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## The Transcendental Foundation of Kant's Cosmopolitanism

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# **The Transcendental Foundation of Kant's Cosmopolitanism**

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**Table of Contents:**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter I: Saving Transcendental Freedom.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>I.1: The arguments for Transcendental Idealism.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>I.2: Noumenal aspatiality and atemporality.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter II: Reason Always Already Achieved.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>II.1: The relation between noumenal and phenomenal subject.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>II.2: Characterizing the noumenal subject.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>II.3: Enlargement of rational knowledge as phenomenal appearance of noumenal rationality.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>II.4: Responsiveness to reasons as a phenomenal appearance of noumenal rationality .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>II.5: The <i>Religion</i> model of willing.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>II.6: The status of particularity in Kant's theory of subjectivity.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter III: Reason in History.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>III.1: The public use of reason as a historical mechanism.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>III.2: Unsociable sociability as a historical mechanism.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>III.3: Cosmopolitanism as the globalization of public discourse.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>III.4: The phenomenalization of the noumenal in history.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>113</b>

## Introduction

Kant has had more influence on modern liberal theory more than any other thinker. Yet this has in large part been through taking his moral theory in isolation from the system of transcendental idealism.<sup>1</sup> Kantian morality lives on in modern thought, while concepts that are systematically central like the distinction between phenomena and noumena have long fallen away. Yet Kant did not see his system as made up of isolatable parts; from the *Critique of Pure Reason* onwards, many of his major works exist in close relation with each other. Conclusions reached in the first *Critique* will be used to solve problems in the moral works; the social effects of Kantian morality play out in political and social history in works like “Toward Perpetual Peace” and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, among other texts. Indeed, I wish to argue, Kant’s moral theory is grounded through his metaphysics in the first *Critique*, and serves as a ground for his theory of historical development.

Before the production of modern political theories grounded in Kant’s ethics, Kant himself had already written a such a political theory. In important ways, the modern international sphere resembles the international sphere which Kant saw as the goal which a just politics is to establish, and which he thought would bring about providence in history. Substantial progress has been made on the tasks Kant outlined in “Toward Perpetual Peace” as sufficient for bringing international peace about: first, that all states become republics; second, that an international federation with the aim of preserving peace is established; and third, that a cosmopolitan right to visit other nations without hostility is secured.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, that which I argue Kant is aiming at with this last, most important definite article, the expansion of a public space through which rational

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<sup>1</sup>Jürgen Habermas, “Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 195.

<sup>2</sup>“Toward Perpetual Peace,” in Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, 74-85.

knowledge put forth in one place can disseminate, is perhaps better established in our digital age than Kant could have imagined. While not seeking to establish such a connection in this paper, the importance of Kant to modern political theory should cause us to wonder about a connection to the appearance of historical developments which resemble those he thought guaranteed to come about given a politics grounded in his moral theory.

Clearing the ground for such a task, in this essay I seek to establish the connection between Kant's moral theory and his theory of historical development. In doing so, I have tried to clear up one major misconception concerning the former, and two concerning the latter. With regard to Kant's moral theory, I argue in the second chapter through a reading of the *Religion* in addition to other moral and historical works that phenomenal actions can only be free, for Kant, in a derivative sense: as the appearance, made intelligible through cognition, of a single noumenal choice of a good or evil disposition. Taking Kant seriously in the *Religion* on this point allows us to see this conception of freedom at work in the rest of his corpus, even in the *Groundwork* which is the text of Kant's most amenable to a reading of him as putting forth what he called a dogmatist conception of freedom, where we free beings break through the natural causal chain to bring about our will.

Rather, I argue, Kant's conception of freedom is one which originally sets up and works through the natural causal chain. This conception of freedom rather than that of the dogmatist is what is established as possible in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Deduction of the first *Critique*, and taken up as an explicit theme in the Third Antinomy between dogmatist freedom and empiricist determinism, which I explicate in the first chapter. The distinction between noumenal freedom and the phenomenal appearance of freedom allows me to solve what I term the "educational antinomy," posed by Johann Friedrich Herbart, a contemporary of Kant's: how

can Kant hold both that moral education is necessary, but at the same time that morality requires absolute freedom? Kant's system provides a solution to this antinomy just as he solves antinomies in the first *Critique* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*<sup>3</sup> – through appealing to the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. A phenomenal human being's life is always already determined, but it is determined totally through the free act of the noumenal subject, an act which is outside of time and determines the appearance of that individual under natural causal laws.

Kant transports this conception of reason always already achieved, necessary given the ontological priority of noumena over phenomena and the fact of noumenal atemporality, to the phenomenal. Through the solution of this educational antinomy, along with similar characterizations of phenomenal rationality in “What is Enlightenment,” “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” and “Toward Perpetual Peace,” I argue that this phenomenal rationality, a responsiveness to reasons, grounds the ultimate mechanism of historical development for Kant. Past commentators on Kant's philosophy have followed the “Idea for a Universal History” in emphasizing the role of unsociable sociability as a mechanism of historical development. This forms what could be termed a “historical antinomy”: the more moral state of affairs which Kant believes history is the process toward, comes about seemingly only through human beings' immoral action. I argue that this view is incorrect. Rather, I distinguish between two stages of historical development in Kant's philosophy of history: the development of just political communities, and the development of an ethical community. While Kant doesn't have faith that either stage can be fully completed, the former is prior to the latter, I argue, insofar as the extent to which it is completed secures conditions through which the latter can be carried out.

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<sup>3</sup>*The Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:418.

For Kant, unsociable sociability has played and will continue to play a role in the first, political stage of development, but the latter, ethical stage of development is wrought only through the spread of reason through a public discursive space. A cosmopolitan condition, brought about through the development of just political constitutions, makes global the space of public reason through which moral knowledge is guaranteed to spread. In light of this, I argue through an engagement with Hannah Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, cosmopolitanism is so important to Kant's political thought because it grounds the ultimate mechanism of historical development, the spread of rational knowledge through discourse. In Kant's philosophy of history, I argue in closing, this spread that is guaranteed by human beings' universal rationality produces universality at the expense of particularity in approximation of the end of history.

## **Chapter I: Saving Transcendental Freedom**

To understand subjectivity and history in Kant's critical thought, we must start at its genesis: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Kant famously announces in his preface to the second edition, the development of his critical philosophy has effected a second Copernican revolution. Where Copernicus hypothesized, for the first time in modernity, that the Earth revolves around the sun rather than the sun around the Earth, Kant declares that the assumption that our knowledge conforms to objects has everywhere ended in failure; we must instead consider the possibility that it is rather objects which conform to our cognition.<sup>4</sup> And this is how Kant begins the first *Critique*: by reconceiving, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, of the world of appearances as merely a necessary effect of subjectivity 'in itself.' From a brief analysis of this

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<sup>4</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B xxvi.

early section, we will make our initial entry into an important Kantian theme: the relation of phenomena to noumena as the spatial and temporal appearance of what is aspatial and atemporal in itself. An understanding of this relation is ultimately necessary, I argue, to grasp the character of subjective freedom.

### **I.I: The Arguments for Transcendental Idealism**

The body of the Transcendental Aesthetic is comprised of two sections: one on space, one on time. Both provide five arguments<sup>5</sup> for the transcendental ideality of both, followed by a “transcendental exposition,” that is, “the explanation of a concept, as a principle from which the possibility of other *a priori* synthetic knowledge can be understood,”<sup>6</sup> followed by conclusions drawn from these expositions. The form of these arguments, which have been termed transcendental arguments by commentators, attempts to show that some necessary quality of experience would be impossible if not for the experiential reality, or, as Kant would say, the empirical reality, of space or time. Kant first argues that space is not something which can be learned from experience, because any experience of objects in space would already be spatial, that is, we are already able to experience space before any first experience of space. Second, he argues, space is *a priori*, or a condition of the possibility of an appearance, because we cannot represent the absence of space to ourselves. His latter two arguments claim that space is a form of intuition rather than a concept, as we can imagine only one space, not many, and that space again cannot be a concept because one can think of it as containing infinite representations within it, and not just under it, meaning that we can think of space as containing infinite

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<sup>5</sup>At least, in the A edition; in the B edition the argument from the apodeictic certainty of geometry (A24) is removed for space (but the corresponding argument for time (A31/B47) remains).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., A25/B40.



representations at once.<sup>7</sup> The prior two arguments establish that space is *a priori*, not learned from experience, and the latter two establish that it is an intuition, not a concept (that is, the form of experience, not the content). So, Kant argues, space is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience, a condition that is met by our *a priori* intuition.

The only knowledge that had been thought to be accessible *a priori*, Kant tells us, are analytic truths, that is, conclusions which are contained within the concept being analyzed. Yet having established that space is an intuition *a priori*, Kant reminds us that it is something which we can make synthetic judgements about. Geometry, he tells us, is the science of *a priori* judgements about space. How can we come to knowledge that is not already contained in the object being investigated prior to any experience? That is, how are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible? This is Kant's question. His answer is that space must be something produced by the subject's cognition. This was what was meant by calling space an intuition, but Kant now makes it clear in the exposition:

How, then, can here exist in the mind an outer intuition which precedes the objects themselves...? Manifestly, not otherwise than in so far as the intuition has its seat in the subject only, as the formal character of the subject, in virtue of which, in being affected by objects, it obtains *immediate representation*, that is, *intuition*, of them; and only in so far, therefore, as it is merely the form of outer sense in general.<sup>8</sup>

We will return to the thought that is indicated by the words "only" and "merely." For now, we note that Kant tells us that it is only this thought, that space, the *a priori* intuition which is the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., A23-25/B38-40.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., A25/B41.

form subjects must necessarily give to objects, is wholly produced by the subject, which allows for the possibility of geometry, the synthetic *a priori* science.

The case is similar, Kant argues, with time, and his arguments correspond to those for the transcendental ideality of space. Time is not empirical, as even the first experience one has must be ordered according to the principles of time; it is *a priori*, as we cannot have an atemporal representation; it is an intuition, not a concept, because we can have apodeictic certainty about its features: we can imagine only one track of time and it must be infinite. Thus, as an *a priori* intuition, time must be, like space, a form by which subjects order the world in order to experience it.<sup>9</sup> This determination of temporality as a form imposed by subjects on the objective helps us solve another question concerning the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgements, namely those in the physical sciences. As Kant notes, change is only possible in a temporal structure.<sup>10</sup> As motion is a type of change, *a priori* claims about motion in physics are synthetic *a priori* judgements about time, the possibility of which only the theory that time is an *a priori* intuition produced by the subject can explain.

So, Kant has it, space and time are forms necessarily imposed *a priori* on things in themselves, noumena, to yield the objects of our empirical experience, which Kant terms appearances or phenomena. As subjects necessarily impose the forms of space and time, which they produce wholly themselves, on noumena as any other experience for a subject is impossible, Kant limits our ability to make claims about these noumena or things in themselves. “The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations.”<sup>11</sup> The world that we experience is the phenomenal world of appearances, yet

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., A30-31/B46-47.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., A33/B48.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., A30/B45.

the origins of these appearances are the noumena which we necessarily give structure to with the forms of space and time. We cannot have experience of anything other than that which we have structured through the forms of space and time, as they are necessary for experience in general – this is why we must structure our experience with them. We are unable, Kant tells us, to make any sort of judgement about things in themselves.

Even experience of our own selves, introspection, must be ordered by us through the intuition of time, can never be experienced ‘in itself’. Through this claim Kant meets what he notes to be an idealist objection to his argument for the ideality of time. Since our representations change, the idealist argues, alteration has reality at least internally, and since alteration can only occur in time, time must exist. He argues that this is correct if the reality of change and time is taken to be an empirical and not transcendental reality. Our introspection is ordered through our intuition of time, as a necessary condition of experience; one can never experience the subject as a subject, but only as an object of inner sense, and objects are always intuited with the forms of intuitions which have their seat in the intuiting subject.<sup>12</sup>

We should note that these noumena, things in themselves, which we cannot gain any knowledge about given the fact that we necessarily give them a structure which has intelligibility for us, are held by Kant to be real in a higher sense than are appearances. Both phenomena and noumena are in some sense real: the latter have transcendental reality, the former empirical reality. Yet, as the words “thing in itself” and “appearance” imply, Kant believes that noumena are things “as they really are,”<sup>13</sup> or “the constitution [*Beschaffenheit*] of things,” and it is only this, the objective ground of phenomena, which exists prior to and outside of cognitive

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., A37/B53-4; B67-9.

<sup>13</sup>Speaking of inner sense, Kant writes: “The mind... intuit itself not as it would represent itself if immediately self-active, but as it is affected by itself, and therefore as it appears to itself, not as it is” (B69).

experience; yet “we do not apprehend them in any fashion whatsoever,” being only able to cognize the phenomenal appearances of objects.<sup>14</sup> So, noumena have an ontological priority over phenomena, yet only as phenomena can we experience and judge this ground of being.

### **I.2: Noumenal aspatiality and atemporality**

It appears, however, that Kant does make some positive claims about things in themselves: namely, that they are atemporal and aspatial. We can separate a Kantian transcendental idealism into weak and strong versions. A weak version would hold that experiencing subjects necessarily order all objects spatially and temporally, but would make no claims about the spatiality or temporality of the totality of being. A strong version, on the other hand, would state that experiencing subjects necessarily order all objects spatially and temporally, *and* that space and time are only subjective intuitions. Under weak transcendental idealism, noumena might be atemporal and aspatial and so wholly ordered by subjects, or they might have a spatiality and temporality that either maps onto or is different from the spatiality or temporality we impose on it. Under strong transcendental idealism, noumena are aspatial and atemporal, as space and time are nothing but subjective forms which make objects able to be experienced.

Kant makes it unambiguous that his transcendental idealism is the strong version. Not only do we order noumena with the intuitions of space and time, but space itself “is *nothing* but the form of all appearances of outer sense... it is *solely* from the human standpoint that we can speak of space,”<sup>15</sup> and the transcendental ideality of space means that above the empirical

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., A44/B62.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., A26/B42, emphases added.

perspective, space is “nothing at all.”<sup>16</sup> The nature of reality, for Kant, is aspatial. And the same goes for time: it is “nothing but the form of inner sense,”<sup>17</sup> and “if we take away from our inner intuition the peculiar condition of our sensibility, the concept of time likewise vanishes; it does not inhere in the objects, but merely in the subject which intuits them.”<sup>18</sup> If one could, *per impossibile*, intuit oneself as a pure subject, that is, without temporally ordering and turning oneself into an object, “the very same representations which we now represent to ourselves as alterations would yield knowledge into which the representation of time, and therefore also of alteration, would in no way enter.”<sup>19</sup> Objectively, reality is atemporal. I wish to ask – why does Kant proceed past the limits that he places on knowledge, which are meant to prohibit us from making judgements about noumena, to make the strong claim that things in themselves are atemporal and aspatial, instead of formulating the weaker version of transcendental idealism which states only that subjects must order their experience spatially and temporally?

To reach an answer, we must look to the *Critique's* Antinomy of Pure Reason. The Antinomy of Pure Reason is, Kant tells us, a seemingly undecidable argument between what he terms dogmatism and empiricism, concerning four contradictions between the two equally provable positions. The dogmatist argues from the ideas of the subject, while the empiricist argues from the appearances of phenomena.<sup>20</sup> The argument appears to be undecidable because both sides are without contradiction. “Each of them...” Kant writes, “finds conditions of its necessity in the very essence [*Natur*] of reason...” yet a contradiction arises between the truth of both arguments: “the assertion of the opposite has, on its side, grounds that are just as valid and

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., A28/B44.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., A33/B49.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., A37-8/B54.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., A406-7/B433; A466/B494.

necessary.”<sup>21</sup> Dogmatism puts forth the transcendental ideas of freedom, God, and morality on the basis of the practical interest of the subject, whereas empiricism denies that anything but appearances exist, thus eliminating the possibility of freedom, God, and morality. These ideas are what Kant calls the unconditioned, as opposed to that which is conditioned by something prior. In order to realize why Kant must claim that things in themselves are atemporal and aspatial, we must first examine the relation between conditions and the forms of space and time.

First, we must note that under his empirical realism with regard to Newtonian physics (“We assert, then, the *empirical reality* of space, as regards all possible outer experience; and yet at the same time we assert its *transcendental ideality*”<sup>22</sup>), Kant believes that the laws of nature which physics seeks are built into the structure of phenomena itself. Nothing can happen phenomenally that cannot be explained by previous phenomena, which is to say, every phenomenon is the necessary result of previous phenomena. This is what Kant means with his talk of conditions: what occurs as some certain phenomenon is conditioned to happen in that way by previous phenomena which are causally linked to the former. Nature can even be defined for Kant in terms of its being governed by the laws of physics.<sup>23</sup> It is understandable, then, that Kant claims that were freedom to exist in the world of appearances, nature would be incoherent. The presence of any unconditioned freedom in the world of phenomena means that nature is no longer ruled by the law of causality, for an unconditioned free act would not follow necessarily from phenomena which came before it.<sup>24</sup> We see, then, that with respect to phenomena Kant is a physical determinist – he believes that all empirical occurrences are predetermined and if, *per*

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., A421/B449. Translation amended.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., A28/B44. Newton himself, on the other hand, would be a transcendental and empirical realist, as he held that appearances are things-in-themselves.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., A419f/B446f.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., A451/B479.

*impossibile*, one could know the location of all particles and discover all of the laws of physics, it would be possible to predict all future occurrences. “If we could exhaustively investigate all the appearances of people’s wills,” he writes, “there would not be found a single human action which we could not predict with certainty, and recognize as proceeding necessarily from its antecedent conditions.”<sup>25</sup>

For Kant, then, space and time must be necessary conditions for determinism: if there was no succession, there could be no series of events where those before condition the next. Kant believes, however, not only that space and time are necessary conditions for determinism but that they are sufficient: if space and time exist, determinism follows. The intuitions of space and time are inseparable from the category of causality. Kant’s argument is as follows. He claims that there are two ways in which a series of conditions can be synthesized: via ‘regressive’ or ‘progressive’ synthesis. (By ‘synthesis,’ Kant simply means the totality of conditions which together produce a certain appearance.) A regressive synthesis is a chain of conditions which begins at some given phenomenon, determining what phenomena caused that phenomenon, what phenomena caused those phenomena, and so on. It is a chain which, by starting from a present phenomenon, necessitates the prior phenomena which have conditioned it. A progressive synthesis is a chain of conditions which begin at some given phenomena, determining the conditioned phenomenal consequences of these, the conditioned phenomenal consequences of those consequences, and so on. The progressive synthesis is a chain which starts from present phenomena and necessitates future phenomena which are conditioned by them.<sup>26</sup> Kant believes that regressive synthesis is built into the structure of time. It is not only “the formal condition of all series,” but “is in itself a series,” and therefore “the absolute totality of the series of

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., A550/B578.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., A411/B438.

conditions of any given conditioned... is necessarily thought as being given in its entirety.”<sup>27</sup>

Any given present phenomenon, Kant thinks, necessitates the chain of past phenomena which conditioned it, ultimately yielding that present phenomenon. This is what allows Kant to tell us that if “pure reason, as a purely intelligible faculty,” was “subject to the form of time, [and] consequently to the conditions of succession in time... it would itself be subject to the natural law of appearances, in accordance with which causal series are determined in time; and its causality would then be nature, not freedom.”<sup>28</sup> The form of time, for Kant, is inseparable from the causal chain of conditions that is a regressive synthesis. For space, on the other hand, both regressive and progressive synthesis are built into its structure. Some certain phenomena necessitate necessary conditioned consequences in the future and outwards, a progressive synthesis; and “reality in space,” all that is physical and extended, is made up of parts which have conditioned the current whole, which is to say that any extended physical body came into being through the collection of its parts. This also means that, as Kant says, “the parts of these parts [are] remote conditions” of the whole. The parts which condition the whole are themselves conditioned wholes made up of conditioning parts.<sup>29</sup>

With this exposition of Kant’s belief in the sufficiency of space and time for determinism accomplished, we can see the thrust of the Third Antinomy. The dogmatic argument (the thesis) is a critique of the empiricist’s view. If the only type of causality was the causality of natural laws, there could never have been a first cause, as it would violate the law of causality. The empiricist’s argument (the antithesis) claims that were there to be a causality that was not natural causality, there could be no such thing as natural causality; for natural causality is defined, for

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., A412/B439.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., A552/B580.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., A413/B440.



