THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Practical Reason and the Metaphysics of Human Dignity: A Dialogue between Christian Personalists and Kantian Liberalism

A DISSERTATION

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This dissertation aims to correct the critical interpretation of Immanuel Kant’s metaphysics and ethics developed by Thomistic thinkers as part of their critique of liberal politics, an interpretation that was adopted by Christian personalists such as Karol Wojtyla. According to the Thomistic interpretation, Kant’s transcendental idealism negates traditional realistic metaphysics, and consequently the traditional ethics based on the guidance of the human will by the intellect’s grasp of the teleological structure of reality or the created order of ends. This implies the construction of a subjectivist, formalist, and proceduralist ethics based on a radical notion of individual autonomy that is at the basis of the modern liberal and secular state. In contrast to this view, which is shared by some influential Neo-Kantian thinkers, this dissertation will argue that Kant is more adequately understood as proposing a different kind of metaphysics, based on the primacy of the practical use of reason. Once cognition is understood to be restricted to objects of possible (theoretical) experience and traditional “dogmatic” metaphysics is rendered impossible, a new sort of metaphysics must be primarily moral and found through the participation of human beings in the moral law as pure practical reason. Thus, in Kant’s concept of the unconditionally good will (that grounds the categorical imperative) the idea of duty for duty’s sake translates for sensible beings the moral priority of the constitution of the good as an existential participation in the order of being. In this way, teleology is not negated but has its innermost moral ground disclosed. Kant also recovers the moral core of faith in God and in the
immortality of the soul, whose characterization as postulates of practical reason points to their metaphysical status beyond the fixities of empirical being rather than to a doubtful claim about their existence. Finally, autonomy of reason, or the self-legislation of morality, is understood as the only proper instantiation in rational beings of an order that is primarily moral and thus not reducible to the attraction of the will by external objects. By choosing autonomously, i.e. morally, human beings display their dignity as participants in a rational, supersensible nature that can ground their political relations on more than mere isolated subjectivity or willfulness.
This dissertation by Gustavo Adolfo P. D. Santos fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in political theory approved by David J. Walsh, Ph.D., as Director, and by Claes G. Ryn, Ph.D., and Stephen F. Schneck, Ph.D. as Readers.

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David J. Walsh, Ph.D., Director

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Claes G. Ryn, Ph.D., Reader

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Stephen F. Schneck, Ph.D., Reader
To Cristiane, João Pedro, Antônio, and Teresa.
“Duty!... what origin is there worthy of you, and where is to be found the root of your noble
descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations, descent from which is the
indispensable condition of that worth which human beings alone can give themselves?”¹

“Man as the person both lives and fulfills himself within the perspective of his transcendence. Is it not freedom, obligation, and responsibility which allows us to see that not only truthfulness but also the person’s surrender to truth in judging as well as in acting constitute the real and concrete fabric of the personal life of man?”²

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Introduction

Christians and liberal philosophy

Pope John Paul II claimed, in his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, that “authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person.”\(^1\) Despite the statement’s apparently simple and straightforward character, the late Roman Pontiff’s words lie at the surface—as is usually true in his encyclicals—of a complex history of philosophical debates that reach down to the beginnings of the Modern era. Speaking from the standpoint of Catholic traditional anthropology and social thought, John Paul II takes to task those currents of thought that have claimed, as he puts it, that “agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life.”\(^2\) The pope counters that freedom, which lies at the center of democratic life, can only attain its fulfillment in truth, as opposed to the will of the majority.

The complex discussions that provide the background to these assertions are exemplified by an influential contemporary liberal theory. Its proponent, the philosopher John Rawls, prescribes a certain kind of agnosticism or relativism for the construction of a realistic and fair conception of democracy, especially regarding substantive “comprehensive views” of the good life. At the same time, however, Rawls’s political liberalism is founded upon the presupposition of a conception of the person “that would prove acceptable to citizens once it was properly

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\(^2\) Ibid.
presented and explained.” This conception describes persons as “both free and equal, as capable of acting both reasonably and rationally, and therefore as capable of taking part in social cooperation….” So, both John Rawls and John Paul II agree about the need for an adequate conception of the person at the basis of democracy, one that is not open to arbitrary challenges and redefinitions. Moreover, it would be fair to say that both thinkers share a similar emphasis on equality, rationality, and sociality (or solidarity) in their respective conceptions of the person.

And yet, even though John Paul II reassures those concerned with the imposition of religious truths that “the Church’s method is always that of respect for freedom” (in view of the “transcendent dignity of the person”), the freedom and equality that underlie Rawls’s conception of rational and reasonable persons lead to a political organization that excludes from its public reason “the truth which [the Christian] has known (cf. Jn 8:31-32)” and which Christians are called to offer to others in the service of freedom. For Rawls, the kind of “comprehensive worldview” typified by Christian anthropology and ethics could not be used as a source of arguments and criteria of validity for a kind of reason that may be considered “public,” i.e., accessible to all rational and reasonable persons, irrespective of their views of the good life. As a corollary of the pope’s argument, then, Christians would have reason to consider Rawls’s conception of the person incorrect, or at least incomplete; behind the similarity between the phrasing of personality and freedom, a deeper exam would reveal important differences in their respective metaphysical and ethical outlooks.

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4 Ibid.
5 John Paul II, ibid.
6 Ibid.
John Paul II was, of course, not alone in his assessment of liberal democratic philosophies, of which Rawls’s “Kantian constructivism” is just one prominent example. A number of Christian philosophers have criticized liberal political theories, specifically the liberal emphasis on individual autonomy and rights, due to a perceived lack of a “thick” or substantive view of the nature of the human person who is a subject of rights. This shortcoming of liberal theories has been associated by the critics with the subjectivist turn of modern philosophy and its abandonment of realistic metaphysics. For these Christian thinkers, any just political system must be founded upon the dignity of the human person created by God in His image (*imago Dei*), which involves a definite set of basic human ends or goods and the ensuing obligations placed on the person, society, and the political community, which limit the scope of rights. In contrast, liberalism’s exclusive concentration on subjective rights allegedly sets aside any conception of natural human ends or goods that may lead to a system of duties as a counterpart to and even as a foundation of individual rights.

In the wake of the Catholic Church’s recovery of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as the authoritative source of metaphysical and socio-anthropological principles for the Church’s teaching and engagement with the world, such criticisms against liberalism have tended to be

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7 Russell Hittinger has written a very useful account of the political and philosophical contexts in which popes Leo XIII and Pius X brought Thomism back to a position of theological authority in the Catholic Church. Hittinger remarks that there were two separate ways of incorporating Thomism in philosophical and theological discussions, the one originating in a disciplinary or defensive attitude before anti-Catholic philosophies and the other reflecting a will to engage the modern world’s social and political problems. For Hittinger, John Paul II attempted to reunite the engaged form of Thomism to Aquinas’s original metaphysical wisdom. See Russell Hittinger, “Two Thomisms, Two Modernities,” *First Things* (June-July 2008): 33-38.
expressed from the point of view of a Thomistic realistic metaphysics. Among the most famous Neo-Thomistic critics are Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and Yves Simon, as well as Charles de Koninck; they were the intellectual heirs of an earlier generation of Thomistic thinkers, among whom Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Désiré Mercier were prominent. From the more strictly Thomistic thinkers, however, there have come a generation of Catholic thinkers who united Thomistic metaphysics to a phenomenological understanding of the internal dynamics of the person; they have been called Thomistic Personalists. These include John Paul II, who started his philosophical and academic life still as Karol Wojtyła (a Polish professor-priest and later bishop and cardinal), and some of the followers of his Christian Personalist “theology of the body,” such as Michael Waldstein, David Schindler, and Rocco Buttiglione. Other contemporary Thomists who have carried forward the criticism of modern liberalism are Kenneth Schmitz, Remi Brague, Russell Hittinger, W. Norris Clarke, James Schall, and Michael Pakaluk, among others.

What they hold in common is the diagnosis that, having abandoned traditional Thomistic and Aristotelian metaphysics for a secularist and subjectivist philosophy, philosophical

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8 This is not to say that all Catholic criticism has been based on Thomistic metaphysics, much less that so-called Neo-Thomism has been a unitary, homogeneous philosophical movement (about this last point, see the section about … in Chapter 1). But in an important sense, thinkers who have been more aligned with the Catholic Church’s magisterium have resorted, in one way or another, to Thomistic and Scholastic metaphysical and ethical realism. A significant example of this tendency in ethics has been the reliance of papal magisterium on the Thomistic version of a theory of the natural law when debating other political philosophical systems. This can be seen in papal documents such as John Paul II’s already mentioned encyclical Centesimus Annus and in the later Veritatis Splendor, and in many writings by pope Benedict XVI, such as the encyclicals Caritas in Veritate and Deus Caritas Est, and the speech given before the German Bundestag in 2011, entitled The Listening Heart. Reflections on the Foundations of Law. But mention to the natural law as a guide for social and political action is already present in Leo XIII’s encyclical that inaugurated modern Catholic Social Doctrine, Rerum Novarum (paragraph 32).
modernity has robbed itself of the resources for the maintenance of a stable and fair political community. The problem, as synthesized by John Paul II, is the danger of the decline of democratic politics into a rule of the stronger, in which what is “right” is reduced to the protection of subjective “rights.” These latter, in turn, amount to self-centered claims to absolute freedom on the part of those individuals and groups that have the power to influence the will of the majority in democratic societies, leaving vulnerable classes of human beings, such as the unborn or the incapacitated, at the mercy of ever changing consensus and a hedonist and productivist mentality.

Pope Benedict XVI has rearticulated this issue as a positivist conception of law as opposed to the traditional natural law understanding which united reason and nature in the concept of conscience, a concept of “reason that is open to the language of being.”9 For Benedict XVI, this understanding was active up to the drafting of important documents of Western political tradition such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the German Basic Law. But, he argues, the rise of legal positivism expelled natural law (along with the Catholic tradition in which it is limited) and ethics from the public sphere, substituting a scientific concept of reason that effects an “unbridgeable gulf… between ‘is’ and ‘ought’” and according to which “anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable… does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood.”10

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10 Ibid.
In different ways, most of these thinkers see modern liberal democracy approaching an irreversible process of political self-destruction, unless its philosophical exponents can find their way back to the solid foundation of an adequate anthropology, based on a similarly appropriate metaphysics, which grounds the dignity of the person on something less shifty than naked assertions of self-interest and willfulness. The problem is observed at the level of the contemporary political conflicts between, on the one hand, the secularist State that defines its social counterpart chiefly as autonomous and isolated individuals with rights and, on the other hand, the traditional and authoritative communities of meaning that envision individual persons in the context of their belonging to realities that are prior to them and that hold a claim to their assent and faithfulness. But the roots of this conflict are seen to lie in the philosophical accounts that respectively ground each of these ways of viewing human beings: one considers individual persons mainly as isolated and rational subjects (in the modern sense of “consciousnesses”) who autonomously build their own social world, while the other sees them as objective parts of a universal hierarchy of ends, which can be objectively known through the intellect.

Liberalism and human dignity: a Kantian heritage

Nevertheless, as Benedict XVI rightly noted, ethical considerations on the objective dignity of the person have not been wholly absent from liberal constructions, a point that is illustrated by the connection of rights and human dignity in many constitutions and international
charters. And one of the main sources of liberal political philosophy, the ethical and political thought of Immanuel Kant, is importantly founded on the dignity of rational nature, upon which Kant builds his doctrines of right and virtue. Moreover, some of Kant’s formulations in this area have been adopted by Christian thinkers and the Catholic Church itself, the most prominent example being the categorical imperative’s formula of humanity, according to which the person must never be treated merely as a means for the attainment of others’ ends.

The question is whether these considerations on the inviolable dignity of the person and the limits that dignity imposes on the political system are an integral and coherent part of liberal philosophies or simply “survivals” from a former traditional ethics that have remained as a latent part of Western culture but that tend to lose value as liberalism comes into its own as a culturally authoritative, self-grounded philosophical system.

The Catholic case against Immanuel Kant

For the Thomistic and Thomistic Personalist thinkers, the second alternative is a more apt description of what has taken place in the development of modern liberal society. And, by virtue of his place at the center of the liberal philosophical self-understanding, Immanuel Kant represents a crucial turning point in the “self-grounding” of liberalism, by means of his concept of autonomy. For the Christian thinkers, the final unraveling of traditional realistic metaphysics
and ethics was occasioned by Kant’s “Copernican revolution” and his ensuing development of the notions of practical reason and morality as human constructions that stand independently of speculative knowledge, or from nature seen as a causal order of objects of experience. This independence, or autonomy, is at the heart of Kant’s conception of “the dignity of rational nature;” thus, for the Thomistic critics, Kantian autonomy in fact empties human dignity of its transcendent connection to the Creator, of whom man is an image.

