas. But a skeptical concern about the distinction might be raised, namely: is it not more parsimonious (and, hence, better) to focus simply on the moral law and disregard individuations of it? After all, speaking of ideals as individual entities of reason—beyond adding yet another concept to an already crowded system—stands in tension with Kant's view that only *intuited* objects can be individualized and invites worries of burdening Kant's moral psychology with a kind of rational dogmatism (as discussed in Chapter 1). While legitimate concerns, there are good philosophical reasons for upholding the distinction. And I think it can be done in ways that do not saddle him with dogmatic claims about objects that are transcendent relative to experience. In this chapter, I develop an interpretation of how practical ideals function as moral substrates that is unique, grounded in Kant's texts, and philosophically compelling. But first I present a skeptical objection to upholding the distinction at all.

2.1. A Challenge from a Skeptic of the Idea-Ideal Distinction

Someone skeptical of the distinction between ideas and ideals might object to my analysis so far. Indeed, there seems to be a problem for any attempt to define practical ideals as potent over and above the moral law. After all, ideas—I argued—are in some way the determining factor in an ideal's individuation. If we have the moral law as the practical idea, what unique function can a practical ideal serve, if, as Kant maintains, the law serves to determine it? One could maintain a parsimony of principles if one simply removed the distinction altogether. This ostensible problem, I will refer to as the *redundancy problem*.

Before presenting the problem, I would like to note that I believe an interpretive trend has emerged as a result of the redundancy problem (or some variation thereof), which has elicited two reactions: one dismissive and the other favorable. The trend is to assign an ideal some sort of psychological function that aids us, as weak-willed and imperfect human beings, to realize an absolute moral law. As one might expect, the dismissive reaction bases itself on a rejection of the need for such a crutch's inclusion in Kant's moral theory. For example, Lewis White Beck defines the highest good qua practical ideal as perhaps "psychologically necessary" but not important "logically or ethically" since it provides no "separate command, independent of the categorical imperative, which is developed without this concept."¹ While aimed at the highest good, Beck's critique could, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to other ideals such as the perfect will or the perfect civil constitution. All remain conditioned on the moral law while the moral law remains unconditioned. Without a biconditional relation holding, ideals seem expendable—particularly for those who want to hold Kant to account for an ethics lacking any reference to results, rewards, or self-interest.

However, some favorable reactions find strength precisely in a psychological reading of practical ideals. For example, John Rawls and Barbara Herman offer accounts of how an ideal might bring the categorical imperative closer in line with experience.² The psychological function helps us visualize the categorical imperative as something that we can actually bring about. The thrust of such readings is that the psychological component is actually necessary for making pure ethics into a *human* ethics. This is one way of explicating how a Kantian ideal can be practical, but it ultimately swerves much further from the letter and spirit of Kant's texts than what I propose. It also fails, I will argue in this section, to address the redundancy problem successfully. Ultimately, while I find the skepticism of the dismissive reaction warranted and the ingenuity of the favorable reaction interesting for creating something beyond a Kantian account, neither can qualify as adequate representations of Kant's view when it comes to the nature of ideals. I will take both, though, as necessary foils in bringing my own reconstruction to light.

¹ See Beck, *A Commentary*, 244; as well as Auxter, "The Unimportance;" and Simmons, "Kant's Highest Good," 358–60.

² Rawls, *Lectures on the History*, 213; Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 68; as well as Denis, "Autonomy and the Highest Good," for an account related to the highest good that is similar in spirit.

Let us begin by fleshing out how a skeptic of the idea-ideal distinction might object. Take, for example, Rose. She is, by all accounts, a good person. If we ask Rose why she acts virtuously, she says: “Just because. And I had good role models. My parents were exceptional people. If you had asked them, it was thanks to their being good Christians, who really tried to take seriously the idea of following Jesus’ example.”³ Now, Rose clearly finds nothing wrong with her parents’ faith, but she also finds it ultimately moot, as she has become a content atheist who sees nothing inconsistent with maintaining her morality as a nonbeliever. Now, a situation arises: Louise, her neighbor, needs immediate aid. Rose, despite having an important engagement, helps Louise because she thinks it is what one *ought* to do. Now, ask Rose the following: “In your reasoning, were you thinking of how Jesus Christ or a role model would have acted?” Rose, it seems, needs to say nothing of the sort—indeed, it seems absolutely reasonable for her to say: “Look, I just realized that helping was what one ought to do—what everyone ought to do; I wasn’t thinking of my parents, Jesus, or anyone else at the time.” There seems nothing wrong or irrational with Rose’s answer. Indeed, it sounds like a very patient response to an incredibly oddball-sounding question.

To wit, what would an archetypal personification or individuation of the idea of virtue add to moral deliberation that the moral law leaves out? If it is merely to buttress us psychologically, why should that find fit in Kant’s pure ethics? If it adds nothing, then it is perhaps best to leave it out, particularly since it might affect the purity of one’s motives or interfere with one’s autonomy in discerning what the right thing to do is.

Let us try—as a first counterargument against the skeptic—to see how an ideal might favorably fit into an account in which it guides action. Suppose, now, that Rose does think of a practical ideal. Rose reasons, “The perfectly wise person could *only* have X-property: to always help others despite selfish interests. Not helping seems contrary to this imagined, perfectly wise person. Hence, I should help.” The rule tells her what property would belong to the perfect human individual, and imagining it helps her realize how the general rule should take shape individually. In individuating the rule qua ideal person, we can picture virtue in a fashion akin to us as persons.

³ See, e.g., *RGV* 6:60–3, for where Kant refers to Jesus Christ as the *Urbild* or “[archetype] of humanity,” the “ideal of moral perfection,” and *V-MS/Vigil* 27:610: “[The Idea of humanity] is rendered practical, if we conceive thereunder a person adequate to the Idea, or an ideal, just as Christ, for example, is presented to us as an ideal.”

This reading is in line with interpretations by John Rawls and Barbara Herman, who—until now and as far as I know—have presented the most plausible Kantian account of how an ideal can be practical by favoring how it could buttress our moral psychology. For Rawls, an ideal acts as a tool to bring the categorical imperative “nearer to intuition,”⁴ namely as a model in which we picture ourselves to “stir our moral sensibility far more deeply than did the categorical imperative in its first formulation.”⁵ Herman extends this position and claims that an ideal is essential since it allows us to take general principles and apply them to our particular existence: “The animation [of rules into an ideal] is not trivial; it is necessary in order to represent the Stoic principles as ones that can be the principles in a *human life*,” making the ideal “a formal *embodiment* of regulative principle.”⁶ There must be ways for taking the supersensible principles of morality and applying them to the sensible realm, so goes the argument. To have these principles embodied in representations of people like us helps our striving. Herman writes: “The wise man eats, marries, negotiates the obligations of citizenship, raises children, and the rest. These are the kinds of things that a human person must do.”⁷ By possessing this personification of the moral law in a person like myself, “I have a model for how to behave: a way to think about what to do.”⁸ So goes one Kant-ish line of approach.

As intriguing as this line of interpretation is, I think it faces two major issues: First, I think it will not assuage the skeptic who still wonders about the necessity of this extra step of individuating rules. Second, I think it is actually something that Kant forbids against in his very definition of ideals. Indeed, I think that it qualifies as a mere fiction according to his notion and would fail to qualify as an ideal. It might be useful. However, the trappings of human contingency should play no role in a Kantian ideal since they are not universal individuations, but contingent on the imaginations of those spinning them to life. And if an interpretation exists that can both answer

⁴ This refers to Kant’s description of the different formulations of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork*, which are “intended namely to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby to feeling” (*GMS* 4:436).

⁵ Rawls, *Lectures*, 213.

⁶ Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 68.

⁷ Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 68. Here is where the notion breaks away from Kant’s since the ideal can never be taken from experience or placed in its trappings without doing harm to the ideal itself. Indeed, see the helpful exegetical note by Heimsoeth, *Transzendente Dialektik*, 417n18, about Kant’s employing the notion of ideal almost exclusively with holiness of the will as well as Baron, “Moral Paragons,” 341, who argues that nobody can be “*the* moral paragon.”

⁸ Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 69.

the skeptic while standing in close proximity to the letter and spirit of Kant's texts, then that reading should take the prize. Especially if that interpretation sheds further light on the highest good's fit in rational experience.

Regarding the first point of not assuaging the skeptic: Even if it were acceptable in Kantian terms to personify the moral law as someone who eats, marries, and has children, why think of this ideal person at all since one must, presumably, already know the rule by which the behavior of this ideal person is determined. For how otherwise is one determining how this imagined figure is behaving? And if already possessing knowledge of the rule, then that knowledge on its own should—for a Kantian account—be a sufficient ground to act (assuming it is the moral law to which we are responding). Such an ideal embodiment of a rule in a fictional figure would, it seems, persist as flat-out superfluous if it is just to showcase the rule in action for the sake of some present action.⁹ Indeed, it might even corrupt the purity of intention that the categorical imperative commands.

As for the second issue, namely, that it cannot qualify as a valid Kantian account, Kant warns explicitly against such fictionalizations of the ideal in the first *Critique*:

But to try to realize the ideal in an example, i.e., in appearance, such as that of a sage in a novel, is not feasible, and even has about it something non-sensical and not very edifying since the natural limits which constantly impair the completeness in the idea render impossible every illusion in such an attempt, and thereby render even what is good in the idea suspect by making it similar to a mere fiction. (*KrV* A570/B598)

Pace Rawls and Herman, Kantian ideals, if in any way true to the source, cannot function in such a way. We should not bother individuating an ideal in the same way that we can picture, say, fictitious persons since any such example degrades the maximum goodness of the individuated entity that underlies our thinking. This might further explain Kant's choice of Jesus Christ as the archetypal embodiment of moral perfection in later works—a figure whose life and suffering are embodied as a fully human individual who simultaneously remains fully divine in Christian portrayals. The archetypal

⁹ The Rawls-Herman approach has other options of response. But these options require bringing ideals so far down to earth that they cease to be ideals in a Kantian sense and instead become fictitious displays of virtue in action.

figure is, in short, forever superior to our capacity according to Kant. But that is precisely the point. For only as a permanently superior entity can an ideal serve as an inexhaustible ground of possible goodness and enable the comparative knowledge of degrees of morality in this world.

In sum, an ideal—in Kant’s sense—must remain an individuated entity of the intelligible realm as opposed to a rule animated with all the accoutrements of the phenomenal realm. And while skepticism oriented around the redundancy problem is understandable, I turn now to explore why the Kantian distinction is worth maintaining by unpacking how an ideal might function beyond the moral law.

2.2. Two Unique Functions of Practical Ideals

Despite the skeptical objection, I see compelling reasons for maintaining the idea-ideal distinction. For it is not clear how one’s life could reveal certain moral features of the world if working with bare appearances, namely, in how holistic experiences of oneself and the world—as progressing toward a morally better state—presuppose a constant standard that allows us to evaluate this progress of individuals relative to other individuals. Building off of the analysis begun in Chapter 1, I detail the two functions of ideals that might solve the redundancy problem.

The upshot of my analysis, put forward only proleptically so far, is that ideals ground the possibility of certain experiences of gradations of goodness in wholes (individuals or the world) and, in turn, reveal the permanent, substantive potential of self and world improvement toward the ideal. As substrates, they represent principles of possible *being* as opposed to principles or rules for *becoming*, drawing on the distinction made in Chapter 1. I employ this “being”/“becoming” distinction since it is Kant’s way of distinguishing “ground” (as in, the ground of something’s possibility) from “cause” in his metaphysics lectures. While the practical idea is directly involved in the causal story of morality becoming real in the world, practical ideals ground the possibility of certain moral experiences in a noncausal, twofold manner to be unpacked below. I will further argue for how ideals can provide this twofold function without infringing upon the sovereignty of the moral law.

As with any historical reconstruction, my goal is to provide a charitable and close reading of Kant. When supplementation is required, I draw on resources from his lectures and argue in a manner consistent with his overall

thinking. For those who find any inconsistency between an interpretation and a single passage as grounds enough for dismissal of an interpretation, this reading might not suit their needs. But which interpretation ever could suit such needs? That said, among other approaches, I think this comes closest to Kant's theory in important respects and has merits in the way it can make sense of the highest good's puzzling evolution traced in Part II below.

Consulting again the function of the *theoretical* ideal from the first *Critique* is informative here. In an important passage on the transcendental ideal as a theoretical archetype, Kant writes:

For reason the ideal is thus the archetype [*Urbild*] (*prototypon*) of all things, which all together, as defective copies (*ectypa*), take from it [*daher nehmen*] the matter for their possibility, and yet although they approach more or less nearly to it, they always fall infinitely short of actually attaining it. (*KrV* A578/B606, emphasis added).¹⁰

And in a passage referenced in Chapter 1, he notes that reason must “ground” all thoroughgoing determination on “a transcendental substratum, which contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken” (*KrV* A575/B603). The original German for “storehouse of material” is “Vorrat des Stoffes.” In the third *Critique*, Kant states that aesthetic ideas “contain rich material [*Stoff*].”¹¹ And even as late as the first fascicle of the *Opus Postumum*, Kant refers to ideals (albeit as “ideas”) providing a “Stoff,” demonstrating a continuity in that they serve a similar role as an ideal material within reason:

These representations [*Vorstellungen*] are not merely concepts, but rather simultaneously ideas that provide the material [*Stoff*] for the synthetic laws <determined> a priori by concepts. Thus they [ideas] do not merely follow from metaphysics, but rather ground [*begründen*] transcendental philosophy. (*OP* 21:20, my translation)

As I will show below, Kant's descriptions of ideals in practical reasoning also align with this notion of providing a material or *Stoff* that is otherwise lacking if dealing only with appearances. We identify them as essential moral

¹⁰ Translation altered by substituting “archetype” for “original image.”

¹¹ See *KU* 5:317, as well as “opening up for [the mind] the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations” (*KU* 5:315).

resources for recognizing the good or a storehouse of potential material because morality as we experience it in a universal fashion cannot be derived from the world of sense. And the moral law, while determining actions, does not obviously serve as grounding for comparing individuals morally. Ideals, in turn, enable the evaluation of our characters and the world; they enable, that is, the very discernment of moral degrees and nuances in descriptive terms.

It seems like Kant here is providing the manner that we might glean, for example, the moral progress of an individual relative to the ideal—a maximum—that the individual imperfectly displays or demonstrates. For otherwise, we might simply see someone lifting items repeatedly into bags going to a homeless shelter, instead of recognizing that this person, Philo, is actually showing beneficence after a life of having ignored the plight of the homeless. Not only is the ideal then grounding our recognition of the good as it grows in this person (*ceteris paribus*¹²), but rather it is also grounding the difference that we can notice between multiple occasions in which we compare Philo with the ideal. Before, Philo was pursuing *mostly* selfish ends; now, he is working for a charity in his spare time. We judge, then, the progress because the gap between Philo and the ideal has shrunk, though there is plenty of growth (an endless amount in this life) for him to go through. And what we evaluate is not exhausted by the actions Philo performs. We evaluate when we are around him small things that are morally salient features of evaluation. The way he performs the actions, combined with his demeanor and observations of how he comments on things, might all contribute to how we evaluate his progress. And these features all, somehow, are about Philo as a whole, a total individual. Moral experience of Philo, that is, is not reducible to simply seeing him act and listen to his reported intentions. In moments of moral evaluation, we are not only attuned to the way the world is deficient but also indirectly aware of morality as a perennial potential, ready to be realized in the world. This requires, though, a way to understand individual wholes as complex systems.

Ideals could help us here in that they provide conceptual wholes (qua singular individuals) that serve as points of comparison, which we are always approximating. The resulting picture is, therefore, both epistemological and metaphysical in nature. Epistemological in so far as ideals ground certain

¹² Assuming that the person is not doing it for the wrong reasons and that we are properly positioned to count as reasonable evaluators.

moral experiences; but also metaphysical in regard to the source and nature of these ideals, namely, as part of the ultimate source of morality and inherent to what it means to be reasoners like us.¹³ This aligns with remarks Kant makes about ideas in the *Vienna Logic*: “The doctrine of ideas is very important but actually belongs in metaphysics. Until now, it has been expounded wrongly” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:907). For, “what matters is the origin of the concept, and this is already a metaphysical investigation” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:905), as opposed to a logical one, which cares only for whether “a concept exists. It does not pertain to logic whether it is independent of experience or comes from experience” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:905). Hence, by examining ideas, ideals as their individuation, as well as the origin of these concepts, we are in a metaphysical space, which, in turn, grounds certain moral evaluations.

Consider the following passage from the *Metaphysik L₂* lecture notes, to further flesh out this role of ideals and confirm the role of individuation:

A being of the reasoning reason *<ens rationis ratiocinantis>* is an *ideal*. Reason is constrained to assume such an ideal of perfection *as a greatest <maximum>* in a matter, according to which the other is judged, e.g., a model of the most perfect friendship. Such an ideal is the greatest, and for that reason only one; for the greatest is only a single one.—Imaginary beings *<entia ficta imaginaria>* are things which we can think; but these are not ideals. For *ideals are a matter of reason and without intuition*. They are necessary substrates *<substrata>* of reason. Chimeras and ideals are different from each other. An *ideal* arises by a necessary use of reason; a *chimera* on the other hand is an arbitrary predicate of straying reason. (V-Met-L2/Pölitiz 28:555)

From this passage, we can see the functions of an ideal as a moral substrate in full clarity and in full alignment with my analysis so far. The functions connect back with both the negative epistemic quality Kant references in the first *Critique* and to the more general positive function. An ideal serves as a substrate that offers two aspects to the practical sphere that ideas as rules do not, namely functioning as (a) a measuring stick for copies (negative function) and (b) a storehouse of material for the copies—the possession of which

¹³ This thought naturally leads to the conclusion that the ideal is always an expression of God (though I leave it unexplored here). I return to this in the Epilogue.

reveals the maximum possibility of *being* a moral individual in the first place (positive function).

These two functions offer a way to conceive of an ideal's practical power as unique in response to the skeptic. The first functional aspect does not tell us *how* to act morally, but rather is negative in that it reveals constantly the morally impoverished state of affairs. Ideals are not guidelines or inspirations for acting, but inform us constantly of the extent to which we and the world fall short of a moral standard that we do not find outside ourselves, but in reasoning about ourselves and the world. In this way, they serve a totally different function than rules. It is only because we have these ideals that we are even capable of recognizing degrees of moral goodness.

Support for this interpretation can be found explicitly in the Mrongovius notes from Kant's lectures on ethics as well (1785). There, Kant first details that "*ideas*" in a practical sense "constitute guidelines to which we must constantly approach" and "make up the law of approximation" (*V-Mo/Mron II* 29:604). Kant goes on, however, to say that we nevertheless "have to possess a yardstick by which to estimate our moral worth, and to know the degree to which we are faulty and deficient" (*V-Mo/Mron II* 29:604–5). For this, we conceive of the maximum as explicitly an *ideal*, "so that I know how far away I am, or how near I come to it" (*V-Mo/Mron II* 29:605). As the rule qua law of approximation serves a primary function in determining action, the ideal functions as grounds of possibility that inform our moral evaluation, a yardstick that shows us to what degree morality is waning or waxing relative to a possible maximum being. This function is also referred to in Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy*, where he states that everyone "has an ideal of humanity before his eyes," with which one "compares himself" (*Päd* 9:489) in order to note how one falls short. Finally, it is referenced—albeit referring to "*ideas*"—in the Pölitz lectures on the philosophy of religion:

Human reason has need of an idea of highest perfection, to serve it as a standard according to which it can make determinations. In human love, for example, we think of the idea of highest friendship in order to be able to determine the extent to which this or that degree of friendship approaches or falls short of it. [...] A concept of this kind, which is needed as a standard of lesser or greater degrees in this or that case, regardless of its reality, is called an idea. (*V-Phil-Th/Pölitz* 28:993)¹⁴

¹⁴ These lectures are another instance of inconsistency, terminologically speaking: "How does an idea of reason differ from an ideal of imagination? An idea is a universal rule *in abstracto*, whereas an ideal is an individual case which I bring under this rule" (*V-Phil-Th/Pölitz* 28:994).

Of course, it will never be waxing to the point where we attain the ideal fully. Instead, we will always face degrees of moral imperfection. This, in turn, is an implicit and indirect indication that we stand before a moral storehouse of possible material.

With (a) the “negative function,” I mean a judgment in which a conceptual standard finds no particular case as corresponding to it adequately, but instead myriad imperfect moments of a less-than-ideal whole that approximates it to some wanting degree. A practical ideal will always aid judgment because *each and every* actual case will fail to be judged as fully adequate to the standard of complete goodness that the practical ideal represents. This negative form of judgment that tells us how things are morally *deficient* relative to an innate moral standard requires a unique form of judgment. I take up this task in the next chapter. As a preview, though, we are dealing here—I think—with what might be called a *negative constitutive judgment*¹⁵ that will occur whenever we estimate moral states of affairs. Some states of affairs will possess greater commonality with the ideal than others, but they are never enough, never finished, and never absolutely transparent as cases of the unconditioned good.

This brings out the second positive function (b), namely, that ideals act—as it were—as a revelatory moral storehouse of possible material. Even if there is never a perfect correspondence between an ideal and a deficient example, the recognition of graded similarity affords an indirect awareness of our and the world’s potential to *be* moral in a comprehensive, maximum manner. This positive aspect of practical ideals must hold if degrees of the good are to be known at all. Knowing something to be *not-M* (or *not-fully-M*) remains fully indeterminate if *M* remains a total unknown. Thus, the negative standard function depends on inferring a tacit positive presence of the moral ideal substrate that we possess as rational beings.

To linger with this positive function further, one might refer to it as a constitutional function of a practical ideal as a moral substrate, in that it reveals as it were a constitutional quality of rational beings and the world taken as a whole system. After all, one might conclude that the negative epistemic

¹⁵ This negative sense of constitutive judgment is my own terminology. At the time when Kant writes the first *Critique*, constitutive judging would never seem to apply to moral estimations of our self or the world. Ideals—as concepts—can never find cases of possible objects that provide corresponding intuitions in experience, since no such intuition would provide a perfect exemplar.

function will only demoralize us. Yet, this insight into our own and the world's moral imperfection instead informs us of the moral material in progress, as well as that which we have left to realize and which serves as grounds for hope.¹⁶

Indeed, when introducing Christ as an "ideal" in Vigilantius's notes on his 1793 lectures on ethics, Kant points out that a personified rendering of the practical idea of humanity's virtue provides us with a point of moral "comparison." First, from the comparison Kant points to the negative function (a) in that an ideal reveals "the insignificance of our moral worth in consciousness of its inadequacy to the law" (*V-MS/Vigil* 27:610). However, the second function (b) is equally important. Indeed, out of this comparison, we find a relation to "no special duties," but rather to "the general dutifulness that we must observe in all our moral conduct," which awakens a "need for firm determination in our principles and tenacious pursuit of them" (*V-MS/Vigil* 27:610). Important is the emphasis on ideals holding up for us a *general dutifulness*. Rather than tell us how to act in some proximate moment of action via practical ideas, the ideal provides us with a point of comparison that contextualizes the moral parts of experience within one, progressing moral whole (i.e., in an individual).

The individuated ideal, that is, sets us in comparison with the possibility of an individual who is *generally* dutiful. But what is it that makes such a comparison possible? It can only be because we, in some way, *are* participants within the same domain. The ideal is not an alien potential, but rather immediately recognized as *our* potential too, even though we can only partially represent it in our nature as embodied rational beings. Nevertheless, we discern through it our participation in the infinite despite our finitude. As William Blake puts it in allusion to Plato's cave:

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern. (Blake, *The Marriage*, 26)

So too, the ideal provides a glimpse of the infinite of which we are parts, sharing in the potential being of that source. Perhaps this glimpse, as it were, through narrow chinks of our cavern, explains a mysterious argument that

¹⁶ Compare with *V-MS/Vigil* 27:611, where he refers to "despondency" as a "defective disposition."

Kant jots in a margin of the *Opus postumum*, in which he cites the devil as a point of negative comparison: “Whether immortality can be included *a priori* among the characteristics which belong to freedom? Yes, if there is a devil. Since the latter has reason, but not infinity” (*OP* 21:37). What Kant means exactly is nebulous. But it is clear that what sets us apart, as free beings from the devil, would be our possession of not merely reason, but further infinity in contrast to the devil who possesses only reason. Perhaps it is Kant’s thought here that we are bearers of not merely reason, but further a constitutive, infinite quality that freedom entails—a nature of infinite *good* potential.

From this positive function, moreover, hope springs. And it springs because the condition of a comparison, even one based on only approximating similarity, is that we are not set apart from the individuated ideal of moral perfection absolutely, but instead are already—in some small way—of a shared nature with it, albeit deficiently so. In the *Bible*, the author of the *First Letter of Peter* writes:

Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”¹⁷

The “for it is written” refers to *Leviticus*, where God speaks to Moses, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”¹⁸ Indeed, it is this passage that Kant refers to explicitly in the part of the *Religion* in which he describes Christ as the ideal archetype (*Urbild*) of virtue, and the command to “be holy” (*Seid Heilig*).¹⁹ The epistle suggests that we must be members within a measurement system beyond any that experience can provide. Kant’s suggestion, rather than direct revelation, is that the ideal provides a window into our own (and the world’s) possibility of *being* more, namely, being more like an individuated standard whose potential we share, even while forever falling short in this lifetime.²⁰

Ideals, in sum, can be conceived as grounds that make living a life primed for moral action coherent in that they enable the benchmarking of our and

¹⁷ See 1 Pet. 1:14–6 (*The Holy Bible*, 250).

¹⁸ See Lev. 19:2 (*The Holy Bible*, 117).

¹⁹ See *RGV* 6:66.

²⁰ See Englert, “Kant’s Favorite Argument,” for how this relates to the teleological argument for our immortality.

the world's moral progress as individuals. They are models in thought that provide checks but also from which we glean degrees of moral reality in the world and infer potential for growth, not to mention point to a system in which such moral growth can make sense in the first place. In such a way, ideals accompany our thinking at all times as a moral reservoir of material—the divine man within us, the divine intelligence above us, the moral world before us, and so on—by which we gauge the degree of moral imperfection and remind ourselves that there is plenty of moral brick and mortar left to be set down. Despite a messy construction site, we also recognize those moral foundation stones that have already been set down.

2.3. Ideals as Grounding Substrates in Thought

Will this reconstruction provide a practicable solution for the redundancy problem? An answer to this question depends not only on my interpretation but also equally on the metaphysical slant of the reader. But even a reader who finds the use of grounding propitious and who accepts moral realism might ask: Can something be considered an influence if it *does* nothing, that is, remains in the background?

To take stock: Ideals on my reading remain an essential point of orientation without which moral experience as a lifelong, meaningful activity of morally progressing wholes would lose coherence. I think this moral substrate is also easy to take for granted. If the Kantian view as I present it holds, then it is always there or graspable in our rational nature. That is, it refers us to our own capacity or the very possibility for us to be a certain way—and *enables*, in turn, certain experiences of moral gradations in the context of projects that stretch a lifetime through evaluating individuals that are deficient relative to the maximum. It is in virtue of this awareness of a comparative maximum that we and the world are always in some scalar relation that we can then orient ourselves, take stock, and discern the moral state of affairs. And if an *a priori* condition of evaluating degrees of morality in the first place (albeit indirectly), then it is not something that we are consciously having to perform. Rather, our capacity to recognize the good is what reveals its *a priori*, necessary status. Consequently—and to answer the skeptical question—I think we can consider this enabling capacity to be a real and necessary influence of sorts. That is, to enable something is to influence something in an indirect way, even if it does not form a causal component in the

chain of reasoning but instead acts as a grounding component. Working with the terms “substrate,” “ground,” and “background,” the ideal illustrates that there is an influence at work in something’s being ready at hand.

The challenge facing my task is that we want things—and particularly practical elements—to *do* something for us, to motivate us, guide us, move us, and so on. It is not clear how one can think of practical power in noncausal terms. But I think a practical ideal possesses practical influence because it constitutes a moral grounding in virtue of which foundational moral experiences of comparing individuals as wholes are possible in the first place. For the Kantian theory, it is in virtue of this grounding being at all times present and unalterable (i.e., unalterable by our own conscious desires) that we are in a position to experience moral life in a coherent way even when moments to act are not at hand and when needing to evaluate individuals comparatively.

To make this sort of relation clear, I would like to use the “in-virtue-of” relation as a heuristic to get at how it might be articulated. I do not want, however, to identify the sort of grounding I have in mind with any modern theory. Modern theories operate within their own parameters with their own presuppositions that do not allow simple comparisons with historical theories. Nevertheless, I think that there is a similar drive at work in these projects, namely, to investigate meaningful relations of dependence that are metaphysically necessary but noncausal in nature. Paul Audi’s definition, for example, is: “I propose that [*grounding*] expresses a primitive, noncausal relation of determination.”²¹ This very loose definition suits my purposes quite well for the sort of determination that must be at play with practical ideals. “Primitive,”²² as something nonreducible and required; “noncausal” as influencing without effecting anything directly.

Since this sort of relation is rather counterintuitive, consider the following examples of a “*dispositional*” form of a grounding relation offered by Audi: “The ball is disposed to roll in virtue of being spherical. The wire has the power to conduct electricity in virtue of being copper.”²³ Both examples articulate the way that certain underlying traits must precede actions or processes without causing these to occur. Because the ball is spherical—in

²¹ Audi, “Grounding,” 686.

²² Shaffer, “On What Grounds What,” 364, and Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence,” 113–4, also see grounding as “primitive.” Shaffer calls it primitive in so far as it “is an unanalyzable but needed notion” (364).

²³ Audi, “Grounding,” 689.

the first place—its rolling is *then* possible. Because the wire is copper—in *the first place*—its power to conduct electricity is *then* possible. Furthermore, it is because these underlying traits persist that ongoing and future rolling or conducting of electricity is possible. Thus, there is a power or influence at work in these traits in so far as without them these events could not occur. And yet, they on their own do not cause anything to happen.

Returning to Kantian ideals: All direct guidance or governance of our actions is due to our freedom and self-guidance relative to the categorical imperative. That said, this idea as a moral-practical rule of reason determines individuated entities of thought, which play an indispensable albeit indirect role in our lives. Individuated as a subject, the moral law forms a person in the form of the perfect will, sage of the stoics, or Jesus Christ (depending on which work of Kant's one uses). Individuated as an object, the moral law forms the highest good possible in the world. Taken together, these form an underlying substrate (read: grounding) to our possible constitution as beings in the world. It is because this basic constitution persists and permeates as a background condition that we can intelligibly evaluate progress toward these standards of perfection as persisting points of comparison. That is, they are grounds of imitation, which make it first clear that (a) moral deficiencies exist and (b) potential acts of imitation can and must occur in order to correct these by realizing the moral potential we possess in reason.

To use an example of my own of the sort of grounding relation that I have in mind, consider: "I can navigate the world coherently in virtue of there being ground under my feet, a connected terrain, and Polaris holding North: all of which remain constant despite my movements." The example is imperfect since it relates my *physical* navigation with a *physical* terrain, and I want it to relate to *intelligible* elements in reason as they condition the very coherence of certain *experiences* in actual lived life. But the general idea aids in grasping the sort of influence that I have in mind, namely, a primitive and unconditionally fundamental one that does not cause anything, but rather must be presupposed in the first place. That is, one could not make any sense of navigation or movement were it not for the terrain and (here: literal) grounding that must precede the possibility of navigation to unfold. Whether we move remains up to us. And though we may forget the terrain under our feet and take for granted Polaris above us as we wander, all serve an essentially primitive and noncausal role by enabling our navigation and providing the space in which our experience of progress *as progress* is first possible.

On the working assumption that the highest good is an ideal in this sense, Kant might be seen as confessing the tacit nature of ideals in experience in *On the Common Saying* where he remarks that the principle of the moral law can “pass over and set aside (as episodic)” (*TP* 8:280) the doctrine of the highest good as its ideal object. As I discuss in later chapters, I think he is, first and foremost, highlighting the secondary or indirect importance of this ideal for moral action. But furthermore, I think he is pointing out that the highest good is in some ways marked by its (merely) apparent absence in quotidian conscious life. We need not always think of ideals. It is only when we reflect on how the moral parts fit together that we must indeed—when contemplating philosophically—think by means of these substrates explicitly. Otherwise, the grounding is doing its work whether we are cognizant of it or not. And this ideal grounding is something constant and permeating—an ideal material that we carry in us and that represents the point of reference for our moral activity in the world, which on its own might appear barren of morality on the Kantian picture. This substrate of goodness is one we possess as a standard and which serves as a moral constant against which we can orient ourselves in moral matters by identifying through comparison the moral projects underway and the constant improvement left to be realized. Ideals cause nothing, but rather permeate our thinking.

2.4. The Highest Good as an Ideal Proper

I have now, based on the textual evidence and philosophical analysis, provided an account of how practical ideals, as distinct from ideas, might serve a unique function in our lives relative to the rules of moral action. The question now is whether the highest good qualifies as a practical ideal along the lines of my conceptual reconstruction so far. That is, does Kant’s various employments of it across his critical works function as an ideal qua substrate? Or is it best conceived of as an idea, a rule that reiterates the moral law? My answer: the highest good ought to be interpreted as a textbook case of a practical ideal.

To get the foundation set for the rest of the study in Parts II and III, I will now illustrate the ways that the highest good persists in the conceptual form of a practical ideal as a grounding substrate in reason. That is not to say, as I already indicated, that the highest good remains static. As I show in Part II, it evolves as Kant reconsiders how we relate to it as agents and contemplative beings. However, it evolves in such a way that a unity to its form and function

persists, which accounts for why Kant eventually comes back to settle it in the background of experience in the third *Critique*. Regardless of how it shifts in Kant's theory, its features keep it firmly within the conceptual limits as an ideal. Drawing on my reconstruction of what makes a Kantian ideal distinct, it should always at base: (i) be an individuated substrate in reason (*entia rationis*) determined through the moral law, (ii) serve a negative function by revealing a gap between how things are and how they should be, and (iii) serve a positive function as indicating our and the world's potential to *be* good in the first place.

To (i): There is textual evidence that the highest good (I focus here on the *derivative* notion of a moral world that we are working to realize through our free actions) is always an individuated representation of the world, thought as determined fully by the moral law.²⁴ In all three *Critiques*, Kant refers to the highest good as a product of determining the moral law a step further to constitute an individuated world. This step, one might refer to as the step of *individuation* or *thoroughgoing determination in individuo*. The rule, on its own, is not an object, but if given material could conceivably direct the construction of an object. In the first *Critique*, the highest good as a moral world is defined exactly along these lines: "I call the world as it would be if it were in conformity with all moral laws (as it **can** be in accordance with the **freedom** of rational beings and **should** be in accordance with the necessary laws of **morality**) a **moral world**" (*KrV* A808/B836). And in the second *Critique* as well, one sees Kant treat the highest good as a world determined maximally by the moral law:

For, the moral law in fact transfers us, according to the idea [*der Idee nach*], into a nature in which pure reason, if it were accompanied with suitable physical power, would produce the highest good, and it determines our will to confer on the sensible world the form of a whole of rational beings. (*KpV* 5:43)

And in the third *Critique*, Kant asserts:

The moral law, as the formal rational condition of the use of our freedom, obligates us by itself alone, without depending on any sort of end as

²⁴ Kant refers to God in the first *Critique*—as an "intelligence, in which the morally most perfect will, combined with the highest blessedness, is the cause of all happiness in the world"—the "**ideal of the highest good**," or the "ideal of the highest **original** good" (*KrV* A810/B838). God, here, also serves the role of a grounding substrate to the highest good conceived as a moral world. Indeed, Kant notes that it is only in God that we can "find the ground of the practically necessary connection of both elements of the highest [*höchste*] derived good—the ground, namely of an intelligible, i.e., **moral world**" (*KrV* A810–11/B838–39).

a material condition; yet it also determines for us, and indeed does so *a priori*, a final end, to strive after which it makes obligatory for us, and this is the highest good in the world possible through freedom. (*KU* 5:450)

In all three, the highest good is a singular world—a point of orientation for all wills—that would be created if we were to give the moral law free rein to shape it through our wills collectively.

Moreover, in the texts, one sees that this individuation of the moral law is distinct from the moral law as a command. In a way that addresses the redundancy problem, Kant often notes that the moral law is not to be identified with the highest good. The highest good is simply not reducible to the moral law. As Kant notes in the *Religion*: “[The highest good] is a proposition that extends past the concept of duties in the world, and adds a consequence of these (an effect), which is not contained in the moral law, and thus cannot be worked out analytically from it” (*RGV* 6:7n). Pauline Kleingeld provides an analysis of this aspect of the highest good via the analogy of building a bicycle. None of the instructions (commands) on their own are identical with the completed bicycle. And yet, they also determine the creation of an individual object without which they would be senseless: “Only once I see the *complete* list of assignments and mentally put all the steps together does it become possible for me to see that I am, in this example, building a *bicycle*.”²⁵ Her point is that the commands are only coherent in so far as they relate to some final product (i.e., final end). The rules all point toward the creation of an individual object, and the individual in turn makes coherent the rules.²⁶

Finally, the highest good is individuated because there could be only *one* highest good to allow for harmony that does not leave anyone out or leave open the possibility of conflict. If not working within a framework of modal realism, which Kant was not,²⁷ then the highest good for *this* world only

²⁵ Kleingeld, “Kant on ‘Good,’” 46.

²⁶ Kant frequently says that it is a “duty for us to promote the highest good” (*KpV* 5:125, also, e.g., *KpV* 5:113, *KU* 5:450, 471). Understanding how to interpret this duty is a thorny and divisive issue in the literature (see Beck, *A Commentary*, 244–5; Engstrom, “The Concept of the Highest Good,” 776; Kahn, “On the Philosophical Incoherence,” 166–8; and Kleingeld, “Kant on ‘Good,’” 42–8). The issue is further complicated because some claim that Kant refers to an “extra” duty to promote the highest good (see *RGV* 6:7n and *TP* 8:280n). I agree with the view that there is no extra duty to promote the highest good over and above following the moral law.

²⁷ See, e.g., his repeated emphases in the *Opus postumum* that there is only *one* of any maximum in transcendental idealism: “The maximum of every kind, if it designates a totality, can only be one [*Eines*]” (*OP* 21:33, my translation). And: “That which can be thought but which cannot be perceived (*cogitabile, non dabile*) is a mere *idea* and if it concerns a maximum, then it is an *ideal*. The highest ideal as a person (which can only be an *individual*) is God” (*OP*, 21:30, my translation).

makes sense as singular. If there were a plurality of the *highest* goods, the term “highest” would simply lose cogency. There would cease to be a highest. That said, assuming that there even were such a plurality of equally high goods, it would seem that such a plurality of relatively higher goods would leave open the question of whether there were not, indeed, some superlative good that could unite them all. And if we are all working toward moral ends that are universally shared, it would also seem odd to consider these as not part of one unified project, the completion of which would be the highest good. Textually, it is clear that Kant thinks the moral law, as a universal principle of reason, directs us toward a single universal project of realizing *the* final end of morality (full stop). This adds yet one more reason that the highest good ought to be interpreted as an *individuated* end relative to the moral law.

(ii) The practical ideal’s negative function is again in how it reveals a gap between the maximum that we possess in reason and the deficient expressions exhibited in our own characters and the world. The highest good provides for such a negative function since it is never an object we achieve but rather represents a receding horizon. This is related to the claim that Kant makes in every work, namely, that the highest good is never completely in our power. It represents the completed object of pure practical reason. But as perfect virtue, it is never attainable in this life, and as complete happiness (proportionate to virtue), it can only be assumed possible if there is a God who can provide for exact distribution in a future life. For these reasons, Kant asserts that it must be conceived of as an object that we can only approximate, but never (in this life) fully attain. It remains, that is, an object that never finds sufficient expression in the world.

This gap between an asymptote of an ideal that leaves us constantly striving is a hallmark of Kant’s practical philosophy. And the highest good serves the negative function of an ideal well since a negative relation always holds between the highest good and the world. This function is particularly evident in the proportionality thesis of the highest good between virtue and happiness. Although we never have direct insight into anyone’s degree of virtue,²⁸ we also are not totally lost as to the moral state of things since we are always tuned into how things appear off from how they ought to be. And in comparing states of affairs in the world, we identify imperfections (or deviations from the ideal) precisely in the ubiquity of general injustice

²⁸ Though we can judge an action as conforming or not with the categorical imperative, as well as infer that someone acted from inclination if a wrong action is committed.

and suffering, and particularly in those ways that appear senseless, gratuitous, and irredeemable. In the next section, I provide an example of how this might look in a concrete case of moral evaluation that includes both the idea of virtue and happiness together.

(iii) Third, the importance of the highest good as persisting throughout all these works—even while the moral law becomes sufficient to determine and motivate us to act—points to the positive function of an ideal: namely, that it reveals a constant moral substrate to which we cannot help but relate in reason and which is central to how we view the moral potential of ourselves and the world.

In the first *Critique*, the highest good has objective reality not as a given object, but rather in the way it stands in relation to the world of sense “although as an object of pure reason in its practical use and a *corpus mysticum* of the rational beings in it, insofar as their free choice under moral laws has thoroughgoing systematic unity in itself as well as with the freedom of everyone else” (*KrV* A808/B836).²⁹ It models, therefore, a potential state—a state with which we can compare the sensible world as not providing the same “complete systematic unity” if left without supplementation by an ideal of reason. And though merely an ideal in the first *Critique*, the very task of making this world into a copy presupposes that there is a potential for goodness in the sensible world as it is experienced.

Further, in the second *Critique*, in reference to practical “archetypes,” Kant refers to them serving as a “*standard of comparison*” (*KpV* 5:127n). And in the third *Critique*, this comparison relation takes on the form of the final end of creation itself, which can provide a “common reference point [*Beziehungspunkt*]” (*KU* 5:440–1) for all ends (natural and moral) in one system. And, as previously mentioned, in the *Religion*, he states in the same vein that the highest good “does not increase the number of duties, but provides them with a special point of reference [*Beziehungspunkt*] of the unification of all ends” (*RGV* 6:5, my translation). As a point of reference, it reveals a permeating potential of goodness indirectly. In reference to our wills, it reveals our potential to *be* fully good and, in reference to the world, its potential to *be made* fully good (despite appearing fully deterministic according to natural laws). Subsequently, it is the *rule*, then, which tells us

²⁹ At the beginning of this passage, he describes how the “objective reality” of the ideal is “not as if it pertained to an object of intelligible intuition” (*KrV* A808/B836). This poses a challenge for my reading, which I discuss in the next chapter.

to turn the potential maximums of goodness in us and the world into actuality: that is, to make the ideal *actually* real. But it is the ideal that represents the point to which we must refer when faced with a morally deficient world, even while the ideal enables cognition via the same comparison that reveals the deficiencies.

Textually and conceptually, the highest good appears a perfect fit to be categorized as an ideal according to its form developed so far. It is an individuated entity of our reasoning that grounds moral evaluations via comparisons to help us know the world as a potential habitat for moral activity and experience its progress in this direction.

2.5. Comparative Contemplation with the Highest Good

I have mentioned how a maximum of goodness could reveal degrees of deficiency in the case of individuals. How, though, would the highest good function as a point of comparison in contemplation, especially given its inclusion of happiness? This deserves inspection.

Kant gives us relatively little to work with. But this lack of material is less evidence against the viability of my reading than a sign of a blind spot (quite literally) in Kant's own epistemology, namely: in accounting for how purely descriptive evaluations of morally salient experiences are possible. Exposing this lacuna is the topic of my next chapter. In short, no straightforward form of judgment in Kant's epistemology can account for the reference to "assessing" and "measuring" moral degrees and nuance. For this reason, I've been using "contemplation" in an explicitly capacious way, but also with textual standing. Using Kant's intriguing language from the third *Critique*, I think it is what must be employed in "contemplation involving subtle reasoning [*vernünfteln*de Contemplation] in accordance with ideas" (KU 5:292), substituting "ideal" for "idea," of course. For now, though, it is not difficult to reconstruct how the highest good as an ideal could serve us in assessing states of affairs as an ideal point of comparison.

To see this, let us first introduce another example, namely, the case of the crooked landlord: Alan and Lana find a place to rent in a competitive real estate market. At first, they are very content. But at some point, it becomes clear that something is amiss. They realize that there are many issues with the property that are hazardous to their health. And these issues seem the sort of thing that an inspection would have found and corrected. One morning they

smell smoke coming from the basement, call the fire department, and soon discover—through the officials’ investigation—that the property has been rented illegally to them, without proper registration or inspection.

It comes to light that Janet, the landlord who owns the property, knew better. She rents other properties that *are* registered, making the offense a clear-cut case of getting her hand caught in the proverbial cookie jar. At this point, though, rather than make amends, Janet seeks a retributive course of action. She blames Alan and Lana—inexplicably—for the whole affair. She accuses them of needing to pay for certain repairs and of “helping” the inspector to find issues that he otherwise would not have discovered after finally gaining access to the property. Janet tries everything she can think of to turn the tables. She threatens to evict her tenants (though she cannot legally). Then, she claims that they will need to move out for her to undertake the repairs at their own cost (though that also is illegal). After begrudgingly beginning some of the requisite repairs, she gets caught trying to outmaneuver the inspector by taking illegal shortcuts. Finally, she threatens to raise the rent to unforgivably high levels, forcing Alan and Lana into a predicament of wanting to move, but not being able to find anything comparable in the market where they have to live for work.

Alan and Lana, to say the least, suffer. Not only do they feel mistreated, but they also do not understand why they are being accused. They have never missed a payment, been prompt to alert Janet to issues, and have been fine tenants. The strain of their treatment and fears of what Janet might be able to do to them cause them many sleepless nights, anxiety, and stress as they weigh their options and seek legal counsel. By all outward appearances, it is a clear-cut case of decent people suffering for no good reason.

Let us imagine that we are Alan and Lana’s neighbors. Beyond our sympathy for them, we note that independent of our feelings, there is something off about the whole affair. Alan and Lana do not strike us as morally perfect by any stretch of the imagination. But they also are decent human beings who are clearly being mistreated in this situation. And when we notice how unhappy and stressed they appear, we judge that the whole state of affairs is off balance. *Ceteris paribus*, they are being treated in ways that are disproportionately harsh relative to their (observable) degree of virtue. While they could also clearly suffer *more*, we adjudge that this state of affairs presents us with a case of the world being imperfect. The *whole* affair is off-kilter.

Now the question: What in Kant’s epistemology can account for this judgment of Lana’s and Alan’s predicament as a whole? What concepts could reveal

this apparent imperfection? We decide to consult our Kantian friend, Manuel. What in Kant's system would enable such a judgment, such a grasping of some whole that is morally off? Manuel notes that it is not going to be an empirical judgment, since it involves morally salient features that cannot be derived from previous experiences. But it will also not be a straightforward, constitutive judgment of the understanding. The categories will not reveal the moral nuances in terms of the apparent virtue and suffering of Alan and Lana. The categories are merely theoretical and morally neutral.

Manuel then begins hunting for the actions of the parties involved, hoping that he can apply the categorical imperative to reveal why the whole state of affairs appears so unjust. To do so, he must assess the forms of action involved via practical judgments. He returns to us and shares that after subjecting all possible maxims to the test of the categorical imperative, he is fairly sure that Janet's actions appear impermissible, and that Alan and Lana appear to have acted in line with what morality would command. However, even if these evaluations could describe the discrete actions and even if they were combined in some sort of an aggregate, a big question looms, namely: how does this enable a judgment of the total state of affairs as an imbalance between degrees of moral worthiness and relative happiness (or lack thereof)? Practical judgment of the moral permissibility or impermissibility of actions simply fails to describe the whole state of affairs since it only applies to discrete actions and does not pertain to happiness.

Moreover, our contemplation of this scenario, while evoking in us a natural sympathy, is not based on our personal feelings for them. We assume that a disinterested judge of sound mind would find the situation a clear case of unjust treatment and unfortunate suffering of innocents. Based on concepts of reason (i.e., moral ones), that is, we find our judgments to have an objective quality. The whole affair *is* relatively unjust, and in a way that is independent of our emotions. As a result, aesthetic judgments do not seem to fit, as they are connected to how we are affected by objects such that we cannot immediately conceptualize them. Manuel is at a loss.³⁰ But evaluate the whole situation we *do*. Indeed, we feel compelled to judge the state of affairs in a necessarily determinant manner. And barring a radical turn of events, this seems like a classic case (among all too many others) of good people suffering for no justifiable reason.

³⁰ Why it does not obviously seem based on the principle of purposiveness or mere reflective judgments of aesthetic qualities or teleological composition is a topic that I discuss in Chapter 3.

It appears that what we need is not merely a perception of individual moments and actions, but rather an evaluation that takes up the state of affairs as a whole. Returning to the language from before, what is required is something like the “contemplation involving subtle reasoning [*vernünfteln* *Contemplation*] in accordance with ideas” (*KU* 5:292), from the third *Critique*. Or from the first *Critique*, a comprehension through concepts of reason: “Concepts of reason serve for **comprehension** [*Begreifen*], just as concepts of the understanding serve for **understanding** [*Verstehen*] (of perceptions)” (*KrV* A311/B367). An idea, as a practical rule, telling us how we ought to act unconditionally does *not* explain well the possibility of this purely descriptive experience. An ideal world, by contrast, which is determined by this idea as a singular maximum of perfection, marked by everyone doing their duty and flourishing, could explain well what we are noticing, namely: an inadequate fit between what we perceive and this ideal that we possess in reason as a maximum point of comparison. And through this comparison, the ideal enables us to grasp a state of affairs as a whole. Ideals as standards of comparison would always orient us to the good, individuated in various guises, and serve as wholes relative to which we can contemplatively recognize certain wholes as comparatively deficient. Exploring how this might look in detail, as well as how it could fill a gap in Kant’s moral epistemology, is the task of my next two chapters.

Redundant concepts in Kant’s system indeed!

3

The Moral Epistemic Gap

So far, I have argued that practical ideals can be read as serving a unique role in Kant's theory, as uniquely of moral epistemic significance in contemplation. Textually and philosophically, I find the view compelling. It suggests that Kant saw a need to account for how we experience morality in the world in a purely descriptive manner (which is to say in third-personal terms). I already gave indications of why I think something like this story is needed by Kant's account, as well as previewed how it might work via, what I termed, negative constitutive judgments. But I delayed extensive discussion because it is complicated, and ultimately it stands in tension with hallmark features of Kant's view. In this chapter, I argue that Kant has, as I will call it, a *moral experience problem* due to a *moral epistemic gap* in his epistemology. In the next chapter, I will suggest that using ideals can fill the gap if one is prepared to expand Kant's epistemology.

To begin, I want to distinguish a moral epistemic gap from an *epistemic limit* that has been recently associated with Kant's theory. For example, Joe Saunders has recently—to my mind—stated precisely the main issue that I am worried about with Kant's moral experience problem. He says that Kant “overlooks the importance of the third person in moral philosophy.”¹ He points out that important features like being able to recognize others as morally responsible beings, as well as degrees of responsibility, cannot be accounted for due to Kant's transcendental idealism.² Saunders argues that, granting Kant's transcendental idealism, we are bound by certain “epistemic limits” such that there can be absolutely no way of experiencing that we are transcendently free: “In locating freedom outside of nature, Kant ruled out any experience of freedom.”³ And:

¹ Saunders, “Kant and the Problem,” 169. And I agree with him in assessing theories, like Grenberg's, *Kant's Defense*, 15, which seeks to distance practical philosophy completely from third-personal accounts.

² Saunders, “Kant and the Problem,” and “Kant and Degrees.” Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, 169, also highlights a similar problem.

³ Saunders, “Kant and the Problem,” 177.

One might suggest that, with human beings, we experience behaviour that requires explanations in terms of reasons or agency. And that seems right. However, once again, Kant is not entitled to this, given his conception of experience. I am not being unfair to him here. This is his position. As we saw in §3, he repeatedly insists that we could have no experience of freedom whatsoever. This problem infects Kant's whole theory of freedom.⁴

If Saunders is right, then it would be absolutely impossible in principle (i.e., according to the principles of Kant's system) to know anything about freedom beyond the fact that we—as of the second *Critique*—must infer it based on our awareness of the moral law. And the reason is that “If we can have no experience or intuition of the noumenal, then we can have no consciousness of our own activity,”⁵ let alone experiences of anyone else being free or discerning that certain phenomenal properties are morally valanced. This would further entail that there is no hope for Kant's theory to provide anything like a robust moral phenomenology of individuals (subjects or objects) as they are morally progressing. We would have phenomenal experience of deterministic appearances, an awareness of the moral law (our responsibility), but from there only infer that we are, in fact free. The only moral experience in this account, it seems, is the consciousness of the moral law and what it prescribes, forbids, and so on. Whereas a “limit” suggests an uncrossable line—a blockage of any progress—I think there is simply a gap that requires filling. Once filled, the problem will dissolve.

While Kant reiterates time and again that we can have no sensible intuition of freedom or of morality proper, he is also inconsistent on this score as illustrated from the numerous passages noted in the previous two chapters that indicate we can assess and estimate individuals as morally progressing based on observation and, indeed, relative to an ideal maximum. And in this inconsistency, I see hope to save his theory from an incapacity to account for certain basic moral experiences. Here is an example of one such inconsistency: In the doctrine of method in the third *Critique*, Kant indicates that we might *experience* freedom as related to real actions. When speaking about “facts” [*Tatsachen*] that are proper objects of knowledge, Kant asserts that they must either be mathematical (constructing adequate sensible intuitions based on a priori concepts) or experiential in which case—whether “from

⁴ Saunders, “Kant and the Problem,” 174.

⁵ Saunders, “Kant and the Problem,” 170.

theoretical or practical *datis* of the same must in all cases be mediated by a corresponding intuition” (KU 5:468). Already here, the question is what provides the “practical *datis*” that serves as evidence of the facts. Kant continues with a strikingly odd passage:

But what is quite remarkable, there is even one idea of reason (which is in itself incapable of any presentation in intuition, thus incapable of theoretical proof of its possibility) among the facts, and that is the idea of **freedom**, the reality of which, as a particular kind of causality (the concept of which would be excessive from a theoretical point of view) can be established [*dartun lässt*] through practical laws of pure reason, *and, in accordance with these, in real actions, and thus in experience*. It is the only one among all the ideas of pure reason whose object is a fact and which must be counted among the *scibilia*. (KU 5:468, emphasis added)

First, Kant reiterates his key claim that the idea of freedom itself is incapable of sensible presentation. And yet, he states that it is among the known facts not only because we are aware of “practical laws” (as he argues in the second *Critique*) but—and this is the important line for my purposes—also because “in accordance with these” (practical laws), they can be established (or *dargetan*) “in real actions, and thus in experience.”⁶ Reading Kant here as meaning what he says, we are not just experiencing the moral law but a relation between it and real actions in experience. And if we can do this, then the experience of the world as morally expressive in some way must be possible. For we must be capable of recognizing some similarity between a moral intention or prescription and a moral work. Otherwise, whence any conviction that morality can take root in the world at all? Yet, behold the beneficence that is apparent, the shades of morality that color experience, and we begin to see the need not merely to prescribe, but further describe the world *as* morally valanced. I will take this as an anchor point: We can establish that moral *experience* is possible in principle for Kant. For now, I am willing to take the

⁶ This might connect to Kant’s argument from section three of the *Groundwork* in which he talks of our ability to transfer ourselves to the purely intelligible standpoint (cf. GMS 4:452–4). NB: I am making a stronger claim than, say, Frierson, *Kant’s Empirical Psychology*, 52, for whom moral psychology while perhaps “correlated” to empirical “markers” ultimately “cannot discuss the underlying transcendental freedom that ultimately explains choices for which people can be held morally responsible.” He thinks that nothing in our empirical psychology is necessary or sufficient for knowledge of transcendental freedom and, hence, moral responsibility. I think that the knowledge Kant speaks of in this passage *is* necessary and sufficient. Otherwise, it could not establish freedom as fact, which it does as a “practical *datis*.”

gift horse and ignore the state of its mouth. Though I agree with Saunders that this on its own does not suffice to account for moral experiences without further articulation—to such an articulation, I now turn.

One caveat: This chapter is a significant start of an account that would require further studies to spell out in detail. In the process, I propose some fruitful directions to go, but admit too that many Kantians will find these unappealing. Because Kant's epistemology is so complicated, this chapter is a broad strokes approach to an etiology of the problem and solution. That said, I see it as motivating the adoption of practical ideals as rational substrates as I have worked out in the previous two chapters since they elegantly fill the gap.

3.1. Kant's Moral Experience Problem

In Chapters 1 and 2, I already noted that ideals are the basis for our moral evaluation of individuals in experience as moral works in progress, always deficient, but deficient in degrees relative to ideals as maximum standards of comparison. Herein lies an interpretive riddle since, first, Kant thinks that the phenomenal world cannot supply us with knowledge of the good. But, second, Kant also insists that we *can* know events and individuals in the world to be good or evil (indirectly and to degrees). Yet, third, Kant does not have an obvious and immediate way of explaining how such comparative evaluations of the moral state of individuals (and states of affairs) in experience occur in a descriptive manner. The problem is that Kant's description of practical cognitions and practical judgments—the two epistemic elements in practical reasoning—are exclusively first-personal, prescriptive, and prospective in nature. The question is: Can Kant's epistemology explain third-personal and descriptive accounts of moral individuals that are comparative?

To begin, let us consider some textual evidence that Kant thought we can indeed experience value in the world of phenomenal appearances. Kant says in the *Vienna Logic* when discussing the nature of ideas that:

The whole of morality rests on ideas. We cannot encounter virtue among men. But my reason must nonetheless have a concept of virtue, as it must be in its complete perfection. We can perceive [*wahrnehmen*] virtue in experience. But much must still be added; thus it is an idea. (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:906)

Or as Kant notes in the Pölitz lectures on religion: “Human virtue is always imperfect; but for this reason we must have a standard in order to *see* how far this imperfection falls short of the highest degree of virtue. It is the same with vice” (*V-Phil-Th/Pölitz* 28:994, emphasis added). These textual examples I introduce as evidence that Kant would not want to deny that we can experience, indeed, *perceive* morally salient features in phenomenal experience.

Further, many instances of him saying similar things from the first *Critique* were cited in Chapters 1 and 2, though with reference to “evaluation” as opposed to perceptual experience. But in those passages, there was also just as much an emphasis on our status as judges of moral experience, rather than actors. Consider the following passage from the third *Critique*, in which Kant speaks to how we must find morality in perceptual experience: “The visible expression of moral ideas, which inwardly govern human beings, can of course be drawn only from experience” (*KU* 5:235). Kant continues to explain how it is that we can evaluate these visible expressions drawn from experience:

to make visible in bodily manifestation (as the effect of what is inward) their combination with everything that our understanding connects with the morally good in the idea of the highest purposiveness—goodness of soul, or purity, or strength, or repose, etc.—this requires pure ideas of reason and great force of imagination united in anyone *who would merely judge them*, let alone anyone who would present them. (*KU* 5:235, emphasis added)

Here Kant, I think, is saying that we can only perceive the visible expression of morality through a unique form of assaying. Kant, scant on details, suggests that we must employ the imagination together with ideas (following my reading “with ideals”). But here, the contemplative notion beckons, which I explored at the end of Chapter 2. And this form need not be one that is prescriptive, for we can “merely judge them” even while not necessarily embodying them. He notes a “great force of the imagination” being required, but nothing more. And here we have the tension in plain view that requires an expansion of Kant’s system in the direction of ideals serving as a substrate for judgments.

Beyond this exegetical evidence, however, there are philosophical and intuitive reasons for why Kant’s theory would do better by including our capacity to see and judge value in the world in a merely descriptive manner. I begin with the philosophical reasons.

One reason has to do with Kant's repeated claims that obligation requires the real possibility of the commanded end. Kant's moral theory works according to a model in which commands are issued whose real possibility is required in order for them to be obligating. By "real possibility," Kant means that something is not merely conceptually (or logically) possible but further that it is possible to be realized as a representation in space and time. Acting from duty can only be obligatory if it is *really* possible for us to realize the prescribed action in the world of sense through our freedom. It follows that Kant's moral theory demands that we intend to cause effects in the world and independently ascertain the real possibility of morally determined events occurring in the world *at all*. And how can we ascertain the real possibility if *nothing* in experience that we can directly perceive corresponds to what we cook up when reasoning practically? Without evidence that morality can even take place in the world of sense, that is, a radical skepticism would result and one would lose any grounds for measuring one's progress along the way. This is not to say that it is psychologically necessary. Rather, it is a need connected to what it means to be morally free in the first place; namely, a need to establish freedom's *efficacy* as really possible.

Another reason has to do with features of our common moral phenomenology. For instance, the possibility of measuring—or evaluating—moral progress of individuals is important for how we navigate life, establish relations of trust, and seek reconciliation. Kant's moral theory is complex in that it includes the duty not merely to act from duty, but furthermore the duty to perfect ourselves until we have attained complete perfection, which remains impossible in this lifetime. While we can never be completely sure of how we are progressing, since Kant thinks that we are never totally transparent even to ourselves in terms of motivations, he nevertheless thinks that we can use outward appearances as an approximating stand-in for direct knowledge of our moral state. As he notes in the *Religion*, while we cannot encounter our disposition, we do experience signs of our improving character "in the sensible world" (RGV 6:74–5n, my translation). Kant is speaking of how we can approximately judge our progress in how it "reveals itself in actions" (RGV 6:74–5n, my translation). But if actions or series thereof could not be morally evaluated in any way, then we could never tell that we are progressing. Kant's insistence that we improve ourselves, however, requires that we also sensibly benchmark signs of improvement from which we might infer that our underlying disposition is morally improving. Of course, here he is speaking of actions. But even if it is restricted to actions, we would need to evaluate them

in appearances. So we still need an account of how this is possible. And moreover, I think Kant's theory need not be made so barebones. For a great degree of moral perception and concomitant judgment will inevitably include evaluations that are not reducible to actions. To properly benchmark moral progress (even if always in some form of deficiency), we will need more thorough appraisals of what we witness in the person's overall presence.

To make what I mean by "overall presence," clearer: We may, for example, judge that a person has come a long way. She is kinder, more giving, softer in fraught situations, and so on. But here is the key point. Even if practical judgments could give us a sure guide in judging whether the actions of others are consistent with duty, would that be enough to allow the comparison just noted with all its shades of detail? One might say, "Of course!" If someone now is doing more morally consistent actions than they have ever done at any other time in the past, then surely they are morally progressing. Intuitively, though, we have reason to doubt. Quantity of morally consistent actions does not necessarily mean the person is morally improved.

Need the Kantian accept such a nonintuitive position? I don't think so. It seems to me that the Kantian should reply, "Not entirely." Certainly, how one acts is essential in our evaluations. But more must go into evaluating an individual that is not reducible to actions, but instead rests on perceiving *how* they perform the actions combined with other experiences of them. For instance, we might see that someone is just going through the motions or that how they talk behind closed doors belies their lack of commitment to a cause that they publicly support. If moral evaluation is of an individual, we might need more than a rule: We might need to know how an individual, as a complex whole, would *be* if aligned with the rule—even if this is known only indirectly through how we see the world as deficient without being able to say why. That is, we often experience not only actions, but rather we experience the *individual* through perceiving *how* they act in ways that cannot be determined by direct appeal to moral maxims.