Kant, by the fact that all current phenomena absolutely necessitate all past and future phenomena by the regressive and progressive syntheses. Kant's solution to the problem, by which he synthesizes the truth of both arguments yet escapes the seeming contradiction, makes use of his strong transcendental idealism, that is, the claim that being in itself is atemporal and aspatial, which we make into the world of experience by ordering it through the intuitions of space and time. Both arguments are without contradiction, reasoning correctly from their premises; yet the antithesis reasons from a faulty premise, namely, that appearances are things in themselves.<sup>30</sup>

With transcendental idealism in hand, however, we can recognize phenomena as nothing but the appearances of things in themselves. Natural causality was only shown to be true of these appearances, for, Kant holds, it is always true of a spatial and temporal structure, but cannot be true for an aspatial, atemporal realm. Thus, while the empiricist's argument shows that appearances must be subject to the law of natural causality, it does not preclude the possibility that a given phenomenon is conditioned by a free noumenal act in addition to its phenomenal conditions that follow the law of natural causality. If this were the case,

the acting subject, as *causa phaenomenon*, would be bound up with nature through the indissoluble dependence of all its actions, and only as we ascend from the empirical object to the transcendental should we find that this subject, together with all its causality in the appearance, has in its *noumenon* certain conditions which must be regarded as purely intelligible.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., A507/B535.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., A545/B573.

On account of his belief that there can be no such thing as spatiality and temporality without natural causality, Kant is led to the claim that the realm in which these intelligible conditions, produced by the subject's spontaneous freedom, originate, must be aspatial and atemporal. It cannot be simply one which is already spatially and temporally ordered but is then reordered by our intuition, as spatiality and temporality are sufficient conditions for natural causality, which would contradict the possibility of the free action of the subject which Kant sees himself as establishing here, and which he will see himself as establishing as true in the ethical works to which we will come in the following chapters. Kant, we will ultimately see, thinks that this freedom indeed grounds the process of historical development itself.

Kant reminds us throughout the first *Critique* that we cannot gain knowledge of things in themselves. Yet we have seen that he does make a positive claim beyond the strictures he has placed down: that things in themselves are not just not necessarily spatial and temporal, but in fact aspatial and atemporal. This means that subjects considered noumenally, which, we have said, means for Kant subjects considered "as they are" as opposed to how they merely appear, are known by us to be aspatial and atemporal. Given their aspatial and atemporal character, it is also possible that they are rationally free. And this is what he either attempts to prove or asserts in all of his major ethical works.<sup>32</sup> Many commentators have argued that his proofs for the reality of freedom are unsuccessful, and it is true that Kant's constant reworking of his justifications for the reality of freedom suggest that he himself found his arguments falling short of proof; nevertheless, what concerns us here is that throughout his critical period, Kant affirms the reality of freedom. This is in turn an affirmation of the reality of this twofold image of the subject who exists both noumenally and phenomenally; who *qua* noumenon is unconditionally free, aspatial,

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<sup>32</sup>For example: *G* 4:451; *MM* 6:221; *CPrR* 5:33.

and atemporal, and *qua* phenomenon, bodily and conditioned. Accepting that he takes this picture to be true is a necessary first step to comprehending what, for Kant, constitutes subjectivity.

## **Chapter II: Reason Always Already Achieved**

If we are to take seriously Kant's claim that we are morally appraisable and thus free, we must, I argue, take seriously his claim that this can only be so if freedom is located in aspatial, atemporal noumena. In this second chapter, I argue that the model of the relation between phenomenal and noumenal subjectivity that meets these criteria is most explicitly and completely set forth in the *Religion*, where Kant argues that all morally appraisable phenomenal acts are part of a chain of appearances of a single, noumenal choice of a good or evil disposition. Indeed, I argue, accepting this view as Kant's mature critical position is the only way to reconcile the "educational antinomy," the conflict between Kant's two beliefs that a subject must have absolute freedom, i.e., total moral self-determination, in order to be morally appraisable, and that, at the same time, moral education, i.e., the moral determination of oneself by another, is valuable. Once we accept this conception of subjectivity, however, we come to see it informing not only Kant's other ethical works, but also his historical works. The fact of atemporal freedom requires Kant to claim that human beings are always already rational; that reason is not something that develops, but rather essentially constitutes human beings at all times. Kant transports this conception of subjective reason into phenomena, I argue through an engagement with the *Metaphysics of Morals* and "Conjectural Beginning to Human History." In the third chapter, we will see that doing so ultimately grounds Kant's belief in the guarantee of providence in history.

## II.1: The relation between noumenal and phenomenal subject

To articulate this picture of subjectivity, we must start by analyzing what is at its base: the subject considered noumenally. We saw above that Kant holds things-in-themselves to have some sort of primacy over phenomena. But, I now wish to ask, what is the sense in which these things-in-themselves are prior to phenomena? The characterizations quoted earlier of the thing-in-itself as the ‘essence’ or the ‘reality’ of the thing makes us suspect that this primacy is an ontological one. But this does not mean that noumena are temporally prior to phenomena; this doesn’t make sense to say, as time is a feature of phenomena, and so there can be no relations of temporal priority outside of the world of appearances. Nor can we say that this ontological primacy is strictly causal, i.e. the existence of any object of appearance can be traced back to a thing-in-itself in the noumenal realm, for the same reason: causality is a feature of the structure of phenomenal appearances, and we cannot make any claims concerning whether it is true of the connection between phenomena and noumena. Yet Jacobi claimed that this was precisely how Kant conceived of the relationship of phenomena and noumena, contradicting his claim that causality is a mere formal concept of the structure of experience.<sup>33</sup> There is something to this critique of Jacobi’s. There does seem to be a sense in which there is a causal relationship between the two realms when we consider the freedom of the human agent. Kant speaks of freedom as an unconditioned causality, as opposed to the conditioned causality of natural necessity, or as a different kind of causality from natural necessity.<sup>34</sup> We have seen that for Kant, freedom must and can only exist in the noumenal world, and so this unconditioned causality is not bounded by phenomena, meaning that causality extends beyond the phenomenal world.

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<sup>33</sup>Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* 95.

<sup>34</sup>See for example *CPR* A419/B447, A448/B476, A543/571.

This does not mean, however, that the noumenal directly causes the phenomenal, in the sense of existing prior to phenomena and bringing them into existence. Rather, in our peculiar condition as free subjects, we have in our noumenal being the spontaneous ability to cause effects in the phenomenal world. Is there, then, a causal relation from noumena to phenomena? If we call this relationship causal, it is not like the type we are familiar with, that of natural necessity. For where in a natural causal chain, in which the physical configuration of one state of affairs in conjunction with natural laws brings about the necessary successive physical configuration, and so exactly one cause can be found for a physical configuration, the causality of freedom is one which works *through* the natural causal chain rather than *in* it. The causality of freedom can be thought of, Kant tells us, as being bound up with the causality of natural necessity, with both being causes of a certain event. Though we can discover a phenomenal cause for every phenomenal event through tracing the causal chains to which it belongs, these events are more ultimately ‘caused’ by noumena, of which all phenomena are mere appearance. Kant, however, retains the language of cause and effect in discussion the relation between noumena and phenomena: “every action,” he writes, “irrespective of its relation in time to other appearances, is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason;”<sup>35</sup> perhaps Jacobi would not have been drawn to raise his question were Kant to? drop such language, as he will do in later works, and stick with his description of phenomena as mere appearance of the noumenal. As noumenal subjects, we are responsible for the phenomenal appearances of our action, but this responsibility is not “causal” in Kant’s scientific sense of a progressive or regressive synthesis of conditions. There is no “causal chain” connecting noumenal freedom and phenomenal “effect.”

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., A553/581.

But, we now see, the realm for investigation of noumena is the realm of inferences about the conditions of the subject and its rational freedom. The relationship of noumena to phenomena is that of the phenomenal action, which is always the appearance of free noumenal action. The only questions we can directly ask and answer about noumena, then, are those about the noumenal subject, which is the seat of freedom. When we investigate into a phenomenal causal chain, we must ask about processes describable by physics, i.e. we must consider all things as objective. But we can ask other questions about phenomena that do not have to do with causality, and some of these questions can deal with subjectivity as it appears in phenomena, for example in the Transcendental Deduction or the deduction of duties in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. But to ask and answer questions about noumena, we must proceed from inferences about the subject, as it is only through the unconditioned causality that is freedom that phenomena reflect their noumenal origin. It is thus only from phenomena considered as ends or conditions of the freedom of a subject that inferences to the noumenal can be made. This is how Kant reached his conclusions about the spatiality and temporality of the noumenal – it must be aspatial and atemporal because if this were not the case, Kant believes, natural necessity would reign and unconditioned causality would be impossible. The only possible route to true inferences about noumena, then, is through inferring what conditions make subjective freedom possible.

## **II.2: Characterizing the noumenal subject**

With this established, then, what can Kant infer about the noumenal? We can rephrase this in light of our earlier investigations: what can Kant infer about the essential being of things? Firstly, as we have already pointed to, it is populated by us (human beings) as we are in ourselves, which is to say us as we are as free subjects. It is these free subjects, then, which we

must start with if we wish to know about being in itself. First, what can we learn about the subject from the fact that it is free? The fact of the subject's freedom means that the subject is rational. Reason is necessary for freedom, or, said otherwise, reason is built into the structure of freedom. To understand why this is we can look to Kant's distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives in the *Groundwork*. Imperatives are formulae which "express the relation of objective laws of willing as such to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e.g. of the human will," which is to say, a command based on reason which the rational being will obey, as our being rational is characterized by a responsiveness to reason as it appears phenomenally.<sup>36</sup> A hypothetical imperative is such a law which expresses what must be done to achieve a certain end. So, to use Kant's example, a physician who seeks her patient's health as an end must prescribe the correct medicines to achieve this, or alternatively, if having money makes me happy, I must get money in some way in order to be happy. Thus, I must prescribe the correct medicines for my patient *only* if I wish for her health, or I must get money *only* if it is what makes me happy. Yet, if I want my patient to become healthy, or if I want to be happy, then I recognize it as necessary to prescribe the medicines or get money, and so will attempt to do so.

On the other hand, a categorical imperative is a command for action that is good in itself.<sup>37</sup> Kant tells us that there is only one such imperative: "*act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become universal law.*"<sup>38</sup> Since this imperative is good in itself, I recognize it as necessary in my immediate cognition of the imperative.<sup>39</sup> In the case of both kinds of imperative, I recognize that a certain action is necessary

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<sup>36</sup>G, 4:414.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 4:414-5.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 4:421.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 4:416.

for the end which I desire. If I were without reason, and unable to recognize that the correct medicines for treating my patient's illness were what would bring her to health, I would be unable to freely choose her health as an end. The same goes for the Categorical Imperative – if I were unable to recognize that my acting in a universalizable way was the necessary action for realizing the end of acting morally, I would be unable to freely choose morality over immorality. To freely choose an end, I must have the reason to recognize the means; otherwise I do not have freedom. So, in claiming that all humans are free *qua* noumena, Kant claims that all humans are rational *qua* noumena:

A human being actually does find in himself a capacity by which he is distinguished from all other things, even from himself, in so far as he is affected by objects, and that is *reason*... on account of this a rational being must view itself, *as an intelligence* (thus not from the side of its lower powers), as belonging not to the world of sense, but to that of the understanding... As a rational being, *hence as one that belongs to the intelligible world*, a human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom.<sup>40</sup>

All human beings are, as noumena, rational and free. Yet we saw above that, as noumena, they are also aspatial and atemporal: and alteration, as something which can occur only in time, also does not have transcendental or noumenal reality. Thus, a human being *qua* noumenon cannot grow more or less rational over time, as we would think of a child becoming more rational as she ages, or of an elderly person becoming less rational with age. And, I emphasize,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 4:452. Final emphasis added.



this means that for Kant human beings *in their essence* are universally constituted as rational in a manner that is always already completed.

### **II.3: Enlargement of rational knowledge as phenomenal appearance of noumenal rationality**

As the human being *qua* phenomenon is nothing but that noumenal subject ordered by the forms of intuition and the categories, Kant must hold that each and every human being is rational in an equivalent manner. He states as much in a footnote in the Canon of Pure Reason chapter which discusses the essential morality of rational beings:

The human mind (as, I likewise believe, must necessarily be the case with every rational being) takes a natural interest in morality, although this interest is not undivided and practically preponderant. If we confirm and increase this interest, we shall find reason very teachable and in itself more enlightened as regards the uniting of the speculative with the practical interest.<sup>41</sup>

We have gestured at the essentially moral interest of subjecthood which is posited here above. But in this passage, I wish to point out that Kant is claiming here that if we attempt to teach morality, which, as we have seen, is what Kant believes is the highest object of reason (“it is evident that the ultimate intention of nature in her wise provision for us has indeed, in the constitution of our reason, been directed to moral interests alone”<sup>42</sup>), a human being will prove educable because of her already-existing rationality. If the act of teaching is initiated, “we *shall*

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<sup>41</sup>*CPR*, A829-30/B857-8 fn.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, A801/B829.

find reason” there, “very teachable,” which is to say no lesser than our own considered as a capability for development. Furthermore, Kant believes that if fostered correctly, any human being considered as phenomenon will come to express the rational interest in morality that she already possesses considered as noumenon. Kant clarifies this conception of the subject later in that chapter:

“What *use* can we make of our understanding, even in respect of experience, if we do not propose ends to ourselves? But the highest ends are those of morality, and these we can know only as they are given us by pure reason. But though provided with these, and employing them as a clue, we cannot make use of the knowledge of nature in any serviceable manner in the building up of knowledge, unless nature has itself shown unity of design... But the former purposive unity is necessary, and founded on the will’s own essential nature, which contains the condition of its application *in concreto*, must be so likewise. And thus the transcendental enlargement of our rational knowledge [*Vernunftkenntnis*] is not to be regarded as the cause, but merely as the effect of the practical purposiveness which pure reason imposes upon us.”<sup>43</sup>

Kemp Smith here translates this word *Vernunftkenntnis*, a Kantian neologism of which the literal translation would be “reason-knowledge,” as “knowledge, as secured by reason.”

Elsewhere he will use the more concise terms “knowledge of reason”<sup>44</sup> or “rational knowledge.”<sup>45</sup> Most often, however, he separates the words ‘reason’ and ‘knowledge’ from each

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., A817/B845. Translation amended.

<sup>44</sup>See B xvi, A836/B806, A839/B867.

<sup>45</sup>See B xx, A329/B386.

other in a variety of ways.<sup>46</sup> Some of these formulations imply that Kant is speaking of a kind of knowledge, and others imply that he is speaking of a faculty of reason. I argue, however, that for Kant *Vernunftkenntnis* indicates a technical concept which is in fact both a kind of knowledge and a result of reason. While Kant largely abandons this term after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I argue that it indicates a concept that will gain central importance in Kant's thinking on historical and individual development. To capture the particular meaning of this term and preserve its technical usage, I will translate it with the term "rational knowledge," which I will later use to describe the continued existence of this concept in his historical work. In the Discipline of Pure Reason chapter of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, he characterizes mathematics and philosophy as two kinds of rational knowledges, the former which is gained through the construction of concepts, the latter of which is gained through the concepts themselves.<sup>47</sup> Mathematics and philosophy, we recall, are the two disciplines which Kant thinks produce *a priori* synthetic judgements, the two disciplines that make up the faculty of theoretical reason. So, rational knowledge is the kind of cognition that consists of *a priori* synthetic judgements. Kant confirms this a few pages later: "A transcendental proposition is therefore synthetic rational knowledge."<sup>48</sup>

But, note that both philosophical and mathematical knowledge are things possessed by phenomenal agents. No philosophical or mathematical claims can be made outside of a temporal structure. Rational knowledge appears then to be both phenomenal knowledge and an effect of reason. The last indented passage shows how this is so. Throughout our lives, considered as phenomenal and so temporal, we are trained through education and the encountering of new

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<sup>46</sup>See A57/B81, A83/B109, A634/B662, A713/B741, A715/B743, A722/B750, A724/B752, A732/B760, A817/B845, A818/B846, A836/B864, A837/B865, A840/B868, A851/B878, A853/B881, A854/B882.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., A713/B741.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., A722/751. Translation amended.

ideas to increasingly act as, be seen as, and see ourselves as more rational as we become more knowledgeable. But this enlargement of rational knowledge is not what makes us more rational, Kant tells us; at all phenomenal times, we possess the same faculty of noumenal reason as all rational beings do, which is to say that in themselves all humans possess the same faculty of reason. It is this noumenal reason that drives us to enlarge our rational knowledge which gives us the appearance of a phenomenal development of reason. I do think that Kemp Smith's translation in this instance captures something essential about rational knowledge: that it is a knowledge which is secured by reason, a knowledge that is the phenomenal "effect" of noumenal pure reason, which Kant makes clear at the end of that sentence ("our rational knowledge... is merely the effect of the practical purposiveness which pure reason imposes on us"). But, in using this term, I wish to leave behind the impression that rational knowledge is just any knowledge which we gain by some indefinite conception of reason or "reasoning," as left open by Kemp Smith's translation here, so that we can recognize that it is particularly a knowledge *constituted by* the rational: those cognitions which are the phenomenal appearance of our noumenal reason, which reflect some end of our noumenal being.<sup>49</sup> In addition to mathematical judgements and inferences about the noumenal,<sup>50</sup> our moral knowledge is also rational knowledge, although how this is so, Kant tells us in this first *Critique*, will have to await explanation in a sequel.<sup>51</sup> Rational knowledge is precisely knowledge *of* reason in the sense that to know of reason as freedom, morality and the necessary conclusions from their existence is rational knowledge. This is so because rational knowledge is pure reason's appearance in the phenomenal world.

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<sup>49</sup>We see here also that *Vernunftkenntnis* can take on the meaning of an individual cognition, which, in translating the term as 'rational knowledge' or some variety thereof, forces us to either take on the awkward locution 'a piece of knowledge' or further obscure the systematic character of Kant's German by switching to 'rational judgement' or 'individual rational cognition.'

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., A634/B662.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., A329/B386.

#### II.4: Responsiveness to reasons as a phenomenal appearance of noumenal rationality

Kant writes in the first *Critique* that the transcendental enlargement of our rational knowledge is an effect of our practical purposiveness, the moral ends which are given to us by pure reason. The *Metaphysics of Morals*, published sixteen years later, is Kant's attempt to put forth rational moral knowledge, that is, the duties by which we must abide and the virtues which we ought to realize. The penultimate section deals with teaching virtue, for virtue, as something over and against inclinations and so not innate, "can and must be taught."<sup>52</sup> But ultimately, simple catechism proves sufficient for moral education. Having elucidated the relation of subject reason to phenomenal rational knowledge in the last section, we can better understand Kant's philosophical justification for thinking catechism to be sufficient moral education.

Unlike in theology, Kant tells us, where religious education by catechism is seen as an indoctrination or impure way of coming to religious belief, "a pure *moral* catechism... involves no such scruple or difficulty since (as far as its content is concerned) it can be developed from ordinary human reason" which, we know, even the pupil possesses to its full extent. In Kant's picture, the teacher leads the student with a series of questioning, which "methodically draws [answers] from the pupil's reason."<sup>53</sup> The teacher leads the pupil to use her reason by saying, for example, "Your own reason teaches you what you have to do and directly commands you to do it. Suppose for example, that a situation arises in which you could get a great benefit for yourself or your friend by making up a subtle *lie* that would harm no one: what does your reason say about it?" The pupil responds that the prohibition of lying "is an unconditional necessitation through a command (or prohibition) of reason, which I must obey; and in the face of it all my inclinations

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<sup>52</sup>*MM*, 6:477.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 6:479.

must be silent.”<sup>54</sup> This conclusion, not given by the rational knowledge of the teacher, but rather emerges out of the pupil’s own reason after corresponding rational knowledge is put to the pupil by the teacher. The success of this process relies upon the pupil being equivalent in her rationality to the teacher. The universal noumenal rationality which all human beings share, then, is expressed not only as a drive toward the enlargement of rational knowledge but also as a universal responsiveness to rational knowledge put to one from outside.<sup>55</sup>

This responsiveness to rational knowledge makes human beings such that, Kant believes, we are guaranteed to accept rational knowledge which we encounter through discourse or education and produce corresponding rational knowledge out of ourselves in response. Human beings do not differ in their essential rationality, and recalling the claim from the *Groundwork* quoted above, that to consider a human being as a rational being is to consider them as an intelligible being, this means that they do not differ in their intelligible or noumenal being which is their essential being that is causally prior to their phenomenal being. Neither does difference arise in what we can conceive of as the formal existence of rationality in the phenomenal subject, the universal natural drive to enlarge one’s rational knowledge. Difference only arises in what we may think of as the phenomenal appearance of reason in the phenomenal subject, which is the amount of rational knowledge one has; and this is only a result of the amount of contact one has had with the rational knowledge of others through teaching or discourse.