In regard to transcendent being in particular, which for the Thomistic thinkers is the ultimate ground of being, the Kantian “ideas” or “postulates” of freedom, immortality of the soul, and God, are almost arbitrary inventions of human consciousness, or at most merely epistemological instruments with which reason attempts to ground its own coherence and possibility on its radically sovereign activity. Thus, all things considered, human beings must in the end rely exclusively on their own subjective rational powers to order moral and empirical reality.

This generally negative reading of Kant as an “all destroyer” of traditional metaphysics is reflected in many contemporary Christian accounts of liberal democracy and its philosophical basis. One example is a recent exchange between two Christian thinkers about the appropriation of Kantian terminology by Catholic thought in the twentieth century. In this case, Derek S. Jeffreys writes a defense of Thomistic personalists such as Jacques Maritain and Karol Wojtyła against Robert Kraynak’s description, actually an indictment, of them as Kantian Christian philosophers who attempt to unite Thomistic and Kantian philosophies but end up undermining
traditional Christian political thought.\textsuperscript{11} For Jeffreys, though, “John Paul II uses Kant’s ethic without degenerating into a Kantian;”\textsuperscript{12} it would be possible to appropriate some insights of Kantian ethics, while remaining within the bounds of a traditional Christian metaphysics. Therefore, independently of their respective positions in favor or against Thomistic or Christian personalism, both Jeffreys and Kraynak are in agreement concerning the deleterious nature of Kant’s metaphysics and epistemology. The latter amount to a separation between nature and freedom and the assertion of a purely human will to create a human world separate from the natural hierarchy of ends. For Jeffreys, when absorbed without the restrictions of a realistic metaphysics, Kantianism has “undermined traditional understandings of God, the person, and ethics.”\textsuperscript{13}

This partial agreement between a defender and a critic of Christian personalism reflects a general propensity, on the part of Christian thinkers, to see in Kantian idealism an enemy of traditional Christian metaphysics and ethics. Even when a thinker has come to appreciate the value of the Kantian formulation of the person as an end in herself who shall never be used merely as a means, as Karol Wojtyła does in \textit{Love and Responsibility}, calling it the “personalistic

\textsuperscript{11}The debate between Jeffreys and Kraynak, entitled “The Influence of Kant on Christian Theology: A Debate About Human Dignity and Christian Personalism,” takes place on the pages of the \textit{Journal of Markets and Morality}, vol. 7, n. 2 (Fall 2004): 507–537. Kraynak’s critical of “Kantianism” as a whole, as it is expressed in modern individual ethics, the liberal politics of human rights, and the cosmopolitan worldview of the United Nations. Jeffreys, on the other hand, believes that “Thomistic personalism can selectively use Kant’s ethical ideas without worrying about Kantianism’s alleged dangers,” (ibid., p. 533) which lie in the metaphysical and epistemological spheres.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 510.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 509.
norm,” the common view of Kant’s rejection of realistic metaphysics seems to prevent a reexamination of the philosophical scaffolding that allowed Kant to affirm the dignity of the person.

This study proposes to execute just this reexamination, and thus to correct Christian personalist philosophers’ view of Kantian ethics (and its underlying metaphysics), by taking up and developing a different interpretation of Kant’s notion of autonomy, which is at the ground of the rational being or the person’s dignity, and its main philosophical foundations.

A different way to read Kant – a summary of this dissertation central objectives

A more careful, even if brief, reading of Kant will, without the need of much philosophical excavation, reveal that the moral autonomy of which Kant speaks is not the arbitrary, self-asserted matter that many Christian critics have often taken Kant to defend. Kant’s own pronouncements about his philosophical goals reflect at least the intention to ground autonomy more robustly than the on mere and idiosyncratic individual will. Indeed, Kant talks

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15 This has been noted by Phillip Rossi, SJ, who has also proposed to look anew at Kant’s thought and its theological implications. Rossi describes the general interpretation of Kant in certain twentieth century Catholic circles as defined by an “ineradicable subjectivism,” concluding that “the views of the Kant against whom [the Neo-Thomist tradition] argued bear, in far too many instances, a tenuous relation to the views that can be most plausibly construed from his texts, particularly when those texts are read with attention to Kant’s own historical context.” (Philip J. Rossi, “Reading Kant from a Catholic Horizon: Ethics and the Anthropology of Grace,” Theological Studies, no. 71 (2010), p. 97.) Rossi’s project of looking anew at Kant “from a Catholic horizon” is in some ways parallel to this dissertation’s main goal, although his focus is more theological, dealing with the issues of grace and hope in Kant’s ethical and religious thought.
about the autonomy of reason in its practical use, in the context of the primacy of practical over theoretical reason and the ultimate unity of reason in its purposiveness towards a final end (as Richard Velkley has pointed out\textsuperscript{16}). Thus the all-important dimension of autonomy is not merely a self-referential, epistemological grounding of the subject in itself or its own “standpoint”; in fact, autonomy is for Kant the enactment of a transcendental freedom in which man is not fully conditioned by the natural order of causality, but instead participates in an order of reason that manifests itself as universal moral law—whence the affirmation of the dignity of rational nature as an end in itself. Seen in this light, Kantian practical reason provides a genuine ground for human dignity, although not by means of “speculative” or “theoretical” notions of the good.

Although this represents an avowedly direct attack on traditional metaphysics and its claims of grounding morality on theoretical reason’s grasp of a hierarchy of ends, Kant is not thereby simply denying the possibility of any metaphysics whatsoever; on the contrary, he is attempting to provide a safe ground for metaphysics, as suggested by the title of his Prolegomena. By so doing, Kant points toward a different view of metaphysics, and of reason itself, which emphasizes their comprehensive or constitutive (a priori) nature and their ultimate source in an existential order of will, or pure practical reason.

In light of this latter view of Kantian thought, this study aims to retrieve the metaphysical (in this novel sense) significance of autonomy and practical reason in Kant’s idealism, in order to show that the liberal tradition includes a strong, well-grounded notion of human dignity with

which Christian personalists can find common ground, and from which they can build a more
effective criticism of liberal ideas where necessary, using a common philosophical language.

The study will explore and advance an interpretation of Kant’s ethical and political
philosophy that, although faithful to Kant’s own considerations, has been largely overlooked by
the personalist critics and not sufficiently developed in most of the literature on Kant. This
interpretation, as put forward by David Walsh, holds Kant’s concept of practical reason as
ultimately grounded on its own existential unfolding, taking its “validity” from participation in
rational activity itself, which is moral from the start; Walsh has called it a “metaphysics of
practice.”17

An exam of the literature shows that many renowned scholars of Kant’s ethical and
political thought (such as Christine Koorsgard, Allen Wood, Paul Guyer, or Henry Allison) deny
or at least sidestep the metaphysical implications of Kant’s transcendental idealism, preferring to
focus on epistemological considerations which favor the “standpoint” of the knowing and acting
subject, or a merely epistemological “regulative” role of ideas. Christian personalists, in their
turn, seem to take this hegemonic tradition of interpretation at face value, or they simply read the
Kantian text for the arguments that confirm Kant’s image as a proceduralist, subjectivist modern
philosopher.

Thus, by going back to the Kantian text and interpreting it in this “existential” key, this
study will re-evaluate the extent to which Kant shares central concerns and themes with Christian
anthropology, even if the latter be re-conceptualized in modern philosophical form, which is in

University Press, 2008), chapter 1.
some ways more radical in its claims for the primacy and irreducibility of moral experience and
the status of the knowledge that arises within that experience. By doing that we do not wish to
invalidate the claims of traditional metaphysics regarding the nature and the ends of man and
society, but point to a way in which Kantian philosophy illumines and develops certain elements
of that traditional thinking that had not been the focus of concern. Among those would be the
special status of morality as an irreducible sphere of human existence that provides the primary
way through which human beings access the transcendent sources of order and thus encounter a
hierarchy of ends.

Outline of the dissertation

This study’s methodology will involve a reading of the relevant Kantian texts in response
to the main objections of Christian personalists to Kantian idealism and the idealist philosophical
grounds of human dignity, including the primacy of practical reason and the role of autonomy
within it. The Christian personalists who we shall refer to as the main sources of criticisms
include Karol Wojtyła, Kenneth Schmitz, Michael Waldstein, Rocco Buttiglione, and David L.
Schindler, among others. The Kantian texts include certain parts of the Critique of Pure Reason,
the Critique of Practical Reason, the Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, the Metaphysics
of Morals and Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. Consideration will also be given
to the secondary Kantian literature about the points covered in the study, inasmuch as the
commentators offer valuable insights into Kant’s thought or propose contrasting interpretations that are sometimes convergent with the Christian critics’ views.

Regarding the organization into chapters, in order to set up our investigation of Kantian philosophy, first it will be necessary to establish a few central points of the Thomistic personalist critique of transcendental idealist metaphysics and ethics. Chapter 1 attempts to summarize that critique, through a survey of key figures in the development of the Thomistic revival that influenced the Christian personalists mentioned above. In the same chapter, after synthesizing that critique in four main points of contention, we examine another side of the Christian personalist ideas, which draws their view of the human being closer to the Kantian insights about autonomy than is usually noticed. Central to this personalist view is the philosophical work of Karol Wojtyła, elaborated in his most mature philosophical work, *The Acting Person*.

Having synthesized the main points of the Thomistic critique, the rest of the dissertation is organized as a series of responses to each separate point. Chapter 2 starts our exam of Kantian philosophy by focusing on the nature of Kant’s criticism of traditional realistic metaphysics and the resulting alternative to the grounding of morality on an objective hierarchy of goods or ends: the concept of the good will as pure practical reason, or subordination to the universal moral law. Chapter 3 takes up the questions of the status of the postulates of practical reason (freedom, God, and the immortality of the soul), and their place and significance in the context of Kant’s principle of the primacy of the practical, or the priority of morality as pure practical reason. Chapter 4 analyzes the Kantian notion of the autonomy of reason that lies at the root of the dignity of rational nature in human beings. Supported by insights gained in the two previous chapters, the chapter’s argument shows how autonomy, considered as participation in the moral
law, makes better sense of some of the perceived conundrums or “paradoxes” of Kantian ethics than some of the alternative interpretations. Finally, in the Conclusion, some of the political implications of this reading of Kantian philosophy are considered.

Except for Chapter 1, in which a more formal albeit brief survey of Thomistic and Thomistic personalist authors has been provided, the secondary Kantian literature is not the object of a formally separate study; instead, that literature is brought to bear on the questions as needed, in order to support some of the arguments put forward or as a foil against which our own view of Kant’s ideas and their implications may be developed. In view of this dissertation’s main goals, which involve chiefly a rereading of the Kantian text, any detailed and comprehensive criticism of the literature in its own right would lie beyond the scope of this work. The views expounded here, however, should facilitate and guide a more detailed engagement with both the Thomists and the Kantians as an ensuing by-product.
Chapter I

Thomistic Personalism and Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution’

Introduction: the Neo-Thomistic Critique of Modern Philosophy

According to the modern notion of individual autonomy, the individual person—either by virtue of her interests or of her reason—is the fundamental source of norms to herself and society. This particular idea of autonomy is connected with a set of concepts and attitudes that refer back to the Enlightenment’s enthronement of individual reason over belief and tradition.¹ The connection is noted, for instance, by Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Taylor describes the imperative of authenticity as an ethical vision “peculiar to modern culture” that incorporates the individualism and the rationalism originated in the work of thinkers like Descartes and Locke,² infused with a particular preoccupation with moral self-determination that stems from the Romantic Movement, and which received its most influential shape in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In contrast with Taylor, however, who believes in the merits and the promise of this modern tendency while recognizing the risks of a radicalized concept of autonomy or authenticity, Neo-Thomistic critics have focused almost singly on the dangers of the modern

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¹ J. B. Schneewind takes issue with an interpretation of this connection that assumes Enlightenment thinkers were generally atheists who had a “project” to “secularize” morality; he points out atheism is not the same as anti-clericalism, the latter being a better term to describe most of these thinkers’ attitude of distrust and criticism toward the traditional authoritative institutions. Schneewind classifies the working of the new conception of autonomy into voluntarist and rationalist currents; in either case, moral rules were to be directly worked out by moral agents themselves, either as God-given commands or as a structure of rational norms. (J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8.)

philosophies of individual freedom, and not primarily for their challenge to the moral authority of religious officials. For most of these critics, the main issue lies rather in the separation of man from the order of nature to which man belongs as a creature of God.