Connected to this point of common moral phenomenology, Kant's theory cannot account for moral nuance.⁷ When we form maxims, this first-personal process is not a source that could inform us of *degrees* of goodness. It appears a rather cut-and-dry affair. Actions that are permissible, say, are not going to tell us whether some are *more* permissible than others. And

⁷ Relatedly, Saunders, "Kant and Degrees of Responsibility," thinks that judging degrees of responsibility cannot be accounted for in Kant's theory.

those that are obligatory, or, necessary duties, will all be *equally* so, since one cannot be more necessary than another. Kant endorses this explicitly in the *Metaphysics of Morals* since this explains why he thinks there can be no conflict between duties:

A *conflict of duties* [...] would be a relation between them in which one of them would cancel the other (wholly or in part).—But since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain action and two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time [...] so a *collision of duties* and obligations is inconceivable. (MS 6:224)

On the side of vice, we encounter the same problem. There are degrees of evil related to the various predispositions of humanity, but even these will not necessarily give us a basis on which to experience a situation as possessing a *degree* of more or less moral imperfection within any one of them. And yet it seems quite possible that one might have two tokens of radical evil within the same degree that we would evaluate differently in terms of weight of wickedness. Kant leaves open how to make such fine-tuned discernments.

Finally, we ought to be capable of experiencing morality as perceivable in the world because of Kant's discursive theory of knowledge. This will raise many alarm bells for a Kantian, since it seems that it is precisely his discursive theory of knowledge that firmly establishes the impossibility of moral empirical experience (i.e., it is at the center of his idealism and the reason that Saunders asserts an epistemic *limit* as opposed to a mere *gap*). And while this is true in one sense, it also sets his theory up for failure if taken to extremes (even if those extremes are endorsed by Kant). His theory is discursive because he thinks that knowledge is a product of two stems of knowledge working in tandem: Our senses provide received "matter," in his terms, via sensible intuitions; but this matter can only be made intelligible through concepts that function to determine it into a universal form. This discursivity thesis is connected with Kant's famous claim about intuitions being blind without concepts and concepts being empty without intuitions. And it is on this discursivity thesis that Kant rests his realism (in contrast to a Platonic theory of ideas, Neo-Platonic mysticism, or a Berkleyean idealism, say). It is not that our concepts *create* the world; rather, they *work* with mind-independent matter mediated by sensations (which are themselves not representations) to determine experience. Important for the context of this discussion is that Kant finds the real-making quality of our cognitions and

judgments (if they are to be claims about the sensible world, and—not—say mere thoughts⁸) as dependent on the world providing some given empirical correlate that constitutes part of the representation.

Now, Kant, as already noted, thinks that the concept of morality is not derived from the world of experience and finds no adequate representation therein. One can refer to this quality as the *novelty of moral concepts*. Whereas an empirical concept or category finds perfect-fitting examples, moral concepts find only imperfect-fitting ones. However, if one accepts this absolutely, then his moral theory, I think, loses much of its otherwise intuitive appeal. Just as with other concepts, were it not the case that moral concepts could find a real correlation or instantiation to intuitions in the world of sense, then it seems that we would be free to adopt a moral skepticism about the validity of the moral law in the first place. At least this is one reason why I think that he connects freedom to “real actions” in the passage from the third *Critique* cited above. We should want *some* evidence that our moral maxim setting is not misfiring in the world of sense 100% of the time. As a point of comparison, the pure category of causation is only actually instantiated if some intuition serves as an example of it (even if it is a subjective condition of possible experience):

E.g., cause and effect [are concepts] of the understanding. One can distinguish the things in sense, [can] sense what the talk is about in the case of effect, cause, etc., but the concept of causality lies merely in the understanding. Now the question arises, Can one encounter in experience the objects of this, his concept of the understanding? Resp. Yes. This happens through examples. An example of causality is: fire destroys wood. (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:905–6)

And as has been referenced, Kant even maintains that there must be at least some examples of morality, even if it cannot be adequately exhibited. Thus, there is a worry that without being able to judge virtue as instantiated in the sensible world, granted in some form of approximating degrees, then we would perhaps lose any warrant to be moral realists beyond the mere awareness of the moral law. Even if the texts were to indicate unmistakably that this is Kant’s intent, though, it would make his theory seem an odd caricature

⁸ Kant notes that we may have a cognition that is exclusively a represented concept, in which case we are merely thinking, as he notes in the *Jäsche Logik*: “Cognitions through concepts is called thought (*cognitio discursiva*)” (*Log* 9:91).

of actual, lived experience in which we have a strong awareness of morally valued events, individuals, institutions, and so on. For nonrealists, this will not cause alarm. But for all those who, like me, see Kant as defending a moral realism, we should very much want some confirmation from experience, both first-personal and third-personal, that our pure concepts are not merely in our heads.

But precisely here we encounter the problem of moral experience for Kant. And the reason is that his theory of discursivity makes it such that only sensible intuitions provide us with singular representations (as noted in Chapter 1). But due to the novelty of moral concepts as strictly pure concepts that can never adequately correspond to intuitions, it remains difficult to see how any relating can occur.

Kant never gives up the novelty of moral concepts. For example, in the third *Critique*, Kant says: “To demonstrate the reality of our concepts, intuitions are always required” (*KU* 5:351). He continues then to describe three ways that our concepts can be connected with intuitions. The first way is that an empirical concept presents us with an “example” (*KU* 5:351). This would be when one points to a grizzly bear as an example of the concept “bear.” The second way, for the categories and concepts of the understanding, is that we connect them to intuitions through “schemata” (*KU* 5:351). This is the process referred to in the passage above from the *Vienna Logic* where “fire burns wood” is schematized as an example of causation in space and time. And the final way is, in point of fact, no way if dealing with appearances and pertains precisely to ideas as novel concepts: “But if one demands that the objective reality of the concepts of reason, i.e., of the ideas, be demonstrated, and moreover for the sake of theoretical cognition of them, then one desires something impossible, since no intuition adequate to them can be given at all” (*KU* 5:351). This does not seem promising for an account of third-personal, descriptive moral experience. Kant then points out that, despite this inability to find adequate intuitions for ideas, one can use symbols to represent them indirectly. In symbolization, “the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization” (*KU* 5:351). Kant provides the example of using the symbol of an ensouled body for a just kingdom and a gristmill for a despotic one. Here, one will note the moral epistemic gap when thinking of the passages cited above about the visible expression of morality. And while there are certain ideas (or, better, ideals), like God, which simply can never be exhibited, the same it seems should *not* be true for the ideal of an archetypal good will,

which presumably many of us are with stops and starts approximating as we progress in the sensible world.

Perhaps one would say that the third option of symbolization is simply the best way forward. But spelling this out, I think, would underdetermine comparative moral experiences of moral progress and deficiency so much so as to leave Kant's theory looking absurd. First, how would symbolization aid us in judging that the balance between virtue and happiness (lack thereof, really) is off in the case of Lana and Alan from the end of the previous chapter? Moreover, it would seem that we can only symbolically schematize on the grounds that we have already produced a moral evaluation, for which we then seek out a sensibly appropriate correlating symbol. Otherwise, we could not accurately symbolize, for example, a good kingdom in contradistinction to a despotic one in the first place. Finally, if he goes this route, then we could only judge states and persons *as if* they were good or evil. I will discuss this more below. But, at first blush, this also seems absurd, namely, that any judgment of degrees of good and evil gives us nothing but an analogical representation. Even if working with degrees and approximations, this does not entail that we view the apparent goods and evils as analogically so. This result, while epistemically humble, would give no stable grounds to hold anyone culpable, ever.

Exegetically and philosophically, therefore, it seems to me that Kant has a moral experience problem in that Kant's theory needs to have but does not seem to allow for moral experiences of value in the world. Now there might be complex workarounds to solve the problem by appealing to the moral law, but I actually do not think that this would solve the problem but only aggravate it. For even if, textually, the passages I cited can be massaged away (as some Kantians euphemistically refer to defeating another Kantian's evidence); and even if, philosophically, one can show that Kant need not ever admit to a moral experience that is purely descriptive, this leads to what I find Kant's chief problem, namely, it presents a barren picture of moral experience. And it is a barren picture of moral experience because it reduces all moral experience to maxims and laws, as well as judgments based on knowing the laws (explicitly or implicitly). While many Kantians will say, "Quite right. That's simply Kant!" it does not seem like the Kantian needs to accept such a reductive account. One worry that I have if one does make the reductive move is that it will leave moral experience underdetermined and unnecessarily diminish the Kantian account's appeal. Moral experience seems to me, rightly, to not merely consist in forming beliefs about what one

ought to do (Kantian practical judgments leading to practical cognitions). Rather, I think that moral experience—if we seek to do justice to actual moral phenomenology—consists also of fine-tuned moral evaluations that need not be reduced to expressions of the moral principles of action.

To summarize, the moral experience problem is present because it is not totally clear that Kant can account for the possibility of moral judgments that are purely descriptive in nature and which account for the gradations of moral imperfection. There must be some account, though. Despite Kant's skepticism about knowing our own true intentions, it seems too far from his professed views to think that he thought we could not have *any* way of morally evaluating individual states of affairs about ourselves, others, or the world with some degree of accuracy. And it is a quite commonsense perspective to assert that somehow in human experience we can observe and judge certain actions and states of affairs as morally good or evil. We praise and blame based on these judgments; more seriously, we imprison people based on these evaluations. And we can judge situations from a detached position, by which I mean, from a position of agential neutrality. We often (if not *most* often) are spectators in the world. We read accounts of, watch documentaries about, and hear the tales of those who found themselves in moments that have clear moral stakes. In such a situation, it is not *prima facie* that we are confronted with the moral law or conferring value extrinsically from some extension thereof. We are not setting maxims, because we are not present. And still, we deem the situations as loaded with moral meaning and evaluate the ways that others acted as worthy of praise or blame on moral grounds, often immediately without thinking too much. We can do so quickly and draw connections of comparison with other events. And further, we judge degrees of value in more than a merely analogous way. That is, we do not judge the random beating of innocents by a gang *as if* it is more evil than a student, say, plagiarizing an essay.

Kant's theory—I contend—will be a better theory if we can expand it to account for how such merely descriptive, third-personal evaluations of moral degrees in individuals are possible. And I think it can.

3.2. The Gap and Quick-Fix Approach

To put the epistemic gap simply, while Kant's epistemology explains how we can think about moral actions, it leaves us—as far as I know—on our own

to figure out *if*, and if yes, *how* moral experiences and related, descriptive judgments are possible.

Initially, one will turn to the moral law as the way of explaining how it is that we evaluate moral individuals comparatively. Perhaps we—after internalizing the moral law—can through habituation become quick judges of whether things align with universalizable maxims. Further, morality—since it is not a feature of natural empirical experience—also must, at some point, terminate in a will as its source. So, one might think that every manner of moral value appearing in nature must be attached to some action or agent. And, finally, if operating under the principle of parsimony, one ought to make the most of the principles that one has within Kant's already full system.

Let us, then, first attempt to apply this most obvious fix: namely, appeal to the moral law, expressed by the categorical imperative and its various formulations. The solution would be that the moral law presents us with an *ought* that we use then to interpret the world. Just as we practically judge how we ought to act by subsuming a particular action under the moral law, we do the same when judging others and states of affairs. We judge what anyone *ought* to do in such a situation. Even when we are not acting, we can judge based on imagining ourselves in the situation. We are able to import ourselves into the mindset of the agent. If we then find the way someone acts in line with how we think we ought to act, then we judge it as morally good.

And Kant does think that the categorical imperative and our deliberations about it occur through cognitions and judgments of a practical nature, which terminate in imperatival representations (*I ought to do X*, etc.). The hunch will be that whatever evaluations we are making, these must somehow be a subset within the domain of practical cognitions and judgments or some derivation thereof. To put this in the more technical language of Kantian epistemology, this would work through a process of combining various cognitions (as various species of representation that are either singular intuitions or concepts)⁹ into a judgment. In general, Kant defines judgment in the B-Deduction of

⁹ Regarding "cognitions" [*Erkenntnisse*], Kant is reported as saying at the beginning of the *Vienna Logic* lecture notes: "There are two kinds of cognition. An *a priori* one, which is independent of experience; and an *a posteriori* one, which is grounded on empirical principles" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:792). And: "All representation is either sensation or cognition. It is something that has a relation to something in us. Sensations do affect, but they quickly vanish, too, because they are not cognitions. For when I sense, I cognize nothing. Cognition is of two kinds, either intuition or concept. The former is singular, the latter universal. For a concept belongs to all" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:805). See also the *Jäsche Logik* (1800): "All cognitions, that is, all representations related with consciousness to an object, are either *intuitions* or *concepts*" (9:91), as well as the *Dohna-Wundlacken Logik* (1792): "All cognition is through intuition or concept—representation is an elementary expression which cannot be further analyzed" (*V-Lo/Dohna* 24:752). Cognition differs from mere sensation in that they can easily take

the first *Critique* as “nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception” (KrV B141). In the *Vienna Logic*, he explains in detail the process by which cognitions in general combine to form judgments that, in turn, form a single representation:

A judgment is generaliter the representation of the unity in a relation to many cognitions. A judgment is the representation of the way that concepts belong to one consciousness universally, objectively. If one thinks two representations as they are combined together and together constitute one cognition, this is a judgment. In every judgment, then, there is a certain relation of different representations insofar as they belong to one cognition. (V-Lo/Wiener 24:928)

The general picture, then, presents a way for various cognitions, which might on their own be separate representations, to become a richer, more complex cognition through a judgment that represents them as unified. And while this is the general form, Kant thinks that practical cognitions and judgments are distinct from other forms in a key respect. In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant writes:

A cognition is called practical as opposed to theoretical, but also as opposed to speculative cognition. Practical cognitions are, namely, either 1. imperatives, and are to this extent opposed to theoretical cognitions; or they contain 2. the grounds for possible imperatives and are to this extent opposed to speculative cognitions. (Log 9:86)

And in the *Vienna Logic*, Kant is explicit that practical cognitions (and judgments) always have the form of an “*imperativus*” that “commands” and states that “something ought to happen,” and which “says what free actions would be good for a purpose” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:900–1). A practical cognition, that is, always has the form of an imperative that tells us how we must act: “Cognition is practical where imperative propositions are expressed, in that they indicate the necessity of a free action” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:901). And

propositional form, that is, it is conceptual in some basic sense. And this, in turn, makes it fit to be taken up in judgments. Anything that falls below the basic threshold of having a concrete singular form in intuition or concept would be a mere sensation and not represent anything since it could not form a proposition. For my purposes, this suffices, though I flag this term as challenging. For an excellent take, see Willaschek and Watkins, “Kant on Cognition.”

these cognitions are the result of practical judgments that subsume particular actions under the moral law.

Taking the general form of cognitions and judgments together with the specification of practical ones comprising imperatives of judgments leading to particular actions, one might reconstruct a moral evaluation as follows: First, there is representation of an imperative, an obligation to q . Then, there is an intuition (or combination thereof) in which one notices that Jack performs $\sim q$. We then draw together these representations into a single representation in which we judge that Jack committed a moral wrong. The important thing is that q represents a possible action of a type that also can be perceived in the world of sense. Thus, even when we are not acting ourselves, we use our awareness of our own duties to notice moral features of the sensible world.

Does this account work? There are many issues facing it, some of which have already been covered. First, it leaves us again with a very barebones account of an experience. It seems to imply that we can only morally evaluate actions that we could formulate as morally valued through the application of the categorical imperative. And it does not clearly allow for how one might perceive degrees or nuances between various action types or account for gradations of progress in individuals. These issues have already been stated.

Another initial worry would also be that it could artificially overdetermine a process with extra reflective constraints that need not be so. If we were using imperatives, that is, a further unconscious mental act would need to be presupposed as well. We would always need to be transposing a command into a theoretical statement. But is this not philosophical theory taking common experience hostage? It also might seem that we often just *know* (in an approximating sense) moral good and evil when we see it (which is obviously not to say that we always do). Though one might reply that in so far as adults have a good grasp of appropriate (and deviant) moral behavior (grounded in experience of the moral law over time), one need not posit any prerequisite cognitive steps prior to evaluating. That is, one need not determine one's own obligation in order to appraise another if one is well versed in such matters from long life experience.¹⁰ While that might account for how adults can morally evaluate based only on knowledge of the moral law, would it work for how small children grasp moral matters, which seems deep but not bound up with explicit principles?

¹⁰ Thanks to Michael Smith for proposing this solution.

The main problem is that while practical cognitions and judgments are in the right domain, they have the wrong form. Practical cognitions and practical judgments are defined as always about possible actions. They are always prescriptive and prospective. And they always will be, first and foremost, first-personal in nature, since they are grounded in claims about what principle of action *I* ought to follow. Because Kant thinks that any time we judge, we determine “whether something stands under a given rule” (*KrV* A132/B171), this spells trouble for thinking of moral evaluation as a form of practical judgment.

Here, many—perhaps even the preponderant majority of—Kantians will point out that this is simply Kant, for whom any form of standard moral realism (i.e., in which morality is treated as a mind-independent quality of the world) is untenable. Indeed, this is the hallmark of Kant, since all normativity must relate to a rational will. Picking up on this, Hannah Arendt notes: “For judgment of the particular—This is beautiful, This is ugly; This is right, This is wrong—has no place in Kant’s moral philosophy.”¹¹ As Onora O’Neill argues, this seems to mean that whatever a practical judgment is, it is “neither determinant nor reflective,”¹² since no practical judgment based on the idea of morality can ever be such that a “particular is ‘given’”¹³ for it. As a result, moral evaluation, as about given particulars, simply does not fit the *modus operandi* of practical judgments:

A fair amount of ethical writing has tried to construe ethical judgement as reflective. This is plausible only for ethical judgement about existing or past cases, where the particular to be judged can be given. It is not possible for practical judgements about what to do, which do not seek to “appraise” or “attend to” or “evaluate” existing situations.¹⁴

And:

The appraisal of situations, and of their details, is of course of great ethical importance—if we do not notice the bullying we cannot consider whether to desist. But noticing and appraising a situation is not practical

¹¹ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 15.

¹² O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice*, 123.

¹³ O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice*, 123.

¹⁴ O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice*, 124n.

judgement: having noticed the bullying we still need to decide whether to desist or to intervene.¹⁵

O'Neill's point, which I think is correct, is that the sorts of judgments that we make when determining how we ought to act have a completely different form than our judgments about moral states of affairs as they are.¹⁶ Practical judgments are about maxims and potential actions.¹⁷ If we come to a conclusion about what we ought to do, the resulting thought—an imperative—is what we mean by a *practical cognition*. But anchoring all moral evaluations in an indirect application of how we set ends, I do not think can explain, first, how we judge *degrees* of moral imperfection and, second, pick up on morally salient features of experience that are not reducible to action.

No need to single out constructivist approaches here. As Béatrice Longuenesse notes, the two kinds of relevant judgment are “(1) those by which we determine what we are supposed to *do or refrain from doing*” and “(2) those by which we subject to a moral evaluation *the actions already performed by ourselves or by others*, and the *characters* of those who performed them.”¹⁸ And Jens Timmermann, while disagreeing with the constructivist approach, agrees that “The mere representation of something is practically irrelevant unless there is a suitable connection that bridges the ‘gap’ between will and object.”¹⁹ And continuing in an attached footnote: “Note that it is taken for granted that the concept of goodness is not contemplative but practical. A good object cannot be an object of quiet admiration; in that the good differs from beauty.”²⁰ For these and many other interpreters, all of what is moral

¹⁵ O'Neill, *From Principles to Practice*, 89.

¹⁶ O'Neill is in good company, and rightly so. Treatment of practical cognitions, judgments, and knowledge in the literature focuses almost exclusively on the relation between the moral law (and freedom) and possible actions, or to the postulates. For example, Engstrom writes: “Practical thinking *can* make its object actual through and only through its *consciousness* that it can do so” (Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, 30) and “practical knowledge is always knowledge cognizing subjects have of what *they themselves* are to do” (Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, 121). In Schafer, “Practical Cognition,” practical cognition is a topic that pertains to a direct cognition of our noumenal freedom. And Kain, “Practical Cognition, Intuition, and the Fact of Reason,” 228, claims, “Kant insists that we have practical *knowledge* of the moral law and our freedom,” and practical cognitions of God and immortality.

¹⁷ Recent work argues that practical judgments are reflective in nature. Dunn, “Reflections of Reason,” argues that practical judgments involve reflective judgments. Bremner, “Practical Judgment as Reflective Judgment,” 612–4, argues that practical judgments are reflective in how they bring morally salient factors about our particular context to bear on the moral law, such that we can pursue the categorical imperative better through life. Both pertain to how we ought to act or concepts that help us act better.

¹⁸ Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, 236–237.

¹⁹ Timmermann, *Kant's Will at the Crossroads*, 37.

²⁰ Timmermann, *Kant's Will at the Crossroads*, 37n20.

must boil down to actions, judged by someone who prescribes autonomously what *oneself* ought to do in some situation. Such interpretations gladly embrace that practical judgments are always prescriptive and prospective. They underline that any other form of descriptive evaluation must begin here. If we do not, then we run the risk of losing morality's stable foundation, which depends on the novelty of its concepts and rigid location in the noumenal. These are the reasons for seeing moral evaluation of states of affairs as a separate enterprise from practical cognizing and judging of (possible) actions.

All that to say, there are good reasons for seeing moral evaluation as a separate enterprise from practical cognizing and judging. Or, if we bring the two together, then we must tell a story. Perhaps there is a good one to tell, but the resulting form will have to be a different than practical judgment (and cognition).

Even if not practical cognitions or judgments, though, the question is what part of Kant's epistemology can make sense of these. Where can we turn to address the moral experience problem? Before going through the remaining candidates, I want to put forth as a working hypothesis the general form of the cognition and judgment that we do require, which I will refer to as *moral cognitions* and *moral judgments* to distinguish them from practical cognitions and judgments. By *moral judgment*, I mean one that pertains to the evaluating of moral individuals in experience, which allow for degrees and which are purely descriptive in nature. These can be retrospective, third-personal, and also scalar in so far as details that are nonreducible to actions or principles of action might be part of a resulting moral judgment, as *one* cognition out of many unified in an act of judgment. As descriptive, these judgments will also be constitutive of experience *but* in an approximating manner, as sketched in Chapters 1 and 2. It will not reveal how an object must be formed to be possible in experience, but rather reveal degrees of moral deficiency between how something appears and a moral standard.

I want to address two objections that one might have against seeking such a unique form of cognition and judgment. First, it might seem a virtue of Kant's theory that it does not enable us to morally judge others (in a truth-tracking, third-personal sense). After all, if I am uncertain about my own motivations, then who am I to judge those of others? Kant's position has an appealing epistemic humility. The right response, however, is to pose the question: Must this humility be purchased at the price of a total agnosticism about the moral state of others and the world? The fact that our moral evaluations are always in terms of approximating degrees allows us

to maintain our epistemic humility, while at the same time allowing us some means for moral evaluation. While we should not feel like we can occupy the place of infallible judges, we also should not feel totally disoriented when assessing moral progress of individuals. A Goldilocks position of not-too-much in either direction should be possible.

Second, one could worry that moral cognitions and judgments might conflict with practical cognitions and judgments or fail to relate at all. We might, that is, appear to morally evaluate in ways that fail to align with practical judgments of how we ought to act. But if these are *not* to conflict, then they must follow the same standard. I think that the introduction of moral cognitions and judgments is fine, assuming one develops it according to the idea and ideal distinction from Chapter 1. For the ideal used in moral cognition and judgment is an individuation of the moral law, which is the idea that guides our practical judgments and cognitions. Hence, there should be a natural agreement between the two judgments: The difference will be in the form these judgments possess and the separate cognitive needs they address. Moral judgments and cognitions will succeed in addressing the moral experience problem, whereas practical judgments and cognitions address possible moral agency.

3.3. No Clear Gap Fillers

Before adding a new component to an already complex system, it is important to check for other candidates in Kant's epistemological taxonomy that might work. In this section, I argue that—to my knowledge—none of the remaining types of cognition and judgment that Kant describes make clear sense of how we judge moral individuals and states of affairs as progressing wholes relative to an ideal. For non-Kantians, one may skip this section and jump to the next chapter, as I do not have the space to adequately introduce all the technical terms at work and it is aimed primarily as an intervention in Kant scholarship. For Kantians, this overview, of course, cannot do justice to the complexity of all the judgment forms, which justifiably are frequent topics of standalone studies. Instead, I focus on essential features to check whether any might fill the gap.

I already examined the quick fix in the previous section, namely, looking to practical cognitions and judgments. That leaves us with two other primary types of judgment (with concomitant cognitions), namely, constitutive (or determining) and reflective, each of which has specified subtypes

under each.²¹ I investigate both in turn, along with their specifications. What becomes clear is that the desiderata of moral judgments and cognition would require, in essence, an amalgamation of various features that no single type possesses on its own.

Beginning with constitutive judgments, one form is an empirical judgment. It can be quickly crossed off the list. Empirical judgments are based solely on experience and are contingent on us having encountered (somehow) representations of the objects to which they refer. An empirical concept is “one that is produced through the comparison of objects of experience” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:905). For example, once one knows the concept, *firefly*, one is able to judge certain winged insects as subsumable under this concept. Moral judgments cannot fit this type of judgment. Indeed, judgments based on empirical concepts simply cannot help at all since moral judgments patently and explicitly cannot receive their determining concepts from experience. Hence, any judgments based on concepts won from experience will always be incapable of telling us that something is moral or not. For Kant, one can know a concrete situation to be morally good or evil regardless of one’s history and wealth of experiences. That said, a moral judgment will be about the contents that are discovered in empirical experience. So, some form of empirical cognition based on these judgments will conceivably be involved in forming a moral judgment. By that I mean, for instance, we learn from experience the concept of *slapping*. When discerning, then, between an immoral slapping of a face and the morally neutral slapping of hands in celebration, cognition of a slap *as a slap* is perhaps salient, though not essentially relevant to the moral evaluation.

What about the other form of constitutive (or determining) judgments, namely, those that function with pure concepts of the understanding (i.e., via the categories)? Kant details such judgments as those in which a sensible intuition falls under a concept, and which make it possible to cognize said object of experience in the first place.²² When one judges constitutively, one determines “an underlying concept through a given **empirical** representation” (*KU* 20:211). There is a logical necessity at work in any such constitutive

²¹ I will mean “merely reflective judgments” (*KU* 20:220–221): “If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found, then the power of judgment is merely **reflecting**” (*KU* 5:179). These include aesthetic and teleological judgments.

²² See “If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the power of judgment, which subsumes the particular under it (even when, as a transcendental power of judgment, it provides the conditions *a priori* in accordance with which alone anything can be subsumed under that universal), is **determining**” (*KU* 5:179).

judgment. The very possibility of cognizing the object presupposes that it conforms to the concept adequately. It is on these grounds that we can claim the universal validity of the forms of understanding. In contrast to empirical judgments, the concepts of this form of determining judgment precede any experience, even while they require empirical input to form actual representative results.

Judging a moral state of affairs, however, I think will be significantly different than straightforward constitutive judgments for reasons already covered. As a refresher, however, constitutive judgments obtain only for those sorts of judgments in which a sensible intuition must fall under certain concepts (the categories) to be a representation for us at all. It pertains strictly to how things must appear. And in the process, the concept determines some intuition fully. There is, in Kant's terms, a *correspondence* or *adequate* relation between the concept and the appearance in question.

Again, moral judgments cannot be a straightforward case of constitutive judgments of this stringent kind since our ideals are unconditioned maximums, which never have a corresponding relation to a sensible intuition. Indeed, the way things appear is permanently deficient. Hence, it cannot be the case that ideals structure the way things *must* appear. It is actually reversed. In regard to this, moral judgments must be unique as what I termed *negative* constitutive judgments. It is because of how things appear deficiently that we become aware of the maximums by which we judge them to be deficient. Although we might only become aware of our ideals second in order, this does not affect their priority as conditions of the judgment by which we deem something deficient. Furthermore, ideals do not create or form reality as Platonic ideas would. And they do not directly form adequately possible objects of experience as conditions of their very representability. On the contrary, it is somehow in virtue of them that we are first able to recognize varying degrees of good and evil in individual persons or states of affairs. This aspect, moreover, is a key reason for why straightforward constitutive judgments cannot help us since they do not offer details about the gradations and nuance of qualitative aspects of appearances. They determine the very being of something in an all or nothing way. Even while crossing standard constitutive judgments off the list, this puts pressure on my account. For however we judge the world, it follows that we cannot merely read morality off of the appearances (which would be an empirical judgment), but rather we must somehow be relating pure moral concepts to nonmoral phenomenal features of experience in an *inadequate* manner. I spell out how this might work in the next chapter.

A final brief, but related, problem is that it seems quite likely that we can err in moral judgments. Standard constitutive judgments, however, determine the very representations themselves, which excludes the possibility of erring *ceteris paribus*.²³

Thus, there are many reasons for why we cannot constitutively judge moral states of affairs in the standard sense. Regardless, there is an approximate accuracy in our moral judgments and cognitions that must qualify as a constitutive judgment in an inverted manner. This is especially the case since the theoretical form of judgment and cognition in general appears the correct one in that it concerns: “*not an acting* but rather a *being*” (Log 9:86). Some scant textual proof for this can be found in Kant’s *Anthropology Mrongovius* lecture notes, in which he claims: “moral judgments are judgments of the understanding” (V-Anth/Mrong 25:1300). And since the understanding is the faculty typically associated with constitutive judgments, we might take this as a strong indicator that we are on the right track. Still, the philosophical reasons are the driving factor in seeking something along this route. We need something related to this form for moral judgments, yet less fully determinant than empirical and positive constitutive judgment.

Before moving on from constitutive judgments and their related cognitions, there is perhaps one final avenue worth taking in Kant’s discussion of how certain theoretical cognitions might have practical power. Indeed, if a fan of Kant’s logic lecture notes, one might imagine that a distinction can aid us, which Kant draws between practical and theoretical cognition in some of them. Practical cognitions, as described above, have the form of an imperative. Theoretical cognitions are independent of any *immediate* relation to actions and help represent that something *is* a certain way.²⁴ Among the theoretical cognitions, some are merely speculative and have no connection with action. Meanwhile, others, which Kant refers to as “objectively practical theoretical cognitions,” are theoretical in form, yet “practical *in potentia*” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:901). These latter kinds of cognition relate to practical matters but in a way that does not direct action. Instead, they provide some information that might influence moral actions. Kant explains these further in the *Jäsche Logic*: “On the other hand, if we oppose practical

²³ That is, as long as our cognitive faculties are working correctly and the conditions supportive of knowledge that is universally valid (i.e., barring illusions or hallucinations that might be only subjectively valid).

²⁴ See the V-Lo/Wiener: “Speculative [read: theoretical] propositions are all those from which no rules or *imperativi* for our actions flow” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:901); and “Theoretical cognitions contain the cognition of an object, what it is” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:902).

to *speculative* cognitions, then they can also be *theoretical*, *provided only that imperatives can be derived from them*. Considered in this respect they are then practical as to *content* (*in potentia*) or *objectively*" (Log 9:86). This might appear promising at first.

The form is right: descriptive and third-personal. And it connects directly to morality. That said, I have doubts that this distinction on its own provides a panacea for filling the gap. The reason is that Kant's typical examples of such cognitions are metaphysical and theological in nature. Consider his example from the *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic* lectures from 1792: "E.g., There is a God[;] this is no merely speculative proposition but rather a practical one. For it contains grounds for possible imperatives" (V-Lo/Dohna 24:751).²⁵ The other example he offers in these lectures is the immortality of the soul. Kant at no point relates these to the process of judging directly an appearance as a visual representation expressing degrees of moral value. Instead, they serve as "grounds for possible imperatives" that serve to perhaps motivate or fortify actions, rather than cognize morality in experience.

Despite my doubts, there is promise here. While Kant's own examples do not fit my purposes, the cognition that we end up with when evaluating moral degrees in experience will be theoretical in form *and* potentially important for practical matters. I take this as evidence that there is room in Kant's taxonomy to find a place for such nonstandard descriptive evaluations. That said, this form of cognition on its own helps us little unless we know how it is that a specific judgment enables us to form it. And we are yet to find that form of judgment. I will return to this notion of a theoretical cognition that has practical power in Part III, since I think that it relates to the process of constructing a moral worldview.

This brings us to the final, major type of judgment. Perhaps moral judgment is a reflective judgment? Reflective judgments, Kant explains, are a form of judgment in which there is a mismatch between the concept and a sensible intuition.²⁶ The intuition requires more than the categories can

²⁵ See also from the *Jäsche Logic*: "There is a multitude of such speculative propositions in *theology*, for example. Speculative cognitions of this sort are always theoretical, then, but it is not the case, conversely, that every theoretical cognition is speculative; it can also be at the same time practical, considered in another respect" (Log 9:86–7).

²⁶ I agree that reflective judgments *broadly* construed contain all forms of judgment in Kant; see, for instance, Bell, "The Art of Judgment;" Dunn, "Subsuming 'Determining' Under 'Reflecting';" Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*; and Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Eventually, I think, there must be a moment in which a "matching" occurs in reflecting judgment, as Guyer, *Kant and the Claims*, 35, also thinks, but this matching is set off by the initial mismatch.

conceptually account for, which requires that our imagination enter into a free play or search for a concept that is adequate to what is represented. A new concept is generated through reflective judgment: “To reflect [. . .], however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one’s faculty of cognitions, in relation to a concept thereby made possible” (*KU* 20:211). In this case, intuitions lead us to hunt for further conceptual determinations past what our understanding can provide. With the previous forms of judgment and related cognitions, the concepts were at hand and the imagination had the easy task of simply fitting like with like when processing an intuition received through sensibility. Reflective judgments arise when more is demanded of our cognitive faculties, which Kant thought related to aesthetic cases (of beautiful and sublime objects) and teleological ones (organisms, but also artifacts). I can offer only a brief gloss of both.

In aesthetic judgments, or those of taste, no concept provides a permanent resting point. There is a purposive play of our faculties as we search out an end for “an object without any end” (*KU* 5:221). This searching for formal purpose elicits a “satisfaction” that we also judge as “universally communicable” (*KU* 5:221). With cases of the sublime, Kant thought we were equally sent into an unrelenting search for an adequate concept, but discovered an unpleasant feeling related to our human fragility and finitude. Examples are the mathematically infinite and natural events that threaten to rip us from the face of the earth. Despite our cognitive hunt for grasping these events conceptually, both—for Kant—lead us to wonder about our qualities that bespeak a timeless, unconditioned order: that is, our moral predisposition.

With teleological judgments of natural ends, we arrive at a concept, namely, of objective purposiveness, which we must impute to conceive of the possibility of organisms as wholes (but also which we employ when seeking out any purpose in reality). Just as with aesthetic judgments, our cognitive faculties must search, since the purposiveness that we eventually employ to conceive of the possibility of organisms is not discovered in our first representative contact with it. It arises, instead, through the imagination’s hunt to find an adequate concept to determine organizations in nature that do not fit with mechanical cause-effect thinking.

In all forms of reflective judgment, we cannot say that these judgments are constitutive of the objects themselves as representations, but rather that we cannot help but judge the represented objects *as if* they were so constituted.

This feature is, for Kant, essential to reflective judgments. There is a subjective necessity at work in them, which is universally valid but not objectively so. That means that others could experience the same represented objects in space and time without these judgments occurring. For instance, everyone in a concert hall who can hear will experience the same notes played in Bach's *Musical Offering*, but perhaps only a few judge the whole effect as beautiful. According to Kant, however, everyone nonetheless *ought* to agree about their beauty. The same holds true for something's status as sublime or the apparent organization by inner purposiveness if one attends to the represented objects fully. We can expect agreement if all who share our cognitive faculties spend enough time observing the objects in question. There is great debate as to how these judgments function. The brass tacks, though, are that it has something to do with the way these objects elicit a search in us based on the faculties of mind we universally share, as opposed to sharing certain concepts.

Now, I think that there are certainly aspects of reflective judgment that capture what must go on when we morally judge an individual person or state of affairs as more or less moral. But before focusing on what is right about the form of a reflective judgment, I would like to point out some issues that make it problematic to adopt a merely reflective judgment as a gap filler.

First, with a moral evaluation of someone as morally progressing or nuanced, we have a clear concept that is in force, namely, the moral law as the determining factor, which reason individuates as a point of comparison. The merely reflective judgments on offer in Kant's third *Critique*, though, do not fit well here. With an aesthetic judgment, it is led by the intuitional content of the representation and never finds a concept at which to cease one's inner search for an adequate fit. It is not the case that we possess, for example, a category of beauty that can be instantiated by certain objects for Kant. In a judgment of the sublime, we also fail to find any concept that can contain the experience of the object. While we are led to reflect on our moral nature, as noumenal beings, the moral law has nothing to do with judging the object itself as beautiful or sublime. And in both cases, we ultimately discern the universal validity from the concept of purposiveness (for complicated reasons).

Finally, with teleological judgments, we have a concept at hand, namely, objective purposiveness. This concept, Kant thinks, we take on analogy from our practical reason. It is not as such moral, but rather pertains to the relation

between an end and the conditions of its realizability. However, this applies equally to judgments of beauty and the sublime, as well. In none of these cases would the application of purposiveness easily explain a moral judgment and cognition of an individual. When we judge something as morally valenced, we are doing more than seeing it as affecting our cognitive framework in a satisfying (beauty) or disturbing (sublime) way, or as organized by some purpose (teleological): Instead, we are seeing it as representing some degree (or lack thereof) of morality, represented in an individual of some kind.

Next, a problem with aesthetic judgments is that they are ultimately all grounded in the *feeling* elicited by the free play of the faculties. Morality, though, is grounded in pure concepts of reason and not in how the world affects our feelings. Even saying this, though, one might not want to take this too far. After all, it would seem quite odd to say that moral value in the world *cannot* affect us emotionally. Indeed, emotions seem a key part of moral experiences. They must, however, not be the determining cause of our judgments for Kant.²⁷ With teleological judgments, this is not an issue since they are not grounded in how we feel. Still, without the right conceptual fit, they will not help us grasp degrees of goodness or its lack for the reasons stated above.

A further reason to doubt that moral judgments are reflective is because they should not be guided or led by intuitions and should quickly come to an assessment of how things *are*. That is, we evaluate moral states of affairs based on the concepts of unconditional goodness that we carry in our reason. We do (as noted above) have a constitutive category of goodness in a negative sense in that the world will deficiently express it to one degree or another. To me, this is fundamentally at odds with what goes on in reflective judgments, since it seems to demand a degree of universal objective validity that reflective judgments lack. With aesthetic and teleological judgments, we say that we must judge the represented objects *as if* they were determined in such a way as to elicit the kind of judgment we make. That is, we are judging via analogy. I will touch on this more in later chapters. But, in short, there is

²⁷ This emotional grounding of how an object affects us could, though, be used to develop an account of the sorts of judgments that Murdoch details and which I referenced in the previous chapter. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me. For important work that has shown the importance of emotions for Kant's philosophy, see Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue*, as well as Cohen, "A Kantian Account of Emotions."

an analogical or symbolic quality to these judgments, which does not fill the gap sketched above well.

Take examples from the previous chapter. For instance, it seems strange to say that we are seeing mere analogical or symbolic representations of good and evil (and shades in between) when we—for instance—witness the suffering of Alan and Lana at the hands of Janet. It is not merely *as if* the event is morally troubling or *as if* organized toward an end, but rather it is a jumbled mess of imbalanced impressions that signify a specific imbalance between virtue and happiness. And it is not that our representation of Philo is *analogous* to some model of general purposive end-setting as such. Rather, it seems more accurate (and natural) to say that we see in him moral growth relative to the ideal of a perfect will. More to the point, let us say that we then seek out symbolic representations of these cases. We would need a reflective judgment to pick out an apt representation, according to Kant. But this all presupposes that we have already come to a moral assessment of the individual person or state of affairs at hand. Even though we only have an approximate grasp of these cases, the same *as if* or symbolic quality that Kant identifies for reflective judgments just seems a poor fit or obfuscation.

Still, there are some qualities of reflective judgments that are appropriate for the kind of moral judgment in question. For example, no reflective judgment finds a perfectly corresponding fit between concepts and intuitions. Rather, they are elicited when the intuitions challenge our very ability to conceptualize the object in basic, constitutive terms, which leads us into a field of free association via the imagination. There is something right here for moral judgments. After all, moral judgments display an imperfect fit between concepts and intuitions, which might even enable an emotional response. But as noted above, there are reasons for why this mismatch is of a different nature in moral evaluations of individual persons and states of affairs. With moral judgments, we will judge in a way that has more objective validity than mere reflective judgments, even while our evaluations are never *positively* determining. And we will also expect more ready agreement than in reflective judgments, even though we cannot count on it. Finally, there is the question of feeling briefly noted above. While we should not ground our judgment on feeling (but rather relative to the ideal), we still will be moved in ways that seem to elicit a movement of our cognitive faculties that will be more than the mere moral feeling of respect for the moral law.

Based on my analysis, there is no obvious candidate in Kant's taxonomy of judgments that can solve the moral experience problem. A gap yawns, with multiple potential forms of cognition and judgment coming close but not filling it in any satisfactory capacity. A key component of our common moral phenomenology requires something more. To save Kant, we might be required to commit a minor heresy.

Filling the Gap, Embracing the Ideal

To conclude Part I, I explore in a speculative manner how it is that we have access to the ideal, as well as how a judgment employing it might work. The reason that such an exploration is required is because the ideal counts as a rare breed among all the other concepts.

When it comes to other concepts, Kant is working with general rules or forms under which individual sensible intuitions of objects fall. As a result, their universality is legible in a—more or less—straightforward sense. As *general, universal* rules or principles of order, we can infer them through whatever is necessary about the representable form of *any* possible object of experience that instantiates them. There must be some *particular, individual* intuition, but this singularity of the intuition is interchangeable with infinitely many others as possessing the same universal form.

With ideals, however, the universality in experience ought to be of an equally valid kind for all rational subjects who are drawing comparisons with singular intuitions. *But* in this one case, we have a concept that itself is individuated, rather than a general principle or rule. As I have argued, it is individuated in this way because there is only one of its kind; it possesses all properties that could belong to it according to the idea (moral law) as a rule for its determination; and it is essentially of a kind with other individuals that enables comparison between them. Rather than the typical move of the understanding from a *universal* concept to a *particular* intuition, the understanding moves between a universally shared *particular* in reason and a *particular* intuition. Herein lies the rub, though, which I already addressed in Chapter 1. Typically, when it comes to something *individual* or singular, Kant treats this quality as belonging exclusively to something that we can *perceive* or *sense*. But by its own status as a maximum concept of reason, it also stands the furthest away from perceptible, sensible experience (as detailed in Chapter 1). Precisely here, then, Kant's own theory stands opposed to any such concept, first, serving as a singular individual; and second, any form of cognitive access that could begin to grant access to individuals that are not sensibly given. It would seem to require a form of cognition, an

intuitive understanding, or intellectual intuition, which Kant thought only God or our souls in an afterlife might possess.¹

For these reasons, I find myself—though it was never my intention—having arrived at a point at which we might have to stretch Kant’s epistemology in ways that will be controversial, indeed heretical. Along with those like Fichte, Maimon, and Hegel, I find myself, that is, seeking a unique form of intuition, one that is purely intellectual, as a result of studying Kant’s philosophy and following where the transcendental road leads. Yet, this stretching arises quite naturally from an analysis, which is in keeping with much of Kant’s system. Moreover, I think that the required heresy need not be a major departure from Kantian orthodoxy (and I remain, of course, open to other suggestions and corrections). Before presenting the heresy, however, I first review why an expansion is required. Then, I look to alternative methods that stay within the bounds of Kant’s traditional, discursive theory of our understanding. Again, by discursive understanding Kant meant one in which we have sensible input of individual objects given, which we then form in accordance with general concepts, with no special form of access or intuition required. Finally, I present how it is that the judgment might work and how it might require a minor heresy by allowing us a certain form of intellectual intuition—albeit, not one that would put us on the same level as God.

4.1. Reasons to Expand Kant’s Moral Epistemology

As an overview, I have argued that Kant has no obvious way to account for how we morally evaluate degrees of moral imperfection in individuals. And without this, it is hard to see how we can—in a purely descriptive sense—provide a Kantian explanation of many basic features of human moral phenomenology. Assessing, say, moral progress in someone, like Philo, who appears to be morally improving; discerning that an imbalance between someone’s approximate degree of virtue and perceived happiness (or lack thereof), as in the case of Lana and Alan; or denoting degrees of relative good or evil apparent in various works of the will are all quite hard to explain if one limits oneself to working merely with the moral law and standard forms of judgment (and cognitions) in Kant’s taxonomy. In these cases, what we

¹ See, e.g., *KrVA*781/B809; *KpV*5:123; *RGV*6:67, *V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt* 29:978, *V-Met/Mron* 29:857.

are noticing requires a point of comparison for these individuated cases that does not fluctuate and which is equally individuated. For we can only notice change against an unchanging background or *substrate*. And the individuation of this substrate permits gradations, degrees, and nuance of individuals in experience to become apparent against its persisting scale, which standard concepts cannot obviously deliver.

It is here where we can use practical ideals to fill the gap along with an expansion of Kant's theory of judgment to include a negative constitutive kind. This expansion of Kant's account on its own is, I believe, mostly innocuous. As noted above, it is clear that Kant tends in the direction of grounding all moral knowledge in the ideas and ideals that we possess in our reason, or as he states: "The whole of morality rests on ideas" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:906). If one grants my reconstruction, we could have such an unchanging standard of comparison against which we could assess changes, notice variants, and evaluate a whole state of affairs as comparatively off through a unique form of judgment.

And textually, I have already pointed out passages in which Kant acknowledges that we discover various examples that "exhibit" morality, "in regard to which all possible objects of experience do service as examples" (*KrV* A315/B372). Kant states that it is only relative to the ideal substrate that "any *judgment* as to moral worth or unworth is possible" (*KrV* A315/B372, emphasis added). And if one operates with the negative constitutive function proposed in the previous chapter as a friendly amendment to Kant's taxonomy of judgments, then one can begin to make sense of how it is that we judge in a way that gets around the issues of fit. To wit, the proposal is that it is because of the constant *lack* of fit that we can descriptively make moral heads or tails of individual persons and states of affairs in experience. As noted at the end of the previous chapter, more will need to be worked out regarding how this judgment works. There were features of other forms of judgment, which one might need to include. And if so, then we could require a completely new form of judgment altogether. For now, though, I will stick with the conservative recommendation of adding first only this negative constitutive judgment.

I think there are many reasons for accepting it. As a kind of constitutive judgment, albeit *negatively* constitutive, there is necessity in a qualified sense. We all would have to possess the same ideal as rational beings to serve as a substrate. Only in such a way could our evaluations be universally valid. We can furthermore make the case for this universal validity. After all, because ideals are determined by an idea, we do not just drum them up in

a—to use a technical term—willy-nilly way. If we were simply to engage our imaginations without a rule to follow in constructing an individual, ideals would be fictions and only useful to the extent that they resonate with the individual in question. By contrast, the idea of the moral law, which we Kantians all agree is a synthetic principle a priori, determines these maximum models as individuated entities of reason. These, then, permeate our thinking and make it possible for assessing degrees of morality in individuals. And experience, which previously offered nothing in the way of its own content to tell us what morality is, wins a sharper definition through apparent moral qualities that we assess. We might think of ideals, then, as a bright screen containing circles, some as small as points and others expanding exponentially, but none of which ever expand so much that they cover or contain all the light.

Crucially, and this point must be stressed, this function should not be conceived of as arbitrary. Rather, it is a universal form of our operating in experience, constitutive of our lived reality in that it marks out deviations from an innate form. To elucidate this nonarbitrary quality, consider the case in theoretical reason of positive constitutive judgments. In the case of categories, which Kant explicitly refers to as “pure concepts” that arise from our understanding (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:905), we find representations in actual experience through the marks of *sufficiency*. This full and equal instantiation occurs moreover with every nonmoral, pure concept that conditions cognitions and judgments in space and time. There is no scalar difference between the concept and an example of it: one either is or is not it. In the practical case of ideals, as pure concepts of reason, however, we discover moral individuals through marks of *deficiency*. This, of course, is why we are not speaking of a classic, positive constitutive judgment. There is always an identification of the intuition as related to the good, but in such a way that is indirect and deficiency-tracking. Yet, it remains morally salient. We identify it as of the same kind, albeit to a lesser qualitative degree. And we then, in comparison with the ideal of the maximally good person or world, determine the gap or deficiency immediately through the contrast. This determination of deficiency runs parallel with the categories in so far as it is immediate and a precondition of experiencing certain appearances as morally valued in degrees. But it is also unique in so far as the judgment is an immediate assessment of a gap, a deficiency, a *not* fittingness.

But it is precisely here where the tension, which I alluded to in the previous chapter, comes to the fore. For, granting that we are dealing with some form of judgment that picks out a deficiency in appearances, how is it possible that

this deficiency relation occurs in the first place? How is it that appearances, which for Kant reveal nothing about morality, relate to an ideal, which is moral through and through? It is relative to this point that we must, I think, commit the minor heresy. But first, it is important to go over the obvious options.

4.2. Ways to Avoid Heresy

If Kant is consistent on one score throughout all his published works, as well as lecture notes and reflections from the critical period, it is this: we can only receive intuitions, as the immediately given content of empirical experience, through the senses, which we then form with concepts through our active understanding. Of course, he thought we possess “pure” intuitions of space and time as the conditions of such content appearing in the first place,² but these do not offer us any sort of access beyond what the senses offer up as content, which—if immediately given—is always spatiotemporal. Thus, we have sensible intuitions and a discursive understanding, which I already touched on briefly in Section 3.1. This doctrine of humanity’s two stems of cognition (or “discursivity”) is an orthodox dogma of transcendental idealism in the church of Kant. This discursivity of our understanding, further, means that we never have direct, immediate access to things as they truly *are*, but instead only to how they must *appear* for us. To stand in for what is in this unrepresentable domain of reality where the way things are is independent of how we conceive them, Kant used the terminology of a *Ding an sich* (or “thing in itself”).

According to transcendental idealism, how things appear constitutes the “phenomenal” domain of experience, and how things are is referred to as the “noumenal” domain. As such, the phenomenal is all that we experience in space and time. Anything empirical belongs to the phenomenal sphere. For any phenomenal experience of an object to occur, the mind must combine intuitions (again, the sensible inputs received) and concepts, which are cognitive forms that necessarily order the sensible inputs in universal ways. When I see a rainbow cast by stained glass or when I feel the pressure of someone’s hand, and so on, I am experiencing phenomena. And if I judge

² In the *Prolegomena*, Kant says that we have some kind of “pure intuition” (*Prol* 4:281) of mathematical objects that is nonsensory. But these pure mathematical intuitions, he claims, are grounded in the pure intuitions of space and time itself (see *Prol* 4:283).

some individual person or state of affairs as appearing morally deficient, then I am also referring to a phenomenally given person or state of affairs. But anything pertaining to morality, for instance, our freedom or the person's character, remains hidden, totally invisible to us as part of the noumenal domain that underlies all that appears.³

Here, though, is precisely the puzzle. For if how things appear is non-moral, then the question looms large: how can one begin to judge anything in the appearances as morally graded, even the actions of other individuals? Kant's theory seems to prohibit such moral descriptions of the phenomenal world, tout court. My project, consequently, is already verging on heresy, in that I am making room for descriptive evaluations of moral individuals and states of affairs based on how things appear in relation to an ideal. But I briefly note three ways to avoid heresy, two of which I have already covered.

First, one can accept orthodoxy but maintain that Kant's philosophy is flawed and, in this regard, simply cannot succeed. Here, I am thinking of views like Saunders's from the previous chapter. In accepting Kant's view as it is, one would give up on trying to account for certain essential moral descriptions of individuals in experience. While I agree with the problem, I disagree with the verdict: namely, that Kant's theory is hopeless on this score.

Next, one could argue along the lines of orthodox supporters of Kant's theory as I described in Section 3.2. The, as I called it, "quick-fix" approach is to accept that Kant's taxonomy works well enough in that the categorical imperative and its formulations must be the source of all practical-moral knowledge. Perhaps through habituation and deep familiarity with the moral law, we come to recognize morally salient features in experience even when we are not acting. While I understand the appeal of this view and admire its parsimony, I think that the moral law will underdetermine the sorts of moral descriptions with which we operate when evaluating moral individuals for reasons already provided.

The final route verges on heresy, without seeming to commit it. It would be to interpret Kant's transcendental idealism as providing some direct epistemic access to noumenal moral qualities of the world *through* appearances. I am thinking here of Andrew Chignell's "one world phenomenalism" reading, for instance, according to which there are certain "straddler"

³ There are, of course, many ways of interpreting what this all means. For helpful overviews, see the first part of Allais, *Manifest Reality*; as well as the introduction of Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*.

features that permit us to grasp qualities of the noumenal nature of things as they are via the phenomenal representations of them, such that the phenomenal representations are not *just* phenomenal, mind-dependent qualities. Straddlers are “Features that things both have and appear to have.”⁴ Chignell points out that moral features of the world seem to invite a reading that allows us some access into the way things actually are, morally speaking. Or as he says: “But other things equal, how you morally appear to us in practical cognition licenses a *prima facie* conclusion about how you morally really are.”⁵ Something like this might be right. Such a solution would shortcut many issues by providing direct insight into the noumenal through the phenomenally apparent in certain cases (Chignell, of course, does not think that this allows us total access to the noumenal). It would, as a result, not require ideals in the way that I have sketched.

Here, though, it seems that a phenomenal quality is doing double duty, as simultaneously phenomenal while expressive of a noumenal quality. How can it be that we see noumenal qualities in phenomenal form? The sort of value ontology at work here seems to demand that we have knowledge of *intrinsic* values that objects possess as things in themselves directly through phenomenal properties.⁶ One would grasp immediately a moral feature as some phenomenal feature. It is not clear, though, how we can distinguish the phenomenal and noumenal properties from each other. Is the noumenal bad-making feature of something distinguishable from the phenomenal nonmoral feature? There is, that is, a problem of connection between the noumenal and the phenomenal since both must somehow be located in the phenomenal presentation of the object. And there is a connected puzzle as to how it is that the account of knowing the degrees of moral imperfection would work here. Do we simply grasp the gradations of morality directly in the phenomenal guise? Or do we still require that this noumenal-phenomenal quality be compared to a maximum standard? If it is possible to gauge moral progress on this model, then it would follow that we could, in principle, possess knowledge of noumenal things in themselves, as well as their progress. Thus, even while remaining committed to

⁴ Chignell, “Kant’s One-World Phenomenalism,” 345.

⁵ Chignell, “Kant’s One-World Phenomenalism,” 352.

⁶ See, e.g., both Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity*, 19–20, and Rauscher, “Moral Realism,” 160: “Any value property would have to come from sensation (outer intuition) or feeling (inner intuition). No value comes through sensation, and any value derived through feeling would be contingent and not the necessary value of humanity and would also reflect the agent and not merely be a property of the object.”

the discursive theory of cognition, heresy might be in the offing, for it seems hard to maintain the distinction between the two domains even while they are acknowledged as being straddled. With my alternative, by contrast, I do not claim that we have any direct access to the noumenal. Instead, we must have a single form of pure intuition of ideals as individuated entities of reason, which then permits a unique kind of judging, to whose exposition I now turn.

4.3. How One Could Judge in Relation to an Ideal

There is a persisting mystery about how moral judgments would actually work that allows successful tracking of good and evil states of the sensible world. If not going with one of the standard forms described in Chapter 3, there are many questions about how an ideal might serve us in judging the phenomenal world. How does a moral judgment connect a noumenal ideal with a phenomenal appearance? What allows for this relation? And if we *can* judge certain states of affairs as good, the next question is what about the representations is it that we identify as such?

The problem in a nutshell is that any phenomenal quality will ultimately be of a completely different kind from a pure ideal that is so novel that *nothing* in experience is adequate to it. It seems like we must be judging more than the mere phenomenal qualities when assessing morally good or evil states of affairs. In this way, there is something like a mere reflective judgment at work in so far as it is nonconstitutive of the object itself as a possible object of experience. Instead, there is something in our intuitions that triggers a response between real phenomenal properties and the ideal. Rather than searching for the concept, though, the moral judgment must approximate a lack of fit between the given individual and the maximum ideal as a point of comparison. And in this way, they are—then again—patently *unlike* mere reflective judgments for, as noted above, our judgments of morality are about the moral states of affairs as they appear, not about moral analogies: it is not *as if* something is evil; it is, rather, experienced *as* evil. And further, there is no indefinite search for an appropriate concept or concepts (as in aesthetic judgments) since the concept in question is fixed, a moral Polaris. And it is not that we infer that something must be judged as if it were teleologically organized as an organic whole or serving some function for a whole (as in teleological judgments) since the judgment in question is about something's

value relative to morality. And whether something fulfills a purpose, while perhaps contingently useful, as such is morally neutral.

This takes us beyond the charted territory of Kant. And while I recommend this alternative, it requires a heterodox openness to reading Kant as needing, among other things, a kind of intuitionism and, even, intellectual intuition (as I describe in Section 4.4) despite his own best efforts to claim that it is impossible for us. However, as I detail below, what I recommend is a more modest notion of intellectual intuition than the paradigmatic kind that Kant appears to have in mind, namely, a divine intellect. Because fleshing out this account extends well past the highest good, I leave a robust development of the way moral judgments might work in detail to a future project. Here, my goal is to propose the trajectory with some inspiration from non-Kantian sources.

My suggestion, building off of my account of ideals, does not see innate moral properties as shining through the appearances but rather maintains that there must be a way of seeing things *as* morally valued without seeing intrinsic properties of the objects of possible experience. To present a working model that might account for the richness of moral experience, I will relate it to Robert Audi's theory in *Moral Perception* (2013). This is a loose relation, but also one that I think gets something right about the form of moral experience as such, which Kant's theory might approximate.

First, Audi does not think that nonmoral phenomenal properties are moral properties proper (thus, this is in line with presenting Kant in a way close to his own, explicit view). As Audi states: "[W]e should not expect moral perception to be exactly like physical perception [. . . since] moral properties are not easily conceived as observable, in what seems the most elementary way: no sensory phenomenal representation is possible for them."⁷ Instead, Audi proposes that the way we perceive things is in a way that evokes—helpfully for my purposes—a grounding relation between nonmoral perceptual properties and a sense of moral properties. I quote it at some length to show features that I think the Kantian model can agree with, albeit with some variation:

[P]erception is a kind of experiential information-bearing relation between the perceiver and the object perceived. [. . .] [E]ven if moral properties are not themselves causal, they can be perceptible. We perceive them by

⁷ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 33.

perceiving properties that ground them, which, in turn, may or may not be perceived in the basic way in which we perceive some properties other than by perceiving still others. But the dependence of moral perception on non-moral perception does not imply an inferential dependence of all moral belief or moral judgment on non-moral belief or judgment [. . .] Indeed, although perceiving moral properties, as where we see an injustice, commonly evokes belief, it need not. When it does, it may do so in a way that grounds that belief in perception of the properties of the unjust act in virtue of which it is unjust. This kind of grounding explains how a moral belief arising in perception can constitute perceptual knowledge and can do so on grounds that are publicly accessible and, though not a guarantee of it, a basis for ethical agreement.⁸

Audi's theory strikes a fine balance between incorporating nonmoral, empirical properties, and moral properties that correlate to them through an appropriate response. Of course, Audi's rich account, which involves appeal to intuitions (in a non-Kantian sense) and emotions, differs from a Kantian approach in key respects. Also, Audi wishes to "naturalize" the account by treating the nonmoral, phenomenal properties as "grounding" the moral responses: "Although moral properties are apparently not natural properties, they are constitutively anchored in natural properties."⁹ There is much to admire in his account that simply will not transfer easily to Kant.

However, the basic model that Audi proposes is one that I think is very similar to Kant's. Kantian moral judgments and cognitions also, as I have argued, would arise from a grounding relation between an ideal of reason and nonmoral, phenomenal properties. And they would not permit us to infer that everyone must judge the world as moral in an absolutely certain way. They are negatively constitutive in terms of degrees. So, rather than Audi's approach to naturalize the process, I seek the idealized variation. We would look to build a model in which some nonmoral properties trigger a response of discord. But this response is not grounded in the nonmoral natural properties but rather in the ideal of which we are somehow aware in a way that enables the comparison.

That said, this clause "of which we are somehow aware in a way that enables the comparison" requires an account, which I turn to next. For we

⁸ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 49–50.

⁹ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 56–7.

know the sensible properties of the world through the senses. But how is it that we could begin to relate them (in any way, let alone a grounding relation) to ideals? It is here where I think we would be at a loss if playing by the proper Kantian rules of requiring a sensible intuition for any cognition that is determining how things *are* positively. We, in short, need some immediate awareness of the ideals as individuals, which can then be connected as grounds to the nonmoral properties of individuals in the world. But no such immediate awareness is allowed in Kant's theory.

4.4. Enter the Intellectual Intuition

Here, I think we must break the Kantian rules for an exception when it comes to the ideals of reason, namely, by appealing to a moderate form of intellectual intuition. I will not appeal this reading primarily on textual grounds, but rather philosophical ones. According to Kant, such an intuition would amount to "a faculty of a **complete spontaneity of intuition**," which is "distinct and completely independent of sensibility" (*KU* 5:406). We would have direct insight that is immediate, namely, as, not mediated by appearances. And there are times when Kant, while discussing ideas, seems to nod in the direction of this kind of access being at work.

For example, in his *Metaphysics L*, Kant notes that archetypes actually do form objects of intuition of a special kind:

[A]rchetype is actually an object of intuition, insofar as it is the ground of imitation. But in order to regard something as an archetype, we must first have an idea according to which we can cognize the archetype. [...] I must have an idea in order to seek the archetype concretely <in concreto>.—The model is the ground of imitation. (*V-Met-L2/Pölit* 28:577)

This suggests that Kant entertained the possibility of there being a direct grasp of certain archetypal ideals, which we must have as the grounds for comparison (even if we do not intuit them in the sensibly receptive sense). They are that which enables comparison in the first place, allowing us to obtain the most experiences possible (in particular, rich moral experiences). And further, consider this line from the *Opus Postumum*, which seems to refer to something like the transcendental ideal of theoretical reason (*ens realissimum*): "The totality of beings [*All der Wesen*] is not (sparsim) regarded as disjunctive (in logical

respect), not for discursive cognition, but rather conjunction for *intuitive cognition*" (OP 21:140, my translation). And there are moments when Kant arguably indicates the possibility of a unique intuition that we have directly of our noumenal freedom in the *Groundwork*, second *Critique*, and third *Critiques*.¹⁰ Thus, Kant—at times—waffles about there being certain privileged, intellectual cognitions when it comes to ideas. However, the textual argument is hampered by Kant's dominant insistence that we have only a discursive understanding. Hence, this road is one that we must venture on our own.

Let us see what the Kantian intellectual intuition might mean to grasp the grounding element in the process of moral judging and cognizing. First, we would not be reading the moral state of affairs off of the phenomenal properties of objects in experience in a way where they are grounding our perceptions and concomitant judgments, such as in Audi's naturalized form of moral perception. Instead, we would ground our moral perception of the phenomenal world on an ideal whose perfection is immediately available as a ground for comparison.

In this way, the intellectual intuition is not of a full-blown sort à la the intuitions of God. We are not, that is, piercing the phenomenal veil and *seeing* the intrinsic properties of things. Instead, we are aware, indirectly but immediately nonetheless, of an individual in relation to which the sensibly perceived individual is deficient. These are "intuitions," because they are nondemonstrable, immediate, and not strictly conceptual or propositional in form. We would infer an intellectual intuition of ideals as complete representations because they would enable the nuance and distinction of scalar gradations that pertain to some individual person's or state of affair's overall presence, which, in turn, is nondemonstrable, immediate, and not strictly conceptual or propositional in form. This unique comparative grasp of a sensible intuition in relation to an intellectual intuition would create a cognitive link in which we could maintain confidence that something is amiss or morally off (or improving and morally waxing) without always being able to provide any direct argument or conclusively point out a single property that qualifies as instantiated in the judgment.