The topic of education, then, as Robert Louden rightly notes,<sup>56</sup> is an important part of Kant’s systematic critical thought. In discussion thereof, Louden considers and rejects the

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<sup>54</sup>*MM*, 6:481.

<sup>55</sup>Richard Eldridge expresses this thought in saying that for Kant, human beings are “*beings responsive to the authority of reasons*,” although he does not explicitly identify the ground for Kant’s belief in this phenomenal universality as being in the universality of noumenal subjects. I am nevertheless indebted to him for the use of the term ‘responsiveness’ in this context. *Images of History: Kant, Benjamin, Freedom, and the Human Subject* 53.

<sup>56</sup>In “‘Total Transformation’: Why Kant Did Not Give up on Education,” in the *Kantian Review*, 21, 3, 393-413.

position of Manfred Kuehn, who holds that a belief in the importance of education to moral development is inconsistent with the centrality of autonomy in Kant's critical moral philosophy. This is a view which Loudon traces through Lewis White Beck back to Johann Friedrich Herbart, the second successor to Kant's chair in Logic and Metaphysics at Königsberg, who would in fact become extremely influential in the foundation of modern pedagogical theory. Herbart writes in 1804:

How did Kant imagine moral education? As an effect of transcendental freedom? Impossible, for the concept of the latter comes to an end, as soon as one thinks it is not entirely free from every causal nexus. Transcendental freedom does what it does by itself; one cannot hinder it through anything, one cannot help it through anything. It discovers maxims; what the teacher says to it is immaterial... In this way Kant and his followers describe transcendental freedom to us; - and in this way they destroy all pedagogy.<sup>57</sup>

Louden's response is to ground Kant's philosophy of education in his philosophy of biology. He attributes to Kant a Leibnizian "quasi-innatism," the claim that "[moral] capacities themselves are innate, but education is needed in order for them to develop properly," emphasizing Kant's frequent characterization of education as the development of *Keime* and *Anlagen*, "seeds" and "predispositions," "inheritable tendencies," where rational autonomy is but one of these seeds to be developed through education.<sup>58</sup> Loudon thus interprets Kant's critical emphasis on a revolutionary "change of heart" as the goal of education as a philosophy of education directed at

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<sup>57</sup>Johann Friedrich Herbart, "Review of *Immanuel Kant über Pädagogik*, ed. Friedrich Theodor Rink," in *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 27, 257-61. Quoted in Loudon, *ibid.*, 404.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 405-6.

the development of autonomy within the student, where acting upon certain moral principles is based on an understanding of them as moral rather than mere habit, which, he argues, was Kant's pre-critical position.

This answer, however, while perhaps Kantian in spirit and undoubtedly consistent with the anti-metaphysical spirit we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century academe are disposed to bring to practical philosophy, begs the question posed by Herbart, Beck, and Kuehn: how are we to reconcile the absolute freedom of the human being as noumenon that grounds the critical philosophy with Kant's strong commitment to the centrality of education to human progress, both in the individual and the species? If the development of our autonomy depends on having a teacher who has the right philosophy of education, it indeed cannot be autonomy in the total sense required by Kant. A recognition of Kant's belief in the dual appearance of noumenal rational freedom as a drive to enlarge one's rational knowledge and a responsiveness to it provides the solution. "Transcendental freedom" indeed "does what it does by itself," but *pace* Herbart there is no contradiction in holding both this claim and that that education is necessary for the development of morality. This is so because the student, considered noumenally, is an active participant in her own education, not a mere passive receiver of knowledge bestowed on her by an instructor, even in instances where learning appears to be passive. Both the drive toward enlargement and the responsiveness toward rational knowledge are noumenally free acts of a human subject, although from the phenomenal perspective the former may appear much more active than the latter. This radical distinction between free noumena and naturally caused phenomena deserves further clarification, and in so doing, we will clear common misinterpretations from the path of thinking that which Kant understands by freedom.



Herbart's question, as its continual reoccurrence in the history of the study of Kant's philosophy of education suggests, puts forth a critique which logically arises when we attribute to Kant a dogmatic conception of freedom. In the first *Critique* Kant rejected this conception as standing in contradiction with the phenomenal reality of empiricism. The dogmatic conception of freedom is similar to Kant's in that it holds that the subject has total autonomy, "isn't hindered through anything," but differs from Kant in that it imagines the subject to assert herself against and overcome natural causality. Kant constructs the system of transcendental idealism to save a concept of freedom which is total and yet does not contradict the phenomenal reality of empiricism, a concept of freedom which works through rather than against natural causality.. Let us examine Herbart's question and try to reveal what he misunderstands, and how we should rather understand Kant. "How did Kant imagine moral education?" Herbart asks. "As an effect of transcendental freedom? Impossible, for the concept of the latter comes to an end, as soon as one thinks it is not entirely free from every causal nexus." We should first note that Kant holds that there are two systems of causality: natural causality, but also "a concept of causality justified by the *Critique of Pure Reason* although incapable of being presented empirically, namely that of *freedom*."<sup>59</sup> In the second *Critique*, Kant seeks to prove the existence of this second type of causality and come to a more determinate conception of it. So Herbart's claim that the concept of transcendental freedom cannot be retained if it is not entirely free from every causal nexus is mistaken: transcendental freedom constitutes its own causal nexus, and hence is not free from every causal nexus. Herbart does understand this: "transcendental freedom," he writes, "does what it does by itself; one cannot hinder it through anything, one cannot help it through anything." Yet we should note that this free doing that transcendental freedom is has effects in

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<sup>59</sup>Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor 5:15.

the world of appearances. While transcendental freedom is “free of” natural causality, it is not foreign to it. We saw above that the free causality of transcendental freedom works *through*, rather than *in addition to*, the natural causal chain, and exhibited some allusions to this thought in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. “Every action,” Kant told us there, “irrespective of its relation in time to other appearances, is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason.”<sup>60</sup> Every human action is free, and yet also explicable through the natural causal chain. Free acts do not as it were break through and alter the system of natural necessity in a manner which rational cognizing subjects cannot account for. It is *not* the case that some human actions are determined by, say, natural inclinations, while other actions are free. While Kant thinks that this is true of appearances, a claim that often misleads commentators, we will see that he holds all morally appraisable actions to be the consequence of the noumenal free act of the human being. Herbart is thus absolutely right to say that transcendental freedom cannot be hindered through anything, an insight that many modern interpreters of Kant’s moral philosophy have failed to grasp.

All things which a human being does, Kant believes, she freely does, and I intentionally use this unwieldy phrase rather than the more natural “human actions” to emphasize that Kant’s belief that a human’s entire life is her free choice – more specifically, the appearance of her free choice. This is what Kant means by the “independence of the will”<sup>61</sup> or the claim that rational beings are “independent of nature.” “The moral law as a law of freedom commands through determining grounds that are to be quite independent of nature and of its harmony with our faculty of desire... the acting rational being in the world is, however, not also the cause of the world and of nature itself.”<sup>62</sup> (One might claim that *via* the inclinations the natural is constitutive

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<sup>60</sup>*Critique of Pure Reason*, A553/581.

<sup>61</sup>*CPrR*, 5:94.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:124.

of rational beings, or at least human beings, and thus Kant's quote here does not have the implication that the rational being is a total cause of herself. Shortly below we will see that in the *Religion* Kant unequivocally rejects this understanding of the natural inclinations.) And yet with this affirmation of Herbart's interpretation his question strikes us with renewed force. If the rational subject totally determines herself, it seems we have eliminated the point of education, which is for the teacher to influence the student in a manner seen to be fit. The rational being "discovers maxims; what the teacher says to it is immaterial," Herbart tells us: "... in this way Kant and his followers describe transcendental freedom to us; - and in this way they destroy all pedagogy."

For Kant, every moral action a subject carries out must, if it is to be considered moral, arise out of the subject's self-determination. As rational, moral beings, human beings indeed must wholly self-determine themselves. The teacher cannot exert any influence over the future actions of the student, or the fact of human freedom would be contradicted. And yet in addition to lecturing on education, Kant devotes time to the topic of moral education in closing both the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Metaphysics of Morals* with a 'Doctrine of Method,' i.e. for leading a moral education.<sup>63</sup> Kant implores us to educate and gives us the tools to do so. He is himself involved in a pedagogical project in writing these works: he is educating us, his readers, toward moral acting. Kant does so because he believes that it is through education that morality is achieved in persons. We will see later that Kant holds that the mechanism of historical development itself is education, and consequently that the ideal form of government is one which allows for the creation and expansion of discursive spaces, spaces in which people can educate each other without hindrance. Does this then contradict the fact of transcendental freedom? We

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 5:151-161; *MM* 6:477-486.

appear to have come across an educational antinomy between the importance of moral education, on the one hand, and the absolute freedom necessary for moral responsibility. We must, then, deal with it as he deals with each of the many antinomies he comes across in his systematic works: by synthesizing the opposing dogmatist and empiricist theses through the transcendental distinction of appearances from things in themselves.

Herbart is an empiricist arguing against the dogmatist he takes Kant to be. As an empiricist, he makes what Kant takes to be the ultimate empiricist error: takes appearances for things in themselves. Kant warns us against this mistake often. In the second *Critique* he writes:

If one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time for the determinations of things in themselves... then the necessity in the causal relation can in no way be united in freedom; instead they are opposed to each other as contradictory. For, from the first [causality as natural necessity] it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point in time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time... if one still wants to save [the concept of freedom], no other path remains than to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and so too is its causality in accordance with the law of *natural necessity, only to appearance and to ascribe freedom to the same being as a thing in itself*.<sup>64</sup>

Moral education, actions, the moral development we can observe in a person's life, which is to say in time: all of these are appearances.

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<sup>64</sup>*CPrR.*, 5:94-95. Kant's emphasis.

Herbart, apparently mistaking Kant's sense, treats the latter two like things in themselves in supposing that the fact that "transcendental freedom does what it does by itself" means that moral education is worthless. Transcendental freedom indeed does what it does by itself, but this doing is not the doing of a particular moral action or a particular track of moral development. Rather, Kant believes that these are appearances of a doing. When a rational agent cognizes another rational agent making a free decision, the result is the experience of a particular phenomenal action (over a shorter period of time, and, Kant thinks, the morality of any single apparently moral action can be called into question) or of a process of moral development (over a longer period of time, and, we will see, Kant thinks that only by assessing longer periods of time do we attain greater accuracy in our judgements of the morality of an action). Herbart treats the former like a thing in itself when he assumes that moral education has an effect on a rational being's morality, rather than being the appearance of the moral character of the student. Why does Herbart make this mistake?

I believe it is because a concept of freedom working through rather than breaking through the causal chain is quite different than the concept of freedom possessed by many people in the modern West. A more popular idea of freedom passed down to Kant by the tradition holds that every action we do is, as a discrete action separate from all others, absolutely free and so absolutely morally appraisable, meaning that every choice rests on nothing but the will of the actor. This is precisely the dogmatist view of freedom which Kant shows contradicts the empirical reality of natural laws in the Third Antinomy of the first *Critique*. The dogmatist, as characterized by Kant, holds that "the power of spontaneously beginning a [causal] series in time is... proved," and so "attribute[s] to... substances a power of acting from freedom."<sup>65</sup> This

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<sup>65</sup>*CPR*, A450/B478.

notion remains popular today – our philosophers and psychologists still attempt to discover the possibility thereof. We might even hesitate to think of anything less as freedom. If this is true of us, having had this idea passed down to us from similar traditions as those which passed down this idea to intellectuals in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, perhaps many of them would also hesitate or struggle to think of anything ‘less’ as freedom. This commitment to and high(est) valuation of this concept of freedom (as implied by the recognizable way of speaking of any differing conception of freedom as ‘less’) might explain the inability to understand Kant’s doctrine of freedom. But the dogmatist conception of freedom is not Kant’s. If the dogmatist conception were true, Kant writes, natural laws would have no determining influence.<sup>66</sup> He saw it necessary to solve the contradiction between transcendental freedom and the reality of natural laws which, as laws, must encompass the entire spatio-temporal realm, with the system of Transcendental Idealism, which takes space and time to be mere forms of intuition by which we order objects in our cognition of them. Things in themselves, however, are aspatial and atemporal, and only on account of this is freedom possible. But natural necessity is never broken by freedom: rather it is the appearance of freedom.

To try to understand this conception of freedom as working through rather than breaking through the causal chain, we might consider an example from Carl Th. Dreyer’s 1955 film *Ordet*, which, while not mirroring Kant’s conception of freedom exactly, might elucidate his conception of the relation of freedom to natural causality. The film tells the story of the family of a small-town farmer in rural Denmark, Morten Borgen. Morten is a devout Lutheran who tries to lead a good Christian life for him and his family, yet is plagued by doubt. In conversation with the local minister, he asks him about the lack of miracles in our day: while the minister has answers and is

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., A451/B477.

secure in his beliefs, we come to the understanding that this lack is responsible for Morten's doubt. Meanwhile tragedies have begun to befall his family: his son Johannes, who was studying to become a minister, had read too much Kierkegaard and now believes he is Jesus Christ returned, now roams the house chastising the family and their visitors for their lack of faith in him in a spectral monotone; another son's wife Inger delivers a stillbirth and after a long struggle dies herself. On the day of the funeral, Johannes, who had run away after Inger's death, returns home clear-eyed and no longer believing himself to be Christ. He gives a speech on the power and mercy of God, blaming lack of faith rather than a lack in God for the absence of miracles, and after convincing the family to have faith, begs God to return Inger – finally she opens her eyes and the family rejoices.

The film ends here, but we might imagine what would happen after the events depicted. Inger would go to hospitals for testing and doctors would try to find out what happened in scientific terms; perhaps the story would make the news and scientists and intellectuals would weigh in with their theories of what happened. Perhaps her doctors would discover that she was only in a coma or for whatever reason appeared dead but was not; if her doctors failed to find a scientific explanation, they would come to the conclusion not that there was no explanation but God's mercy, but rather that they had failed to discover what had happened. If modern science can explain such an event with recourse to natural laws, can we still call it a miracle, brought about by something outside of the natural causal chain? A scientific anti-realist might claim so, but that science is a tool which is structured to give these explanations in every case. Kant, on the other hand, believes that the world of appearances is structured to give explanations in line with Newtonian physics, as his belief in the absolute chain of natural necessity which constitutes the

Antithesis of the Third Antinomy reveals. (We might call Kant a realist about phenomena, though unlike the scientific realist, they are not the only things he holds to be real.)

But does the ability of modern science to yield a scientific explanation for such a case mean that there could not also be another cause, divine mercy? When Christian intellectuals, Kant being one of them, developed and subscribed to the idea of a Laplacean all-encompassing natural necessity during the Enlightenment, the possibility of reckoning this belief with a belief in God's omnipotence (as well as a free will) became a question. On one solution, which I argue is Kant's, God (and we free agents) creates the natural causal chain such that it is set up for certain ends that He (and we) choose, but do not 'meddle in it,' for natural necessity is not something that can be meddled within, it is completely determined. We see that this is the case in the portrayal of God in *Ordet*. On watching the final scene, one might first think that the family's moment of prayer in absolute faith convinced God to perform a discrete miraculous act. But we soon realize that this moment would not have been possible had Mikkel, Inger's husband, not thrown himself on Inger's casket in despair, stopping his family from bringing her to the hearse that would take her to be buried. Had Mikkel not taken this action, done in ignorance of what would soon happen, Inger would have been gone and buried when Johannes returns. Mikkel's action, considered as discrete, could not be understood as a free action to bring his wife back to life, yet it was just as necessary to this end as the absolute faith-resurrection interaction between the Borgens and God that initially strikes us as discretely free. The two actions must then be set up in the same thought, in God's creation of the natural causal chain, and the world of experience which happens in time is the playing out of this thought.

Solving the problem of reckoning a belief in natural necessity with that of the existence of an omnipotent God and human freedom is what Kant attempts most directly in the Third



Antinomy which we have examined above. He references his solution in the second Critique, in a quote that anticipates Laplace's demon:

[T]he *sensible life* [S i n n e n l e b e n] has, with respect to the *intelligible* consciousness of its existence (consciousness of freedom), the absolute unity of a phenomenon, which, so far as it contains merely appearances of the disposition that the moral law is concerned with (appearances of the character), must be appraised not in accordance with the natural necessity that belongs to it as appearance but in accordance with the absolute spontaneity of freedom. One can therefore grant that if it were possible for us to have such deep insight into a human being's cast of mind, as shown by inner as well as outer actions, that we would know every incentive to action, even the smallest, as well as all the external occasions affecting them, we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse and could nevertheless maintain that the human being's conduct is free.

In calling Kant a 'phenomenal Laplacean,' I intend to bring to the fore precisely what he says in this quote: that the entirety of the physical world is predetermined in line with natural laws. But Kant is a phenomenal Laplacean rather than a Laplacean *simpliciter* because he believes that in reality in itself, we are free, and our existence in deterministic nature is merely the totality of appearances of this freedom of ours, as is apparent as the passage continues:

... If, that is to say, we were capable of another view, namely an intellectual intuition of the same subject... then we would become aware that this whole chain of appearances,

with respect to all that the moral law is concerned with, depends upon the spontaneity of the subject as a thing in itself, for the determination of which no physical explanation can be given.<sup>67</sup>

In stating, as he does here, that not only does the world of experience *appear* deterministic when we cognize it, but rather that if we had a means of measuring the apparent processes of the mind, we could predetermine the whole of the world of experience, he is claiming that experience itself is predetermined, but in a strange sense. For that which determines it, our free moral acts and the will of God, are the singular things which we are able to know exist yet cannot be cognized because they contradict the categories through which we cognize experience, or, less precisely said, are ‘located’ in the noumenal but not in the phenomenal. So the determination cannot quite be a ‘pre’-determination, because freedom and the will of God, things which have phenomenal effects but no phenomenal existence, as noumenal, are not in time. As atemporal, freedom and the will of God cannot be ‘before’ the playing out of phenomena according to natural laws.

And yet in saying that a sensible life “contains merely appearances of the disposition that the moral law is concerned with (appearances of the character) ... [grounded in] the absolute spontaneity of freedom” and that if, were we to view a sensible life through the lens of Transcendental Idealism, we would see that the “whole chain of appearances, with respect to all that the moral law is concerned with, depends upon the spontaneity of the subject as a thing in itself,” it seems apparent that the free spontaneity of the subject is originally determinative of the chain of appearances which constitutes a sensible life. Could it be the case that this free spontaneity which is the ground of human actions is spontaneously acts in discrete instances for

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<sup>67</sup>*CPrR*, 5:99.

every discrete human action, such that we could judge discrete actions as moral or immoral? That is to say, is each discrete action, the chain of which makes up a human life, grounded in a discrete noumenal spontaneous free act which make up a chain of discrete free noumenal acts? This might seem to contradict the atemporality of being in itself. Furthermore, we might read Kant's claim that one's sensible life is phenomenon and as such is an *absolute unity*, made up of (many) appearances, which are appearances of the *one* disposition or *one* character which the moral law addresses [*die das moralische Gesetz angeht*], it seems as though a sensible life would be the collection of appearances of a single disposition, where the single free choice of the latter (free insofar as it is that which that is addressed by the moral law), appears as a series of choices. But if this were so, why does Kant seem to talk so frequently about applying the moral law to discrete actions? Why, indeed, is the categorical imperative, the catchphrase of Kantian moral philosophy, phrased in terms of discrete actions in three of the four formulations in the *Groundwork*:

1. *Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.*<sup>68</sup>
2. *Act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.*<sup>69</sup>
3. *The idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislating will.*<sup>70</sup>
- (4.) Act according to the maxims of a member universally legislating for a merely possible kingdom of ends.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Kant, *Groundwork* 4:421.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 4:429.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 4:431.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 4:439.

Formulations 1, 2, and 4 each appear to discrete acts, where an action would be either moral or immoral if the subject's maxim meets the test that the these formulations of the categorical imperative put to it. Kant does exactly this in consideration of the first, the 'universalizability principle.' He tests four cases against the principle, three of which are discrete actions: suicide, taking a loan with the intention not to repay, the cultivation of one's natural predispositions, and withholding charity. Imagining the first case, Kant imagines a man considering taking his own life, and using the categorical imperative as a test.