Michael Waldstein, for example, has singled out Francis Bacon and René Descartes as the first modern proponents of the emphasis on the acquisition of power over nature in the service of the project of improvement of “man’s estate,” which carries the consequence of limiting reason to a mechanical or mathematical understanding of nature. For Waldstein, Descartes’ search for power was connected with Descartes’ elevation of free will as the greatest human good, resulting in an anthropological stance that “makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects.” For Waldstein, “this apotheosis of the freedom of choice as the greatest human good seems to anticipate already the core of Kant’s philosophy of freedom and autonomy.”

Kenneth Schmitz, who undertakes a more sophisticated analysis of the different metaphysical structures of scholastic and modern thought, describes the modern view of the world as the result of the substitution of a concept of discrete building elements of reality for the older language of principles of being. While in the latter “diversity of ontological principles [such as the Aristotelian four causes] is a diversity in being,” and “not simply a division made for the convenience of the inquiring human mind,” in the new paradigm, that of natural sciences, only the logic of material causes and quantitative proportions guides the construction of reality

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4 Waldstein, ibid.
from the discrete elements. Schmitz utilizes the concept of an “interiority” of being to signify the pre-mental organization of being through the diverse principles of being. That interiority was expelled from the physical universe by modern philosophy and natural science, and subsequently isolated in the human mind as subjectivity. The freedom or autonomy characteristic of this new view of subjectivity is, consequently, not linked to a prior structure or order of the whole cosmos, but constitutes a world unto itself, and from there it organizes the physical universe through quantitative or formal laws of its own finding.

The new outlook, as these and other Thomistic critics view the situation, implies that within a mechanical universe man is left to his own devices in the search for moral and political order; that order must now come from man himself, it must be constructed by the now isolated consciousness. As Russell Hittinger has put it, speaking of the degradation of Aquinas’ theologically based natural law, in the modern era the method of “resolutive analysis and compositive synthesis” was extended from physical reality into human matters, so that man was subject to material laws of matter and motion (in the case of Thomas Hobbes’s materialist philosophy) or to principles of equity and justice (as in other theories of an individualistic and lawless state of nature). Whatever the case, the guiding principles were now measured against “what is first in the mind [of individual man],” as opposed to having their ultimate reference in what was originally “in the mind of God.”

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6 Ibid., p. 188-9.
8 Ibid., p. 13.
If a summary list of the main philosophical stances included within this new outlook were to be made, it might consist chiefly of the following: metaphysical and moral anti-realism (articulated either as skepticism or some sort of “constructivism”); the absolutization of consciousness as a source of principles; subjectivism; and, last but not least, formalism. A concatenation of these positions, as the Neo-Thomists have formulated it, could be stated as follows. Starting with Descartes, modern philosophy questions the reliance of traditional metaphysics on the power of human sensibility and intellect to know external reality, the reality of beings, and through them the ultimate cause, Being itself. Connected to the doubt regarding the status of the external, objective world is the lack of confidence in the intrinsic order of the universe extending over to man. Man is no longer seen as part of a community of beings, a subject of being within an objective order of beings and thus subjected, in his own particular way, to the laws and goals of being; instead, subjectiveness—the quality of being a subject of being or a suppositum—is equated to consciousness and absolutized as the only sure and fixed point for the construction of moral knowledge.

Consequently, the human subject becomes the central element of the construction of moral reality, or the measure of what ought to be done. The Cartesian cogito is interpreted by the Thomistic thinkers as the beginning of a line of thinking that discards the objective order of external and internal reality to which man is subordinated by virtue of his intellect’s capacity to know the good. Instead, the subject is forced to find on its own—now emptied—interiority, be it in the passions, or interests, the new moral and political norms; the common quality of subjectiveness is radicalized into the principle of subjectivity. The rejection of the hierarchy of goods, or of a universe of beings moving towards the actualization of the particular ends of each
participant and of the common fulfillment of that overarching reality, finally results in a restricted understanding of the norms by which man is to be guided, as limited to general or formal injunctions of scientific or “reasonable” character.

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Although Immanuel Kant was not at the origins of all these developments, his “Copernican revolution” has been considered by some Neo-Thomists the epitome of the modern tendency towards subjectivism, formalism, and the autonomy of the isolated self. As they have attempted to criticize modern philosophy and defend the traditional Catholic understanding of natural reason and its openness to the order of being, important figures in the Thomistic reawakening from the end of the nineteenth century developed and transmitted a reading of Kantian transcendental idealism that was carried over to the Thomistic personalists who wrote about ethics and politics in the second half of the twentieth century. These latter, in turn, stuck to this view of Kantianism as they attempted to unite the Thomistic realistic metaphysics to an understanding of the human being that includes inner experience as an irreplaceable locus of the development and manifestation of personality.

This chapter endeavors to prepare the ground for our interpretation of Kant’s thought by means of a survey of the views about Kantian thought held by representative members of the intellectual current of Neo-Thomism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The survey culminates in a more detailed analysis of the personalist thought of Karol Wojtyła, focusing both on his criticism of Kantian philosophy and his development of a personalist philosophy that somehow went beyond the traditional Thomistic concepts.
A Caveat: the Neo-Thomistic revival’s pluralism

In preparation for the survey of the Neo-Thomistic criticism of Kant’s philosophy, some comments are in order about the relative pluralism that was a feature of the Neo-Thomistic revival of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lest the reader gets the impression of this intellectual movement as a monolithic phenomenon. As Gerard McCool has shown, far from being marked by doctrinal and conceptual unity, Neo-Thomism was a variegated movement constituted by thinkers affiliated with different currents of interpretation of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, including thinkers who attempted to integrate Kantian insights within Thomistic realistic metaphysics.

As McCool puts it, the revival’s goal, as it was encouraged by Pope Leo XIII, was not to take the Catholic Church philosophically back to the Middle Ages, but to “provide nineteenth century Catholics with the philosophical resources needed to integrate science and culture into a coherent whole under the light of their Christian faith.” If post-Cartesian philosophy was not capable of promoting such integration without seriously questioning their basic philosophical and theological tenets, Catholic thinkers were still called to engage these modern philosophies and scientific achievements in their own right and provide responses to the challenges they face.

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9 McCool has written extensively on the development of the diverse currents of interpretations of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, starting with Pope Leo XIII call for a revival of Thomism as the Catholic Church’s authoritative mode of philosophizing. See Gerald McCool, From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989) and The Neo-Thomists (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

10 McCool, Neo-Thomists, p. 7.
posed. That made for diverse ways of establishing the dialogue between the Thomistic tradition and modern philosophy, like the immanence-based philosophy of action proposed by the Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel, or the integration of Kantian critical epistemology and the Thomistic concept of judgment effected by Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Marechal, as well as the traditional Thomism of Ambrose Gardeil and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

As a rule, however, Kantian thought was received negatively, even by the philosophers who attempted to integrate some of Kant’s insights into their Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology. In particular, the point with which even these “Kantian” Catholic philosophers, such as Marechal and Rousselot, found fault was Kant’s rejection of speculative reason’s capacity to directly cognize external reality or noumena, either as “objects of experience” or spiritual substances, including the infinite spiritual reality of God. In one way or another, then, Catholic Thomistic thinkers generally sided against Kant’s idealism, opposing to it their own Thomistic realistic metaphysics and the ethical doctrines inspired by Aquinas’s basic principles.

For our purposes, the critiques made by the traditional or “orthodox” Thomists to Kantian thought will be enough to arrive at a sketch of the general interpretation of Kant in the Thomistic tradition. The goal here is not a full description and analysis in detail of the Thomistic theories that were opposed to Kantian idealist epistemology and ethics, but rather a clear formulation of the essence of these Thomists’ understanding of Kantian thought and its implications, an

11 Connected to this point was the central role assigned to final causes in Thomistic metaphysics and ethics. For Rousselot, what allowed man to know these objects as things in themselves was the very nature of “a mind whose ultimate end was intuitive union with infinite reality, and whose natural propensity was to ‘place its synthesized objects in the real,’” unless awareness of an obvious contradiction prevented it from doing so.” (Ibid., p. 107. See also p. 108 and 116-8.)
understanding that was more or less widely shared. Moreover, the intellectual figure whom we have selected as Kant’s main “dialogue partner” in this work, Karol Wojtyła, was intellectually formed within the traditional Thomistic current, and in his work he displays an interpretation of Kantian theory that is aligned with the traditional Thomists’ view.

In what follows, we present the main elements of the traditional Thomists’ interpretation of Kant’s critical philosophy, an interpretation that emphasizes the Kantian departures from Thomistic realistic metaphysics and teleological ethics. The survey starts with an important Thomistic interpreter from the end of the nineteenth century, and it ends with Karol Wojtyła, who united the Thomistic tradition to phenomenological analysis in his studies of the nature and the dynamics of personal action. We have selected Wojtyła not only because of his centrality and influence in the Church as Pope John Paul II, but also because he represented in an interesting way the Catholic tradition’s attempt to accept and respond to the challenge of modern philosophy. Wojtyła did not simply react to modern subjectivism and formalism in a superficial manner, “circling the wagons,” so to speak, of Thomistic philosophy and theology, but he acknowledged a legitimate modern concern with the inner life of the human subject and employed phenomenological methodology to investigate the inner life of the person.

In order to examine Wojtyła’s attempt to enrich Thomistic philosophy and face the challenges raised by the modern philosophies of consciousness, after our synthesis of the traditional Thomistic interpretation of Kant’s thought we turn to Thomistic personalism itself and its own ventures beyond the traditional Thomistic categories. We start with Wojtyła but also note other Thomistic philosophers who wrote on the sui generis reality of the person. By focusing our attention on Thomistic personalism, we seek to bring to light an openness, even within the
Thomistic philosophical tradition, towards a different perspective on metaphysics and ethics that is usually elicited when closer attention is paid to the special features of the person. We hope to apply a similar outlook, or openness, which we characterize as a “metaphysics of participation” or “existence,” to our analysis of Kant’s philosophy, as something that arises from Kant’s own philosophical project, even if Kant did not fully articulate it in these terms. In this light, Kant’s thought hopefully will become more amenable to a dialogue with the traditional Christian view of man, especially regarding those points of contention that are laid out in the following section.

The traditional Thomistic interpretation of Kant: a survey

Cardinal Désiré Mercier

Désiré Mercier (1851-1926) was the first director of the Higher Institute of Philosophy at Louvain, one of the first institutions founded with the approval of Pope Leo XIII as part of the effort to recover Thomistic philosophy and theology as the basis for the teaching of the doctrine of the Catholic Church. According to Gerald McCool and Georges Van Riet, Mercier’s major works on Thomistic epistemology “defended the certitude of the intellect’s universal and necessary judgments against the positivism of the day and what he took to be the subjectivism of Kant.”

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12 Ibid., p. 41.
Mercier focused his criticism of Kant on the separation of practical from theoretical reason, and the primacy of the former in Kant’s general philosophical architecture. The dislocation of moral and religious beliefs to the sphere of practical reason meant, for Mercier, that belief in God became a subjective attitude, not “enforceable” from outside reality, but merely dependent upon personal assent. Drawing from Kant’s Logik, in which Kant uses the language of *subjective feeling* as the foundation for moral certainty, Mercier contrasted this personal moral belief with scientific, reflected knowledge, and thus equated the primacy of practical reason to “the primacy of instinct over reflection.”\(^\text{13}\) In his view, the Kantian “moral interest” was not a reflected interest, based on reason, but one based on the dread of meaninglessness:

> I know, Kant says to us, that it is in our interest to believe in God and in a future life. That man, even if he wanted to, could not defend himself against the dread that there is no life after this one, no supreme judge…. But Kant does not remark that it is this interest itself that is in question. It is about this very knowledge whether this irreflexive feeling of a moral destiny is to prevail over the enlightened decisions of the theoretical reason.\(^\text{14}\)

Mercier did not accept, then, but denied the primacy of practical reason as affirmed by Kant, claiming that “from the moment where moral certainty is submitted to a reflexive control, it becomes the object of speculation and science, and it therefore falls under the application of the *Critique of Pure Reason.*”\(^\text{15}\) Practical reason remained, for him, “nothing but speculative reason itself applied to judgments, which must preside over the guidance of our life.”\(^\text{16}\) In this way, Mercier purported to reject the bases of Kantian morality by means of the affirmation of the

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 148.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 150.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
primacy of theoretical reason and its concepts of sufficient reason, causality, etc. In a speech given at Antwerp in 1908, Mercier would maintain that any feeling worthy of respect from an “enlightened consciousness” would have to model itself on norms conceived by the intellect or by speculative reason, and consequently “the divorce, operant through Kant, between theoretical order and moral order is unacceptable.”