The argument for our grasp of the ideal via an intellectual intuition, in sum, would have to be accepted based on the need to account for how robust moral experience is possible, which is both universal and immediate (though

¹⁰ See, e.g., *GMS* 4:457; *KpV* 5:31; *KU* 5:468. These, of course, are passages open to multiple interpretations.

not infallible) and not based on a concept. That is, we cannot prove that we have intellectual intuitions directly. Or to take a line from Fichte's explanation of intellectual intuitions, "That we possess such a power of intellectual intuition is not something that can be demonstrated by means of concepts, nor can an understanding of what intellectual intuition is be produced from concepts."¹¹ Rather than conceptually definable or demonstrable, the presence of an ideal as a substrate is immediate and intuitional in the same manner that our awareness of a spatiotemporal object before us is immediate. But the immediacy is graspable only because without it, we would not have any grounds for comparison.

There might be a similarity here too with G. E. Moore's brand of "intuitionism."¹² To take a line from Moore's *Principia Ethica*, which would apply here, the good is one of "those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined."¹³ In a way that fits well with the view of ideals as individuated grounds of comparison, Moore notes that there must be a primitive nature to the good. And, consequently, there must be *one* standard of which we are indirectly aware *immediately* whenever a morally relevant moment arises in experience such that we notice a divergence. We cannot *sensibly* see it in the sense of seeing in the world. But we, so to speak, *intelligibly* see it immediately without needing to demonstrate its presence either. And we also know it to be a singular standard since it is never changing. We can—in the moment—discern with some level of publicly agreed-upon accuracy when things are "not right" or "off" as well as (hopefully) "on the mend" or "getting better" or "almost as good as it gets." We would immediately note the ideal substrates when we compare two individuals on moral grounds, or simply the properties of a single individual in this moment (and over time). But this access is "intellectual" because the ground of comparison is of some singular entity, which is nonexistent in the phenomenal manifold of experience. Still, it is not merely subjective or up to me. Rather, it is a possession of reason. Though we only possess access to the ideal through intellectual intuition, it is objectively valid in a way akin to how the categories are, although we can never find ideals fully instantiated in the same way.

Still, much more needs to be developed in terms of how ideals enable us to perceive and then judge certain qualities in objects that we can then

¹¹ Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 46.

¹² Moore, *Principia Ethica*, x.

¹³ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 9–10.

immediately compare with the ideals. Here Audi's account could be a fruitful source of inspiration, according to which there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a hand swerving around at the end of an arm or its connection with a face. But the unjustified slap of an innocent perhaps immediately pushes us past a mere constitutive judgment to a comparative space of a negative constitutive judgment (in a way akin to mere reflective judgments). There is something intuitional that we immediately know must be set in comparison with the ideal. To use Audi's language, "We may intuitively *see* that the one is wronging the other."¹⁴ I have already noted how the Kantian account of what is going on here would differ from Audi's account in a key respect. Whereas for Audi, it is the nonmoral features of the phenomenal world that *ground* our perceptions of them as morally valued, for Kant, it would have to be the reverse. That is, it is in the way that they (i.e., the nonmoral phenomenal features and our immediately intuited ideals) combine that triggers in us the negative constitutive judgment—the determination of a moral deficiency that must be graded relative to a universal standard of an individual possessed by reason. How this connection occurs would bring us to a point where our account bottoms out. For the buck must stop once certain primitives have been reached.

Following the lead of passages cited above from the third *Critique*, in which Kant speaks of "visible" manifestations of the good requiring "pure ideas of reason and great force of imagination," (*KU* 5:235) and "contemplation involving subtle reasoning in accordance with ideas" (*KU* 5:292), perhaps one could incorporate the imagination as a stand-in for Audi's use of intuitionism to bring together nonmoral and moral properties.¹⁵ This track is worth further exploration since Kant notes that "the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception" (*KrVA*120n) and that "the morally oriented reason (through imagination) calls sensibility into play" (*RGV* 6:223n). That said, the imagination is a challenging faculty to grasp on Kant's account since it plays an intermediary role of some kind between sensibility and the understanding, without any obvious laws of its own.¹⁶ Developing this account, therefore, will require a follow-up study.

¹⁴ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 135.

¹⁵ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 83, refers to intuitions as noninferential feelings about the moral status of some perceptual content, which goes beyond a mere "gut feeling."

¹⁶ See, e.g., the first *Critique*: "Both extremes, namely sensibility and understanding, must necessarily be connected by means of the transcendental function of the imagination, since otherwise [...] there would be no experience" (*KrVA*124).

4.5. “The Death of All Philosophy”?

I have now provided a picture of how ideals, as fully formed individuated entities of reason, might require an intellectual form of intuition to be grasped—as they are not concepts in the traditional sense but (as individuals) would require that power of mind (intuition) that picks out immediately given singularities. Just as when I *see* the sun peaking over the mountain and can do nothing further to substantiate my vision of it beyond the fact that I perceive it, the intellectual intuition of the ideal would similarly be so brute. I just *apprehend* that this individual state of affairs is *not* in complete alignment with the archetype of a moral world whole of which it would form a microcosmic expression. To end this section, however, I would like to note why this heresy is, as I see it, minor since the intellectual intuition in question is of a modest variety.

First, it is important to note that the form of intellectual intuition that I think is required is not as profound as the kind that Kant himself considered when using the term. As Eckart Förster has clearly charted, Kant’s thinking on such nonhuman faculties of mind originated with his considerations of how God’s mind would work.¹⁷ And Kimberly Brewer has also shown that by such an intellect, Kant “understands a non-human mind, paradigmatically *God’s* mind.”¹⁸ While our discursive understanding moves from a universal concept to a particular intuition, Kant thought that an intuitive understanding would move “from the intuition of the whole to its parts,” and as a result perceive “no contingency in the way that the parts are assembled into a whole.”¹⁹ For such an understanding, there is no distinction between necessity and possibility. It, as it were, “contains the sum of all possibilities”²⁰ and grasps in each the whole. Why would such a mind, then, require any intuition at all? On Förster’s interpretation, the intellectual intuition comes into play to actualize “the combinations chosen from among the possibilities.”²¹ For God’s intuition—in contrast to our passively receptive intuition, which is mediated through the senses—would *create* actively its object, rather than the object acting upon it. In it, “possibility (thinking) and actuality (being) coincide,”²² since the previously grasped wholes are then, as it were, thought

¹⁷ Förster, *The 25 Years*, 145–50.

¹⁸ Brewer, “Kant’s Theory,” 163.

¹⁹ Förster, *The 25 Years*, 145.

²⁰ Förster, *The 25 Years*, 148.

²¹ Förster, *The 25 Years*, 148.

²² Förster, *The 25 Years*, 145.

into existence.²³ From a God's eye point of view, there would be no distinction between appearances and fundamental reality behind them, but rather all would be known and all that *is* would be actively created from one and the same source.

For Kant, such a form of cognition cannot be known to exist. Yet, it also is one that we cannot entirely discount and which, as Kimberly Brewer puts it aptly, performs "a kind of epistemological foil."²⁴ It enables us to better understand the nature of our patently *non*intuitive understanding and patently *non*intellectual intuitions. For in dividing appearances (the phenomenal) from what actually *is* (the noumenal), Kant's transcendental idealism certainly posits that this division is due to *human* cognitive constraints. And humans are not the only logically possible cognizers; indeed, we might even be predisposed to develop beyond our limitations in a future life,²⁵ such that we come to know the noumenal directly through an intuitive form of intellect.

Sticking with just intellectual intuition, now, it is clear why Kant thought that we cannot possess it in this lifetime.²⁶ Such an intellect could not distinguish between possible realities and what is actual, which we *do* distinguish. It would directly see the thing in itself in its entirety, such that there would equally be no division between how things appear and how they truly are. By contrast, we do recognize limitations in our own cognitive abilities that indicate we are not accessing all of reality through our senses and understanding.

Beyond these philosophical reasons that Kant thought best explained our cognition, he also considered an appeal to such an intuition as suspicious and against the spirit of the Enlightenment, since as Brewer notes, "talk of finite intuitive intellects is seen as encouraging philosophical laziness and speculative claims to metaphysical insight."²⁷ As Kant writes in his essay, *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* (1796), in which he responds to a particularly exclusive club of self-promoting amateur

²³ Förster's reading of there being two distinct faculties in play is not the only reading. Brewer, "Kant's Theory," argues, by contrast, that Kant often has one form of intellect in mind, which he refers to as possessing both moments as powers thereof (as opposed to qualifying as distinct faculties).

²⁴ Brewer, "Kant's Theory," 163.

²⁵ See Englert, "Kant's Favorite Argument," for Kant's teleological proof of our immortality based partly on our unrealized potential to realize higher forms of understanding in this lifetime.

²⁶ Brewer, "Kant's Theory," 179, notes that "although Kant insists on our this-worldly lack of intellectual intuition, he does see in such a model intriguing similarity to aspects of our own cognition" and that he also "does not reject Plato's model as a coherent hypothesis for our *post*-embodied state" (Brewer, "Kant's Theory," 177).

²⁷ Brewer, "Kant's Theory," 175.

Christian mystics, led by Johann Georg Schlosser, “The principle of wishing to philosophize by influence of a higher *feeling* is the most suitable of all for the tone of superiority; for who will dispute my feeling with me?” (VT 8:395). If an intuition is *sensibly* given, then it is publicly accessible in a way that encourages debate. As he argues in the essay, such philosophical attempts, in particular those that appeal to certain feelings and intuitions that are nonconceptual and nonaccessible by all, stand strictly against the very goals of philosophy and science as being open to peer disagreement and subject to peer review.

Finally, there were certainly historical reasons in play. Kant saw himself as a pioneer breaking away from the trend in philosophy that assumed that one could make pronouncements about how things *are* without any grounding whatsoever in how they *appear*. It was this tendency, which Kant thought led to so many irresolvable conflicts in philosophy and which his new brand of idealism could resolve. And it was in virtue of his idealism that true progress could finally be made since it did not allow itself to be led astray into imagining that it has true insights into how things are through thinking alone. Take, for instance, his explanation of how his idealism differs from full-blown or “genuine” idealism in the *Prolegomena*:

Genuine idealism always has a visionary purpose and can have no other; but my idealism is solely for grasping the possibility of our *a priori* cognition of the objects of experience, which is a problem that has not been solved before now, nay, has not even once been posed. By that means all visionary idealism collapses, which (as was already to be seen with Plato) always inferred, from our cognitions *a priori* (even those of geometry), to another sort of intuition (namely, intellectual) than that of the senses, since it did not occur to anyone that the senses might also intuit *a priori*. (*Prol* 4:375n)

And he thought that not only Plato but further even more so neo-Platonists and all rationalists ever since (such as Leibniz and Wolff²⁸) were also overextending themselves into a domain where no verification by the senses could follow. The exuberant belief that one could grasp things via pure

²⁸ See, e.g., from his essay *On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one*: “[Leibniz] also seems, with Plato, to attribute to the human mind an original, though by now dim, intellectual intuition of these super-sensible beings, though from this he inferred nothing concerning sensible beings” (ÜE 8:248).

thinking alone, Kant thought was a danger to all philosophy because it ultimately suggested the truth might not actually be accessible by all, or perhaps—worse still—not unified in a way that allowed interpersonal agreement.

All of this indicated to Kant that intellectual intuitions, beyond misunderstanding human cognition, would lead—in quite dramatic terms—to “the death of all philosophy” (VT 8:398). They promised an “overleap (*salto mortale*) from concepts to the unthinkable, a power of seizing upon that which no concept attains to, an expectation of mysteries, or rather a dangling of them before us” (VT 8:398). The question then becomes whether my suggestion that we have some form of intellectual intuition of ideals as singular entities in reason commits such a grave heresy, perhaps even sentencing philosophy itself to death!

Here, my question is: must we conceive of an intellectual intuition as only comprising such God-like powers? Or might we consider there being a spectrum of possible kinds of intellectual intuitions, ranging from moderate types that finite beings possess to more extreme types that only the infinite being could possess? To me, it seems that such a moderate form of intellectual intuition need not spell the death to philosophy. Indeed, in this moderate form, one might discern a quite modest move to simply account for a single type of intellectual intuition. It could also account for certain other features of Kant’s transcendental idealism perhaps, such as our consciousness of our own capacity to act freely despite the lawful determinism of appearances. With the sort of intellectual intuition that I have in mind, it is a minor heresy because it makes no claims that we have any form of direct insight into how things actually are in the noumenal realm.²⁹ This modesty might be enough to save it from falling into the immodest claims of the enthusiasts that Kant worried about.

Moreover, looking at the letter of Kant’s texts, he excuses Plato “*the academic*” from the neo-Platonic interpretations of his philosophy that came after. In the *On a Recently Prominent Tone* essay, Kant notes that Plato’s way of employing the intellect to grasp pure ideas was much different than full-blown access to nonsensible entities. Instead, Kant writes:

Plato the academic, therefore, though through no fault of his own (for he used his intellectual intuitions only backwards, to *explain* the possibility

²⁹ Brewer, “Kant’s Theory,” distinguishes five characteristics that pertain to Kant’s notion of the intuitive intellect, most of which would not apply to the form of intellectual intuition I have in mind since they mostly pertain to how such an intellect would access the thing-in-itself behind appearances.

of a synthetic knowledge *a priori*, not forwards, to extend it through those Ideas that were legible in the divine understanding), became the father of all enthusiasm *by way of philosophy*. But I would not wish to confuse him with *Plato the letter-writer*. (VT 8:398)³⁰

I too have been seeking such an avenue to “explain the possibility of a synthetic knowledge *a priori*,” and indeed “not forwards,” but rather also “only backwards” in reference to the possibility of certain essential forms of moral knowledge. It is only through the necessity of individuating the concept and finding a maximum whole as a point of comparison that we arrived at the ideal.

While understanding Kant’s concern, his crusade to maintain the strict duality of our discursive cognition might stand in the way of a deeper grasp of our cognition that has access to some forms of intuition that are nonsensible but also not mystically untethered flights of personal fancy. Much more, of course, could be said on this score, investigating other thinkers’ and traditions’ ways of conceiving nonsensory and nonconceptual cognition. But suffice it to say, I commit myself to the minor heresy on behalf of a Kantian theory to allow for some moderate intellectual intuitions. In embracing the ideal, we might also need to embrace an intellectual intuition.

Kant doth protest too much, methinks.

* * *

In sum, one possible key to plugging this gap in Kant’s moral epistemology is in grasping how moral ideals as substrates of our thinking might make sense of how we are not completely out to sea when it comes to knowing degrees of good and evil in individuals. Much more detail about how a moral judgment works and how one might argue further for such a moderate form of intellectual intuition is required. But, at the same time, we venture now into the depths of human cognition, which, perhaps even Kant thought, we would never grasp, just as he never thought we could ever understand why we have the categories in the first place. But I return now to the highest good as an ideal substrate for the remainder of the study.

From the foregoing analysis, it is not only that the highest good best qualifies as a practical ideal. Indeed, there is, to my mind, an essential

³⁰ See also VT 8:391n.

philosophical advantage that arises from its categorization as such. As a substrate of reason, it can fill a gap about how moral judgments might be possible within Kant's theory of judgment. We can judge because we have a standard of comparison that allows us to permanently note a graded deficiency in appearances, as illustrated with the examples from Chapter 2. But this absence is also an absence of a specific kind, namely, a moral deficiency such that we are still able to orient ourselves through knowledge of good and its opposite grounded in ideals.

This, therefore, is a reality of the ideal that is quasi-Platonic, a family resemblance that you cannot miss though many Kantians might wish it was not apparent. Kant's point is nuanced in ways that distance it from Platonism. It is primarily epistemic, though also metaphysical to the extent that it concerns the nature and source of these ideals as singular maximums and ingredients of knowledge (i.e., of the deficient good in actuality). His commitment voiced in the first *Critique* persists. Plato was right about the reality of ideals, but wrong about how this reality manifests itself. Ideals are real in that they ground our capacity to recognize degrees of goodness and its opposite in experienced individuals. But they do not on their own generate good and evil independently of our wills. We (and others) create good and evil through our free choice. While I think this distinction elucidates much of Kant's practical theory and persists throughout his works (despite lingering puzzles), what shifts is how it is that we relate to the highest good as a practical ideal. To understand Kant's evolving position about our relation to the ideal substrate in our reason, one needs to trace the highest good's evolution as his thinking develops.

PART II

THE EVOLUTION OF A
PRACTICAL IDEAL

5

A Mere Ideal Beyond Ends in Nature (1781–1786)

In Part I, I investigated the conceptual form of the highest good. The highest good, I argued, is best understood as a substrate in reason, a necessary individuation of the moral law that possesses universal validity and grounds the possibility of certain essential moral experiences in the first place. In our contemplation of experience, we employ it as a standard of comparison. The reality of the ideal, consequently, is not one that is actual in the sense that it counts as existing in space and time. And it is not something that we can make directly real *in concreto* without undermining its unconditioned status. For this reason, it is also not positively constitutive of possible experience as such. Still, its reality is necessary and indirectly constitutive of the possibility of moral experience. We do not invent it as we do with fictions, just as we do not invent the categories.

This gloss is the broad strokes picture of what is going on with the highest good as an ideal, which will remain the orientation for the remainder of the study. Yet while Kant, throughout all of the works, refers to the need for some basic awareness of an archetypal or intelligible moral world, he tinkers with the highest good's relation to us as human beings and moral agents. In the process, the practical ideal comes to serve human experience frequently in ways that relate directly to our wills. What reveals itself is that the contemplative use of the highest good as an ideal expands as his system expands. The ideal persists as a substrate, but another form of contemplative use arises for it in how we reflect on the whole of reality.

As noted in the Introduction, the highest good—while unified in terms of its conceptual form—evolves and changes as Kant's thinking develops. Its evolving nature has led to many philosophical skirmishes in the literature about whether the highest good is important for how we act. This is partially due to Kant changing his mind and sometimes being vague. But it is also due to an overlooking of its basic conceptual form and a fixed stare at some period as being *the* defining period for the highest good in Kant's thought. This

part has two goals. The first is to recognize the development of the highest good in a way that resolves the tensions in its depiction via a careful observation of how Kant employs it. In the process, I find that a clear trajectory reveals itself. By the time of the third and final *Critique*, the highest good as a practical ideal is essentially important for contemplation. The second goal is to grasp the trajectory of the highest good's evolution, reinforcing the conceptual interpretation of Part I. The highest good, that is, as a substrate in our reason, grounds the way we think of the world. This part of the study will be of primary interest to Kant scholars and offers new insights that, while certainly philosophical, are also dependent on historical developments. For those who prefer to get back to the development of Kantian ideals in experience, one could skip ahead to Part III. That said, I would recommend not skipping Chapter 7, as it motivates and sets up why the highest good is chosen in the Kantian approach to serve as the blueprint for building a coherent worldview.

For the next three chapters, therefore, the focus is less on the conceptual form of the highest good and more on the question of how and why Kant theorized our *relation* to it as an ideal as his system developed. To put the question in a pithy form: What is this ideal substrate *for me*? While the highest good, I contend, is always in the basic form a practical ideal, this conceptual consistency does not entail that Kant's theory of humanity's relation to it remains constant. Indeed, what is so interesting about the highest good as a practical ideal is the manner that Kant changes his views on our relation to it.

As a bird's-eye view to orient the reader in grasping the broad strokes evolutionary steps, the key factor that drives the evolution of the highest good and its relation to us is its gradual connection to teleology in Kant's thought. Or put differently: The reasons for our shifting relation to the highest good are because of how it becomes entangled with ends in the world, indeed, particular ends of action and eventually with natural ends. Its evolutionary arc, in a nutshell, then is as follows: It begins as an ideal completely detached from ends in the world. Then it becomes converged with the particular ends of our moral willing as we seek to change nature. In both of these early stages, the manner in which it connects with our ends shifts from a motivational to a rationally validating function. And finally, it shifts outside of acting completely and becomes the only end fit to qualify as the final end of creation. At this point, Kant returns to his insight that ideals ground the possibility of individuals and individual

states of affairs being certain ways in the first place, as well as serving primarily in contemplation. However, this evolution changes our relation to the highest good as a practical ideal. A further contemplative use is discovered, namely, as a blueprint for how to relate harmoniously vastly different parts of experience into a totality oriented toward the good. It is, in short, a deep substrate in relation to which we win a systematic outlook of the world and all ends contained in it. The reality of this ideal—as it were—comes down closer to earth in so far as we come to judge it as interwoven with ends in nature. The reality of the ideal becomes the grounding for judging nature and our place in it, but further becomes the key for checking the overall coherence of our systematic outlook—the creation of a worldview (as a technical term).

In this chapter, I detail the highest good's initial form as completely separated from ends in the world. It is for this reason that I refer to it as a “mere” ideal. That said, the role of the ideal is already important at this stage for us to experience morality as a feature of the world. The “mere” qualification, that is, is important for its status relative to us as agents with moral projects in the world. The basic contemplative use continues to allow comparative knowledge. A mere ideal illuminates morality as imperfectly at hand and a source of potential, but it—for Kant—at this point does not actually connect with our actions as moral agents. I spend the rest of the chapter tracing the first developmental step of the highest good's journey as it begins to converge with natural teleology.

5.1. The Highest Good as a Mere Ideal (1781)

At its starting point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the highest good is explicitly a mere ideal relative to us as agents. Below I explain in detail what “mere” means here. Quickly, it refers to how the highest good is abstracted from particular ends in nature during this period. As a principle or mere ideal, that is, it is neither an actual object proper nor a really possible one at that. Instead, it stands explicitly for Kant as a desired object of our action precisely because it promises us happiness if we act well. This phase of Kant's ethics reveals a position that Kant abandons as soon as he begins developing his critical ethics with the *Groundwork* in 1785. However, its reality as a substrate in reason, which I excavated in Part I, persists throughout this phase and all subsequent phases.

Even though Kant did not think that morality could undergo critique when writing the first *Critique*,¹ it is tempting to see the starting point of the highest good as equivalent to its later employments. Kant refers to it as an “ideal” and “determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason” (*KrV* A804/B832). It is a counterpoint to this world, exhibited in thinking and completely determined by the moral law, with added happiness based on our worthiness. It represents a state beyond this life based on Kant’s conviction that it is not possible to make it real in the world. And, as shown in Part I, it is an ideal that we carry in our thinking. Kant refers to God as the “original” [*ursprünglichen*] (*KrV* A810/B838) and primordial highest good that makes possible this image of the world. If we act well, we may hope that God will—in His infinite goodness—reward us with happiness in a future world. This future state is what we think of as the “highest derived good” (*KrV* A811/B839) since it represents a state that is metaphysically dependent on God as the ultimate ground in which our moral ends and happiness might be proportionately and maximally aligned.

While the highest good remains an ideal in so far as it is—in both the original and derivative forms—an individuated entity of thought, a maximum of moral goodness and happiness in relation to which we become aware of the world’s imperfection, Kant also considers how it might further play a role in our actions. As a mere ideal, Kant dismisses its realizability in this world. And yet he thinks that it might help in motivating us to act. I first explore its starting point, which Kant quickly modifies as soon as he considers morality’s relation to nature.

In what sense is the highest good *merely* an ideal in the first *Critique*? The answer pertains to Kant’s views on it relative to our doings in the world. In 1781, he is quite adamant that the derivative highest good, or the “**moral world**,” does not obtain in this world or in this life, but rather is thought of “merely as an intelligible world” since his method (at this point in the critical project) requires abstracting away “all conditions (ends [*Zwecke*])” (*KrV* A808/B836).² This intelligible world is, therefore, merely a rational entity, analogous to the sensible world, but lawfully organized such that we would, if freed from self-interest, act to realize every duty. And in this process, Kant thinks of the synthetic relation between virtue and happiness as being one

¹ See, e.g., his remarks at *KrV* A15/B29 and A329/B386.

² Though his position has changed by 1787, when he published the second edition of the first *Critique*, he did not have the time to edit the canon chapter. Thus, it remained in its 1781 form despite the advancements in his moral theory.

of direct, peer-supporting causation. We would, that is, become in such a world “the authors both of [our] own enduring welfare and at the same time of others” (*KrVA*810/B838). A tempting image is to try and imagine a human hive in which all are attuned to the needs of the other in such a thorough-going transitive web of mutual care that one no longer worries about oneself. Just as I am engaged in supporting my neighbor, some neighbor is just as fully engaged in supporting me.

But metaphysically speaking, as a principle (even an idealized one), Kant says that such “a system of self-rewarding morality [...] is only an idea” (*KrV* 809/B837). While it might be an idealized object, it is explicitly distinguished from the sensible world as *only* an idea. We do not constitute a human hive of mutually supportive, universal care. And, hence, this ideal, while enabling moral experience as a grounds for comparison, remains—taking a phrase from David Lewis’s theory of possible worlds—*causally isolated* from the world of existing actors, who concoct existence-altering plans that lead to existent actions among other things and actors. The highest good as a practical ideal simply is not apt for real possibility and remains causally disconnected from all ends (*Zwecke*) in our world in so far as these remain empirically conditioned. And yet it remains an ideal substrate in our reason that provides a point of comparison by which we evaluate morality in the world, albeit in varying deficient degrees by judging the perpetual imperfection of us and the world around us. This causal isolation of the highest good from ends in nature is a principled separation that I will detail below. Even in his later, more developed works, the highest good as the unconditioned ideal must, in principle, remain separate from the phenomenal sphere in which we discover empirical, conditioned entities. But pressure from within his thinking pushes these two together toward a gradual convergence. At this point, however, the ideal is *merely* ideal in the sense just sketched. There is nothing substantial about its relation to the world of sense beyond what it reveals about the morally impoverished state of affairs and whatever role it (might) play in action.

The second facet of the highest good from the first *Critique* is the influence it exerts on us. Indeed, it plays an essential role in determining us to act or our *becoming* moral. This function is motivational in nature and represents a brief and self-corrected area of Kant’s ethical thinking. That is, the ideal substrate is employed as a projected reward to motivate the moral agent to act morally. At this point in his thought, Kant believes that moral action involves emotions as requisite impulses (as he thought was the case for any action).

By *motivational*, I mean that Kant thinks the command of the moral law when writing the first *Critique* was insufficient without extra motivation or incentive to bring us to act. In the first *Critique*, Kant presents the idea of life in a “future” world as necessary for any moral command: “[T]he moral laws as **commands**; [. . .] could not be [commands] if they did not connect appropriate consequences with their rule *a priori*, and thus carry with them **promises and threats**” (*KrV* A811/B839). And looking to his early lecture notes reveals that he continued to maintain this argument up until the writing of the *Groundwork*. From lectures delivered in 1782–1783, Kant writes of the “moral-theological proof” for immortality as a condition connected to the highest good to incentivize us to persist in our moral efforts:

Morality would be *without incentives* if there were no immortality of the soul. Without belief in immortality, morality would have power only in the idea, but not in reality. Since morality thus lacks reality, the hope of immortality is a practical postulate of reason. (*V-Met/Mron* 29:917–8, my emphasis)³

Thus, it is due to moral-psychological neediness that we must believe in the completion of the moral project (through our immortality). While present in the early critical period, however, this motivational or incentivizing argument disappears completely in later works after Kant’s development of a pure ethics, which abstracts away from all consequences as relevant to determining our will. Kant’s philosophical reasons for abandoning this motivational argument will become clearer as the picture evolves.⁴ However, it is unequivocally clear that Kant first thought of the highest good as an ideal that (among other things) exerts influence on us in so far as it motivates us to persist in our moral efforts, despite its completely disconnected status from this world. We desire the highest good not because it is the right thing to do, but because it holds out the promise of our happiness if we act well. This relation to the ideal substrate, however, begins to evolve with Kant’s considerations of whether history is intelligible or not.

³ See also *V-Met/Mron* 29:777 and 918–9 for reiterations of the same point.

⁴ See, e.g., the *On the Common Saying* essay where he says the highest good or postulates are not required due to a “lack of moral incentives” (*TP* 8:279n) or to provide “a sure ground and the requisite strength of incentive” (*TP* 8:279).

5.2. Nature's General, Nonmoral Aim for Humanity (1784)

The reason that the highest good is separated from ends in nature for Kant at the outset of his critical project is based on a methodological principle that I will refer to as the *principle of isolation*. This isolation is evident because Kant initially keeps teleology (a theoretical idea) separated from the highest good (a practical ideal).

When it comes to understanding nature, that is, morality plays no direct role because it is a distinctly nonnatural, purely rational end. While he employs teleology to decipher the hidden aim of nature, the highest good persists as the moral aim of individuals that sends our thoughts beyond the sensibly given into a numinous beyond. This principle is, furthermore, fundamental to his division between the related, but distinct fields of anthropology (an a posteriori science) and moral theory proper (a pure science).⁵ To follow along with Kant's development according to the principle of isolation, I take a perspectival and chronological approach for the remainder of the chapter, tracking changes in Kant's thinking relative to each other. We know from his position in the first *Critique* that he thought history was *not* bringing about the highest good, since it was a mere ideal at that point in his thinking. But Kant's early philosophical exploration of history led him to search nonetheless for an ideal grounding that might provide a philosophical answer for *what* the end of human history might be. Working with the principle of isolation, we can—with Kant—bracket morality and follow him on his early reflections about nature.

If one gave nature a voice, what would she tell us about humanity's history and its future? Rather than inviting a historical or natural scientific answer, Kant thought this question invites a philosophical one. The philosopher's task according to Kant is unique. Whereas a natural scientist starts from experience and moves to concepts, a philosopher seeks to understand concepts and their connections, which in turn offer stability to our judgments of experience. Thus, the philosopher does not merely memorize concepts, but rather legislates over the use of concepts: "Philosophy, then, is an idea of the most perfect legislation of the human understanding, and the philosopher is the legal expert of human reason" (*V-Log/Wiener* 24:798). The philosopher, as a master of concept formation, does not want merely to gather information, but instead wants to understand how concepts necessarily hang

⁵ See also *Prol* 4:362, published two years earlier in 1783.

together and condition our knowledge of the world. One could call this the *philosopher's mission*, namely the search for the interrelations between the totality of our cognitions. As I note below, it turns out that Kant also saw the philosopher's key role as being a *carpenter* of reason. As a carpenter, the task became one of creating a world out of the disparate areas of experience to shape a coherent systematic outlook or worldview.

In 1784, right before writing the *Groundwork* and in the phase of his thinking in which the highest good represents a motivational ideal, Kant considered how a philosopher would begin making sense of history. In his essay, *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784, hereafter: "*Idea* essay"), he questions whether sense can be made of human nature as it develops within the course of nature as a whole. Is it pointless? Or is it presenting a cogent trajectory? Kant's answer is complex. On the one hand, he admits that working with examples or working our way to a picture based on aggregation presents no overarching, coherent picture of the whole. We would find merely endless examples of vice and virtue, natural selfishness, and moral grace. Therefore, to answer this question of nature's plan for us as a whole manifested through human history, the philosopher must make use of a concept that provides a rule for interpreting each part as relative to a whole. Familiar from Chapter 1, Kant calls such a specialized concept an "idea," that is, a "a rational concept of the form of a whole, insofar as through this the domain of the manifold as well as the position of the parts with respect to each other is determined *a priori*" (*KrV* A832/B860). Indeed, an idea as a concept of reason is required since we need help in signposting how the parts relate to a whole that we never can perceive in the same way that we perceive the parts.

Although it is ultimately the philosopher who provides the idea, Kant points out every step of the way that it is the philosopher acting as an oracle for nature. It is not merely ideas, but rather ideas used to fill gaps in the causal order in which we see the effects. When below I write about "nature" acting or intending, I am always writing about Kant's legislation of concepts on nature's behalf. Also important is the fact that the philosopher is conscious that the posited "idea could become useful" (*IaG* 8:29). That is to say, ideas—as rules—are prescriptive rather than descriptive; regulative rather than constitutive. And an idea can set certain ends "the bringing about of which is promoted by the very idea of it" (*IaG* 8:27).⁶ That is, philosophy can establish its own millenarian belief as long as it remains grounded in what has actually

⁶ Förster, "The Hidden Plan," 188, highlights this sentence from the Eighth Proposition as one that "breaks new ground," since it gives warrant, in a philosophical capacity, to offer a guideline for humanity where a simple description offers none.

occurred in human history. Kant even notes, in a way that explicitly parallels his later development of worldview, that positing an idea can help generate a point of view through which “there will be opened a consoling prospect into the future” (*IaG* 8:30). And: “Such a *justification* of nature—or better, of *providence*—is no unimportant motive for choosing a particular viewpoint for considering the world [*Weltbetrachtung*]” (*IaG* 8:30). The philosopher’s task, therefore, is one of deep reflection about humanity’s place in the nature.

But what idea could one employ? Immediately, Kant bars one way of inquiry: The philosopher cannot use the “aims of [individuals]” but rather only the “aim of nature” (*IaG* 8:18). The reason is that our freedom provides too variegated and contingent a picture to understand the whole. Because we are free, we can also be selfish and introduce chaos or caprice into the schema we seek to interpret. The question, then, is which idea the philosopher can reasonably choose that comes not from what we put into nature, but rather from what nature puts into us. It is for this reason that nature’s plan and human history converge. Nature’s plan for us is the philosopher’s best bet of finding Ariadne’s thread through the bloody but also hope-inspiring course of human history.

At this point, if we are philosophically searching for ideas that can account for history’s progress as determined by nature, it might seem odd that Kant did not immediately posit the highest good (in its derivative sense) as our aim. However, Kant does not refer to the highest good explicitly in the essay. Instead, he interprets the course of human history through nature as developing toward a “*perfect civil union*” (*IaG*, 8:29), namely, a human legal state held together by coercion via external lawgiving. The reason is mostly due to the principle of isolation, which clearly excludes a pure idea as a live option since it is not something imputable to nature (our own or any nature outside us). It is a pure ideal, far removed from sensible experience.

However, I think that Kant also worried about underdetermining human nature if he chose something based on an a priori concept of morality. That is, Kant sees no promise in searching for a decrypting tool of history’s progress in a *purely* rational fashion. Individuals are selfish, and the scenes observable to us appear “in the large” as if “woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction” (*IaG* 8:18). Thus, even if *pure* reason possesses access to a moral world as a point of comparison, the philosopher who provides an idea to organize nature must employ one that captures the hidden “*aim of nature* in this nonsensical course of things human” (*IaG* 8:18). Since this system cannot arbitrarily

select the elements it includes, we cannot choose to skip over the wars and genocides as if they mean nothing in an otherwise meaningful whole.⁷

What idea will avoid underdetermining human nature? The answer is that it must be an idea that grasps human nature as a whole. And human nature is complex. On the one hand, human beings, Kant writes, “do not behave merely instinctively” such as bees or beavers, and “yet also do not [behave] on the whole like rational citizens of the world in accordance with an agreed upon plan” (*IaG* 8:17). Thus, the idea we choose must determine the aim of human beings not only in accordance with our instinctual nature (shared to some extent by bees and beavers), and further not only in accordance with our purely rational nature as “rational citizens” (as moral beings), but rather with our hybrid nature as both. We are too rational to employ an idea that sees human history as simply a brute, mechanical process of bare survival. Indeed, reason does guide much of our decision-making.⁸ Yet, we are too instinctual to employ an idea that sees human history as merely a development of us as purely rational beings. Selectively choosing one or the other would represent the philosopher departing from the empirical foundation of facts and methodologically cease to ascertain anything worthy of counting as a historical cognition.

In this way, it makes sense why the moral law or highest good would not suit nature’s purposes as an organizing idea or ideal, respectively. The highest good could not make sense of all our powers, including those not directly concerned with the realization of an ideal, moral world. Instead, nature’s ultimate aim for humanity must be an end “in which the human species is represented in the remote distance as finally working itself upward toward the condition in which *all germs* nature has placed in it can be fully developed and its determination here on earth can be fulfilled” (*IaG* 8:30, my emphasis).⁹ Important to note is that “germs” [*Keime*] is a technical term of Kant’s that is interchangeable with “predisposition” [*Anlage*]. Kant, drawing on the science of his day, thought that organisms had certain key traits that were in the process of unfolding over time toward a set end. Indeed, they

⁷ Kant might also worry about explaining what should, in principle, remain hidden. As Reflection 6082 written around this period states: “[T]o what end the human species as a whole exists is hidden. If a human being is to exist at all, then it is obvious that he must be upright, wise, etc. But that and why a human being should exist is hidden. Whatever always remains hidden is inscrutable” (*Ref* 18:444).

⁸ See, in particular, *GMS* 4:395.

⁹ Translation altered. For more indication of this, see Kant’s description of the perfect civil society opening up the “vitality of all enterprise” [*die Lebhaftigkeit des durchgängigen Betriebes*] (*IaG*, 8:28); and an emphasis on “tranquility and security in a lawful constitution” (*IaG* 8:24–5), as opposed to some notion of a perfect, moral world as in the first *Critique*.

would unfold Kant's thought if nothing gets in their way (this is well before the third *Critique* when he refines his views on teleology). If they did not, then, Kant thought this would amount to undermining the very intelligibility of nature, or as he states in the *Idea* essay's first proposition: "*All natural predispositions of a creature are determined sometime too develop themselves completely and purposively*. [. . .] An organ that is not to be used, an arrangement that does not attain to its end, is a contradiction in the teleological doctrine of nature" (*IaG* 8:18). That is, the idea may not just be the ultimate aim of morality, but rather an aim ascribed to mother nature who gave us reason as a tool to realize *all* ends (including technical, aesthetic, and educational ones).¹⁰ And this is postulated as gradually in the offing as history progresses.

The idea, therefore, is the hidden aim of nature to cultivate *all* humanity's predispositions¹¹ (nonmoral ones included) through an increasing dominance of reason as that which allows us to pursue various ends: our physical nature guided by reason.

To be sure, morality is a major part of human nature. But Kant is extremely sensitive about finding an idea that speaks to our whole nature as rational organisms. Reason's talents also include technical advancements that aid us in our survival, comfort, and education. And while Kant explicitly mentions that the formation of society leads us gradually from a "*pathologically* compelled agreement [. . .] into a *moral* whole" (*IaG* 8:21), Kant's single mention of "*moral* whole" stands as more of an aside when taking the whole essay in view, perhaps even a placeholder for further development of this thought down the road (since he was on the brink of discoveries in this ethical theory with the soon-to-be-finished *Groundwork* of 1785). Hence, in history, Kant asserts that it is the perfect civil or legal society that is the hidden aim of nature since only it could provide humanity with the greatest degrees of freedom for realizing *all* of human potential.

¹⁰ In *What is Enlightenment?* (written also in 1784), we see a similar determination of human nature, as well as an emphasis on freedom in an overtly general sense. Enlightenment is distinguished according to a broad, politically innocuous form of freedom: "namely, freedom to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters" (*WA* 8:37). And on the first mention of "human nature," Kant refers to our "original vocation" as the promotion of (a) the enlargement of our cognitions, (b) the purification of errors in said cognitions, and (c) the general furthering of "progress in enlightenment" (*WA* 8:39). The second mention of human nature details our ability "to *think* freely" (*WA* 8:41). In 1784, therefore, there was a very wide mandate given to us by nature for using reason—i.e., covering *all* activity and not primarily *moral* activity.

¹¹ While not the focus of the *Idea* essay, Kant in other texts uses these terms while developing his views on race. This topic has been brought into focus in recent scholarship, which I flag now but return to in Chapter 9.

However, it is not only the methodological concern of getting human nature right, as it were, that makes Kant keep morality separate from his teleological considerations of human history. Rather, already here, there is pressure from the side of morality to keep nature out of the mix. After all, morality is about ideas according to which we should act *as individuals*. Around this same time, Kant is working on the *Groundwork*—a work that maintains that morality is dependent on the individual's good will and autonomous maxim formation. If morality exists at all, the *Groundwork* establishes that its necessity relies on the autonomous working of our will determined by pure reason alone. Thus, it follows that morality depends on the individual's character and actions and must be isolated from all anthropological considerations of natural purposes at work in the species. Kant says exactly as much in the Preface to the *Groundwork*: "Since my aim here is directed properly to moral philosophy, I limit the question proposed only to this: is it not thought to be of the utmost necessity to work out for once a pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical and that belongs to anthropology?" (*GMS* 4:389). Morality, that is, must abstract from nature completely if it is to be universal.

Nature, by contrast, plays the long game through the species and "needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next" (*IaG* 8:19). And an individual now is but preparing the "steps on which the latter [generations] may bring up higher the edifice which was nature's aim" (*IaG* 8:20). Indeed, as has been noticed, the idea of a gradual unfolding of the natural predispositions over *generations* seems to conflict with his a priori moral theory. If morality, by contrast, required generations to create good will, then the very purity of the morality's foundation could erode. Subsequent generations, one could maintain, would be more moral. Being more moral, they would also—it seems—be freer or more autonomous; that is, less determined by selfish desires, and so on. Later in essays from the 1790s, Kant tries to get around this issue by establishing moral progress of humanity without thinking of the individuals in these future generations as morally superior. Indeed, in the *Contest of the Faculties*, Kant claims that such a thought would be absurd.¹²

¹² See, *SF* 7:82. Kleingeld, "Kant, History, and the Idea," 59–60, argues against those who see an inconsistency between this essay and Kant's mature ethical theory. Her arguments are good, but unnecessary if I am right. The inconsistency is real, but because he altered his position.

Thus, for the sake of morality, the principle of isolation must also hold. And instead of the moral whole being nature's primary plan, it is the gradual opening of space for freedom in an external sense toward which nature aims. Kant concludes that the aim of nature is an "externally perfect state constitution" (*IaG* 8:27). This end is determined *not* primarily as the internal legislation of the moral individual, but rather as the sphere "in which *freedom under external laws* can be encountered combined in the greatest possible degree" (*IaG* 8:22). One might overlook the distinction here, but it is important. This freedom, whose greatest expression is realized by the ultimate aim of nature, is not primarily freedom in the full moral sense, but rather grounded in the most perfect external sense. And in the process, we become "*cultivated*" [*kultiviert*] and "*civilized*" [*zivilisiert*], but Kant asserts in the essay that this does not equate to us being "*moralized*" [*moralisiert*] (*IaG* 8:26). Such a task cannot be completed by nature. Instead, the natural end of human history is to create a domain of self-sustaining freedom where human beings freely submit to a "condition of coercion" (*IaG* 8:22). Such a condition is one in which we give up our "wild freedom" and enter into a covenant with fellow rational beings. The thought is something akin to what Rousseau¹³ and others meant in discussing the establishment of a commonwealth. Though we may hope to rise to the level of the mentioned "moral whole," this is up to us. Nature by getting us to accept a perfect civil constitution (if and when that happens) will have done her part.

Despite Kant's good reasons for keeping the principle of isolation in place, one notices already that the separation is tenuous. Even while the highest good ought to remain external to nature, Kant's thinking already gestures toward the points where the highest good as an ideal will converge with our teleological estimations of nature.

This gesture is evident in one small remark from the essay, which indicates that Kant sees a deficiency in any perfect civil constitution that lacks a foundation in moral individuals: "But everything good that is not grafted onto a morally good disposition, is nothing but mere semblance [*Schein*] and glittering misery" (*IaG* 8:26). In the rest of the *Idea* essay, there is no mention

¹³ Kant explicitly mentions Rousseau along with Abbé de St. Pierre (*IaG* 8:24). See, in particular, as a point of comparison with Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, 53: "This transition from the state of nature to the civil state produces a most remarkable change in man by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and endowing his actions with the morality they previously lacked. Only then, when the voice of duty succeeds physical impulsion and right succeeds appetite, does man, who until then had looked only to himself, see himself forced to act on other principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations."

of morality as being in any way an inviolable condition that must precede a perfect civil society. Indeed, the picture arising from this early period is the following: Morality (as the internal condition of one's character) remains somehow connected with the ends of nature in that it is our reason that sets our maxims and makes us free. However, the aim of *nature* is the *external* manifestation of our freedom that provides the space for the greatest degree of our end-setting in general (both technical and moral). In this way, nature's aim is not a moral one, but rather a rational one in a grand sense. But if every good is conditioned on a good character, then it would seem that the *rational*, that is, noncoerced, nonpredetermined, aims of moral individuals must partially constitute a perfect civil society if it is to count as *good*. Herein lies the rub for the natural idea: The moral disposition cannot be coerced from the outside—otherwise, it would simply be just, but not moral. Thus, nature depends on the freedom that it equipped its agents with but which its own end cannot possibly bring about without simultaneously undermining it. This tension is a seed that will lead to the main change in how Kant adapts the highest good two years later in his essay, *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786).

5.3. The Moral Law's Aim (1785)

In Section 5.1, the highest good was shown in the first *Critique* to be a mere ideal vis-à-vis particular ends in the world, a substrate that remained cordoned off to a sphere apart from nature but accessible in thought. It provided a desirable goal and possessed a practical reality in grounding our contemplation of moral valances of goodness in experience. To wit, Kant even thought that it might play a pivotal role in motivating us by promising a reward for acting morally (as long as we postulate immortality and God along the way). While the basic standard function of the highest good remained unaffected, the secondary role it plays in motivating us practically is completely replaced with the nascence of his critical ethics in the *Groundwork* (1785), where Kant notes that moral worth depends solely on whether one acts from duty: "A good will is good not because of what it effects, or accomplishes, not because of its fitness to attain some intended end, but good just by its willing [. . .] Usefulness or fruitfulness can neither add anything to this worth, nor take anything away from it" (*GMS* 4:394). Indeed, the highest good as a mere ideal world determined in our reason by thinking the moral law individuated

qua object is arguably absent in the *Groundwork*.¹⁴ And this absence should not be too surprising in a work that seeks not an object of morality, but rather “nothing more” (*GMS* 4:392) than the search for the highest principle of morality without the need to look to particular, realizable ends. Nevertheless, the *Groundwork* provides a pivotal chapter in the development of the highest good as a practical ideal because it is in the *Groundwork* that Kant must have realized that reason’s highest, supreme determination aims not at a system of *external* laws but at a system of laws determined *internally* by the autonomous agent: a kingdom of ends. And this sets the stage for a necessary step in the evolution of Kant’s thinking about the highest good and human history, since this highest end of reason must, in turn, change our estimation of nature’s hidden plan.

More or less, though, Kant operates with the same ground rules as are in effect while considering human history in the *Idea* essay in so far as the principle of isolation is crucial for understanding morality. In the Preface of the *Groundwork*, Kant explains that the necessity of morality requires a pure foundation: “[O]ne could not give morality worse counsel than by seeking to borrow it from examples” (*GMS* 4:408). And when considering the kingdom of ends as the model of a world determined by the moral law, *there* (in a footnote) and only there in the entire *Groundwork* does Kant mention “teleology” explicitly. In keeping with the principle of isolation, he employs it to highlight that the analogy only extends so far:

Teleology considers nature as a kingdom of ends, moral science a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. There the kingdom of ends is a theoretical idea for explaining what exists. Here it is a practical idea for the sake of bringing about—in conformity with precisely this idea—what does not exist but can become actual by means of our behavior. (*GMS* 4:436n)

Teleology, that is, organizes a completely separate kingdom of ends from what we are concerned with in morality. We use it as a *theoretical* idea to organize the aims of nature. And we organize our thinking as moral individuals by imagining a world structured by a *practical* idea. Moral science might

¹⁴ The presence or absence of the highest good from the *Groundwork* is point of debate in the literature. For example, Engstrom, “The Determination of the Concept,” sees the highest good as implicit in the first few paragraphs of the work. Beck, *A Commentary*, 244, argues that the promotion of the highest good is not to be found there since it is not in any formulation of the categorical imperative.

bring the practical idea “closer to intuition” (read: closer to reality), but never in a sense that would make the idea contingent on its realizability in actuality.

Thus, the *Idea* essay of 1784 and the *Groundwork* of 1785 dance to a similar tune. The only overlap is thanks to an analogy. Teleology and morality belong to two completely different employments of reason. Teleology is a purely theoretical idea; morality is a practical one. And Kant remains firmly committed to keeping the highest aim of morality hermetically sealed off from anthropological judgments about the aim of nature:

[A] completely isolated metaphysics of morals, mixed with no anthropology, no theology, no physics or hypophysics [. . .], is not just an indispensable *substrate* of all theoretical securely determined cognition of duties, but at the same time a desideratum of the highest importance for the actual execution of its prescriptions. (*GMS* 4:410, emphasis added)

While Kant thinks we need anthropology to understand how best to *realize* the principles of morality (*GMS* 4:412), morality transcends our species and its capacities and connects with a universal plane that may be accessed by other rational beings as well (if they exist). This continued separation lends support to my conclusion from Section 5.2 as to why nature’s aim in the *Idea* essay remains concerned with the creation of perfect external conditions for the maximum realization of *all* our predispositions. Namely, if we are looking for *humanity’s* natural end, then it would be an imperfect conceptual account to start by looking for *rationality’s* ultimate end—that is, stripped of all the other aspects of us that one could read into a wise, benevolent nature.

If this were the end of the story, though, one would not need to seek a conceptual evolution of the highest good in terms of its teleological dimensions. We might remain with a model of nature’s aims and a model of the moral individual’s aims that stand apart. However, three paragraphs in the first section of the *Groundwork* deserve special attention as they force Kant to rearrange his concepts.¹⁵

The three paragraphs come after his famous assertion that only good will can qualify as absolutely good. Indeed, nothing in the world and no physical desire aimed at the world can give us unconditioned goodness. Everything else, every other thing that we might name “good,” is conditioned on its being anchored in a good will. In a way that is often overlooked in the literature,

¹⁵ These take up exactly two pages, namely, *GMS* 4:395–6.

it is here where we find Kant make his first of only two explicit uses of the term, “highest good,” in the entire *Groundwork*. And indeed, in both cases, it is not an object of the will that includes our proportionate happiness, but rather is nothing else than the good will itself, for while not the “only and the entire good,” it “must yet be the *highest good*, and the condition of everything else, even of all longing for happiness” (GMS 4:396, my emphasis).¹⁶ At this point, though, Kant enters into a brief aside in which he addresses a skeptical rejoinder: And this sets the trajectory for convergence between the highest good as an ideal and ends in nature.

For one might think that the good will is perhaps based on a misunderstanding of nature’s chief intention in equipping us with reason. If only nature were to speak for herself, says the skeptic, she might tell us that we have misunderstood her intent “in assigning Reason to our will as its ruler” (GMS 4:395). Kant replies by addressing the skeptic on her own terms and thus slips into a consideration about the basis of nature providing us with not merely reason, but rather moral-practical reason.

Kant begins by introducing the notion of natural predispositions and asserts that “we assume as a principle that no organ will be found in it for any end that is not also the most fitting for it and the most suitable” (GMS 4:395). This is familiar ground from the *Idea* essay. Kant then provides a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the skeptic. Assuming the skeptic is correct and that it is one’s “*preservation*,” one’s “*prosperity*, in a word [one’s] *happiness*” (GMS 4:395), that should be fully attained as the actual end for which we are endowed by nature, then we would have to assume that nature is indeed a terrible provider. Why? Kant’s answer is that reason performs very poorly in this task since it makes every decision complicated and open-ended, or even worse, possibly self-sacrificial and, ergo, counterproductive to our immediate happiness. Were we simply driven by instinct, then our ends “would thereby have been obtained much more reliably than can ever be done by reason” (GMS 4:395). Further, if this *were* the case, then our reason would play only a passive and voyeuristic function: namely, one that allows us to appreciate and be thankful for satisfied desires, without relating causally to action. In other words, it would be there to allow us to bask in our well-being rather than serve as a serious tool for deliberation, decision, and action. Kant concludes that this picture of nature would have “prevented Reason

¹⁶ The second mention is also in section I of the *Groundwork* in reference to the good will (GMS 4:401).

from striking out into *practical use*, and from having the impudence, with its feeble insights, to devise its own plan for happiness and for the means of achieving it" (GMS 4:395). This lies, however, in flat-out contradiction with reality since we can and often do go against what we desire or need on the grounds of moral-practical reasons. Indeed, we recognize morality as *the* only unconditioned good in the form of good will.

It is at this point that Kant makes a pivotal move. Kant just explained that we have sufficient grounds to treat reason as a gift of nature with an aim *other* than happiness. Our teleological assumption about nature's arrangement points us, therefore, to a radically different conclusion about how we are meant to develop our unique faculty fully. Nature gave us reason as ruler rather than instinct to subsume all "private purpose of a human being" under a higher, "supreme condition" (GMS 4:396), which is the good will. And this arrangement does not illegitimately import moral principles into the anthropological sphere, for what is said here is "consistent with the wisdom of nature," which "has everywhere else gone to work purposively in distributing its predispositions" (GMS 4:397). While it is a good question in what way this arrangement of our faculties is "consistent" with nature, I do not think it is anything more than Kant making explicit his awareness of running close to mixing two domains (the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*) that he promised to keep separate. However, in speaking now of reason's supreme aim—Kant remains in one respect consistent with his former account of nature's aim, but inconsistent in another. This is the tension that demands the conceptual adaptation to come. That is, in this three-paragraph reflection, in which he ponders why we are arranged such as we are, Kant realizes that reason's highest, supreme determination aims not at a system of *external* laws, but at a realization of laws determined *internally* by the autonomous agent. This crucial passage precedes immediately his claim that the good will is the highest good:

[Reason's] true determination by nature must be to produce a *will that is good* [einen (. . .) *an sich selbst guten Willen* hervorzubringen], not for other purposes *as a means*, but good *in itself*—for which reason was absolutely necessary—since nature has everywhere else gone to work purposively in distributing its predispositions. (GMS 4:396)¹⁷

¹⁷ Translation altered. In the Gregor and Timmermann translation, they write at the beginning, "its true function." But *Bestimmung* here is clearly meant in a teleological sense, open to other connotations left out by "function," hence I translate it as "determination" here and in every other translation in which it is otherwise translated (say, as "vocation").

This passage is in one respect consistent with the previous philosophical picture of nature's aim (à la the *Idea* essay) and in another it is not. It is consistent because Kant continues to speak of humanity's primary aim being a development of reason. However, there is also an inconsistency. For if reason's "true determination" is to bring about a good will; *and* the good will is anchored not in our external use of freedom, but rather our internal and autonomous use; then, wise nature's *ultimate aim* for humanity cannot be merely the creation of a civil society under perfect external laws. This ultimate aim is an ethically *just* one. But now to remain consistent with Kant's moral theory, wise nature's ultimate aim—in line with reason's *true* determination—must change to become a *moral* one.

And Kant need not worry too much about this development. Remember, he acknowledged even in the *Idea* essay that nothing counts as good if not anchored in a wholly good disposition. But this must be moved now from an aside to the full-on aim of nature. For if we have these *Urbilder* inside us, all other human pursuits appear incomplete in their goodness without this higher supreme condition attaining completion. And so, why would the philosopher, when interpreting nature, not even more directly and with bold print state the ultimate end of human history must not simply be to form a perfectly *just* civil society, but rather a perfectly *moral* one?¹⁸

As a brief aside to address a possible concern: Despite the highest good's absence in the *Groundwork* as an ideal world, the kingdom of ends [*Reich der Zwecke*] has often appeared to certain commentators as synonymous with it.¹⁹ If this were true *and* if it were indeed connected with *Zwecke*, then it might seem that the highest good *does* connect with natural, conditioned purposes as early as the *Groundwork*. The kingdom of ends, though, is a tricky case. On the one hand, it not only—following my reconstruction—qualifies as a practical ideal, but it also clearly is not synonymous with the highest good. As an ideal, however, and even on the supposition that it were

¹⁸ Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 166, details this development in the *Groundwork* as introduced to provide "another argument for the absolute value of the freedom of rational agency—the teleological argument that freedom or autonomy rather than mere happiness is the ultimate end of nature and our own ultimate end because nature somehow makes it so." However, Guyer is not sensitive, as Kant surely was, to the direction of influence. The *Groundwork* reveals that it is our rational-moral determination that suddenly reveals our teleological end as natural beings and not the teleological argument that proves the absolute value of freedom. The proposition that only the good will can condition any other good posits the end of our teleological judgments, and not vice versa since no such anthropological judgment (at this point in his thought) could provide any unconditioned end.

¹⁹ For example, Zeldin, "The Summum Bonum," 49, finds that the kingdom of ends in the *Groundwork* is "identical" to the Kant's description of the *summum bonum* in the first *Critique*.

synonymous with the highest good, it would still fall within the same framework from this period in so far as it remains a mere ideal, guiding us as an ever-illuminating maximum standard of comparison. Yet causally, it would be isolated from the workings of our wills even as it beckons us on qua potential reward.

As I noted in Chapter 2, John Rawls and Barbara Herman saw in the kingdom of ends (as the third formula of the categorical imperative) an illustrating case in point of a practical ideal. On its conceptual status, it fits the bill of a practical ideal in many respects, Kant even refers to it as a “splendid ideal” that arises from an idea (*GMS* 4:462).²⁰ And it is also explicitly a model of nature that is thought determinately to a point of completion. Kant writes that it is “an idea of reason closer to intuition (according to a certain analogy)” (*GMS* 4:436) leading to a “*complete determination* of all maxims [... such that] all maxims from one’s own legislation ought to harmonize into a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature” (*GMS* 4:436). Hence, it is certainly in the sphere of practical ideals: It is an individuated entity of thought based on the moral law and the power of reason to forge individuated models that could never be perceived directly in the world of sense.

But, for what it’s worth, the kingdom of ends is not obviously the highest good or not *yet* identical to it. To the first point, although it has some family resemblance to the “intelligible” or “moral world” described in the first *Critique* (*KrV* A809/B837), and Kant refers also to the kingdom of ends in the *Groundwork* as “a world of rational beings (*mundus intelligibilis*)” (*GMS* 4:438), it lacks any direct, explicit reference to happiness. It expresses the moral law as a systematically shared principle that connects us as ends and not merely as means. It makes no reference to happiness or even our worthiness to be so, since persons—when thinking of the kingdom—abstract “from all content of their private ends” (*GMS* 4:433). The kingdom of ends is ultimately just another formulation of the categorical imperative. As a reformulation of a formal law, it is hard to see how this could—by itself—count as the *highest* good. For example, it might represent a very good state, but one that could receive further goodness through the addition of complete happiness based on an agent’s worthiness. That is, one could conceive of a possible kingdom of *distraught* ends, in which all recognize each other but happiness remains permanently constrained due to the environment ruining

²⁰ Though he also refers to it as an “idea” (*GMS* 4:439).

everyone's quality of life (due to, say, an irresolvable pollution that permits survival but prohibits thriving). The kingdom of ends, that is, remains an idealized world that is less than complete without happiness of which we are worthy (as discussed in the Preface).

To the second point, namely, that it remains disconnected from ends, Kant is explicit that it is not referring to ends in nature. On the one hand, Kant describes explicitly it as “a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, i.e., a kingdom, which [...] can be called a kingdom of ends (*of course only an ideal*)” (*GMS* 4:433, emphasis added). This is a point he finds important enough to repeat, stating again unequivocally that the kingdom of ends is “admittedly only an ideal” (*GMS* 4:433). Hence, it remains separated from the question of realizability of moral ends in nature. Furthermore, Kant notes that it is not truly an end that we bring about, but rather instead the “end must here be thought not as an end to be effected *but as an independently existing end*” (*GMS* 4:437).²¹ As one might expect from a practical ideal from this early phase of Kant's thought, the kingdom of ends, therefore, is neither something we should nor can bring about. We ought to act morally under the idea of a moral world, but we cannot actually bring it to pass in this or any future generation. Rather, it is an end that exists “independently.” Where does it “exist” in such independence? Not in the sensible world of action, but rather in reason. This is not to say that it is a mere fiction, but rather an ideal created by a full determination of the moral law. Hence, whatever the highest good is relative to nature, it still just as perfectly expresses Kant's views on the role of practical ideals at this time in his career as it did in the first *Critique*. They are set apart from nature completely, indeed, they *must* be. With the kingdom of ends, however, Kant makes sure to avoid the motivational argument of the first *Critique* since his thought has taken a turn to focus exclusively on intentions.

5.4. Humanity's Final, Moral End (1786)

In the *Groundwork*, we see Kant maintaining a strict divide between seeing morality as in any way based on anthropological considerations. The idea

²¹ In more detail: “Now, this end can be nothing other than the subject of all possible ends itself because it is also the subject of a possible absolutely good will; for it cannot, without contradiction, be ranked lower than any other object” (*GMS* 4:437).

of teleology remains theoretical; the idea(1) of the highest good (as essentially the good will) remains practical. All of morality rests on a foundation of ideas, and these ideas we do not derive from experience. Ideas, though, arise from reason. And we see Kant in the *Groundwork* argue that reason is humanity's signature predisposition provided by nature. Indeed, in the *Groundwork*, Kant states that reason's true determination must be the creation of the good will. If this is reason's chief aim, and we judge nature's aim for humanity as embedded in our reason, then a change must arise in the philosopher's interpretation of human nature and history as portrayed in Section 5.2. The philosopher, now, must (remaining consistent) posit that reason's full development is not merely the development of a system of *external* laws, but actually one that drives individuals *internally* to be good. Nature's aim that we posit as at work behind the appearances, providing order to an otherwise seemingly stochastic unfolding of events cannot be any conditioned use of our reason. For the true determination of reason is not inherently rational as such, but moral as such. This is the first step toward convergence between morality and our cognitions of nature, and it is made in so far as the highest good—qua the good will—informs our judgments of humanity's place in nature.

This philosophical shift is evident from a close examination of the next historical step in Kant's thought. Just a month after the publication of the *Groundwork*, namely, on April 19, 1785, in his *Lectures on Ethics* (Collins), and in 1786 with Kant's *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, one finds evidence of this convergence that took three years and which illustrates that the principle of isolation is, at best, a porous boundary.

In April 1785, Kant's lectures on ethics ended in his crowded *Hörsaal*, with a message as to "the final destiny of the human race." The paragraph, which ends with "Finis, Königsberg, the 19th April, 1785,"²² states unequivocally:

²² The lecture's dating is from the "Winter Semester of 1784–5," which fits my interpretation well that Kant's views shift. Especially due to the last section being dated after the publication of the *GMS*, there is nothing contrary to the chronological development I set forth. Still, Schneewind, "Editor's Introduction," xv, notes that the production and the timing of the notes is a point of scholarly contention. Schneewind relates how Paul Menzer, the original publisher of the lecture notes, thought the Collins text "represents the basics of Kant's teaching for the nine years from 1775 until 1785" ("Editor's Introduction," xvi). This simply cannot be correct, however, with respect to the final end of humanity. Indeed, the editor of the German edition of the lectures, Werner Stark, points out regarding this passage and particularly its mention of a "kingdom of God," that, "In the 1785 *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, whose publication was delayed by a year, Kant undertakes a critical evaluation of this idea under the name of a 'kingdom of ends,' (IV: 433). The lectures on morality from the middle of the 1770's do not (yet) recognize such a critical distance to a moral idealism as this" (Stark, "Einleitung," 368n244, my translation).

The ultimate destiny [*letzte Bestimmung*] of the human race is moral perfection, so far as it is accomplished through human freedom, whereby man, in that case is capable of the greatest happiness. God might have made men perfect in his fashion, and allotted to each his share of happiness, but in that case it would not have sprung from the inner *principium* of the world. But that inner principle is freedom. The destiny of man is therefore to obtain his greatest perfection by means of his freedom. God does not simply will that we should be happy, but rather that we should make ourselves happy, and that is the true morality. The universal end of mankind is the highest moral perfection. (V-Mo/Collins, 12:470)²³

We see here a definitive focus on morality as humanity's "ultimate" *Bestimmung*. The "inner *principium*" of the world (read: of nature) is not simply to make us happy, but rather to set us free, to enable us to be the architects of our own worthiness to be happy. And, the result of this perfection will be nothing less than "the kingdom of God on earth, and inner conscience, justice and equity will then hold sway rather than the power of authority" (V-Mo/Collins 27:471). Our natural state is one of moral freedom, not merely a state of reason *in all its applications* as it was in the *Idea* essay. Moreover, it will not arise from the "power of authority," but rather be the product of conscience. Kant has changed his tune significantly—and our determination now is not merely to achieve a perfect civil state that compels us to curb our unsociable sociability, but rather an idealized moral world. Just as with all natural predispositions, we are determined not simply to become moral in an average way, but rather moral in a completely adequate way. The ideal should not remain separate from the world but rather is the blueprint of a moral edifice in the world that we are to help erect—both in our person and in our spatiotemporal surroundings.