Now he tries out: whether the maxim of his action could possibly become a universal law of nature. But his maxim is: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if, when protracted any longer, it threatens more ill than it promises agreeableness. The only further question is whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. But then one soon sees that a nature whose law it were to destroy life itself by means of the same sensation the function of which it is to impel toward the advancement of life, would contradict itself and would thus not subsist as a nature, hence that that maxim could not possibly take the place of a universal law of nature, and consequently conflicts entirely with the supreme principle of all duty.<sup>72</sup>

Should we not take this scene as a claim that this man can in this moment choose to act either morally or immorally? Yirmiyahu Yovel indeed comes to this conclusion: "the formal principle of morality," he writes, "relates only to isolated acts which are mutually independent. Each of

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 4:22.

them has a determining ground and a moral value of its own; one cannot be the cause of the other, nor impair its purity (if it is good), or “atone” for it (if it is evil).”<sup>73</sup> It seems that Kant’s position on the issue of whether actions are discretely free and thus discretely morally appraisable, or whether they compose a phenomenal unity that *as a unity* is the appearance of a single free noumenal act, remains unclear in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Restated, these two early critical works leave open to question whether there is a series of noumenal acts which corresponds to the series of phenomenal acts, or whether all phenomenal acts form a unity which is the appearance of a single noumenal act. We must look, then, to his 1793 *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where Kant’s position becomes explicit.

### II.5: The *Religion* model of willing

The traditional doctrine of original sin (the German term, *Erbsünde*, translates literally as hereditary sin), by which all human beings are tainted by birth by inheriting the sin of Adam’s fall, contradicts Kant’s beliefs concerning moral responsibility. Evil, like goodness, must, as an appraisal of morality, refer to “the grounds of actions out of freedom”<sup>74</sup> or that which comes from these grounds. Human beings can only be evil (or good) if they are absolutely free. As a consequence, Kant cannot hold that human beings inherit evil. If all humans are indeed evil, he must hold that we all freely choose evil. Yet the doctrine of original sin justifies some of the most central Christian tenets, such as the Immaculate Conception or the necessity of Jesus’ sacrifice, as well as both Kant’s anthropological and introspective assessments of the difficulty of moral action for human beings (to which he will ultimately appeal in arguing that the choice of evil is contingently universal). But Kant cannot accept the claim that evil is inherited by

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<sup>73</sup>Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* 52.

<sup>74</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni 6:21.

human beings rather than chosen out of absolute freedom. His solution is to show that while the concept of an *Erbsünde* is incoherent, it is indeed the case that human beings originally sin. The first essay of the *Religion* attempts to give an account of how it can be that the evil of human beings is both original and free. In giving this account, Kant is forced to give an analysis of human willing.

We should first note that in speaking of an original sin, we already remove ourselves from a theory by which discrete acts are the object of moral evaluation. Kant writes:

We call a human being evil... not because actions that he performs are evil (contrary to law), but because they are so constituted that they allow the inference of evil maxims in him. Now through experience we can indeed notice unlawful actions, and also notice (at least within ourselves) that they are consciously contrary to law. But we cannot observe maxims, we cannot do so unproblematically even within ourselves; hence the judgement that an agent is an evil human being cannot reliably be based on experience. In order, then, to call a human being evil, it must be possible to infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim, and, from this, the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims.<sup>75</sup>

Here Kant lays out for us three stages in the presence of evil in the human being. Discrete actions are those that we call evil because they are contrary to law. In our consciousness of the fact that an action is evil, we can infer that it is contrary to law, which is to say that it rests upon a maxim

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 6:20.

that is not universalizable. We may not have been conscious of this maxim prior to our action, but we can formulate *post hoc* in terms of the phenomenal world and consciously realize that our action was contrary to law, such as with the maxim we saw above, upon which the discrete action of suicide rests: “from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if, when protracted any longer, it threatens more ill than it promises agreeableness.”<sup>76</sup> But, Kant tells us, these maxims which we can consciously bring to mind must in turn be grounded in a single maxim, a common ground of all particular morally evil maxims. Yovel understands this fundamental maxim to merely “unify” all of our discretely free actions. He writes as follows:

On the one hand, the particular acts are not causal outcomes of the fundamental resolution but always involve new, spontaneous initiatives. On the other, these are no longer totally arbitrary and contingent, for they are taken in the light of a global choice, which they implement and at the same time renew or reconfirm. The tie between the fundamental maxim and its particular expressions is one not of determination but of logical implication, requiring the free subject to draw this implication and implement it. For each situation the global maxim intimates the right choice, but man must still make it; thus renewing his global resolution each time he realizes it in a particular situation. This scheme, however, also allows for deviations from the basic choice, and even for its complete reversal or “conversion.”<sup>77</sup>

Yovel’s attempt to reconcile his reading of Kant as holding that phenomenal acts are *both* discretely free *and* share a common fundamental subjective ground, however, seems to reduce

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<sup>76</sup>*Groundwork*, 4:22.

<sup>77</sup>Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* 52-53. Cf. 197, 209fn.

that fundamental ground to a mere suggestion to the person at the moment of every discretely free choice. But for Kant, freedom must be absolute. If a suggestion exerts any sway over discrete actions, they could not be understood as free. With this in mind, one struggles to see the point of such a suggestion. Absolute freedom means that the actor needs no information on which to make her choice – it deals with the simple, and original, choice between good and evil.<sup>78</sup> If the fundamental maxim plays an advisory role, it is one that can never have any influence upon what would be actually morally appraisable, discrete acts. The subjective ground of maxims, on the other hand, should not be morally appraisable, because it never influences any actions which appear to us as morally appraisable. On Yovel's picture, then, it appears that Kant should tell us that while discrete acts are morally appraisable, the subjective ground of maxims is not. Yet in the passage of the *Religion* cited above, which Yovel references as well, Kant says the opposite: it is on the grounds of the fundamental disposition, and not any discrete act, that we can call a human being evil.

Kant makes clear that this disposition, a particular human being's 'nature,' does not arise out of objective nature but rather is a free act by which the subject originally constitutes herself:

Lest anyone be immediately scandalized by the expression *nature*... let it be noted that by "the nature of a human being" we only understand here the subjective freedom in general (under objective moral laws) antecedent to every deed that falls within the scope of the senses. But this subjective ground must, in turn, itself always be a deed of freedom...

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<sup>78</sup>For the simplicity of the moral choice, see *Religion* 6:25fn, quoted on p. 55 below.



In conceiving of a human being's nature as an original choice which she herself makes, Kant emphasizes that the original deed is the deed which is originally freedom, as opposed to those apparent uses of freedom merely given in experience, to which the noumenal choice of a disposition is *in every case antecedent*:

since the first ground of the adoption of our maxims, which must itself again lie in the free power of choice [*Willkühr*], cannot be any fact possibly given in experience, the good or the evil in the human being is said to be innate (as the subjective first ground of the adoption of this or that maxim with respect to the moral law) only *in the sense* that it is posited as the ground antecedent to every use of freedom given in experience... and is thus represented as present in the human being at the moment of birth – not that birth itself is its cause.<sup>79</sup>

We see just how superior, in the literal sense, this freedom is in Kant's engagement with the Stoics in the beginning of his second essay, which calls to mind Herbart's characterization of transcendental freedom: "it does what it does by itself; one cannot hinder it through anything, one cannot help it through anything." The Stoics conceived of the pursuit of virtue as a battle of good wisdom against the evil natural inclinations. Kant claims, rather, that "*considered by themselves* [an sich selbst] natural inclinations are *good*, i.e. not reprehensible, and to want to extirpate them would not only be futile but harmful and blameworthy as well... only what is unlawful is evil in itself, absolutely reprehensible, and must be eradicated."<sup>80</sup> "On [the inclinations] can be grafted all sorts of vices... however [vices] do not of themselves issue from

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<sup>79</sup>*Religion*, 6:20-22.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 6:58. Slightly amended.

this predisposition as a root.”<sup>81</sup> The natural inclinations, as something bestowed on us human beings by nature, can neither be morally good nor evil considered by themselves. They are good insofar as they can be put to morally good ends by a morally good disposition. Thus, although we cannot say whether this disposition is the foundation of our entire being, we can say that it is the foundation for our entire existence as *moral* beings.

Yet, Kant suggests, our moral being is the only thing which really constitutes *us*. At one point he strikingly calls “impotence, temperament, upbringing, and tempting circumstances of time and place,” all of which might be blamed for an individual’s immorality, as “nothing but things which cannot be seen as belonging to us” [*lauter Dinge, die uns nicht zugerechnet werden können*]. To seek an explanation for one’s immorality in these mere appearances is a “dishonesty... which hinders the establishment in us of a genuine moral disposition.”<sup>82</sup> Kant reminds us here of the claim that for freedom to truly be freedom, i.e. completely autonomous, it must be outside of the structure of space and time. We return, then, to the distinction between discrete actions and the freely chosen subjective ground of all actions, the two outer levels of the free actions which we saw Kant lay out above. He writes that both can rightly be called deeds:

The term “deed” can in general apply just as well to the use of freedom through which the supreme maxim (either in favor of, or against, the law) is adopted in the power of choice, as to the use by which the actions themselves (materially considered, i.e. as regards the objects of the power of choice) are performed in accordance with that maxim.

The propensity to evil is a deed in the first meaning (*peccatum originarium*) and at the same time the formal ground of every deed contrary to law according to the second

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 6:26-27.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 6:38. Translation amended.

meaning, [i.e. of a deed] that resists the law materially and is then called vice (*peccatum derivativum*) ... the former is an intelligible deed, cognizable through reason alone apart from any temporal condition; the latter is sensible, empirical, given in time (*factum phenomenon*).<sup>83</sup>

Although a discrete action, which for Kant is the ordinary meaning of the word “deed,” is what is considered under the Categorical Imperative as formulated in the *Groundwork*, is morally appraisable, and as such, is free, the original choice of a moral disposition is also to be called a deed, and as such is free and morally appraisable. And not only might we be able to infer the latter to be evil in a human being who we observe committing evil deeds in the former sense, but Kant emphasizes here that the choice of an evil moral disposition is the ground of every discrete action contrary to law. This should make us pause. How can a deed be free and yet have a ground which is already determined? What defines a deed as free is its being the choice of a hitherto undetermined will. Yet Kant tells us that both the choice of a moral disposition and discrete acts are free, with the former as the ground determined prior to the latter. Kant’s Latin insertions underscore this problem. Our subjective choice of an evil moral disposition is an *peccatum originarium*, an original sin, while each discrete action is a *peccatum derivativum*, a derivative sin. A footnote addressing Plato and Aristotle early in the first essay points to an answer.

The ancient moral philosophers, who have pretty well exhausted all that can be said concerning virtue, have also not left the two questions above untouched. They expressed

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 6:31.

the first thus: Whether virtue must be learned...? The second was: Whether there is more than one virtue...? To both they replied with rigoristic precision in the negative; and rightly so, for they were considering virtue *in itself*, in the *idea* of reason... If, however, we want to pass moral judgement on this moral being, the human being *as he appears*, such as experience lets us cognize him, *we can then answer both questions in the positive.*<sup>84</sup>

Kant agrees with the ancients that, in itself, morality cannot be learned, and cannot be manifold. The former would contradict the total autonomy that constitutes freedom – we have already discussed this problem at length with reference to the pedagogical method Kant puts forth in the *Metaphysics* and to Herbart's critique of the idea of moral education within the system of transcendental idealism. But when we cognize human beings according to the intuitions and categories, i.e., as phenomenal creatures, morality appears as we experience it: both manifold and something that must be learned (and thus, taught). It is the same morality we are considering, we are simply considering it from two standpoints: morality itself, and morality after we subject it to our intuitions and categories. Only in the second manner can we experience morality – but the way it really is, in itself, is the first. In this way, we come to understand how we can hold that both the subjective ground of our maxims and discrete actions are free, while at the same time, that the former is the ground of the latter. The subjective ground of our maxims, the extent to which we have chosen an evil moral disposition, is our morality itself; our discrete phenomenal actions are merely moments in the cognition (our own, or one of another) of this choice we have made.

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 6:25fn. Last emphasis added.

With Kant's formulation in the passage above, we can also begin to see the form that his response to Herbart's question would have to take. While it is true that "transcendental freedom does what it does by itself," this absolute autonomy is incomprehensible to our limited human form of cognition. We must order things in themselves according to our form of cognition in order to experience them, as Kant sought to prove in the first *Critique*. The way our wholly autonomous moral choice happens to appear in our cognition of it always includes some appearance of intersubjective pedagogy. Herbart's question assumes that we can choose, discretely, to educate or not to educate some student in matters concerning morality. But for Kant, we have always already chosen good or evil, once and for all. The appearance of one who educates others in morality reflects some goodness, and the appearance of one who neglects to morally educate others reflects some evil. The appearance of one who is morally educated, too, reflects some goodness, and the appearance of one who is never so educated reflects some evil. Kant must hold that we are all responsible for our own moral development, for the single truly free choice is that which is already "represented as present in the human being at the moment of birth – not that birth itself is its cause."<sup>85</sup>

We also see this active conception of phenomenal development put forth in Kant's short essay "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," a narrative account of humanity's exit from the garden of Eden reinterpreted as a story of the initial development of rational knowledge, the phenomenal appearance of noumenal reason, which appeared in the *Berlin Monatsschrift* in 1786, a year before the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant tells us that this writing "cannot lay claim to being serious business, but rather only to being an allowable

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 6:22.

exercise of the imagination, in the company of reason,” is “only a mere pleasure trip.”<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, given that the first instance of human development arose out of human nature, such a story “should not be fabricated, but rather can be derived from experience if one assumes this nature was no better or worse in its first beginning than we find it now: an assumption which is in accordance with the analogy of nature and puts forth nothing daring.”<sup>87</sup> And Kant does proceed to make claims that reflect the position of an essential rationality set forth in the first *Critique* and moral works.

As a “mere pleasure trip,” Kant asks us to allow him a number of assumptions from which he can start this story of moral development. “I shall,” he writes, “consider the human being only after it has made substantial progress in honing its skills in using its naturally given powers, and not begin with the human being in its complete brutishness, for to endeavor to fill the gap between these two points, which would presumably extend across quite a lengthy span of time.”<sup>88</sup> From this starting point, in line with Adam as we meet him in Genesis, the first human being “was thus able to *stand and walk*. It was able to *speak* (Genesis 2:20), even *communicate*, that is, to express itself through the use of coherent concepts (v. 23), and consequently to *think*.”<sup>89</sup> But notice that Kant’s story differs from Genesis here: the first human was not created

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<sup>86</sup>“Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8:109, in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, translated David L. Colclasure, edited Pauline Kleingeld.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid. Translation amended. “*Denn dieser darf nicht erdichtet, sondern kann von der Erfahrung hergenommen werden, wenn man voraussetzt, daß diese im ersten Anfange nicht besser oder schlechter gewesen, als wir sie jetzt antreffen: eine Voraussetzung, die der Analogie der Natur gemäß ist und nichts Gewagtes bei sich führt.*” Grammatically, *diese* could refer either to *die Erfahrung* or to *die Natur* from the sentence before. Colclasure reads it as referring to *Erfahrung*, ‘experience,’ but this makes little sense. Rather, *diese* must refer to human nature (*die Natur*) which is mentioned in the previous sentence, and which the end of this sentence appears to modify. Additionally, as we have and will continue to see, Kant does believe that human nature is something which is unchanging and so could not have been “better or worse” at the beginning of history, which he states explicitly in “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective.” “Human nature is such that it cannot be indifferent even in consideration of the most remote epoch that shall affect our species, if only it can be expected with certainty.” 8:27.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 8:110.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

with these abilities, having them bestowed as fully formed by God, but rather “made substantial progress in honing its skills in using its naturally given powers,” that is, the first human being developed the abilities to speak and think out of *its own* nature, self-sufficiently. Kant emphasizes this point in the next sentence: “These are all skills that the human being had to acquire *on its own* (for if they had been inborn, they would also be passed on, an assumption contradicted by experience).<sup>90</sup> Kant here appeals to this unchanging conception of human nature which he established on the first page, where at no time is it “better or worse” than at any other. In extending this eternal human nature to the first human, along with the experiential fact that babies cannot speak, he comes to the conclusion that the first human being must have had the rational capacity to develop speech and thought self-sufficiently. In a footnote on 8:110, we see a characteristic of this rational essence.

It must have been the *urge to communicate* that first motivated the human being that was still alone to proclaim his existence to living beings other than himself, primarily to those who make a sound that he can mimic and which can later serve as a name. A similar effect of this urge can be seen in children and thoughtless people who, through their buzzing, screaming, whistling, singing and other noisy activities (and often also gatherings of this sort), disturb the reflective part of the community. For I see no other motivating reason for their behavior than the wish to make their existence known far and wide.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 8:110-1. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

Here we see again that the rational essence of human beings is, Kant believes, something which is unchanging, equivalent from the first human to the children of Königsberg. We also see the justification for Kant's annoyance at small noisy children: he attributes to them, in line with his theory of subjectivity, a capacity for reason-giving which underlies their actions. Due to their lack of rational knowledge, children cannot participate in rational discourse leading directly to its enlargement. But nonetheless, as agents who are essentially rational, they take the first step toward participation in rational discourse: asserting their existence as rational agents worthy of respect and inclusion in that discursive space. As essentially rational agents, their actions must be grounded in reasons directed toward the enlargement of their rational knowledge, realizing reason phenomenally.

### **II.6: The status of particularity in Kant's theory of subjectivity**

The model of subjectivity free noumenon which appears as determined phenomenon is elaborated upon in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant introduces and utilizes a new terminology for this distinction between two aspects of the human being to solve a number of supposed problems in ethical theory. The subject as it belongs to the noumenal, and so where pure reason and freedom lie, he terms *homo noumenon*, and the subject as an object of experience in the phenomenal world, determined by the free acts of *homo noumenon*, he calls *homo phaenomenon*. The antinomy of duty is one of the problems solved using this distinction: how can one be bound to a duty set by oneself? If I was the one who obligated myself so, I have the authority to release myself from that obligation. But if I can release myself from it, it was never really an obligation.<sup>92</sup> Kant's solution is this:

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<sup>92</sup>*MM*, 6:417.



When a human being is conscious of a duty to himself, he views himself, as the subject of duty, under two attributes: first as a *sensible being*, that is, as a human being (a member of one of the animal species), and second as a *rational being* [*Vernunftwesen*] (not merely as a being that has reason, since reason as a theoretical faculty could well be an attribute of a living corporeal being) ... Now the human being as a *natural being* that has reason (*homo phaenomenon*) can be determined by his reason, as a *cause*, to actions in the sensible world, and so far the concept of an obligation does not come into consideration. But the same human being thought in terms of his *personality*, that is, as a being endowed with *inner freedom* (*homo noumenon*) is regarded as a being capable of obligation and, indeed, obligation to himself (to the humanity in his own person).<sup>93</sup>

Although he does for the most part leave behind his neologism *Vernunftkenntnis* in this book, through this distinction he retains the notion of the subject as essentially rational and free as *homo noumenon*, which directs and conditions the human's experiential being as *homo phaenomenon*, causing the development of rationality *qua homo phaenomenon* through the essential and always complete rationality of *homo noumenon*. This is made clear by the description of *homo noumenon* as a *Vernunftwesen*, literally a reason-being or, as I have translated it, a rational being. This is something more, he tells us, than a being that merely has reason, that is, *homo phaenomenon*, who has it through both the responsiveness to reasons which allows for the enlargement of rational knowledge, and through that rational knowledge itself. What makes *homo noumenon* a *Vernunftwesen* is that it is constituted by pure reason: *Homo*

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 6:418. Translation amended.

*noumenon*, Kant says elsewhere, “is pure reason in me.”<sup>94</sup> This distinction between the subject as reason and the subject merely *having* reason appears, then, to be a reflection of the distinction from the first *Critique* between the possession of reason, which is present in its full extent without change, and the possession of rational knowledge, the development of which is driven by the former.