As this brief review shows, Mercier’s reading of Kant was not fully accurate, and his summary rejection of the primacy of practical reason did not really appreciate the distinctions and limits placed by Kant between theoretical and practical reason. Indeed, David Boileau, the editor of the volume of Mercier’s selected works, states in his commentary on Mercier’s thought that Mercier’s specific criticisms were wrong-headed and pointed towards the wrong targets in Kantian philosophy. Nevertheless, Boileau vindicates Mercier’s description of Kant as a practical “dogmatist,” i.e., a thinker whose practical postulates are not critically thought through, by virtue of what Boileau identifies as Kant’s humanism “in the worst sense of the word.” For Boileau, Kant’s principle of the primacy of reason in its practical use is simply an uncritical acceptance of the modern philosophical project that claims that the proper and highest end of philosophy is not contemplation—as Classic and Christian philosophy have maintained—but power and mastery over nature. Thus, for Boileau,

In Kant’s view, science, as directed to the mastery of nature, and religion, as subordinate to morality, are both merely in the service of the one ultimate human end and comprehensive teleological principle of moral freedom and its political realization.

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17 Ibid., p. 584.
18 David A. Boileau, “A Study in Neo-Thomism,” in Mercier, Philosophical Essays, p. 664.
The primacy of practical reason means, in this view, the raising of freedom as the highest value to be promoted by science and politics, with the consequent dethronement of theoretical reason’s search for the ultimate good.

We shall see that the general tenor of Mercier’s criticisms, which according to George Van Riet\(^\text{19}\) tended to follow other nineteenth century Catholic interpreters, giving theoretical reason pride of place in moral reflections, was shared by the other Catholic thinkers we will examine below. This is the case of the next thinker to be examined, who was a champion of traditional Catholic theology and philosophy against the modernist tendencies both within and outside the Catholic Church.

Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange

Known as a “strict-observance” or traditionalist Thomist for his refusal to mix the Thomistic tradition to modern philosophical methods and ideas, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange was Karol Wojtyła’s professor at the Angelicum, the traditional Dominican center of higher learning in Rome.

Writing from the position of a theologian defending Church doctrine against modern philosophical errors, Garrigou-Lagrange took as his starting points authoritative papal and conciliar pronouncements, such as the Encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) and the doctrinal affirmations of the I Vatican Council. In his work on *God, His Existence and His Nature*, for example, his point of departure is the papal teaching on the sure and demonstrable

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knowledge of God and His attributes through natural reason, as a preparation for revealed faith.

Regarding this issue, Kant in particular is condemned for maintaining that

the speculative proofs for the existence of God are not convincing, that metaphysics is an impossibility, and that there are no other proofs for the existence of God except those of the practical or moral order, productive of moral faith, which is sufficiently certain, subjectively considered, but objectively considered, is insufficient.20

In order to answer the Kantian challenge, Garrigou-Lagrange analyzes in detail the idealist objections against the “demonstrability of the existence of God.” In his view, at the heart of these objections is the rejection of the ontological proofs of God’s existence, especially regarding the proof from the principle of causality. In his antinomies of reason, not being able to affirm a first cause in the phenomenal sense, Kant had restricted that concept to the noumenal sphere, as a regulative principle, an object of “rational belief.” Garrigou-Lagrange maintains that, by doing so, Kant “does not deny, as the Empirics do, the necessity of the principle of causality; but he does dispute its ontological and transcendental validity.”21

In this sense, Garrigou-Lagrange interprets Kant’s idealism as a doctrine of the knowledge of mere ideas, as opposed to a doctrine of beings known through ideas and concepts. Even if Kant affirms the necessity and universality of the first principles of reason, he sacrifices the very reality of these principles as “laws of being.”22 In this way, Kant’s philosophy remains a

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21 Ibid., p. 103.
“subjectivist conceptualism” and “does violence to the fundamental affirmation of the common sense, or natural intelligence, [making nonsense] of all the elements of knowledge.”

As regards the question of free will, the Belgian Dominican agrees with the “philosophy of liberty” about the will’s capacity to be, “at least in the order of secondary causes the source of action.”

But having affirmed that Being is prior to Good by virtue of the latter’s higher complexity—the Good is “Being inasmuch as it is desirable.... It is the good that presupposes being, and this latter is the first of notions”—he is unable to accept will or practical reason as the primary source of the moral law. In contrast with Kant, who excluded freedom from the realm of causality in which the law of sufficient reason gave rise to determinism, Garrigou-Lagrange finds, with Aquinas, a space for freedom between the universal or perfect good (before which the will is not free but fully determined) and the non-universal good of non-perfect beings, in which good is mingled with non-good, just as act is not pure, but always mixed with potency:

If there can be a reason for acting, which of itself does not actually and necessarily determine the action, this is because there can be, apart from nothingness, undetermined being, which of itself is not actual being.

Elsewhere, Garrigou-Lagrange claims that a philosophy based on a freedom-centered concept of becoming, like that of Bergson’s, ultimately makes nonsense of the principle of non-contradiction, without which organized and coherent thought about reality is simply not possible. Garrigou-Lagrange maintains that “becoming” itself can only be explained on the basis of a stable concept of being, through recourse to the Aristotelian categories of potency and actuality.

23 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 328.
As McCool states, “the starting point of [Garrigou-Lagrange’s] philosophy was the mind’s immediate grasp of being and of the first principles which flowed directly from its abstract concept.”\(^{27}\) The grasp of being, in its turn, can only come from the mind’s “prior knowledge of a sensible singular.”\(^{28}\) Garrigou-Lagrange was, in sum, a realistic metaphysician who followed the Aristotelian order of the sciences, in which epistemology was a part of metaphysics and subordinated to the prior study of “sensation, intellection, and the immateriality of knowledge….”\(^{29}\) He could not accept what he saw as Kant’s attempt to “save” universality and necessity by isolating them from phenomenal being, or “appearances,” nor Kant’s dislocation of freedom to the sphere of practical reason. And his focus on “being” as a true object of knowledge, as opposed to idealism’s subjectivism, would be found in other thinkers’ criticisms of Kant, such as his contemporary Jacques Maritain.

Jacques Maritain

Maritain arguably was the greatest lay Catholic philosopher of the twentieth century, in view not only of the volume and depth of his work, but also of the cultural, intellectual, and political influence he exerted in Europe and in the Americas. Coming from a Bergsonian philosophical background, his deep conversion to the Catholic faith and the attendant conformity to the Church’s official condemnation of modernist philosophies around the end of the nineteenth century would have made him abandon philosophy, had it not been for his discovery

\(^{27}\) McCool, *Neo-Thomists*, p. 68.  
\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 69.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 70.
of St. Thomas Aquinas. After being introduced to the Angelic Doctor’s philosophy, he reformulated his philosophical convictions and went on to become “in many respects… [Neo-thomism’s] best known representative.” He aligned himself within the “traditionalist” current of the Neo-Thomistic revival and adopted some of the views defended by Garrigou-Lagrange, although Maritain eventually came to reassess part of what he had received from the latter. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of his Thomistic philosophy Maritain fought and condemned the formalism and immanentism of modern philosophies, like Garrigou-Lagrange had done before him.

Kant’s centrality to modern philosophy made his transcendental idealism a natural target of Maritain’s criticism in various aspects. Particularly as regards ethics, Kantian morality was the object of scathing criticism in Maritain’s treatise on Moral Philosophy. In that work, Maritain characterizes Kant’s moral philosophy as an a-cosmic philosophical construction, “constituted purely on the basis of the interior data of the conscience, while severing itself from the world of objects…” For Maritain, although Kant had the merit of seeing in some traditional or popular moralities the supremacy of self-interest hiding behind eudaimonism, his concept of the disinterestedness of the moral act excessively withdrew morality from the order of finality. Maritain thus interprets Kantian morality as a whole in the light of its affirmation that any

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30 Ibid., p. 79.
31 Ibid., p. 77.
32 One important point Maritain came to reconsider regarded the prominence of essence as the main aspect of being, in favor of the priority of existence as the source of the intelligibility of being, the latter understanding being closer to the original position of Aquinas. (Ibid., p. 80-1.)
34 Ibid., p. 98.
admixture of desire for happiness in the motivation for acts irremediably taints the morality of the act. According to this particular interpretation of the Kantian principle of pure duty, the only sentiment allowed in moral life would be that of the respect for the moral law. For that reason, what Maritain calls “the subjective ultimate end” of man, which in Christian ethics consists of the “superfulfillment of the being and the desires of the human subject through the vision of God, and the joy which derives from it as an inherent property,” has no part at all to play in morality proper.

Maritain correspondingly understands Kant’s postulates of practical reason as mere “after the fact” additions, and he considers the related Kantian “end of reason” (“the final harmony between the law of the world of freedom… and the law of the world of nature”) an element that is “not only exterior to the realm proper of morality, which is entirely constituted and fulfilled without any reference to it, but… a ‘recompense’, in the most anthropomorphic and extrinsic sense, a reconciliation offered in reward for good conduct.” Kant is, in Maritain’s view, responsible for perverting the meaning of the concept of “postulate,” which, instead of an indemonstrable assertion on whose support a certain philosophical system can be built, becomes an unprovable claim that is merely necessary to harmonize speculative and practical reason, but only after the whole philosophical structure has been secured.

35 This is an interpretation of Kant’s moral theory that goes back to Friedrich Schiller’s satirical treatment of a Kantian friendship in which the friends had better try to despise each other so as to acquire the proper moral disposition. It has been challenged by Kantian scholars, such as Allen Wood (Kant’s Ethical Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 28-30), and involves a misinterpretation of Kant’s intentions in the layout of the pure principle of morality in the Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals. We deal with this issue in Chapter 2.

36 Ibid., p. 100.

37 Ibid.
Accordingly, Maritain considers the existence of God in Kantian philosophy as no longer the first principle of being and the objective ultimate end of creation and man, but a kind of postulate of which it can be said that

it is only after the fact and outside the proper structure of ethics, once the universe of ethics has already been entirely constituted in and for itself, that this universe requires us to believe in the unknowable objects thus postulated…, object which owe the universe of ethics the existence we attribute to them.\(^{38}\)

A divine existence of this kind is clearly not appropriate for Maritain, for in that case God becomes an “appendix” to, rather than the foundation of, morality. For that reason, but without going into any further detailed demonstration, Maritain calls Kant’s theory logically inconsistent and “worth no more… than the common idea of religion as a ‘comforting illusion’ answering our needs.”\(^{39}\)

The Kantian notion of autonomy is also centrally marked, for Maritain, by the disinterestedness of the moral act as regards final ends and the separation of the moral subject from any motivating love of that which was the objective ultimate end of man, which in Christian philosophy is the source of true autonomy. Indeed, in the Christian view the “heteronomy” (as Kant would define it) of following God’s will out of love is not a kind of servitude, “for this law established by another is the law of our own nature—it requires us to act as men, or according to what we are essentially—and it corresponds to our will’s radical desire for the good.”\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 102.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 105.
For Kant, however, “reverence for the law has taken the place of the love for God, just as the unlimited goodness of the will, existing within the moral agent, has taken the place of the infinite goodness of the absolute ultimate End, which exists outside him and above him.” Kant has, then, removed God from the center of ethics and placed him in its periphery, as an afterthought.

Finally, Maritain interprets the whole of Kantian morality as based exclusively on the form of universal law, so that

the intrinsic moral goodness of the object of our actions, the good and the evil inherent in the things we do, in the reality that we produce in the world, which itself possesses a certain moral quality in virtue of what it is, irrespective of the logical possibility or impossibility of universalizing or willing to universalize our maxims of conduct, has been entirely excluded and eliminated from the structure of ethics.

As a result, the good intrinsic to the objects of moral action is of secondary or derived importance, and the process of interiorization of the moral law, involving prudence and emotional assent, is left out of the domain of ethics proper.

In the final analysis, Maritain judges Kantian ethics to involve an appropriation and radicalization of a part of Christian ethics that emphasizes the love of God before the love of self and the importance of a pure heart, but in a way that leaves behind its foundation in God’s being, as well as in the nature of man as rooted in the act of creation by a loving God. Seen in the light of a problematic that is, in essence, theological, the God of being is replaced by Pure Reason that fails to see the absolute:

Kant wished to save all these elements derived from Christianity and to exalt them in an essentially rationalist ethics in which Pure Reason—but a reason which can know nothing

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41 Ibid., p. 104.
42 Ibid., p. 110.
of the absolute—takes the place of the God of Moses, in its capacity as Pure Practical Reason and on the condition of imposing an absolute commandment empty of all content.\textsuperscript{43}

To sum up, in Maritain’s interpretation of Kant’s ethics, the emphasis on the form of universal law means the full exclusion of all non-formal contents from ethical experience (starting with God): either a world of beings exists and its hierarchy determined morality, or it does not exist in any meaningful sense for the construction of an ethical system.\textsuperscript{44} This same kind of interpretation, along with the other elements analyzed above, is found in Karol Wojtyła’s ethical works, as we proceed to show.