And in the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, Kant—again as the philosophical interpreter of nature—tries to grasp a "*progression* of history" (MAM 8:109). The philosopher's task is, once more, not to describe but to legislate philosophically by finding an organizing principle that makes history intelligible:

Nevertheless, what must not be ventured in the progression of the history of human actions, may yet be attempted through conjecture about its

²³ Translation altered to correct the mistranslation of "*letzte Bestimmung*" as "final destiny." Since *Endzweck* is not employed here, the translation is misleading.

first beginning insofar as *nature* makes it. For that beginning must not be invented by fiction but can be taken from experience, if one presupposes that the latter in its first beginning was not better or worse than what we encounter now: a presupposition that conforms to the analogy of nature and does not bring anything venturesome with it. (MAM 8:109)²⁴

Nothing venturesome indeed! While in this passage he does not say explicitly what this “better” is toward which we see humanity moving, Kant no longer speaks in this essay of a perfect civil society as humanity’s *final* terminus. Instead, he speaks of the “ultimate goal of the moral [determination] of the human species” (MAM 8:118) as being that which we aim to fully perfect. After two years prior so carefully pulling apart the aim of nature from the idea of morality, Kant now speaks of nature’s ultimate end as necessarily pointing toward a moral order. Whereas before morality remained an important side note in the philosopher’s interpretation of human history, now Kant speaks of humanity not merely as a rational species, but explicitly as “a moral species” [*eine sittliche Gattung*] (MAM 8:116). Indeed, little to no mention is made of the previously ubiquitous theme of working toward a state in which we can realize all of humanity’s predispositions. Instead, Kant sees the ultimate aim of nature as the development of the *good*. We see Kant philosophically argue for an optimistic outlook toward the future based on the iron voice of the moral law embedded in our rational nature.

The ultimate end of nature for our species now is to reach a point where our aims as moral individuals cease to conflict with the world as it is given. Kant does mention that we must in the process of realizing our moral determination establish a “civil constitution and public justice” somewhere along the way, but an absolutely perfect one is no longer nature’s ultimate aim.²⁵ On the contrary, with humanity’s “predisposition to good [*Anlagen zum Guten*] predelineated by nature,” it is our “moral determination [*Bestimmung*]” that now sets the ultimate end. And it is not simply here to create us as we are now,

²⁴ Rather than allow his imagination full freedom, he restricts himself to “determinate concepts” and “observed laws” (compare with his, *RezHerder* 8:55) in order to fill in gaps between effects and causes that we do not merely make up on a whim, but out of a real need.

²⁵ This shift has to do with Kant realizing that our guidance by reason requires that the good will alone and not the perfect civil society qualifies as the supreme, and thus, only end that could qualify as the *ultimate aim*. One passage that signals this change with Kant correcting himself is the following: “In this [coming to view oneself as an end rather than a means], and *not in reason considered merely as an instrument for the satisfaction of various inclinations*, there lies the ground of that so unlimited equality of the human being even with higher beings, however superior beyond all comparison they might be to him in natural gifts” (MAM 8:114, my emphasis).

nor one single specimen of a *truly* good will. Instead, it is to work such that we arrive at the point where “perfect art again becomes nature, which is the ultimate goal of the moral vocation of the human species” (MAM 8:117–8). Nature directs us to be moral, that is, free in such a way that we act morally without such conduct posing a challenge, but rather becoming art qua second nature. Our moral disposition is now nature’s ultimate aim. The ideal substrate in our reason is taking root in our philosophical reflections of nature.

This change is further significant because Kant now notes that our progress as individuals is just as important as the progress of the species. Indeed, we are now agents of nature’s will—that is, the agents of providence—in so far as the final realization of nature’s aim depends on the inner world of the individual’s disposition (recall in the *Idea* essay, our only hope rested in a future state of humanity bringing about the perfect civil constitution). And this represents a philosophical consequence that will persist as a tension in Kant’s thought for the rest of his career, namely, it follows that if our aims and nature’s aims converge where morality is concerned, then it also follows that our moral dispositions (our work as individuals in the here and now) might very well be necessary for nature to accomplish her aims. But humanity across the generations also plays a role. Hence, there is a question of how to square our individual efforts with the collective agency of the species. Evidence of this tension is in the concluding remark of the *Conjectural Beginning* essay with an interesting, subtle twist on a familiar theme. Similar to the *Idea* essay, Kant speaks again of nature with her idea as akin to providence. And with morality and teleology beginning to converge, “[I]t is of the greatest importance to be *content with providence* [. . .] partly in order to grasp courage even among our toils, and partly so that by placing responsibility for it on fate, we might not lose sight of our own responsibility [. . .], which consists in self-improvement” (MAM 8:121). Note, two years prior, we were meant to take hope only in providence that our species might not be doomed, even if we are. Now, two years later, after writing the *Groundwork* (and editing it for a second edition), Kant sees the individual’s predicament not in the same passive role. We should not just *hope*, rather we should strive to be better. We are meant to embody the good will even while taking hope in a determination implanted in humanity by nature.

We see a transitivity of responsibility. First, we see nature/providence as responsible for setting us on the road toward goodness. This keeps us from despair. Second, this responsibility passes on to us individually as members

of a moral species, in so far as our moral determination calls us to obey duty and treat this world as a project, a kingdom of ends in the making. Kant's last lines sound a very different call than the *Idea* essay: Providence and the "course of things human on the whole [...] develops gradually from the worse to the better; and each of us, for his part, is called upon by nature itself to contribute as much as lies in his power to this progress" (MAM 8:123). Thus, wise nature calls to the philosopher again, but instead of whispering of a hidden plan, she now calls us to action with the rallying cry to be moral above all else.

This historical evidence of the shift is subtle but clear. I end this chapter with a philosophical analysis of why this shift occurred and what it means for the practical ideal's relation to our lived lives.

Why the shift? Two problems emerged in the dialectic between the aim of nature and the aims of moral individuals that called for conceptual revision.

The first problem was that Kant came to see morality as the unconditioned good, which is not merely the foundation of morality but also the unconditioned determination of reason. The original aim of nature remained focused on an organization of established external conditions allowing freedom. Thus, it was a state not concerned with good willing per se, but rather willing in general. And a new worldview emerges. Whereas before, we had only one "consoling prospect" of a future, namely, one "in which the human species is represented in the remote distance as finally working itself upward toward the condition in which all germs nature has placed in it can be fully developed and its vocation here on earth can be fulfilled" (*IaG* 8:30), we have now a different picture of the world. One where there is more to hope for in looking not forward to a future, x-number of generations hence, but omnipresent in this supreme condition of goodness that we can know via ideals. The aim of nature read by the philosopher now, far from portraying us as rational seedpods, portrays the ultimate aim of nature as creating moral agents of change. Thus, if looking for an ideal to suit nature's aim in human history, it must be one that is not merely a progress toward a more externally free society, but rather also a more immanently moral one.

The second problem follows immediately from the first, namely, that such a progression requires a different conception of an ultimate end than simply a perfect civil society. Indeed, it requires that we judge ourselves (as moral beings) as the ultimate end of nature. We see immediately that the perfect civil society, while a *means* to the ultimate aim of nature, cannot be its complete and perfect end. After the epiphany in the *Groundwork* that reason

is actually determined, fated (as it were) by its internal determination, not simply to strive for external realizations of freedom, but rather to strive for a complete internal realization of freedom, that is, full autonomy, we can take one more step, a step that will be repeated in the third *Critique*. If morality represents the only unconditioned good in the world, then the aim of nature in our history seems to offer us reason to take this further inferential step. Nature we seek to understand as a system of ends. And if there is an end, namely, a moral one, that is unconditioned, then the only place it can reside in nature's purposive hierarchy is outside or *above* all others.²⁶ It must be *the* final end of all ends, period.

In Kant's 1786 reconstruction of the stages of reason's awakening, the human being must conclude that "he [is] the genuine *end of nature* [der *Zweck der Natur*]" (MAM 8:114). Above animals and all the rest, we must be the ultimate end for which nature strives. The reason is that we alone can treat other things and animals as a means to our ends. While certainly a move betraying an anthropocentric hubris, we see Kant actually changing the story to be consistent with a thought that he only developed after writing the *Idea* essay, namely, in the *Groundwork*: "And thus the human being had entered into an *equality with all rational beings* [...] namely, in regard to the claim of *being himself an end*" (MAM 8:114). Thus, not only does our steps from the "guardianship of nature into the condition of freedom" make us free and destined to create an external system of laws—rather, it destines us to awake to internal qualities of our rational nature: namely, to the "moral determination of the human species" (MAM 8:118) through nothing else than acquaintance with our own dispositions. That is, in terms very familiar from the teleology introduced earlier, destined to awaken to the moral determination of the human species [*sittliche Bestimmung der Menschengattung*]. We see ourselves, therefore, not only as morally determined. Rather—and by extension from our status as natural beings—we see ourselves fitting into nature's aims as the crowning achievement because of an impulse to look away from the world of sense and seek our place in a world of ideals. But this also demands that we view other rational beings as equivalently the end of nature in so far

²⁶ Further evidence that Kant saw morality become the final determination of our species is in *Refl* 6133, 18:464–5, written after the publication of the *GMS* (either 1785–89 or 1788–93): "Great predispositions to the good would have diminished the imputation of the good. Now evil sprang from the very conditions under which alone the greatest moral worth could spring: namely, a moral character acquired through one's own efforts. Adversity serves to test and train the strength of morality through resistance."

as they share the possession of the practical ideals that determine our noumenal nature.

While not ever explicitly stated by Kant, one witnesses here an interesting move in his ethical thinking that cements the dignity of every person relative to nature and explains why philosophically his entire model of human history must change to remain coherent with his moral theory.²⁷ Consider that in 1784, Kant portrays the human species as “immortal” (*IaG* 8:20) and requiring an “immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order finally to propel the germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim” (*IaG* 8:19). In this picture, what is the role of an individual? It is certainly not the aim of nature that each should “live well” (*IaG* 8:20). As cited in Section 5.2, individuals Kant thought at this time are but steps on the way to a better future that they must promote without enjoying. In a strange way, Kant’s philosophy of history in working with the aim of nature at this point—isolated from the aims of individuals—sees individuals as a *means* to an end, similar to Fichte’s views in the *System of Ethics* of human beings as the tools of morality: “Driven by the moral law, I forget myself as I engage in action; I am but a tool in its hand.”²⁸ Kant notes in a similar vein that only the future generations will “have the good fortune to dwell in the building on which a long series of their ancestors (to be sure, without this being their aim) had labored” (*IaG* 8:20). And on top of each generation serving as a means to a final, distant end, Kant states that nature’s explicit “*means*” employed “*in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is [humanity’s] antagonism*” (*IaG* 8:20). Thus, there is a predisposition given to us by nature not merely to serve as means, but which actually encourages us to treat others as means—thereby, arriving in conflicts that play into nature’s long-term plan. Kant’s thinking about history as of 1784 is that humanity’s *existence* and its *attitudes* are means-oriented.

This position of seeing generations of individuals as *means* to an end cannot stand as of 1785. For if we as rational beings can only view ourselves as ends and not means, how can we consistently judge nature philosophically as employing us as a mere means? As the judges and legislators of reason,

²⁷ Kleingeld, in “Kant’s Second Thoughts” and “Anti-Racism and Kant Scholarship,” argues that Kant changed his views on race and colonialism by 1795 (which, of course, does not excuse or allow one to ignore his racism and procolonialism prior). Although the shifts that I detail here are from a period in which he explicitly endorsed racist views, I see in them already immanent philosophical pressures that perhaps influenced him later to revise his outlook.

²⁸ Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 244.

we can no longer see nature this way, just as we can no longer judge ourselves this way. Nature too cannot have given us morality, only to have us then view ourselves as mere cogs in nature's machinery. Indeed, the passage above states that former generations toiled to set up a higher edifice "without this being their aim." The *Groundwork* and the *Conjectural Beginning* essay both fundamentally revise this statement. Indeed, since it is reason's ultimate aim to be good and since reason must view itself as an end and not a means, *our* idea posited into our judgments of nature should equally reflect these nobler aspects of our nature. Thus, when judging human history, we should cease to see ourselves (and former generations) as means, but rather each and every one of us as bearing (in our moral capacity) the ultimate end of nature. A practical ideal changes the way we view nature and our place in it as we strive to form a coherent picture. This implicit conceptual move to form a coherent picture between morality and nature is a philosophical worldview in the making. From this point onward, the relation between the practical ideals and our judgments of nature will only continue to converge.

6

An Ideal as the Final End of the Will (1786–1788)

The highest good's most dramatic shift occurs in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), which marks the definitive developmental step away from its starting point as a mere ideal detailed in the previous chapter. With the second *Critique*, the highest good as a practical ideal becomes entangled with our particular ends in the world. Indeed, for the first time in Kant's works (both precritical and critical), the highest good is referred to as the final end or *Endzweck* of our pure practical reason.¹ As such, the highest good is not merely indirectly related to our ends in the world, but rather becomes *the* end of all our actions in the world in a practically real sense. It is in this phase where the highest good becomes more than a mere ideal, but it does so in a way that requires revision that occurs in the third *Critique* (and which I detail in Chapter 7). Kant's identification of the highest good as the final end of our wills, however, is definitive for what is to come and gives the ideal another dimension of reality heretofore absent: namely, its firm connection with our ends in the world as practically real. My focus here is on telling the story of the relation between the highest good and us as agents, but the contemplative function is still very present, evidenced by passages from the second *Critique* already mentioned.

At first blush, it might seem strange that Kant suddenly concerns himself with the object of our volitions after leaving such considerations out of the *Groundwork*. Why does a practical ideal become identified with an end to be realized, *really realized* in the world? The answer lies in the forceful

¹ See Martin (hrsg.), *Wortindex zu Kants gesammelten Schriften*, 292, for proof that Kant refers to “final end” [*Endzweck*] zero times in the precritical works in the *Preußische Akademische Ausgabe*; only two times in the first *Critique*, once in the second edition of 1787 (*KrV* B425) and the other in the first of 1781 (*KrV* A840/B868), but neither refer to the highest good (which he refers to as an “ultimate end” [*letztes Zweck*], which is subordinate to a final end); and zero times in the *GMS*, *Prolegomena*, and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Starting with the *KpV* where he uses the term once to refer to the highest good, it becomes much more frequent. It is used 84 times in the third *Critique*, 16 times in the *Religion* and *Metaphysics of Morals* (taken together), and 44 times in the final three volumes of Kant's major published works from the *Akademischen Ausgabe*.

philosophical arguments of a reviewer of Kant's *Groundwork*, namely, Herman Andreas Pistorius. Pistorius, in essence, inquires what the teleology of the moral law is, assuming any whatsoever can be offered by such a purely formal principle in the first place. And this teleology, as Pistorius suggests, must be some object, some end or other. First, I explore the review and Kant's answer that posited a practical ideal as an object for this world. Then, I explain how this philosophically complicates things since it makes the highest good's function appear to be important primarily for action. It is for this reason that Kant shifted his views to seek a place for the highest good in our construction of a worldview in the next phase of the study below.

There are two important preliminary points before diving into the analysis. First is in regard to how I speak of "ends," "final ends," and "objects." Although I will treat "end" and "object" as synonymous,² "final end" and "end" (or "object") I will not. By an end or object, I mean some represented state of affairs or action that we seek to bring about through volition. This is what Kant refers to in the second *Critique* as an object of practical reason (but not *pure* practical reason): "By a concept of an object of practical reason I understand the representation of an object as an effect possible through freedom" (*KpV* 5:57). In most cases, an end or an object can be understood in a quite banal sense. One end (or object) in buying a car is to possess it and thereby get places faster than I can by foot or for recreation, and so on. My end (or object) in practicing the Irish tin whistle is the capacity to play it well for personal enjoyment. None of these ends or objects are final because they are states of affairs conditioned by space and time. Only such actions *can* indeed be effects possible through *my* freedom. A final end (*Endzweck*) is one that cannot be conditioned by space and time, and hence we cannot effect it through freedom alone. We might effect it *partially* but not completely. Nevertheless, a final end may function, in a qualified sense, as the "object" of a special type of will—namely, pure practical reason as the perfectly good will. This distinction is ultimately the reason for the tensions that I detail in Section 6.3.

The second preliminary point is that I do not claim that Kant thought morality lacked any relation to ends at all in the *Groundwork*. It certainly does in qualified senses as noted in previous chapters. Moreover, I do not want to make the absurd claim that Pistorius is responsible for Kant writing the

² I only switch between the two because there are times when it is linguistically smoother to speak of an "object" of volition, as opposed to an "end," which has a more technical, unnatural tone.

second *Critique*.³ Nor do I intend to say that Pistorius is solely responsible for the ideas themselves in Kant's second *Critique*. I do want to look for clues, though, in Pistorius's review that can help elucidate why we in the second *Critique* receive not only a moral will, as was the case in the *Groundwork*, but also a moral will directed toward an ideal as a final end whose physical or real possibility presents a problem in need of a transcendental solution.

6.1. Pistorius Asks for an Object (1786)

In the previous chapter, I argued that the *Groundwork* represented a point where Kant's thoughts about morality and human nature began to merge. However, due to the principle of isolation and the attempt to find the unconditioned principle of all morality, Kant intentionally left to the side all mention of objects and consequences. Even the kingdom of ends remained an end existing "independently" of anything that we actually effect in the world. For this reason, the practical ideals remained detached from nature. Kant's picture, however, underwent significant change and was influenced by a review of the *Groundwork* by Hermann Andreas Pistorius. Indeed, we know that Pistorius was on Kant's mind because of Kant's explicit reference to him in the Preface of the second *Critique* as a reviewer "who is devoted to truth and astute and therefore always worthy of respect" (*KpV* 5:8–9). This high praise shows that Kant found Pistorius's review significant. And in the Preface, Kant notes in detail the portions of his work devoted to answering the objection posed by Pistorius, namely: "that [in the *Groundwork*] the concept of the good was not established before the moral principle (as, in [Pistorius'] opinion, was necessary)" (*KpV* 5:9). Indeed, Kant explains that the "second chapter of the *Analytic*" of the second *Critique* is devoted precisely to this task.

As the new year of 1786 began, Kant must have felt as though things were coming together. Pieces of his theoretical as well as practical philosophy found fit through the philosopher's historical and moral interpretive determinations. Yet, this nascent worldview found a challenger just four

³ Kant by November 1786 was working on the second *Critique*, though as a part of the second edition of the first *Critique*. In an announcement from Christian Gottfried Schütz about the upcoming project, it was made known that "In addition to the *critique of pure speculative reason* contained in the first, a *critique of pure practical reason* will be added to the second edition, securing the principle of morality against objections which have been or may yet be made against it" (3:556).

months later. Living and working on the craggy island of Rügen, marked by its chalk cliffs falling into the Baltic Sea, Pistorius wrote the first critical review of Kant's *Groundwork* in May 1786.⁴ Indeed, Pistorius challenged the very essence of Kant's morality as depicted in the early years of its critical exposition in the *Groundwork*.

Beyond Kant's explicit mentioning of Pistorius in the second *Critique*, we have evidence in correspondence that Kant was made aware of a growing enthusiasm among German scholars for Pistorius's criticisms and professed views. In a letter dated May 14, 1787, Daniel Jenisch, a Berlin pastor, wrote to Kant of the reception of his *Groundwork* and the manner in which Pistorius's review inspired skepticism about it:

Your *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, my Herr Prof., finds much more backlash [*Widerspruch*] among the intellectuals I know than your [first] *Critique*; they find it impossible to be convinced that nature built our morality on such deep grounds [*daß die Natur die Moral auf so tiefen Gründen gebaut habe*]. [. . .] Your reviewer in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* is apparently Provost Pistorius of Femarn,⁵ the translator of Hartley.⁶ His review of your *Groundwork*, even if it does not go deeply enough despite its apparent rigor, has found many supporters, because moral thinkers are on this occasion corrupted by popularity [*weil die Köpfe in der Moral nun einmal durch Popularität verstimmt sind*]. (Br 10:486–7)⁷

This letter reports two interesting points. First, it gives Kant the impression that Pistorius's review is, indeed, winning skeptical support against his claims. Second, it indicates that one common root of doubt centers on Kant's claims regarding the purity of morality. Skeptics think that nature would not build morality on such "deep grounds." Combining these points together: Kant hears that skeptical support bases itself on claims about how nature predisposed us, or how it is that morality relates to human nature.

⁴ Cf. Gesang (2007, xxv–xxvi), for a list of other reviews, which did not raise any substantial objections.

⁵ An island in the Baltic that now belongs to Denmark.

⁶ Referring to Hartley's *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty and his Expectations* (1749).

⁷ My translation. The last line is bit tricky to translate. "*Verstimmen*" comes in this context from the sphere of music, namely, an out-of-tune instrument. Jenisch is essentially saying that moral thinkers are being led astray or set out of tune by popular opinion—in this case, the opinion expressed by Pistorius.

And when one looks at Pistorius's review in detail, it is clear why Kant would have felt the need to respond directly and publicly.

Pistorius's review questions the ability of pure ethics to account for our nature as ends-directed, volitional agents. And it suggests that Kant's categorical imperative can only be saved if it connects somehow to our judgments and interests as a species. And on all of these issues, Kant had been thinking vigorously, though in different, strictly separated domains in accordance with the principle of isolation. Ends of volition and our determination as a species remained for Kant empirically conditioned data for anthropology or philosophical history. By contrast, our agency as individuals only found unconditional grounding by looking away from these fields. Pistorius's review argues that this demarcation cannot be upheld as stated in the *Groundwork*. Something essential is missing from an account of human morality if there is no object for our wills to aim toward. And lacking an object, it is unclear why and how we as a species can be moral in a directed, efficacious sense.

Two objections from Pistorius's review deserve special attention. Both orbit around the same question, which is: How can the formality of the good will alone give us a robust and human system of value if it has no relation to any object? Pistorius's two objections are:

- 1) A *good will* without a good object cannot be called "good."
- 2) Rational consistency of an action alone (i.e., when universalized) cannot suffice to connect a will to action without some third representation grounded in a collectively desired object.

Both can be better grasped by connecting them with the questions, which Kant's *Groundwork* must have elicited from Pistorius, namely:

- i) What makes an absolutely good will *good*?
- ii) What connects a good will and a law to bring about action?

I will now fill them out, respectively.⁸

The first objection that Pistorius raises in his review is the most fundamental in that it strikes at the very root of the *Groundwork*. The question

⁸ All translations of Pistorius are my own. Few have explored Pistorius's review, and if they do, there is a tendency to focus on his initial objection in the first two paragraphs of his review, e.g., Basaglia, "The Highest Good," 18–20; and Kleingeld, "Kant on 'Good,'" 34–38. For an interesting analysis of Pistorius's review, see Walschots, "Kant and Consequentialism."

threatens the very success of the grounding project due to Kant's analytic method.⁹ That is, since Kant develops the *Groundwork* out of an assumed premise—one that must be accepted if any of the subsequent arguments is to be accepted—the very stability of that premise ensures whether the rest of the project succeeds or fails. The premise is that only a good will can qualify as absolutely good, and it qualifies without reference to anything other than its pure motivations. No physical drives, no external motivations or forces, and no consequences arising from its actions determine its goodness. Rather, its goodness remains immanent. Immanent because the goodness neither depends on nor arises in response to what occurs in the world. And most importantly, Kant (in a manner that parallels the foundation of truth in our theoretical reasoning) sees in a good will determined by the moral law the only *objective* foundation for morality. Only a good will is free from contradiction because its maxims present rules to which every rational being (human and perhaps nonhuman) can assent.

Pistorius, however, finds Kant's notion of an encapsulated goodness of the will incoherent. He observes that without an independent account of what is "good," Kant's definition of a good will threatens to be a vacuous tautology that begs the question. He writes:

I wished only that the author would have found it favorable to discuss the general concept of what is *good* before all else, and to define more precisely what it is that he understands by it. For it seems obvious that we would need to first agree on this before we can discern anything about the absolute value of a good will. I am, consequently, justified first to inquire what is *good* exactly [*was ist überhaupt gut*], and what in particular is a good will? Is it possible to think of a good will that is such in and of itself without any attention to its relation to some object?¹⁰

Pistorius goes on to point out that merely calling a good will "good" without specifying in what its goodness consists tells us nothing.

Pistorius presses hard for this definition. For it seems like the only people that it will convince are those who have already agreed to assume with Kant

⁹ Kant explains this in the Preface, *GMS* 4:392. For an especially lucid description of this, see Wolff, *The Autonomy of Reason*, 33–5.

¹⁰ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 449.

that goodness must be of this formal nature. Yet, Pistorius provides a positive suggestion:

Here I cannot see how anyone could even begin to assume something to be unconditionally and absolutely good, or to call something good, which in fact is good for nothing. [. . .] In fact, the will should only be absolutely good *in relation to some object*, and not in relation to its principle or a law according to which it acts.¹¹

As other scholars have pointed out, this passage most likely set into motion Kant's thinking about the *object* of pure practical reason as developed in the Analytic and Dialectic of the second *Critique*. Kant will make explicit that any volition must have an object and that only an ideal as a final end can qualify for moral volitions.

Of course, Pistorius here is missing the point that Kant *has* said something about what demarcates this goodness as noted above. The goodness, the absolute value, arises from the fact that the moral law should apply to every rational being, including human beings.¹² All rational beings can assent because in the formula of humanity, "*rational nature exists as an end in itself*" (GMS 4:429),¹³ providing rules that should in some way present the goodness of the categorical imperative as more than its mere detachment from contingent ends. The formula of humanity makes it such that we must fill out the substance of the formal commands in a way that aligns with our rational nature.

This to the side, Pistorius is looking for whether we can think of a law as binding if we don't know what its corresponding object is. The negative nature of the qualities of absoluteness—that is, its noncontradictory status, neither depending on nor arising in response to some specific contingent object, end, or state of affairs—might allow for one to simply swap one term for another. That is, goodness of a will, à la Pistorius, seems to mean nothing other than its absolute and unconditioned quality, and an absolute and unconditioned will means that it is good. Pistorius will go on to point out that he sees no escape by looking to the categorical imperative for answers. If one

¹¹ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 449, my emphasis.

¹² See GMS 4:425: "For the purpose of achieving this proof it is of the utmost importance to take warning that we should not dream for a moment of trying to derive the reality of this principle from the special characteristics of human nature."

¹³ Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 213, notes that we must grasp "rationality as a value, not the value of rationality."

moves to ground the goodness of the will because it follows from the law, then the new question will be what makes this law good. Kant's answer is that it is because it accords with our nature as rational beings in so far as it presents a maxim that is noncontradictory and, thus, universalizable. This provides further formal scaffolding. But what is inherently *good* about noncontradiction? Or what is inherently good about our rational nature being an end in itself? Pistorius will suggest in presenting his second objection that there might be a way of providing some universalizable scaffolding that connects with a material, *final* end that includes not only our thinking but also our feeling nature.

One passage from the review is worth special attention because it points Kant to the connection that he eventually makes in the second *Critique* between an object of our pure will and the concept of the highest good as a *final* end. Pistorius provides the following positive suggestion:

And if we have already traced the question back from the will to the law, then we must seek answer in a more satisfying manner: i.e., we must *arrive finally at some object or at some final end of the law*. In short, we must turn to the material components [*das Materielle*] for help because working with the merely formal aspects was neither enough for the will nor the law.¹⁴

Searching from the will to the law, and from the law onward, we still need some terminus where goodness is established. Pistorius's key phrase, however, is that "we must arrive finally at some object or at some *final end* of the law." It is precisely a final end of the law, which Kant delivers in the second *Critique*, employing this term to refer to the highest good for the first time in any work. Kant, in fact, practically takes this language verbatim over to describe the highest good as the material condition of the good will—a final end of the law that does not establish the moral possibility of the law, but rather fills out the conceptual or philosophical picture by providing an ideal toward which the moral will is directed. I will detail this more in Section 6.2.

Pistorius's second objection is based on the question of what connects a good will and a law such that it brings about action. That is, how does pure morality relate to ends [*Zwecke*] in the world? Pistorius thinks that mere universalizability of a law (its rational consistency and noncontradictory nature) makes us respect the law but does not explain how it connects to

¹⁴ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 449, my emphasis.

action (which requires some form of interest). This objection calls for an account as to how the principle of isolation can be overcome, that is, how we can connect the pure law of reason (and practical ideal to which it relates us) with volitions aimed at purposes in the sensible world. Bernard Williams also found this aspect of Kant's philosophy deeply problematic: "Instead of relying on a specific teleology of human nature, [Kant's theory] starts from a very abstract conception of rational agency."¹⁵ And because there is no specific connection to our human purposes, Williams charged that "there is not an identity of interest between the reflective practical self and any particular desires, my own or others."¹⁶ Pistorius, meanwhile, proposed a solution to help Kant on this score. And his suggestion is to identify some "third thing" to connect the moral law to our wills. Or, perhaps, put better: some third thing to make the law willable.

Pistorius reasons as follows: First he sets up the problem by inquiring how it is that we are "morally necessitated to act" considering we are also to be "completely disinterested beings."¹⁷ Pistorius finds this notion of a completely disinterested agent completely "unthinkable."¹⁸ If the moral law is not some absolute physical force (which it cannot be if we are to be autonomous) and if the form of a law alone fails to explain *why* it is good (which Pistorius has charged in the first objection), then what representation could this be that "binds a rational being to a law"¹⁹ but which they have zero interest toward realizing?

Since Pistorius argues that it cannot be merely "the representation of the law itself, for this would be merely the same for the same [*idem per idem*]" since the law itself is nothing further than a certain representation for a rational being that it should act in some way,²⁰ he asserts that it must be some "third representation [*eine dritte Vorstellung*]" that constitutes the necessary connection [*Zusammenhang*] between the law and the will of the rational being."²¹ That is, Pistorius claims that Kant deals us one representational card too short as it were. The will and the law alone do not account for the bindingness between the two. A law simply commands: *Do x!* And too little

¹⁵ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 54.

¹⁶ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 69.

¹⁷ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 455.

¹⁸ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 455.

¹⁹ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 455.

²⁰ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 456.

²¹ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 456.

is said about why we obey. What makes a will act purposively on a law that is guided by reason rather than desire?

Kant might have thought that he had answered this question in the *Groundwork*, where he points out that this is precisely the difficulty with a categorical imperative as “a synthetic *a priori* practical proposition” (GMS 4:420). In formulating the categorical imperative, we “without presupposing a condition taken from some inclination [...] connect an action with the will *a priori* and therefore necessarily” (GMS 4:420n). We connect the action to the will as that which a perfectly rational will would do if it were “only subject to the idea of reason” (GMS 4:420n). And it is the task in the third part of the *Groundwork* to discover the third thing which makes this synthetic *a priori* practical proposition possible for us. The third thing will be our freedom from the realm of sensibility. That is, we can think of ourselves as free in so far as we have an intelligible (noumenal) nature, independent of sensibility.²² Thus, so Kant argues, it is possible for us to connect a will to an action that has no other connection to an inclination.

For Pistorius, though, even if it is possible that we are *free from* complete determination in thought, this does not explain why we will freely want to be moral given this freedom. There must be something else represented beyond the form of the law which is “moral and not physical.”²³ And Kant’s famous answer from the *Groundwork*—namely, that it is a pure moral feeling of respect or *Achtung* for the law that generates action—seems to say too little. How is a purely moral feeling sufficient to produce action in our volition, as it is swarmed by conflicting thoughts and strong physical urges? Pistorius offers a proposal in the form of a disjunction:

Such a representation could be either the truth or the utility of the law, i.e., its harmony with our ability to think or its conformity with our faculty of desire. In both cases the law would interest a rational being in so far as it was in accordance *with its nature*. And the representation of this would only be the connective element [*Mittelband*]*—indeed the only possible one—through which a rational being could be connected at all to a law and compelled to pursue it.*²⁴

²² For analyses as to whether this is successful, see, e.g., Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, 214–29; Grenberg, “The Phenomenological Failure;” Saunders, “Some Hope;” Wolff, *The Autonomy of Reason*, chapter 3.

²³ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 456.

²⁴ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 456, my emphasis.

Pistorius's suggestion is that there must be something that accords with our "nature," such that acting on moral ends in the world interests us. The first disjunct is that the representation of a law's truth might move us. The truth of a law will, of course, for Pistorius involve its content. And in our case, it would be checked by whether its content—what it brings about—accords with our nature such that one can think of it as consistent with human nature, even if we do not gain anything from it.

The second disjunct is that it could have to do with the utility of the law, in which case it accords with us in that it conforms to our faculty of desire. Rather than connecting to our thinking nature, it connects our desiring nature. We all would desire it.

So what is this third representation that Pistorius thinks could link our (collective) wills to a universal law? It must be recognizable, it must establish the goodness of a law, and it cannot be "inborn" or "physical" such as a "law brought about by force of instinct."²⁵ Pistorius's answer is the concept of a "highest good" as a communal good anchored in humanity's communal nature. Pistorius writes:

If something is found in this investigation that is good universally and in all circumstance for feeling and thinking beings, then this must be called the highest and absolute good. If there is such a highest good, then there must also be a communal nature and a universal interest of all rational beings that is grounded on it. For only through the agreement with that nature and in conformity with this interest can something be good at all for such a being.²⁶

This idea of a communal good is a potent suggestion that foreshadows (perhaps even inspired) Kant's further development of the highest good in subsequent works. Pistorius objected first that an absolutely good will (defined merely by its relation to a law) is insufficient since it leaves open why we call it good. But now he suggests that perhaps a highest good that is "good universally and in all circumstances for feeling and thinking beings" could act as the connecting element missing in Kant's overly formalistic account. By accounting for what we all feel and think as good communally, we come to a notion that could harmonize the form of a law (as in force for everyone) with

²⁵ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 457.

²⁶ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 457.

our wills as rational beings of a natural kind. This third representation will, of course, not change the formal status of our maxim formation. However, it will include a material element of goodness in our deliberation founded in nothing other than what it is that is good for us as a species.

6.2. Kant Provides an Object and Final End (1788)

It is impossible to say exactly how much of the development of Kant's thought regarding the highest good can be traced directly to Pistorius's review. As a result, one reaches something akin to what many paleontologists reach in their search for knowledge: an abyssal gap between available fossil records. We know that Kant read at least part of Pistorius's review and probably all of it since he most likely would have liked to know what precisely was turning heads in Berlin and winning support against his *Groundwork*. Yet like those seeing some of the earliest fossils of life on Earth from the Ediacaran period, where life seemed free of predation, and comparing them with the Cambrian period, where the appearance of certain features suggests that struggle began, one can only infer to a limited extent as to how events connect, albeit knowing—thanks to Kant's direct reference—that we at least are dealing with two events connected by some line of influence, the degree of which remains opaque. Two points are clear relative to Pistorius's main two objections discussed above: Kant provided an object through the highest good and noted that it ought to interest us at least in so far as our rationality is concerned. I develop both points in turn.

First, the highest good becomes an object, rather than a mere idea or principle, whose real possibility our moral activity directly promotes, and which even grounds the validity of the moral law. What is first of interest is the connection of the highest good to ends in the world, that is, to *Zwecke*. Prior to the second *Critique*—in the period covered in the previous chapter—one purposely abstracts away from any particular end in the world, that is, any real consequences.²⁷ Now, though, the moral law leads us to “the concept of the highest good, *as the object and final end of pure practical reason*” (*KpV* 5:129, emphasis mine). Indeed, this answers precisely Pistorius's objection about how a good law could be called good if it did not lead to anything

²⁷ In the *Groundwork*, Kant says he is concerned “with nothing more than” the “search and determination of the highest principle of morality” (*GMS* 4:392).

good. Kant appears to acknowledge this head-on in the first chapter of the *Analytic* in the second *Critique* that there cannot be any volition without some object: "Now it is indeed undeniable that every volition must also have an object and hence a matter" (*KpV* 5:34).²⁸ And, hence, the moral law too, if determining our volitions, must connect to some object. This sets the stage for one of the most controversial and polarizing passages of Kant's works.

The first question is how one can begin to find an object of the moral law after the *Groundwork's* intentional abstracting away from all ends. The answer lies in Kant's paradox of method. In essence, the paradox is that the object in the case of morality is not determined *prior* to one's action being determined by the moral law. Kant details this paradox of method, it also so happens, in the second chapter devoted to the "concept of an object of pure practical reason," in which Kant directly addresses Pistorius's first question and objection. In Kant's own words, the paradox is "[N]amely, that the concept of good and evil must not be determined before the moral law (for which, as it would seem, this concept would have to be made the basis) but only (as was done here) after it and by means of it" (*KpV* 5:63).²⁹ By this, Kant asserts that the "moral possibility" of an action be determined before its "physical possibility" (*KpV* 5:57). The physical possibility depends on contingent empirical factors. The moral possibility remains unconditioned. And this precedes everything else. That is, we can know that we ought to do something, even if it is not thereby apparent how we will realize it. Ultimately, Kant's position builds a *reductio ad absurdum* against anything else determining what the good is apart from the mere form of the law. For if the determination of the will "had no practical a priori law for its standard, the criterion of good or evil could be placed in nothing other than the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (*KpV* 5:63). Such a criterion, however, could not function as a law since it is empirical and contingent on the particular feelings of each individual. Thus, the paradox of method: to find the

²⁸ See also *TP* 8:279n: "For without some end there can be no will"; and *RGV* 6:4: "But although on its own behalf morality does not need the representation of an end which would have to precede the determination of the will, it may well be that it has a necessary reference to such an end, not as the ground of its maxims but as a necessary consequence accepted in conformity to them.—For in the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will can take place in human beings at all, since no such determination can occur without an effect."

²⁹ Rather than a weakness, Kant finds the strength of his theory firmly cemented by this paradoxical approach: "[A]ll the errors of philosophers with respect to the supreme principle of morals" arose because they first "sought an object of the will in order to make it into the matter and the ground of a law [. . .], whereas they should first have searched for a law that determined the will a priori and immediately, and only then determined the object conformable to the will" (*KpV* 5:64).

foundation of a universally binding moral law, we cannot begin with anything but the law itself.

How can we retrospectively determine the content of the moral law that remains nonempirical and nonmotivational? Kant begins with the thought and common sense perspective expressed in Pistorius's review, namely, that an essential feature of our wills is that volitions without effects (that are really possible) are nonsensical. Further and connected with the analysis of ideals above, there is a sense in which volitions based on the categorical imperative must be *so* universal that it would be a conceptual mismatch to assign any one to a merely conditioned object, as in some particular act token. Any such token—say, any act of beneficence at time *t* and place *p*—would be particular to one's situation and not an end of moral action that is equally unconditioned (see Figure 6.1). The formal, unconditioned nature of the moral law (labeled below) requires some adequate effect (symbolized by the dashed arrow), related to a universally shared, moral object *simpliciter* (marked by the "HG"), which interconnects all particular moral actions (marked as "Action x," etc.) that we directly realize (symbolized by the solid arrows). Therefore, if focused on moral volition writ large, it is not any act token's material component that we are willing, but rather the systematic object that connects every token of action. And such an object can only be the system expressing the universal moral consequence that arises from our moral volitions taken as a totality. If we should bring parts of this object about through our actions, then there also comes into question whether—assuming first its moral possibility—we can posit its physical possibility too. Thus, Kant's point of departure that should align with common sense has led

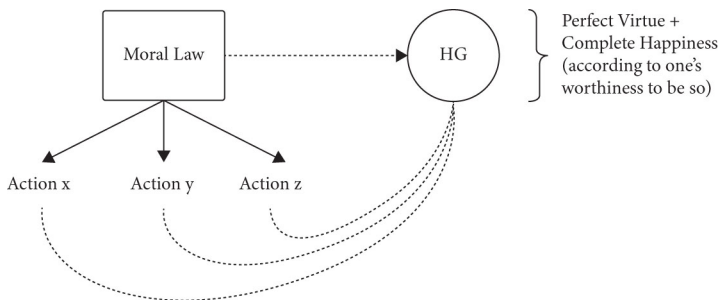


Figure 6.1 The moral law demands the highest good (HG), while determining individual actions that remain insufficient.

to a quite uncommon conclusion: namely, that we must believe that an ideal is practically possible.

Pistorius's suggestion was again that, "If something is found in this investigation that is good universally and in all circumstance for feeling and thinking beings, then this must be called the highest and absolute good."³⁰ Kant's theory could also only reach the same conclusion, for the universality of the moral law requires that the good toward which it points is equally universal. And the fact that this good, then, is the object of our wills means that our moral actions are linked to it in an efficacious manner.³¹

The highest good as the object of the moral will in the second *Critique* is, thus, not an object in the conventional, pre-theoretical sense of the term. As determined by a universal moral law, any particular object in the world cannot count as the good will's object. One must picture the moral law, therefore, as pointing to two levels of ends. It determines (a) contingent ends that correspond to represented actions; and it simultaneously determines (b) an unconditioned end that every will ultimately is working toward when acting on the moral law and which combines systematically every moral action. If we read practical ideal as an individuated substrate as I suggested in Part I, an anchor point that can qualify as such an end in the sense of (b) is at hand. We need not include it in the moral theory of how we personally determine our wills per se since it is not a contingent end and put second to the determination of the will according to the paradox of method. Yet, it can align completely every good will as a philosophical or theoretical account of how—at the unconditioned level—there remains a final end that subsumes all other conditioned ends.

Thus, Pistorius's first objection does have a reply in the second *Critique*. The object of the good will cannot be any contingent end state. Only a final, unconditioned end state will do. The move of the highest good as the "unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason" (*KpV* 5:108), and as the "whole *object* of a pure practical reason" (*KpV* 5:109), does provide us with an object without which Kant agrees no coherency in the overarching organization of our volitions could occur. And this object while conditioned on the moral law is not identical with it, since it includes happiness proportionate to virtue. Or as Barbara Herman puts it well, Kant now has an

³⁰ Gesang, ed., *Kants vergessener Rezensent*, 457.

³¹ Simmons, "Kant's Highest Good," 365, asks whether "Kant or any of his defenders has ever advanced sufficient reasons for introducing the highest good into ethics." These are the sufficient reasons, both philosophical and historical.

opportunity to underline how: “Purely formal principles do not have *no* content; they have *noncontingent* content.”³² And it is noncontingent in a way that makes it fit for every will to desire it no matter when they are acting.

Using a final end allows moral actions to remain directed but in a way above the contingency of any immediate moment to act. A nonempirical object is required that we cannot help but relate to the world as a maximum standard, and which can remain in permanent relation to the ongoing and renewed efforts of moral agents in experience. An ideal can provide such an object. The moral law is that which determines it as an ideal, thus, it is not contingent on any particular version of how the world satisfies us or contributes to a physiological notion of goodness as “wellbeing” (*das Wohl*).³³ Further, as including our happiness (qua complete) good, it connects us with a project that is not totally foreign to our nature, but rather in sync with that sensible part of us which reason must admit as conditioning complete goodness. Thus, happiness is part of the good but in a nonmotivational sense, since there is no actual promise of actual proportionate happiness. We see Kant has provided an object, which responds to Pistorius’s first objection about the good will lacking an object.

In sum: While left out of the *Groundwork* for methodological reasons, the highest good as an ideal complements Kant’s moral theory. From the perspective of the agent’s will in moral matters, it functions as the object of pure practical reason, which unifies every action into a cohesive whole. A practical ideal as a substrate can act as an object because of its individuated status and can relate objectively to our projects in the world while remaining nonempirical and nonmotivational since it simultaneously—as a final end—must be thought as *beyond* the world under the conditions of space and time. In *Metaphysics Mrongovius* lectures, Kant is reported as working out how the highest good is more than an ultimate end, but rather a final end:

[I]t is certain that all our sensible cognitions are also only sensibly conditioned, therefore are alterable just as the things themselves, and contingently certain. Therein lies the ground that a human being finds no satisfaction for his reason here except insofar as he exerts himself to cognize and to reach his highest good <*summum bonum*>, i.e., the highest

³² Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 217.

³³ See *RGV* 6:5 for a direct summary of how the idea serves as the object or end of the moral law as an “idea of an object.”

final end of all his ends, the highest degree of worthiness to be happy connected with the greatest *morality*. This object of his exertion lies beyond nature, he cannot find all his empirical knowledge adequate for this, he must find it simply through reason in its laws: he feels it necessary that this alone is the highest end and *Bestimmung* for reason. (*V-Met/Mron* 29:948)

The highest good as the *final* end is the organizing principle of all ends, the object that lies “beyond nature,” but which still plays a role in our judgment of our determination as rational beings fitting into nature and producing goodness in it through freedom.

However, this creates a tension that will call for an adaptation in Kant’s theory of the highest good. For it—as that end which grounds the system of our moral actions—cannot be completely “beyond nature.” Rather, if connected to practically real ends in the world as particular actions, it must further be *of* or *in* nature too. Here, one might infer that Kant is answering Pistorius’s second objection, namely, the question of how the pure ideal can interest us to act in the first place. Kant’s answer (in an already cited passage) is that the practical ideal must be of interest to all rational beings since it is a rational substrate that connects us all:

For, the moral law in fact transfers us, according to the idea [*der Idee nach*], into a nature in which pure reason, if it were accompanied with suitable physical power, would produce the highest good, and it [the moral law as an idea] determines our will to confer on the sensible world the form of a whole of rational beings. (*KpV* 5:43)

Kant arguably goes the route of asserting that it is our rationality that demands we take an interest—though not one that comes before the assessment of any action’s moral possibility. And the interest is one of taking the ideal and making the world share the same form. But this is not totally surprising based on the analysis of Part I. After all, the ideal is the source, Kant says, of our moral knowledge of how all individuals in experience fall morally short in comparative degrees. And the moral state of the world and our actions is revealed through a comparison that allows us to recognize it. Hence, the ideal is always priming us to see it as connected with end-setting in the world.

But here we can now begin to turn to the second objection raised by Pistorius. For as an object that correlates to our activity in the world, Kant insists in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique* that we must establish the “possibility” of the highest good, which “is to be made real by our will” as it now “concerns a practical good, i.e., one that is possible through action” (*KpV* 5:113). Rather than the possibility of willing the law, which was the task of the *Groundwork*, Kant provides an analysis of the possibility of willing the law’s object in the second *Critique*. And this entails that we must establish why acting on it is cogent in the first place. For, like any other object to be worked toward in the world, our wills must be able to confer it onto how things are represented. So, though moral actions are first determined by moral possibility (via the categorical imperative), the real possibility of the highest good as an object is now of central concern too. It is on this score that Kant issues a statement, which readers of Kant have struggled over ever since, namely, that “the impossibility of the highest good must prove the falsity of the moral law also” (*KpV* 5:114). I will discuss Kant’s reasons for this in the next section. But we can now see how, modally, the highest good has descended from the sphere of mere ideas, without any real possibility, to become a really possible object. Kant seems to have done this, partially, in answer to Pistorius. That answer, however, has connected with a further topic that could be seen as answering Pistorius’s second objection. For Kant’s tactic is to argue that it would be irrational to act for the realization of an object that is, in principle, impossible.

To make it explicit, the tension in all of this, of course, is that it appears to make the validity of the moral law conditioned on the success of the highest good’s realization in the world. And this seems to insert a condition into the process of determining our wills, which should be totally unconditioned.

6.3. The Highest Good’s Realizability: An Interest of Reason?

Kant provided a partial answer to Pistorius. To a certain extent, Kant stuck to his guns. Due to the paradox of method, the immediate determination of the will requires no object. Rather, it is only through the moral law that we determine what a proper object for this law could be. However, Kant also conceded to Pistorius in a way that changed his theory. For Kant admits that we do indeed act toward creating an object, indeed toward an ideal fit for the good will.

However, what of the second objection that interrogates why there should be any connection between a moral law and an action at all? How is it that we might be *interested* in this object?

In a certain sense, one could make the case for seeing Kant attempt to answer these questions in how he explains why we all must, at least *intellectually*, remain committed to the final end as really possible for the sake of action. Recalling Pistorius's disjunct, he suggested that we might remain interested either in its "truth" or "utility." Regarding "utility," Kant's own system prohibits this option of seeking out something desirable to motivate us. But "truth," or the highest good's "harmony with our ability to think," might be something that Kant actually took steps to incorporate in the Dialectic section of the second *Critique*. There, he explores how the highest good as the final end must be thought of as physically possible due to a rational constraint on what it means to act. And it is this move that sets us in a new relation to the highest good and which creates a philosophical tension that, I believe, can only be resolved in the next stage of the highest good's development.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that Kant related us to the highest good for the sake of our motivations in acting morally. The notion was that without the highest good, we would not have the requisite desire to act on moral actions that might require self-sacrifice. With the second *Critique*, this argument has completely vanished for reasons already discussed. The highest good, due to the paradox of method, cannot be determined prior to the determination of the will. And yet, the highest good even here continues to remain tied to our particular actions. Indeed, it is now tied to *every* moral action as the final end, without which the rationality of said action would cease to hold true.

While no longer motivationally important, the highest good remains related to agency or what I will figuratively refer to as the *control center of action*. With this metaphor, I mean all that pertains to our presence of mind when consciously determining ourselves to act immediately in the here and now. Deliberating between possible actions, deciding on one action in particular, and acting on this decision all belong to this control center. It refers to those moments in which one *could* conceivably act on one's self-determination. One is, in a certain sense, of course, always *near* the control center. As long as one is alive, one is in the sphere of possible activity. However, speaking for myself, one is not always actively engaged in serious operations of practical, rational activity. Daydreaming, habitually going through the motions, sitting and reading this book, none of these moments

qualify as actions in the relevant sense for which one must take full stock of the moment and arrive at a course of action, or respond thoughtfully to new developments that affect one's ongoing projects. Instead, the control center of action pertains to moments that are practically salient and live. One is aware of the energy and impetus such that one is at the ready and *can* indeed act.

Relative to the control center of action, the highest good in the first *Critique* directly motivated us to act. Our promised, proportionate happiness Kant thought provided the relevant incentive to behave morally. And only God and an immortality after this life could guarantee the proper reward for our good behavior. It is as if the highest good were a promised payment for sticking it out in our mission control center, no matter how awful or stressful the mission became. There is a mercenary-like quality to this model, in which the merits of the mission can be more or less moot as long as the price is right. This consequent-dependent good behavior, however, could not stand with Kant's developing moral theory. Starting with the *Groundwork*, one must completely abstract away from the success or consequences of one's actions and, further, act strictly *from* duty and not for possible rewards.

Now, though, Kant presents a new argument. The highest good as a practical ideal is no longer separated in pure realm apart. Instead, it constitutes the final end of all moral striving, an end to whose realization we contribute every time we act on the moral law. However, thanks to the paradox of method, there is no possibility for it to influence action as a motivational force. Kant protects the purity of moral motivation as determined solely through the categorical imperative. The highest good only arises after that fact. However, as the final end for us all, it is that which "reason points out to all rational beings as the goal of all their moral wishes" (*KpV* 5:115). By positing it as the object whose realization we are partially responsible for as coauthors of the totality of actions that it subsumes and interconnects, it takes on a new relation to the control center of action. It will still require that we postulate God and the immortality of the soul, although for different reasons.

The argument now goes as follows: The view is that we do not require the highest good's realizability vouchsafed (by belief or a moral faith in God and immortality) in order to remain motivated or committed to moral action; rather, we require it due to a rational constraint on what it means to will. In the Introduction, I touched already on Allen Wood's contributions to this topic. He has done the most work in reconstructing this argument, especially in *Kant's Moral Religion* but more recently in *Kant and Religion*, where he

hones it further without changing the basic structure.³⁴ Rather than motivational, he states, “The importance of the relation between belief and action for Kant is that it is a *rational* relation.”³⁵ The rational constraint is that if we are committed to realize any project *p*, then *p* must be possible in order for our willing of *p* to be rational. Kant then points out, alas, that we are unable to realize the highest good and nature appears indifferent. Hence, there must be a way for rationally committing to this project by accounting for its possibility. Note that at this point, were we to stop our reflection and believe that the highest good is impossible, then we would rationally cease to pursue moral ends and start pursuing possible ends based on empirically attainable goals that serve our self-interest. Kant thinks the only (or only good) avenue of supplementation on offer to avoid this terrible result is in theistic accounts in which God might aid our efforts. Therefore, we ought to believe in God in order to fully account for the rationality of our moral commitments. Going forward, I will refer to this as the rational argument, which can be laid out as follows:

The Rational Argument

1. The moral law commits us to the project of realizing the highest good. (Transcendental Philosophical Assumption)
2. If the highest good is to be realized, then we must become morally perfect and receive proportionate happiness based on our worthiness. (Definitional Corollary of the highest good)
3. We cannot become morally perfect in one lifetime despite every effort and happiness proportionate to moral perfection cannot be guaranteed by nature alone. (Fact of Human Experience)
- C1. Thus, the highest good cannot be realized in this lifetime. (2,3)
4. It is a rational requirement of willing that the ends we set are possible. (Rational Constraint on Willing)

³⁴ Wood, *Kant and Religion*, 31n7, remains explicitly committed to it and states that he thinks it “was largely right.” He also, though, thinks his interpretation of the moral argument secures God as a postulate rather than immortality. Even in the second *Critique*—he argues—“the realization of the highest good for each of us is located no longer in a future life but in a natural order governed by divine providence” (Wood, *Kant and Religion*, 46).

³⁵ Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, 20. For similar interpretations, see Bader, “Kant’s Theory,” 210–2; Watkins, “The Antinomy of Practical Reason,” 149; and Willaschek, “Must We Believe,” 224–5.

- C2. Thus, we are required to believe that our moral progress can continue beyond this life in a future world and in which God too will provide for complete happiness *for the sake of acting rationally* to realize the highest good. (1,2,4)

This argument rests on the rationality of acting. Since we cannot in this life fulfill our duty to make possible our portion of the highest good (but must if we are to continue acting rationally), a solution must be found so that the moral law is not rendered invalid, bringing about the stop of moral action. While we cannot give up the moral law—which stands firm as a fact of reason in the second *Critique*—we can abandon our notion that this life is the only “time” for moral matters and can further hope that God exists and will provide proportionate happiness in a future existence. Premise (4.), therefore, permits us to supersede the results from the modus tollens argument leading to C1. The rationality of willing demands that we assume both postulates for the sake of avoiding an irrational result: that is, willing the impossible. The moral law commits us to realize the highest good. And if this rational constraint fails to hold, then the strong consequence (as expressed in the second *Critique*) will be that: “Now, since the promotion of the highest good, which contains this connection in its concept, is an a priori necessary object of our will and inseparably bound up with the moral law, the impossibility of the first must also prove the falsity of the second” (*KpV* 5:114). In sum, the validity of the moral law for us depends on the realizability of the highest good.

Thus, the highest good remains of central importance for the control center of action, albeit in a nonmotivational sense, according to the rational argument put forth by Kant. This becomes clear by looking at the stakes in play, that is, where he posits the realizability of the highest good as grounding the very validity of the moral law for us. For if the highest good were judged impossible in this or a future world, then the very rationality of acting in the here and now would vanish. We would still have the moral law as a formal principle; however, we would need to view it as a fluke in our reasoning since its object is impossible. The thought is something like if we were to imagine possessing a crystal ball in which we see that the world, in fact, goes to hell in a handbasket and that all we do is pointless. Then, it would follow that we rationally ought to divorce ourselves from morality and choose ends that serve our own best interest for the time we have left.

Thus, while very different in form, both the motivational and the rational arguments are similar in that they both agree that the highest good

is important for the sake of what goes on when deliberating, deciding, and acting. Both views also agree that the impossibility of the highest good (i.e., if God's existence is denied) would lead to negative consequences for agency. Whereas for the first *Critique's* motivational argument, the loss of the highest good would remove any motivation to stick with our mission, the rational argument asserts that we would simply lose any *reason* for it in the first place. Or better said: Our original reason would lose its status as a valid reason. Back in our control center, it would be as if we learned that the original destination of our planned mission is actually nonexistent. The data we based our trajectory on prove flawed, completely erroneous in fact due to technical flaws in our instruments that showed a blip where there was, in fact, nothing of substance. We set out to land on a planet of pure imagination. Hence, we would be better off—indeed, more rational—to reassess and plan a new mission that salvages our remaining resources. This is not a matter of motivation, but calculated reasoning about what is real and practically achievable.

Understandably, this move has elicited great debate since it becomes quite hard to understand the status of the moral law as truly unconditioned. Indeed, it appears that a strong condition is now placed on the moral law, namely, that its object, the highest good, be realizable. For many, it seems dubious that we must believe that an ideal is realizable. As David Sussman puts it: "It may be true that if I intend to bring about some end, I must take success to be a real possibility. However, no such confidence is needed for an end to serve as an ideal *for action*."³⁶ The critical distinction here is in the highest good's status as an ideal. For the very definition of an ideal is that it is *not* a given (even givable) state of affairs in space and time. Hence, its relation to action as an end is not the same as an end that I intend to bring about—quite simply because an ideal for action patently cannot be brought about through any particular action. And yet it might serve some other function.

In the next chapters, I argue that Kant alters his position in the third *Critique* and contemporaneous works in a compelling way, pace those who think that the second *Critique* offers Kant's most mature and compelling take.³⁷ Others conclude from Kant's third *Critique* that the second *Critique* argument is a failure that Kant himself saw through. I will argue, however, that there are other philosophical reasons for the changes that Kant

³⁶ Sussman, "The Highest Good," 220.

³⁷ E.g., Wood, *Kant and Religion*, 49, who thinks that the argument in the third *Critique* is "essentially the same as that in the second *Critique* [. . .] But it is given a different and larger context." See also Bader, "Kant's Theory," 184.

undertakes. Connected to what I have tracked so far, the convergence between nature and morality continues. But morality's (now) status as a *final* end takes on a deeper significance in that it is the only final end of which we are aware, and which, in turn, we can reflectively impute to nature as well. In this convergence, a further contemplative function of the highest good arises. Kant will see his role come to include being a carpenter of reason, as he seeks a way to build a coherent, sturdy edifice according to a blueprint that we find in reason: the ideal of the highest good.

Thanks to Pistorius, that astute devotee to truth, Kant felt the need to deepen his account of the good. As a maximal point of comparison for this world, it became the only candidate to qualify as the complete terminus of all our actions.

An Ideal as the Final End of the World (1790–1794)

In a way that follows from the trajectory traced thus far, with the third *Critique*, Kant argues that the transcendental philosopher cannot help but judge the highest good as the final end of creation itself. By “creation,” Kant means the totality of all things that constitute the world in a broad sense,¹ signaled through the explicit theological connotation of the term. It is meant to cover the whole of all representable reality, every created thing relative to us as an object of possible experience. One could rephrase the claim as follows: The highest good is the reason for the existence of the world—in a universal, cosmic sense—and everything within it. To communicate this degree of generality, I will often treat *nature as a whole* as synonymous with the world whole, but intend this broad sense. The notion at work is of nature as the whole transcendently grounded sphere of human experience. With the highest good crowning nature, however, we find a much weightier claim and title than what came before in its development. More than the object that unifies all moral wills toward a final end in the world, it now becomes the only object qualified to fit a worldview in which it crowns creation itself. Much confusion has arisen around the highest good in the third *Critique*.

While the theoretical meaning of this controversial claim can more or less be grasped, the main question has been: What does this mean for the practical sphere? As the final end of creation that is, did Kant see the highest good serving—as a practical ideal—a specific purpose in the control center of action? Whereas it is relatively clear in the previous phases of the ideal’s development what its position is relative to our thinking and action, the third

¹ Pasternack, “Restoring Kant’s Conception, 445, clarifies that Kant often “uses ‘world’ far more broadly than just in reference to this physical-causal order” (445). Morality certainly qualifies as part of the world, albeit in a purely intelligible sense, and the afterlife might be part of this world as well, along with perhaps noumenal entities.

Critique has led broadly to two competing views in the literature. On the one hand, some see the third *Critique* as upholding the view presented just two years prior from the second *Critique*, albeit in a broader, now teleological context. The other view, by contrast, sees Kant introducing a new argument more sensitive to our needs as frail, finite beings. To my mind, no evidence provides a definitive win for either side. And in the commotion, a third transcendental function has been missed, which centers on the role of the highest good for a new, distinct kind of contemplation (relative to that discussed in Part I).

For the remainder, I explore why this confusion has arisen and promote a new way of interpreting the importance of the highest good. In this chapter, I first portray how the highest good comes to serve a new and unique role relative to our judgments of experience as a whole and connect how this is possible relative to my account of the contemplative function sketched in Part I. Then, I present why confusion has arisen. I argue that we can, to a good extent, lay the blame at Kant's feet, by presenting an etiology of the confusion that has arisen—indeed, a confusion evidenced in Kant's own day—and that is rooted in Kant's moral proof for God's existence. That said, I think the confusion can be cleared if one takes a broad view of the patterns and innovations that Kant makes from 1790 to 1794. It is because this broad view has been lacking, I believe, that the deeper, transcendental function for the highest good has remained underdetermined. To preview what this role is: It is not about thinking of a final end for morality and humanity, but rather—*based on this positing of a final end*—taking an extra step to construct a systematic outlook about the whole of experience as organized relative to the highest good. And the construction has nothing exclusively to do with one domain or the other, but rather is a process of philosophical reflection seeking to achieve a coherency between one's views and experiences, a harmony that makes sense of one's whole life. At least that is the chief purpose that Kant came to see for the highest good, I contend. And I reveal that the key to grasping this purpose lies in the technical meaning of "coherent," which in Kant's original is *konsequent* or *bündig*. These terms have very specific meanings that if overlooked skew the interpretation. While the setup here underscores the importance of this terminological clue, I only unpack it thoroughly in the next part of the study.

The upshot of my view is that Kant performed a delicate recalibration of the highest good within his theory of human experience. For, on the one hand, the highest good becomes even more enmeshed with our views of nature, dilating now to encompass not merely moral-practical ends but even

natural ones.² But, on the other hand, the highest good—despite this down-to-earth placing within nature—figures first and foremost in the philosophical activity of worldview construction. We need it when contemplating about how the whole of experience hangs together. Indeed, Kant generally argues against its serving a use anywhere in the control center of action from this point onward. As a reminder of what I mean by this term: By the control center of action, I mean all that pertains to the conscious process of determining ourselves to act immediately in the here and now resulting in a particular action. Instead and despite its practical origin and ineliminable practical power (which I explore in Part III), the systematic outlook won through contemplation satisfies primarily a need that we have as philosophical beings. It is this function that has been overlooked until now. Preparing the way for it is the task of this chapter.

7.1. The Highest Good in Third *Critique*

In this section, I detail the delicate recalibration of the highest good as it relates to our judgments of ends. For with the third *Critique*, the highest good finds its place in how we judge nature as a whole. More specifically, the highest good comes down to earth, so to speak, in our judgments about why nature and why we, as a moral species, are here in the first place. It is in this section, where I detail Kant's employing the highest good in the process of philosophical contemplation.