We have already characterized this essential noumenal rationality as universal, undifferentiated from one subject to the next. It has turned out that quite a bit can be said about the noumenal subject, yet what can be said, concerning its rationality, morality, and relation to the phenomenal subject, does not differ from one subject to the next. This does not mean, however, that Kant has no place for the obvious fact of human particularity in his system. The prominent placement of the two ends that are also duties in the introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the happiness of others and the perfection of one’s natural abilities, serves as a testament to this.<sup>95</sup> While the setting of each as an end is equally a duty for all subjects, both the perfection of natural abilities itself and happiness itself are qualities of particular phenomenal agents: the means by which they are pursued must necessarily differ in each case. Both depend on the particular natural composition of the subject: the happiness of an individual is determined “by virtue of the impulses of his nature,”<sup>96</sup> and the direction which one can take to perfect one’s natural abilities depends, of course, upon the natural predispositions gifted to one by nature.<sup>97</sup> Nature, by which Kant refers to the chain of conditions that constitute the phenomenal world and which we ourselves are a part of, is full of differentiation, and so not

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 6:335.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 6:385-394.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 6:386.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

everybody has an equal capacity for any occupation which requires certain natural abilities to be perfected, as Kant notes in Book II of the Doctrine of Virtue:

Which of these natural perfections should take *precedence*, and in what proportion one against the other it may be a human being's duty to himself to make these natural perfections his end, are matters left for him to choose in accordance with his own rational reflection about what sort of life he would like to lead and whether he has the powers necessary for it (e.g., whether it should be a trade, commerce, or a learned profession).<sup>98</sup>

The powers necessary for developing a certain natural perfection are something that, Kant believes, the hand of nature has distributed to people in an unequal way. Yet, it is a universal command of morality that the human being must perfect those particular natural abilities which they have been given by nature. In opposition to a virtue ethic in which the perfection of a certain natural virtue is good in itself, Kant tells us that the human being has a duty to perfect his natural abilities *because* he “has a duty to himself to be a useful member of the world, since this also belongs to the worth of humanity in his own person, which he ought not degrade.”<sup>99</sup> So, where some virtue ethic may prescribe the development of particularity as a universal command for a number of particular ends, Kant tells us that the development of particularity is something universally prescribed by reason for a *universal* end, that is, a harmonious human society. In the case of happiness, particularity is made subservient to universality in an analogous way. Often overlooked, happiness holds a place of extreme importance for Kant. Whereas morality is undoubtedly the highest good for Kant, it is something that has its real existence only

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 6:445.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 6:446.

noumenally. Our happiness, on the other hand, is always experiential, and thus always phenomenal. It is in fact the highest good that we can directly experience. And one's own happiness is, Kant believes, "an end that every human being has (by virtue of the impulses of his nature)."<sup>100</sup> He claims at the end of the *Metaphysics of Morals* that the ultimate end of the human race set by God must be "the *happiness* of human beings."<sup>101</sup> Yet Kant never fails to place particular happiness second to universal morality in their relation. It is only good to set happiness as an end for oneself to the extent that great unhappiness, which makes moral action more difficult, is avoided.<sup>102</sup> Just as we are universally necessitated (by ourselves *qua* noumena) to develop our particular natural perfections only in order to bring about a harmonious human society, so too are we universally necessitated to reach our particular happinesses only in order to allow us the comfort necessary to avoid immorality.

The place of particularity in Kant's moral thought, then, appears to not be part of the essential being of a human being, reflecting the line of thought, begun in the first *Critique*, which claims that the thing in itself is the essential being of the thing, and the phenomenon only the thing's appearance. Insofar as the *essential* being of the subject is open to rational investigation, what can be found is universal, and it is this undifferentiated character which must be the essential nature of each individual human being. This essential universality is emphasized by Kant's continual characterization in the *Metaphysics of Morals* of *homo noumenon* as one's "humanity" or "humanity in one's person."<sup>103</sup> This claim is not to be read as an assertion that there is some ideal humanity which somehow accrues to each phenomenal subject, as Kant makes clear that *homo noumenon* and *homo phaenomenon* are indeed "the same human

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 6:386.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 6:488.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 6:388.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 6:239; 6:295; 6:418; 6:423; 6:435.

being.”<sup>104</sup> Rather, humanity, that in virtue of which one is human, is posited here in equivalence with *homo noumenon*, the individual subject which each human being is in herself, that is, insofar as she is the author of her being as *homo phaenomenon*. The constitution of human beings in themselves, in opposition to their appearances which we experience, and experience particularly, is seen to be, as humanity in one’s person, universal and prior to the particularity of experience. Yet, I wish to emphasize here, we have seen that these universal features of noumenal subjects, that is, freedom, pure reason, and morality, appear as two universal qualities of phenomenal subjects: the drive toward enlargement of rational knowledge, and what I have called a phenomenal responsiveness to reasons. The two are not quite separable, but are not the same.

We saw above that in the first *Critique*, Kant claims that as pure reason, that is, in our rational faculty *qua* noumena, human beings freely cause themselves *qua* phenomena to possess this drive toward increasing their rational knowledge. One way in which this drive appears is the attempt to be recognized as a member of a human community portrayed in the “Conjectural Beginning” essay, in order to be able to participate in a discursive space where rational knowledge is shared. We can extrapolate from this that active participation in such a discursive space, as the goal of this cry for recognition, would also be an expression of this drive. For such a drive to actually lead to the enlargement of rational knowledge, however, the human being as phenomenon must have a responsiveness to reasons. In using this term, I am referring to the belief that if confronted with rational knowledge, human beings are such that they will universally recognize this knowledge *as* rational, and so assimilate it. In our examination above of Kant’s prescription of learning morality by catechism, we saw that he does believe that human

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 6:418.

beings have this responsiveness. He characterizes his conception of it well in a passage from the *Groundwork*:

There is no one, not even the most hardened scoundrel, if only he is otherwise in the habit of using reason, who – when one presents him with examples of probity of purpose, of steadfastness in following good maxims, of compassion and of general benevolence (involving in addition great sacrifices of advantages and comfort) – does not wish that he might too be so disposed.<sup>105</sup>

Granted, Kant qualifies his statement here with the claim that acceptance of moral truth will only be the outcome of moral teaching if the student “is otherwise in the habit of using reason.” But as we saw in the *Groundwork*, Kant believes that any sort of functional human being is absolutely in the habit of using reason, for the achievement of any end requires the rational setting up of a hypothetical imperative. We saw Kant attribute a rational capacity to not yet functional human beings, too, in the “Conjectural Beginning” essay. It appears, then, that we can embrace this passage of Kant’s as saying that human beings, as long as they can enter a discursive space, as is necessary for being presented with pieces of rational knowledge, will reflect the phenomenal responsiveness to reasons which is a universal characteristic of human beings as phenomena. This phenomenal universality of a responsiveness to reasons, I have argued, is grounded in a conception of rationality always already achieved, transported by Kant from a characterization necessary in his system, where the original free act, distinguished from mere *appearances* of freedom, must occur atemporally, which is to say, without reference to development as a subject.

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<sup>105</sup>*Groundwork*, 4:454.

In the final chapter, I will argue that this phenomenal universality grounds Kant's belief that progress in history is guaranteed.

### **Chapter III: Reason in History**

We saw in the prior section that Kant's theory of subjectivity, in accordance with his ontology as a whole, posits *homo noumenon* as the subject's essential being which is the ground of the subject as it appears phenomenally. It is a ground which we may, with Kant, speak of as having a more "original" reality than the phenomenal, for *homo phaenomenon* is simply *homo noumenon* intuited and ordered according to the concepts of the understanding. It is only through the transcendental recognition of the atemporal and aspatial being of *homo noumenon* that we can make sense of the always already achieved reason which Kant argues must belong to human beings, for Kant holds that freedom cannot exist in a spatial and temporal structure. As the free reason of the subject must have its originary ground in the atemporal essential being of the subject, then, this reason is a birthright possessed universally by subjects, and the apparent development or non-development of phenomenal reason is merely the intuited appearance of unchanging noumenal reason. Despite the fact that subjects, who in themselves universally share these essential aspects of being, are intuited as differentiated particulars, we have seen that intuited phenomenal subjects do reflect these noumenal universalities, which appear as two intertwined phenomenal universalities, a drive toward enlargement of rational knowledge and a responsiveness to it. Turning here, for the first time explicitly, to Kant's philosophy of history, we will see that the mechanisms by which Kant believes history progresses are grounded in human beings' universal rationality.

### III.1: The public use of reason as a historical mechanism

This first mechanism is expressed in Kant's short 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" The titular question was asked by Berliner theologian J. F. Zöllner in an article for the *Berliner Monatsschrift*, which prompted both Kant and Moses Mendelssohn to respond.<sup>106</sup> When viewed through the lens of the theory of subjectivity I have analyzed above, this essay of Kant's is quite revealing, providing as it does not only an answer to that question, but also a theory of historical development rooted in his conception of human nature. Kant provides that answer in the first sentence of the essay: "Enlightenment is the human being's emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity."<sup>107</sup> But he goes on to detail the conditions for the possibility of that emancipation, for "it is much more likely that an entire public should enlighten itself" together than it is for "any individual to work himself out of the immaturity that has almost become second nature to him" within an unenlightened society.<sup>108</sup> To do so, Kant distinguishes a public use of reason from its private use. Insofar as a member of society represents a certain institution, she is a private representative of that institution and should obey its doctrines and commands; but every member of society should be able put forth their own opinions on those doctrines "as a scholar" in front of the public.<sup>109</sup> In his capacity as a clergyman, i.e. at the pulpit, a member of society must propound the doctrines of his church, and his use of reason is bound by what these doctrines are; but on his own time, "as a scholar," he must be allowed to critique those church doctrines which he disagrees with in front of the public, which is to say, "the entire world."<sup>110</sup> This latter 'scholarly' use of reason should be, Kant thinks,

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<sup>106</sup>Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, [https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls\\_uploads/pdfs/159\\_kant.pdf](https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/159_kant.pdf).

<sup>107</sup>"An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" 8:35.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 8:36.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 8:37.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 8:38.



completely unrestricted. Yet actions must remain restricted in order to maintain a functioning society. In this vein, Kant, twice, puts the words “reason [*räsonniert*] as much as you want, and about whatever you want, only obey!” in the mouth of Friedrich II with approval.<sup>111</sup>

Given Kant’s absolutist moral views and his belief that they are far from phenomenal realization, why does he claim that people must obey their governments, prohibiting action directed at political change? Scholars have noted the apparent contradiction, which came particularly to the fore in Kant’s views on the French Revolution, of his outspoken support of liberal republican movements on the one hand, but declarations against the morality of revolution or any sort of rebellious action against one’s state, no matter how tyrannical its government, on the other.<sup>112</sup> The solution to this problem lies in Kant’s theory of historical development. Recalling Kant’s belief that human beings as *phenomena* are responsive to reasons and are driven to enlarge their rational knowledge, we are now in the position to see that his call in this essay for all to publicly use one’s reason “in all matters” is the call for the creation for a robust public discursive space, where all can come into contact with rational knowledge which, by virtue of their being humans, which is to say, essentially rational beings, they will adopt. This is why Kant can claim that “it is nearly unavoidable [that a public will enlighten itself] if one allows it the freedom to do so;” “for there will always be some independent thinkers even among the appointed guardians of the great masses who... will spread the spirit of rational appreciation of one’s own worth and the calling of every human being to think for himself.”<sup>113</sup> Given both the existence of “some independent thinkers” who will produce rational knowledge, which Kant

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 8:37, 8:41. Translation amended.

<sup>112</sup>Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom*, 104-5; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 44; Allen W. Wood, *The Free Development of Each: Studies on Freedom, Right, and Ethics in Classical German Philosophy*, 117; Paul Formosa, “All Politics Must Bend its Knee Before Right: Kant on the Relation of Morals to Politics,” 167.

<sup>113</sup>“What is Enlightenment,” 8:36.

takes to always be the case, and the freedom to reason publicly (which is less secure), the rational knowledge of these independent thinkers will spread to the population through free discourse, because of the responsiveness to rational knowledge that belongs to each and every human by virtue of their being human. Kant emphasizes this in claiming that it would be impossible for a society to commit itself to a certain dogma for perpetuity:

One generation cannot form an alliance and conspire to put a subsequent generation in such a position in which it would be impossible for the latter to expand its knowledge (particularly where such knowledge is so vital), to rid this knowledge of errors, and, more generally, to proceed along the path of enlightenment. *That would be a violation of human nature, the original vocation of which consists precisely in this progress*; and the descendants are thus perfectly entitled to reject those resolutions as having been made in an unjust and criminal way. The touchstone of anything that can serve as a law over a people lies in the question: whether a people could impose such a law on itself.<sup>114</sup>

For a people to impose such a law, Kant believes, contradicts human nature. On the practical level, Kant believes that a human being could not actually prevent themselves from enlarging their rational knowledge, for it is human nature to be receptive to reason, and so to accept pieces of rational knowledge as true when presented with them: while “a human being can indeed postpone enlightenment for his own person... concerning that which is his responsibility to know,” he can do so “even then only for a short time.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 8:39. Emphasis added.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid. Translation amended.

But there is a moral contradiction too, hinted at by the specter of the Categorical Imperative in the last line of this passage. (The Categorical Imperative would be formulated for the first time in the *Groundwork*, published the year after this essay.) Human beings have an interest in there being a free discursive space, for as we saw in the previous section, choosing to be moral is a conclusion of rational thinking, and indeed the most important conclusion that rational thinking yields. This is hinted at in Kant's claim in the above passage that a society's public development of reason is "the original vocation" of human nature; but later in the essay, Kant goes so far as to align a citizen's rational enlargement with his salvation:

If [a monarch] only looks to ensuring that all genuine or supposed [rational] improvement is consistent with the civic order, then he can for the rest just let his subjects do that which they themselves find necessary to do to save their souls [*Seelenheil*].<sup>116</sup>

Insofar as morality, which is in the interest of all human beings both in itself and in the rational conclusion that it is divinely rewarded, is reached through rational enlargement, which is only possible through the creation of a free discursive space, the prohibition of such a free discursive space is something that contradicts the interests of those who seek to impose such a law themselves, morality and salvation both being in their interests. Kant believes that it is precisely through the creation of such a space, rather than through revolutionary action, that society itself will progress according to the rational moral principles which spread through that space. For a monarch, too, is a human being, and as such has an interest in the establishment of a rationally

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 8:40. Translation amended.

moral society and will accept rational knowledge, which, as rational knowledge, is directed toward this end, as Kant suggests in closing:

When nature has fully developed the seed concealed in this hard casing, to which it gives its most tender care, namely, the tendency and the calling to free *thinking*, then this seed will gradually extend its effects to the disposition of the people (through which the people gradually becomes more capable of *freedom of action*) and finally even to the principles of *government*, which find it to be beneficial to itself to treat the human being, who is indeed *more than a machine*, in accordance with his dignity.<sup>117</sup>

There is thus nothing in a monarchy, Kant believes, which necessarily prohibits rational societal change. As Kant holds that all people, including those who have the power in a given society, are constituted by this responsiveness to reasons, rational societal change will occur as long as those rulers are accessed by free rational discourse.

With this in mind, we can come to see Kant's "Secret Article" from "Toward Perpetual Peace," written ten years later, which proposes that rulers ought to consult philosophers in order to guarantee future perpetual peace in a new light. Kant is not, as Plato did, claiming that the philosopher has a special access to truth which a non-philosopher cannot, but rather seeks merely to guarantee that public discursive spaces assimilate all members of society, including, with special importance, the one with the greatest power to effect social change through changes to policy. As Hannah Arendt puts it, Kant "agrees with Aristotle, against Plato" on the relation between philosophizing and ruling.<sup>118</sup> The philosopher is not to be the sole advisor of the ruler,

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 8:42.

<sup>118</sup>Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* 29.

possessing truth, but rather as the link between rulers and the public sphere of scholarly reason. At the end of that essay, Kant proposes a “transcendental principle of publicity” to employ in his critique of a Machiavellian ‘prudent’ politics, which he understands as constituted by three maxims: *fac et excusa; si fecisti, nega; divide et impera*.<sup>119</sup> He formulates his alternative thus: “All actions that affect the rights of other human beings, the maxims of which are incompatible with publicity, are unjust.”<sup>120</sup> Applying this principle of publicity to Machiavelli’s three maxims of ‘political prudence’ results in a contradiction, for their success requires secrecy – they could not be successful if made public before they are carried out. Thus, these are not maxims which are in agreement with public right.

We may briefly note the faith in public reason that this principle reflects. If all maxims according to which political actors may act are placed into the free and public discursive space, they are subject to the rational evaluation which is constitutive of a free and public discursive space. There is not even the need for a philosopher to rationally assess these maxims, but rather if they are uttered before they are carried out, they will provoke “the resistance of *all others*,” the public itself.<sup>121</sup> If immoral, and hence irrational, maxims are made public, they will be defeated by public reason, and so Kant believes that a society in which all maxims (for the most part) are placed in the public discourse is one which will best make rational progress. We can see, then, that Kant’s characterization of this principle as ‘transcendental’ is not merely an empty emphasis on its importance, but rather that this principle is a condition for the possibility of making judgements concerning the justice of a given political maxim.

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<sup>119</sup>Act and make excuses; if you did it, deny; divide and conquer. “Toward Perpetual Peace,” 8:374-5.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 8:381.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

Surprisingly, however, Kant makes one exception to this transcendental principle. To truly be efficacious in the progression toward perpetual peace, he writes, a treaty between states that seeks this end should include a secret article which states that “*the maxims of the philosophers concerning the conditions of public peace should be consulted by states prepared for war.*” This is to be kept a secret because “it seems belittling to the legislative authority of a state... to seek instruction from its own *subjects*,” and so were this maxim made public, its end would be defeated, as rulers of states would presumably stop seeking the advice of philosophers in the face of this public belittlement.<sup>122</sup> Yet despite the fact that to publicize this maxim contradicts its end, violating the transcendental principle of publicity, Kant prescribes it as necessary for the progression toward perpetual peace. Why does he do this? We should first note how strange it is that Kant would prescribe an exception to a *transcendental* moral principle: something he would never do in the case of, say, the Categorical Imperative.

There are, as I see it, three possible explanations why he does so here. The first would be to argue that “Toward Perpetual Peace” is simply not as serious a work as the three *Critiques* or the *Groundwork*, or perhaps even that Kant was declining into senility at the time he wrote it, and so his terminology here lacks the rigor it held at the advent of his critical period. Hannah Arendt rejects this argument by appealing to Kant’s early works, showing that the concerns of the late historical-political essays were prominent in his pre-critical work.<sup>123</sup> I think this is correct, and underscored further by the fact that Kant was writing about these questions in the very heart of his critical period, in “Idea for a Universal History” (1784), “What is Enlightenment” (1784), and “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786), in ways that are emphasized and built upon in “Toward Perpetual Peace.” The second would be to claim that the

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 8:368.

<sup>123</sup>Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* 9.

contradiction between the completion of the maxim and making it public is of a different sort here than those which are really relevant to the principle of publicity, for the potential failure which publicizing would bring about lies in the irrational vanity of the ruler rather than the sphere of public reason. The maxim *divide et impera*, for example, fails the principle of publicity because in publicizing it, that is, placing it into the realm of rational public discourse, the public will rationally resist being divided by the ruler in possession of the knowledge of the intended ends of the actions of that ruler. The publicity of this and the other “politically prudent” maxims contradict their ends because when presented with these maxims explicitly, the public can rationally assess them, and, seeing that they fall foul of rational ends, dispense with them. But the contradiction between the publicity of the Secret Article and its completion lies not in reason, but in the vanity of the ruler, who does not want to stoop to the level of his subjects. So, the contradiction here is not a true violation of the principle of publicity.

I think that this explanation makes the most sense, but I wish to suggest a third, more controversial explanation, namely, that actions which in themselves violate moral laws, yet are necessary for the progression of society toward a rationally moral cosmopolitan world are, in some sense, forgiven by Kant. We will return to this issue later in discussion of further mechanisms, namely unsocial sociability on both the individual and international level, which Kant sees as necessary to the progression of history but in themselves immoral.

We can see, then, why Kant believes that the Secret Article is necessary to bring about perpetual peace. Rulers, as human beings, are responsive to reasons. Presumably Kant thinks of philosophers as both the most rational people in the public discursive space, and the most actively participatory, thus coming into contact with more pieces of rational knowledge both from within and from outside of their own nation than other members of their society. By

including, in a treaty between states, the requirement that rulers seek their philosophers out for advice, Kant assures that those rulers will be confronted with the most rational knowledge that is produced out of public discourse, and thus be assured to assimilate it in time, making rational improvements to the society ruled. Kant, then, on the basis of his commitment to the necessary possession of human beings of a responsiveness to reasons (by which when one presented with rational discourse, she will accept its conclusions), believes that discourse is a mechanism of historical progress in which rational knowledge will win out, and alter society by means of the rational conversion of both the citizens and the rulers. Such a conversion is to be expected in time due to the universal responsiveness to reasons that characterizes human beings. To some extent, this mechanism produces itself, for as more individuals become more rational, they will also come to the rational conclusion that such discursive spaces should themselves be further developed.