Karol Wojtyła

Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005), who came to be universally known as Pope John Paul II, shared deeply in the Catholic Church’s endeavor to enter into a more profound, but still critical, dialogue with modernity during the twentieth century. Having suffered under ideologically motivated attacks against freedom and the dignity of the person in his Polish homeland, he went on to become an active participant and leader in the development of the Magisterium of the Church, as a council father in Vatican II and later as head of the universal Roman Catholic Church. But one of his more significant contributions to Catholic thought was given in philosophical form, as a development of Thomistic personalism.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 113.
\textsuperscript{44} Additionally, Maritain’s account reveals how, starting from the Thomistic conception of a real and objective difference between God and man as two separate beings, he continues to look at God and man, when analyzing the Kantian realm of practical reason, as two discrete units, exterior to themselves, between which there can only be relationships of heteronomy or autonomy, this latter meaning a radical independence. This view is not tenable, however, if Kantian morality is understood in the light of a metaphysics of participation, as we shall attempt to do in the next chapters.
Briefly put, Wojtyła’s personalism was a synthesis of the older tradition of Thomistic metaphysical thought and the developments of contemporary philosophy that have been alluded to above as the philosophies of consciousness. In this sense, Wojtyła went well beyond Garrigou-Lagrange, his teacher at the Angelicum. In particular, Wojtyła was a student of Max Scheler’s phenomenology (which was the theme of his second dissertation, or habilitation thesis) and remained in contact with prominent philosophers of the phenomenologist school, such as his compatriot Roman Ingarden. Wojtyła was deeply impressed by the techniques and the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology; he was especially influenced by its insights into the inner constitution of human experience.\(^45\)

Wojtyła’s engagement with modern philosophy mirrored in a certain way the Catholic Church’s own cautious embrace of the modern world, historically embodied in Vatican II. On the one hand, he shared in the Church’s intent to protect and transmit to the modern world the traditional Catholic doctrines, the deposit of faith and its implications for other fields of human activity, a mission to which Thomistic philosophy had been enlisted by Leo XIII in his encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* (1879). On the other hand, he was deeply aware of the indispensability of including the inner experience of the person in a full account of the human being, for that inner life was one of the main targets of the materialist and collectivist philosophies and ideologies that attempted to subsume man within a class, or ethnic group, or national collective.

 Nevertheless, even in the work in which Wojtyła developed his phenomenological side to the greatest extent in order to account for the subjectivity of the person in action, *The Acting Person*, he did not fully incorporate the phenomenological attitude’s indetermination as regards

\(^{45}\) We shall analyze particular features of Wojtyła’s personalism in a later section of this chapter.
the knowing subject or the characterization of the subject, the human being, as a person. As Rocco Buttiglione has argued, phenomenology was insufficient to provide validation for one of Wojtyła’s central concerns:

If one starts from phenomenology, it is impossible ontologically to found the person. But the data of the phenomenological description make it possible to find the ontological consistency of the person and to show how these data can be integrated into a whole.  

In that sense, Wojtyła remains rooted in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of his theological and philosophical Roman formation with Garrigou-Lagrange. Following Garrigou-Lagrange, he called Thomism a “philosophy of being,” as opposed to the “philosophy of consciousness” characteristic of the modern and contemporary ages. Accordingly, Wojtyła would also single out Kant as one of the seminal philosophers of consciousness and focus on the shortcomings of Kant’s thought from the standpoint of Thomistic realistic metaphysics.

An examination of Wojtyła’s philosophical development, as witnessed by articles and papers published during his academic career, reveals that he brings the criticisms made in the Thomistic tradition to Kantian philosophy mainly under the heading of “formalism,” in a way that is parallel to Scheler’s main indictment of Kantian ethics in Scheler’s work on the non-formalistic ethics of values (materielle Wertethik).  

Here, it will be useful to take a small detour and briefly examine a few of Scheler’s ideas, especially the ones that bear on Kant’s ethical and metaphysical thought, in order to better

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understand Wojtyła’s criticism of Kant. It is widely known and noted that Max Scheler writes his *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values* as a criticism of Kant’s ethical system, chiefly of its formalist presuppositions. But it is not usually remarked that, although Scheler disagrees with the claims to universality, anti-hedonism, and autonomy achieved by Kant’s ethical system, Scheler is effusive in his appreciation of Kantian ethics as possessing outstanding and unrivaled “greatness, strength, and terseness.”⁴⁸ Kant has, for Scheler, the merit of irreversibly refuting “all ethics starting with the question, what is the highest good, or what is the final purpose of all volitional conations?”⁴⁹

Indeed, instead of returning to a teleology-based ethics, Scheler intends to show that there can be an a priori ethics of non-formal (*materielle*) values, one that is not limited to duty as the form of universal law but that starts from essential values of the person. Scheler’s criticism of Kant is based upon his assessment of Kant’s main presuppositions; according to this assessment, Kant overlooked a whole area of human phenomenological experience corresponding to non-formal or material values, an area that lies between the sphere of objective ends or goods and the more abstract sphere of pure duty. Thus Scheler will agree with Kant that “no philosophical theory of values (be it in ethics, aesthetics, etc.) may presuppose goods, much less things;”⁵⁰ but he will part ways with Kant when he avers that it is possible to find “a non-formal series of values, with its order, which is totally independent of the world of goods and its changing forms, and which is a priori to such a world of goods.”⁵¹ Kant is mistaken, for Scheler, in regarding

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⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 5.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23.
⁵¹ Ibid.
non-formal values as necessarily connected with possible experience, and in defining pure moral values as exclusively grounded on formal lawfulness.

Furthermore, in a much more frontal attack against Kant’s fundamental presuppositions from the point of view of “phenomenological experience,” Scheler rejects any necessary connection between the a priori and the formal. This indicates that Scheler understands Kant’s epistemology and ethics above all as a formalist system, based on the rejection of sensible, “material” (in the original German sense of materielle) or non-formal, content-based knowledge as an adequate a priori foundation of theoretical and practical reason. Scheler’s concept of the a priori, in its turn, is phenomenological, and comprises “all those ideal units of meaning and those propositions that are self-given by way of an immediate intuitive content….” By defining the a priori as any content immediately and immanently given in intuition, regardless of any consideration of the status of that intuition regarding an external, internal or a hypothetically more fundamental reality (as Kant does), Scheler makes the concept of a priori include both formal and non-formal contents of experience: “The a priori ‘non-formal’ is the essence [Inbegriff] of all propositions that are valid in a more special area of objects, in contrast to other a priori propositions, e.g., those of logic.”

Scheler considers, then, “the identification of the ‘a priori’ with the ‘formal’… a fundamental error of Kant’s doctrine. This error is also at the bottom of Kant’s ethical ‘formalism’, even at the bottom of ‘formal idealism’ as a whole, as Kant calls his doctrine.”

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52 Ibid., p. 49.
53 Ibid., p. 54.
54 Ibid.
Turning back to Wojtyła, it would not be overly rash to note that his Thomistic understanding of Kantian epistemological and ethical formalism—connected, for Mercier and Garrigou-Lagrange, for instance, with a subjectivism bordering on skepticism—may have been reinforced by Scheler’s strong anti-formalist views. Wojtyła retained, however, in contrast with Scheler, the ethics of objects and ends, potency and act, of traditional Thomism. Indeed, Wojtyła strongly criticized Scheler for his incapacity to give the personal subject an objective metaphysical status. Scheler had clearly stated that

> the person must never be considered a thing or a substance with faculties and powers, among which the ‘faculty’ or ‘power’ of reason, etc., is one. The person is, rather, the immediately coexperienced unity of experiencing; the person is not a merely thought thing behind and outside what is immediately experienced.  

As Kenneth Schmitz has remarked, Wojtyła considered this non-objective conception of the person inadequate, due to its attempt to “subordinate the will to feeling, and thereby reveal an inadequate grasp of the decisional character of ethical life.” In this particular Wojtyła sided with Kant’s rationalist view of the concept of moral duty, according to which the will is a faculty of practical reason belonging to one concrete human individual with a decisive role in moral action.

On the central matter of the nature of morality as a feature of personal action, however, Wojtyła found himself in agreement with Scheler’s critique of formalism. Wojtyła’s general judgment of Kant’s moral theory focused on what he saw as Kant’s isolation of moral decisions from human experience. Although Kant was right in investing the will with great centrality for

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55 Ibid., p. 371.
ethical analysis (which Scheler disregarded in favor of feeling), his formalistic ethical reason did not allow for the elucidation of the structure of ethical action. An examination of Wojtyła’s critique of Kant, as it developed over a number of published works, will make his views clearer.⁵⁷

In Wojtyła’s view, Kant accepted the philosophical premises of the thinker whose thought elicited Kant’s search for a different grounding of causality and necessity. In the process of working out the transcendental solution for David Hume’s skeptical criticism of the objectivity of causality and necessity, Kant absorbed the Scottish philosopher’s naturalistic understanding of the attraction of ends and goods as a product of passions, pleasures and instinct:

Hume managed to convince Kant that the search for means to an end is always nothing but a pursuit of pleasure. No other end apart from pleasure can be seen—and so morality also cannot be seen: teleology could only be connected with utilitarian eudaimonism.⁵⁸

Not willing, however, to consider reason the slave of passions, and intent on saving the validity of the concepts of universal necessity and causality, Kant could not allow practical reason to be determined by teleology; for this would be equivalent to subordinating practical reason to the force of the pleasures or instincts that lie at the bottom of every attraction towards an end. In the search for a concept of reason and morality that is independent of the force of base instincts, Kant would adopt a “defensive” attitude for reason before the world of feelings and “nature,” isolating it in consciousness by means of a formalistic construction of moral laws.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Some of these articles and essays have been edited in a volume titled Person and Community. Selected Essays, trans. by Theresa Sandok, Catholic Thought from Lublin, Vol. 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). Due to their independent standing in Wojtyła’s work, they are quoted separately, by essay title.
⁵⁸ Karol Wojtyła, “The Role of Reason in Ethics,” in Person and Community, p. 70.
⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 70.
Here, then, is the center of Wojtyła’s criticism of Kant’s practical reason: the accusation that formalism isolates reason from the substantial being of man, in relation to which alone ethics can be formulated, because ethics is about “directing those spheres of our activity with which we are constantly involved externally and internally....”\(^6^0\) Instead, for Wojtyła Kant understands reason as autonomous, isolated consciousness, not as the property of a being (or as a subject that is an object, in Schmitz’s formulation). This kind of formalism is a consequence of the concentration of philosophy on an isolated concept of consciousness. Separated from being, reason becomes pure consciousness and loses touch with the being of goods in any meaningful sense. Kantian autonomy, for Wojtyła, means isolation of morality, the realm of practical reason, from the being of the human being and its natural ends, which makes a true human ethics impossible:

This is how Kant understood consciousness, and this is also how Scheler—despite all his differences from Kant—understood it. Such a consciousness can only be a subject of values as intentional contents, but it cannot be a subject of values as qualities that really perfect the being.\(^6^1\)

Ethics, for Wojtyła, and in the Thomistic tradition, can only be understood as the examination of moral acts of a specific being, with a specific nature and ends. But Kantian formalism, understood as the exclusivity of duty for the sake of duty as a criterion for the good will, precluded the consideration of that nature and ends:

if the will is to achieve a genuinely ethical act, it must realize the form of the moral law, and not its matter. As long as the will realizes only the matter of the law, it is turned toward goods.... Only when the will turns entirely and exclusively toward the form of the

\(^6^0\) Ibid.

\(^6^1\) Karol Wojtyła, “In Search of the Basis of Perfectionism in Ethics,” in Person and Community, p. 54.
law, when the law as such becomes its motives as well as its object, when the law is fulfilled because it is the law—only then does the will act morally.\(^{62}\)

This is an interpretation of Kant’s moral philosophy that, like Maritain’s, understands the separation between the form of the law and its object as radical and defining, such that any “contamination” of the intentions of the act with goods and ends neutralizes the morality of the act. As Schmitz has put it, commenting on a compilation of Wojtyła’s *Lublin Lectures*:

> What is lost in both philosophies [Kant’s and Scheler’s] is the unity and integrity of the moral act…. With Kant the formal element in its purity is so stressed that the material content is excluded, and… the unity of the ethical act is lost….