But first, a retrospective to capture the moves that have brought Kant to this point: At the beginning of the evolution that I began with in Chapter 5, practical ideals remained isolated from particular ends and belonged fully to a realm apart. As an ideal, the highest good had no direct link to our actual, particular ends (*Zwecke*), but was rather—for this reason—a *mere* ideal. We might be motivated by the promise of an ideal world filled with happiness proportionate to virtue, but the ideal's reality ultimately remained separate from any directly executable end in the sensible world. However, this principle of isolation proved unsustainable even at the earliest developmental phases of Kant's ethical thought. By 1785, Kant realized that our

² This is well-covered ground. For example, Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 390, notes that freedom's convergence with nature in the third *Critique*, "is not at odds with Kant's moral philosophy but instead expresses an assumption that we must make about nature in order for our attempt to be moral even to be intelligible."

judgments of human nature require that we view morality as humanity's final end, that is, as the highest purpose for which we are here. However, these judgments remained historically conditioned and prescriptive as opposed to necessary based on the transcendental principles of reason. It is this conditioned status of the judgment that Kant realized needed revision. For as Kant was writing the second *Critique* and explicitly positing the highest good as the final end of our wills to answer the astute criticisms leveled by Pistorius (from Chapter 6), his system went through a dramatic expansion that drove an even tighter convergence between ends of nature and ends of freedom. Kant, in the third *Critique*, now sees these two ends as in need of convergence to the point where harmony results. And the means by which such a judgment can be made arises in Kant's development of a new form of judgment: namely, *reflective* judgment. In the third *Critique*, he develops this form of judgment and discovers that it can be deployed in bringing together his philosophical project, namely, the philosopher's mission of discovering a coherent model of the whole. I first explain this form of judgment and then Kant's developing project that finally brought together the practical ideal of the highest good into essential relation with our judgments of nature.

To start, the form of judgment that suddenly makes the highest good's placement *in* nature a subjective necessity needs some revisiting and elaboration, even though I glossed it already in Chapter 3, namely: the form of reflective judgment. The third *Critique* (in the broadest of strokes) is where Kant investigates our power to judge and whether this power has an a priori principle that might explain certain claims we make when judging objects as beautiful, states as sublime, or organisms as self-determining unities. Kant thinks that there is such a principle, namely, purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*], which underlies this unique class of judgments. These judgments are those that arise whenever represented objects engage our imaginations in ways beyond standard constitutive judgments. Kant refers to this unique form under investigation as *reflective judgment*. Again, this form of judgment differs from *constitutive* (or determining) *judgments*, which are those where an adequate fit holds between sensible appearances and the concepts (i.e., categories) provided by the understanding. Constitutive judgments are preconditions of representing an object of possible experience at all (as previously detailed).

Zooming in on the nature of reflective judgments, they are those that we employ when we discover a certain need to go beyond the pure categories of experience (which suffice for constitutive judgments) and seek an enriched concept to make sense of some intuition or set thereof. This is because there

is not a perfect fit between the sensible appearances and our concepts. The appearing object—as it were—overloads our cognitive capacity. Or put differently: Some objects, once synthesized as representations of possible experience, engage us past the point of basic constitutive judging. For instance, beautiful objects hold our attention in a manner that invites further lingering to assay it. There is more to an object that is beautiful, as it were, than meets the (initial) eye(ing). In seeking to make sense of how it holds our attention and affects our cognitive faculties in such a pleasurable way, we search for what could account for its possibility. Then, via the imagination and analogy, we import concepts into our thinking about the object without which we could not make full sense of it.

In the case of beauty, we impute the concept of purpose in a way that connects directly with a feeling of pleasure. This process is a pleasurable, self-reproducing free play of one's mental faculties that is enjoyable *for its own sake*. It has what Kant refers to as the “mere form of purposiveness” (*KU* 5:221), even if it brings about no further purpose beyond this pleasurable state. Moreover, in adjudging the possibility of experiences of beauty, the transcendental philosopher arguably³ imputes purposiveness as involved in explaining the possibility of such aesthetic experiences in the first place—as if such attunements between subject and object were so arranged precisely *for the sake* of attaining such pleasurable states (see, e.g., *KU* 5:220, for where he seems to say as much). That is, cognizing beautiful objects requires conceiving of them as if they and our cognitive faculties are so determined to produce precisely such experiences, namely, the enjoyment of lingering with them and plumbing them for deeper meaning.

And, with teleological judgments, as the other case in point, we cannot make sense of certain features of organisms (ourselves included), as well as organisms qua wholes, by mechanical laws alone.⁴ Our constitutive judgments leave too much of the organism unexplained. Indeed, in order to make sense of them (Kant thinks), we cannot help but judge them as organized *as if* they are self-organizing and constituted unities determined by a reciprocal relation between part and whole. Put more simply, we cannot help but judge them as organized by an internal purposiveness of the parts being there *for the sake* of the whole. Otherwise, we would lack a complete account of them, as is

³ This is my own interpretative gloss of §§10–12 of the third *Critique*. But they are notoriously difficult to decipher and, of course, open to varying interpretations.

⁴ See for accounts of this unintelligibility, e.g., Breitenbach “Teleology in Biology;” Ginsborg, “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability;” and Zammito, “Teleology Then and Now.”

evidenced by our perpetual search for *why* certain features of organisms are the way they are. For example, if experiencing bioluminescence in an ocean's torrent on a moonless night, we cannot help but judge that there must be some purpose that this function serves *for* the organism producing it. Why would it self-illuminate when bumped or touched? At this point, of piqued curiosity, we then turn to the natural scientific investigation that takes up the search (in our post-Darwinian day) for an advantage that it serves the organism for which it might be "picked out" via its bettering chances of the organism's survival, which then gifts its progeny (possibly) the same *useful* trait.

Finally, such reflective judgments, while not counting as objective knowledge claims about possible objects of experience, are nonetheless not merely up to *me* and *my* imagination in opposition to *your* experience. Because reflective judgments are grounded in the shared, a priori principle of purposiveness relative to a stable and universally shared cognitive constitution that we possess as a rational species, we may claim a "subjective universality" (*KU* 5:212) for these judgments. From this, we can claim a universal validity for them such that we can expect others to agree with us. Still, these judgments ultimately have to do with the way represented objects affect us (based on the sorts of cognitive faculties we have) as opposed to how objects must be constituted to possibly affect us in the first place (which is what constitutive judgments enable).

Kant's development of the form of reflective judgment sets his theory on a completely new footing and makes it such that our judgments of ends in nature and in human history (as a largely natural unfolding of our species) are not merely contingent, but rather subjectively necessary. In judging now what the purpose is of certain empirically given, conditioned elements in experience, we no longer—Kant thought—are merely thinking in a dogmatic or illusory way, but rather a way that is unavoidable, indeed, necessary for us as the sort of cognitive beings we are. And, in fact, due to transcendental idealism's separation of appearances from underlying reality, these judgments quite possibly could be truth-tracking of how things are in themselves. Teleology becomes a central feature of rational experience as to how we cannot help but experience the world even if we cannot ascribe our conclusions as being constitutive of nature in itself. Indeed, in the third *Critique*, Kant asserts that teleology is neither a science of nature (proper) nor of theology, but rather a science without doctrine—indeed, a science of critique: "Teleology, as a science, thus does not belong to any doctrine at all, but only to critique, and indeed to that of a particular cognitive faculty,

namely that of the power of judgment. But insofar as it contains *a priori* principles, it can and must provide the method for how nature must be judged in accordance with the principle of final causes" (*KU* 5:417). Hence, the third *Critique* revisits the question of whether nature has a final end and invites then a reevaluation by the philosopher as a legislator of concepts to view it as a whole, including our place within it.

With the third *Critique*, however, it is not just that Kant has developed reflective judgments, but he has also realized that he can unify his whole philosophical project in a way that depends on deploying these reflective judgments to fill in gaps left by the principle of isolation, on the one hand, while preserving its legitimacy, on the other. As I detailed in Chapter 5, this philosophical legislation took place with the principle of isolation in force. And in the third *Critique*, the principle remains in force:

The domain of the concept of nature under the one legislation and that of the concept of freedom under the other are entirely barred from any mutual influence that they could have on each other by themselves [...] by the great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances. (*KU* 5:195)

Kant's realization, however, that his three *Critiques* might indeed form a system and that reflective judgments might provide a key for thinking of nature and freedom as not merely independent, but also co-constitutive of *one* world brings him to an amended position. The principle of isolation, that is, while holding for the domains taken by themselves is ultimately superseded by Kant's realization that a third *Critique* could provide for a systematicity in critical philosophy, thanks to the principle of teleology.

Evidence of this can be seen in a letter to Karl Leonhard Reinhold dated December 28, 1787. One sees how Kant saw the scope of his transcendental project expanding toward a third *Critique*. Kant explains that he has been distracted by Georg Forster's essay "directed against some other ideas of mine" (*Br* 10:513), which required a response (i.e., Kant's *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy*). Kant goes on to reveal that this essay, along with finishing the second *Critique* and planning the third (as a "Critique of Taste," *Br* 10:515), were all occupying him around the same time. Kant tells Reinhold that having found a priori principles for two of the three faculties of mind left him in a position to search for those belonging to the intermediary faculty, namely, the "faculty of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure" (*Br* 10:514). What at first seemed impossible Kant could now solve because "the analysis

of the previously mentioned faculties of the human mind [i.e., the faculty of cognition and the faculty of desire] allowed me to discover a *systematicity*” (*Br* 10:514, my emphasis).⁵ It is from this systematicity that Kant comes to “recognize” the “three parts of philosophy,” namely, “theoretical philosophy, *teleology*, and practical philosophy” (*Br* 10:515, my emphasis).

In Kant’s letter to Reinhold, he claims—after having finished the manuscript of the second *Critique* in approximately June of the same year⁶ and being forced to justify the use of teleological principles in philosophy—to have discovered the key to unlocking systematicity for all the faculties of the mind. And the intermediary field of philosophy is teleology, which will act as a bridge between the theoretical and practical domains. The reason is that, in Kant’s words, such a teleological principle pushes us “to look beyond the sensible and seek the unifying point of all our faculties a priori in the supersensible: because no other way remains to make reason harmonious with itself [*mit sich selbst einstimmig*]” (*KU* 5:341).⁷ And it will be through this reflective process of judging the world and our place in it that Kant comes to further find that the highest good fits the bill as the only end that we can judge as this “unifying point” around which all of the various applications of our reason might find order and harmony.

Back in 1784, when Kant applied the teleological doctrine of nature to our philosophical explorations of human history in the *Idea* essay, our investigations remained centralized around historical and anthropological data. Now, however, these considerations of humanity’s final end must be situated within transcendental philosophy proper.⁸ At the start of my tracking of the evolution, I took a hint from the principle of isolation; I take now what

⁵ Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years*, 125, argues that Kant wrote the third *Critique* due to a “reorientation of transcendental philosophy” to address the “possibility of synthetic judgments a priori,” which now led to a search in the third faculty of mind for a priori principles. Discovering the principle of purposiveness “makes it possible to reconcile both the legislation by theoretical reason and that by practical reason and also their realizability within the world, although this reconciliation takes place in the supersensible substratum” (Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years*, 137).

⁶ See, *Br* 10:490, to Christian Gottfried Schütz dated June 25, 1787: “I am so far along with my *Critique of Practical Reason* that I intend to send it to Halle for printing next week. This work will better demonstrate and make comprehensible the possibility of supplementing, by pure practical reason, that which I denied to speculative reason.”

⁷ The Cambridge translation uses “self-consistent” for “*mit sich selbst einstimmig*.” As I detail in the next chapter, “*einstimmig*” is connected with Kant’s technical term, “*konsequent*,” which means “coherent” and which is stronger than mere “self-consistency.” This usage by Kant further reinforces my reading.

⁸ With Allison, “Teleology and History,” 25, I agree that the third *Critique* sets a new precedent when revisiting previous historical texts: “Even though the latter work [i.e., the third *Critique*] was published six years after *Idea for a Universal History*, it provides the lens through which the earlier work must be examined.”

I will refer to as the *principle of systematic unity* as that which characterizes the philosopher's mission. And the watchword, as a base condition for such a unity, is coherency, or the manner in which certain necessary judgments mutually support one another in reciprocal relation. This principle is superior to the principle of isolation because it seeks some common point of reference that allows the various, isolated domains of reason's legislation to find some interrelatedness without infringing on the sovereignty of each. The philosopher is one who does not want a mere aggregate of cognitions. Rather, unity of the whole sphere of experience with its disparate and heterogeneous forms of cognition is sought above all else. As Kant writes in the *Vienna Logic*: "It is necessary, then, to treat things systematically in order to get a concept of completeness and to have a touchstone for how the different parts agree with the whole" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:831–2). How can the whole of transcendental experience be constituted such that the parts all find agreement? Such a mission might appear, *prima facie*, self-undermined by Kant's own assertion that the theoretical and practical domains remain independent of each other. If truly independent, whence the need for agreement?

On this question, Kant provides an answer without much in the way of justification. Kant's justification involves his fundamental assumption that experience as a whole is only representable as a unity. While present throughout Kant's critical period, I find some of his clearest statements in the *Opus postumum*, in which he repeatedly makes the point that experience is always a singular whole: "Experience is *at all times a system* and as such is a possible system according to principles a priori as only a singular, transcendental one" (*OP* 21:101, my translation).⁹ Experience, that is, cannot be broken into pieces for Kant. Its basic unit is always the whole of which any moment is a part. One way of reading Kant here is that he is appealing to a basic phenomenological point that experience represents a seamless totality of elements that find a rational order despite philosophical tensions in the description. A more philosophically technical way would be to argue for the unity of experience from the unity of reason—that reason, namely, which enables any necessary experiences in all the domains in the first place. I am sure there are many other ways of justifying why Kant thinks that we need to account for the unity of experience. For my purposes, I simply grant Kant the need, as a full-on justification would require its own study.

⁹ See also, *OP* 21:53, my translation: "Experience is the asymptotic approach to empirical completion [*Vollständigkeit*] of perception."

Granting the justification, it is the philosopher who seeks to resolve these tensions and account for how reason, with its *a priori* principles, provides for this overarching harmony. And it is in the third *Critique* where Kant thinks to have achieved the point at which this system of experience in totality can be accounted for philosophically. The key lies in the mediation of the concepts of nature and freedom, respectively, through the middle concept of teleology:

That which presupposes this *a priori* and without regard to the practical, namely, the power of judgment, provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a *purposiveness* of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized. (*KU* 5:196)

This passage reveals that the mediation between nature and freedom results because both nature and freedom share a common point of reference, namely, the highest good as a “final end” of “purely practical” reason. It is, therefore, now in virtue of the highest good’s status as the final end of every will that we can answer the question of how the domains of freedom and nature respectively might converge. The practical ideal that began as a mere ideal apart from all actual *Zwecke* is now the ground for unifying nature and freedom as the *Endzweck* of both. A practical ideal, as it is now to be shown, has become the foundational structuring element in our judgments of experience as a whole to discern the possible harmony between practical and natural laws. Where Kant shows that the highest good can serve in this capacity comes at the end of the treatise in the difficult Doctrine of Method. For it is there where he searches for the proper application of the teleological principle to nature as a whole.

These two elements, the form of reflective judgment and the philosophical mission to account for the unity of experience despite certain *a priori* judgments standing in tension, come together at the end of the third *Critique*. In the Doctrine of Method, Kant analyzes how we can properly apply the *a priori* principle of purposiveness and reflective judgments to experience writ large, that is, to nature as a whole. While he has shown that beautiful objects and organisms elicit reflective judgments in us, Kant thinks that when we seek to understand nature as a whole, namely, as the system out of which

organisms emerge, in which beauty is experienced, and in which our lives as moral beings are embedded, we are naturally led to question why it too exists. We are led, namely, to search for the final end of nature itself, conceived as the being of all things (which is, again, why Kant refers to the whole of nature as “creation”).¹⁰ And to answer this question, Kant thinks we must judge reflectively in the same manner that we judged certain parts of nature.

Philosophically, this is grounded in the fact that we do not find all of our questions answered via what we can know through constitutive, determining judgments alone. That is, through experiencing that which is sensibly given. And yet, the sheer complexity of human experience within nature leads to a need to search out a higher concept that might provide for unity between all the disparate and yet inseparable domains of experience. Thus, Kant thinks when facing a view of the sensible realm and posing this question, we must engage a reflective judgment that searches for a concept that is first made possible by the whole of experience overloading our understanding.

That said, Kant here is also following the metaphysical tradition laid by his predecessors Leibniz and Baumgarten. Kant notes, for example: “[W]e will ultimately have reason to assume as the principle for research into nature that there is nothing in nature at all without an end” (*KU* 5:454). Instead, we investigate under the assumption that everything is connected with everything else and the whole of creation. Of course, for Kant, this is tempered as an epistemic heuristic, instead of a dogmatic assertion. But he clearly is channeling the Leibnizian tradition to a great extent as well. As Leibniz notes in §69 of *The Monadology*: “Thus there is nothing fallow, sterile, or dead in the universe, no chaos and no confusion except in appearance, almost like it looks in a pond at a distance, where we might see [...] teeming motion of the fish in the pond, without discerning the fish themselves.”¹¹ And Baumgarten in his *Metaphysics* (which Kant used as a textbook for his own lectures on the subject) refers to any concept of a world as, in essence, completely filled:

¹⁰ For helpful analysis of this, see Watkins, *Kant on Laws*, chapter 8, and Ameriks, *Kant’s Elliptical Path*, chapter 11.

¹¹ Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 222. See also §3 from his *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* from 1714: “Everything is full in nature” (Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 207), as well as his letter to Johann Bernoulli dated January 13/23, 1699, that states a principle that Kant adopts full-heartedly: “For such places [i.e., vacuums] to remain contradicts wisdom. I think that there is nothing sterile and uncultivated in nature, even if many things seem that way to us” (Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 171).

In every world there are real parts (§354, 155). Each is connected [*verknüpft*] in its own way [*für sich*] with the whole [*dem Ganzen*] (§14, 157). Consequently, the individual parts are interconnected (§33). Thus, in every world there is a universal connection [*Zusammenhang*] of the parts and a universal harmony [*Harmonie*] (§48), i.e., *there is no island in the world* [*in mundo non datur insula*].¹²

The colorful, final phrase of this passage is one that Kant repeats in his own lectures on metaphysics, namely, in the *Metaphysik L₂*, which he delivered around the time of the third *Critique*'s original publication in 1790–1791. Kant writes: “in mundo non datur insula, and no thing [*kein Ding*] is independent from the other” (*V-Met-L2/Pölitz* 28:581). In turn, based on our employment of purposiveness to find all the ends of nature, we are led by a working hypothesis that all of nature (as a unified system) must be connected or attuned to the same game of ends. And this requires that we engage our imaginations, but in a rule-guided manner that abides by the same principles at work when judging parts of nature reflectively.

It is in this regard that Kant takes the metaphysical tradition of seeing all as connected, alive, and purposive and provides his own transcendental spin on it. It is not that we can know this dogmatically. But rather it lies in the particular constitution of our cognitive faculties that we cannot help but seek such a view in which this order arises. If we were left with islands of experience, we would not be able to continue applying our judgments universally with any stability, which must hold for our reasoning and judgments in one domain to be reasonably extended in other similar domains. Kant writes that the natural investigator's work will lack all grounding (be “entirely in vain”) unless one always “bases” judgment of things “whose concept as natural ends is indubitably established (organized beings) [...] on some original organization” (*KU* 5:418). At another point, Kant goes so far as to claim that the very “possibility of the purposive form [*Zweckform*] of the products of the animal and vegetable kingdoms cannot be conceived at all [*nicht zu denken ist*]” (*KU* 5:419)¹³ without some universally purposive organization ranging over the

¹² Baumgarten, *Metaphysik*, 199, my translation. See also Kant's *Mrongovius Metaphysics Lectures* for an explicit connection between the possibility of conceiving the world and the necessity of the principle of sufficient reason: “There is no chance in the world. [...] [Chance] runs contrary to the principle of sufficient reason [...], without which, however, no experience is possible. The world is a sum of appearances. In the world everything happens according to natural laws” (*V-Met/Mron* 29:923).

¹³ See also “For if one departs from this principle, then one cannot know with any certainty whether several of the elements are currently to be found in a species are not of contingent,

whole. As a result, though not constitutive of the very representations of experience for Kant, we cannot help but judge according to a *teleological principle of sufficient reason* (I will refer to this as the “TPSR”) when working our way through nature. Indeed, Kant refers to such a TPSR himself in the third *Critique*, when he writes that without a final end of the “nexus of ends discovered in [nature] with ideas of reason [...] we can form no common reference point for all these natural ends [*gemeinschaftlichen Beziehungspunkt aller dieser Naturzwecke*], no sufficient teleological principle [*kein hinreichendes teleologisches Prinzip*] for cognizing all the ends together in a single system” (*KU* 5:440–1).¹⁴ And this principle is at work not merely for the parts of nature, but indeed whenever we sit back and reflect on nature as it forms within experience as a whole. Indeed, we must possess it according to Kant since this is what makes it possible to judge individual entities as purposive in nature.

With this setup, we can now look specifically at the point where Kant lands on the highest good as serving for the concept that we discover, which can provide an answer for why the whole of creation exists. It is this process that most closely reveals Kant, as it were, providing a step-by-step walk through of how philosophical contemplation is required to fulfill the philosophical mission. And it is a task that is aimed at life-orienting wisdom (which I discuss in Part III), rather than pertaining to any particular domain, or serving primarily a purpose for action. After sketching this type of contemplation, I turn in the next section to explain how it relates to the negative constitutive judgments, which were my main topic in Part I.

Driven by the TPSR to judge why something exists in the first place is how Kant begins this search for where one can discover something that might account for not merely natural ends in the parts of nature, but rather a principle for the unity of the whole of nature organized teleologically. Initially, Kant thinks we are led inexorably to question why organisms exist at all. Looking to mere mechanical explanations, however, provides no resources for answering the question, indeed, undermines the possibility of the question itself: “If the mere mechanism of nature is assumed as the basis for the explanation of its purposiveness, then one cannot ask why the things in the world exist” (*KU* 5:434). Working with the TPSR, though, we are driven to

purposeless origin, and the principle of teleology, namely, that in an organized being nothing that is preserved in its procreation should be judged to be nonpurposive would thereby turn out to be quite unreliable in application” (*KU* 5:420, translation altered).

¹⁴ Translation altered to reorder “sufficient teleological principle” in line with the original German.

inquire why each thing exists, which inevitably leads to a series that, in turn, requires a final principle for why it as a whole exists.¹⁵ That is, as a system, nature cannot merely be viewed as a contingent series of ends, but rather as itself organized (as ends do) toward some unifying point around which all purposes are organized: that is, it must point toward a final end that anchors the chain of ends in one, systematic reason sufficient for all the rest. Thus, just as the parts cannot find full explanation in mechanical terms alone, the whole cannot find explanation by mere reference to mechanical causes.¹⁶

What end could serve to account for the whole of experienced nature, human-moral nature included? Having already given away the ending, Kant concludes this reflective search for the correct application of teleology to nature as a whole by pointing out that the highest good is the best candidate for the work of answering why nature or creation exists at all. But why?

This line of reflection of what end could serve to ground nature that ends with the highest good occurs in §§81–86 of the third *Critique*. Kant proceeds by the process of elimination to search through our experiences and judgments of nature for an end that will do. Ultimately, Kant thinks no end in nature will suffice since all such ends are conditioned and presuppose some condition. Only an end that is final, or one that is unconditioned by space and time, could successfully serve as the condition of nature itself: “A **final end** [*Endzweck*] is that end which needs no other as the condition of its possibility” (KU 5:434). Thus, in §§84–86, he develops the position that only one final end is on offer that can qualify. Indeed, the only final end of which we are aware is our moral nature as such¹⁷ and morality’s corresponding object, namely, the highest good as an unconditioned system of ends. That is, the only end that could possibly anchor our assumption of the thoroughgoing

¹⁵ Or as Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 210, puts it: “Thus *the sufficient reason*, which needs no other reason, must be outside this series of contingent things, and must be found in a substance which is its cause, and which is a necessary being, carrying the reason of its existence with itself. Otherwise, we would not yet have a sufficient reason where one could end the series.” See also Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 217–8.

¹⁶ Again, this thought is not original to Kant, but rather in line with Leibniz’s thought on where to seek the principle of sufficient reason for the world as such in *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* (1714): “For I have found that we must have recourse to *final causes* for this [i.e., to give a reason for the laws of motion], and that these laws do not depend upon the *principle of necessity* as do logical, arithmetical, and geometrical truths, but upon the *principle of fitness*, that is, upon the choice of wisdom. And this is one of the most effective and most evident proofs of the existence of God for those who can delve deeply into these matters” (Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 211). Kant, as always, adds his own characteristically transcendental spin on these, which separates him from the rationalists proper.

¹⁷ Since it is the only thing of which we are aware that sets ends for the sake of those ends themselves and these ends are *not* derived from sensible (spatiotemporal) experience.

order of the universe lies not in any object in nature, but rather a singular feature of our rational nature that points to the need to change the sensible world. Kant states: “Now of the human being (and thus of every rational being in the world), as a moral being, it cannot be further asked why [. . .] it exists. His existence contains the highest end itself, to which [. . .] he can subject the whole of nature” (*KU* 5:435). This is where Kant concludes with the weighty claim—unprecedented in any of his previous works—that we cannot help but judge the highest good as the final end of creation. A practical ideal outside of nature in reason, but somehow also a part of nature through us as natural beings doing our part to coauthor it is that which we must judge as the best answer for why the whole of nature is organized as it is. And after setting the period to conclude the sentence, the theologians rejoiced and many a naturalist groaned a heavy sigh.

For the remainder of this study, I will refer to this line of reflection just traced as Kant’s *ethico-teleological reflection*. It is this conclusion, ultimately, that I think illustrates already the importance of the highest good for human experience by the third *Critique*. It is, first and foremost, related to how we judge the world and our place in it. And it is obvious that Kant here is seeking to make good on a promise he made in the Introduction of the work, namely, to provide a “ground of the unity” that “makes possible the transition” (*KU* 5:176) between our theoretical and practical employments of reason. The highest good can deliver on this promise because it is a unique model of a purposive system. On the one hand, it is determined through practical reason as the complete object of morality. On the other hand, the highest good—as a system of ends—relates equally to nature as a whole, which is the regulative, theoretical idea of philosophy, for two reasons: First, it must be *realizable* in nature; and second, it can provide a grounding for the theoretical-speculative question of why nature exists in the first place. Hence, the highest good can bridge the practical-theoretical abyss. The added bonus is that—as purposive—it can equally serve as a grounding element for our reflective judgments of the beautiful, sublime, and organic as all determinate parts of one world, one experience. Poetically, the highest good acts as a sort of grand central station that can connect all the elements of reason as unified in one system, one view of the world.

I will return to analyze this place of the highest good in the construction of a philosophical worldview in Chapters 8 and 9. But it is worth highlighting that this role of the highest good reveals the convergence begun with Kant’s realization in the *Groundwork* that morality must serve as the only final end

fit for our reason. By the third *Critique*, Kant has now the epistemological framework in place to explain how it is that the principle of isolation can be upheld without standing in the way of the principle of systematic unity. Now, however, it is not just a question about how to interpret human history, but rather the question of how to construct a coherent theory of human experience through philosophy. The highest good's function, that is, in answering the question of why creation exists leads to a unique view of the whole of philosophical experience. This, as I will contend below, explains Kant's frequent reference to a *Weltbetrachtung* or view of the whole as "harmonizing" (*zusammenstimmen*) throughout the third *Critique*'s Doctrine of Method.

The ethico-teleological reflection is a line of thought that leads to a point where a moral ideal could serve as that which holds together the system as a whole. And the question that begins the search is not practical at all, but rather theoretical-teleological. The reason that this important work is partially overshadowed is by how Kant continues. Instead of letting things rest there, Kant continues in the next section with a moral proof for God's existence. And it is this section that is almost the exclusive focus of interpreters as they explain the role of the highest good in the third *Critique*.

7.2. Two Ways to Contemplate with an Ideal

But before turning to the moral argument, I would like to pause and very briefly address what might be a natural point of confusion. In Part I, I made the case that the ideal of the highest good served as a concept for a novel form of constitutive judgment (a negative constitutive judgment) for our evaluations of moral gradations in individual persons and states of affairs in experience. This knowledge is weaker than that provided by proper, positive constitutive judgments, in that it is of an approximating, scalar kind. And I argued further—as an extra motivation for adopting it—that it serves to fill, what I referred to as, a moral epistemic gap in Kant's theory. In that context, I said that a merely reflective judgment would not be a proper avenue for filling the gap (via the ideal). And yet now, lo and behold, I am saying that the highest good, as an ideal, is useful precisely for such a reflective judgment. A clarification, therefore, is called for as to how these two contemplative uses of the ideal relate.

First, the highest good, as a concept, is an ideal. It is a maximum of moral goodness individuated into the form of, for example, a subject (perfect moral

person, which Kant refers to at times as the “sage of the Stoics” or even as the “Christ”) and an object (a perfectly moral world as the highest derived good). Whatever judgment takes it up, it never loses this status. When evaluating cases of individuals or whole states of affairs in the world, we are employing these ideals—I argued—to evaluate comparative degrees of virtue, as well as the imbalance between virtue and proportionate happiness. We come to know these indirectly, namely, through our moral attempts and failures, or through the wretched plight of those whom we deem as deserving better, in that we cannot make sense of our evaluative descriptions without them. And, as determined by the moral law as a practical rule, ideals are not ad hoc, but rather constrained and determinant. Without these, we would cease to have grounds of comparison with which to estimate both shortcomings and, hope-inspiringly, ineliminable potential for moral growth.

Now, when we make our way in the world, the highest good appears to us only, as it were, through a glass darkly, and yet we manage to see it in some way nonetheless (which was what brought me to my heresy in Chapter 4). We cannot help but seek out a balance between virtue and happiness based on one’s worthiness, and we often—unreflectively—employ this very synthetic combination a priori when assessing the justice or injustice of situations as belonging or not belonging to the ideal order that we have access to in the ideal. When confronted with appearances that trigger us to note the deficiency, to various degrees, we judge negatively: *There is a gap of greater or lesser degree evident here*. And the concomitant cognition, I noted, most likely is a highly technical kind that Kant refers to as an “objectively practical theoretical cognition,” which while theoretical in form maintains a practical power. This power in the case of negative constituent judgments, I believe, can be understood in a straightforward way. Such a resulting cognition can serve us in many ways germane to a moral life. For example, we notice a deficiency in the world, which then informs us where we ought to engage ourselves. Or we notice, perhaps, that our lack of happiness is fitting for us, when we honestly assess that we prioritize a brutal business practice that seeks profits through duping unsuspecting investors. And this realization brings us to a point in which we become better primed to morally improve our characters. For even if we do not become happy, we at least will be able to feel as if we deserve it. That is, we can look at ourselves in the mirror and feel that we are doing our part. We are worthy members of the species, now, for whom one could wish happiness and judge that wish as correct, as opposed to perverse (as it would be if we were morally unworthy).

This is one form of contemplation in which the ideal as a concept is employed, and which we come to cherish and know in a way that defies easy understanding. But it by no means follows that the ideal must be restricted to this one form of judgment only. Rather, as a concept, it might be utilized in various judgments, depending on what the experience in question is and whether it is fitting. In this chapter, I have argued that the ideal is available as a concept for further use, now, in a different experiential mode of judgment.

Indeed, it is in this merely reflective judgment that we find a distinct form of contemplation that utilizes the ideal, which I have alluded to already above. “Contemplation,” beyond Kant’s own usage of it, proves an apt term precisely due to its (already noted) capacious quality. In this new form, the ideal of the highest good—first employed in evaluating comparative moral states of affairs in individuals—lends itself during an episode of reflection in which we contemplate differently. We are not facing a particular individual person or state of affairs, but rather we are stepping back and considering how the whole of experience fits together. How is it, say, that nature and morality might not merely be consistent, but further stand in a harmonious or mutually supporting manner?

Since we are after a *whole*, we know that we need an ideal (or idea, as Kant sometimes waffles between the terms), which provides a point around which all the various parts can be brought together as unified. This notion of wholes requiring ideas or ideals I already discussed in Part I. And relative to this ideal, we then must employ reason as that capacity that ranges over all judgments. In this case, we have—indeed—a textbook case of what he refers to as, “contemplation involving subtle reasoning in accordance with ideas” (*KU* 5:292). In particular, I think we have a case of what Kant further specifies at one point in the third *Critique* as “calm contemplation,” which he employs when discussing how we reason about the “last” or big questions such as: “to marvel at the greatness of God, for which a mood of calm contemplation and an entirely free judgment is requisite” (*KU* 5:263). When taking up calm contemplation,¹⁸ we have access to any ideal or idea that we want, as we engage it to bring unity to what reason finds across various domains of its use.

I have already given the reasons for Kant alighting on the highest good as his ideal of choice for contemplating how the whole of creation might form a well-unified whole. Some of these reasons, however, could not have

¹⁸ Kant mostly uses “contemplation” in the third *Critique* to refer to aesthetic judgments (see, e.g., *KU* 5:209, 247, 258, and 292).

been readily available to him earlier in the critical period. For instance, the fact that we require a final end for our contemplation of creation only arose thanks to Kant's innovations in the second *Critique* (Chapter 6). And the fact that the ideal was further enmeshed with how we assess the underlying order of nature and human history allowed for a convergence between nature and morality, both of which Kant at first thought needed to be kept strictly separate (Chapter 5). Thanks to the evolution of the highest good, the system's growth, and Kant's development of mere reflective judgments, a new use for the highest good in a more macro-scale form of contemplation arose. This new form of contemplation in which the highest good as an ideal is essential does not in any way negate its other use. The ideal, as with any concept, is a workhorse that can be useful in more than one domain of human experience and judgment. And its reality is important in both contemplative cases, for it is only by virtue of its universally valid status as a substrate that it can serve in both cases of contemplation as more than mere whim or fantasy (read: fiction). With reflective judgments, though, as I will discuss, the validity, even while universal, is subjective in a sense that differs from negative constituent judgments (as one might expect).

Now, why have these contemplative uses gone unnoticed in the literature? It is here, I think, where Kant is to blame for muddying his own waters. And the reason gets us back to the moral proof of God's existence in the third *Critique*, which overshadows the work of the highest good in the ethico-teleological reflection, which directly precedes it. The reason that the proof "muddies the waters" is because it is unnecessarily messy and at odds with itself, which has made it a great source of confusion in the literature. My view of the highest good serving as grounds for a philosophical worldview—I will argue in Part III—can make sense of it, but I first present the two, major views on offer, which have done their best so far.

7.3. The Main Competing Views

If one were to solely examine the ethico-teleological reflection, one would think that Kant has a function in mind for the highest good that is primarily about how we contemplate the whole of experience. It alone serves as the final end not only fit for every will, but further fit for our estimations of why the world itself exists as a whole. However, Kant follows the reflection with

the famous §87 in which he provides—as he has in each of the previous two *Critiques*—a proof for God’s existence.

It is a tantalizing feature of §87, the moral proof for God’s existence, that it—with its diminutive five pages—created two interpretive trends that are so different, so at odds. Indeed, it sucks one’s attention away from the ethico-teleological reflection just preceding it and might seem to shift the discourse into the sphere of action, despite the work being a critique of the power of judgment. This is the source of confusion that has led to two camps in the literature. For the sake of simplicity, I combine various interpretations together that are unique in detail. As a result, I do not intend to oversimplify any one view. Instead, I aim to articulate two broad trends of interpretation that appear entrenched. One interpretive camp thinks that Kant employs the highest good in a way similar to his argument from the second *Critique*, namely, that we require the highest good in order to be rational in our willing albeit in a “different and larger context.”¹⁹ This is the rational argument that I discussed in Chapter 6, albeit now involving teleological considerations. The other view thinks that Kant makes a new argument connected to our moral psychology, namely, that we need the highest good in order to stave off despair, shore up resolve, or limit hindrances of distraction that might otherwise interfere with acting from duty.²⁰

¹⁹ Wood, *Kant and Religion*, 49. See also Beck, *A Commentary*, 273n35: “The last time the moral argument is given in its classical form, involving both the components of the *summum bonum* is in *Critique of Judgment*, §87, where it is presented with only one modification.” Esser, “Applying the Concept,” 249, also seems to be in this camp: “Thus I think that what Kant means is this: we can actually only set a final end for ourselves if we can entertain the legitimate hope that our moral ends can be realized and that, should this actually prove successful, we will also be happy in correspondence with the realized moral demands” (see also 255). For a very thorough appraisal of the highest good in the *Religion*, see Pasternack, *Kant’s “Religion.”*

²⁰ Here one sees perhaps the greatest diversity of views, e.g., Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 361–71; Chignell, “*Demoralization and Hope*,” Englert and Chignell, “Kant on the Highest Good,” esp. 510–9; and Sussman, “The Highest Good.” Beiser, “Moral Faith and the Highest Good,” 616, also views this as the key point in the third *Critique*: “What Kant is looking for is not rewards for moral intentions and actions, but the motivation to persist in moral action at all. His ultimate worry is [...] *existential*: the despair that comes from believing that all our moral efforts and strivings in the world are in vain.” This group of views differ though from another camp. For instance, Fugate, “The Highest Good,” 142, also presents a version of moral-psychological argument, but it is needed “not to fulfill any rational need to believe that virtue will be crowned with bliss, but precisely so that we need not concern ourselves with happiness at all in our specifically moral deliberations.” Pasternack, “Restoring Kant’s Conception,” 463–4, also, I think, sees things in a similar vein, namely, that the highest good serves to counteract a tendency to despair. He even uses *worldview* in this context, though not as a technical term, such that the highest good and its religious postulates “do more than just address our psycho-social dynamics, but also offer for us a shared worldview that helps to offset the pessimism or even despair that would otherwise be borne from a belief that we are fundamentally

In broad strokes, the first view, which is again the *rational argument*, interprets the argument as follows: The moral law commits us to realize the highest good. If we are committed to realize any project *p*, then *p* must be possible in order for our willing of *p* to be rational. To ensure the rationality of moral action and continue the work as a rationally sensible (i.e., not patently false) endeavor, we postulate God working with us toward the goal in nature—which is teleological to boot.

This view—interpreters might think—is “extended” in the third *Critique* through our teleological judgments (both moral and physical) about nature as a system. If we cannot help but judge nature’s final end as the highest good, then it seems like the rationality of morality can be vouchsafed. Nature itself supplements our efforts. But to think of nature in this way requires that we believe that this harmony between morality and nature is somehow not contingent or unguided, but rather determinate and will result in a necessary proportionality between virtue and happiness. God, as an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good creator, fits the bill as a source to explain this determinate harmony between nature and morality. Hence, we ought to believe in God in order to uphold morality’s rationality. This is a familiar argument, proposed from our perspectives within the control center of action. For the sake of rationally grounding the validity of moral action, we postulate the real-making conditions of the highest good.

The other view in the literature, which I will refer to as the moral-psychological view, sees the *bindingness* of the moral law as independent of the highest good’s realizability. Instead, it contends that a new relation to the highest good arises in the third *Critique*. It focuses instead on the famous remarks Kant makes about Spinoza, as a virtuous atheist, which come at the end of §87. There Kant asks: “How would [Spinoza] judge his own inner purposive determination by the moral law, which he actively honors?” (*KU* 5:452). Kant answers on the virtuous atheist’s behalf that without belief in the conditions of the highest good (God and a future life), a virtuous atheist would have a worldview in which all striving was, essentially, pointless. In a famous and often cited passage, which I will call Kant’s *fire and brimstone* passage, he depicts in graphic detail the resulting worldview:

corrupt beings.” Ebels-Duggan, “The Right, the Good,” 92, also thinks that we get God as a way of staving off a morality-crippling despair that will arise because of a “full-blown practical conflict.” However, she does not think that this requires the whole highest good, and thus is an outlier in this camp, pitched as it were on the furthest outskirts. I share with her the view that the moral law should not require stabilization whatsoever.

Deceit, violence, and envy will always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable, and benevolent; and the righteous ones besides himself [. . .] will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, [. . .], to all the evils of poverty, illnesses, and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth, and will always remain thus until one wide grave engulfs them all together [. . .] and flings them, who were capable of having believed themselves to be the final end of creation, back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn. (KU 5:452)

In the subsequent, concluding line, Kant concludes that such a virtuous atheist would face a choice. Either one “would certainly have to give up as impossible [the end of morality]” (KU 5:452) or, somehow maintaining moral commitment, one would suffer “damage to the moral disposition” (KU 5:452–3). This passage (along with two more²¹) creates the impression that Kant sees a moral-psychological need grounding our belief in God.

The argument in a nutshell, then, shares the first premise with the rational argument, namely, that we are committed to realize the highest good. Instead of a rational constraint, though, it bases itself on an assumed fact of human psychology: If we commit to any project *p*’s realization, then we must be assured that project *p* is possible in order to maintain our resolve. If we believe that the world is going to hell in a handbasket and that nothing we do matters, then our moral striving will likely suffer damage. God—as in the rational view—is the only hope for the highest good’s possibility and, consequently, secures our resolve. Thus, we ought to believe in God.

The argument, laid out more formally, would go like this:

Moral-Psychological Argument

1. The moral law commits us to realize the highest good. (Transcendental Assumed Premise)

²¹ A single line from the “remark” of the previous section (KU 5:446) and a single passage from the *Religion* (RGV 6:5) are the other two that seem to support the moral-psychological view best. It might appear that these passages show Kant reverting to his position in the Canon chapter of the first *Critique* and earlier lectures on ethics where Kant explicitly endorses a motivational need grounding the highest good’s importance (see, e.g., KrV A812/B840). However, advocates of this reading disagree that Kant reverts to his old position. The psychological need in the third *Critique* has nothing to do with motivation they maintain, but rather addresses a human frailty that might derail successful, sustained commitment to the project of realizing the highest good.

2. If we commit to any project *p*'s realization, then we must be assured that project *p* is possible in order to maintain our resolve or not be hindered. (Moral-Psychological Fact)
3. We require assurance that the highest good is possible (or cannot be distracted by its potential impossibility) since we will otherwise lose our resolve or be hindered in acting morally. (1,2)
4. Only God's aid would assure us of the highest good's possibility. (Transcendental Postulate)
- C. Thus, to stave off crippling despair (which would undermine our resolve or hinder us), one must believe in God's existence. (3,4)

This argument is similar, of course, to the rational argument. However, it sees the issue as ultimately in how we are constituted as finite beings. The focus shifts away from the rationality of acting moral to the needs of beings in keeping up their resolve to be moral due to our unavoidable vulnerability to despair. It is similar in form to the motivational argument from before, in that the role of the highest good in the control center of action is one of keeping us going. Rather than motivating us to continue the mission despite all signs in the control center pointing toward its failure, this argument seeks to fortify our resolve without rewards. We are pointed to the possibility of success that, if we believe in it, might very well be that which gets us to our mission goal. There is something akin to the Jamesian will to believe going on here, though as already noted there are a host of varying interpretations.

Where the two views disagree is on why we ostensibly require the highest good to act morally. The rational argument asserts that the impossibility of the highest good would destroy the link between our deliberative process and morality by revealing the moral law as nothing but a hollow dream. The moral-psychological argument, by contrast, posits that the impossibility of the highest good leaves the link between the moral law and the control center of action intact, but erodes our deliberative process' efficacy.

It is important to note before moving on that, while strikingly different, both views of the argument are similar in an important respect. Namely, both agree that the highest good is important for the sake of what goes on when deliberating, deciding, and acting. That is, the highest good is important for how it relates to the control center of action. Both views also agree that the impossibility of the highest good (i.e., if God's existence is denied) would lead to negative consequences for agency. It is on this point where my interpretive approach differs since it remains detached from this process and

trusts the moral law to do its work—let the consequences fall as they may. And while my view will share some family resemblances with the rational view, it is distinct for many reasons, one of which is this: The highest good belongs primarily outside the control center of action.

7.4. Etiology of an Interpretive Confusion

To understand how five pages can give rise to two distinct views, it is informative to look at the form of §87 itself. It immediately becomes clear, when one does, why these two competing interpretations have arisen since the form of the section presents something akin to a duck-rabbit image. Depending on where one looks, two different proofs appear in the offing. My analysis here, therefore, provides an etiology behind the interpretive confusion. Kant is making things harder than necessary. However, it also invites the search for a third view, which I provide in Part III.

In Figure 7.1, I present a schematic presentation of §87. Looking at how segments communicate completed thoughts, one can conclude that the section has at least three clearly distinguishable parts. The main part (I) is the proof proper, which runs for three pages. Afterward, there is a break marked by three stars. This break signals the end of the proof. We can be certain of this because Kant says so explicitly in his note (II), which follows the stars directly. Though Kant does not label it as such, all that comes after the stars clearly qualifies as a remark. This includes the final part (III), which presents the virtuous atheist as a comparative case study through the fire and brimstone passage.

Stepping back, one sees why two views have arisen: Focus on (I) where there seems to be an emphasis on fitting nature and morality together harmoniously, and one sees a proof with a passing resemblance to the rational argument; focus on (II) and (III), and one sees an argument based on our moral-psychological needs.

Examining the parts of §87 further provides exegetical reasons that complicate either of the established views claiming a definitive status. Beginning with the rational view, it is problematic because Kant in (II) appears to distance himself explicitly from his rational argument à la the second *Critique*. Kant writes:

This proof[. . .] is not meant to say that it is just as necessary to assume the existence of God as it is to acknowledge the validity of the moral law, hence that

§87
The Moral Proof of
God's Existence

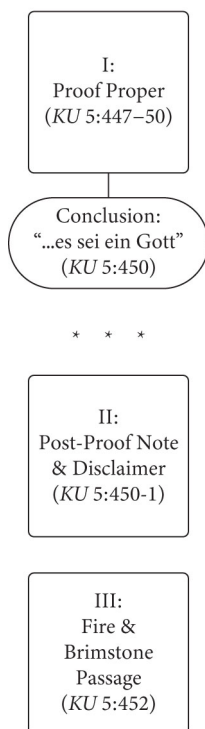


Figure 7.1 Kant's proof concludes with 'es sei ein Gott,' followed by corollary remarks after the caesura.

whoever cannot convince himself of the former can judge himself to be free from the obligations of the latter. No! All that would have to be surrendered in that case would be the **aim** of realizing the final end in the world [. . .]. *Every rational being would still have to recognize himself as forever strictly bound to the precept of morals; for its laws are formal and command unconditionally, without regard to ends.* (KU 5:450–1, emphasis added)

Both emphasized portions make it clear that there is no rational constraint on moral volitions based on the highest good's realizability. Whatever occurred in the proof proper, this passage suggests that it is not the case that we are testing the consistency of the moral law and nature on a grander scale.

Indeed, Kant thinks, that sort of consistency has already been established. In section IX of the third *Critique's* Introduction, Kant refutes any claim that nature and morality stand in a “contradictory” relation (*KU* 5:195–6) or even a problematic one. Kant asserts that freedom influencing the world “is possible,” that is, is consistent with treating nature as fully determined by natural laws.²² Hence, morality’s validity is established *tout court*. All that is required for the rational constraint to be met is that nature and morality are reconciled. The problem Kant addresses in the proof proper, by contrast, is different and requires more than mere reconciliation. Instead, it deals with whether morality and freedom *harmonize* in one world. Since I detail this in the next part, I leave it purposely underdeveloped here.

Turning to the moral-psychological view, proponents of the rational view can find it problematic for different exegetical reasons. First, nowhere in the proof proper (I) does Kant mention despair or human frailty. Indeed, there is no talk of our moral psychology anywhere in the proof. Instead, the focus is on our “moral teleology” (*KU* 5:447) and the need to make “moral thinking . . . coherent” (*KU* 5:451n) or the need to “conceive” [*vorstellen*] how two necessary judgments “harmonize” [*zusammenstimmen*] (*KU* 5:450) with each other when reflecting on experience and the last questions of existence. Apropos to a critique about the power to judge and its proper application to nature as a whole, the proof proper seems, *prima facie*, about achieving coherency between necessary judgments that might not appear to relate meaningfully to each other.

Second, the only passages that support the moral-psychological reading are arguably intended as a remark *about* the proof. Why did Kant include them? There are many possible reasons. A strong philosophical interpretation in favor of this moral-psychological function is that Kant, at this time, was also thinking about radical evil, which he thought to be a universal feature of human beings. This radical evil is an inclination to subvert the good to our own selfish interests rooted in our inescapably physical nature. And one degree of radical evil concerns our “frailty” (*RGV* 6:29), which pertains to our resolve in following through with morally challenging demands. The highest good and its conditions might be an antidote to this by retraining our focus on morality. And as a universal feature of human beings, perhaps

²² Because of the third antimony from the first *Critique* and because of the fact of reason in the second.

we could say that it is practically necessary *for us*.²³ That said, I think that the proof proper (I) shows something else going on than what this view promotes, and which leads me to think that much more is going on in the third *Critique's* Doctrine of Method without being mutually exclusive.

Another possible explanation (albeit not the only) candidate is that after explicitly ending the proof, Kant wanted to offer a public-facing commentary about the intuitive pull of the argument. While unnecessary for the proof to work, his commentary in (III) might provide an added benefit to certain persons who are prone to despair and who might find succor in the proof. But it is not for these people that the proof exists, and their frailty need not be presupposed, nor humanity's universal frailty for the sake of the proof. Securing our moral disposition, that is, might be a beneficial side effect of the proof, but is actually not part of its logical infrastructure.

7.5. Kant's Attempts to Contain the Confusion

To conclude, attention must be paid to the time period of 1790–1794, as it provides clues of why Kant thought the highest good might be of importance over and above those moments when we are morally striving, namely, in fulfilling a contemplative need that supervenes on all domains of experience.

Kant published the third *Critique* in 1790. Though a huge success, Kant's contemporaries were just as confused by §87 as we are today. In 1792, Kant was confronted by an interpretation of his proof that seems to fall somewhere in between the rational and moral-psychological (though identical to neither) view by Christian Garve, a highly esteemed contemporary and friend. What we see is that—once confronted with this interpretation of his work in 1792—Kant immediately sought to correct it as a mistaken interpretation.

Garve's interpretation is in his 1792 work, *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Litteratur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben*.²⁴ In a lengthy remark placed at the end of Volume One, Part I of the work (essentially a long endnote), Garve voices his confusion about what is going on with the highest good in the third *Critique*. Garve begins the remark by noting that there is a theoretical debate about whether “moral

²³ Fugate, “The Highest Good,” as well as Pasternack, “Restoring Kant's Conception,” as noted above, have done the most work to my knowledge in presenting this line of interpretation.

²⁴ Since there are no translations of Garve's work into English, all translations are my own.

perfection [*moralische Vollkommenheit*]²⁵ or happiness constitutes the final end of creation. Garve then examines what he views as an issue for certain philosophers—that is, Kantians—who read the final end of creation as first and foremost constituted by moral perfection. Since this passage is (to my knowledge) not available in English, I translate it here in full. It is mainly this passage that elicited Kant's responses:

Those who claim the former [i.e., that moral perfection constitutes the final end of creation], nevertheless do not trust themselves to separate happiness from virtue for eternity. Indeed, they want that the observance of the moral law to be—without any consideration of happiness at all—the only final end of creation; the one viewed as the only final end of the creator. Yet they view virtue nevertheless under the point of view, that it provides *worthiness* to become happy to the rational being, which distinguishes itself through this [distinction]. They even agree that the virtuous person—during his unselfish obedience to the moral law—never can nor may lose sight of that point of view [that includes his happiness]. Never may, I say, because otherwise the transition to the invisible world, which leads to the certainty of the existence of God and immortality, is completely lost; *a certainty, in fact, which according to the theory of these philosophers themselves is actually necessary in order to give the moral system support and stability.* The virtuous person, therefore, strives—according to these principles—unceasingly to be worthy of happiness but—in so far he is truly virtuous—never to be happy. Indeed, he thinks about his obedience to the moral law always in relation to *wellbeing* with which it has a natural connection grounded in reason. But he disregards completely this wellbeing from his final ends, when he actually proves his obedience [to the moral law].²⁶

In a nutshell, Garve is highlighting that happiness for Kantians appears baked into moral actions (whether admitted or not) in order to account for how one can sustain moral commitment. It is not because we require the promise of happiness as a reward for acting morally, but rather because it is the crucial element of the highest good that we ourselves cannot bring about. To ensure its possibility, we require God. Without God, there is no highest good as well as, in turn, no “support and stability,” as Garve notes in the

²⁵ Garve, *Versuche*, 111.

²⁶ Garve, *Versuche*, 111–2, emphasis added.

emphasized portion. Garve here is suggesting that—despite remarks to the contrary—psychological needs for a morally stable system seem to drive the inclusion of the highest good along with our need that it be completed, God permitting. We need psychological support, which is why we cannot give up on the idea of complete happiness, but we determine ourselves to act as if it were not actually going to happen. Somehow, though, the latter appears conditioned on the former, Garve suggests.

Thanks to Garve's criticism, we can approach Kant's considered view through how he responded to this initial reading. Indeed, Kant responded in a flurry of activity from 1792 to 1794. The flurry allows us to conclude that Kant wanted to refute Garve's interpretation publicly, as well as posit the highest good as important for a different reason.

Kant first took action by making an addition to the second edition of the third *Critique*, which he undertook in 1792 (the second edition was subsequently published in 1793). To understand why this change stands out, it is important to note that Kant was quite content with the first edition of the third *Critique*, as is evidenced in his correspondence with his publisher at the time. The third *Critique* was something of a philosophical bestseller when it first appeared in 1790; it quickly sold out. François Théodore de Lagarde, Kant's publisher, felt an urge, subsequently, to ramp up sales with the second edition and suggested to Kant in correspondence that they market it with a "second and improved edition" subscript under the title. On October 2, 1792, Kant responded and forbade "adding the phrase 'second *improved* edition' to the title of the edition [. . .] since it is not completely honest" (*Br* 11:359, my translation). Kant's reason is that the additions are too few in number and not significant on their own to serve as a "special impetus for its purchase" (*Br* 11:359, my translation). While minor and selective in one sense, this also tells us that, first, they are targeted to issues that Kant thought in need of extra support and, second, they are clearly important enough for addition in an otherwise well-pleasing work.

One of these additions is a long footnote attached to the final line of the proof proper (I) of §87, that is, right at the end of the concluding line: "es sei ein Gott.*". The asterisk connects with the footnote that Kant fits at the juncture where the proof itself ends and the remark (plus disclaimer) begins (II). The importance of this footnote cannot be overstated. Not only does it clarify what the proof is not about, but it further gives the greatest clue as to what it is about:

This moral argument is not meant to provide any **objectively** valid proof of the existence of God, nor meant to prove to the doubter that there is a God; rather, it is meant *to prove that if his moral thinking is to be coherent [konsequent], he must include* the assumption of this proposition among the maxims of his practical reason.—Thus it is also not meant to say that it is necessary to assume the happiness of all rational beings in the world in accordance with their morality **for** morals, but rather that it is necessary **through** their morality. (*KU* 5:450–451n, emphasis added)²⁷

First, Kant's last sentence clearly refutes Garve's interpretation. The moral proof is not there *for the sake* of securing our morality, but rather because it is "necessary **through**" morality. This "through"-clause I clarify below. Second—and most important—Kant clearly in the underlined portion tells us what the proof is about, i.e., what the stakes are. And these stakes are *konsequent* moral thinking. By the term, "konsequent," Kant has a special technical sense in mind, which I explore in Chapter 8. It is enough for now to simply flag its importance as the essential clue to unlock the proof proper. And part of the reason for this is that this clue helps to connect the moral proof with the work of the highest good that occurs in the ethico-teleological reflection. It is still a moral proof in so far as it is exploring our *moral* thinking, but it is not a moral proof in that its starting point is the moral command to realize the highest good. Instead, it is a testing of whether the object of morality is coherent given what we otherwise must judge about nature. And if it checks out as coherent, then the highest good's work as grounding a system of philosophy can proceed in line with the ethico-teleological reflection by unifying the two main domains and lesser fiefdoms of philosophical cognition. This also explains more elegantly its connection with the sections preceding it, as well as is more cogent within a critique of judgment.

If one focuses, though, on *only* the moral proof for God's existence in §87, then it might seem that Kant here is only concerned (in a critique of the power of judgment) with trying to ground his moral project in our judgments of nature. But if one, instead, takes a step back and reflects on the question to which the highest good provides an answer, a different emphasis emerges: namely, that its fit in experience relates to a reflective judgment about the whole of experience. That is, the highest good's coherency is part

²⁷ I have changed the Cambridge translation, namely, by replacing "consistent" for *konsequent* (as in the translation) with "coherent." The two mean different things, as will become clear in Chapter 8.

of a long train of thought aimed at finding a systematic outlook on the whole of experience.²⁸

Kant's refutation of Garve's moral-psychological reading continues in the other works that he was finishing at the time. In his *Religion Within the Limits of Mere Reason*, which Kant finally could publish in its entirety (after getting around the royal censure) in the spring of 1793, he fills the first few pages of the Preface with remarks obviously aimed at Garve (e.g., see, *RGV* 6:3–4). For example, he writes: "These [moral laws], namely, command absolutely—the success, which one wants, be as it may—indeed, they even necessitate us to abstract completely away from their success when faced with a particular action" (*RGV* 6:3). And that:

All human beings could have enough to go on, if they would only (as they should) uphold the precept of pure reason in the law. *What need have they to know the results of their moral actions and trials which will be brought to pass by the course of things in the world?* And they make thereby duty into an object of the highest respect, *without presenting and prescribing us with an end (and final end).* (*RGV* 6:7n, emphases added)²⁹

These remarks in the Preface to the *Religion* combine well with Kant's remarks against Garve's interpretation in the essay, *On the Common Saying: That might be correct in theory, but it doesn't work in practice*, published in 1793

²⁸ Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 169, misses this key significance of the highest good in the third *Critique*, while getting close in other respects: "As a regulative ideal, the conception of the absolute value of freedom can serve to motivate our practical behavior and guide it toward rational coherence, just as the regulative ideal of the systematicity of natural laws can serve to guide as well as motivate our theoretical inquiry. [...] This purpose is ultimately a conception by means of which we ourselves can make sense of our own nature, not something that nature imposes on us. By seeing our freedom as the ultimate end of nature, we can give ourselves a dignity that we lack as mere organisms of nature." For one, the moral proof—as I have reconstructed it—is not about "motivating" or "guiding" our "practical behavior," and it is not meant to "give us dignity." The moral law and our rational capacities achieve this sufficiently. Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 170, thinks that the third *Critique* represents a culmination of Kant's attempt to "prove the unconditional value of freedom" via teleological judgments, but which Kant—Guyer thinks—must surrender: "The *Critique of Judgment* is not a simple reassertion of the teleological argument but rather a sorrowful good-bye to it." Here, Guyer misreads the doctrine of method in the third *Critique*. The goal is not, I think, the proving of freedom's absolute value. Instead, it is the leveraging of freedom's inherent, absolute value (which we just know, cf. *KU* 5:468) to serve as a foundation for establishing a philosophical outlook of the whole system that Kant has just completed building (or so he thinks).

²⁹ This translation from the *Religion* is my own. I have discovered some inconsistencies and slight, but meaningful, errors in the Cambridge translation. In particular, di Giovanni fails to distinguish "letzte Zweck" and "Endzweck," often translating the latter as "ultimate end," despite the terms having distinct technical uses by this time in Kant's works (cf. di Giovanni's translation of *RGV* 6:6 for such an instance).

and in which Kant refers to Garve by name. For example, Kant writes that we do not require the highest good because morality, thereby, “gets a sure ground and the requisite strength of incentive” (*TP* 8:279). Quite the opposite, Kant thinks morality to have firm footing, regardless of one’s beliefs in the conditions or realizability of the highest good.

But what now is the importance of the highest good according to Kant? If this ideal holds any reality for us, in what does its reality consist? I will turn now in Part III to answering these questions by returning to the highest good’s conceptual form as a practical ideal, reconstructed in Part I, as an available substrate to be used in a new form of calm contemplation.

PART III

IDEALS AND
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A
WORLDVIEW

8

Kantian Coherence as a Contemplative Need

My analysis up until now has tracked how Kant's theory of the highest good evolved in how it related to ends in the world. It began as a mere ideal, separate from all contingent ends [*Zwecke*]. It ended with the third *Critique* as the only final end fit to judge as the purpose of all creation. Along the way, I pointed out how Kant related the highest good to the control center of action, respectively, as a reward motivating good moral behavior (first *Critique*), a rational constraint on the validity of acting moral in the first place (second *Critique*), or a moral support system (third *Critique*). I think, however, that the highest good's most compelling and prominent function from this period shifts and is made legible only if one catches the clue that Kant provides from the added footnote. Employing this clue along with rediscovering a lost technical term of Kant's that was used by him in the first edition's proof, which he adopted from the carpentry trade, enables one to decrypt this overlooked function. In the process, the main point of the moral proof in the third *Critique* shows itself to actually point elsewhere and, indeed, be primarily about how we *judge* the whole of experience relative to an ideal. As a result, the highest good, as a practical ideal, can be best understood in a different capacity than one pertaining directly to determining the will (though it might have secondary uses in the control center of action as others have argued). And at the end of the previous chapter, I began presenting the evidence that Kant himself moves away from his experimentation of relating the highest good to action. Now that the path is clear, I conclude my study with a presentation of a new view of the highest good's importance for us according to Kant, namely, as the grounding of a philosophical worldview won through philosophical contemplation. This provides a systematic outlook of the whole of experience.

Part III has two goals: First, I want to provide a positive account of how the highest good serves in the process of forming a systematic outlook through

contemplation. This systematic outlook, I will argue, fulfills primarily a contemplative need in the production of a worldview. This and the next chapter together explain this contemplative function of the highest good and why it is important for us as rational beings. The second goal will be to connect the results of Part I with this new function of the highest good: Can a coherent model arise in which the highest good fulfills the function of practical ideals (articulated in Part I) *and* enables a reflective act of creating a systematic outlook? I began connecting these at the end of Part II, but go into more detail now about the philosophical significance and appeal of these unique contemplative functions of the ideal.

In this chapter, I aim first to examine thoroughly the textual evidence and present a philosophical reconstruction of Kant's less-than-clear assertions about the use of the highest good as he was completing his system with the third *Critique* and working on texts to respond to criticisms of it, in particular Garve's (discussed in Chapter 7). I continue where I left off in the previous chapter. The question was, if not for securing the moral system, what possible function could the highest good to serve? What work does it provide, which if left aside, would be missed?

I will now build the case for seeing a further contemplative function for the highest good's fulfilling a need¹ we have, namely, a need that we possess as beings who find deeper meaning in an experience that is "coherent," or *konsequent*. For, as I argued in Chapter 7, Kant arrived at a point where the highest good came to the rescue in providing a unifying substrate in enabling a meta-reflective judgment about how it is possible to create a systematic outlook for the whole of experience: That is, it came to serve in connecting, as a proverbial grand central station, all the regions of reason together as their common hub. This role was detailed in the ethico-teleological reflection. As a practical ideal, it is, of course, still engaged in any moment of comparative moral judgment of individuals relative to the ideal, but it is now serving a further role as a point of reference in reason for contemplating how the whole might hang together.

The search for an answer as to why nature exists, after all, was the starting point for the investigation. Thus, the highest good proved crucial in reflections to make sense of experience *as an ordered system*. And making

¹ My reading shares some similarities with other attempts that seek to place the importance of the highest good as primarily systematic in nature, e.g., Düsing, "Das Problem des höchsten Gutes," 155–9; Förster, "What Is the 'Highest Point,'" 216; Loudon, "The End of All Human Action," 114–7; Sweet, *Kant on Freedom, Nature, and Judgment*; and Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's*, chapter 17.

sense of experience as an ordered system fulfills a fundamental need that we have as philosophical beings—as contemplative beings. This fundamental need, in sum, is the need to feel at home in the world through contemplating it and discover meaning to the extent that it provides a harmonious system, shot through by intelligibility and interconnections of support, rather than one that is disconnected and fraught with tension. And while it is not, of course, necessary for human survival *per se*; it is necessary—Kant thought—if one wants to flourish as a rational being. The highest good, in short, becomes about how we find meaning in experience as a whole. This new role for the highest good, which concludes with the construction of a worldview relative to the ideal, stretches past any of the previous arguments that saw it as primarily involved in the control center of action.