Historical development, “Toward Perpetual Peace” and “What is Enlightenment” suggest, is carried out through communication in discursive spaces. What is developed in these spaces and spreads through them to educate humanity is rational knowledge, which is above all moral or for the sake of allowing the spread of the moral, i.e., knowledge of just political maxims. I hope to have shown that Kant takes this development to be providential, guaranteed, and carried out through the mechanism of public discourse. Additionally, I have argued, this mechanism is grounded in Kant’s attribution of a reason always already achieved to all human beings considered phenomenally. This ‘phenomenal universality’ is a transportation of a feature of human beings considered as noumena, which they must possess for freedom as conceived of in the system of transcendental idealism to be coherent, to the world considered as phenomena.



But what justification does Kant have to transport this feature which must, in his system, be true of noumenal rational beings, to phenomenal rational beings?

My proposal in this essay has been that we must interpret Kant's philosophy of history, as a phenomenal process, through his thinking of the relation between phenomena and noumena. In introducing the model of human subjectivity and willing which Kant puts forth in the *Religion* after my discussion of Transcendental Idealism in the first chapter, I intended to suggest that this model both is suggested by his various discussions of education and moral development in the first two *Critiques* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and indeed is the only feasible model of the subject *qua* moral agent given the features of Transcendental Idealism as Kant formulates it, specifically, the fact of noumenal atemporality and aspatiality, which he sees necessary in order to salvage the absolute freedom proven by practical reason. In accepting the *Religion* conception of the moral subject as *the* systematic Kantian conception, we were able to meet Herbart's critique of the idea of rational (moral) development in Kant's system by claiming that being educated, though apparently passive, is active when we consider the subject in itself. This subject, on account of its atemporality, has in experience of it as phenomenon always already made its free choice of a disposition. This choice is that which only in virtue of its relation thereto can we speak of any phenomenal act as free.

Thus, insofar as my reading of "What is Enlightenment" reveals that Kant holds the mechanism of historical development to be the rational development, that is to say, the education, of humanity, which can be guaranteed through the establishment of free discursive spaces, it must be read against the background of this picture of moral subjectivity which is put forth in the *Religion*. The subject, as having as phenomenal being always already made the simple moral choice of which her moral phenomenal life is mere appearance, is predetermined as

moral phenomenon. This does not mean only that Kant holds that later appearances are necessary and fated, but also that the noumenal disposition of which a phenomenal life is the appearance is already fully developed at each phenomenal moment. This, I believe, is what causes Kant to attribute a phenomenal reason, the grounding of actions in reasons, to subjects even in early childhood, as we saw in the “Conjectural Beginning” essay and in the Doctrine on Method in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. It is only by virtue of the universality of this fully developed phenomenal reason that we are able to have the assurance of the providential direction of human history which we do, for it is only by virtue of the universality of fully developed phenomenal reason that we have the assurance that rational knowledge will disseminate through free discursive spaces.

Yirmiyahu Yovel gives a different reading of Kant’s theory of historical development in his *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. We saw in chapter 2 that Yovel interprets the relation between free noumenal action, i.e. the choice of a fundamental disposition, and free phenomenal actions which Kant puts forth in the *Religion* in a manner that trivializes the role of the noumenal. He justifies doing so on the basis of his reading of the second *Critique*, for, as he claims: “In [the *Critique of Practical Reason*] the virtuous disposition is supposed to be achieved only at the ideal end of the process (thus requiring the postulate of immortality). In the [Religion], on the other hand, the global virtuous disposition is created by a “revolution” at the *beginning* of the moral process, whose goal is to close the gap between this general disposition and its phenomenal manifestations.”<sup>124</sup> When we look to Kant’s argument for immortality in the second *Critique*, however, we see that although he indeed grounds it upon the claim that at no point in her phenomenal existence will a human being’s disposition [*Gesinnung*] prove adequate

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<sup>124</sup>Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* 53fn.

to the moral law, we see that this discussion is strictly limited to phenomena.<sup>125</sup> We can note the strangeness of the fact that for Kant heaven and hell are included in the world of phenomena, and like our lives on earth, are mere appearance, but in considering *eternal* life, something temporal, we see that it must be the case. Seen as a discussion limited to the phenomenal, we see that there is nothing contradictory about the discussion of *Gesinnung* from the second *Critique* which Yovel cites, and the discussion of the original choice of a *Gesinnung* in the *Religion*. Indeed, Kant reaffirms in the *Religion* what is put forth here in the second *Critique*: he claims that as phenomena we can only be judged over the whole of our phenomenal lives. All humans initially choose evil, Kant writes, but to some extent effect a change to the good. But this all occurs atemporally, in the choice of a disposition.

How can this disposition count for the deed itself, when this deed is *every time* (not generally, but at each instant) defective? The solution rests on the following: According to our mode of estimation, [to us] who are unavoidably restricted to temporal conditions in our conceptions of the relationship of cause to effect, the deed, as a continuous advance *in infinitum* from a defective good to something better, always remains defective... but because of the *disposition* from which it derives and which transcends the senses, we can think of the infinite progression of the good toward conformity to the law as being judged by him who scrutinizes the heart [i.e., God] to be a perfected whole.<sup>126</sup>

How can a person be said to morally improve, Kant is asking, when the choice that can truly be morally judged is atemporal, and, our series of phenomenal actions being mere appearances

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<sup>125</sup>Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:122.

<sup>126</sup>*Religion*, 6:66-67.

thereof, at every point in phenomenal time only the single truly free choice exists on the level of reality from which phenomena reflect? How can anyone be said to be morally good when we can never negate this choice, which is universally a choice of evil, but only accompany it with some extent of a revolution to the good? His answer is that the totality of appearances of a life is the appearance of one's disposition, and so even though we are equally evil, morally at fault, in each (phenomenal) instant, the appearance of phenomenal moral improvement is the appearance of a greater revolution to the good.<sup>127</sup> Kant is clear in the *Religion* that one's disposition, that upon which one can be morally judged, is a choice from which all phenomenal action is derived, and is only open to intimation following all phenomenal action. But, I argue, there are statements in the second *Critique* to this effect too. There he writes that

A rational being can now rightly say of every unlawful action he performed that he could have omitted it even though as appearance it is sufficiently determined in the past and, so far, is inevitably necessary; for this action, with all the past which determines it, belongs to a single phenomenon of his character, which he gives to himself and in accordance with which he imputes to himself, as a cause independent of all sensibility, the causality of those appearances.<sup>128</sup>

### **III.2: Unsociable sociability as a historical mechanism**

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 6:68. See also 6:70fn: "The moral subjective principle of the *disposition* by which our life is to be judged is (as transcending the senses) not of the kind that its existence can be thought as divisible into temporal segments but rather only as an absolute unity. And since we can draw inferences regarding the disposition only on the basis of actions (which are its appearances), for the purpose of a [moral] estimate our life is to be viewed only as a *temporal unity*, i.e. a *whole*."

<sup>128</sup>*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:105, from Robert Merrihew Adams' introduction to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* xviii.

This story of historical development is, however, incomplete, for we saw in the previous section that the process of the rational development of human beings is not quite so simple. Human beings are not, for Kant, blank slates to be filled in with rational knowledge, but rather are animals with animalistic inclinations, but who nonetheless, in virtue of their being human, will assimilate rational knowledge if presented with it. As he writes in the *Groundwork*, “even the most hardened scoundrel” wishes to be moral when presented with good moral examples, yet, Kant writes there, he? cannot overcome the evil force of his inclinations.<sup>129</sup> We saw above that Kant comes to the conclusion in the *Religion* that such a state of conflict against one’s inclinations reflects an evil disposition. In light of this, we see that a free discursive space without an original production of rational knowledge would not improve phenomenal human beings. Note that Kant skirts over the problem of how such an original production comes to be in “What is Enlightenment,” where he simply states that “there will always be some independent thinkers” in a society, from whom, given a free discursive space, rational knowledge spreads throughout the people.<sup>130</sup> So, to posit free discourse as a providentially directed historical mechanism which is actually efficacious assumes this original production of rational knowledge. To explain this necessary feature of Kant’s theory of historical development which is only assumed in that essay, we must look to another essay on history, published the year after “What is Enlightenment?”: his “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective.” In this essay, a second mechanism of historical development is introduced and made use of: “unsociable sociability,” which, Kant says, is “obviously part of human nature.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>*Groundwork*, 4:454

<sup>130</sup>“What is Enlightenment,” 8:36.

<sup>131</sup>“Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” 8:20.

Unsociable sociability, as Kant conceives of it, is a twofold drive which pushes human beings both toward and away from society; it is human beings' "tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society."<sup>132</sup> Although such a claim may appear to be one of layman anthropology, I will argue that, like the other phenomenal universalities which we have seen Kant attribute to human beings, unsociable sociability, too, is in fact founded in his rational theorizing about subjectivity. Early on in the essay, Kant further articulates this idea:

Human beings have an inclination to *associate* with one another because in such a condition they feel themselves to be more human, that is to say, more in a position to develop their natural predispositions. But they also have a strong tendency to *isolate* themselves, because they encounter in themselves the unsociable trait that predisposes them to want to direct everything only to their own ends and hence to expect to encounter resistance everywhere, just as they know that they themselves tend to resist others.<sup>133</sup>

What are these natural predispositions which allow human beings to "feel themselves to be more human" in developing them? Talk of developing one's natural predispositions should make us recall Kant's similar terminology in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In that work, as we have discussed, Kant claims that the development or perfection of one's natural predispositions [*Naturanlagen*] is a duty commanded by rational morality. Human particularity arises in Kant's system as the difference of natural predispositions between different individuals, but this particularity is the phenomenal appearance of a noumenal universality that is prior, and as such is

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 8:20-1.

a particularity that is to be developed in order for the realization of a goal which is universally held, the instantiation of a phenomenal kingdom of ends. It makes sense, then, that rationality itself is held to be one of these natural predispositions which it is a duty to develop.<sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, it is *as* rational beings that we seek to develop our natural predispositions in line with the prescriptions of reason; this is what is meant by the claim that it is a duty to do so.<sup>135</sup> Kant expressed the same idea in the first *Critique*, despite misleadingly using metaphors of cause and effect, with the claim that human beings as pure reason, that is, *qua* noumena, cause themselves *qua* phenomena to enlarge their rational knowledge, and in this way reason appears phenomenally. This drive to associate that is one side of unsociable sociability appears, then, to be the expression of that same rational drive, for it is only in community with other people that the creation of a free discursive space can occur.

In itself, the drive to associate appears to be morally neutral, but as it results in the enlargement of rational knowledge in individuals, it is instrumentally rational and moral. The tendency to isolate, on the other hand, is more complicated. This tendency is in Kant's eyes unambiguously immoral; he characterizes it as a "selfish presumptuousness" that is "quite unattractive" in itself.<sup>136</sup> Even more significantly, the want to "direct everything only to one's own ends" is quite clearly not universalizable, and thus violates the Categorical Imperative which is the ultimate command of rational morality. Insofar as we are unable to separate morality from rationality, for Kant, it seems that we should call this tendency to isolate both immoral and irrational. Yet, Kant thinks, human beings as phenomenal beings require this unsociable tendency to be spurred on to rationally develop their predispositions.

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<sup>134</sup>*MM*, 6:215.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 6:444.

<sup>136</sup>"Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective," 8:21.

It is this resistance that awakens all human powers and causes human beings to overcome their tendency to idleness... for this reason one should thank nature for [human beings'] quarrelsomeness, for their jealously competitive vanity, and for their insatiable appetite for property and even for power! Without these all of the excellent natural human predispositions would lie in eternal slumber, undeveloped.<sup>137</sup>

The articulation of human beings' "primitive natural predisposition for moral discernment" into rational morality, "definite practical principles" requires both sides of unsociable sociability, the drive to associate and the tendency to isolate.<sup>138</sup> Without the tendency to isolate, human beings would not enlarge their rational knowledge and progress toward a phenomenal expression of rational morality.

Insofar as this tendency to isolate is necessary for this phenomenal expression, then, as Lydia Moland points out, it is itself instrumentally rational.<sup>139</sup> As that which brings about the development of phenomenal morality, it is the expression of noumenal reason despite its appearance as irrationality. Moland places Kant's unsociable sociability in the context of other Enlightenment theories of original human nature, in which one can construct a dichotomy between Rousseauvian harmony and a Hobbesian state of nature. The presentation of such a variety of schemes raises the question of whether unsociable sociability was merely empirical data based off of Kant's experience of phenomenal human beings which was then worked into his system as a contingent part, or whether it has a more central relation to the system as a whole.

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Lydia Moland, "Conjectural Truths: Kant and Schiller on Educating Humanity," in *Kant and his German Contemporaries: Volume II*, 97.



I wish to suggest that it is the latter. Hobbesian brutishness and Rousseauvian harmony are both posits of a human nature which were most purely expressed in prehistoric societies. Yet for both thinkers, they are something which can be negated through history – for Hobbes, we should negate our original state through the building up of institutions which preserve peace, and for Rousseau, we have sadly lost it through corruption by culture and society. Both original states are lost by the setting up of a societal structure which is opposed to it. For Kant, unsociable sociability is such an original state of humanity, and with Hobbes, the society which is the primordial expression of it is not one in which we want to live. But unsociable sociability is not to be lost by a societal structure which opposes it. Rather, it necessarily produces its own development toward this later and better societal structure, in which the immediate effects of unsociable sociability are positive rather than negative.

That unsociable sociability is something systematic in Kant's philosophy is further suggested on the basis of the repetition of this picture on the levels of both the individual subject and the international sphere. What characterizes this picture is the articulation of morality out of the strife between phenomenally moral and immoral appearances, yet, as phenomenal appearances directed at the development of morality, both must actually be expressions of noumenal reason. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, this structure of development is laid out on the level of the subject. Considered as a natural being, a subject is originally constituted by, on the one hand, a universal responsiveness to reasons and drive toward enlargement, but particular predispositions and inclinations on the other, the latter of which, as having to do with natural desire, Kant sees as often "vice-breeding."<sup>140</sup> The subject can only become moral by the

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<sup>140</sup>*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:376. As we have seen above, though, Kant's more considered opinion on this topic put forth in the *Religion* is that inclinations are only vice-breeding in light of our original choice of evil, which we may or may not to some extent overcome. In themselves, though, our naturally constituted persons are value neutral, and

possession of “considered, firm, and continually purified principles” of morality based in reason, against which inclinations are tested. The two are directly opposed in their determination of the *Willkür*, phenomenal choice:

That choice which can be determined by *pure reason* is called free choice. That which can be determined only by *inclination* (sensible impulse, *stimulus*) would be animal choice (*arbitrium brutum*). Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will.<sup>141</sup>

Where the will of God is wholly free, and that of animals are wholly determined by sensible inclinations, the *Willkür* of human beings is somewhere in between, a battle between rational morality and natural inclinations. Through acquiring a certain phenomenal proficiency of reason, enlarging one’s rational knowledge, one gains the ability to govern oneself, to

bring all his capacities and inclinations under (reason’s) control and so to rule over himself, which goes beyond forbidding him to let himself be governed by his feelings and inclinations... for unless reason holds the reins of government in its own hands, his feelings and inclinations play the master over him.<sup>142</sup>

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only disposed or inclined to good or evil in light of our free, noumenal, originally constituting choice of a disposition.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 6:214.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 6:408.

Yet this acquired proficiency of reason, that which allows one to rule over immoral inclinations, is something that plays out phenomenally, and as we have seen, occurs in virtue of the phenomenal predispositions of a responsiveness to reasons and drive toward enlargement. ‘Irrational’ inclinations and rational predispositions are of the same species, being both merely natural qualities of phenomenal subjects, and it is through the development of these aforementioned predispositions which human beings have that reason gains its mastery. It is in fact only through this strife that actions have a true moral worth, as, Kant famously claims in the *Groundwork*, action that appears morally praiseworthy is only so if it was done “not from inclination but *from duty*,” duty that is rationally freely chosen.<sup>143</sup> If there was, for human beings, no original opposition between inclination and moral duty and moral-seeming action was thus done on the basis of inclinations, we would not be morally praiseworthy. Our rational predispositions require the ‘irrational’ predispositions, immoral inclinations, to make us so.

A similar story is told in the “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” where Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit is reconceived as the first “stir” of reason, in which the human being made a judgement concerning how to act, rather than merely listening to natural instinct, the “*voice of God* which all animals must obey.”<sup>144</sup> This first attempt turns out to be an error as the fruit was not fit for human consumption, and this clash of rationality and natural instinct triggers a chain of realizations beginning with the human being’s recognition of his freedom. Kant then posits that human beings began to wear clothing as a rational choice “to make [sexual] inclination more fervent and lasting by withdrawing its object from the senses,” but which had the fortunate unintended consequence of converting animal desire to love, and

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<sup>143</sup>*Groundwork*, 4:398.

<sup>144</sup>“Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8:111. I am indebted to Moland’s discussion of this essay in her “Conjectural Truths” for this and the following points.

with it the inclination toward pleasure to a taste for beauty, which made possible human decency, “an inclination to inspire the respect of others toward our persons through good manners,” which in turn is necessary for the formation of a society – no community could form without any mutual basis of respect for others’ persons.<sup>145</sup> As society is necessary for the development of the predispositions of the human species, Kant speaks here of this grounding of the possibility of societal formation as the ultimate turning point in human history: it “is more important than the entire, incalculable series of subsequent expansions of culture.”<sup>146</sup> Yet this turning point was only possible on the basis of the contradiction of the voice of God, natural instinct, and so “the history of *freedom* begins with evil.”<sup>147</sup> Society, necessary for the development of the rational predispositions, which is to say, the phenomenal appearance of noumenal reason, owes its possibility to humanity’s original sin.

Above, we briefly outlined how Kant conceives of unsociable sociability as a mechanism that produces a moral society out of immoral parts: the drive to associate creates the background for and material out of which the selfish development of natural predispositions driven by the tendency to isolate can occur. In analogy with the picture of the subject developed in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the drive to associate corresponds to the rational predispositions, and this tendency to isolate to immoral inclinations, but it is also true that both of these sides of unsociable sociability are just those opposed features of the individual viewed from the perspective considering the human being in society with others. We might balk at the claim that the seeking of isolation is the societal expression of immoral inclinations. But in using this word, Kant does not mean the mere rejection of human society (although this would, for Kant, still be

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 8:113.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 8:115.

immoral, given the necessity of living in a society for participation in a free discursive space, which itself is necessary for enlarging one's rational knowledge to express phenomenal rational morality); rather, as human beings are driven to enter into society in the first place, this tendency to isolate expresses itself as the predisposition "to direct everything only to their own ends and hence to expect to encounter resistance everywhere, just as they know that they themselves tend to resist others."<sup>148</sup> This, then, is a clear violation of the Categorical Imperative, and thus it cannot be denied that Kant thinks it irrational and immoral.

As in the individual, the product of the strife between the apparently moral and immoral tendencies is a rationally moral condition. In the fifth proposition of the "Idea for a Universal History," Kant discusses how unsociable sociability is the mechanism designed by nature to produce a wholly rational "civil society which administers right universally:"

It is the greatest hardship of all, that which human beings inflict on each other, whose natural inclinations make them unable to live together in a state of wild freedom for very long. It is only in a refuge such as a civic union that these same inclinations subsequently produce the best effect, just as trees in a forest, precisely by seeking to take air and light from all the others around them, compel each other to look for air and light themselves and thus grow up straight and beautiful.<sup>149</sup>

The brutality of unsociable human beings in the state of nature eventually forces them to come together in society, in which their unsociability becomes productive in virtue of the strictures that living in society places on the extent to which human beings can act on others toward selfish

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<sup>148</sup>"Idea for a Universal History," 8:21.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 8:22.

ends. In the state of nature, naturally selfish human actions are unrestricted and thus inflict enough hardship that human beings cannot be secure enough to develop their rational predispositions in addition to those necessary for brute survival, but in society, human beings are similarly compelled by the development of others' predispositions to develop their own, yet are so compelled within a security that allows for the development of rational predispositions. Nevertheless, the realization of a perfect civil constitution requires a law-governed international sphere, for as long as nations spend their wealth on preparations for war rather than the moral cultivation of their citizens, a true moral state cannot develop. "All that is good yet is not based on morally good convictions is nothing but pure outward show and shimmering misery," he says in this context,<sup>150</sup> a statement which would be echoed a year later in the *Groundwork* claim we saw above, that actions that appear externally moral are only so if they are based on duty rather than inclinations. Even a "nation of devils" may form an apparently moral state under a perfect civil constitution,<sup>151</sup> but this state is not truly moral unless the individuals which make it up are morally cultivated.