> Kant’s pure duty… cannot perfect or complete the whole person…, since it eliminates the empirical factors from the ethical domain.\(^{63}\)

Buttiglione spells out this view’s implications as regards the capacity of Kant’s moral philosophy to understand and explicate moral action:

> Because every concrete human act is always turned toward a particular good, it is doubtful whether the conception of an ethical act can have an empirical example—that is, if we can still speak about an ethical action within Kant’s system.\(^{64}\)

To sum up, for Wojtyła, Kantian ethics divorced reason from passions and from nature for the sake of moral autonomy; this implied the reduction of all ends, or goods of the human being, to the status of pleasures, and thus obliterated the Aristotelian-Thomistic distinction between *bonum honestum* (the good in itself) and *bonum delectabile* (the useful or agreeable good) and dismissed the hierarchy of ends as a legitimate structure for orienting moral choice. Kantian autonomy, for any human purposes, would seem to be empty of content, the autonomy


\(^{63}\) Schmitz, *Human Drama*, p. 48.

\(^{64}\) Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, p. 66.
of an isolated consciousness that cannot find its way back to being, leaving the will in an impossible situation.

**The Thomistic view of ethics and the relationship between will and reason**

In contrast, in Thomistic ethics the directive role of reason implies a confidence in the intellect’s capacity to abstract from cognized reality the principles of being and its structure of ends. The will, in its turn, is naturally subject to reason by virtue of its being a “rational appetite,” a hybrid faculty that is able to incline itself towards the being that has been intellectually cognized. Thus, it is this capacity of the will to be ordered by reason that allows the rational hierarchy of being, objectively cognized by the human intellect, to acquire a power of attraction for the human being’s erotic or appetitive structures. Being establishes its priority over duty through the mediation of abstractive reason and the latter’s affinity with the faculty of the will (as well as the will’s affinity with reason). As Schmitz formulates it,

> any analysis of the whole ethical fact that begins in experience must acknowledge the relationship of theoretical and practical knowledge to moral action…. Metaphysics, then, is not simply complementary to ethical analysis; neither is it merely supportive of that analysis. Metaphysics is necessary and intrinsic to ethical analysis, if we are to give an adequate account of ethical experience and ethical life.\(^{65}\)

The views of this set of Thomistic thinkers that spans from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century display a fairly coherent and stable interpretation of Kantian epistemology and ethics that can be observed in other Catholic thinkers who share in the

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\(^{65}\) Schmitz, *Human Drama*, p. 56-7.
same intellectual tradition. The main indictments of Kant’s philosophy from the Thomistic standpoint may be synthesized in the following four points:

1 – Kant’s critical philosophy abolishes the stability and validity of the metaphysics of being, with the consequence that it uproots the will from the hierarchy of goods that guides it, according to Thomistic anthropology, through the mediation of the intellect.

2 – For Kant, the ultimate sources of morality, God (as creator and ultimate end of man), man’s place in the hierarchy of goods, and a freedom anchored to the nature of man as created to achieve the highest good, are transformed into weak mere postulates of a morality that is built according to its own closed and abstract logic.

3 – Autonomy is the property of an isolated consciousness, no longer capable of knowing being and the good, and thus forced to create its own order from a formalistic concept of universal law that is fatally empty of content and bereft of connections with the real nature of man.

4 – As a result, in the political sphere, the most destructive and unnatural systems of law can be founded upon arbitrary, individualist, or scientist premises.

The personalist view

Emancipation of the will—defined as practical reason—from the intellect; the relegation of the ultimate realities of human existence to a secondary role by practical reason; and a resulting formalist, procedural concept of autonomy that is untethered from a true anthropology:
understood as such, these are the main pillars of Kant’s ethical thought that are criticized and condemned by the Thomistic philosophers who were called forth since the nineteenth century to defend the traditional Christian understanding of man and human order.

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The beginning of the twentieth century, however, witnessed a development in Christian thought that somewhat complicates the black and white distinction between the traditional Thomism and modern idealisms, namely, the advent of Christian personalism. Personalism, as a historically located set of (sometimes very distinct) philosophical doctrines, did not start out strictly Christian, but has its roots in the context of German idealist philosophy. Thomas D. Williams and Jan O. Bengtsson describe the beginning of a self-denominated personalist philosophy as a “broad critical reaction against what can be called the various impersonalistic philosophies which came to dominate the Enlightenment and Romanticism in the form of rationalistic and romantic forms of pantheism and idealism, from Spinoza to Hegel.” 66 Williams and Bengtsson include F. H. Jacobi and F. W. J. Schelling among personalism’s chief pioneers, in their denial of what they considered pantheist and impersonalistic excesses of some German idealist thinkers. The variety of types of personalist philosophies and their usual starting point in practical or moral considerations about the unique status of the person (as opposed to a fixed and basic theoretical account from which to build a coherent philosophy) makes it difficult to locate one particular distinctive feature of a personalist philosophy, let alone one single “founder” of personalism. But as Williams and Bengtsson

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helpfully put it, in general a philosophy can be called personalist if it “focuses on the reality of persons and their unique status among beings in general,” so that “the human person should be the ontological and epistemological starting point of philosophical reflection.” For most kinds of personalist philosophy, the person is an irreducible, *sui generis* entity with its own dynamism and inner logic, from which comes the person’s special dignity and the protection of this status from other systems that would use persons as mere means to other ends (such as a collectivist organization of society, or the profit of other individuals).

In France, in the first half of the twentieth century, Personalism was taken up and developed by Catholic thinkers who tried to incorporate the Christian view of the person as a spiritual reality and *imago Dei* into the criticism of collectivist and liberal materialistic philosophies. Among these, Emmanuel Mounier developed a communitarian and spiritual idea of a “personalist revolution” that would create a sociopolitical and economical “Third Way” between capitalism and communism, and Jacques Maritain examined the reality of the person as a “spiritual whole” superposed over the individual material existence of human beings, calling them to their unique and irreplaceable role in communion other persons and a privileged personal relationship with God. In Germany, Personalism was adopted by followers of the phenomenological school, among which chiefly Max Scheler and (the Polish phenomenologist) Roman Ingarden. These two authors greatly influenced the intellectual development of the Polish priest, philosopher, and university professor Karol Wojtyła, who was also exposed to French

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67 Ibid.
Personalism during his studies in Rome and through the review edited by Mounier, *Esprit*, and its Polish counterpart, *Znak.*

Wojtyła wrote extensively on the special nature and status of the person, not only in philosophical format but also in his theological works, as well as his plays and poems. As John McNerney has noted, even his artistic creations bore the mark of his phenomenological concerns, as they invited their reader or audience to “pause,” “rest the eyes,” and experience wonder before the multifarious mystery of the person. But, as mentioned above, *The Acting Person* was Wojtyła’s greatest effort at developing a phenomenological description of the unique experience of the person. Wojtyla’s reflections in that book, which take the shape of thick phenomenological descriptions of the inner life of the individual human being who acts in the world along with other individuals, are an elaboration of the insight that action—especially of a free, moral character—best reveals the essence of the person. At the same time, this essence corresponds to a fixed ontological entity with proper location within the hierarchy of being that the human intellect can know by means of its sensible and rational faculties. In this sense, the Thomistic critical interpretation of the philosophies of consciousness and specifically of Kant’s idealism continues to underlie Karol Wojtyła’s personalist philosophy, even though he needs to go beyond strictly Thomistic metaphysics in order to elucidate the special being of the person through action.

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Nevertheless, at this point an interesting situation arises. While Wojtyła attempts to remain within the horizon of Aquinas’ affirmation of reason’s capacity to know the objective truth about the world created by God, in opposition to what he sees as the subjectivism and formalism of the philosophies of consciousness, Wojtyla is aware that the dynamism of the person requires more than talk of essences and substance, because moral realities such as freedom and responsibility can only be understood from within the consciousness in which they take place, in the context of action. Throughout his personalist writings, then, Wojtyła strives to strike a balance between the affirmation of the ontological reality of the human suppositum, the created being from which action arises, and the necessity to emphasize action and subjectivity as the keys to the disclosure of the special being of the person. In this endeavor, Wojtyła is forced to execute veritable intellectual tight-rope walks, in which he goes into deep phenomenological investigations of consciousness, freedom, and the creation of moral being, while maintaining sharp critiques of idealism or the philosophies of consciousness in general.

It can be argued (as Schmitz does) that Wojtyła is convinced that the human person is not sufficiently accounted for “from the outside,” as a metaphysically discrete individual being. What takes place in the interior life, referred to as the experience of man, including the experience of the ego and the experience of others as other egos, is crucial to the explanation of “what” the person really is. As Wojtyla puts it, “action as the moment of the special apprehension of the person always manifests itself through consciousness—as does the person, whose essence the action discloses in a specific manner on the ground of the experience of man,
particularly the inner experience.” Nevertheless, Thomistic realistic metaphysics is not abandoned in *The Acting Person*; if anything, its role as a safeguard against the excesses of idealism and the philosophies of consciousness is given even more emphasis. There is always the risk, it seems, that the experiential analysis will swerve from the ground of ontological certainty, losing itself in an ungrounded and self-referenced consciousness. Be that as it may, it is somewhat ironic that the “risk” be often present precisely because of Wojtyła’s sensitivity to the existential mode in which the person is revealed through action. For, at times, during Wojtyła’s analysis it is not easy to see how Thomistic intellectualist objectivism remains indispensable for the understanding of the dynamic reality of the person in action.

The reason for this lies in the fact that a deeper reflection about the reality of the person dislocates philosophical thought from the realm of stable and easily objectifiable essences and natures. As David Walsh formulates it,

> neither human beings nor nature simply exist as entities without any questions about themselves. We exist as questioners because our very being is in question…. Human being... is defined by questioning that is itself a mode of being, never by a nature that has closed the process through an answer.\(^\text{72}\)

Thus, we find that looking at how Thomistic thinkers are challenged by the reality of the person and try to respond to it in ways that leave behind at least some of the traditional Thomistic concepts opens up an alternative avenue for the interpretation of Kant’s thought. As the Thomistic thinkers themselves are forced to leave the realm of stable essences and substances in order to understand what can only be comprehended from the perspective of existence, so can

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Kant be interpreted in a way that does not necessarily negate metaphysics and a hierarchy of ends, but sees these realities from a different perspective. We analyze next the ways in which attention to the sui generis reality of the person elicits this different perspective in Karol Wojtyła’s personalism and in two other examples of Thomistic analyses of the person, by Romano Guardini e W. Norris Clarke, S.J.\(^73\)

**The dilemmas of The Acting Person**

The first six chapters of *The Acting Person* contain the main thrust of the book’s argument, inasmuch as they establish the anthropological dynamics on which personal action depends, as the enactment of self-consciousness, self-determination, and morality. Although they comprise an investigation of the inner experience of personal action, their thematic sequence runs parallel to a traditional metaphysical buildup of the understanding of the human *suppositum* and its moral context. The phenomenological investigation of consciousness corresponds to the metaphysical foundation in *being*; the elucidation of the unique dynamic of the human person as efficacious and self-determined corresponds to the metaphysical definition of human rational nature; and the exploration of freedom and free will as experientially connected to an order of axiological truth, or values, corresponds to the metaphysical explication of the will as a rational

\(^73\) The following section is largely based on a paper delivered at the Eric Voegelin Society meeting at the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting of 2011: Gustavo Santos, “Karol Wojtyla’s personalism and Kantian idealism: parallel avenues of reason within the tension towards the ground of existence,” paper presented at the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting, Seattle, 2001. URL: <http://www.lsu.edu/artsci/groups/voegelin/society/2011%20Papers/Gustavo%20Santos.pdf>
appetite that, guided by the intellect, is oriented by a hierarchy of human ends or goods. The following analysis focuses on each of these three levels.

Consciousness as the space where the person is constituted

The study takes up first the experience of consciousness as the fundamental “space” where the person is constituted both as a subject and an object of actions.\textsuperscript{74} Consciousness, defined as the background and necessary condition for any human action, situated before, during, and after action, is initially described by means of the metaphor of a mirror: in it is contained, and reflected to the ego, all that is processed by man’s cognitive faculties. By so doing, consciousness interiorizes the contents of cognition.\textsuperscript{75} Objective knowledge of the ego, in particular, is a fundamental content reflected back to the same ego in consciousness. Thus, “owing to self-knowledge the acting subject’s ego is cognitively grasped as an object,”\textsuperscript{76} giving rise—as it is mirrored—to self-consciousness. This reflective capacity is what empowers consciousness “to form man’s experience and thus to allow him to experience in a special way his own subjectiveness.”\textsuperscript{77}

It should be noted that, in an important sense, Wojtyła treats consciousness as a passive or secondary faculty, devoid of the power of “cognitive objectification;” it merely receives its

\textsuperscript{74} McNerney has pointed out that the metaphor of “space” is used by Wojtyła in many of his works, including his poetic creations, as representative of the “search to arrive at the interior ‘what’ of things and the ‘whatness’ of the human person,” and indicates the need to avoid “any reductive ‘extrinsicism’” when it is a matter of the person. (McNerney, “Triptych Reflections,” p. 68.) This is coherent with Wojtyła’s intention to examine the phenomenon of consciousness “from the inside.”