To get at this further contemplative function, attention must be paid to Kant's notion of coherence, which is highly nuanced and often conflated with (and translated as) meaning the same as “consistent” or “cogent.” Returning to the clue noted at the end of the previous chapter, namely, that the highest good is important for coherent moral thinking, I will now show that coherent thinking is for Kant part of a larger philosophical goal that must be global in scope and is formative of one's very experience as a whole. In this section, I present a terminological discovery that has gone overlooked in the literature, but which explains why the philosophical mission is at the forefront of his thinking when attempting to bring together his system of experience. What has been overlooked, namely, is that coherence for Kant sets a much higher bar than mere logical consistency. That's the first point. And the second, connected point is that coherence sets a much higher bar because of how it effects our experience as a whole and contributes to an enriched, flourishing experience through philosophy.

8.1. Coherence as the Highest Philosophical Goal

Picking up from the end of the previous chapter, Kant had to clarify his position, thanks to Garve. The highest good is important—from the key clue in the added footnote to §87—for the sake of coherent [*konsequent*] moral thinking. But what does it mean to think coherently? And how is this related to the ethico-teleological reflection about nature as a whole that precedes the proof?

First, we must excavate what Kant meant by “konsequent.” *Konsequent* thinking, that which Kant used to answer Garve, is philosophy's ultimate

goal as a doctrine of wisdom.² In the second *Critique*, Kant notes: “To be coherent [*Consequent zu sein*], is the greatest obligation [*Obliegenheit*] of a philosopher and yet the most rarely found” (*KpV* 5:24, translation modified).³ And in the third *Critique*, Kant identifies *konsequent* thinking as the third and final maxim for good thinking, which he refers to as the *sensus communis logicus*,⁴ namely, “3. *Jederzeit mit sich selbst einstimmig denken*.”⁵ This third maxim, Kant expounds in a way similar to the second *Critique*, as a “coherent way of thinking” [*konsequente Denkungsart*], which is “the most difficult to attain and can also only be attained through a combining of the first two” (*KU* 5:295). What is it about coherent thinking that is so challenging? The key clue is in how Kant identified it with another term that has a telling origin, namely, *bündig*.

This identification between *konsequent* and *bündig* occurs in his *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic* from 1792 (delivered as he was responding to Garve and drafting the footnote added to the second edition of the third *Critique*): “*Bündig* means the same as *konsequent*, that everything stands in *nexu*, in connection [*Zusammenhange*]. The coherent is the highest thing in the use of our cognition—to be consequent [*konsequent*]” (*V-Lo/Dohna* 24:735). And one arrives at this highest goal, Kant clarifies, when a series of cognitions that are in tune with “logical laws” can “harmonize” together [*zusammenhängen*] as a “system” (*V-Lo/Dohna* 24:736).⁶ To achieve coherent thinking, therefore, is the goal of philosophy that seeks to make out of a consistent set of cognitions something more, namely: a *harmonious* system.

What has gone overlooked in the literature is the synonymous nature of *konsequent* thinking with “*bündiges*” thinking, as well as the connected appreciation of *bündig*’s meaning in its original etymological context, which further fleshes out the philosophical implications of the terms. Once one begins hunting for the meaning of *bündig*, one discovers that it was actually a

² Kant says this often, e.g., “[Philosophy’s] sole preoccupation is wisdom” (*KrV* A850/B878).

³ Here is a point where “*konsequent sein*” is translated as “consistency,” which oversimplifies Kant’s meaning.

⁴ He speaks about this general *sensus communis* in order to make sense of a subspecies of it, namely, the *sensus communis aestheticus*. Kant is careful though to note that these three maxims “do not properly belong here,” i.e., as strictly aesthetic, but rather can be used as a heuristic to articulate the starting principle of such a sense (*KU* 5:294).

⁵ All three maxims are found at *KU* 5:294. They are repeated also in the *Anthropology* (*Anth* 7:200) and *Jäsche Logic* (*Log* 9:57). Merritt, *Kant on Reflection*, 78–9, provides an excellent resource for tracking other instances of the three maxims.

⁶ In Reflection 2440, Kant also scribbled together: “*bündig*, in connection and system, in proofs” (*Refl* 16:368), as well as identified them in Reflection 2437, where he notes their identity: “*bündig*, consequent” (*Refl* 16:367).

term that Kant adopted from the carpentry trade, and which one must have heard thrown around when interacting with Zimmermänner or Schreiner (carpenters). Its technical meaning reveals that what might seem like a minor point of semantics, in fact, unlocks the philosophical importance of Kant's notion of coherence. And this has gone overlooked, I think, by contemporary scholars because, on the one hand, "bündig" in contemporary German means "succinct" or "compact," and, on the other hand, no alarm bells have gone off that the original meaning ought to be double checked due to Kant's infrequent use of the term.

When checked, one finds that *bündig's* meaning in Kant's day was different. It pertained to the goal of any worthy carpenter and Kant derived from this a figurative meaning for philosophical argument. When consulting the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by the Brothers Grimm, both meanings of *bündig* are presented. The literal meaning is a term carpenters used to describe the ideal formation of an edifice by "exactly placed and connected carpentry beams."⁷ The figurative meaning, which takes its cue from this literal meaning for carpenters, applies it to philosophical argument as pertaining to the "often abstract, from itself connecting, setting [of] determinations and inferences." The clincher that demonstrates the importance this term possessed for Kant is evident in the fact that one of the listed sources of *bündig's* figurative, philosophical meaning by the Brothers Grimm (as well as its nominalization into *Bündigkeit*) is none other than Immanuel Kant himself. A coherent proof, in reference to Kant's usage, goes beyond mere noncontradiction between judgments. It is, indeed, as the above passages noted, the *highest* to be sought after in philosophy, because it shows how all of one's inferences fit together, as it were, like the beams in a well-made house.

Once one is tuned into *Bündigkeit* or coherence in this sense, one notices that Kant sandwiches his moral proof in §87 between two explicit references to coherence in this technical sense. As already mentioned, Kant adds the footnote to the second edition in which he underscores that the proof is for coherent (*konsequent*) moral thinking. This footnote is, as it were, finishing the proof proper off, attached to the very last line. However, this addition must have seemed redundant to Kant. For when one looks to the beginning of the proof proper where Kant is setting things up, he employs none other

⁷ My translations from the original *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm* entry "Bündig" (i.e., before the revisions undertaken in 1957). The first, literal meaning of *bündig* is "von genau gefügten und verbundenen zimmerbalken," while the figurative meaning is "häufig abstract, von sich bindenden, fügenden bestimmungen und schlüssen."

than the term *Bündigkeit* to describe what he is attempting to show. That is, at the beginning of the proof proper (marked as part “I” from Fig. 7.1) where Kant sets the stakes for the proof, he writes: “We will first describe the progress of reason from that moral teleology and its relation to the physical [teleology] to **theology**, and will subsequently consider the possibility and *Bündigkeit* of this sort of inference” (KU 5:448). Thus, after having just finished the ethico-teleological proof from the previous sections, coherence or *Bündigkeit* was on Kant’s mind: The fate of his systematic outlook of philosophy depended on the structural integrity of how everything fit together in a mutually supporting manner. If read in this light, the proof proper can be read as Kant’s attempt to complete the edifice of philosophy by testing the systematic outlook of the foregoing philosophical contemplation. It is about testing whether the object of morality and value in the world are coherent, given what we otherwise judge about nature. And if this final check is successful, then the highest good’s function in grounding a systematic outlook of the whole of experience can persist in unifying the two domains and even throwing a bridge to religion.

It is worth lingering with *Bündigkeit* and *konsequent* thinking to unpack their shared philosophical significance. First, both only apply to wholes that are organized relative to an idea in Kant’s sense. This is the key difference from mere consistency, which lacks any reference to a unifying idea. One could, that is, arbitrarily determine a logically consistent set by thinking A and B together if A and B do not stand in contradiction to one another. But this, on its own, does not entail that A and B are coherent or *bündig*. To be coherent in Kant’s sense, A and B must be mutually related to a third concept (an idea) C that explains why A and B are present and related as they are. While the former, consistency, sets a low cognitive bar in which A and B need not support each other toward a common end, coherency requires that A and B stand in a relation determined by the unity in which they are parts.

Two beams—before being fit together into a frame of a house—might, when piled in the lumberyard, be considered consistent since they can stand in community, occupying a shared space and time. If the two beams stacked in the lumberyard are fit together for the purpose of supporting a roof along with all the other building materials, then this relation is of a completely different quality than their haphazard coexistence. In systematic relations that are well fit together according to a plan, if one abstracts away from the plan (the roof) and thinks of two parts as constituting a mere set with no further relations, one will fail to understand essential features of their relation and

their reason for being present at all in the current system. The reason for their presence and organization, in the case of the beams, depends on their function in serving the end of supporting the roof. One would, in such a situation with only consistency but no coherent comprehension, be seeing the trees but missing the forest. You would have consistency perhaps (a low bar), but not coherence (the highest thing in philosophy).

Similarly, one can maintain two thoughts consistently even if they do not *fit* well together or mutually support one another. Take, for example, two consistent thoughts that do not cohere well: I could judge, say, that exposure to aesthetic experiences is essential to a good life but also judge that avant-garde art is “not true art” when compared to classical forms. There is nothing inconsistent in these judgments. One could cease contemplation and move on. However, there is a tension here, a lack of *Bündigkeit*, since one notices that many avant-garde aesthetic experiences are valued. Further, one might suspect that artists working with both forms would, in essence, agree with the first judgment about the value of aesthetic experience in general. Here, one might feel challenged to continue reflecting. Indeed, coherent thinking entails the second maxim of the *sensus communis logicus* for Kant, which means we must consider how others think to achieve coherence, or take account “of everyone else’s way of representing in thought” (*KU* 5:293).⁸ So ceasing contemplation about avant-garde art would not produce coherent thinking. But if one reflects further with the question, “Might avant-garde art contribute to a good life through aesthetic experiences of a different kind than I am familiar with?” one might discover that the former judgment (about the value of aesthetic experience in general) is now not only connected with more forms of art, but further is stabilized by having a richer account of aesthetic experience overall. As Susan Sontag puts it in *Styles of Radical Will*, modern avant-garde art often employs silence, emptiness, and reduction to highlight aspects of experience that go unnoticed in classical forms:

These programs for art’s impoverishment must not be understood simply as terroristic admonitions to audiences, but rather as strategies for improving the audience’s experience. The notions of silence, emptiness, and reduction sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc.—which promote a

⁸ See the third *Critique* where he refers to the second maxim as: “2. To think in the position of everyone else” (*KU* 5:294).

more immediate, sensuous experience of art or confront the artwork in a more conscious conceptual way.⁹

Adjusting the judgment about avant-garde art, therefore, could harmonize the two judgments so that they fit together. And if so, there is a new-won stability for one's overall view that aesthetic experience is valuable since one's revised judgment of the value of avant-garde art reinforces the original judgment about the value of aesthetic experience in general.

Kant, though, has grander aspirations for coherence in philosophy. Indeed, Kant wants to create a systematic outlook in which the world comes into view, as opposed to improving merely the coherence of one subsystem. This explains why he refers to it as the hardest intellectual activity that is the most rarely found in philosophers. For it requires a much deeper and long-lasting examination of one's views, which is why the carpentry metaphor is so illuminating. Building a structure represents a long labor. When multiple beams, stacked in the lumberyard, are fit together for the purpose of supporting a roof along with all the other building materials, this relation is of a completely different quality than their haphazard coexistence. If constructed well, such a structure endures and provides essential shelter from life's storms.

8.2. The Proof Proper Reconsidered

If read as establishing coherence or *Bündigkeit* between our judgments, the proof proper from §87 can be read as revealing the highest good's importance for how we think.

Evidence for this is in the passage just mentioned above that highlights that testing the *Bündigkeit* of various inferential relations is the purpose of the proof proper. With bracketed letters this time to indicate which aspects of experience are in play, it again states: "We will first describe the progress of reason from that [a] moral teleology and its relation to the [b] physical [teleology] to [c] **theology**, and will subsequently consider the possibility and coherence [*Bündigkeit*] of this sort of inference" (*KU* 5:448, emphasis added). The areas of experience noted in [a] and [b] have been connected

⁹ Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, 12–3.

already in the ethico-teleological reflection, representing morality and nature, respectively, as two domains that share the highest good as a common point of reference. The proof proper will explore the “progress” from these two connected orders of experience to [c] theology, which aims to test the “possibility and *Bündigkeit* of this sort of inference.” Hence, from the get-go, the stakes are clearly about coherency in thought. And this explains why in the proof, Kant notes that our moral teleology “concerns us as beings in the world, upon which this very same law [i.e., the moral law] prescribes us to direct our *judging*” (*KU* 5:447, emphasis added). The proof indicates that, while involving our moral teleology, the stakes of its success pertain more generally to judgments about the unity of nature and morality.

I offer here a reconstruction of the proof as primarily about the coherence. I take Kant’s cue that the proof can “easily adapt to the form of logical precision” (*KU* 5:450), as he notes after the caesura:

Contemplative Argument

1. Philosophy ought to provide a coherent account of experience as a whole. (Philosophical Demand)
2. Judging experience as a whole leads to two necessary ideas, [a] MORALITY¹⁰ and [b] NATURE,¹¹ that ought to figure into a coherent account.¹² (Fact of Experience, 1)
3. A coherent account between [a] and [b] requires the highest good as a common point of reference. (Result of Ethico-Teleological Reflection, 2)
4. The highest good can only be thought as really possible if we postulate a further idea, namely, [c] GOD, as “another causality” (*KU* 5:450). (Philosophical Postulate, 3)
- C. Thus, we must have faith in God to do as we philosophically ought to do, namely: provide a coherent account of experience as a whole.¹³ (1, 4)

¹⁰ As an intelligible system organized by the moral law directed toward realizing the highest good as its practically necessary object.

¹¹ As the sensible world organized by laws (constitutively) and by a physical teleology (reflectively).

¹² Kant indicates this, I believe, throughout the proof with his references to how morality and nature should stand in “reciprocal relation” (*KU*, 5:447) or “harmonize” (*KU*, 5:450, 452) relative to the highest good.

¹³ See *KU* 5:450n.

The move in premise (4) covers familiar ground from the previous critiques by postulating that only God could ensure that the highest good is possible. While Kant continues to posit the same here,¹⁴ it is situated within a contemplative context in the proof proper. That is, in judging how morality and nature can coherently fit together, we require the highest good. And this means that we must have a means for conceiving of the highest good as more than a mere ideal. In contrast to the first *Critique*, this proof is not predicated on the requirement of securing our motivation to act morally. And, contrary to the second *Critique*, Kant is not concerned with vouchsafing the validity of the moral law's bindingness. Indeed, as he notes right after the caesura, the proof proper "is not meant to say that it is just as necessary to assume the existence of God as it is to acknowledge the validity of the moral law" (*KU* 5:450). Instead, Kant is concerned—as is appropriate in a critique on the power to judge—with testing a structure of interrelated inferences to see if a coherent whole can result in holding them together in contemplation.

The process, that is, in seeking coherence, or a *bündiges* edifice through philosophy is global in its scope, encompassing much more than any one sphere. It is, as I will discuss below, a proof about establishing an existential state of mind toward the whole of creation. Of course, it is easy to see how this might connect with the moral-psychological view. But, to my mind, that is not what the proof is really about, if localized around our ability to maintain resolve only. Indeed, here I agree with Kristi Sweet's work on the third *Critique* that it is much more about providing "a kind of relief from the hegemony of the practical."¹⁵ The upshot of the highest good becoming a point of reference for organizing *all* of experience touches on a deeper need that we have. And there are two ways of formulating this "need," one stronger than the other.

The stronger form of "need" is what I employ in reconstructing the proof, as I think it is closer to Kant's own meaning. Indeed, turning back to the proof above, this is what I signify by "must" in the conclusion that follows from the "ought" in premise 1. This stronger version of "must" follows from a theoretical instance of "ought" that Kant employs when it comes to the demand of reason. For he insists that it is incumbent on us to provide a coherent account without which reason itself could not function. That Kant thought we had theoretical obligations as rational beings in this way is evidenced in

¹⁴ See, e.g., *KU* 5:450.

¹⁵ Sweet, *Kant on Freedom, Nature, and Judgment*, 206.

the first *Critique*: “[T]hat therefore a certain systematic unity of all possible empirical concepts [. . .] *must* be sought; is a school rule or logical principle, without which no use of reason would take place” (*KrV* A652/B680, my emphasis).¹⁶ The thought here is that reason imposes on us the demand to seek a coherent, systematically unified picture of the whole. And because we ought to, we must seek every philosophically justifiable avenue that enables us to do so. Here, the only way to do so is to have faith that there is a God. We are, therefore, required by reason to postulate God but—*pace* the rational view—not for the validity of the moral law, but rather for securing the only ideal in relation to which we can form a well-built, coherent model of the whole of experience.¹⁷ The *must* has to do with the cognitive demand that we build a sturdy edifice, a world in which we feel at home with necessary judgments standing in relation of mutual support in working toward a common end. While I think that Kant has this stronger notion of a rational need in mind, I believe that a less strong version of the need is available and, perhaps, just as compelling (if not more so).

8.3. The Inner Satisfaction of Coherent Thinking

When Kant started his critical enterprise with the first *Critique*, he did not think of the philosopher in clear terms as a carpenter of reason, as someone working to lay a plan and test the sturdiness of a whole system of cognitions, judgments, and related feelings. Such a process requires that the philosopher do some crafting between domains of experience. By contrast, Kant explicitly saw the role of the philosopher, as discussed in Chapter 5, as solely a legislator of reason, overseeing the use of concepts relative to each other. Kant writes in the first *Critique*:

But there is also a *Weltbegriff* (*conceptus cosmicus*) that has always grounded this term [i.e., the systematic unity of knowledge], especially when it is, as

¹⁶ See also, *KrV* A653/B681.

¹⁷ Tomasi, “God, the Highest Good,” 122, who thinks that the “must” “originates from the feeling that we have no alternative but to assume that “there is a God” [. . .] when making sense of the moral necessity of aiming at the highest good,” is on the right track and refers to how this might lead us to casting our “worldview in religious language” (Tomasi, “God, the Highest Good,” 125). But ultimately, the *must* in the proof is weightier than a mere “feeling,” which would be contingent on one’s sensibilities. Indeed, it is for Kant a requirement that all seek a coherent model of experience through philosophy. One might also ground this “must” based on Kant’s reference to a “*need*” of reason from the *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* essay (see *WDO* 8:136).

it were, personified and represented as an archetype in the ideal of the **philosopher**. From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is *not an artist of reason* but the legislator of human reason. It would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense and to pretend to have equaled the archetype, which lies only in the idea. (*KrVA*838–9/B866–7, emphasis added)

While this description already contains all the important elements that will come together in the third *Critique*, Kant at this point is not aware that the critical enterprise will require more than a legislator. A legislator works within a single legal domain, identifying and interpreting how certain concepts relate and which properly belong.¹⁸ By the time of the third *Critique*, however, there are various independent structures of rational experience, each with their own legitimate laws and concepts delineated by the principle of isolation. Creating out of all these a single, unified structure requires creative work—a carpenter to plan and measure how it is that they can be connected in a mutually supportive manner through bridges and hallways. When writing the first *Critique*, Kant had not yet developed his theory to the point where these domains of experience could form a coherent whole. By the time of the third *Critique*, however, he came to a distinct idea about which ideal could qualify as a unifying point for the manifold of all cognitions (theoretical, practical, aesthetic, teleological, and religious), and that is nothing less than the highest good—arrived at via the ethico-teleological reflection. And with the principle of systematic unity now superseding the principle of isolation between the domains, Kant came to realize and continued to insist until the end of his life that the philosopher must indeed be both a legislator *and* an artificer of reason, albeit artificers akin to carpenters building structures.

In saying this, Kant's point is not just that we *must* perform this unifying task of constructing a coherent whole, but rather that—in so doing—we achieve a deep satisfaction as the sorts of beings we are. In this, I see the weaker sense of the need that Kant is identifying as fulfilled through philosophy that achieves a systematic outlook. Before expanding on this philosophically, there are plenty of textual instances where Kant seems to indicate that it is very good for us to achieve such an outlook without this serving any particular end. That is, again, why it is not to be conflated with the rational

¹⁸ For an investigation of the Architectonic of the first *Critique*, see Ypi, *The Architectonic of Reason*.

or moral-psychological views, in that it is life-encompassing and not strictly under the “hegemony of the practical,” as Sweet noted (albeit she is talking about the purpose of the whole third *Critique* and not about the highest good specifically).

In the *Vienna Logic*, for example, he notes regarding the value of philosophy:

Only philosophy can provide this inner satisfaction. It closes the circle, and then it sees how all cognitions fit together *in an edifice*, in rule-governed ways, for such ends as are suited to humanity. (V-Lo/Wiener 24:800, emphasis added)

The emphasized reference to an “edifice” shows Kant attuned even in the 1780s to this notion of coherence, borrowed from the context of carpentry as akin to the order found in a well-made house and applying it to the process of philosophy. And as late as the *Opus Postumum*, from around 1800, Kant continues to think in terms of the carpentry metaphor of coherence about seeking how all the parts fit together in a mutually supporting manner, such that one builds a well-formed experience. Using the verb, *zimmern*, which means literally to create or make out of wood, Kant notes that it is up to the philosopher to construct a world since such is never actually found in any perception or collection thereof:

A *cosmotheoros*¹⁹ who creates the elements of knowledge of the world himself, *a priori*, from which he, as, at the same time, an inhabitant of the world, *constructs* [*zimmert*] a world-vision [*Weltbeschauung*] in the idea. (OP 21:31, emphasis added)

And from the same fascicle, Kant later writes: “Whoever wants to cognize the world must *construct* [*zimmern*] it first and indeed in himself.” (OP 21:41, emphasis added and my translation). Or, from the second fascicle (which was written much earlier than the first): “It is, however, impossible to *construct* (*zimmern*) a system out of mere empirical concepts. Such would

¹⁹ Adickes, *Kant's Opus postumum*, 140, notes that this is most likely inspired by Christiaan Huygens's posthumous work, *Cosmotheoros, oder weltbetrachtende Muthmassungen von deren himmlischen Erdkugeln und deren Schmuck*, which was translated into German with this title for the second edition in 1743.

always be a tossed-together aggregate of observations” (OP 21:161, emphasis added and my translation). And while it serves my purposes that Kant here is speaking of the construction (in carpentry terms) of a worldview, the carpentry imagery saturates other ways of his thinking about this idealistic modeling of the whole of experience in so far as Kant repeatedly speaks of the end product as also a “*Weltgebäude*” or, literally, *world building*. On a sheet from the *Opus Postumum* in which he again speaks of the cosmotheoros whose task is “*Weltbeschreibung*” (OP 21:101), or the description of the world, Kant states: “Matter with its purposiveness constitutes a *Weltgebäude*” (OP 21:100, my translation). And later in the same fascicle in which he is discussing “the bringing together” [*Zusammennehmen*] of the various ideas into a total system, Kant continues: “That is the way it is with a *Weltgebäude* as a totality” (OP 21: 138, my translation). It would be, therefore, just as correct to say that Kant found the philosopher not merely a legislator of reason, but furthermore a carpenter of reason, tasked with the construction of a whole edifice of experience from the building materials discovered in each experiential domain.

Why a well-made, *bündiges* system is satisfying can be made intuitive by comparing it to other forms of wholes that fit together coherently. Kant often contrasts this form of philosophy with the activity of a scholarly dilettante. While the philosopher seeks coherence, the dilettante is content with a mere aggregate or hodgepodge of judgments that—while not contradictory—are also not mutually supporting or related in a meaningful way. Such a person might have, as Kant notes in the first *Critique*, a view of experience as a “mere rhapsody” of the parts of experience, whereas the philosopher has parts that are meaningfully related “under one idea” (KrV A832/B860). The appeal and satisfaction of a unity can be thought of in terms of music. For musical notes to form not merely a cacophony, a unifying melody precedes and determines the setting of each note. The melody, of course, cannot exist without the notes, but it also must be thought or have its idea precede the organization of the notes. The satisfaction arises because of this order, which cannot be reduced simply to the notes, but which also cannot stand independently of the notes. The whole, as a whole that hangs together in a mutually supportive manner, is deeply satisfying, and—dare I say—*good*. If constructed well, one inhabits a framework of interrelated, necessary judgments of experience that mutually support each other. The art of constructing a systematic outlook goes well beyond what a dilettante produces since the mutual support between the elements in the system creates a stability of perduring quality,

well suited to convoke others to orient their research and volitions toward the good.

It is this global importance of the highest good as providing grounds for the construction of a systematic outlook or worldview, which I think will be the most challenging to grasp for similar reasons that the importance of the ideal in comparative moral judgments is challenging to comprehend. The satisfaction that such a worldview amounts to, that is, must go deeper than any one domain of rational experience and instead is about an existential state of mind.

Stepping back a bit, I see here how the notion of an ideal, moral world—accessible as a maximum state of affairs in which perfect virtue is accompanied by a proportionately complete happiness—provides a plan that harmonizes with other notes in the musical score of Kant's transcendental theory. Thinking that the highest good is the *Polaris* around which our world spins, Kant's remarks about how beauty is a naturally attuned symbol for the good and how life presents concrete examples of ends in nature, reveal how it is that all of experience can be felt as deeply meaningful.²⁰ And this connects with a need that I think is quite natural to us as beings, namely, a need to find experience as a whole meaningful and resonant overall. The passages cited above about an inner satisfaction as well as others I cite in subsequent chapters speak to this need to find meaning. To articulate it better, though, one might flesh out its subtle importance, which lies often in the background of our conscious thinking and doing, by connecting it with the work of Matthew Ratcliffe on what he calls, "existential feeling."²¹

Ratcliffe, partly inspired by the phenomenology of Heidegger,²² notes that there are certain states that we *feel*, but which are not intentional in the sense that they are about any particular object or action. These existential feelings instead are, he notes "pre-intentional," in that, "They are not intentional states, directed at however many objects, and they are not feelings of the body or some part of it. Instead, they amount to a felt sense of belonging to the world."²³ Or: "By 'existential feeling,' I mean a felt sense of being rooted in the

²⁰ Sweet, *Kant on Freedom, Nature, and Judgment*; I have discovered has a reading that, to my mind, *harmonizes* well with my interpretation of the highest good, though her concern with the third *Critique* brings her to focus on Kant's metaphor of territories. Yet, I agree with her absolutely about the upshot of the third *Critique* being aimed at providing a deeper sense of meaning for us through beauty and life.

²¹ Ratcliffe, "The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling," 25, as well as Ratcliffe, "The Phenomenology of Mood," 367. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for references to Ratcliffe's work.

²² See Ratcliffe, "The Phenomenology of Mood," 366.

²³ Ratcliffe, "The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling," 24.

world, which shapes all experience and thought.”²⁴ Fittingly, they are about how we *are* present, and *are there* in the world. The German phrase *Dasein* (a favorite of Heidegger’s, but first developed in this existential manner by Fichte²⁵) perfectly captures the state of our conscious, felt sense of reality as a whole constituting a place in which we *are*—a unique category of being that is pure activity. Or as Ratcliffe notes: “The sense of being there, immersed in a world, is not to be identified with experiences of something *in* the world.”²⁶ And this sense of being there is further not something that we can take for granted, but rather is something that depends on our own reflection or contemplation. And it also is not a one-off affair, but rather remains “consistent over fairly long periods of time.”²⁷ The feeling, that is, is not varying day-to-day, though it might shift and change as one’s experience does: “Whether sporadic, longer term or operative over a whole life, a feeling is ‘existential’ insofar as it constitutes a sense of belonging to a significant world.”²⁸ Such a feeling has a global quality. It refers to one’s sense of the whole. And, as a result, it colors and influences any moment of our lives in the background, as it were: It is there whether we are checking the validity of a logic problem, deliberating on a hard moral choice, standing before the *Arnolfini Portrait*, clinging to a ship’s mast as a storm rages, or kneeling in a pew.

There is much in this take on an existential feeling that phenomenologically aligns with what I see as the inner satisfaction that Kant might be driving toward as resulting from the formation of a systematic outlook through philosophy. The formation of this outlook in contemplation is not about any given moment of judgment or action, but rather about a meta-reflective stance that fills us with a sense of deep belonging. It might be important in any particular moment of our experience or markedly *absent* from any particular moment. Yet, if crafted to a state of lasting quality, it will deepen our sense of being in the world. With Kant, one could take Ratcliffe’s proclamation about an existential feeling constituting a sense of belonging within a “*significant world*,” and simply change it to within a “*good world*.” That would be enough to interconnect the domains.²⁹

²⁴ Ratcliffe, “Existential Feeling and Narrative,” 169.

²⁵ See, e.g., Fichte, *Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, 40–6. Förster, *The 25 Years*, 163n14, notes Heidegger’s use of other Fichtean discoveries, which he merely innovates on while failing “to name his sources.”

²⁶ Ratcliffe, “The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling,” 24.

²⁷ Ratcliffe, “The Phenomenology of Mood,” 367.

²⁸ Ratcliffe, “The Phenomenology of Mood,” 367.

²⁹ I see some resonance between this view and what Sussman, “The Highest Good,” 215, argues in that he sees the need for the highest good being one of “love” or a “a need based neither in pure

It is here where my study dovetails with others who seek to articulate why systematicity mattered to Kant and other German Idealist thinkers. As Kant notes in the *Prolegomena*:

Only pure reason is such an isolated domain, within itself so thoroughly connected, that no part of it can be encroached upon without disturbing all the rest, nor adjusted without having previously determined for each part its place and its influence on the others [. . .] That is why it can be said of such a critique, that it is never trustworthy unless it is *entirely complete* down to the least elements of pure reason, and that in the domain of this faculty one must determine and settle either *all* or *nothing*. (*Pro* 4:263)

The sort of coherence at stake, for Kant, is what we get at the end of the process of systematization. But instead of the absolute spirit of Hegel taking on the role of forming the systematic outlook, it is for Kant—in true Enlightenment style—each person as a self-forming thinker who must take up the task of creating a system from one’s philosophizing. The question is taking up what we can know, what we ought to do, and what we may hope—what sort of a world could possibly correspond to our philosophizing? If achieved, our sense of how it all harmonizes might indeed provide a deep sense of meaning that informs all areas of life, including (but not exclusively limited to) our moral life.

8.4. Coherence of Moral Thinking

From the third *Critique* onward, it is certainly clear that the validity of the moral law sticks, regardless of one’s beliefs relative to the highest good. But Kant also notes how the final end of pure practical reason, beyond its place as a final end of creation, plays a role in grounding not moral actions, but a moral life.

The contemplative use of the highest good broadens since it becomes fundamental for the very process of philosophizing about one’s place in the world in general. This predominance of the highest good in all matters, when

practical reason nor in our particular psychologies, but rather in the possibility of entering into an essentially shared way of engaging with and feeling our way about the world, a way that must be available to us if our moral commitments are not to be self-undermining.”

reflecting on how experience hangs together as a whole, I think shows an appropriate culmination of the highest good's development tracked in Part II. Now that it is converged with our thinking about the whole system of experience, its prominence becomes enmeshed with every facet of human existence, since it is the ideal that gives the plan to how nature and morality, art and sublimity, organisms and mechanics, all can be thought of as mutually supporting each other in a way that provides a satisfying order to experience writ large.

That said, it remains deeply important for anchoring our lives as moral agents. Some of the work that I referred to in Chapter 7 regarding the moral-psychological view orbits within this vicinity. I certainly see why some have latched onto this reading, but I would also like to offer that this grounding function of the highest good as an ideal need not be seen as directly influencing us when acting, which I do worry would disrupt Kant's theory of action by undermining the sovereignty of the moral law.

Indeed, I think there is plenty of evidence that Kant was quite wary of making too much of the highest good from an agential point of view. Instead, the highest good is often referred to as of secondary or indirect importance when it comes to a particular action. In Kant's *On the Common Saying* essay, he writes:

When it comes to the question of the *principle* of morality, the doctrine of the *highest good*—which as the final end is determined through and conforming with the laws of a will—*can therefore be passed over and set aside (as episodic)*. (TP 8: 8:280, emphasis added)

What are we to make of this reference to the highest good as important only episodically? As an element that can be “passed over and set aside,” one way to think of it is as nonprimary when facing particular actions. Instead, it may very well be set aside. And when it *is* of importance for us, it will be present episodically. This does not mean, of course, that it is otiose. Instead, it suggests an importance that is reserved for special episodes. And perhaps there will be episodes related to agency along the lines of some of the other mainstream interpretations mentioned so far. But I think it is equally legitimate to consider this episodic importance as reserved for moments of calm contemplation, which might lead to the occupation of systematic outlooks that persist for long periods of time in the background of life. It is in spelling out how this might look relative to

a practical life and coherent moral thinking that I will focus on for the remainder of the chapter.

Kant in both the *Religion* and *On the Common Saying* essay refers to how this coherent moral thinking might be important as a background feature that provides an overall harmony to our lives as agents. Kant frequently argues that the highest good is important not for any role it serves in our actions, but rather in how it provides an otherwise missing “effect.” For instance, in the *Religion*, Kant writes:

[The highest good] is a proposition that extends past the concept of duties in the world, and adds a consequence of these (an effect), which is not contained in the moral law, and thus cannot be worked out analytically from it. (RGV 6:7n, my translation)³⁰

The idea here is that a moral life requires an effect that is adequate to the moral law, much as I sketched in Figure 6.1. Other remarks that Kant makes in this text have led to much confusion because they seem—at first blush—to indicate that the highest good, as the effect, is both unnecessary for willing and essential for having *Wille*. My reading, however, I think can make good sense of these passages in a way that does not see Kant backtracking to any of his previously held positions.

Kant notes in this period, after the third *Critique*, that without this missing effect, there would be no way of asserting that there is a determinable *Wille*. In these texts where Kant is clearly (and in one case explicitly) responding to Garve, one sees him make similar points, which—due to their importance—I quote at length. First, in *On the Common Saying*, he writes:

The need to assume, as the final end of all things, a good that is the *highest good* in the world and also possible through our cooperation is a need [arising] not from a deficiency in moral incentives but from a deficiency in the external relations [*an äußeren Verhältnissen*] within which alone an object as end in itself (as moral *final end*) can be produced in conformity with these incentives. For without some end there can be no *will* [*Wille*],

³⁰ See also the essay on *Theory and Practice*: “[T]he need for a final end assigned by pure reason and comprehending the whole of all ends under one principle [*das Ganze aller Zwecke unter einem Prinzip*] (a world as the highest good and possible through our cooperation) is a need of an unselfish will extending itself beyond observance of the formal law to production of an object [*Hervorbringung eines Objekts*] (the highest good)” (TP 8:280n).

although, if it is a question only of lawful necessitation of actions, one must abstract from any end and the law alone constitutes its determining ground. (TP 8:279n)

And in the *Religion*, Kant notes in a similar vein:

For in the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will [*Wille*] can take place in human beings at all, since no such determination can occur without an effect, and its representation, though not as the determining ground of the power of choice [*Willkür*] nor as an end that comes first in intention, must nonetheless be admissible as the consequence of that power's determination to an end through the law (*finis in consequentiam veniens*); without this end, a power of choice [*Willkür*] which does not [thus] add to a planned action the thought of either an objectively or subjectively determined object (which it has or should have) cannot satisfy itself, as it is instructed indeed *how* to **operate** but not *whither*. (RGV 6:4)

A *prima facie* reading of these two passages might yield the impression that Kant means to say that without the highest good, we would not be able to act on the moral law. Put in a motto: no highest good (as “end”), no *Wille*. If there is no highest good, then we are irrationally bringing about nothing every time we act morally and, hence, ought to cease and desist (rational reading). Or, if there is no highest good, then we are tilting at windmills and, due to our frailty, will soon give up from despair or fragility as the first form of radical evil (moral-psychological reading). While certainly live options, the thrust of these passages after contextualizing them with Kant's other statements and heeding his highly technical distinctions leads, *ultima facie*, to a much more nuanced point. And that point, on my view, is about how our contemplation connects our felt terminus of moral striving with existential considerations of how we feel that experience hangs together in a harmonious way.

Indeed, such a step beyond the *prima facie* view makes better sense of the passages. For if one were attempting to see Kant as working strictly with the version of the rational or moral-psychological view, these passages would be confounding. For on the one hand, Kant begins by pointing out that there is no deficiency of incentives or resolve driving the need to think of a final end, and that the necessity (read: bindingness or validity) of the moral law has no need for the highest good whatsoever. This makes sense, for otherwise the self-sufficiency of the moral law would suffer and one might have

the redundancy problem all over again. Yet, on the other hand, Kant asserts that without some end there can be no *will*. How can one make heads or tails of this apparent flip-flopping? These statements would appear to contradict each other were it not for Kant's then immediate clarification that this has nothing to do with the determining ground of the will or validity of the moral law. If one works with a contemplative need instead of a moral need, these passages unfold in a quite cogent manner.

To make sense of Kant's full meaning, attention must first be paid to the context. We first must recall that these two passages, written in partial response to Garve, both are clarifying Kant's point that we ultimately *can* and *must* determine ourselves to act without reference to the highest good when faced with particular actions. Or as Kant notes in the *Religion*, whenever we encounter the moral law, "it indeed requires that we abstract completely from this [the success], when facing a particular action" (RGV 6:7n, my translation). Or as he notes a few pages earlier: "Thus no end is actually required for morality [and] to act justly, rather the law, which contains the formal condition for any use of freedom at all, is enough" (RGV 6:4, my translation). Kant asserts in both passages explicitly that the importance is not in telling us "*how*" to act, but rather of secondary importance for making up for a "deficiency of external relations" or positing the "*whither*" of our *Wille*, respectively. That is, the dutiful enacting of the moral law has no need for this extra step, hence this taking note of the *whither of the will* is of a specific sort of episodic importance. And this positing of an object occurs because the world is lacking an effect adequate to the moral law. The context in which these statements are made points away from a meaning that is directly important to how and why we act in the heat of the moment. Kant wants to make all guidance from the control center of action completely determined by the moral law. However—keeping with the metaphor and returning to the function of practical ideals sketched in Part I—as we chart a course for our life mission, we can operate better if the regions to be traversed are known well, possible shortcuts and obstacles noted, as well as other features recognized as necessary for the realization of our goals. And focusing on the practical dimension exclusively, the very destination of our moral striving is first possible because of the very presence of moral substrates in our reasoning, for only an ideal can qualify as an unconditioned object fitting an unconditioned law (or rule).

Now, regarding the technical terminology, three terms require further explanation and point toward a deeper meaning at work in the two passages just mentioned. First, *Wille*, or "will," for Kant does not mean what we normally

mean by the will, namely, that which enables us to determine ourselves in acting one way or another. Rather, Kant means by *Wille* the faculty of pure practical reason as such, which he notes in the *Metaphysics of Morals* “can be named neither free nor unfree” (MS 6:226). Our pure practical reason is a merely legislative capacity in us that presents us with the law; it is not free to change the moral law expressible by the categorical imperative and its formulations (which is, of course, a universal feature of reason for Kant). Second, *Willkür*, or “the power of choice,” for Kant is that which is free and which aligns more closely with an everyday conception of the will. For Kant, it is the power to choose and represents our capacity to execute actions based on what we find in our *Wille*. Finally, “operate” is the term Kant employs for what is going on when we posit the highest good as an effect. And by operate, Kant describes the special process of a being that is not merely free (as *Willkür*), but rather free relative to a law embedded in its rational nature (as *Wille*). As he notes in the *Opus postumum*: “Nature *causes* (*agit*). Man *does* (*facit*). The rational subject acting with consciousness of purpose *operates* (*operatur*)” (OP 21:18). Hence, while we are free to *do* things (through *Willkür*), the fact that we *operate* requires that we are capable of taking a wider view that includes knowledge of purposes (through *Wille*). And this feature is not concerned with our free choice in the control center of action, but rather with what it means to be a *Wille* that makes the overall coherence of the sphere in which the control center is active first visible. In other words, we do many things that represent one-off events or disjointed activities that occur completely in a proximal time frame. We brew and consume coffee, of course, relative to the end of satisfying a physical desire or (perhaps for the caffeine addicted—of which Kant might have been one³¹) need. However, for Kant to *operate* refers to ends of reason that might unify together many proximal ends in a unified, systematic attempt.

Viewed from the angle of *Willkür*, we are not indifferent to the highest good. On the contrary, we only get “satisfaction” as agents through finding the highest good since it provides an unconditioned resting place, grounding every conditioned moment of action. But we are not reducible to our moral *doings* when taking an interest in the endgame of all our moral striving. As a *Wille* that operates, in Kant’s jargon, we must also become conscious of the purpose of such a rational faculty. For without it, there would be no *Wille* and instead only *Willkür*, or a capricious ability to work with only those ends of

³¹ See, e.g., his note in the *Opus postumum*: “Coffee without milk is not a nourishing substance but indeed a nourishing slime that moves and distributes itself throughout the blood” (21:116, my translation).

which we are aware in immediate, sensible experience. We might, with only *Willkür*, be capable of brewing coffee on a daily basis; however, we would not be able to work in concert *consciously* with every other will toward an ideal that we carry with us as a grounding of morality in our reason. That there would be no *Wille* without the highest good, therefore, is making a metaphysical point, not a normative one. We need the highest good because of the *kind* of beings we are, and not necessarily for the sake of what we do as such beings. And the satisfaction we feel to have this terminus is of an existential variety, which need have no direct, primary bearing on any action. Still, it might color our mood when so acting or brighten our outlook (as many seek to find through the moral-psychological reading). This, though, need not actually influence our acting; indeed, Kant proscribes us from so doing.

It is not, then, in looking *within* that we have need for the highest good as the final end of creation, but rather when we look *outside* to the external relations that there is a deficiency without the final end. But what is this deficiency? The deficiency is not of determination or cause (which is accounted for), but a deficiency of *effect*. And this deficiency is filled through the extension of our wills, as he notes in *On the Common Saying*:

[T]he need for a final end assigned by pure reason and comprehending the whole of all ends under one principle [*das Ganze aller Zwecke unter einem Prinzip*] (a world as the highest good and possible through our cooperation) is a need of an unselfish will *extending* itself beyond observance of the formal law to production of an object [*Hervorbringung eines Objekts*] (the highest good)." (TP 8:280n)

The philosopher wants to know how the determination of the will takes shape as an effect in the world. But no individual conditioned moment will do. Thus, just as diagrammed in Figure 6.1, the only effect that could possibly suit an unconditioned law is an unconditioned end, a final object that organizes the world as a system. But the function now is—in line with a practical ideal—not about how we actually act, but rather about the sorts of beings we are and the sort of world we inhabit as such beings who carry ideals in thought that fill out a picture of the world that is lacking if one consults only the appearances. Metaphysically, the burning question here is based on the TPSR (from Chapter 7), namely: Why is this moral law here? Toward what end does it point? And in answering that question, we are in a position where we can now utilize a practical ideal as a substrate to make a model of the world.

This model, Kant conceives of and refers to at various points as a *Weltbetrachtung* or *Weltbeschauung*, as I have noted. And though desultory, Kant's conception of this philosophical concept represents the first, explicit development of the term that has now become so ubiquitous today. In the next chapter, I go into the form of this worldview as a technical term. In this chapter, it has been my goal to spell out the need for coherence that this outlook fulfills.

To summarize: Philosophically, Kant asserts, we cannot be satisfied with a hodgepodge theory, or as he refers to it, an "aggregate" of perceptions, judgments, and experiences that find no overarching unity. Instead, the unity of experience is dependent on the unity between the totality of one's inner thoughts, as it were. Now when one zooms in and focuses only on one field of experience—for example, on moral reasoning and the free determination of one's choice—one need not be explicitly concerned with the whole. Indeed, that might prove a distraction. As a matter of fact and unsurprisingly, when it comes to the question of what should and can motivate the moral agent, nothing more should be required than a rule or law to which our maxims may seek conformity. But human experience is not limited to determining one's actions according to a law, just as human experience is not limited to judging constitutively that "X's are P," or the like. Experience—as a totality—involves both and more; but most importantly, it implies that all parts interact and find coherent, mutual support with one another.

Kant asked above regarding the everyday situation of moral agents: "What need have they to know from their moral actions and trials the results which will be brought to pass by the course of things in the world [*Weltlauf*]?" (*RGV* 6:7n, my translation). While perfectly legitimate for one who is not seeking to think philosophically about things, the same question cannot be rightly put to the philosopher as the person who reflects past the limits of one lawful act or one conceptual judgment to inquire: How does this all hang together? The philosopher is invested in such a complete account—namely, an account marked by the principle of systematic unity—to look past any singular part to the whole as the completed end state. Kant's bolder claim is that this activity, though, will be beneficial to any who takes up the task.

The overarching goal of philosophy is clear in the *Opus postumum*, where the connection between his *a priori* philosophy and the physical world is on Kant's mind. Kant says, for example, that: "The *final end* of all knowledge is to know oneself in the highest practical reason" (*OP* 21:156). And this final end sets a goal, namely, "Elevation of ideas of pure reason to the

self-constituting system of a science, called *philosophy*, which includes even mathematics as its subordinate instrument” (OP 21:156). And though Kant refers here to mathematics, he further points out that this goal “does not aim merely at science (as a means), but also at *wisdom*, as a purpose in itself” (OP 21:6). By wisdom, Kant means not only that one is virtuous, but further that one knows oneself in a systematic context. Such is the very goal of transcendental philosophy:

Without transcendental philosophy one can form for oneself no concept as to how, and by what principle, one could design the plan of a system, by which a coherent whole could be established as rational knowledge for reason; yet this must necessarily take place if one would turn rational man into a being who knows himself. (OP 21:7)

And this plan for a system, Kant repeatedly refers to as the construction of a world: “Transcendental idealism is the key to the opening of all secrets of the whole world-system” (OP 21:38, my translation), and “Whoever wants to cognize the world must first build it [*sie zimmern*] and indeed in himself” (OP 21:41, my translation). Though from later in his career, these statements—I think—apply just as readily to the phase of his career between 1790 and 1793 in which he is attempting to articulate, by the principle of systematic unity, how human experience as a whole can find articulation in his critical philosophy.

Philosophy, with such a mission, might fulfill certain fundamental needs of ours as well, which pushes us to take account of not just this or that part of experience, but all of experience so that a well-ordered one results. In this way, there is an odd, unexpected power to philosophy as the pursuit of *Weisheit*, such that it, in taking account of experience, changes experience itself through the process of reflection. This, though, is not uncommon intuitively for common, everyday experience. Often our judgments and reflections present that which we have already experienced, as it were, in a totally new light. If we enter into experiences with a new frame or contextualizing parameter, we will very likely change the experience itself. We do not, that is, change the state of affairs, but we enter into a new relation with it (I analyze this more thoroughly in Chapters 9 and 10).³² And this function of the

³² Merritt, *Kant on Reflection*, 54, expresses something similar with her view that Kant finds it important to think “with the right frame of mind.” That said, I’m not sure that worldview formation would qualify as a responsibility in the same way that Merritt attributes to following the rules for healthy thinking.

highest good in fulfilling a contemplative need is important because Kant is sensitive that our experiential lives cannot be reduced to merely moral moments of activity or theoretical exertions. Our lives are unfolding wholes.

Because of the kinds of beings we are, the highest good remains an important feature for the transcendental philosopher. Its chief importance is serving the philosophical quest for coherence or the creation of a system that is well formed. I have already pointed to Kant's language often slipping into speaking of the result of this search for coherence forming a *worldview*, but more needs to be said on this score. Namely, what does it mean to have a worldview for Kant? And, further, why should we want to construct a coherent one?

Constructing a Kantian Worldview

In the previous chapter, I began to make the case for seeing the highest good's function as serving a role in fulfilling a primarily contemplative need to create a systematic outlook as opposed to a singularly practical use. Because of the sorts of beings we are, namely, philosophical beings, we take a natural interest in the whole, even if in every such instance we can only approach it asymptotically. And in doing so, Kant thought we naturally would seek to find a way in which our variegated experiences, perceptions, and judgments that have a necessary foundation in reason cohere in a mutually supportive fashion through a reflective judgment on how each of these relates. Kant—famous for his metaphorical treatment of the philosopher as a legislator of reason—also saw in the philosopher a carpenter of reason. Until now, I have been using the term, *worldview*, to describe the result of this philosophical search for coherence but have not thoroughly explained what it means in a technical sense. In this chapter, I explain and analyze what worldview actually means in detail from a Kantian perspective.

It is well known and duly noted in the literature on worldviews that Kant coined the concept,¹ *Weltanschauung*, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). And the term's subsequent translation into English for the first time has been traced to James Orr's 1893 work, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation*. And there, Orr quite correctly takes note of the prevalence of the term *Weltanschauung*, its cognate synonyms, and the fact that in the German philosophy following Kant, it represents a technical term. Orr writes:

A reader of the higher class of works in German theology—especially those which deal with the philosophy of religion—cannot fail to be struck with the constant recurrence of a word for which he finds it difficult to get a precise equivalent in English. It is the word “*Weltanschauung*,”

¹ See the entry for “*Weltanschauung*” in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* compiled by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, as well as Meier, *Weltanschauung*, 71–3, and Naugle, *Worldview*.

sometimes interchanged with another compound of the same signification, “Weltansicht.” Both words mean literally “view of the world,” but whereas the phrase in English is limited by associations which connect it predominately [*sic*] with physical nature, in German the word is not thus limited, but has almost the force of a technical term, denoting the widest view which the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology.²

Orr is absolutely right in his exegesis about the term’s technical nature for Kant and those who came after him. Whereas one common assumption has been that Kant had no substantive use for the term since he uses *Weltanschauung* only once in the third *Critique* and never employs it again,³ Orr correctly sees that Kant (and the thinkers who followed Kant’s lead) employs other terms to communicate the same technical use.⁴ And although requiring reconstruction, I will here make the case for seeing Kant’s intended use for *Weltanschauung* and its close cognates, *Weltbegriff*, *Weltbetrachtung*, *Weltbeschauung*, *Weltbeschreibung*, and *Weltgebäude*, as forming a stable technical definition that reveals Kant’s attempt to describe precisely what we are after when working philosophically through experience to arrive at a view of the whole. In outline, it is formed in a meta-process of judging synthetically how various necessary judgments a priori stand together in a mutually supporting relationship. But in order for this overarching synthesis to take place, all these judgments must find a common point of reference. It is the highest good, I will argue that Kant sees as the only game in town that can sufficiently stand as such a common point of reference relative to the transcendental picture of experience arising from his philosophy. Its status as an ideal worked out in Part I frees it to serve unique purposes that are primarily epistemological and contemplative in nature.

Why, though, this formation of a worldview is important in detail presents the more difficult philosophical question, which I began to take up in the previous chapter. Why for Kant was the creation of a worldview thought of as important? Is a worldview simply nice to have? Or is there something essential, which is missing if one lacks a philosophical worldview? I will sketch how, for beings like us, Kant saw a deep importance in arriving at such a cognition of the whole grounded in the highest good.

² Orr, *The Christian View of God*, 3.

³ See, e.g., Meier, *Weltanschauung*, 71–3, and Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 4–5.

⁴ See Orr, *The Christian View of God*, 5, 415–21.

9.1. A Philosophical Worldview

While certainly underdeveloped when compared to other concepts in his thought, worldview (in its various guises) is a frequent technical term for Kant.

Kant does not formally define “worldview” and he employs various synonymous concepts to articulate its basic conceptual form.⁵ While Kant only uses *Weltanschauung* once, he uses *Weltbetrachtung* (*world observation*) in the third *Critique* multiple times, as well as *Weltbeschauung* (*world inspection*) in earlier and later works to communicate a reflective process relative to an idea. Moreover and in a related but different sense, he uses *Weltbegriff* (*world concept*) in the first *Critique* and *Jäsche Logik* to communicate a regulative principle of philosophical investigation.⁶ And, as noted in the previous chapter, he employs *Weltgebäude* and *Weltbeschreibung* in the *Opus postumum*, as well, to detail the world-constituting act of the subject. In all of these employments, Kant highlights, I think, at least two moves that are required for worldview construction.

For the sake of simplicity, I will describe these as the two steps of a construction, though there seems to be no strict order in which they must be completed. Step One refers to the need to posit an ideal (or idea) of reason as a unifying point of reference. It is this ideal, which provides the common element that can mediate between and set in relation to one another the various parts of a world. Step Two refers to the construction of a coherent set of necessary judgments in relation to it. In this step, one tests whether one’s judgments and cognitions might fit together in a mutually supporting or, as Kant himself refers to it, “harmonious” manner. This test for coherence seeks to construct an edifice out of one’s transcendental theory of experience in a way analogous to carpenters seeking *Bündigkeit* in their structures. These two steps, furthermore, I will now show are on full display in the denouement of the third *Critique*, namely, in the ethico-teleological reflection and moral proof for God’s existence. In these sections, therefore, not only does

⁵ It is common to find scholars produce comprehensive summaries of “Kant’s worldview.” A consequence of my study is that this application ironically employs Kant’s fledgling technical term in a non-technical sense to his philosophy as a whole, that is, akin to a “general description of Kant’s system.” See, e.g., Schrempf, *Die christliche Weltanschauung*; Kroner, *Kants Weltanschauung*; Windelband, *Immanuel Kant und seine Weltanschauung*; Makkreel, *Kant’s Worldview*, all of which attempt holistic accounts of Kant’s philosophy.

⁶ See Fugate, “Kant’s World Concept,” for an excellent discussion of this concept in connection with the debate as to its relation to cosmopolitanism.

Kant—as already detailed in Chapter 7—choose the highest good to complete Step One of a worldview construction, but he furthermore then tests the strength of this view by running a coherency test in the moral proof for God’s existence, thereby performatively showing Step Two in action (which fulfills the contemplative need described in Chapter 8). It is in these sections where we see in this meta-judgmental process that Kant posits the highest good as the only final end and substratum that can make sense of transcendental experience when taken up as a whole.

One might wonder whether this result negates the practical grounding function explored in Part I. The answer is “No,” as I will discuss below. For Kant, the epistemic-metaphysical function of ideals as enabling our very capacity to recognize certain essential moral experiences persists. The negative and positive functions remain background prerequisites for comparative judgments of moral individuals as approaching or falling away from the ideal. However, the evolution of the highest good, traced in Part II, brought Kant equally to realize that this grounding in thinking has an unforeseen, philosophical extension. And that extension is in the highest good (qua practical ideal) serving as a point of reference for forming a worldview. What a fortuitous extension too, allowing for the creation of a harmonious and meaningful unity that would otherwise be absent in lived experience. The reality of the ideal lends itself especially to this task that is philosophically reflective and that requires ongoing effort. For as a universal, persisting, and real feature of reason, an ideal can abide as a stable grounding, where ideologies and fictions cannot. In keeping with its substrate function—it is an archetypal model that grounds our being in a way that is, now, important for enriching our life as a whole. In Chapter 7, I already explained how the highest good can serve two masters, as it were, by functioning in two distinct instances of contemplation. And in Chapter 3, I previewed a unique kind of cognition that is particularly well suited for the highest good’s playing dual roles, which I explore further in Chapter 10. The upshot, however, is that this form of cognition is essentially descriptive and theoretical in form, but also possesses a practical influence without issuing commands.

As a point of orientation, let us return to why the ethico-teleological reflection occurred. The ethico-teleological reflection again is the investigation of the application of the *a priori* principle of purposiveness not merely to works of art and organisms, but rather to nature as a whole through reflective judgment. And this investigation arises from the philosophical mission of discerning a principle of systematic unity to address a problem of disunity

that Kant identifies regarding his system as a whole. This problem arose because of Kant's drive to account for all judgments of experience in a systematic manner without gaps. And in the second *Critique*, Kant realized that the results of the first two *Critiques* painted an inherently dualistic picture of experience. On the one hand, there are the necessary laws of nature that our cognizing stringently applied to intuitions provided by sensibility. These laws constructed a deterministic picture of the world as appearance. And on the other hand, we are aware through an irreducible fact of reason that we face moments in which we know we ought to act and could—from this consciousness—further determine ourselves freely to act from laws of reason alone. However, if the world of appearances is deterministic, then how can we be free to act morally in that same domain?

After the second *Critique*, Kant understood that freedom could not merely be outside of the sensible world, but indeed only mattered if it could change it.⁷ That is, moral-rational laws needed to be capable of interacting with our lives in the sensible-deterministic sphere of appearances. Between the laws of nature and law of freedom, however, yawned a “chasm” or “gap” (*KU* 5:195).⁸ We know that the theoretical and practical domains of experience are not necessarily in contradiction with each other since we cognize deterministic laws *and* know ourselves to be free (on a Kantian account). Kant states as much in the introduction to the third *Critique*, as noted in the previous chapter. But neither do we know that they are in harmony, or that interaction can occur while preserving the sovereignty of both. Can the philosopher, as a legislator of reason, find a point of reference to ground the unification of these domains and our disparate but necessary judgments such that coherence in our thinking results? The solution that Kant thought to have discovered and revealed to Reinhold in the letter from 1787 was in the mediating, third domain of philosophy, namely, teleology.

And that this mediation could occur through a reflective examination of nature as a whole from a philosophical perspective, Kant must have realized, provides the possibility for providing unity that experience, when taken up in a piecemeal fashion, lacks.⁹ For it is when taking up what in the scholastic tradition are referred to as “last” questions, that we come to the point where we want to know not merely *how* a certain domain functions, but rather

⁷ See *KU* 5:195.

⁸ See, as well, *EEKU* 20:245.

⁹ Kant notes that the gap can only be filled “insofar as they are related in their determination not only to the sensible but also to the supersensible” (*EEKU* 20:244–5).

probe after the *why* at the heart of things. For example, questions like: Why are we—as moral beings—here in the first place? And why does creation exist in the first place?¹⁰ These are questions that require a synthesis of not merely this or that area of existence, but rather a synthesis that makes sense of the whole of experience. And the only way to even begin to provide answers to these questions, Kant thinks, is through reflective judgment. He notes in the setup of the ethico-teleological reflection that the *why*-nature of these questions cannot be answered in any other way: “If the mere mechanism of nature is assumed as the basis for the explanation of its purposiveness, then one cannot ask why the things in the world exist” (KU 5:434). Instead, one must turn to teleology and purposiveness to get at a *why*. However, after moving through the physical teleological approach, as detailed in Chapter 7, Kant realizes that only an ethico-teleological answer can suffice. And in so doing, we see Kant act out for the reader how it is that we can construct a view of the whole of experience and, indeed, in a way that he thinks connects with everyday experience, or as he calls it the “common understanding” (KU 5:442). And the result of these reflections is not a one-off judgment, but rather a reflective standpoint relative to the whole of experience. And the term Kant chooses to denote this standpoint, which he emphasizes but which the standard Cambridge translation leaves without emphasis, is a “*Betrachtung der Welt*” (second and third editions, KU 5:378) or “*Weltbetrachtung*” (first edition, KU 5:446).¹¹

¹⁰ See, e.g., KU 5:442.

¹¹ For other instances of *Weltbetrachtung* from the third *Critique*, see, e.g.: “[T]he ground of such a disposition, the moral predisposition in us [*die moralische Anlage in uns*] as the subjective principle not to be content with natural causes **in the worldview with its purposiveness** [*in der Weltbetrachtung mit ihrer Zweckmäßigkeit*] but rather to base it in a supreme cause ruling nature in accordance with moral principles, is unmistakable” (KU 5:446, translation modified and my emphasis). And: “Thus one does not arrive at any categorical end, but all of this purposive relation rests on a condition that is always to be found further on, and which, as unconditioned, (the existence of a thing as a final end) lies entirely outside of the physical-teleological *Weltbetrachtung*” (KU 5:378). And: “[The human being] must already be presupposed to be the final end of creation in order for there to be a rational ground *why* nature, if it is considered [*betrachtet*] as an absolute whole in accordance with principles of ends, must agree with his *Glückseligkeit*” (KU 5:443). In the *Opus postumum*, Kant also refers to the notion of a “*Weltbeschauer* (*Cosmotheoros*)” to refer to the manner that the “thought of an elementary system of moving forces of matter (*cogitatio*) necessarily precedes the perception of them” (OP 21:552). Paralleling the notion of a thought infinity preceding the concept of individual numbers, he points out that, “This principle is subjective, for the world-observer (*cosmotheoros*): a *basis* in idea for all the unified forces which set the matter of the whole of cosmic space in motion” (OP 21:553). Adickes, *Kants Opus postumum*, 140, notes that this is most likely arising from Christiaan Huygens’s posthumous work, *Cosmotheoros, oder weltbetrachtende Muthmassungen von deren himmlischen Erdkugeln und deren Schmuck* (1698), which was translated into German with this title for the second edition in 1743. The term *Weltbeschauer* appears even in the *Groundwork* to distinguish how the sensible world might appear to many *Weltbeschauer* as different, though the intelligible world must appear the same for all *Weltbeschauer* (GMS 4:451).

Beginning with Step One, or the positing of a unifying ideal, the ethico-teleological reflection led to the point where the philosopher posited the highest good as the unifying ideal of all creation because it can speak to all the domains of reason in a way that also accounts for how they ultimately, in a way that we cannot directly perceive, stand in a mutually supporting relation. To signify this choice, Kant refers explicitly to the highest good as providing a “point of reference” [*Beziehungspunkt*] in the third *Critique* and the *Religion*, relative to our transcendental *Standpunkt*. The highest good can speak to our theoretical reason because it is the only final end that we can discover to answer the theoretical question of why nature exists in the first place. Or as Kant asserts, the highest good provides the “final aim” that we must judge into nature, since by merely looking at the “nexus of ends discovered in [nature] with ideas of reason [...] we can form no common reference point [*Beziehungspunkt*] for all these natural ends, no sufficient teleological principle for cognizing all the ends together in a single system [i.e., without it]” (*KU* 5:440–1).¹² Hence, using the metaphor again of the highest good as a grand central station for unifying the various regions of reason, the region of theoretical reason can find a final station for its speculations in the highest good as a final purpose for all that exists in nature. The world exists for the sake of the good. But the highest good, as a final end, is also for more obvious reasons connected with the region of practical-moral reason. Not only is the highest good an individuated substrate in reason that is determined through the moral law, but it further represents an ideal that we must (indirectly) intend with every particular end we set in our lives as moral agents. Hence, the highest good is also the final station for our moral lives. In the *Religion*, Kant asserts—again employing the term “point of reference”—this convergence of viewing nature as a system of natural and practical ends unified in the highest good:

It cannot be a matter of indifference for morality as to whether it does or does not make the concept of a final end of all things (to act in harmony with which indeed does not increase the number of its duties, but which provides them with a special point of reference [*Beziehungspunkt*] of the unification of all ends). For through this alone can an objectively practical reality be provided for the connection of purposiveness from freedom with

¹² Translation modified to reorder “sufficient teleological principle” in line with the original German.

purposiveness of nature—which we cannot at all do without.” (RGV 6:5, my translation)

The highest good as a system of ends can relate to both the theoretical domain of nature and the practical domain of freedom, thereby grounding the transcendental possibility that behind the appearances trains and commuters from both regions might connect at one, supersensible hub. While certain laws of nature are *not* grounded in reflective natural ends, they—as a part of nature—need not be at cross purposes behind the scenes of how things must appear to us. Through the highest good, as a point of reference, the possibility arises that the domains, indeed, are not in conflict with each other but rather potentially unified supersensibly. Furthermore, the fact that we experience beauty and the sublime, while not qualifying as their own unique domains of reason, finds a connection in the same system of ends. Since both types of judgment ultimately lead us symbolically (in the case of beauty) or experientially (in the case of the sublime) to recognize our moral-supersensible nature, they also share the highest good as a final station in reflection. All the trains of reason can connect in the ideal of the highest good. And by identifying an ideal to serve as the unifying point around which the various domains of reference can find fit, Step One in the construction of a worldview is complete.