In the seventh proposition of that essay, Kant transports his notion of unsociable sociability to the international sphere:

the same unsociability which hitherto compelled human beings is again the cause due to which each commonwealth in its external relationships, i.e. as a state in relation to states, stands in unbounded freedom, and consequently must expect the same evils from other

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 8:26.

<sup>151</sup>"Toward Perpetual Peace," 8:366.

states which threatened individual human beings and which forced them to enter into a law-governed civil condition.<sup>152</sup>

Assuming such a pure state of nature existed, by Kant's time and our own, human beings have grown out of it. Thus, for Kant, the unsociability of individuals must have proven its rational worth. Yet the lawless freedom that constitutes such a condition did and continues to exist in the international sphere, where the consequent unsociability was expressed as war rather than mere individual expressions of force. Thus, even though historical progression in the international sphere is "seemingly disorderly," we can "assume that nature pursues a regular course in this regard and gradually leads our species from the low level of animal nature to the highest level" on analogy with the domestic unsociable sociability which has already shown its efficacy:

The purposeless condition of savagery, in which all the natural predispositions in our species lay fallow, subsequently compelled our species, by means of the ills to which this condition subjects it, to leave this state and enter into a civil constitution, in which all those seeds would be able to develop. The same holds true for the barbarous freedom of the already established states: through the use of all of the commonwealth's resources to arm for war against others, through the ravages of war, but more still through the need to remain constantly prepared for war, progress toward the full development of natural predispositions is hindered, but the ills that arise from this, in turn, compel our species to

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<sup>152</sup>"Idea for a Universal History," 8:24. Translation amended. "*Dieselbe Ungeselligkeit, welche die Menschen hierzu nöthigte, ist wieder die Ursache, daß ein jedes gemeine Wesen in äußerem Verhältnisse, d.i. als ein Staat in Beziehung auf Staaten, in ungebundener Freiheit steht, und folglich einer von dem andern eben die Übel erwarten muß, die die einzelnen Menschen drückten und sie zwingen in einen gesetzmäßigen bürgerlichen Zustand zu treten.*"

discover a law of equilibrium with regard to the in itself productive resistance between many states which arises from their freedom, and to introduce a united power which lends force to this law.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the fact that unsociability of states toward each other has yet to fully bear its fruits of peace, as the unsociability of individuals appears to have done assuming Kant's picture of the original state of nature, we are justified in assuming that these 'ravages of war' are nature's mechanism for bringing about the development of a peaceful international federation of states, as the same drama has played out on the level of individual societies. Considered solely as an empirical observation of the course of international history, Kant does not think it clear at all that war has led to historical progress, going as far to say that if it were not for the last, peaceful stage of human history which is yet to come, Rousseau would be correct to prefer the prelapsarian state.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, Kant argues, certain characteristics of war, the unsociability between states, lend evidence to the claim that it, like the unsociability between individuals, leads to providential ends. As the world becomes more interconnected, nations are pressured against regression: a state cannot "weaken in its internal culture" or encroach upon the civil liberties of its people without losing power and influence against other states.<sup>155</sup>

This international pressure is articulated in "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," where Kant calls the threat of war "the only thing which moderates despotism," because, in line with his commitment to this idea of unsociable sociability, Kant believes that a certain level of freedom within society is necessary for the development of one's predispositions which brings

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 8:25-6.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 8:26.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 8:27.



wealth production about. Thus, a ruler must ensure a level of freedom sufficient to produce enough wealth for the nation to go to war with.<sup>156</sup> With this development of commercial activity and the consequent differences in wealth between nations, commercial innovations like the international credit system are invented which further connect different nations to each other, causing them to suffer the cost of war even after that war is over by means of their indebtedness to the international creditors which allowed those nations to go to war.<sup>157</sup> Rulers of nations which are not threatened by war due to their isolation from others (China, in Kant's example) are neither pressured to ensure freedom nor forced into greater interconnectedness.<sup>158</sup> Close relations between nations, then, serve the initial purpose of pressuring them to internally develop in a rational direction, making wars more damaging to the participant nations, which causes international relations to be made even closer through the establishment of legal relations between states, i.e. treaties seeking an end the state of war.<sup>159</sup> The problem of war thus helps to produce its own solution, global interconnectedness.

### **III.3: Cosmopolitanism as the globalization of public discourse**

Kant's 1795 essay "Toward Perpetual Peace" is aimed at precisely that solution. In this essay, Kant outlines the constitution states must adopt to achieve the globally interconnected condition that would bring about perpetual peace. This orients us toward a possible curiosity about this essay. In it, Kant develops a sketch for a treaty that, were all nations to adopt it, would bring about perpetual peace, and thus it is seemingly produced for the purpose of convincing governments to seek the establishment of such treaties. Yet at the same time, Kant argues that

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<sup>156</sup>"Conjectural Beginning of Human History," 8:120.

<sup>157</sup>"Idea for a Universal History," 8:28.

<sup>158</sup>"Conjectural Beginning of Human History," 8:121.

<sup>159</sup>"Toward Perpetual Peace," 8:363.

perpetual peace is knowable as the end of history. If this end is guaranteed, why write the essay? This curiosity is explained when we recognize the outlining of this treaty as itself a rational step within history that contributes to historical progress. This should make us recall Kant's claim in the "Idea for a Universal History" essay, written eleven years prior, that attempts at philosophical history "*must be considered to be possible and even to promote this intention of nature.*"<sup>160</sup> Along with further demonstrating the continuity between Kant's historical thought in the middle of the critical period with his later work, this feature of the essay emphasizes Kant's belief that the mechanism of historical progress is the development of rational knowledge in phenomenal agents, a development directed at the complete phenomenal expression of noumenal reason. Although such a result is guaranteed by virtue of essence as noumenal rational beings, it is nonetheless an active discursive process which only we human beings can carry out.

Unlike the earlier historical essays, "Toward Perpetual Peace" is not directly concerned with the rational moral development of humanity, but rather only with solving the problem of war. The essay thus deals with a smaller portion of future history than the historical essays of the critical period, in which Kant argues that history is aimed not merely at a world without war, but at the actualization of a rationally moral society, which, I have argued, he believes is achieved by the enlargement of individual human beings' rational knowledge through discursive spaces that allow for the public use of reason. For the rational moralization of human species as a whole, however, such a discursive space would need to extend to all human societies. We can thus make a distinction between two overarching stages in Kant's theory of history: first, that in which states and institutions develop into rational forms, i.e., republican states which enter into a federation with each other, eliminating certain extreme expressions of immoral inclinations like

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<sup>160</sup>"Idea for a Universal History," 8:29.

the violent confrontation between individuals and states by setting up institutional checks against them, and a second stage by which all human individuals are rationally moralized. The second stage is that which accomplishes the phenomenal expression of noumenal value, yet for its completion it requires the completion of the first stage. This is so because the institutional solutions which place checks on the expression of immoral inclinations are the very ones which ground the possibility of the second stage. That is to say, the condition of global interconnectedness, a cosmopolitan condition, is both the solution to the state of war and what allows humanity's rational moralization.

In the essay, Kant outlines his sketch of a treaty, which contains six "preliminary articles" aimed at producing an end to international hostilities in the short term without requiring any change to the constitution of states or to the international sphere which existed at the time, and three "definitive articles" which do not merely put an end to hostilities but rather establish a "condition of peace."<sup>161</sup> The former articles are aimed at eliminating the immediate cause of wars: meddling in the affairs of other states (Articles 2, 5), acting in a manner that damages trust between states (4, 6), and preparation for war in peacetime which, as Kant rightly notes, can itself become a cause of war once this preparation becomes overly costly;<sup>162</sup> the latter, on the other hand, are aimed at changing the very international order from a "state of war" to a "state of peace."<sup>163</sup> We can discover how Kant thinks mere temporary periods of peace differ from the state of perpetual peace, then, by investigating the definite articles, which are as follows:

1. The civil constitution of every state shall be republican.

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<sup>161</sup>"Toward Perpetual Peace," 8:349.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 8:45.

<sup>163</sup>"Toward Perpetual Peace," 8:349.

2. International right shall be based on the *federalism* of free states.
3. *Cosmopolitan right* shall be limited to the conditions of universal *hospitality*.

By a republic, Kant understands a state in which all people within it are citizens, who are free and equally bound by a “single, common legislation,”<sup>164</sup> and where the executive and legislative powers are separated.<sup>165</sup> This is to say, there is no “owner” of the state to whom the law does not apply equally. Thus, neither an absolute monarchy nor a democracy can be a republic, Kant writes, for in both systems the executive and legislative powers are possessed by the same body.<sup>166</sup> Kant justifies his claim that this system is “the only kind that can lead toward perpetual peace” as follows:

if (as must be the case in such a constitution) the agreement of the citizens is required to decide whether or not one ought to wage war, then nothing is more natural than that they would consider very carefully whether to enter into such a terrible game, since they would have to resolve to bring the hardships of war upon themselves.<sup>167</sup>

We may note the actualization of the principle of universalizability that Kant sees as taking place in a republic as opposed to in a society divided into ruler and subject. A monarch or a majority in a democracy can wage war without facing any of the consequences – they can send their subjects to do the fighting, and if resources are short, they can direct them toward themselves. In a republic, however, where all people are members of the same political class, the citizenry, and

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 8:349.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 8:352.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 8:351.

those who enforce laws are not the same people who legislate, a citizen must only take political action of which they can bear the consequences, for this is what indeed may occur. Any citizen's unsociable political action in a republic, that is to say, one which is not universalizable, is a resolution to bring the hardships thereof upon oneself.

Yet more important to understanding the significance of the republican constitution for the achievement of perpetual peace is the radical political equality, where all people in the state are members of the same political class, the citizenry. In America we are accustomed to think of democracy as the political system in which all members are wholly equal. Kant argues that, in distinction even from monarchy, democracy is “necessarily a form of *despotism*, because it establishes an executive power whereby “all” make decisions over, and if necessary, against one,” but, as he notes, this all is “not actually all,” but rather the majority, which exercises despotic power over the minority.<sup>168</sup> But in a republic, where members only take political action which is universalizable, “the agreement of the citizens is required” to embark on an action such as waging a war. Whether this agreement is explicit or tacit, through the agreement of a representative who one agreed to be represented by, it is rational discourse rather than unsociable sociability which is the immediate cause of the choice of peace over war. Namely, when all members of a state are members of the same political class, they avoid waging war through coming to the rational conclusion that each of them might face the consequences.

Kant is not as explicit about how a federalism of free states, the establishment of which as the international order is put forth as the second definite article, is necessary for perpetual peace. Such a federation, he writes, “aims... at its securing and maintaining the *freedom* of a state for itself and also the freedom of other confederated states without these states thereby

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 8:352.

being required, as are human beings in the state of nature, to subject themselves to public laws and coercion under such laws.”<sup>169</sup> But how does it do so? The answer becomes clear once we see that Kant conceives of a federation as the equivalent of a republic, with states rather than people. As he transports his concept of unsociable sociability from the level of the individual to the international sphere, so too does he transport the concept of a republic. A federation comes to be, Kant writes, through the initial formation of a republic, a rational political form which spreads to other nations, as Kant believes rational knowledge is guaranteed to do when made public: “this republic provides a focus point for other states, so that they might join this federative union and thereby secure the condition of peace among states in accordance with the idea of international right.”<sup>170</sup> The difference between the two systems, the existence of a power above the members absent in an international federation, only exists because, Kant believes, states would not comply with such a demand; yet a world republic, while not to be expected “*in hypothesi*... is right *in thesi*”;<sup>171</sup> right in theory, but not to be expected in practice. Kant finally makes his transportation of this concept explicit, writing, “as concerns the relations among states, according to reason there can be no other way for them to emerge from the lawless condition, which contains only war, than for them to relinquish, just as do individual human beings, their wild (lawless) freedom, to accustom themselves to public binding laws, and to thereby form a *state of peoples (civitas gentium)*.”<sup>172</sup>

The peace brought about in the international sphere by such a federation of republics which, by virtue of their actualization of the universalizability principle on issues of political action, should be sufficient to allow for the establishment of the third definite article, concerning

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 8:356.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 8:357.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

cosmopolitan right. Kant is careful to establish that the traveler to a foreign nation has the right only to hospitality, not philanthropy:

It is not the *right of a guest* that the stranger has a claim to... but rather a right to visit, to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right of common possession of the surface of the earth... the right of hospitality, that is, the right of foreign arrivals, pertains, however, only to conditions of the possibility of *attempting* interaction [*Verkehr*] with the old inhabitants.<sup>173</sup>

This includes the right to asylum (a visitor can be turned away only “if it can be done without causing his death”), but this is not Kant’s chief concern. Rather, the establishment of cosmopolitan right is important for Kant insofar as it is an establishment of the right to attempt interaction with the peoples of other nations. This is not a justification of the European colonialism ongoing while Kant was writing this essay, which he hastens to criticize as “*inhospitable* behavior... with [which] they introduced the oppression of the native inhabitants, the incitement of the different states involved to expansive wars, famine, unrest, faithlessness, and the whole litany of evils that weigh upon the human species,” calling the limitations of contact with European powers by China and Japan wise in this light.<sup>174</sup> The traveler has the right only to attempt contact, and has no guarantee of contact being established.

The questions must arise: how does the cosmopolitan right to hospitality lead to a state of perpetual peace, and why is it as important to bringing about perpetual peace as are both the form of government and form of the international order best suited to bring peace about? To convince

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 8:358.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 8:358-59.

a state to legislate that peaceful travelers are not to be killed, but to be merely turned away if the state does not wish to admit them entry seems insignificant in comparison to convincing a despotic state to become a republic, or a collection of states to create a new international order. Yet Kant includes it as the third definite article, and Hannah Arendt, in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, calls it not only the most original but also the most important of these definite articles, a claim with which I stand in full agreement.<sup>175</sup>

Arendt's lectures are grounded in a recognition of a feature of Kant's philosophy that other commentators with whom we have engaged have failed to recognize: namely, that our relation to morality is a relation to the universal, constituted by our ultimate choice of a disposition, and as such excludes a purely moral relation to the particular, the apparent actions of phenomenal beings. Judgment is what we, as phenomenal beings, exercise on particulars; reason is universal and only through it do we access moral truth; judgment of particular actions as right or wrong can never be morally true, but at best a heuristic to guide our own future actions. But, we should by this point be familiar with Kant's claim that we can never truly judge the moral worth of another or even of ourselves, which he makes throughout his moral works.<sup>176</sup> While we always do make judgments about the moral worth of particular acts – Kant writes in the second *Critique* that there is no topic of conversation which people are so universally interested in and willing to offer their opinion about, as this<sup>177</sup> – one's moral worth refers not to any particular act, but to their ultimate free choice, their choice of a good or evil disposition, which we can only observe in the moral improvement or decline over the course of a life, and yet even such an observation justifies only "legitimate assumption" rather than knowledge of one's moral

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<sup>175</sup>Arendt, *Lectures* 75.

<sup>176</sup>E.g., *Groundwork*, 4:451; at *Religion*, 6:68 Kant writes that one who has steadily morally improved throughout life "can reasonably hope" that they are good.

<sup>177</sup>*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:153.



worth.<sup>178</sup> This does not mean that particular acts are not reflective of a moral or immoral disposition, but only that any particular action can only ever be reflective of an individual's moral worth, and not moral or immoral in itself. For any action "in itself" is undifferentiated from all other actions in a human life in themselves – the fundamental moral choice is the simple choice of a good or evil disposition, which appears phenomenally as a series of moral actions composing a lifespan. As Arendt puts it:

Judgment of the particular – *This* is beautiful, *This* is ugly; This is right, This is wrong – has no place in Kant's moral philosophy. Judgment is not practical reason; practical reason "reasons" and tells me what to do and what not to do; it lays down the law and is identical with the will, and the will utters commands; it speaks in imperatives. Judgment, on the contrary, arises from "a merely contemplative pleasure or inactive delight."<sup>179</sup>

Arendt shows that Kant reacted to the French Revolution in its early stage precisely with this "merely contemplative pleasure or inactive delight," despite this being, from Kant's perspective, the singular event which most clearly served as evidence for his belief in the providential teleology of history. For, even in that early stage, while much of the German intelligentsia was cheering on the revolution, Kant held fast to the claim that while the events assured "progress toward the better," and while he felt "a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm," he, as Arendt notes, "never wavered in his condemnation of all those who had prepared it," and indeed of any active (rather than merely 'wishful') participants of any violent revolution.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>*Religion*, 6:68.

<sup>179</sup>Arendt, *Lectures* 15. The final sentence refers to *Metaphysics of Morals* 6:212.

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-46, citing Kant, "An Old Question Raised Again," sec. 6 and 7, in Lewis White Beck ed. *On History* 143-148.

Arendt thematizes this dichotomy of the actor, bound by the moral law, a matter of practical philosophy, and the disinterested observer, who judges according to whether acts are pleasing to her or not, a matter of taste. She does well, then, to show that Kant believes war, absolutely immoral to participate in by Kantian standards, brings about historical progress, and as such, from the perspective of the observer, is sublime.<sup>181</sup> History, as a series of particular events, the actions of particular individuals, is always subject to this aesthetic judgment of the spectator rather than moral appraisal. But to take part in the actions that drive historical development would violate the principles of universal morality. Thus, with regard to history Kant places the position of the spectator above that of the actor. In this primacy of the spectator, Arendt finds an explanation for Kant's concern with and endorsement of cosmopolitanism. As the correct relation to history is that of the spectator, one who judges rather than acts, the correct relation to history is an aesthetic rather than a moral one. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes that taste, if things are to be able to be objectively judged as aesthetically good or bad, requires a "common sense" which is universal and in virtue of which we can make our judgments communicable to others.<sup>182</sup> When we judge the actions which drive history forth as aesthetically good or bad, as Arendt reads Kant, we are judging as members of a community of spectators, that is, the human community.<sup>183</sup> For this reason Arendt characterizes Kant's concept of the *Weltbürger*, cosmopolitan, world-citizen, as rather a *Weltbetrachter*, a world-spectator.<sup>184</sup> To be a cosmopolitan is then to take "account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought, in order, *as it were*, to compare its judgement with the collective reason of humanity... done by comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 53-54, citing Kant, *Critique of Judgment* §28.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 76.

of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man, by abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgement.”<sup>185</sup>

Arendt notes that there appears to be a contradiction here between politics and morality, or, rephrased, between the aesthetic good and the moral good. The human being is supposed to commend the progressive revolution from an aesthetic standpoint but condemn it from a moral standpoint. Arendt argues that Kant escapes this conflict, however, with two assumptions: first, that one must assume the historical progress of the human species as a result of practical reason, and that evil “destroys itself,” while good “continues to maintain itself once it has been established.”<sup>186</sup> Arendt characterizes these as mere assumptions, not systematically grounded, but justifies Kant’s holding them by reference to the privileged position of the spectator: “What kind of spectacle would that be without the assumption of progress? The alternatives for Kant are either regress, which would produce despair, or eternal sameness, which would bore us to death.”<sup>187</sup> So, the implication appears to be, Kant’s assumption that evil is self-destructive is not quite separable from the assumption that history is providential, and because history must be providential for the sake of the spectator, evil must be self-destructive. And

the ultimate guarantee that all is well, at least for the spectator, is... nature herself, which can also be called providence or destiny. Nature’s “aim is to produce a harmony among men, against their will and indeed through their discord.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 71, quoting Kant, *Critique of Judgment* §40.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 50-51, quoting Kant, “Theory and Practice,” Part III, in Reiss ed. *Kant’s Political Writings* 91.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

Given the assurance of historical providence, then, Arendt establishes cosmopolitan existence as something wholly passive. “One judges always as a member of a community, guided by one’s community sense, one’s *sensus communis*. But in the last analysis, one is a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human; this is one’s ‘cosmopolitan existence.’”<sup>189</sup> To exist as a cosmopolitan, as Arendt reads Kant, is to exist as a member of a community of spectators, disinterestedly pleased by nature’s progress toward establishing human peace and harmony. As such, this cosmopolitan state always already is – there is no need for its being established. And so “when one judges and when one acts in political matters, one is supposed to take one’s bearings from the idea, not the actuality, of being a world citizen.”<sup>190</sup> For Arendt, cosmopolitanism fulfills its role for humanity as idea – its actuality has no consequence.