\textsuperscript{75} Wojtyła, \textit{Acting Person}, p. 34-5.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 36.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 42.
“input” from man’s cognitive potentiality, or his active understanding, which in its turn is taken for granted by the author, since “conformably with the whole Western philosophical tradition [it] appears as a fundamental property of the human person.” But by assuming the cognitive capacity as given, not only does Wojtyła avoid facing the critical observations made and questions posed by the idealist tradition against which he sets himself, but he also overlooks the complexity of the very act of cognition, in which consciousness may have a central role.

In the case of self-knowledge, for instance, the intellect may not have directly available for its cognition the inner actions and processes of the self, first needing a “canvas” on which these actions are impressed or represented, or some “inner sensory” structure, from which conceptual understanding can interpret and objectify what is first represented as a whole. But while the objectification by self-knowledge of the contents of consciousness is included in Wojtyła’s account of man’s “awareness of being conscious and acting consciously,” the conditions for self-knowledge itself are not deeply investigated by Wojtyła, who will affirm that consciousness needs self-knowledge in order not to “exist as if it were suspended in the void,” a situation that, according to him, is “postulated by the idealists.”

Therefore, whereas Wojtyła states that consciousness merely reflects the products of self-knowledge, it can be asked whether there is such a thing as non-conscious, or “pre-conscious,”

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78 Ibid., p. 35.
79 This is, in fact, what Kant points to by positing the existence of “inner sense” as a faculty of intuitions which represent for the understanding the sensible experience of the mind’s processes. A similar notion is proposed in Claes Ryn’s account of will, imagination, and reason, in which the imagination is a faculty of producing intuitive wholes that are the first “raw material” for reason’s conceptual analysis. See Claes Ryn, Will, Imagination & Reason. Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997).
80 Wojtyła, Acting Person, p. 37.
81 Ibid., p. 36.
knowledge of self. Is not rather the “non-conscious,” objectively known being of the person a somewhat artificial construction, by means of philosophical “reverse engineering,” of what was never engineered but, from the start, comes to be as (pre-conceptual) consciousness within the tension of being? The answer to this question is positive if one accepts, as Eric Voegelin has suggested, that “being” is a symbol formed from a fundamental pre-discursive experience of tension towards the ground of existence; it may become a doctrine that protects the content of the experience, but may also deform it in case the original experience is shunned.  

Still, Wojtyła is not blind to the experiential context in which the human subject arises, as he affirms that through consciousness’s reflexive power, “consciousness co-constitutes [the subject] in its own dimension. It is thus that the ego is the real subject having the experience of its subjectiveness or, in other words, constituting itself in consciousness.” Therefore, in so far as subjectiveness is recognized as a fundamental feature of the person, in a certain sense the person fulfills its act of existence at the dynamic level of consciousness, understood as the “space” created by the experience of the tension towards the ground of existence. Next, we examine how Wojtyła’s continuing analysis of personal action problematizes the concept of a stable human nature, or essence, even though he continues to affirm its necessity.

84 Voegelin would also validate Wojtyła’s suspicion of “any reduction which operates [an] absolutization of the experiential aspect,” (ibid., p. 58) whereby consciousness “ceases to account for the subjectivity of man, that is to say, his being the subject, or for his actions; and it becomes a substitute for the subject.” (Ibid., p. 58.) The absolutization of consciousness, which Wojtyła believes to be characteristic of idealist philosophy, is also criticized by Voegelin as one of the modes of derailment from the tension of existence towards the ground.
The human person: personal by nature?

In the experience had by the self-conscious ego of its subjectiveness, Wojtyła highlights the structure of the process called “man acts,” which is proper of actions, in contrast to “activations” or “things that happen within man.” The former expresses the “efficacy of the person,” whereby man is the author of his own actions, and only thus can acquire moral responsibility for them. The centrality of the inner experience of “efficacy” is shown by the striking claim that morality “has no real existence apart from human acting. The one and the other are most strictly related with the efficacy of the person, indeed, with the phenomenon of the experience had of efficacy.”

But in spite of these adumbrations of an existential mode whereby man transcends the immediate context of his action and constitutes himself as a moral being, Wojtyła considers it necessary to identify the “ontological foundation” of both the experience of man-acting and the contrasting experience of something happening to man outside of his proper efficacy. A tension is thus introduced: on the one hand, in Thomistic metaphysics, existence is the basis for action: one must first exist in order to act, and all existent substances possess a nature that defines their mode of actualization. On the other hand, “action is an enactment of existence or actual being.” There is a clear ambivalence between the view that personal existence is only enacted through action and the need for an “ontological being” that grounds the dynamic experience of the subject that acts and to which things happen. The ambivalence is expressed in various ways,

85 Ibid., p. 70.
86 Ibid., p. 71-3.
87 Ibid., p. 73.
such as the claim that the traditional definition by Boethius (*naturæ rationalis individua substantia* or an individual substance of rational nature) is not adequate to describe personal existence, which is “unlike that of an ontologically founded merely individual type of being,” or the provision, regarding ontological basic structures, that “the ontological structure of ‘somebody’ manifests not only its similarities to but also its differences and detachment from the ontological structure of ‘something’.”

The ambivalence is maintained in Wojtyła’s attempt to develop a concept of human nature that accounts for both activations and personal action. This concept of nature, however, cannot be that of natural science, which would ascribe to human nature only those activations that are in man “from birth,” independent of any efficacy of the person in action. Rather than considering action something “unnatural,” Wojtyła wants to keep nature as the basis from which personal action springs, in order to be able to maintain that the potentiality for personal action is a property of the human *suppositum*, or, using the language of nature, “humanness or human nature is equipped with the properties that enable a concrete human being to be a person: to be and to act as a person.” The human person acts by nature, and thus realizes his own nature or potentiality.

Here, however, Wojtyła’s interest in the experiential reality of the person interposes itself again with the following distinction: whereas man’s potentiality is expressed in the Thomistic metaphysical understanding as the faculties or powers of the person, the person’s dynamism is only observable in activations and, more fundamentally, in personal action. His analysis reveals

88 Ibid., p. 74.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 84.
that man’s faculties or potentialities can only be known indirectly, through the experience of action:

We ascertain the potentiality of the man-subject while ascertaining his dynamism. Accordingly, our knowledge of it is in fact experiential: contained in either form of dynamism—whether acting or happening—there is also potentiality as the basis and as the source of the then existing dynamization.91

Further on in his argument, Wojtyła will affirm that man’s “rational nature,” in which—according to the traditional metaphysical understanding—the power or potentiality of the will is contained, “has real existence solely and exclusively as a person.”92 The concept of nature, with its language of faculties, properties, powers, and potentialities, becomes secondary to the inner experience of the person’s efficacy in action, in which the fully personal realities of morality and freedom are discovered.93 Similarly, although Wojtyła tries to include in human nature the aspect of dynamic humanness that is a potentiality of the “ontological structure”, or the “human suppositum,” the very focus of his investigation raises the question whether nature—a category related to the formal, fixed, and necessary being of things—can account for such a creative dynamism. For it is in personal action that the fundamental realities of the human person are, more than simply “discovered”, enacted.

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91 Ibid., p. 86-7.
92 Ibid., p. 122.
93 This corroborates Eric Voegelin’s conclusions in the essay on “What Is Nature” published in Anamnesis, where Voegelin finds that Aristotle’s “inquiry about the peras [ends] of action explodes the definition of human nature as form, for when the question is raised about the limit of action set by the nous, this does not involve form, but form is realized only through action.” (Eric Voegelin, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin. Anamnesis. On the Theory of History and Politics (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 173.)
Freedom and morality: truth and autonomy

This is nowhere clearer than in the analysis of self-determination, freedom, and morality, in which Wojtyła’s investigation culminates. The centrality of morality for action and the person is exemplified in the process of the objectification of the ego by self-determining action: “it is in the modality of morality that this objectification becomes clearly apparent, when through an action that is either morally good or morally bad, man, as the person, himself becomes either morally good or morally evil.”94 The human person is created and recreated, through voluntary action, as a moral entity, and this is the chief content of personal self-determination.

Freedom, as an integral principle of the will—thus called free will—is a synonym for the experience of objectively actualizing one’s own subject through will, or self-determination.

The freedom appropriate to the human being, the person’s freedom resulting from the will, exhibits itself as identical with self-determination, with that experiential, most complete, and fundamental organ of man’s autonomous being.95

Freedom does not rise from the merely “natural” activations that, in other animals, are coordinated by instinct, but depends on the self-consciousness, or self-experience of the ego. This is the meaning of the person’s “transcendence” in action: the acts of will are not simply intentionally directed towards the objects which are presented “from outside,” but transcend this horizontal relation in the context of a relationship with the willing person’s own self, so that the person also wills his own self (in the sense of “producing it anew” through the action) in the act of willing something.

94 Wojtyła, Acting Person, p. 151.
95 Ibid., p. 115.
Now, if the experience of freedom or self-determination is marked by a specific dependence on the ego and its nature, this might betray a circular argument when one considers that the ego is also seen to be objectivized by the will, in self-determination. This, however, is not necessarily an argumentative flaw. It may well be an intrinsic feature of the reality being analyzed, as becomes clear when Wojtyła defines what it means to say that “man is free”:

[man] depends chiefly on himself for the dynamization of his own subject. Hence the fundamental significance of freedom presupposes the objectification which we discussed earlier. The precondition of freedom is the concrete ego, which while it is the subject is also the object determined by the acts of will.96

A similarly circular formulation is made in relation to the relationship between freedom and will: “it is because of the person’s exclusive power over the will that will is the person’s power to be free.”97 The circularity stems from the fact that the “transcendence” of intentional acts of volition by the person can have no other source than the person itself. Thus, Wojtyła will affirm that “the will is dynamized in a way in which only a person could accomplish it—in a way in which nature could not.”98

For Wojtyła, however, what ultimately guarantees freedom’s existence above the necessity of nature is its relation to truth. The will, or more specifically the free will, when viewed as expressed particularly in the moment of decision or choice, cannot be a mere reaction to an object of attraction (as a mere appetite would be), but is an active and “authentic response” to the value of objects of choice, which reveals man as “his own master.”99 That responsiveness,

96 Ibid., p. 120.
97 Ibid., p. 122.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 134-5.
in turn, “flows from the promptings of the intellectual sphere of the human person…,”\textsuperscript{100} and is traditionally reflected in the characterization of will as a \textit{rational} appetite. Wojtyła is clearly talking about human moral autonomy, but at this point the intellectualist emphasis of Thomistic thought reasserts itself, as Wojtyła strives to show how the “being” of truth becomes the “duty” of action.

As decision and choice, the will includes an inherent “reference to truth,” “the reference that permeates the intentionality of willing and constitutes what is somehow the inner principle of volition.”\textsuperscript{101} Wojtyła is careful, however, not to turn this preponderance of the principle of truth into determinism, such that to know the truth would automatically imply to will it. The reference to truth is not an exterior determination, as regards the dynamism of the will: “this principle is… intrinsic to the will itself, and at the same time constitutes the essence of choice.”\textsuperscript{102} Moreover, Wojtyła observes that the reference to truth in the will is not of a cognitive character, a point that might open the door to a still less objectivist notion of willing and freedom: “‘to will’ never means ‘to cognize’ or ‘to know.’ It refers in a specific manner, however, and is internally dependent on, the recognition of truth. This is precisely the reason why it is accessible to cognition and specifically consistent with cognition.”\textsuperscript{103}

Wojtyła perceives, then, an autonomous sphere in which will is independent of the relationship of attraction with intentional objects, and which has its own non-cognitive character. In this concentration on the independence, or autonomy of the person in relation to the objects

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 135.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 137.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
known, and to knowledge itself, the experiential and existential dimension of Wojtyła’s analysis resurfaces. The inner character of this autonomy, as something that belongs to man before external objects may exert whatever attraction they are able to exert (and that is, therefore, somehow *a priori*), is a witness to Wojtyła’s attention to the transcendent character of freedom.