But Kant goes further than merely positing an ideal since it represents a necessary but not sufficient condition to close the gap. It is insufficient, first, for a technical reason: namely, an ideal is a concept of reason, but a worldview as Kant employs it is the systematic outlook based on an ideal (or idea). It is for this reason that it would be inaccurate to say that the highest good *is* a worldview. Rather, for Kant, the highest good is the substrate or foundation relative to which a worldview can be constructed. Indeed, Kant himself refers to the need to find a “substrate” in the very passage where he coins the term *Weltanschauung*:

For it is only by means of this [faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible] and its idea of a noumenon, which itself admits of no intuition though it *presupposes as the substratum* of the *Weltanschauung* as mere appearance, that the infinite of the sensible world is **completely** comprehended in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude **under a concept**, even though it can never be completely thought in the

mathematical estimation of magnitude **through numerical concepts**. (*KU* 5:254–5, emphasis added)

Setting aside the complexities of this passage, the emphasized portion highlights that for Kant, a substrate is a precondition of forming a worldview. And the reason that Kant must have found this philosophically necessary was that only some substrate outside of appearances could serve as a unifying point capable of synthesizing all the conditioned moments *within* one experience. It is here where the reconstruction I offered in Part I of the study becomes all the more appealing. For if a practical ideal, indeed, plays a grounding role in how we experience the world, then it fits perfectly with this philosophical search for a worldview. Once discerned through our moral evaluations and arrived at as the only final end of which we are aware, it is uniquely fitting to serve as a point of orientation for a system of ends that together constitute our experience. And as noted, it does so—as I argue at length in the next chapter—in a way that does not abandon its function as articulated in Part I. For the highest good as a practical ideal in the background of experience can fulfill both functions: It can both ground the very possibility of certain key moral experiences in the first place *and* ground a philosophical worldview that extends past the merely moral sphere of action.

This brings us to Step Two. Again, it is not sufficient for the construction of a worldview to merely *posit* an ideal as the final end of creation. That would be on the Kantian reading of worldview construction philosophically lazy. A carpenter cannot merely point to the timbers, planks, and nails in his workshop and claim: “It’s all a mountain chapel; at least, that’s what it will be after I’ve constructed it.” Until the wood and materials have been fit together and *shown* capable of being such, there is only an aggregate and a possible unity. Just so, merely positing a unifying ideal does not count as worldview, but it does enable and guide the creation of one just as a blueprint enables and guides the construction of an edifice. In short, for the philosopher, it is one thing to posit that the whole must fit together and choose an ideal to ground this harmonious interconnection of parts, and another thing to check the coherence (or harmony) of the interrelated, necessary judgments that shape it. This explains why, on my reading, Kant sets out to show that coherence obtains in a definitive way in §87.

After the ethico-teleological reflection, that is, Kant arrived at a point where—from the theoretical side of things (in which a search for a final end resulted in finding it to be the ideal embedded in our moral-noumenal nature)—there is now a need to set up the moral proof for God’s existence in

§87 by emphasizing that it is the *Bündigkeit* of the inference that must be tested: “We will first describe the progress of reason from that moral teleology and its relation to the physical [teleology] to **theology**, and will subsequently consider the possibility and *coherence* [*Bündigkeit*] of this sort of inference” (*KU* 5:448, emphasis added).¹³ Kant here is laying out, to his mind, a clear plan for the proof that ultimately aims to demonstrate the coherence or overarching harmony between these three domains (the moral, the physical, and the religious), which are all represented in the result from the forgoing ethico-teleological reflection.

Thinking of the carpenter who must seek a plan for the beams to be well fitting and bear the load of the structure, Kant is attempting the same for the philosophical mission of showing how the inferences might all lead to a stable model of the world in reflective judgment. But this needs to be tested to see if there actually can be a harmonious interrelation between the various forms of judgment. This need to fit together our judgments and domains of experience (as determined *a priori*) in a reciprocally reinforcing way remains important to Kant up through the end of his career. As he notes in the *Opus postumum*: “Transcendental philosophy is that system of philosophy in which all philosophical principles of cognition *a priori* connect in a totality of synthetic cognition *in that they are reciprocally* [*wechselseitig*] *unified into an absolute totality*” (*OP* 21:115, my translation and emphasis). Kant thinks that transcendental philosophy itself aims at the construction of a system of experience in the whole such that the various cognitions and judgments stand in a meaningful relation to the rest. It is a thought akin to what Wilfrid Sellars referred to as “the philosophical quest,” whose aim, “abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.”¹⁴ What Kant has in mind, I think, parallels Gilbert Harman’s coherence theory of reason, which seeks a holistic fittingness between one’s beliefs: “Whether such a belief is justified depends on how well it fits together with everything else one believes. If one’s beliefs are coherent, they are mutually supporting.”¹⁵ I turn now to show Kant’s performative test of coherence vis-à-vis the highest good as enabling this mutually supporting quality.

The performative illustration of Step Two in the construction of a world-view occurs again in §§86 and 87, namely, the ethico-teleological reflection

¹³ Translation modified to replace “cogency” with “coherence” for *Bündigkeit*.

¹⁴ Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image,” 369.

¹⁵ Harman, *Change in View*, 32–3.

and moral proof of God's existence. In both, Kant analyzes our judgments of physical and moral teleology in relation to either the assumption that everything is grounded in mere matter, making the universe ultimately materialistic void, or to the assumption that the highest good, as a system of ends, is the unifying point for both matter and mind. The goal is to check which constellation of necessary judgments relative to these foundations provides the most coherent picture. The original German sets the reader into a frame of mind intended to enliven one's own reflective judgments. It begins: "Es ist ein Urteil . . ." or in my translation:

It is a judgment, which even the common understanding cannot free itself from, if one reflects about the *Dasein* of things in the world and existence of the world itself: (*KU*, 5:442)¹⁶

I leave the colon, which is omitted from the translation of the Cambridge edition, and translate as directly as possible since the grammar and ending of the clause seem intentionally formed to achieve a certain goal: namely, to prepare the mind for receiving a judgment that should find approval in one's own reflection about the world.

The judgment is that without the final moral end toward which the world might be progressing, there would be no discernible point to the order: "i.e., the judgment that without human beings the whole of creation would be a mere desert, existing in vain and without a final end" (*KU* 5:442). Kant is not speaking anthropocentrically, but rather ethico-centrally.¹⁷ The judgment is a value judgment about existence itself. If all that existed were beings lacking the idea of a final end according to which the world's phenomena could be organized, Kant thinks we would be left with a picture of the world as, in essence, pointless. This follows straight from the nature of practical ideals. An entity that lacked practical ideals would not be able to see the world as anything but a "desert, existing in vain and without a final end." There would be no moral contours, gradations, or a sense of fit between one's moral calling and what one perceives. But this worldview simply is incoherent within the parameters of necessary forms of human experience on the transcendental model. If we assume that nature lacks any real aim guiding it toward full perfection, then the alternative—for Kant, a chaos of

¹⁶ Translation modified.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Höffe, "Der Mensch als Endzweck," 291–3, 306.

matter in the void—is untenable with conditions of experience that are necessary. Thus, even trying to occupy that standpoint would require the taking up of an unstable view. It throws us back to the starting line of having to judge again. For this would contradict the stable lawfulness of sensible experience, natural ends, and the moral law as a fact of reason, and we cannot make sense of the world without stable laws, natural ends, nor silence the moral law.

That is, in the seat of reflective judgment, we are forced back to the beginning. Or as Kant notes, in reference to a worldview [*Weltbetrachtung*]: “For if this **worldview** were to allow him to represent nothing but things without a final end, then no value would emerge from the fact they are cognized” (*KU* 5:442).¹⁸ Chaos is as nonsensical as a hodgepodge of experience without any order at all. We know there to be order, we feel the bite of conscience, and we cannot escape the need to impute purposes into the internal structure of organisms. These necessary facets of transcendental experience, on Kant’s theory, call out, therefore, for a different, stable grounding. The substrate of practical ideals can serve well here. And its stable reality in our thinking—a universal beacon of the good meant for making the world in its image makes sense of why Kant thought that it and it alone can qualify as the substrate that unifies these domains.

For many modern readers, this will sound downright archaic. It is worth noting, however, that this harmony of experience and nature is not merely a relic of the Enlightenment. As just one example, in unpublished correspondence between Kurt Gödel—one of the most important logicians of the 20th century and called by some the greatest since Aristotle—and his mother, Marianne, Gödel presents his reasoning that supports tenet number 10 in his list that details his philosophical outlook, namely: “10. Materialism is false.”¹⁹ On July 23, 1961, Gödel wrote to his mother:

Does one have a reason to assume *that* the world is rationally structured? I think so. For it is absolutely not chaotic and arbitrary, rather—as natural science demonstrates—there reigns in everything the greatest regularity and order. Order is, indeed, a form of rationality.²⁰

And in a way quite fitting for this chapter on the construction of a worldview, Gödel continues to articulate his position as none other than a

¹⁸ Translation modified to have “worldview” for *Weltbetrachtung*.

¹⁹ Crocco and Engelen, *Kurt Gödel Philosopher-Scientist*, 36.

²⁰ Gödel, *Brief an Marianne Gödel*, 23.7.1961, my translation.

“theological *Weltanschauung*,” as he argues for seeing the world whole as rationally structured:

What I name a theological worldview [*Weltanschauung*] is the view that the world and everything in it has meaning and reason, and indeed a good and indubitable meaning. From this it follows immediately that our earthly existence—since it as such has at most a very doubtful meaning—can be a means to an end [*Zweck*] for another existence. The idea that everything in the world has meaning is, by the way, the exact analogue of the principle that everything has a cause on which the whole of science is based.²¹

Gödel’s reasoning for his worldview rests on the order that one finds in nature and which points toward that same order running deep even in the sphere that is not directly perceivable. For Kant, this search for meaning also points in a theological direction in so far as the highest good, which offers a final station for our theoretical speculation and practical activity (as in the previous two *Critiques*), depends on a higher power to ensure that the highest good’s possibility is truly ensured. Thus, positing the ideal of the highest good in Step One and searching for coherence in Step Two unlocks a final domain of experience, namely, the religious. We have reason to assume, “for the sake of coherent moral thinking” (as Kant added in the footnote to the proof for the second edition), that “there is a God” (*KU* 5:450). Hence, relative to the highest good as a unifying ideal, the worldview of the transcendental philosopher finds space also for faith, thereby adding yet another region of experience to the railway network of reason that converges with the highest good as a common point of reference.

Kant, at the height of his system, sought to use the highest good, therefore, as important for how we judge the whole of the universe and our place in it. That is, it served as the substrate on which a coherent worldview could be constructed. And as a technical term, worldview connotes the active process of orienting oneself relative to the world. This demonstrates, further, a way in which a Kantian worldview differs from its common usage, even in more academic or technical settings. For it seems most often assumed that everyone possesses a worldview. For instance, the eminent scholar of religion, Ninian Smart, in his work, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (1983), asserts: “[W]hether we have spelled it out or not, each one of us has

²¹ Gödel, *Brief an Marianne Gödel*, 6.10.1961, my translation.

a worldview, which forms a background to the lives we lead.”²² Indeed, even the renowned Kant scholar Lewis White Beck, in his overview of Kant for his work, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors*, misses the technical definition of worldview in Kant’s philosophy. Referring to “Kant’s *Weltanschauung*,” Beck writes in a way akin to Smart:

By *Weltanschauung* I mean here: a set of philosophical ideas and opinions held together in a personal attitude, but without benefit of the technical discipline of analysis and argumentation which, it is to be hoped, raises philosophy above the merely subjective, individual, and existential that gives it some claim to more than biographical and historical interest.²³

Kant would certainly agree that a worldview forms a background to our lives. However, Kant would say that we are not merely born into a worldview or naturally come to possess one. A *Weltanschauung* is actually, pace Beck, precisely the reverse: Only through the technical discipline of philosophy do we have hope of actually constructing a worldview. Even if one claims to think that the world has a higher purpose, for example, this determines only (in a loosey-goosey, yet-to-be-determined way) Step One of the process. One must also then, through philosophizing, check the coherence of one’s worldview relative to the ideal. Hence, contrary to some modern uses of the term worldview to connote something like a person’s “general outlook,” or “personal philosophy,” Kant intended for the construction of a worldview to hold only after one has tested for coherence. Rather than a passive aggregate, a worldview is only at hand in this sense if one reflects and shapes it through the method of philosophy.

9.2. The Strength and Value of a Worldview

I have now reconstructed what Kant meant by a worldview and the process of how to construct one. Philosophical puzzles immediately spring to the fore. First, there is the question of the strength, stability, and generality of Kant’s worldview construction. Does Kant think that he has presented *the* philosophical worldview of transcendental, human experience? And, if so,

²² Smart, *Worldviews*, 3–4.

²³ Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, 126.

to what extent can this worldview stand when judged by today's standards, or even simply by other, nontranscendental standards? These first questions arise because it seems suspicious that Kant, living in the 18th century, could adequately provide a philosophical worldview that persists in influence. Another set of puzzles deals with the value of constructing a worldview in Kant's sense. That is, if it is not necessary (as follows from its status as a task, which we may or may not take up), then why should one care? I deal with each in turn.

As to whether Kant thought that he provided *the* philosophical worldview of transcendental human experience, the most likely answer from Kant would be "yes and no." No, because Kant himself was highly allergic to the mere mimicking of philosophy, which he took to be an active task. And a remark he made in lectures is often cited about the true nature of philosophy being rooted in philosophizing as opposed to simply memorizing philosophies. Because worldview construction requires the active testing of coherence in one's own thinking, Kant would stand strictly at odds with his own theory if he simultaneously asserted that his construction was true absolutely. The testing of a worldview presupposes that one is *not* already certain of one's results prior to actual reflection. Lastly, Kant makes remarks himself about how the construction of a philosophical worldview is part of an ongoing process. As he notes in the *Opus postumum*: "This is the way of things with a world-edifice [*Weltgebäude*] as a totality.—It is in a constant state of becoming" (OP 21:138, my translation). And a world edifice's permanent state of becoming connects with the ideals that undergird it and which, as concepts of reason, permanently present us with a certain totality that we can only approximate in lived experience. Hence, the construction of a worldview—even if treated as more or less completed at one point in time—has no guarantees of permanence and, indeed, must undergo future testing for coherence as life continues to happen. Indeed, when taking a step back and observing Part II of my study, one sees that Kant's intellectual development presents a textbook example of the constantly evolving, philosophical model of a mind struggling to account for how the domains of human reason all cohere in a unified fashion. Kant himself was an advocate for keeping one's worldview open to alteration in an ever-changing experience. For these reasons, Kant would reject the claim of having discovered *the* philosophical worldview.

However, Kant would equally reject that his philosophical worldview was only his own subjective take on experience, conditioned and codetermined

by his historical context as an 18th-century Prussian male. For the important tenets of his theory, which he sought to coherently fit together, he argued must be universal conditions of human experience, without which the possibility of representing objects in the first place would fall away. The ideality of space and time, appearances cohering to deterministic natural laws with an *a priori* foundation in reason, and the unconditioned fact of the moral law, to name a few, articulated intuitions, cognitions, and judgments that are necessary for the human species in general. These structuring conditions of possible experience and morality, Kant thought, even if disputed, must be considered live, philosophical options for understanding human experience. Indeed, the lasting importance of Kant's thought indicates that his transcendental arguments are not merely of historical interest, but rather are still philosophical contenders (albeit in need of some interpretive critique, adaptation, and extension). Consequently, Kant would think that his construction of a worldview through his philosophical system represented the *transcendental* philosophical worldview of human experience. Kant clearly thought that his system was right and presented the best way of understanding human experience when compared with an empiricist or naturalist attempt. However, here, he himself would point out that his system aims not at getting every feature of the world right, but rather with understanding the forms that must be present for it to be experienceable by us in the first place.

Here, though, the skeptic will press. For the question then becomes whether Kant's system truly can support its own weight. After all, if the philosophical worldview with the highest good at its center is dependent on teleology and Kant's moral arguments, then many will point out that the structure is perhaps a flimsy edifice not worth any serious consideration as successfully fulfilling the philosophical mission. That is, while there might be hope in philosophy procuring the inner satisfaction for discovering a coherent worldview, Kant's attempt and (consequently) the highest good's role within it ought to be assigned a place among other philosophical views that are historically important but inert in terms of their influence on us. Presumably, to return to the carpentry metaphor, a carpenter will recognize that an edifice in which some beams are made of oak and others of balsa wood is not, as a whole, built to last. And if Kant's system has certain such subpar quality beams, then perhaps one ought to search further.

Here, though, I think the skeptic will need to be careful in assigning what counts as a foundational beam in the Kantian edifice and what does not. Kant would certainly think that many features of his system were beams holding

up the edifice of experience. These are those that are strictly *a priori* and have no (indeed, may not contain any) empirical content or basis. Thus, everything enabling constitutive judgment and the foundations of morality, that is, the theoretical and practical domains of reason, Kant would have thought are supports of the very possibility of rational experience in the first place. However, the reflective judgments of both what we discover in experience and of nature on the whole and the rational faith we place in God and the immortality of the soul, Kant would not treat as equally strong supports of experience. Instead, they make sense of how we cannot help but assume things to be a certain way without determining that they *must* actually be such.

To stick with the metaphor of a dwelling, such judgments might fill the edifice of reason with the furniture and decorations that make sense of certain experiences that connect with the principle of purposiveness. These elements in our worldview might be important, that is, for making the edifice into a livable dwelling. But this also means that these internal accoutrements are not essential to the stability of the building's frames, beams, or foundations. And, as a result, some of these are already rejected, and others might need to be exchanged or tossed aside.

As areas of his worldview that have been thoroughly rejected, I am thinking of Kant's views on race and women, which are grounded in his empirical anthropology, racism, and misogyny.²⁴ As further examples of Kant's worldview that might need tossing, there are his views on the moral status of animals and early education. While Kant forbade cruelty to animals, it was not due to any inherent worth, but only because "it dulls his shared feeling of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other people" (*MS 6:443*). And, as for early education, his views on child rearing are harsh:

To be sure the child does not yet have any concept of morals, but its natural disposition is thereby spoiled in such a way that afterwards very strict

²⁴ Kant mainly developed his views on race in three essays, from 1777, 1785, and 1787, respectively, and then, according to an influential reading by Kleingeld, "Anti-Racism and Kant Scholarship" and "Kant's Second Thoughts," most likely changed course in his thinking by 1795 with the writing of *Perpetual Peace* (see, e.g., *ZeF* 8:358–9). This topic has been a point of intense analysis recently, e.g., Allais, "Kant's A Priori Philosophy," "Kant's Racism;" Basevich, "Reckoning with Kant;" Bernasconi, "Kant's Third Thoughts on Race," "Who Invented the Concept of Race," "Why Do Happy Inhabitants;" Louden, *Kant's Impure Ethics*; Lu-Adler, "Kant on Lazy Savagery," *Kant, Race, and Racism*; Mills, "Black Radical Kantianism," "Kant's Untermenschen," and Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*.

punishment must be applied in order to repair that which has been spoiled.
(*Päd* 9:460)²⁵

The question must be posed (and actively is being posed) whether these baubles and dust collectors from the lifelong bachelor in 18th-century Prussia need to be kept on the shelves as coherent within the overall framework of his theory. While these views are certainly undeniable parts of Kant's historical worldview and must be addressed as the problematic claims that they are, one way forward is to take worldview in the technical sense that I have developed to show how incoherent certain parts of his worldview are relative to other parts, which we might view (with him) as necessary features of his system and, consequently, worth preserving. That is, many elements—regardless of their consistency within his system—might still be incoherent if not mutually supporting and supported by other more primary elements relative to the ideal. And if incoherent, we would have a warrant to mark them as such within a revised Kantian worldview on philosophical grounds. And seeking how a revisionary Kantian worldview can arise by following the principles that he himself advocated, we might find a way of seeing how his thought went wrong and how to move forward with it responsibly.

Despite some features of Kant's system and historical worldview—to my mind—failing his own test of coherent construction, there are other contested features of his system that I think some will want to expel but which I would urge retaining. These are features of the Kantian worldview that are not the oak beams but are also not anthropologically derived accretions that need to be tossed out. The religious postulates, for example, are neither in my view. They do not support the system, but they are parts of the system that Kant thought we must find necessary in a merely subjective sense and from a practical point of view. For these, I think the idea is not of seeing their fit in the edifice in terms of load bearing in any capacity, but rather in terms of how they make the abode livable. Perhaps they are, to end the metaphor, the windows that lighten our rational dwelling.

To summarize, I think that there is much in Kant's system that could be brought together into a coherent worldview (as a technical term), grounded

²⁵ For a man who never raised children, Kant has many harsh opinions about how to raise them. Another telling example is "A hard bed is much healthier than a soft one. In general a hard education is very helpful in strengthening the body. But by hard education we understand merely the prevention of ease. There is no lack of remarkable examples for the confirmation of this assertion, only they are not heeded, or, better said, no one wants to heed them" (*Päd* 9:464).

in and checked via the highest good as its unifying ideal. However, this requires serious contemplative exertion to check the coherence of one's views. As Goethe's titular character says in *Faust*:

What from thy sires thou hast inherited
 Earn, and so make thy own possession.
 What is not used becomes a load of lead,
 Each moment can but use tools of its own creation.²⁶

In the original German,²⁷ it is even clearer that this process of “earning” or “erwerben” one's own inheritance is the only way to truly possess it. And this—in the current context—depends on each individual taking up the task to create a coherent, philosophical worldview. And just as one need not earn one's inheritance, so too one need not construct a worldview—though, Kant promises, it is a privilege proffering rewards to those who try.

I turn now to the next set of puzzles pertaining to why we ought to strive after the construction of a worldview if it is not an absolutely necessary component of theoretical or practical experience. Ultimately, I think that there are two answers. The first answer is relatively straightforward, but also dogmatic sounding. The second answer is more speculative and playful. It is based on inchoate remarks from Kant, which might point to a deeper justificatory reason. Both answers, however, make the same overall point, which is that our lives possess an added value if we possess a coherent worldview. And they very well could be integrally related to each other.

The first answer is that Kant thought it a feature of us as rational beings that we cannot help but strive for a coherent comprehension of the whole through contemplation. I discussed this in Chapter 8. That is, we have a need to search for a coherent model, a totality, that grounds not merely one domain or another, but rather explains how they all interrelate. And as a need that contributes to our well-being if fulfilled, its satisfaction is valuable. That is why, as he notes in an already cited passage from the *Vienna Logic*, we must commit to philosophy; since only it provides “this inner satisfaction,” as it “closes the circle, and then it sees how all cognitions fit together in an edifice, in rule-governed ways, for such ends as are suited to humanity”

²⁶ Goethe, *Faust*, 22.

²⁷ “Was du ererbst von deinen Vätern hast, / Erwirb es um zu besitzen. / Was man nicht nützt, ist eine schwere Last, / Nur was der Augenblick verschafft, das kann er nützen.”

(V-Lo/Wiener 24:800).²⁸ The first sort of added value, therefore, speaks to a dimension of Kant's thought that is virtue ethical in nature.

Part of what it means to lead a good life as the sorts of beings we are is one in which we philosophically search for a wisdom that brings together the domains of our reasoning into a coherent system. Though not necessarily producing anything extra that can be measured, such wisdom generates the intellectual virtue of self and world knowledge. As Kant notes in the *Opus postumum*, which I already cited above, this is that which "must necessarily take place if one would turn rational man into a being who knows himself" (OP 21:7). The idea that Kant expresses is the familiar one from the Western tradition dating back to Plato, namely, that the unexamined life is not worth living. And for Kant, we must construct a worldview because we otherwise will lack a thoroughgoing examination of life. Even were it to lead to no practically advantageous consequences, therefore, there would still be a good in constructing a philosophical worldview in so far as it represents a fulfilling activity for us as rational beings. That is, we thrive and live better lives with such coherence because of the sorts of beings we are. And Kant would not take himself to be begging the question on this score. Rather, Kant thinks he is observing a fact about us that requires no further justification, just as one can state without further justification that it is a fact that we require food and water to survive, that music is soothing to the soul, that for humans love is desirable, as well as that space and time are conditions without which no experience as objective experience is possible. These are not hypotheses or assumed premises, but rather constitutive features of our lives as rational beings that just so happen to be the case.

The first answer posits, in short, that we, as philosophical beings, have a need for a view of the whole that is best satisfied through the construction of a coherent worldview. And, hence, we ought to desire its formation since this is for our own good, our own flourishing, which changes and enriches lived experience once we express the virtue. Nevertheless, a skeptic might insist that this is a case of Kant begging the question. Perhaps Kant and funny folks like philosophers have such a desire, but certainly, we *all* do not have such an inherent impulse, in the same way that some persons but certainly not *all* persons have a desire and receive satisfaction in watching horror movies. That is, Kant is perhaps exaggerating the importance and while certainly apt

²⁸ See also from his *Metaphysik L₂* lectures (1790s): "Philosophy is the only thing that knows how to procure this inner satisfaction for us; it closes as it were the circle, and then the sciences receive order and connection" (V-Met-L2/Pöhlitz 28:535).

to be important for individuals, Kant takes things too far by ascribing this importance as holding for the entire species. However, as will be explored, Kant also indicates that the added value for one's life in constructing a worldview could express itself in ways that are universally applicable in that one's pursuits in all domains are improved through a coherent worldview. In short, the added value would not merely express a metaphysical fact about our nature, but furthermore would be economical in so far as it serves a purpose beyond scratching a philosophical itch. I introduce this answer here, but it also leads to a final question that I go into more fully in Chapter 10.

The second, but not mutually exclusive, answer is that a coherent worldview is worthwhile because of an ameliorative effect on our lives, when all our ends (both theoretical and practical) are teamed up. Kant in metaphysics lectures delivered in 1794–5 (so, right around the same period), notes that:

A philosopher must have two things [. . .] Both must be *together*. One can never become a philosopher without cognition; but *cognitions alone never* constitute a philosopher; there must be a purposeful unity of his skill here, and an insight into the agreement of this skill with the highest ends. (*V-Met-L2/Pölitz*, 28:534)

Here, we see Kant note that cognitions alone are insufficient without connection with skills. In a motto: The theoretical without the practical is inert, but the practical without the theoretical is dumb. In other lectures delivered around the same time, Kant notes in a similar vein that: “herein lies the ground that metaphysics absolutely must be cultivated, because otherwise the whole end of *all cognitions of theoretical and practical* reason cannot be fulfilled. [. . .] In short, no human being can be without metaphysics” (*V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt*, 29:948, emphasis added). From these passages, Kant seems to think that there might be some extra value added to *all* our pursuits—both intellectual and practical—if we are wise in the ways of how these domains interrelate. To put it abstractly, one might be better able to be moral if one has theoretical knowledge that could improve one's moral striving or shed light on psychological facts that relate to our underlying disposition. And, *mutatis mutandis*, one might find a deeper level of meaning in one's theoretical pursuits if one discovers they connect with what one finds to be morally good. Such a person who has a coherent view of the whole of one's experience and has wrestled to fit together the pieces of one's experience into a coherent whole will have in many respects a more elevated, meaningful, and

inspiring life than someone who lacks such a worldview. Kant here, that is, is not concerned with the Platonic goal of a well-ordered soul, but rather with the (certainly related) goal of a well-ordered experience. And because of the sort of beings we are, this pleases and satisfies a high-order, contemplative need. It is not necessary for survival or the possibility of experience, but it does have—Kant ventures—a subjective necessity based on the full use of reason.

Here, there might be natural points of connection with a variation of the moral-psychological view (provided it vouchsafes the validity of the moral law without any overly personal reasons based on neediness or dependence on wish fulfillment, and which are based on a feature that is universal such that practical necessity can follow). Indeed, Kant makes one statement that might seem to place it in some, yet-to-be-articulated relation to actions. In a brief note after defining coherence as *Bündigkeit*, Kant makes the following observation in his *Dohna-Wundlacken Logik* from 1792: “Coherent [*Bündig*]: when this proposition hangs together with the previous ones in a series of a system.—The more coherent [*konsequenter*] a person of dangerous maxims is, the more destructive he is” (*V-Lo/Dohna* 24:737). The notes of Kant’s lectures offer nothing more beyond this statement. One interpretation is that coherence leads to a higher impact on how one lives. A person with an evil agenda and an overarching plan coordinating a complex web of particular acts will achieve more than someone who simply acts on evil maxims spontaneously in the here and now without any grand plan. Furthermore, an evil person who has a coherent model of the whole might be in a better place when manipulating or avoiding potential threats. However, these benefits that might attach to one’s overall influence still do not enter into one’s considerations about whether one should act. And this is the key distinction that will need to be established to make this consistent with the moral law. This requires careful unpacking relative to its status as a practical ideal, which I begin to address in the next section but can only fully treat in Chapter 10.

9.3. Agatha Visits the Egoids

The view that I have put forward can be summarized as follows: The highest good serves as the grounding ideal of a coherent worldview of transcendental experience. That Kant is after coherence with the highest good, I argued in

Chapters 7 and 8. And it is performatively demonstrated through the ethico-teleological reflection and moral proof, which show Kant, first, searching for an ideal that can bridge our theoretical reason (nature) with our practical reason (morality) and, second, test whether a coherent model truly results. The highest good is important in the third *Critique* and beyond because it can provide this special point of reference or common ground between theoretical and practical reason, which permits us to form a systematic outlook in contemplation. In so doing it fulfills a need we have as contemplative beings to expand our understanding of the whole in which our thinking and doing is embedded. This is the contemplative view of the highest good's importance. While we certainly do not merely possess a worldview and while the construction of a worldview is not required for survival, it is nevertheless necessary if we want to express our full potential as rational beings for whom contemplation offers its own rewards that need not be cashed out in terms of their utility for action. The highest good's importance, that is, is inherently connected with the value of philosophizing for Kant, as that activity that centers around contemplation for the sake of a meaningful life. And since it is possible to take this substrate for granted or ignore the task of constructing a worldview through philosophizing, it might be easy to overlook the account's appeal. But precisely, here, I think we find a component of Kant's philosophy worthy of preservation, and which comes to light if we ask: When we philosophically represent the agent not merely as an actor, but rather as the entire world-inhabiting subject, what is required for a complete account? What preconditions must obtain in order to contemplate the way we do?

A thought experiment can help make this point intuitive by checking to see what would be missing if someone lacked this need and ability to search for a systematic outlook of the whole. That is, we can think about a kind of being incapable of accessing a certain point of reflection and see why there might be something to Kant's insistence that it is a rational need for us to construct a worldview in contemplation. The upshot of the thought experiment is that worldview construction is inextricable from philosophy as a way of contemplation. And if one takes philosophy to be inherently valuable, then worldview construction is valuable in the same way—that is, without needing to derive value from its utility in action.²⁹ Rather its scope is holistic and existential, touching every part of lived experience.

²⁹ Though it might very well serve in these ways. The point is that the value of worldview construction is not dependent on these.

The thought experiment: First, we consider a species of beings that we call the Egoids from a combination of the Freudian “ego” and “id.” At first glance, their society resembles human society in many ways. And upon closer examination, their science and morality even align with a Kantian model of human experience. Cognition for them is discursive in that they require both sensible content via intuitions and concepts to think about this content intelligibly. They have developed technologies based on an understanding of the physical-natural laws of nature. And, morally, they act in a way that shows they too must strive to act from duty despite temptations from their sensible nature. They experience aesthetically pleasing moments when hiking through their mountain ranges, and they create artworks that initiate the same aesthetic experiences. And yet, they are very un-Kantian, and very different from human beings in a significant way: They lack the higher cognitive faculty that searches to ask *why* things exist as they do, whether there is a point to life, a *purpose*, beyond mere survival, and where the *whither* of all that is experienced points. They are incapable of contemplation in this deep, philosophical sense.³⁰ But these features are not obviously apparent from any visible sign of their day-to-day doings. It is only when we make contact that this difference becomes apparent.

We now think of a human being who represents the best that humanity has to offer. We call her “Agatha” from the Greek for “good.” She is a paragon of virtue, cognition, and—most importantly—wisdom. Above all, she’s a philosopher. Indeed, it was in virtue of her philosophical ability that she was chosen by humanity to make contact with this newly discovered species. A Kantian by inclination and training, she poses big questions about how and why the world and domains of experience hang together in an open-ended fashion. She is, that is, an advocate for the philosopher’s mission. She visits the Egoids with great expectation. For humanity, through Agatha’s visit, will finally be making contact with another intelligent, technologically advanced species.

Agatha lands and quickly learns that there is something very different about the way that Egoids comprehend reality. It is hard to discern at first. They clearly are intelligent and morally upright (though they too, of course, have their social ills). In speaking with scientists, she finds that they can adequately explain the principles that explain how things work as they do. And

³⁰ One might think that the various experiences that I just listed do require contemplation. I don’t think that this follows. Even if it were, though, I do not think that such beings would be really impossible and, thus, undermine the thought experiment.

in speaking with Egoids from all walks of life, she discovers that they have a keen moral sense of right and wrong. Indeed, they are quite Kantian, she suspects, because they are quite concerned with asking about one's intentions and checking to see if these align with grounds that they too could act upon. At some point, though, she notices that there is a break in communication. It first occurs when she is speaking with a physicist about space travel. She says: "I'm sure there are *many* stories, theories, and opinions on the topic, but what are some of the dominant views about *why* we are here?" Her Egoid companion looks at her quizzically: "What do you mean by '*why*'?" This leads to an odd, indeed completely disjointed conversation. But Agatha soon realizes through the exchange that the Egoids, even the most intellectually curious, care about *what* is the case and *how* it—whatever is the case—works. But as soon as one begins to ask philosophical questions that attempt to attain a meta-theoretical position about the origins and final goals of things, there is no ability for the Egoids to even comprehend the question. They are a very factual people when it comes to their science. She spends time researching Egoid civilization and soon realizes that while they have schools and institutions of higher education (they call these Know-How-Eries), none of these have any philosophy departments and the very notion of an interdisciplinary project receives confused stares. Wherever she turns, she discovers that Egoids are quite competent in explaining what is and how it works, but they are completely devoid of curiosity about *why* things are and whether an account can be offered about how things hang together in the broadest sense of the term. When she poses her philosophical questions, she receives blank expressions and responses like: "It just *is*."

Here, she is also shocked by the subtlety of the differences between Egoids and human beings. Egoids clearly, it seems, are morally attuned in a way that parallels humanity. After noticing an Egoid act of beneficence, Agatha engages him in conversation. When she asks about what the Egoid was thinking, he says: "It is what anyone in that situation ought to do." Here, Agatha thinks that she will finally discover the *why* in Egoidian culture. She says: "Surely there must be many theories about the nature of morality and *why* it exists."³¹ And here, she is simply gobsmacked by the conversation that ensues. She discovers—in a way mirroring the conversation with

³¹ Note: Egoids when asking for intentions do not ask: "Why did you do that?" Instead, they say: "How did you decide to do that?" Or: "What were you thinking?" The same goes for natural scientists there: "What's happening?" and "How's it happening?" are asked instead of "Why did it happen?"

the Egoidian physicist—that there has never been any religion, or even any mythology in their recorded history. They, of course, did not always live in such a state as they do now. Rather than in cities, they lived in nomadic tribes in earlier epochs. And there seems to be an overall improvement in how society is structured, but at no point was there any questioning of why one ought to act morally. There simply was a knowledge of what one ought to do followed by an inner struggle in which it was not always clear whether good or evil would prevail, along with certain advantages that the forming of commonwealths and alliances afforded. And as hard as Agatha tries to interest the Egoids in questions of the why of things, she receives nothing but questions asking for her to explain what she means by “why.” How does it differ from questions of “what” and “how”?³²

Truly curious now, Agatha seeks out if there is an Egoid that all the Egoids, while finding strange, also revere. Is there an Egoid who claims that he is the wisest because he knows he possesses no knowledge? Or is there one that claims that all existence is an illusion, the liberation from which will alleviate all suffering? In asking around, Agatha is directed to an Egoid who lives at the top of a mountain and calls himself “Zarathugoid.” But Agatha’s initial hopes are dashed. Even Zarathugoid does not have any inkling of what it could mean to inquire whether one domain of experience harmonizes with another. So, Agatha takes a different tack and asks him whether there are disputes in cosmology about whether the universe has a beginning or whether it is eternal without any beginning (and end). But every time these questions are asked, a fluid conversation suddenly swerves into incomprehension. Even the great Zarathugoid cannot help Agatha beyond saying: The wisest is simply the person who tries to know as much as possible about everything that is the case.³³

Agatha has discovered that there is no need—indeed, no faculty even whose lack of use leads to the felt need—to seek a coherent worldview and thereby satisfy the philosopher’s mission of understanding how the various domains of experience are not merely consistent with one another, but further cohere or harmonize with each other relative to final ends. There is no awareness that one might begin seeking out a synthetic approach of

³² Kant is clear that morality is grounded in the faculty of reason. Some Kantians might think that such beings, who are incapable of reflecting on final ends, are incapable of counting as truly virtuous as well. Let us assume, though, for the sake of argument that such a moral being is possible.

³³ Zarathugoid is an outlier because many Egoids do not see the point of persisting in the search for knowledge of everything that is the case.

bringing together various domains of experience. Agatha realizes—having read the ancient text, *The Reality of the Ideal*, that the Egoids are completely determined in their thinking by the principle of isolation, and, indeed, are incapable of even occupying the perspective from which they could begin to formulate a philosophical principle in explicit terms. They are clearly an intelligent and moral species, but they are not a philosophical species. Contemplation plays no role in their lives. And while they can talk about things, Agatha realizes that they have no worldview in the Kantian sense. None of them are struggling to understand how it is that they fit into the whole—indeed, it is not clear that they even consider the whole in any aspect of their lives. They certainly are aware of the future, but it does not hold any greater importance for them than a time to come for which they must prepare to survive and thrive.

* * *

What can Agatha's visit to the Egoids reveal about humanity's philosophical nature? One way of attending to the difference would be to point out that Egoids come apart from human beings because they are a species for whom Kant need not have written the Transcendental Dialectic. Their thinking is perfectly in line perhaps with the transcendental aesthetic and analytic, but there are no transcendental illusions that arise for them. Indeed, there are no deeper questions that occur to them. No Kant would ever be required in Egoidian society to resolve antinomial conflicts of reason because no such conflicts could be thought of in the first place. Egoidians exist in a state of shallow certainty. They all think that in grasping facts and certain relations between them that this exhausts completely the knowable. In Kantian terms, they possess sensibility and understanding, but no active reason. While for us, Kant writes in the Dialectic of the first *Critique*: "All our cognition starts from the senses, goes from there to the understanding, and ends with reason" (*KrV* A298/B355), one could say that for the Egoidians: "All their knowledge starts with the senses and ends with the understanding." There is no higher perspective from which they can entertain meta-reflections about how a world coheres. Egoids cannot contemplate. That requires active reason, which Kant notes in the first *Critique*:

never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity *a priori* through concepts to

the understanding's manifold cognitions, which may be called "the unity of reason," and is of an altogether different kind than any unity that can be achieved by the understanding. (*KrVA*302/B359)

The philosophical mission of seeking such a unity of the whole simply fails to compute for the Egoidians. Needs that Agatha feels become clear by comparison.

From a theoretical point of view, Agatha has a restless curiosity and questions why things occur. She also is capable of applying her thinking to her own understanding. How is it that her various cognitions all hang together in one experience such that they cohere in a mutually supporting way?

And from a practical point of view, Agatha is in a distinctly different position from the Egoids because she is not solely responsive to the moral law as an end; rather, she is invested in theoretical mysteries about how this end shapes the world and can codetermine a world alongside determining natural laws. As Kant notes in his metaphysics lectures from the 1790s:

Therein lies the ground that a human being finds no satisfaction for his reason here [in the world] except insofar as he exerts himself *to cognize and to reach his highest good* <*summum bonum*>, i.e., the highest final end of all his ends, the highest degree of worthiness to be happy connected with the greatest *morality*. This object of his exertion lies beyond nature, he cannot find all his empirical knowledge adequate for this [...]: he feels it necessary that this alone is the highest end and *Bestimmung* for reason. (*V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt* 29:948, emphasis added)

Agatha needs to construct a view of a system of ends because nothing in the empirical realm satisfies to answer *why* all our cognitions and exertions are at work. For the Egoidians, by contrast, there is no concern whatsoever for the whither of the will since there is no question of why it is ultimately there in the first place. The Egoids clearly possess the ideal as a real substrate for discerning comparative degrees of morality in the world, but no need to employ it further as grounds for constructing a worldview (and certainly do not metaphysically inquire about the nature of these concepts). In considering our own position, not just as end followers but also as end setters, we are constantly working with two sorts of end—proximate purpose or diachronic purpose, on the one hand, and final purpose, on the other. Answering the question, *Why should I do this?* points first to duty. I should because I'm

bound in so far as I'm rational. Answering the question, *Why should I find that which I should do important at all?* points beyond the immediate consciousness of duty to that whole of experience in which it is but one element. For an Egoid, there is the question of what one ought to *do*, but no concern for the final purpose since that requires an extra level of reflection aimed at thinking about the whole in which one's moral activity forms a part. For an account of Agatha and other beings of the world, we need an account that provides for the manner in which they relate their doings to projects or higher-order ends beyond the here and now.

To illustrate how this aligns with Kant's thinking, we can return to a passage from the *Opus postumum*, which I already introduced. Kant notes: "Nature *causes* (*agit*). Man *does* (*facit*). The rational subject acting with consciousness of purpose *operates* (*operatur*). An intelligent cause, not accessible to the sense, *directs* (*dirigit*)" (OP 21:18). Between nature as the first, which merely *causes*, and God as the last, who directs behind the appearances of things, is the human being. While the Egoids might fulfill the criteria for "doing," there is a sense in which their experience is impoverished in comparison with our own since it lacks any indication as to where it all leads. To operate, by contrast, in the technical sense provides a higher-order framework of practical and theoretical activities, as well as of living in general. For the Egoids, there is not a full consciousness at work in their doings or curiosity about anything more after the moral law has been satisfied. They lack a worldview in which their doings connect with others to create a bigger-picture project or operation.

This leads to the question of the intuitive payoff of the thought experiment. What would the Egoids reveal about the need for constructing a worldview? Assuming that such a species were possible, one notices that it is not for the sake of brute survival that one will value the construction of a worldview. It seems the Egoids can survive and thrive just fine. And it is not clear that they could possibly understand what they were missing. Like the two-dimensional beings in Edwin Abbot's *Flatland* (1883), who cannot begin to comprehend what it means to exist in three dimensions, the Egoids would conceivably never miss or feel like they are lacking anything without philosophy departments. But for Agatha and for humanity, there is something missing from their experience. There is a kind-relative value in being able to explore this dimension of philosophical reflection. Individually, such reflection enriches one's way of living. There are phenomenological opportunities for feeling and responding to a deep sense of wonder, as well as the rewards

of puzzling through such thorny and deep questions even if no easy answer is found, which are simply not available to Egoids. And collectively, it is hard—though I was intentionally vague on this point—to imagine that their technological advances will advance as well as among contemplative-philosophical beings. Just as philosophers have often led innovation on Earth, one might think that there is a value in worldview construction as a form of philosophy because of how it drives one to move beyond old models and paradigms. And morally, one might further wonder if there is some added value in constructing a worldview, indeed, in possessing a grasp of certain ideals of the whole in the first place. But here, we are back at the question of the practical nature of ideals. I turn now to examine how the highest good's use as a unifying common ground on which we create a worldview (the result of Parts II and III) connects to its nature as a practical ideal (detailed in Part I).

The Practical Power of a Kantian Worldview

Grant with me, for the sake of argument, that Kant is concerned with forming a philosophical worldview through the highest good as an ideal that supplies the organizing principle for all the varied parts of experience. And let us imagine that we *see* it too. Let us imagine, that is, that we suddenly find ourselves occupying a standpoint from which nature and morality, art and religion, the sublime and our everyday quotidian existence all seem to be structured together as parts of a world that ultimately is there for the sake of the good becoming manifest. We see that an ideal in which there is a deep harmony between human willing and the state of each human being's life provides a unique point of reference that could make sense of how experience, with all its facets, coheres into a meaningful whole. What we thought was merely an insight into how the world ought to be through a modest intellectual intuition of an individuated entity in reason proves a ground for seeing nature and freedom, art and life, all unifiable as moving toward a final goal that is good and good for us (happiness enabling).

In this episode of reflection, we find ourselves elevated to the point where a deeper meaning, a harmony or coherence, interrelates what—when treated individually—might seem disconnected from the rest. And as card-carrying Kantians, it is mostly sturdy, as we include in this worldview only the elements that speak to the *form* of experience. It is an idealized form in which the *principles* of experience are fitted together, as opposed to the content. Hence, while universal for human experience, the way it is filled out or described is open to new discoveries as they occur. As an ideal in its practical sense, of course, it remains a maximum or a substrate that empirical experience falls short of matching. Instead, we must progress toward its attainment. And as an ideal in this philosophical use, it also—while grounding our worldview—remains merely the form that then can provide an overarching unity to other forms.

Now that we occupy the standpoint from which this worldview has been constructed along the Kantian model, we can state the claim that Kant makes summarizing this synthesis of the various domains of our reason together in one coherent gestalt: The final end of all creation is the highest good. A practical ideal is now not only connected with our practical ends and indirectly available to us as an epistemic standard of comparison, but furthermore the only end fit to organize our understanding of why nature and natural ends exist in the first place. Beauty and our existence-shaking encounters with the sublime also point us toward this end. Once we have achieved a systematic outlook, which is naturally always open to fine-tuning, we further have a deep satisfaction, which colors all of experience in that we feel that it all has a meaning. And this deep-felt sense of satisfaction, as I argued in the previous chapters, is global. As a worldview-informing substrate, it plays a role in an encompassing stance that informs every experience and predisposes us, rather than being imposed on us in moments in which we are intentionally acting or perceiving particular objects.

Kant thinks that if we remain true to ourselves as transcendental idealists, then we cannot help but judge the highest good to be the final end of *all* ends in the world—practical and natural combined. This was the result of Part II. The highest good, that is, we cannot help but posit as an ideal that is imbricated with all that we see and think; it is an organizing principle determined by reason and thought as providing the supersensible substratum of all that exists. And it connects well with Part I as well. For it is in virtue of its availability to us as a ground of possible experiences that allows it to serve these various roles. Individuality, I believe, is equally at work here. For the point of reference must be *singular*; otherwise, it could not serve its unifying function. It remains in the background of experience, which enables it to be an unconditioned point of reference, which alone suffices as a grounding for the chain of ends that we cannot help but judge in nature. As a result, its substrate function from Part I is what first makes it fit to unify nature as a system of ends, which the sensible world alone cannot provide. Moreover, its inclusion of happiness clearly makes it related to how the world is in a way that pertains to the external factors, on which much of our happiness depends. All of which, in turn, leads us through morality and nature to that source, the original highest good, in whom alone we may hope that the two systems might in a way beyond our ken form *one* system.

But as we occupy this standpoint, what sort of cognition is it that we are sustaining? Or put differently, what does it amount to for us epistemically to

make the judgment that the highest good is the final end of creation? In this final chapter, I bring things full circle by connecting the notion of a practical ideal as a substrate with the highest good serving as a substrate in the construction of a coherent worldview. And I make good on many promissory notes along the way regarding how this all might again exert a practical influence on us, even if its primary service I think is ultimately contemplative in ways that are inherently valuable and requiring no further justification.

10.1. A Unique Form of Cognition

From the previous chapter, I left the question open as to what the added value might be of possessing a coherent worldview. This question must now be answered again in order to secure the highest good as a practical ideal, which is a substrate in our reasoning that can find diverse applications.

Whenever we immediately and irreducibly represent a moral world as an individuated whole in which some given state of affairs fails to match up, we contemplate in a way that provides us with a point of comparison in two senses. The first sense is that we suddenly get clued into how the world invites us to fill it with more content from the moral potential (the *Stoff*) that we discern in the ideal, as a ground of how the world as a whole might possibly *be*. If thinking of the highest good in the life of an individual, we might discern that someone's life as a whole invites extra beneficence because we judge them to be fundamentally good people who suffer an inordinate amount. Here, we might become first aware of how a particular person's state of being is morally off, which then primes us to pay heed to how we can engage by seeking to make them happy, even if only in small acts. And if thinking of the highest good in the world collectively as a social space, we might notice states of affairs, say, natural disasters, that collectively degrade the potential for happiness and flourishing in ways that will impact virtuous individuals. We might find through these an imbalance relative to a posited and charitably presumed baseline of virtue and decency. Again, this enables our awareness of moral gradations and imperfections in a purely descriptive manner, which might, in turn, allow us to grasp how we can act to make it become better. These cases are clearly connected to the form of negative constitutive judgment that I explored in Part I.

The other sense in which the ideal might serve as a point of comparison is related to its role in organizing our systematic outlook, as discussed in the

previous two chapters. In this form of contemplation, I have already noted that the highest good, as an ideal, serves us in reflecting on how the whole of experience might be rooted in a coherent, ordered way. We might face any of the types of contemplative insight into the individuated maxim of a moral world as just discussed (in the person or in the world). We then would have this final end available, which requires considering not only the person's virtue in line with the moral law, but further a world that can be affected by it and which harmonizes with a flourishing life of such an individual. Along the way, we then note new experiences, many of which might initially seem to undermine our outlook. For example, why must nature be so violent and threatening at points if it is all for the good? Kant then notes that such sublime experiences, while destructive and, hence, not good for our bodies, remind us that our moral disposition, which rises above all the physical, is indestructible: a constant source of potential goodness that is not of this world. The highest good, then, is reaffirmed as the point of comparison, for nature—while sometimes inhospitable—here could be seen as, figuratively, always reminding us of morality and its individuated substrates.

After our judgments, though, what is our relation to this ideal? This is the first question regarding what role it takes up in our thinking at this point. This is the question of what form the ideal takes on as *cognition* when we step back and assert that it, instead, is a final end that we must posit as the final end of creation itself. That is, what is it in both cases of contemplation when we are occupying the standpoint of constructing a philosophical world-view? After answering this question, I will turn to consider how the highest good in these forms of contemplation might have an extra value for us as experiencers and actors.

Here, it is helpful to look at Kant's own taxonomy of cognitions, one of which I already flagged in Chapter 3 as being potentially useful in conceiving how the highest good might serve both theoretical and practical uses as a unique form of theoretical cognition. In the *Vienna Logic*, Kant divides cognitions into three kinds: logical, aesthetic, and practical. Logical or theoretical/speculative cognitions are concerned with coming to know objects; aesthetic cognitions with how we, as subjects, are affected by objects; and practical cognitions with our desire and the creation of objects. We can proceed by process of elimination in determining the highest good's final form qua cognition.

We might begin with an option that does not seem initially plausible, namely, the view that this standpoint's judgment is yielding an aesthetic

cognition. Indeed, the highest good—judged as the final end of creation—cannot be an aesthetic cognition for Kant. The highest good's determination is a priori. Though including an idea of complete happiness, it does not promise eventual, commensurate happiness as a means to influence us (through affection) to follow the moral law. Instead, as a substrate posited to ground a model of the whole of creation, it is less about what an object *does to us*, but rather about an object in relation to which we judge and act. Hence, it cannot be an aesthetic cognition, determining the way an object affects us. Further, Kant in the third *Critique* points out that aesthetic cognitions and judgments instead are symbols for morality coming to be in the world. Consequently, such symbolic relations mean that cognitions of the highest good (as the only end fit for creation) must precede and stand independent of that which symbolizes them. That leaves the possibility that it is a theoretical or a practical cognition.

One will naturally think that the highest good, as that object that the moral law “imposes” (*KU* 5:455) upon us as the final end of creation, must be a textbook example, therefore, of a practical cognition. However, the highest good in these forms of cognition actually does not fit the bill for reasons already familiar from my treatment of their concomitant judgment in Chapter 3. A practical cognition for Kant, when formed as a proposition, is always an “*imperativus*” that “commands,” stating that “something ought to happen,” and which “says what free actions would be good for a purpose” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:900–1).¹ Thus, practical cognitions provide rules about what we should do in certain cases. Consequently, practical cognitions as imperatives are unfit to articulate the sort of cognition of the highest good at work in the third *Critique*, which does not command as the moral law does, but rather arises and persists for us through the command but which, as noted, extends past duties and, in fact, can be set aside as important for only certain episodes of reflection. Practical cognitions are aimed at our final end, but only as propositions that should “contain a rule about what agrees with our highest end” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:902). “Don’t lie!” or “Help others!” or, nonmorally, “To boil an egg, first fill a pot with water!” provide examples of practical cognitions in general. The highest good as an ideal must form a cognition of a different sort. Rather than imperative in form, it is descriptive or explicative. And it, again, is not a command of the moral law, but rather an

¹ Or: “Cognition is practical where imperative propositions are expressed, in that they indicate the necessity of a free action” (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:901).

ideal object determined by it in order to ground a synthesis of all the domains of reason through judgment.

In short: If the highest good as the final end of creation is a judgment about nature as a whole and humanity's place in it, then it is not a cognition of how an object affects us (aesthetic) nor of what we must do (practical), but rather about how we assess an objective state of affairs. That is, we are left only with it being for us some type of theoretical cognition. And when looking at Kant's notion of theoretical cognitions, we not only find a fitting type for the highest good that clarifies its place in the third *Critique*, but even allows for it to remain practically powerful at the same time. This would get us a satisfying answer to the question of what makes it still practical in nature.

While I already covered some of this in Chapter 3, as a reminder: Theoretical cognitions, Kant writes, are independent of any immediate relation to actions and reveal "how the thing is" or "what it is" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:901). All theoretical cognitions are of this form, namely, roughly as a proposition "S is P." There are two different uses. The first use is solely "speculative" or those theoretical propositions "from which no rules or *imperativi* for our actions flow" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:901). Content for a speculative use of theoretical cognition varies: It may be moral, scientific, theological, and so on, in nature so long as it is not applied to practical uses.² For example, "Three acts of kindness occurred on Main Street last night" might be a speculative-theoretical cognition about the objects or events in a part of the world, just as "Bats are able both to see and echolocate" is about objects in the world. Both tell us how things are and—without adding further cognitions—do not necessarily lead to imperatives or rules for action. Furthermore, theoretical cognitions of objects are related in some way to sensible intuitions that provide them with meaning.³

This brings us to the second use of theoretical cognition, which Kant refers to as an "objectively practical theoretical cognition." Objectively practical theoretical cognitions for Kant are theoretical in form, that is, they say how something is, but they are such that practical cognitions (imperatives) *may* be derived from or influenced by them if desired or required. The central

² See, e.g., *V-Lo/Wiener* 24:902.

³ See the second *Critique*: "since all precepts of pure practical reason have to do only with the *termination of the will*, not with the natural conditions (of practical ability) for *carrying out its purpose*, the practical a priori concepts in relation to the supreme principle of freedom at once become cognitions and do not have to wait for intuitions in order to receive meaning; and this happens for the noteworthy reason that they themselves produce the reality of that to which they refer (the disposition of the will), which is not the business of theoretical concepts" (*KpV* 5:66).

question is how one ought to interpret “influential” here? In Kant’s explicit terms, they are “*practical in potentia*” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:902). They are distinct in their use from mere speculation because they can influence or produce (it is not entirely clear how) practical commands. His example in the lectures is “That there is a God is a theoretical proposition, but it is *practical in potentia*; you must just act as if there is a highest legislator for your actions” (V-Lo/Wiener 24:901). And yet, these objectively practical cognitions remain primarily descriptive in nature (due to their form) and important for thinking about matters, that is, not directly about how one ought to act in the world. Such a theoretical cognition can possess practical power while being capable of fitting into reasoning during which action is of no concern. Not only does this, again, fit well with my proposal about how a practical ideal might work (as noted in Chapter 3), but furthermore connects well with my discussion in the previous chapters about how the value of possessing a worldview might have an added value along these lines, which—while not strictly necessary—is perhaps a beneficial side effect. We might need such a cognition in order to fully synthesize the thinking that has organized together the elements of our experience in a theoretical capacity. And, again, this need arises from our nature as philosophical beings who experience a deep satisfaction in finding a harmony between the elements that constitute our world. However, in doing so, further practical influences and powers might arise. Just as the evil person will be more destructive if possessing a coherent view of things, so too the transcendental philosopher might be more practically powerful with a coherent worldview.

Thus, determined through a reflective judgment about the purpose of creation, the cognition of the highest good as the final end that organizes all the domains of experience is most clearly a theoretical one, in terms of its form. It concerns how an object *is*, without ever leading to the expectation that we will perceive it directly via sensible intuitions. In relation to its theoretical import in the third *Critique*, on the one hand, the highest good serves as a stable grounding for claims of the universality of purposiveness in nature. On the other hand, it grounds the judgment that the world is not only well suited to our practical intentions but rather receptive to our moral purpose, indeed is there for the very sake of its realization.

Importantly, because Kant’s taxonomy allows that this form of theoretical cognitions simultaneously can maintain a practical power of influence, we need not pigeonhole the highest good’s cognitive expression in this moment of contemplation as belonging to any one domain or another, in fitting this or

that role exclusively as a practical ideal. Indeed, there are multiple ways that it could have a potential practical influence, without that being per se its only or primary function. Precisely because of its status as a practical ideal that is primarily of importance for how we contemplate the highest good can serve multiple functions. For example, the judgment may ground our employment of the teleological principle as universally applicable to all organisms of nature, just as well as it grounds the unity of a long-term commitment to a moral life. In either case, the *cognition* of the highest good as grounding our coherent model of the world remains first and foremost contemplative, but with a potency for uses in the practical domain.⁴ And if flexibly open to various uses, then we have a form of cognition well suited for a role that bridges two spheres of legislation; that is, a cognition well suited to center a worldview striving for unity between one or the other side, both of which seem fully theoretical or fully practical when operating under the principle of isolation.

Once understood as a kind of theoretical cognition (with practical power), we can better answer the question: What does the highest good as the final end of creation mean for us? If it is not a command, then its use must be calibrated within a different frame of reference. As a theoretical cognition with the potential to exert practical power and in connection with the philosopher's mission, we can put forth the thesis that for us it is a cognition that enables the creation of a worldview, a harmonious model of reality in accordance with a final end that mediates two domains of rational legislation by the lingua franca of ends. Thanks to teleology becoming a science of critique applied through reflective judgment, we can maintain this cognition through the judgment that presents a coherent picture of the lived world. And this cognition can play many roles in our lived experience.

10.2. How a Kantian Worldview Can Be Practical *in Potentia*

In the previous section, I claimed that the highest good in its most mature form as the final end of creation constitutes a theoretical cognition of a special kind for us, as opposed to a mere practical cognition or extra command

⁴ Guyer, "Kantian Perfectionism," 81, claims that the unconditioned is only important "as ideals for practice rather than as ideas for theoretical cognition" (81). And also that "pure ideas of reason can never give us theoretical cognition" (Guyer, "Kantian Perfectionism," 79). He is correct that we can never refer to claims about God or the supersensible in general as constituting knowledge. Still, we have access to these ideas through chains of inference and can form them into cognitions, even if the cognitions refer to no sensible intuitions in experience.

beyond the moral law. Specifically, I proposed that this theoretical cognition (an “objectively practical theoretical cognition” to be exact) grounds a worldview in which harmony holds between our theoretical and practical judgments in experience when taken as a whole. Because Kant makes the point in his lectures that some theoretical cognitions can remain practical *in potentia*, I pointed out that such a reading offered a strong framework for maintaining the highest good’s status as a practical ideal.

The previous two chapters explored a Kantian model of constructing a worldview with the highest good at its center and why such a process fulfilled primarily a contemplative need to discover coherence between all the domains of reason. However, it remains to be seen how this cognition of the highest good qua ideal maintains a practical influence without undermining the sovereignty of the moral law. For the remainder of the chapter, I will again turn to the question of how this practical influence of a worldview might manifest itself.

In Chapter 2, I articulated how a practical ideal might serve as grounding for comparative moral evaluations. As already stated, I think that this function still holds. There is an obvious practical influence on our maxims through such evaluations. Beginning with our contemplation of moral degrees exhibited in the world and external relations, this will determine the very stage on which we discover ourselves thrust as players. Further, if grasping such degrees and nuances well, we will in turn also be better able to act and form maxims of action that are perhaps more efficacious. And in terms of our deeper contemplations about how the whole of experience harmonizes relative to the ideal, there are many possible ways that such a systematic outlook might influence our lives as practical agents.

As Kant noted, someone who has a coherent system and who operates with evil maxims will be more dangerous than one lacking coherence. But Kant also has something to say about someone good, for a good person who has a coherent system might have an improved moral life as well. In lectures on anthropology, Kant is reported as saying:

Coherent judgment is also very good, especially if the principles are good, for then the consequences must also be *surely* good. Being coherent in one’s maxims to act is very advantageous, as long as only the maxims are good. This use is twofold: theoretical, which connects to coherent judging, and practical, which connects to coherent behavior to act according to

good principles and to determine one's will accordingly. (*V-Anth/Busolt* 25:1480–1)

In a first pass, I already highlighted that this might be making the point that we could in fact be more effective with our plans if operating with a plan and organizing them with a knowledge of the context in which we are making them. Hence, the practical influence pertains to the effectiveness of our pursuits. One advantage here, and a big one, is that this does nothing to undermine the sovereignty of the moral law. Rather, this added value simply refers to the increased efficiency of our operations. As a result, it could respect the sovereignty of the moral in determining our wills, but equally exert a positive effect on our overall power. This is an appealing candidate for how a coherent worldview might add to one's power and be worth pursuing. However, this avenue is not without its issues and might be better articulated by a different way of interpreting Kant's notion of the practical power arising from a coherent worldview.

To begin, one might suggest that the added value is not tied to the effectiveness of our pursuits as initially suggested. After all, it is imaginable that one could conceivably become more effective at certain tasks and yet completely ignore the philosophical process of constructing a coherent worldview. Perhaps, then, the added value arises from a heightened intensity or activism in one's efforts. That is, once one settles on a worldview, the importance might lead to a more frequent and energetic seeking beyond the mere status quo. What is needed is a devotion to morality, an unbending and unwavering conscious commitment to our moral calling that brings us not only to act on the moral law, but rather be its fervent advocates. There is an aspect of this reading that rings true, I think, when it comes to the emphasis on the diachronic aspect of what a moral life constitutes. That is, I would agree that the moral world *makes possible* or *grounds* this longitudinal advocacy if only referring to progress as such, insofar as ideals ground the very possibility recognizing moral progress in the first place. This is connected to the results of Part I. We can only recognize moral degrees in experience, that is, if we have some standard of comparison, which in turn makes first intelligible a moral life or world as off or imbalanced relative to the maximum of goodness in us.

Finally, there is a way that the coherent moral life might be one that is preferable not because it is more efficacious or more devotional, but perhaps simply because it contains *more* of the good. That is, Kant's note about how

a morally coherent life will *surely* lead to good consequences suggests that there is simply something good about possessing the good in such a manner that, perhaps, requires no further explanation or reference to extra efficacy.

My sense is that Kant most likely held a position related to all of these possible interpretations, in that coherence might lead to better effectiveness. A moral worldview might very well empower, inspire, and lead us to innovative projects that merge the domains of reason such that more potent outcomes result. And this is not mutually exclusive from my initial reading of the practical potential of substrates as grounds for comparative moral knowledge of goodness or its opposite in experience in the first place. I will now turn to connect the highest good in its role as grounding a worldview with the practical priming that it, as a substrate, might serve in enabling our awareness of comparative goodness or its opposite, as well as its place in the world to begin with.