But why, then, does Kant write that cosmopolitan right, the right of the visitor, must be adopted to establish a state of perpetual peace? The right of the visitor, we saw above, would allow people to *attempt interaction* with other nations. With this right secure, he writes, “remote parts of the world can establish relations peacefully with one another, relations which ultimately become regulated by public laws and can thus finally bring the human species ever close to the cosmopolitan condition.”<sup>191</sup> In his comment on this third definite article, it is the actuality of a cosmopolitan condition that Kant is concerned with, even if that condition can never be perfectly achieved. He tells us of the results that the progress toward this cosmopolitan condition has already reaped:

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 75-6.

<sup>191</sup>“Toward Perpetual Peace,” 8:360.

The growing prevalence of a (narrower or wider) community among the peoples of the earth has now reached a point at which the violation of right at any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places. For this reason the idea of cosmopolitan right is no fantastic or exaggerated conception of right.<sup>192</sup>

On the other hand, the idea of cosmopolitanism, that is, that we are all members of the community of humanity, needs no interaction established between nations to be made true. Such interaction is rather directed solely at the establishment of *actual* cosmopolitanism.

I believe we can answer the question of why actual cosmopolitanism is so important to Kant by investigating the assumptions that, on Arendt's account, Kant makes, by virtue of which the cosmopolitan observer is not engaged in a contradiction by remaining passive with respect to contributing to historical progress. I agree with Arendt that the belief in the self-destructiveness of evil and in historical providence are inseparable for Kant. History only truly progresses, for Kant, insofar as we are eliminating evil or are clearing the path to allow us to do so. But evil, Kant makes clear in the *Religion*, must always be attributed to the free noumenal will. As such, the existence or non-existence of evil is always the result of the unbounded freedom of the human being, and never affected by nature or the empirical in any way. If the will to evil was so affected even partially, it would not be free, and so would not be evil. For, we saw above, Kant believes moral culpability, evil, can only ever be attributed to a will which is absolutely free. This does not mean that evil cannot be self-destructive, but it cannot simply dissipate – rather humanity has to actualize the conditions which allow it to destroy itself, as, for example, in the principle of publicity put forth in “Toward Perpetual Peace.”

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 8:360.

Strikingly, Arendt only cites the *Religion* twice in these *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, and never references the third essay, "The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth." Kant was concerned with progress in history from at least the first *Critique* until his final essays, as I hope has been made clear enough from this essay. But in the first half of the 1790s, he produced three major writings, all centrally concerned with the topic of progress in history: in 1790, the *Critique of Judgment*, in 1793, the *Religion*, and in 1795, "Toward Perpetual Peace." While giving deep attention to the other two works, Arendt wholly ignores the historical-political implications of the *Religion*. In its third essay, as its title might suggest, he explicitly answers the question of how evil is eliminated from history. We see that it is precisely the actualization of a cosmopolitan condition that achieves this. He writes:

As soon as [one] is among human beings... they will mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil. If no means could be found to establish a union which has for its end the prevention of this evil and the promotion of the good in the human being – an enduring and *ever expanding society*, solely designed for the preservation of morality by counteracting evil with united forces – however much the individual human being might do to escape from the dominion of this evil, he would still be held in incessant danger of relapsing into it. – Inasmuch as we see, therefore, *the dominion of the good is not otherwise attainable*, so far as human beings can work toward it, *than through the setting up and diffusion of a society* in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue – *a society which reason makes it a task and a duty of the entire human race to establish in its full scope*. – For only in this way can we hope for

a victory of the good principle over the evil one. In addition to prescribing laws to each individual human being, morally legislative reason also unfurls a banner of virtue as a rallying point for all those who love the good, that they may congregate under it and thus at the very start gain the upper hand over evil and its untiring attacks.<sup>193</sup>

Kant calls a society led by this principle an ‘ethical society’ as opposed to a juridical society, “and, so far as these laws are public, an *ethico-civil* (in contrast to a *juridico-civil*) society... it can exist in the midst of a political community... indeed, without the foundation of a political community, it could never be brought into existence by human beings.”<sup>194</sup> Two years later in “Toward Perpetual Peace,” we will remember, Kant details just such a juridico-civil society ruled by the principle of publicity. Perhaps we should read “Toward Perpetual Peace,” then, as an account of the first stage of history, the foundation of a juridico-civil society, which is necessary for the second stage of history, the setting up and diffusion of an ethico-political community, of which the *Religion* gives an account. Even the comparatively early “Idea for a Universal History” points at this division, where Kant calls the cosmopolitan condition which political progress is to establish “the womb in which all the original predispositions of the human species are developed.”<sup>195</sup> Political progress is to ground the cosmopolitan condition; the cosmopolitan condition will ground the development of human predispositions, including, especially, morality.

Kant rejects the possibility of a world political state again in “Toward Perpetual Peace.”<sup>196</sup> But in distinction from the just political state, the juridico-civil society, the ethico-civil

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<sup>193</sup>*Religion*, 6:94. Emphases added.

<sup>194</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup>“Idea for a Universal History,” 8:28.

<sup>196</sup>“Toward Perpetual Peace,” 8:357.

society “always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings... hence a multitude of human beings united in that purpose cannot yet be called the ethical community as such but only a particular society that strives after the consensus of all human beings (indeed, of all finite rational beings) in order to establish an absolute ethical whole.”<sup>197</sup> This world ethical state against which the political state is contrasted is precisely the actual cosmopolitan condition, a community of the totality of human beings, to which cosmopolitan right is intended to lead. For this ethical community, ethico-civil society, is meant to be “realized... in the form a church.”<sup>198</sup> Kant distinguishes between the “church invisible,” the idea of the union of all rational beings in a church, or, we might call it, the idea of a cosmopolitan condition, and the “church visible... the actual union of human beings into a whole that accords with this ideal” – that which strives toward the actuality of a cosmopolitan condition.<sup>199</sup> This church will not be “historical,” i.e., be governed by any doctrine not discoverable by reason alone. Only as such does it “bind all human beings universally.”<sup>200</sup> To eliminate evil from the world, then, human beings must work to expand the reach of this ethical community to encompass the totality of humanity. Once this principle of rational religion has “put in roots... somewhere, also *in public*... [it] will one day enlighten the world and rule over it. [For] in the natural predisposition of every human being there lies the basis both for insight into truth and goodness and for heartfelt sympathy for them; and they do not fail, once made public, to propagate everywhere, in virtue of their natural affinity with the moral predisposition of rational beings.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 6:96.

<sup>198</sup>*Religion*, 6:100.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 6:101.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 6:104.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 6:122-23.



While the elimination of evil proves, then, to be something which human beings must work to achieve, the last sentence of this passage leads us to recognize that for Kant there is indeed a sense in which evil is self-destructive. As long as moral knowledge arises in public, which is to say, in a free discursive space, rational beings with whom it comes into contact will assimilate and further propagate it, in virtue of their moral predisposition. Rational beings' moral predisposition is in fact a consequence of their rationality, as our work in the second chapter has shown, and so Kant's claim here is merely a reconceptualization of the assumption which we worked out of Kant's theory of education in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, his telling of humanity's genesis in the "Conjectural Beginnings" essay, his belief in the socially transformative power of free spaces of discourse in "What is Enlightenment," and "Toward Perpetual Peace," and in the instrumental rationality of human nature as unsociably sociable in "Idea for a Universal History": namely, that the rationality which universally informs human beings is of such a sort that we are receptive to reasons, assimilating rational knowledge when we are confronted with it. Within free discursive spaces, the possibility of which is grounded in the establishment of juridico-civil political states, produced out of the unsociably sociable nature of human beings, moral-rational knowledge is assimilated and propagated by all human beings who come into contact with it; this causes the rejection of immoral, that is, irrational, maxims. For Kant, then, evil proves to be self-destructive, but it is not by virtue of the assumption thereof that historical progress is assured; rather, by virtue of the historical progress which we carry out through our reason and moral freedom, the conditions for evil's self-destruction are constructed.

Arendt does give further justification for what she sees as Kant's first assumption, the assumption of historical progress. The ultimate guarantee of this, she claims, is nature, which produces harmony through discord, i.e. through the unsociable sociability that shows up both

between individuals and between states.<sup>202</sup> The question of whether Kant holds nature to have a teleology independent of the teleology of human willing, or whether it merely must appear to us to be so, remains beyond the scope of this paper. In discussing unsociable sociability, however, a quality of *human* nature, we must keep in mind the distinction Kant makes between nature *simpliciter* and the nature of the human being when he considers the latter in a moral context. In the first essay of the *Religion*, discussed in II.5 above, Kant writes that while we can speak of the ‘nature’ of human beings because all human beings originally determine themselves as moral beings by the choice of a fundamental disposition, and this choice is universally evil in the first instance, this human nature is something which we freely give to ourselves, rather than it being bestowed on us *by* ‘Nature.’ Thus, Kant explains, supposedly harmful natural inclinations are good in themselves, but through the universally human original choice of evil, we originally develop these inclinations into something harmful. Unsociable sociability, which Kant characterizes as two inclinations which constitute human nature,<sup>203</sup> must be of this sort. Thus, nature’s achievement of harmony through discord is only apparently guaranteed by nature; in reality, it is the result of the moral activity of human beings. Richard Eldridge makes this same point when, in analyzing the propositions from “Idea from a Universal History” in which Kant characterizes nature as having wisdom about or willing historical progress, he argues that we should understand these claims as being about our *rational* nature.<sup>204</sup> Though Eldridge goes on to elucidate this with a phenomenal, or temporal, description of how human beings carry out this rational self-development which results in historical progress, I would add to his argument the claim that the rational choice which is the ultimate cause of an individual’s own nature is one

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<sup>202</sup>Arendt, 51-2.

<sup>203</sup>“Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” 8:20-1. Cf. 68-70 above.

<sup>204</sup>Eldridge, *Images of History* 61-64.

which occurs outside of time, noumenally. But our conclusion is the same – as Eldridge puts it, human beings “are both subjects and objects” of self-development,<sup>205</sup> and this self-development is what historical progress consists of.

But if we understand the human nature which brings about historical progress as something determined by human beings’ free moral choices, rather than inanimate and heteronomous nature’s partial constitution of us, we must understand historical progress as the same process as the elimination of evil, merely viewed from another perspective. Human beings, originally evil in every case, freely choose to develop their inclinations into something harmful, which constitute the unsociably sociable nature of human beings. When through this unsociable sociability, however, political entities which progressively eliminate the evils caused by unsociable sociability are established, we must attribute the elimination of these evil to human moral improvement. Just as Kant must hold that the apparently passive, successful moral education of a student is actually the appearance of a noumenal moral activity, if human beings’ immoral unsociable sociability results in societies with less evil, a noumenal revolution toward the good must be reflected, that is, a free choice to eliminate evil.

Furthermore, as suggested above, for Kant historical progress should be thought of as comprising two stages: the political development of republics and international federations, which are conducive to peace and the establishment of a global cosmopolitan condition, and the moralization of humanity achieved through the spread of moral doctrines and the ultimate distilling of these doctrines into their rational kernel, pure moral religion. While Kant does not believe that either can ever be fully achieved – as he writes in “Idea for a Universal History,” about the political community, and in the *Religion* about the ethical community, nothing

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<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 64.

“completely straight” can be made from the “crooked wood of which humankind is made”<sup>206</sup> – we can nonetheless say that political progress is in a sense prior to ethical progress, for the globalization of a free discursive space which political progress brings about is the only mechanism of ethical progress. While an increasingly cosmopolitan condition brings about political progress, too, political progress is for the sake of more fully establishing this cosmopolitan condition through which humanity is moralized. And where the most visible evils caused by unsociable sociability, fighting between individuals and wars, are progressively eliminated through political progress, it is through humanity’s moralization that we see evil eliminated at its source, individual wills. It appears, then, that the actuality of cosmopolitan condition actually grounds these two (not totally differentiable) historical processes, reversing Arendt’s claim that Kant must assume these two historical processes in order to justify both his (as Arendt reads him) purely aesthetic cosmopolitanism and his moral prohibition on revolution. In placing cosmopolitan right as the third definite article necessary for perpetual peace, Kant is claiming that for progress in history to occur, nations must establish connections with one another, globalizing the space in which rational knowledge can be heard.

#### **III.4: The phenomenalization of the noumenal in history**

As commentators note, unlike in the philosophies of history of Hegel or Marx, for Kant history has no end.<sup>207</sup> While I hope to have shown that Kant’s philosophy of history does, despite his occasionally tentative statements in “Idea for a Universal History,” guarantee progress in history rather than merely justify our holding such a hope, as he is more willing to claim in

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<sup>206</sup>“Idea for a Universal History,” 8:23; *Religion*, 6:100.

<sup>207</sup>For example, Arendt, 57; Yovel, 96-98. Yovel, however, makes the notable observation that Kant anticipates these thinkers by claiming that the history of philosophy has an end, and the history of philosophy is for all three of these thinkers importantly bound up with empirical history. See Yovel 237.

“Toward Perpetual Peace,” “What is Enlightenment,” and the *Religion*, it is indeed only the approximation of such progress, both political and ethical, that can be guaranteed. Kant’s differentiation from his successors in the philosophy of history on this point is no doubt grounded in his commitment to a conception of a historically universal human nature, grounded in turn in his location of the subject outside of the historical process. In placing the subject within history, Hegel and Marx developed conceptions of freedom which a historically determined subject could possess; but in order to retain *transcendental* freedom, Kant had to locate the subject in the noumenal, outside of time and outside of history. For theological and anthropological reasons, Kant believed that human beings universally chose evil as free atemporal beings. While he saw this as a condition from which human beings could improve, coming to embrace the good, he claimed that evil was the universal originally self-given condition of human beings. It is no wonder, then, that history cannot reach a stage where human beings are perfectly moralized; as they are outside of history, every human being must struggle with the noumenal moral choice. For Kant, the fact of human beings’ evil remains resistant to the progressive forces of history.

Yet history nevertheless progresses, through the consequences of human beings’ unsociable sociability, but concurrently and ultimately through the spread of rational knowledge, guaranteed by the responsiveness to reasons which Kant also universally attributes to human beings. We are now ready to bring together two conclusions reached in the second and third chapters, respectively: first, that the apparently passive process of being morally educated must be the appearance of a noumenally free and active choice, and second, that history progresses through the spread of rational knowledge through free discursive spaces, a spread guaranteed by the universality of human beings’ responsiveness to reasons. For Kant, the process of education

is no different than what occurs in free spaces of discourse. The apparently passive process of listening and learning is reflective of an autonomous noumenal action; it is as active, as morally praiseworthy, as if the student or listener had produced moral rational knowledge out of herself from nothing. Noumenally, this can even be said to be the case – successful moral education is merely how this free activity appears to our cognition. (And unsuccessful moral education, on the other hand, must reflect the free immoral choice of the student and/or teacher.) We must reconceive the spread of rational knowledge in free discursive spaces, the ultimate mechanism of historical development, as an active process by not only spreaders of rational knowledge, but also those who assimilate it. Both are reflective of a morally commendable noumenal action. Historical development, then, is ultimately the appearance of free human actions, and commentators who attribute progress in history to nature, emphasizing the “Idea for a Universal History” at the expense of the other early historical essays and the *Religion*, err in suggesting that it is natural necessity *and not* human freedom which brings about providence in history.<sup>208</sup>

This ultimate mechanism of history, the spread of rational knowledge in free discursive spaces, is assured by the universal characteristic of human beings as educator and educated, both of which are appearances of the free, simple moral act of the noumenal subject. Considered in a free discursive space, all people occupy the same role, the role of a scholar who assimilates and propagates rational knowledge. In “What is Enlightenment,” Kant emphasizes this universality, enumerating the particular, private duties of the clergyman, military officer, and citizen, all of whom nevertheless share the same role in public, that of the scholar or member of a free discursive space.<sup>209</sup> We saw in II.6 that the particularity of the human being is always secondary

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<sup>208</sup>See Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, as well as Allen W. Wood's “Kant's Philosophy of History” in Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, 243-262.

<sup>209</sup>“What is Enlightenment,” 8:37-38.

and for the sake of that human being in her universal character, as a free moral being. This universality was indeed all we could come to know about the subject in itself, given the system of transcendental idealism necessary to preserve the idea of transcendental freedom. But, these universal characteristics were shown to be all that was relevant to the determining act of a human being's existence, the simple choice between good and evil. The universal initial choice of evil and the conception of rationality as a capacity that does not require development, but is always already possessed by human beings, show up phenomenally as the universal features of unsociable sociability and a responsiveness to reasons. Through the historical development which these features carry out, this homogeneity which appears on the noumenal level comes to appear in the phenomenal – in the course of history, the particular begins to fall away, giving way to the universal.

This is most striking in Kant's description of the gradual spread of moral religion. "From this point onwards," he writes in a section of the third essay of the *Religion*, "where the ecclesiastical faith publicly acknowledges its dependence on the restraining conditions of religious faith, and its necessity to conform to it, the *church universal* begins to fashion itself into an ethical state of God and to make progress toward its fulfillment, under an autonomous principle which is one and the same for all human beings and for all times. – We can see in advance that this history will be nothing but the narrative of the enduring conflict between the faith of divine service and the faith of moral religion."<sup>210</sup> By ecclesiastical faith, which he calls elsewhere "historical faith," Kant means faith in a doctrine "merely based on facts," i.e., particular events in history.<sup>211</sup> Because of their particular nature, even if true, an individual can rationally withhold judgement on whether these events truly happened, and so an ecclesiastical

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<sup>210</sup>*Religion*, 6:124.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, 6:103.

religion can never spread throughout humanity. But “religious faith,” a term he reserves for a doctrine “based entirely on reason,”<sup>212</sup> “can be convincingly communicated to everyone,” and so can ground a universal church, one which reaches the whole of humanity.<sup>213</sup> This religion which is “assured” to reach the whole of humanity will be “cleansed of the nonsense of superstition,”<sup>214</sup> conceived of broadly as any faith-based practice not grounded in reason alone – i.e., an attempt to “become well-pleasing” to God in any other way than acting morally.<sup>215</sup> Though as particular beings, we will serve and honor God in particular ways, ecclesiastical practices which do not serve moral ends will be abandoned. Kant calls theocracy, the practices of the Siberian Wogulites, and the services of Puritans and Independents in America equally worthless in the eyes of God. “Only those whose intention is to find this service solely in the disposition to good life-conduct distinguish themselves from those others by crossing over into an entirely different principle... whereby they profess themselves members of a (invisible) church.”<sup>216</sup> The moral progress of humanity is the process by which all particular, historical religious practices are rejected in favor of the universal principle of morality.<sup>217</sup>

As Kant conceives of ethico-religious development of humanity as the movement along a single track from particular historical faiths, which are gradually eliminated once rational beings are morally educated, to the single universal religious faith, so does he conceive of societal development as a single track moving “from brutishness to culture” as he puts it in “Idea for a

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 6:115; 6:181.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 6:102.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 6:101.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 6:174.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 6:177.

<sup>217</sup>This does not however mean Kant seeks to replace religion with purely secular moral principles, as Yovel suggests (See Yovel 209-213). In all of his major ethical works, Kant emphasizes that the faith in God and in a life after death are necessary postulates of practical reason.



Universal History.”<sup>218</sup> Unlike Hegel, Kant can have no conception of different cultures which have an internal path of development, distinct from the development of other cultures. For Kant, *Kultur* must be thought of in a colonialist sense of ‘civilization,’ whereby ‘civilized’ nations exist only further along on the track of development that all nations must, or should, progress upon; for this reason, Kant never speaks of *Kulturen*, only *Kultur*. This is however to be expected given Kant’s view of history as bringing about the cosmopolitan condition. The cosmopolitan condition, ruled by the freedom of discourse where there can be no failure in communicating rational knowledge, and each plays an active role in morally educating and being morally educated, should remind us of the noumenal kingdom of ends, in which all rational beings legislate together as equals and are bound by these laws.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>“Idea for a Universal History,” 8:21. See also “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8:116-121; “Toward Perpetual Peace” 8:375; *Metaphysics of Morals* 6:353.

<sup>219</sup>*Groundwork*, 4:433, 438-9.

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