10.3. An Influence Merely from the Good's Potential

Again, from what Kant provides us to work with, he is anything but clear as to what the practical "*in potentia*" qualifier amounts to. I have just sketched ways in which a coherent outlook and commitment to the good will have a practical influence on us. However, there is also a potential influence that might not have *any* direct influence on our behavior. As referenced in the previous section, we get his enigmatic reference in the *Vienna Logic*, "That there is a God is a theoretical proposition, but it is *practical in potentia*; you must just act as if there is a highest legislator for your actions" (*V-Lo/Wiener* 24:901). In line with my reading of practical ideals, I think that this "you must *just* act as if" need not be an influence required by our frail psychological state or for the sake of experiencing the moral law as valid, but rather a grounding influence for the very possibility of living a connected and meaningful practical life at all. Further, a similar grounding influence might equally hold for the ideal of the highest good as well as the holy will (or wise man of the Stoics). The substrate character—along the lines of what I want to suggest—is apparent in that while the theoretical proposition "there is a God" follows from morality (as made explicit in the *Religion*⁵), it still

⁵ See "However, if now the most stringent observance to the moral law **should be thought** as the cause of the bringing about [*Herbeiführung*] of the highest good (as purpose): so too, [...], must an

precedes the possibility of goodness in the world as its ultimate source. For no source from experience can be thought that is sufficient for the unconditioned nature of the moral law, according to Kant, or make clear why it is that we also seek a proportionate degree of happiness according to how we approximate it. The moral law elevates our thinking to reflect on the possibility of the law's legislation as well as its resulting object, that is, about the possibility of a creator of commensurate power. This cognition involving God as a creator is not a command since we are the executors of the law's realization. Yet, it bears on the possibility of a morally practical life at all—on what must be thought of as grounding its possibility.⁶

Reframing the phrase for our purposes vis-à-vis the highest good, I will suggest that the practical influence of the substrate could go something like the following: "That the highest good is the final end of creation is a contemplative view that encompasses the whole, but it is practically powerful in that it represents the untapped potential for the world's *being* good. It is up to us when we hear the command of the moral law to then make it *become* good." The highest good acts as a model in thought, which provides the grounds for judging ourselves and the world. To draw on language from the previous chapters, as a substrate it presents a point of comparison or reference. Returning to the important passage in the *Religion*, that has already come to the fore, I require a "final end of all things" in order "to act in harmony with which indeed does not increase the number of its duties, but which provides them with a special point of reference [*Beziehungspunkt*] of the unification of all ends)" (RGV 6:5, my translation). I think that in this passage, we see Kant attempt to solidify a picture of how we must judge the world in order to think of goodness as not merely possible for me, but rather as a possibility at all.

Since I know through the moral law that it is possible for me, I must further infer that its possibility is part of the world as such. And this possibility is not effective in the determination of my will, per se, since it does not increase

all-powerful moral being as ruler of the world be assumed [*angenommen*], under whose care this transpires; i.e., morality leads unavoidably to religion" (RGV 6:8n, my translation and emphasis).

⁶ Beiser, "Moral Faith," 621, argues that the highest good's importance for him is "in explaining the possibility of moral action" or "the possibility of morality itself" (Beiser, "Moral Faith," 622). Beiser points out that the "*psychological*" reading might appear to "undermine [Kant's] rigorism;" however, he thinks that such a psychological need is not a problem because Kant is not looking for "rewards for moral intentions and actions, but the motivation to persist in moral action at all" (Beiser, "Moral Faith," 616). He thinks that ideals along with the moral law only have "binding force" if we have certain "assumptions about the moral structure of the world" (Beiser, "Moral Faith," 620). And it is this psychological need, namely, to not feel part of a Sisyphean act, that Beiser thinks Kant alleviates through the assumption that the highest good comes about in the world.

the number of duties. But it does provide a model to even consider the world as the destination for a moral kingdom in the first place and to notice its degree of imperfection in relation to it. If we had no ideals, then the world would be a valueless desert since the very notion of morality in this unconditioned sense would fall away as incomprehensible. It would lack any grounds on which its nuanced degrees or progress toward it is experienceable (as I argued in Chapter 3). As Kant notes in his metaphysics lectures:

One can also think of the perfection of the world in the teleological sense (i.e., according to ends, or practically). If all possible ends can be united into a main end, then it is called the highest good <*summum bonum*>.—The perfect <*perfectum*> and the best <*optimum*> are thus to be distinguished from one another. The entirety of nature is thought of as a kingdom. A kingdom is the relation of many to a one as the highest commander <*summum imperatem*> or law[giver],¹ and so it is in nature as well. What happens once under certain circumstances will happen under the same circumstances on into eternity. The highest good <*summum bonum*> is accordingly the most perfect kingdom of nature as the most complete system of all ends. (*V-Met/Mron* 29:864–5)

And this model is one that again is not discoverable at all from the world as it appears. The very possibility for cognizing the world in such a way, therefore, is by seeking a grounding not in the world but rather in our reason. To draw attention to already cited lectures on metaphysics, Kant insists: “Therein lies the ground that a human being finds no satisfaction for his reason here [in the world] except insofar as he exerts himself to *cognize and to reach his highest good* <*summum bonum*>” (*V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt* 29:948, emphasis added). And it is importantly the very capacity to “cognize” the highest good that pushes us to apply a concept of reason to think of nature: “This object of his exertion lies beyond nature, he cannot find all his empirical knowledge adequate for this” (*V-Met-K3E/Arnoldt* 29:948). We, therefore, require some fundamental grasp not only of the deficiency of the world, to return to the negative function, but rather we require a maximum notion that makes such judgments possible in the first place, that is, returning to the positive function. And this positive function grounds the very possibility of perceiving the world as a moral landscape, filling a gap that Kant’s epistemology leaves underdetermined.

These requisite conditions of the possibility of a morally coherent life are a necessary condition of its actually becoming one, even if these only constitute

a background, namely, one that remains indirect or prior to the moment of action. I defended the position that the sort of indirect influence that an ideal can play in our practical lives is not causal, but rather much more of an overarching grounding of goodness, the very being of which makes possible any downstream potentials to attempt to align ourselves with it or experience morality. This further connects well with the notion of a preintentional existential feeling, that I noted in Chapter 8. That is, the highest good as a practical ideal might function in cognition as a basic priming in our thinking that both our own nature as human beings and the nature of the world are ripe for improvement in reference to these models in our reason, through which their deficiency becomes known. When the moral law commands is the time that one must then look to see if we actually cause the goodness to become real that we carry in our thinking about the world. But the condition of the possibility of morality as a feature of the world, and not merely possible *action*, would depend on ideals grounding the very possibility of moral comparisons between individuals as wholes and individuated ideals in thought.

It is important too for my reading to highlight, as I did in Part I, that Kant himself uses the language of grounding in relation to ideals. A cause is that which brings something into being (as a principle of becoming), while a ground (in this sense) is that in virtue of which something is possible in the first place (as a principle of being). The three lines of a triangle are that in virtue of which it can exist, yet these alone do not suffice for it to *come into* existence. Someone must construct the triangle by setting the three lines together. In the same way, the ground of imitation is separate, as I argued, from the act of actually creating the imitation. The grounds of imitation for which we require ideals are simply the presence of two things. The ideal, as an entity of reason, provides a presence against which something else, say, some state of affairs in the world presently, can then be compared. And through comparison, if one of the compared objects reveals something that the other lacks, this can be the grounds for changing the other to amend its deficiency. Yet, the acts to align oneself with the item represent steps beyond and require further grounds or causes. The grounds of imitation are not the act of imitation itself, but rather the presence of two things that one can then compare.

Just so, I think that the cognition of the highest good as the final end of creation provides a sort of influence that lies in the background of experience, an indirect and only reflectively accessible point of reference from our standpoint as moral agents. Just as the three lines require that someone form

them into a triangle, our ideals require that someone produce their copy in the world of sense. And the highest good as the object of our rational wills represents the world as a place ready to receive our acts of virtue since it stands for a worldview that is equally theoretical (i.e., accounting for natural purposiveness as well). And in providing a deep meaning, it might further reinforce our view that this potential is not alien from experiences that, *prima facie*, might seem opposed to morality.

In a word, then, this grounding influence is one that can be presupposed upstream from action. Because of the philosopher's mission to reflect holistically, we see that moral experience is potentially grounded on our being already outfitted with ideals that tell us how insufficient moral goodness is in our own character and the world at large. From these, we infer the potential for growth and the relation of this growth to a system-level project that we could not infer by merely looking at what is empirically given. But at the same time, this need not be viewed as mutually exclusive with increased effectiveness interpretation. Once we have this grounding substrate influencing the way we see the world, our moral activity might very well be augmented through the ways that we see our natural scientific or aesthetic end-setting as necessarily unified in purpose. Hence, this coherent worldview might also have a further beneficial side effect after the careful craftsmanship by someone who philosophically aligns the domains of reason as all oriented by the good.

Another way of thinking of the practical influence is to imagine if the substrate or grounding were removed. Were there no grounding for perceiving and judging morality as in the world, then goodness itself might lose meaning without *any* sensible correlates, even if fundamentally deficient. There might be more disorientation and confusion about *why* we are ultimately acting on a principle that often requires us sacrificing our own well-being for the sake of others. We might also cease to wonder about the whole of our moral efforts, as was the case with the Egoids in the previous chapter. That is, these ideals that we come to only after we have heard the command of reason to act are that which we view as preceding goodness as such. Or as Kant refers to ideas and ideals in the *Opus postumum*, they represent "images [*Bilder*] (intuitions), created *a priori* through pure reason, which, [as] merely subjective thought-objects and elements of knowledge, precede knowledge of things" (OP 21:51). They come last in practical agency, yet precede practical life as that in virtue of which it as a whole must be thought as intelligible, such stuff as the world might be made on.

Conclusion

The Reality of Kantian Ideals

Roughly 38 years after the publication of the third *Critique* and 24 years after Kant's death, the German playwright and intellectual, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ruminated on humanity and the world with his friend, Johann Peter Eckermann. In their conversation, dated October 23, 1828, Goethe depicts his worldview. In response to Eckermann's prediction that human progress will be a "work for a thousand years," Goethe responds:

Perhaps millions [. . .] who knows? But let mankind last as long as it may, it will never lack obstacles to give it trouble, and never lack pressure of necessity to develop its powers. Men will become more clever and more acute, but not better, happier, and stronger in action, or at least only at epochs. I foresee the time when God will have no more joy in them, but will break up everything for a renewed creation. I am certain that everything is planned to this end, and that the time and hour are already fixed in the distant future for the occurrence of this renovating epoch. But a long time will elapse first, and we may still for thousands and thousands of years amuse ourselves in all sorts of ways on this dear old surface.¹

Eckermann reports Goethe as being "in a particularly good and elevated mood" while saying this and then turning to order a bottle of wine.² This apocalyptic worldview, shared in jovial spirit, provides a striking contrast to the Kantian one. Rather than making progress, Goethe foresees a permanent moral stagnation. We might make leaps and bounds in our technological advances, but we will become tiresome to God. Indeed, Goethe is absolutely convinced that the final end of humanity is our destruction. Even creation

¹ Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 282.

² Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 282.

itself will be renewed, but without any clear purpose or plan. For why should there be a guiding telos for the renovated epoch after our epoch, an epoch that had no guiding telos apart from its own unraveling? Kant would, of course, agree with Goethe that humanity will always face obstacles and that these spur on developments in our rational capacities. However, Kant would also say that Goethe's judgment gets everything else reversed. For Kant, we have rational grounds to posit the final end of the world as a moral one toward which we are progressing and that we also ought to believe the world was created for harmonizing with this final end.

While one might find Goethe's worldview unsurprising and even modern, its opposition to the Kantian one is ironic. For a little over a year earlier, on Wednesday, April 11, 1827, Goethe shared with Eckermann his views on Kant. After being asked which then-modern philosopher is "the highest," Goethe answered immediately:

Kant [. . .] beyond a doubt. He is the one whose doctrines still continue to work, and have penetrated most deeply into our German civilization. He has influenced even you, although you have never read him; now you need him no longer, for what he could give you, you possess already. If you wish, by and by, to read something of his, I recommend to you his *Critique on the Power of Judgment*.³

Goethe suggests that Kant's philosophy has left such an indelible impression on German culture that one need not even *read* him to know him.⁴ Yet while Kant's philosophy might have found its way into the collective unconsciousness of early 19th-century Germany through some form of intellectual osmosis, the Kantian worldview failed to transmit. Despite his high praise of Kant's thought and his explicit reference to the third *Critique*, Goethe's bleak outlook missed the work of the highest good in it to ground a philosophical worldview that provides hope for the future.

³ Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 195–6.

⁴ Goethe also writes in the same conversation: "Schiller was always wont to advise me against the study of Kant's philosophy. He usually said Kant could give me nothing; but he himself studied Kant with great zeal; and I have studied him too, and not without profit" (Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 196).

11.1. The Legacy of Kant's Ideal Worldview

What is striking about Goethe's, on the one hand, observation of the permeation of Kant's thought throughout the subsequent German intellectual tradition and, on the other hand, his dissonant view relative to the Kantian one, is how it aligns with a pattern of historical reception of Kant. The notion of a Kantian worldview and the need for an ideal to ground one both continue to inspire philosophical investigation in regard to how we think and act. Kant is often cited as the philosophical father of ideals in their regulative capacity. However, despite this Kantian legacy of the ideal, a crucial feature of arguably Kant's own view has gone missing along the way. For while it is true that he did not think that ideals were akin to Platonic forms, existing as ontologically real entities in their own realm apart, he also did not think that they were useful fictions or doctrines that we knew to be false. Instead, there are good reasons to see ideals in a Kantian sense as real in a unique sense. They are not empirical, but they also are not supernatural. They cannot be seen, touched, or heard; and they are not necessarily apt for description as "true" or "false." Moreover, while they are not self-sufficient outside of our thinking, as a Platonic form would be, they also are not the subject of personal choice or caprice, since they are universal substrates individuated through universal principles of reason. The reality of the ideal, that is, pertains to a reality of a completely nonstandard kind. And it is for that reason, partially, that it has been overlooked. For it is hard to describe such a reality when we are most often concerned with a reality whose commerce requires exchange in appearances and actualities. Ideals, for Kant, were neither. And yet without them, Kant also thought that appearances and actualities would cease to provide a coherent picture of the whole. To end, I reflect on this unique reality and point out how it has been misconstrued. This I find especially important since it seems to me that *Vaihinger* has set the presiding and dominant view in the literature, namely, that ideals are mere fictions. As I argued, though, in Part I, ideals—if I am correct—are anything but fictions. Indeed, they enable certain essential moral experiences and offer grounds to create a coherent worldview in a Kantian framework. In this chapter, I seek to reclaim the reality of the ideal in a Kantian sense.

Elsewhere, I have already explored how the technical notion of a Kantian worldview was picked up in the German Idealist tradition.⁵ Fichte and Hegel

⁵ Englert, "The Conceptual Origin."

both noted that Kant's *Weltanschauung* presented a search for coherence between human freedom and nature. While both were ultimately critical of the Kantian worldview grounded in the highest good, they understood Kant's key insight that the ideal was formative of how we contemplate in a necessary manner. According to Fichte, a person who failed to construct a worldview through philosophical reflection (he preferred the term a *Weltansicht*) could not live a fulfilling life: "Such [persons] have absolutely no stable view, rather they look cross-eyed in perpetuity at the manifold."⁶ And for Hegel, while critical of Kant's dualistic worldview, he fully embraced the world-structuring facet of the Kantian ideal in so far as the whole of reality is grounded in the idea of spirit and not vice versa: "Nature is the first in time, but the absolute *prius* is the idea; this absolute *prius* is the last, the true beginning, Alpha is Omega."⁷ For both thinkers and others, the ideal enabled our view of reality to take shape as more than an aggregate. The ideal, that is, must always—in a sense—precede or be presupposed conceptually for actuality to be what it is in the first place, since the heterogeneous play of appearances in experience provide no overarching unity on their own. Thus, coherence, harmony, and unity of experience require ideals as grounding that we carry in our reason. Indeed, it is these we must employ (even if unconsciously) to bring order to that which is manifest. And the ideal, while certainly not real in the empirical sense of the term, is in a different sense just as (if not more) real than whatever intuitions pop up on stage in the theater of appearances.

Well into the 19th century, this reality of the Kantian ideal remained noticed. As noted in Chapter 9, Orr noticed it and precisely noted its technical nature. But he was not alone. In a work that Nietzsche referred to in his correspondence as a "book, which gives infinitely more than the title promises and which is a treasure that one may take up and read through again and again,"⁸ namely, *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance* (1877), Friedrich Albert Lange emphasizes the importance of ideals in a Kantian vein for constructing a *Weltbild* that is only possible by presupposing their reality in thought.⁹ In the final chapter of

⁶ Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, 67, my translation.

⁷ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, 30, my translation. From the Zusatz to §248.

⁸ Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel*, 257, my translation. Letter to Carl von Gersdorff (February 16, 1868).

⁹ All translations are my own. Lange's text directly references Kant, but beyond this reference, Lange clearly adopted an idealist worldview in a very Kantian vein. This Kantian spirit was duly noted by Nietzsche himself who refers to Lange, in a letter to Carl von Gersdorff from the end of August 1866, as "a highly enlightened Kantian and student of nature" (Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel*, 257, my translation).

Lange's voluminous work on the history of materialism as a worldview and its ultimate deficiencies, his concluding chapter, "Standpoint of the Ideal" [*Standpunkt des Ideals*], finishes with a paean to the ideal. And it is Kantian in spirit because of three facets of his view: First, Lange emphasizes the necessary, grounding feature of an ideal for experience that arises from our reason, but which for that reason is no less real. Indeed, Lange even notices this need as based on an ideal's use whenever we need to compare the world of appearances in order to estimate its deficiencies or riches of goodness. Second, he emphasizes that the good of an ideal is in bringing about a harmonious worldview. And, finally, he points out that an ideal and concomitant worldview require earnest philosophical activity to possess and are corrupted if treated as dogma. I will shortly highlight these facets and note their Kantian ancestry since it is after Lange that a branching application of the Kantian theory of ideals takes things afield from Kant's original view.

To the first facet, Lange notes that ideals, even though arising from human reason, are absolutely necessary in order to shape a view of the whole. Whether one is an optimist or a pessimist, Lange thinks, depends on where one trains one's focus. The optimist focuses on the "harmony" that one posits into nature through an ideal that makes sense of the whole, while the pessimist focuses on all the disharmonies and rejects the notion that there is any such thing as the ideal. Here, though, Lange challenges the pessimist's conclusion: "The pessimist in contrast to him [the optimist] is right in a thousand cases. And nevertheless, there could be no pessimism without the natural ideal picture of the world, which we carry within us."¹⁰ Lange then, without citing Kant, picks up on the necessary substrate function of an ideal in so far as it grounds the very possibility of a comparison in the first place: "It is first the contrast with this [ideal] that makes reality bad [for the pessimist]."¹¹ And: "Without *comparison* we would not be capable at all of forming a judgment about the quality of the world."¹² Lange was very much in tune with the Kantian function of ideals as supporting our very capacity to recognize the quality of the world to begin with. And this need is not merely a capricious, personal choice, but rather—as Lange notes—grounded in our very constitution as a species.

Lange further recognized the importance of employing the ideal to provide for coherence or harmony, which is otherwise lacking if one merely

¹⁰ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 541.

¹¹ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 541.

¹² Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 541.

looks at the way things appear. And he was, without saying as much, standing in solidarity with the way that this all results in the construction of a coherent worldview: “One thing is certain: namely, that the human being needs a supplementation of reality through an ideal-world [*Idealwelt*], which he produced from himself, and that the highest and most precious functions of his spirit [*Geiste*] work together in such creations.”¹³ And it is only through this act of self-creation, which Lange appropriately refers to as a “free synthesis”¹⁴ [*freier Synthesis*] that takes place relative to a “point of unity, which turns the facts into science and the sciences into a system.”¹⁵ Lange here without quoting one of Kant’s passages emphasizing the philosophical mission of searching for a coherent theory of experience reproduces it almost exactly. And his resulting worldview, pace Goethe, speaks with a defiantly optimistic tone that sees the world, organized relative to the ideal, as harmonious and good:

That alone, however, can finally lead humanity to a perpetual peace, namely, when the everlasting nature of all poetry and art, religion and philosophy is recognized and when the conflict between science and poetry is forever healed on the basis of this recognition. Then there will also arise a dynamic harmony of the true, the good, and the beautiful, instead of that static unity to which the free societies currently cling to in so far as they take empirical truth alone as their foundation.¹⁶

Lange’s view—namely, that we can actually achieve a dynamic harmony in which both natural science, the arts, philosophy, and religion all receive equal recognition—stands in stark contrast to Goethe’s view that leaves no room for even the prospect of such a harmonious future, let alone its eventual realization.

The final and third facet, though, highlights that the ideal substrate, while inextinguishable, also is often corrupted through the freezing of it into a dogma. Lange voices an absolute lack of patience with superstition and religious doctrines that are hostile to progress. Pessimism provides a service if it checks optimistic worldviews that have shifted from ideals into ideologies.

¹³ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 545.

¹⁴ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 539.

¹⁵ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 539. See also “If we conceptualize however the whole as a unity, then we bring into the object our own essence through an act of synthesis” (Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 544).

¹⁶ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 560–1.

Any too rosy picture of the world will ultimately be “destroyed” by the empirically oriented pessimist. However, this is important: “this destruction affects only the dogma, not the ideal.”¹⁷ And the reason, connected with the first facet above of the ideal’s reality in our thinking, is that the destruction:

cannot overturn the fact that our mind is made to bring forth eternally a new harmonious worldview; and that our mind here, as everywhere, posits the ideal next to and over reality and recuperates from the struggles and emergencies of life by lifting itself through thought to a world of all perfections.¹⁸

Thus, even Lange would agree with the Kantian worldview as arising only through a perennial process of philosophical inquiry as to how the whole fits together as a whole. And while we can never cease in this striving, we can very well find in the ideal substrate of reason a great comfort since it forever connects us back to that which uplifts humanity as connected to morality and meaningful expressions of the human mind.

To summarize, the reality of the Kantian ideal, namely, as a necessary substrate in reason, found perfect expression in Lange’s own reflections on the ideal 84 years after Kant published the third *Critique*. In a transcendental idealist vein, the manifold of experience required a synthesis relative to an ideal in order to become a whole in the first place, that is, the worldview required construction. And this process is constitutive of lived reality. Or as Lange puts it: “This ideal striving of the human mind grows, however, now a new power through the realization that also our reality is *no absolute reality*, rather appearance.”¹⁹ If kept within this transcendental framework, its necessity persists as real in a full-throated sense of reality. For it is a universal feature of the mind; an enabling condition of coherence in experience and certain kinds of comparative moral cognition. It only becomes problematic, if one turns the transcendental fact of the ideal substrate into a transcendent substance akin to empirical substances. Then, of course, one would be committing a category mistake. This reification of the ideal was also, Kant thought, a constant temptation and danger for rational beings, which he warned against. And yet, this tempting fallacy did not in any way undercut

¹⁷ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 544.

¹⁸ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 544.

¹⁹ Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, 544.

the reality of ideals as possessions of reason without which we would have nothing to compare or construct lived experience. At least, that is how a Kantian reality of the ideal should be construed.

11.2. Vaihinger's Flawed Interpretation of Kantian Ideals

With the exception of Lange, the primary trend in the subsequent reception of Kantian ideals has followed the ironic pattern set by Goethe. For, on the hand, Kant's employment of ideals has continued to influence thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, while, on the other hand, many have diverged from the original Kantian form while claiming, nonetheless, to be exactly in line with the letter and spirit of Kant's texts. This trend began with the work of Hans Vaihinger in his hugely influential, *The Philosophy of "As If"* (1911) as well as by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his recent *As If: Idealizations and Ideals* (2017), who takes Vaihinger's work as his starting point.²⁰ Both works claim that ideals are "useful fictions," which we know to be false and yet uphold because they help us in some way navigate the world. Here is how Vaihinger describes his theory of the fictionalism of ideals: "An idea whose theoretical untruth or incorrectness, and therewith its falsity is admitted, is not for that reason practically valueless and useless; for such an idea, in spite of its theoretical nullity may have great practical importance" (1924, viii). And this view is more or less adopted in contemporary explorations of the use of idealizations in science as well. For instance, Angela Potochik writes regarding idealizations in natural science: "Idealizations are assumptions made without regard for whether they are true and often with full knowledge that they are false."²¹ This sort of adoption of ideals, while perhaps worthwhile pursuing independently as a theory of noble falsehoods, should not overshadow Kant's distinctive philosophy of ideals in the practical domain. Here is a possible difference between theoretical and practical ideals. For while a theoretical ideal, like the perfectly rational agent (in economic modeling), is not needed, for example, to pick out rational subjects, practical ideals as I have been arguing play a unique constitutive role in the capacity to even have certain, essential moral experiences in the first place. And they do so uniquely since the rule, individualized into a standard in thinking

²⁰ Others who followed in Vaihinger's footsteps are, e.g., Nowak, *The Structure of Idealization*; and Wimsatt, "False Models."

²¹ Potochnik, *Idealization*, ix.

that is individuated, can serve as a grounds of comparison with other particular individuals even when no command or duty to act is present in one's thinking. I restrict my claims, therefore, here to the practical domain, but leave open how there might be a mirroring reality at work in the theoretical domain.²²

My claim here is, of course, provocative and will be, for some, downright incendiary. After all, Vaihinger claims throughout the work that he is uncovering a lost dimension of Kant's thought, buried by a century (from the time Vaihinger was writing) of overly metaphysical renderings of Kant's thought. For the preface to the English translation from 1924, Vaihinger added this remark:

It can be shown, and has been demonstrated at length in the present volume, that the theory of Fictions was more or less clearly stated by Kant, who was proud of his Scottish descent. Nearly 100 pages of the work are devoted to this question and it is there proved in detail that for Kant a large number of ideas, not only in metaphysics but also in mathematics, physics and jurisprudence, were Fictions. The metaphysical ideas were somewhat confused by Kant himself in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Theory of Method), but were definitely called "heuristic Fictions."²³

Vaihinger's waffling here between the conditioned claims of Kant's "more or less clearly stated" and "somewhat confused" endorsement of Vaihinger's fictionalism, and the heavy-handed assertions that this association is indeed "proved," belie the fact that Kant's theory is not obviously in line with Vaihinger's own "as if" philosophy about the nature and function of ideals. And yet, Vaihinger does try to nail down Kant as endorsing a view in which ideas and ideals are nothing but useful fictions, obviously false and possessing no reality, but still useful in a variety of ways and contexts. The whole third part of the work, which is called "Historical Confirmations," begins with a 119-page presentation of Kant citations throughout his critical career that Vaihinger thinks "prove" his theory's historical precedence in Kant.²⁴ My study until now has presented a thorough analysis that

²² Work, which Spagnesi, "Regulative Idealization," has begun, but which has often been overlooked by those who want to treat theoretical ideas as mere illusions, e.g., Grier, *Kant's Doctrine*, or as mere hypotheses, e.g., in Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, or Willaschek, *Kant on the Sources*.

²³ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* viii.

²⁴ In the abbreviated edition of the work in German, which came out in 1924 with the English translation, the Kant exegesis is shortened to 53 pages. And in the translation of the complete work, the section on Kant is also cut by over half to a much manageable 47 pages.

contradicts Vaihinger's conclusion. And even Vaihinger in his more honest moments lets slip that Kant's texts—as they do for all Kant scholars—fail to fit perfectly into the mold he has made for them.²⁵ As he notes in an earlier aside, which is not in his very confidently presented “historical confirmation” section, Kant himself presents a different view:

Kant wanted to allow the subjective concepts some part and value in the acquisition of knowledge. [. . .] But he became entangled in a false position because he regarded the subjective conceptual forms sometimes as fictions, sometimes as hypotheses, and sometimes as an unfortunate cross between the two.²⁶

The truth is that Vaihinger's fictionalism is a poor fit for Kantian ideals, both exegetically and philosophically. A correction is, therefore, in order. The story ought to be set straight for the Kantian tradition and furthermore its philosophical appeal advocated. I first take up the exegetical portion, which is short and derivative of my study's exegesis until now, and then turn to the philosophical issues of identifying his theory as a Kantian one. The Kantian ideal is far from a useful fiction, and it is real in a sense that Vaihinger's theory fails to understand.

Vaihinger's exegesis is impressive and sweeping in scope. Most of the “historical confirmation” with Kant takes the form of marshaling of passages that Vaihinger thinks prove or at least imply strongly that Kant was indeed a fictionalist when it comes to ideals. Vaihinger begins with the *Critique of Pure Reason* and works his way through to the *Opus postumum*. Despite his best efforts, however, his analysis of Kant's view of ideals is flawed and overconfident. This has exegetical, as well as philosophical reasons.

Exegetically, Vaihinger reveals the chink in his own armor in the conditional claims highlighted above in which he admits that Kant's view cannot be pinned down by fictionalism. He admits that Kant also claims that ideas and ideals are explicitly *not* mere fictions. But this alone is not the main exegetical factor that is problematic for the view. Instead, it is Vaihinger's assumption that Kant's view on ideas and ideals is static, namely, that it does

²⁵ Indeed, as I indicated already in the Introduction, even my own reading is not free of inconsistencies on this score, as Kant sometimes refers to ideals as “fictions” (e.g., *V-Mo/Mron II* 29:605), though I think he means here a particular form of hypostatized ideal.

²⁶ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* 156.

not undergo the evolution that I traced in Part II. For, as I noted in Chapter 5, Kant does treat the highest good therein as a mere ideal, totally separate from nature in a certain sense. The first *Critique*, which was my focus, is also the foundation of Vaihinger's reading. He notes: "In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) Kant's new doctrine [of fiction] suddenly makes its appearance with all the vigor and purity of a mountain spring,"²⁷ namely, in the doctrine of method where Kant distinguishes the role of ideas from hypotheses. There, Kant notes that ideas are regulative and never meant to find corresponding intuitions in experiences; indeed, they remain "mere ideas" [*bloße Ideen*] and "heuristic fictions" [*heuristische Fiktionen*] (*KrV* A771/B799). Vaihinger concludes: "Had we always had this famous passage before our eyes, Kant's whole doctrine of ideas would have been better understood from the first."²⁸ Perhaps, but only if this distinction came in a work that was fully consistent with itself, and only if Kant's mindset were fixed regarding the reality of ideals.

But neither "only if" clause holds. As for the first, Kant explicitly distinguishes ideas and ideals from fictions. Indeed, he explicitly states that they are *not* "mere fictions" in the first *Critique*. As noted in Part I, when first introducing ideals, Kant distinguishes them from fictions and creations of the imagination. Kant notes, "These ideals, even though one may never concede them objective reality (*existence*), are nevertheless not to be regarded as mere figments of the brain" (*KrV* A569/B597, emphasis added). This identity relation between "objective reality" and "existence" shifts in Kant's later thought and deepens to grant objective reality to certain substrates of reason that are a priori in origin and permanent background elements of experience. Existence, of course, as the spatiotemporal representability of an object of possible experience does not ever occur for ideals, but objective reality does. In sum, while ideals are not existent, they still are not figments of the brain or fictions created by our whim either. Here is where, in the same section, Kant says as much:

But to try to realize the ideal in an example, i.e., in appearance, such as that of the sage in a novel, is not feasible, and has about it something nonsensical and not very edifying, since the natural limits which constantly impair the completeness in the idea render impossible every illusion in such

²⁷ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* 271.

²⁸ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* 272.

an attempt, and thereby render even what is good in the idea suspect *by making it similar to a mere fiction*. (KrVA570/B598, emphasis added)

Ideals are not “mere fictions,” for Kant, and are not merely up to one’s whim or fancy. They are, of course, *dependent* on reason as their source. But they are also, even in the first *Critique*, viewed as universal maximums that are determined through a priori principles: “The aim of reason with its ideal is, on the contrary, a thoroughgoing determination in accordance with *a priori* rules” (KrVA571/B599). Fictions, on the other hand, are completely a posteriori, and also—albeit universally communicable—not universally valid.²⁹ For Kant, therefore, ideals of reason are just as universally valid as the a priori principles through which they are determined. Even the first *Critique* is an unreliable witness in that it explicitly rejects Vaihinger’s theory.

But it is the second “only if” clause that is the more important, namely, the assumption that Kant’s view remains static. My study builds the case for seeing Kant realize that ideals are not merely outside of nature but in a deep sense constitutive necessarily of our very experience of the world. Vaihinger is right insofar as ideals will, per definition, never *exist* adequately. But as I showed, Kant’s own development of his theory pushed him to adjust his view. Indeed, he came to think that ideals actually inform how we must judge experience as a whole system, and this requires a subtle shift to agnosticism about the real possibility or existence of the highest good (and other ideas). For if it is the final end of nature and our own final end as moral beings, its possibility is implied. This comes across quite strongly in Kant’s *Lectures on Pedagogy*:

One must be careful not to consider the idea to be chimerical and disparage it as a beautiful dream, simply because in its execution hindrances occur. An idea is nothing other than the concept of a perfection which is not yet

²⁹ It is for this reason that Kant continues in other works to critique the use of fictions in education (to my mind unjustifiably, though Plato would agree with him). His *Lectures on Pedagogy*, for instance, condemn the use of literary fiction and fairy tales as instruction for children, because they distract us from our moral determination and might make us doubt the very credibility of the ideal substrates we carry in us: “The worst thing is when children read novels, namely because they will use them for nothing but the entertainment they provide in the very moment of being read. Reading novels weakens the memory. [. . .] That is why all novels should be taken out for the hands of children. While they read them they form within the novel a new novel by developing the circumstances differently for themselves, going into raptures and sitting there thoughtlessly” (*Päd*, 9:473). And: “Children have an exceedingly strong imagination, which does not need to be strained further and expanded by fairy tales at all. Rather it needs to be reined in and brought under rules” (*Päd* 9:476).

to be found in experience—as is the case of a perfect republic governed by rules of justice. Is the latter therefore impossible? If our idea is only correct, then it is by no means impossible, despite all of the obstacles which stand in the way of its execution. (*Päd* 9:444–5)

We cannot be sure anymore, that is, that they truly are *mere* ideas and ideals without any direct relation to particular ends. And Kant says as much in the Pölitz lectures on religion as well (albeit referring to the archetypal, maximum standard function as an “idea”):

Human reason has need of an idea of highest perfection, to serve it as a standard according to which it can make determinations. [. . .] A concept of this kind, which is needed as a standard of lesser or greater degrees in this or that case, regardless of its reality, is called an idea. But are these ideas (such a Plato’s idea of a republic, for example) all mere figments of the brain? By no means. For I can set up this or that case so as to accord with my idea of the most perfect republic, in order to bring his state nearer to perfection. (*V-Phil-Th/Pölitz* 28:993)

If they are true and a priori in our nature, and if they ground our comparative knowledge of goodness in the world and enable a coherent worldview, then they cannot be impossible. For where there is *some* accordance, we are not facing something of another kind, but rather something of a kind in some scalar degree. This is where the rational view has a finger on the truth. One cannot have firm faith in an irrational object; and the objective reality of the highest good is not irrational since the world, while perhaps at odds or in tension with the good is not thereby logically contradictory to it. A reality and power persist in ideals in that they belong to a transcendental concept of experience that is neither merely subjective nor fully empirical, but rather somewhere in between.

Vaihinger’s own exegesis, I think, even substantiates my analysis in Part II. While many pages are devoted to the first *Critique* and antinomial conflicts of pure reason, he spends only a handful of pages on the second *Critique*, and only a single paragraph on the third *Critique*. Also, the passages he cites from the later works, for example, from the *Religion*, do not seem to support the claims he wants them to substantiate. Take, for example, his handling of the crucial passage from the *Religion* in which Kant discusses the ideal of moral perfection and its “objective reality,” that I treated already. I cite this

one example at length because it provides the flavor of Vaihinger's interpretive style:

Although then "the archetype of such a truly divinely-minded being" "is to be sought nowhere else than in our reason," (p. 71) nevertheless "this Idea, in practical respects, has its reality entirely in itself" (p. 70); indeed the whole section from which these last quotations have been taken has the characteristic title: "Objective reality of this Idea." *This has great importance for us, for "objective reality" as applied to an "Idea" is equivalent not by any means to "reality of existence" but to "reality of validity". [...] Had there been any doubt as to what the "objective reality" of ideas meant, doubt is now quite impossible: the expression means not unconditional existence, but unconditional value.*³⁰

This passage shows Vaihinger simply asserting that Kant can only mean that an objective reality is one of existence or validity. And without actually unpacking the passages in detail, Vaihinger assumes that the rational nature of ideals pertains only to a validity whose cash value is determined by whether it is useful or not in the world of sense. In a similar vein, after referring to the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth from the third part of the *Religion*, Vaihinger notes:

This "objective reality" has nothing whatever to do with an external existence theoretically demonstrable, or assumable, [...] the "objective reality" of the ideas consists in their inward existence in the human reason as practical, ethical norms, values, ideals, fictions. This passage is a classic one for Kant's whole theory of Ideas.³¹

Much of Vaihinger's analysis follows this pattern of referring to the use of an idea or ideal by Kant, and then quickly pounding on the table that it is yet another example that "objective reality" equals "existence," and hence anything arising solely from the mind is merely a fiction. This barrage of assertions by Vaihinger is rooted in a philosophical misunderstanding that Vaihinger has and which obscures what seems to be consistently Kant's own, intriguing view.

³⁰ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If,"* 296–7, emphasis added.

³¹ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If,"* 300.

In the passage just referenced, for instance, we see Vaihinger observe that the objective reality of ideas and ideals is “in their inward existence in the human reason as practical, ethical norms, values, ideals, fictions.” Vaihinger erects here a false dilemma that makes it further impossible to see what is actually going on with Kantian ideals, for throughout his work Vaihinger constantly points out that something is *either* real in the empirical world (and accessible by perception, hence, “existent”) or it is a fiction, created by our own minds to help us out in the world (but which is patently false). Everything that is natural and given belongs to reality, and everything created by the mind is fictitious, untrue, and *not real*. When distinguishing between hypotheses and fictions, Vaihinger, for example, notes:

Thus the real difference between the two is that the fiction is a mere auxiliary construct, a circuitous approach, a scaffolding afterwards to be demolished, while the hypothesis looks forward to being definitely established. The former is artificial, the latter natural.³²

This distinction might be perfectly fine and agreed upon in other philosophical theories. Indeed, often Vaihinger appears to be appealing to and identifying himself as in line with logical positivism.³³ But he also carries over this dichotomous delimiting of the real and fictitious into Kant’s thought, evidenced by statements like the following: “These are modes of expression [of Kant’s regarding the idea of freedom] which can be interpreted dogmatically as well as critically, dogmatically in the sense of an assumption of reality, critically in the sense of a heuristic fiction.”³⁴ Here we see Vaihinger assume that reality only obtains if something is empirically given. One could read Kant this way, so says Vaihinger, or one can read Kant “critically,” in which case all that is not empirical is nothing but a fiction.

Here, though, lies a philosophical misconstrual of Kant’s philosophy. Kant would, of course, agree that the categories, say, or the moral law are not empirical. They can never be seen or heard, observed or touched; and

³² Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* 88.

³³ Not only in the preface to the English translation does he claim his greatest influences as arising from the English and Scottish philosophers, especially Hume, but he also throughout tows a rather materialist-reductionist line. Take, e.g., his claim, which he posits as if it were an agreed upon, self-evident fact: “The psyche must therefore be regarded as a machine, not only because it works according to psycho-mechanical and psycho-chemical laws, but in the sense that its natural forces are intensified by these mechanical processes” (Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* 101).

³⁴ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* 290.

yet, without them, there would be no empirical reality in the first place as we experience it representationally. But these a priori forms are also necessary in all rational beings. They are real, but in an ideal sense as opposed to an empirical one. But Vaihinger's theory does not allow for this distinction. And as a result, he misses the unique reality of the ideal. I have already noted many passages throughout the phases in which he was writing his major critical works that point to this other type of reality, which I have referred to as a rational substrate or grounding without which our experience would lose coherence. In fact, we would lose key parts of experience without the grounding substrate of ideals, as well as a part of reality that we must posit without direct experience: the noumenal.

A full-on correction of Vaihinger's interpretation of what Kant means by transcendental idealism is work for another project. I would like, though, to point out some passages from the *Opus postumum* that reinforce Kant maintaining the reality of the ideal until his final years. For example, he notes: "Ideas are self-produced subjective principles of the power of thinking [*Denkkraft*]: not fantasies [*Dichtungen*], rather thought out" (OP 21:29). And a few lines later, Kant notes that this "power of thinking [*Denkkraft*] must precede [knowledge]" (OP 21:29). But not only thinking is presupposed for the sake of cognizing the empirical, but rather explicitly *ideas* are "Ideas are pure concepts of reason, which as principles must precede the empirical" (OP 21:48).³⁵ Why? The reason that Kant gives is that "These representations [*Vorstellungen*] are not merely concepts, but rather simultaneously ideas that provide the material [*Stoff*] for the synthetic laws <determined> a priori by concepts. Thus they [ideas] do not merely follow from metaphysics, but rather ground [*begründen*] transcendental philosophy" (OP 21:20, my translation). Many other passages speak to the necessity of ideas for the possibility of experience, and they all get back to what I described in Chapters 7 and 8 as the philosophical mission. Transcendental philosophy can only construct a reality with the help of ideals that ground a coherent model of the whole.

11.3. Reclaiming the Ideal

I turn now in conclusion to highlight the philosophical sovereignty and appeal of Kantian ideals from the interpretation of them as nothing but useful

³⁵ See also OP 21:51.

fictions, which has continued until recently, with the work by Appiah in his book, *As If*. I include Appiah because his theory adopts Vaihinger's principle starting point and also assumes a Kantian "confirmation." Appiah says:

Vaihinger came to apply the same strategy over and over again to one field after another, abandoning realism about a domain (atoms, infinitesimals, law, space, abstract objects, force, economics, freedom) but maintaining his "esteem" for the corresponding ideas because of their utility. And in explicitly connecting this strategy with the one that Kant had made famous in arguing that rational agency requires us to act *as if* we were free, even though our theoretical understanding shows that we are governed by deterministic laws, he claimed a Kantian ancestry for his ideas. Indeed, in the final section of *The Philosophy of "As If,"* Vaihinger records scores of places in Kant's work where his great predecessor speaks of proceeding "as if" what is theoretically known to be false is true.³⁶

However, what is missing on both Vaihinger's and Appiah's account is an appreciation of how, on Kant's theory, the essential forms of experience must be sought outside experience in human reason, such that they, in principle, are not theoretically knowable objects of possible experience. It is precisely the Humean skepticism based on a lack of direct perception of causality that Kant credited in the *Prolegomena* with awaking him from his dogmatic slumber after all. After awaking, he did not fall back to sleep into thinking that the transcendently discoverable forms were existent objects of possible experience. And while Appiah and Vaihinger very well might be on to something when it comes to a new theory of the utility of fictions, whatever the theory is must stand on its own legs instead of Kant's shoulders. I have presented the exegetical reasons. However, these are less important than the philosophical differences. Highlighting these differences will, with luck, set the record straight and further reveal its general contours that might be checked and built upon by contemporary thinkers who desire—to echo the neo-Kantians of the 20th century—a return to Kant.

One can present the differences quickly by a comparison with the key characteristics that Vaihinger describes that belong to fictions, as opposed

³⁶ Appiah, *As If*, 2–3. See also "[Vaihinger's] thought, like Kant's thought about the inevitability of the idea of freedom in the world of the understanding, is that we can grasp theoretically that the ideas we are using are false, while still finding them practically useful . . . indeed inescapable" (Appiah, *As If*, 26).

to natural scientific hypotheses or factual cognitions. He presents four key characteristics in Chapter 24, "The Main Characteristics of Fictions" in *The Philosophy of "As If"*. The Kantian ideal does not fulfill a single one.

The first characteristic that Vaihinger cites is that a fiction is inherently contradictory, indeed violent relative to reality. He says:

This contradiction with reality shows itself both in the form of the ideas and judgments involved, that is to say in the premises, which do not harmonize with facts, laws and phenomena otherwise known, and also in the conclusions drawn from these ideas and judgments. These are always in contradiction with immediate reality, and though the opposition is often hidden it reveals itself to deeper analysis.³⁷

With Kantian ideals, however, they are not contradictory of experience, but rather cannot be exhibited adequately in experience. And while there might be a real opposition between certain states of the world and the maximum in reason, this does not entail that they are impossible. Quite the contrary. By the end of Kant's development, the highest good, as the highest practical ideal, provides the grounds for viewing freedom and nature as possibly working toward harmonious completion. If the highest good were a contradictory fiction vis-à-vis reality, then it could fulfill none of these functions. This also seems true of ideals possessed in a less technical sense. The ideal, say, of a peaceful coexistence between all human beings is opposed by much of what we take to be human nature, but there is nothing *logically* contradictory between such a state and the world as we know it.

The second characteristic that Vaihinger attributes to fictions is that they are transient. Vaihinger states:

A second main character is that these ideas either disappear in the course of history or through the operation of logic. [...] Contradictory ideas are thus only there to be finally eliminated; moreover, in spite of these contradictory ideas, correct results are obtained in thought and calculation, and these fictions must somehow be eliminated and their contradictions cancelled.³⁸

³⁷ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* 97.

³⁸ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* 98.

Again, the Kantian ideal is not a fiction according to this criterion. The ideal for Kant is not a contingent a posteriori creation in experience, but rather is a necessary substrate in reason determined through an a priori principle. And it is because we possess these, that we are able to know comparative degrees of good and evil in the first place. Only if ideals persist can they be illuminating and constitutive of how we experience the world. Historical examples or fictitious personalities exhibiting the right way to live, Kant thinks, cannot succeed in getting us to reach our moral perfection because they can provide no universality, no unifying principle for us all to get behind. Or as he puts it in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*: “For how differently do people live! There can only be uniformity among them if they act according to the same principles, and these principles would have to become their second nature” (*Päd* 9:445). And here, the principle Kant considers is our moral *finis*, the ideal of a morally perfect will. Only at this level of generality can one conceive of an ideal. The very nature and the function of a Kantian ideal is not transitory, but rather persisting and permeating. Ideals for Kant are perennials of reason that are not contingent on one historical period or another, or belonging to one tribe of people or another. And they are bedrock ideals for that reason. Since Dilthey, there has been a trend to treat worldviews as always culturally and historically contingent. And there is an undeniable truth in this. However, it is not mutually exclusive with the reality of certain ideals that are realities of reason, such as the ideal of a will that always acts from the moral law, a world that expresses it, or a creator who designed it. These ideals, due to their anchoring in the moral law and sheer ideality, might very well persist. As Lange noted in relation to the pessimist: In relation to what can we draw our comparisons of historical moral blunders and triumphs if the moral scale undulates in perpetuity depending on when one was born? Indeed, the moral claims of the oppressed in the past are no less valid today, at least we, who are moral realists, maintain. Thus, there must be a common standard, a common point of reference. Or as Kant would put it, a single maximum that does not shift and change with time.³⁹ While this view bucks the current cultural confidence in there being perhaps multiple moral viewpoints that can compete, it can stand its ground to those as well by asking how they should be compared to one another or evaluated if

³⁹ “The maximum of every kind, if it designates a totality, can only be one [*Eines*]” (*OP* 21:33, my translation) And: “That which can be thought but which cannot be perceived (*cogitabile, non dabile*) is a mere *idea* and if it concerns a maximum, then it is an *ideal*. The highest ideal as a person (which can only be an *individual*) is God” (*OP* 21:30).

there is truly no universal common standard of morality. And if they cannot be compared, why choose one as superior or better for oneself in the first place? And if the reason is contingent, then it will seem that we are at risk of descending into a state of dueling fictions. But if everything is a fiction, then there can be no clear winner. But that does not sit well with a moral realist stance at all, which many of the proponents of said fictions will not want to do without.

The third characteristic of an ideal as a fiction is that we know they are false, but employ them all the same. In this sense, the ideal for Vaihinger and Appiah is no different from the noble falsehood that Socrates advocates in the *Republic*.⁴⁰ The lie is justifiable as long as it serves a purpose. However, one should not do the absurd thing of taking it at face value. Vaihinger notes: “The third main features of a normal fiction is the express awareness that the fiction is just a fiction, in other words, the consciousness of its fictional nature and the absence of any claim to actuality.”⁴¹ However, again, this cannot apply to the Kantian ideal. It is fundamentally not a falsehood. Theoretically, it cannot be dug up in nature like a fossil or discovered through a telescope, but this sort of existence is neither the source nor confirmation of the ideal’s reality. Indeed, Kant is explicit that we table the question of the empirical reality of an ideal entirely. Kant notes repeatedly in the third *Critique* that we impute the real possibility of the highest good to the world from a practical point of view, while we must maintain an agnosticism from a theoretical point of view. In the third *Critique*’s Doctrine of Method, Kant writes regarding the highest good that we may retain our faith in it “on account of the obligation to [the highest good], although *we can have no insight into its possibility or into its impossibility*” (*KU* 5:472, emphasis added). And in the *Opus Postumum*, Kant notes regarding the ideal of God: “God is the concept of a personal being. Whether such a being exists is not questioned in transcendental philosophy” (*OP* 21:45, my translation).⁴² And regarding transcendental philosophy, he notes that “[Philosophy] raises

⁴⁰ Plato, *Republic*, III.414b–c. The falsehood is the so-called myth of the metals that Plato through Socrates presents at the end of Book III. Socrates suggests telling everyone in the *polis* that they were born from the earth with one of three metals in their breasts (brass or iron, silver, and gold). Each corresponds to a function within the ideal city. The falsehood is clearly made-up and presumably most will see through its lie (with the exception perhaps of future generations brought up with it as an educational tool). Yet, its falsehood remains noble or “opportune” because of its utility “in making [the citizens] more inclined to care for the state and one another” (Plato, *Collected Works*, 660). Thus, the story is a *mere* story without any real truth behind it. But this does not matter as long as it serves a useful end.

⁴¹ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* 98.

⁴² See also *OP* 21:27.

itself through transcendental philosophy to the forms of thought: it is not important whether objects correspond empirically (in actuality) to them or not" (*OP* 21:101, my translation). In short, the empirical (read: theoretical) truth or falsity of ideals is simply not even a cogent question for the transcendental philosopher who understands that he is dealing with universal forms of reason, not things.

Finally, Vaihinger notes that fictional ideas are means to an end. They are artificial constructs that we use, but which do not in any way represent a stable point of reference: "A further essential character of fictions, i.e. of scientific fictions, is that they are a *means* to a definite end, in other words that they are expedient. [. . .] Fictions are mere temporary halting-places for thought and have no bearing on reality."⁴³ Here again, the Kantian ideal cannot qualify. For Kant thinks that only through the final end of the highest good is it possible to find a grounding for nature as a whole. In other words, the world itself cannot present any halting places, according to Kant, only in the ideal can we find a place of rest.

Philosophically, therefore, the Kantian ideal simply cannot be a fiction as Vaihinger and Appiah take them to be. There is nothing arbitrary, whimsical, or fictitious about them. On the Kantian picture, they are necessary, persisting, subjectively true, and ends-providing possessions in reason. And we cannot grasp the world as a moral place or a place that constitutes a harmonious, organized whole without some ideal grounds to reveal comparative degrees of good and evil, as well as aid in judging how the whole might fit together coherently. Of course, this might seem a throwback view when compared with much of the contemporary philosophical discourse. But that on its own should not frighten one away. Throwback theories have a tendency of coming back in style if their roots are good.

To end, I will provide an intuition pump for the reader as to why the reality of the ideal might further be an appealing option for further consideration. To do so, I would like to consider the example that Appiah brings up of make-believe or play as a moment in which we create an ideal that is merely a heuristic. Appiah provides this wonderful example:

Some of the most marvelous capacities of children are so natural and so familiar that we can lose track of how extraordinary they are. One such ability, [...], is their aptitude for make-believe. Martha, in the garden, forms

⁴³ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* 100.

a shape out of the mud in her hand and tells us, if we ask, that it's a cake. If she has a toy kitchen set, she may place this "cake" in the "oven." So far, so familiar. And yet something very strange is happening here. It is another instance of the philosophy of the as-if. For she is inviting us to join her in treating something that she knows is not a cake *as if* it were. But only *in some respects*. She's not going to put it in her mouth, for she knows that this "cake" is in fact mud and that mud is no good for eating.⁴⁴

Here we see a case in which Appiah thinks ideals are at work, which are obviously false and yet useful all the same in so far as they allow children to model the world and learn. However, while an advocate of free play and encouraging children to use their imaginations (which is a very *un-Kantian* view, by the way⁴⁵), I do not think that the example of play works with ideals.

Consider Martha's friend, Arty. Arty is also working with the as-if modeling as Martha. Arty is playing doctor with his father. In the middle of a game, in which Arty is the "doctor" and the father is the "sick patient," Arty—in the very process of finding his father's, to be sure, many ailments—stands up and says: "OK—we're done; let's play a different game." Just as Vaihinger and Appiah note, there is a clear artificiality to the play. The fiction has completely arbitrary parameters. While a moment of an ideal as-if in the spirit of Vaihinger and Appiah, it is a textbook moment that could be selectively ignored on a whim precisely because both Arty and his father know it to be false. The as-if model, as it were, can be turned on or off depending on one's desires; ignored or shelved for future use; amended or changed on the spot without worry of anything of note really changing. There is something ephemeral about the nature of this play that contrasts with ideals.

Kantian ideals, by contrast, can only be of use or upheld as long as they are taken to be—in some sense—more than mere fictions or falsehoods. Take, as an example, advocates of the notion of human rights, which I think is baked

⁴⁴ Appiah, *As If*, 105.

⁴⁵ Kant has a number of critical things to say about play in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*: "For the sake of these games the boy will deny himself other needs, and thus learn little by little to do without other things as well. Furthermore, he will thereby become accustomed to continuous occupation. But for this very reason the games must not be mere games but games with intention and final purpose" (*Päd* 9:468). And: "Among other things, one has hit upon the idea to let children learn everything as if in play. [...] This is entirely counterproductive. The child should play, it should have its hour of recreation, but it must also learn to work" (*Päd* 9:470). As well as: "In work the activity is not pleasant in itself, rather one undertakes it on account of another aim. By contrast, in play the activity is pleasant in itself without intending any further purpose" (*Päd* 9:470). Concluding with: "It is extremely harmful if one accustoms the child to view everything as play" (*Päd* 9:472).

into the ideal of perfect humanity in terms of *dignity*, which I explored in Chapter 1. If one upholds the belief that this ideal is important and guiding one's endeavors, then it must differ from the make-believe scenario of Arty. The reason is that such an ideal is categorically different in so far as it permeates one's mindset. That is to say, it seems *prima facie* wrong to assert that you believe in working for human rights in one moment, only in the next to say, well it's a fiction so forget about it. For an ideal to really take root in one's psyche, that is, there must be a sense in which it fits into the background of experience in a way similar to the way I argued that ideals might figure in the background of experience: namely, as all-encompassing substrates or models that link together individual moments into larger scale patterns of meaning. And, further, as substrates that ground the very possibility of recognizing such a dignity in the first place, namely, as an inexhaustible common standard in which all participate but never count as full possessors. For where, pray tell, does human dignity then *exist*? The reality of ideals is grounded in reason, true, but this is not something that we simply may take or leave. That is, with ideals, it seems wrong to equate them to something like make-believe that can be toggled on and off in an arbitrary fashion. Kant's account might be of use here for developing a modern approach to thinking of ideals as more than mere pretend play.

Another way of making a similar point is to look at the despair that sets in when someone gives up on ideals as impossible. When one loses conviction, the devastation that can set in for one's overall relation to life indicates that it was not just a matter of make-believe before, which was selectively taken up or dropped, as one could with an obvious falsehood. Indeed, the negative side effects of giving up on our ideals point to a deeper, more real sense in which they shape experience.

One should never end with despair, though. And the highest good as a Kantian ideal is one that might provide even modern minds with an antidote. Watching the news provides an acid bath for the mind, presenting the world's worst events and possibilities. And Kant was no naive optimist when it came to human nature himself. And yet, he also thought that in the background of our thinking is always the moral substrate that prepares us to act, prompts us to seek out the good, and grounds a way of having the world in view. As Kant noted in his late, unpublished essay on whether metaphysics has shown any progress: "In regard to these Ideas he may be in doubt from a theoretical viewpoint, but cannot do without them, like beacons to lighten

his path” (*FM* 20:350). The same is true of ideals if Kant could only keep track of his own technical terminology. We will never see ideals face-to-face in this lifetime, but Kant thought that they persist nevertheless as inextinguishable lights of reason. No experience can snuff them out as they lighten our way.

Epilogue

End of the Endless

Toward what does the foregoing analysis lead us?

Exegetically, Kant scholars will wonder whether the study has led far enough. And, as a result, suggest that it leads to a need for further study of the very end of Kant's career. For Part II terminates around 1794 with the third *Critique* and contemporaneous works. But what of Kant's later works until the end of his life a decade later in 1804, in particular the *Opus postumum*, where the highest good is arguably left to the side?¹ First, much of the textual support that I have drawn on throughout my study comes from the *Opus postumum*, as well as works that go into his later critical period. But here, there is certainly further opportunity to examine the extent to which the ideal continues to work as a background feature of our experience. I think, however, that the contemplative importance of securing a worldview with the good as its foundation persists. It might, however, simply—particularly in the *Opus postumum*—go to the source that Kant already calls the “ideal of the highest **original** good” in the first *Critique*, namely: God (*KrV* A810/B838). For God is the source of all good and the source of whatever might be derived in terms of his creation coming to realize it fully.

Throughout the *Opus postumum*, Kant frequently notes how the human being is the locus in which two ideas, God and the world, are synthesized. As I have been arguing above, the world is not something given in experience. We must create the world. Kant says as much: “The thinking subject also creates for itself a world, as object of possible experience in space and time. This object is only one world” (*OP* 21:23). But we also, through the moral law, arrive at the ideal of God, as that being through whom such a moral law came into being and who must be viewed as the creator of laws of nature to boot:

¹ Kant while referring to the “*summum bonum*” certainly does not employ it in the same way as he does in his *Critiques*. For a view on why Kant might have moved away from it, see, e.g., Förster, *Kant's Final Synthesis*, 145–6. Also see Kahn, “Kant's post-1800 Disavowal.”

A being who is originally universally law-giving for nature and freedom, is God. Not only the highest being, but also the highest understanding—good (with respect to holiness). *Ens summum, summa intelligentia, summum bonum*. The mere idea of him is likewise proof of his existence. (*OP* 21:14)

And it is these together, God and world, that Kant indicates represents the “highest principle,” of his system, as combining the source of good and all laws with its creation:

The highest principle of the system of pure reason in transcendental philosophy, as reciprocal relation of the ideas of God and the world. Not that the world is God, or God a being in the world (world-soul); but the phenomena of causality are in space and time, etc. An immaterial and intelligent principle as substance is a spirit (*mens*). (*OP* 21:18)

For me, when reading the *Opus postumum*, such remarks do not indicate that Kant is abandoning the highest good, but rather tracing back the derived ideal to its source. There is still the highest good, a *summum bonum*, and it is indeed an ideal that we access through our own reasoning as an individuated concept of reason—an ideal. For as a “person,” it must be individuated and, accordingly, an ideal in Kant’s terminology.² And if combined through our actions to a world that God equally legislates, the highest derived good is just as much at hand implicitly—whether Kant refers to it explicitly or not.³ But those who push for more needing to be said about this later phase of Kant’s thought are right. A study of the ideal does lead there and requires a study of its own.

Philosophically, however, I think that the study leads to the same place. For even if we individuate the ideal in various guises and can know it, albeit darkly, through a modest intellectual intuition, is there perhaps a deeper root to all these individuations? Is it not so indicated by Kant already in the first *Critique* with the notion of an original highest good and sealed in the *Opus postumum* by God as the necessary ideal set over the world and all philosophy? If all good leads to the ideal of God, then any other individuation

² See, e.g., “One thinks for oneself under the concept of God a substance which [is] adequate to all conscious purposes—that is, a person” (*OP* 22:48).

³ For those who think that his lack of explicit reference is evidence that he changed his mind, I see an equally likely explanation being that he already felt like he could say nothing further of value beyond the three *Critiques*.

ultimately must have its source and ground in this supreme ideal: the Alpha and Omega. As St. Augustine puts it in Book One, section 4.4. of his *Confessions*:

O highest, best, most all-powerful, most merciful and most just, most hidden and most present, most beautiful and most steadfast, unwavering and incomprehensible, unchangeable but changing all things, never new, never old, making all things new and bringing old age upon the proud, though they know it not: you are always at work, always at rest, gathering but not from any need, upholding and filling and protecting, creating and nourishing and bringing to maturity, going forth to seek even though you lack nothing.⁴

If there is a *highest* good, must it not be this singular source, above and beyond which nothing further can be thought? If the ideal is a true maximum, from which it might be derivatively formed into other individuated types, the reality of the ideal remains contained in this highest of all sources. Only this would ensure that the good transitively obtains between the various ideals in a uniform, objective way.

Finally and regardless of what we think of the ideal, the study leads us to reflect on our worldview. What are we to make of this task, which Kant took to be the most arduous? And what do we make of the Kantian worldview?

On the one hand, Kant appears to divulge a truth about us, namely, that we—indeed—do not find a world fully formed before us, but rather must make a world out of that which is given to us. This thought is a profound one that is quite easy to forget or perhaps never fully comprehend. It reminds me of a passage from Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*:

He said that the world could only be known as it existed in men's hearts. For while it seemed a place which contained men it was in reality a place contained within them and therefore to know it one must look there and come to know those hearts and to do this one must live with men and not simply pass among them.⁵

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.

⁵ McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 134.

What McCarthy points out, however, is precisely the manner in which the world is not outside of us as an object among other objects, but rather is constructed in the mind and hearts of human beings. And this brings us back to the tension at the, pun intended, heart of Kant's creation of a worldview.

For, on the one hand, Kant is explicit that this task is one that each of us must undertake on our own. And as such, it would seem that we will arrive at a variety of worldviews. Kant even says it would be hubristic to assert a singular dominance of one over the rest: "It sounds arrogant, conceited, and belittling of those who have not yet renounced their old system to assert that before the coming of the critical philosophy there was as yet no philosophy at all" (*MS 6:206*). And yet, Kant, after inquiring about whether "*there could really be more than one philosophy*," asserts that since "there can be only one human reason, there cannot be many philosophies; in other words, there can be only one true system of philosophy" (*MS 6:207*). Thus, much hinges on whether one agrees with the claim that the existence of *one* reason implies that there is but one single philosophy and, consequently, philosophical worldview. Or might a person's philosophy come apart from the worldview one has painstakingly constructed?

Nevertheless, and as already noted, Kant himself—despite the unity of his reason—came to change his system and philosophical worldview many times. And even if there were a unity to reason, who is to say that this unity can be contained by any system conceived within a finite mind? Indeed, I think the tension itself—Kant's insistence both on the ongoing need to construct a worldview and the finality of his system—indicates that the process between the seeking and rest is the final result. It reminds me of T.S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*, from which I borrow a line as the title of this epilogue:

End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends.⁶

⁶ Eliot, *The Wasteland and Other Poems*, 60.

The study, that is, leads us to an ongoing process, one which Kant himself underwent until the end of his life as he continued to seek a final word for his system in an unfinished work—still incomplete.

We all, I think, can take a lesson from this ongoing tension of worldview formation as a process. We stand constantly in tension between no world and a fixed world, between passively going through the motions and actively contemplating our place. We are tugged by ideologies, tempted by fictions, and always searching for meaning—or seeking a place for old meanings among newfound ones. And all the while, we must always renew the query of whether anything is constant among all that changes. We are led, therefore, to a perennial task.

You must change your worldview.

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