There is a clear ambiguity present in the analysis of the transcendence of the person in freedom, as regards the cognitive versus the volitional principles of action: on the one hand, “the will’s proper relation to the truth does not derive solely from the cognitive presentation of objects,” for that would imply determinism, or (to use again a Kantian phrase) heteronomy. Instead, the will has “originality,” its own “specific intentionality.” On the other hand, “the moment of truth… stays under the jurisdiction of the cognitive experience of value.”

Wojtyła ultimately opts to emphasize the cognitive source of the motivation that “serves to urge the will out of its initial, still undetermined state…, being the condition enabling autodetermination.” This source is the cognitive experience of the good (value), and it comes before a choice or a decision by the will. As the product of the cognitive judgment of values, “axiological truth… is… the factor that plays the most essential role in the structure of our acting to the degree that we may say that ‘to know’ passes into ‘to will’.”

The mechanism, or faculty, that accounts for that transformation is conscience, whose “function consists in distinguishing the element of moral good in the action and in releasing and

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104 Ibid., p. 140.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., p. 142.
107 Ibid., p. 143.
108 Ibid., p. 140.
109 Ibid., p. 143.
forming a sense of duty with respect to this good.”110 The process starts in the mind, which has the ability to “grasp the truth and to distinguish it from fallacy,” and thus gives man his “peculiar ascendancy over reality, over the objects of cognition.”111 The “truthfulness” about the good of actions is then integrated by the conscience in the inner experience of the person:

It is in the conscience that there is achieved the peculiar union of moral truthfulness and duty that manifests itself as the normative power of truth. In each of his actions the human person is eyewitness of the transition from the ‘is’ to the ‘should’—the transition from ‘X is truly good’ to ‘I should do X.’112

In conscience, the recognition of truth is related to the properly personal actions; thus “being” is transformed into “duty.” Truth comes before, and it is the foundation, as “it is owing to their truthfulness that [moral normative sentences] become related to the conscience, which then, so to speak, transforms their value of truth into the concrete and real obligation.”113 Kant’s view of the conscience as “lawmaker” is thereby criticized, since for Wojtyła conscience “does not itself create norms; rather it discovers them, as it were, in the objective order of morality or law.”114 This interpretation of Kantian moral autonomy does not do justice to Kant’s account, in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, of the origin of moral duty in the categorical imperative and its successive formulations, which emphasize rational nature as an end in itself and the legislation of moral norms in accordance with the idea of a kingdom of ends;115 nor does it seem to acknowledge the complex network of the doctrines of right and virtue in the

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110 Ibid., p. 156.
111 Ibid., p. 158.
112 Ibid., p. 162.
113 Ibid., p. 165.
114 Ibid.
115 This is one of the central themes of the following chapters, especially Chapters 2 and 3.
Metaphysics of Morals. Instead, what is clear is the resistance against a perceived excessive subjectivity and lack of a mooring for morality in a stable order of goods.

We find, therefore, that in Wojtyła’s account the ultimate source of the orientation for the moral life, and thus for the person’s specific fulfillment through the process of self-determination, is an objective order of truth, to be known by the mind.¹¹⁶ In his concern with idealistic conceptions of morality that allegedly let it float freely without any objective ground, Wojtyła does not take the path opened by his own sensitivity to human experience; instead, he subordinates the latter into the function of “personalizing” an objective structure of being that exists independently of and before it, just as the consciousness subjectivizes the objective knowledge of the human suppositum. The crux of the problem for Wojtyła lies in the consideration that, without a suppositum, there can be no actualization of the ego or the person, but only “pure consciousness constituted by a stream of acts.” But for Thomistic metaphysics “the person, the action, and their dynamic union are more than merely an enactment of consciousness: indeed, they are a reality that exists also apart from consciousness.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 166.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 153. This particular criticism seems to come from Wojtyła’s reading of Max Scheler phenomenology of value. Elsewhere, Wojtyła criticizes the latter for depicting the person as “in no sense a being, but… merely a unity of experiences.” (Wojtyła, “Perfectionism in Ethics,” p. 53.)
Romano Guardini

The relationship between human consciousness and reality as well as the complications that the dynamics of the person brings to the discussion are also treated by the seminal Catholic theologian Romano Guardini in his work on *The World and the Person*. In that book, Guardini critically examines the nature of the concepts of the subject, nature, and culture as the basic components of the modern understanding of reality. In opposition to a more traditional view, in which culture consisted of the activity of man in obedience to an order established by God, in Modernity man is seen as an autonomous creator of order. The objectively good and true is replaced by the ethos of “genuineness and actuality,” and philosophically “the emphasis is on the self, and nature appears as a chaotic mass of possibilities, out of which the subject, by an autocratic moulding, produces the world of culture. This is the method used in the philosophy of Kant.”\(^{118}\) Guardini displays a negative and almost fatalist understanding of this process, as if the only outcome of the discovery of the subject and the emphasis on autonomy could be the disconnect from the image of the world as created from God, and from God himself.

The Christian philosophy elaborated by Guardini, here, proposes the world not as mere “nature”, but as “creation,” the free act of a priori being that “has the character of ‘grace’…, not a necessity, but a fact.”\(^{119}\) And here, too, is the source of man’s own sense of responsibility and autonomy:


\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 18.
Only because man originated in answer to the call of God and is maintained by that call, because he is the ‘Thou’ called forth by Him who gives His name as the ‘I am’, does man have the possibility to know himself as an autonomous being. Only because the creating God really placed the created world in man’s hand can the latter come upon the idea that he must create an autonomous culture.\textsuperscript{120}

However, Guardini sees that man’s creation as a person is different from the creation of the rest of nature. Guardini realizes that the utter dependence upon another being will lead to the question of whether man can really be mature and live for himself, assuming his responsibilities, when he has been and is constantly created by God’s sovereign will, thus remaining under his eternal gaze and dependence, the dependence on “another.” Can this apparently radical “heteronomy” leave space for man’s autonomy and personhood?

The solution is found in Guardini’s discussion of God as neither the same nor an “other” to the human being, a formulation that would not have sat well with Garrigou-Lagrange’s adamant defense of the principle of identity and non-contradiction. For Guardini, God’s unique act of creation does not make of Him fully an “other,” nor does it mean that God and man are one, but makes God closer to the human being than his very self. The discussion leads to an image of life within the limits of the life of God, of participation that leaves space for autonomy.

But God creates man. The creative energy of his act makes me to be myself. Because he turns to me with the evocative power of His love I become myself and exist as myself. When God beholds me it is not as when a man looks upon another man, a finished being regarding another finished being, but the glance of God creates me. The concept of the “other” has no meaning here.... The concept of creation which expresses God’s relation to man signifies two things. First, that man is really given his own existence, and then, at the same time, that God is not “another” beside him, but the absolute source of his being, and closer to him than he is to himself.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 31.
This is for Guardini at the root of the true religious experience, and at the same time, of what it means to be a person: “by calling [man] in love God makes man a person—but in esteem. He does not create him as he does a star or tree or beast, by a mere command, but by a call.”

This mode of existence, as “called-to be in esteem”, is not the mode of objects, things standing against one another, but that of a “higher reality” giving life and meaning to a “lower reality.” The language of things does not apply, as the substitution of the personal “Thou” for the more objective concept of the “other” in Guardini’s account indicates. This is a language that refers, rather, to the conditions of freedom and will and personality, that alone explain these personal phenomena but that cannot really be counted among regular objects of knowledge.

Guardini’s philosophy of the person defines a special area for the personal reality, one that is beyond the fixed quantities of the world around the person. The area of personality is the area of meaning: understanding, consciousness, and truth are its proper realities, as well as autonomous will, following only value and moral duty. A new world is constructed from the inner resources of the person, in a truly creative way that involves destruction and recreation, and thus involves the risk of choosing wrongly. The answer to the question of who is a certain person involves being for oneself, self-purpose, self-belonging, inviolable responsibility for oneself and thus radical uniqueness. The person is the owner of its own actions and responses in a way that cannot be challenged or neutralized by interior or exterior limitations (economic systems, psychic disorders). And any enumeration of components, faculties, and conditions is always eluded by what the person really is:

122 Ibid., p. 32.
123 Ibid., p. 109.
124 Ibid., p. 111.
This fact unfolds itself in the conditions we have set forth: the completeness of the form, the interiority of the life, the spiritual basis of knowing and willing, of acting and creating. But all this is not yet the person, ‘person’ means that in all this the man stands in himself.\textsuperscript{125}

At this level, the person no longer exists in the mode of subject-object. For personality, Guardini maintains, can only be activated in the context of a relationship of personal character, or “I-Thou” character, with another person. Expressed in another way, a person is only actualized when it manifests itself as an “I” in relation to a Thou; it takes another person to activate the full reality of the person: “When I glance at another as ‘I,’ I become open and ‘show’ myself.”\textsuperscript{126} The space where this happens is described by Guardini as “mental life,” at the center of which are “dialogue” and “language”. Language, the medium in which persons exist, is defined as a comprehensive reality:

Language is not a system of signs by means of which two monads exchange ideas but it is the very realm of consciousness in which every man lives. It is a connected whole of forms of consciousness determined by supra-individual laws, into which the individual is born and by which he is formed.\textsuperscript{127}

This understanding of language is, in its turn, connected to the very nature of the Word of God, \textit{Logos}, or \textit{Verbum}, who is communication and language in His own being: “God is a person in relation to the word. He utters His infinite mystery and thereby exists, as the one who speaks, in relation to the one who is spoken—and who is also, we may say in addition, the true hearer….”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 118.  
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 128.  
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p. 130.  
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 136.
Guardini’s personalism, then, starting from a traditional conception of form and potency, reaches a distinction between the world of non-personal beings and the person, summarized by the insight that “things come into existence by the command of God; the person by His call.”\textsuperscript{129} Even at this point, Guardini continues to maintain his distance from other conceptions of the person which, he believes, lose sight of the origin of the person’s dignity and uniqueness, including Kant’s. To this effect, Guardini claims that the person’s dignity cannot be received from the person’s own being, which is finite, but only from the absolute. And not from an abstract absolute, such as an idea, a value, a law, or the like. These could only determine the content of its concrete life, not its personality, which it derives from the fact that God has brought it into existence as a person.\textsuperscript{130}

But here again personalistic language opens a possibility for a mode of thinking that goes beyond the philosophy of form and matter and objective being, which Kant is frequently accused of discarding for the sake of a formalistic and subjectivist philosophy. We intend to show that Kant’s notion of the moral law is not “an abstract absolute,” as Guardini suggests, but a symbol for personal participation in a reality that transcends the subject-object relationship, understood in an existential perspective. Thus we can see Kant involved with the same issue that moves Wojtyła and Guardini, namely, to define a separate sphere or mode of existence of the person that lies beyond the kinds of deterministic relationship that obtain among objects with a fixed nature. This issue is brought into sharper focus by W. Norris Clarke, who articulates further the Thomistic roots of Wojtyła’s personalism.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p. 142.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
W. Norris Clarke, S.J.

Clarke, who criticizes Kant for finishing the work of “cutting the bridge of action as the self-revelation of being,” focuses on the problem of personal being as a distinct mode of self-expression that goes beyond what non-personal substances can do. As traditional Thomistic philosophy does not present a fully developed account of this issue, Clarke explores the ways in which the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas might be “creatively completed” to better account for the reality of the person, starting with the aspect of “self-presence,” or “self-consciousness.”

Unlike material being, which is extended in space, “dispersed,” the person “coincides fully with oneself, so that both the subject and the object of the same act are identical, as in the act of self-awareness.” This requires that the person be more than material, “pointing to a more intense and concentrated level of self-presence that we call ‘spiritual being’.” In addition, this spiritual entity, being human, needs to be “activated from without,” a process starting with the external, material world, but only fully achieved through the intervention of another spiritual being, echoing thus Guardini’s insights: “it seems that the explicit awakening to self-awareness as an ‘I’, as a self, can only be done by another human person, reaching out to us

132 Ibid., p. 44.
133 Ibid., p. 44-5.
with love and treating us as a person, calling us into an I-Thou relation.”

In this gradual process of drawing oneself out into a relationship, there remains always an area of mystery: “our self-awareness is a partial zone of light within us, ever in fluid expansion or recession, surrounded by a penumbra of shadow shading off into an (at present) impenetrable darkness.”

Clarke then turns to the aspect of personal self-possession through freedom: after going over the centrality of the concept of moral autonomy for the person, Clarke refers to Karol Wojtyła’s analysis of self-determination as a creative completion of St. Thomas’s own anthropology, with a stronger focus on the “self-constituting” aspect of free, moral action: “By my actions, therefore, especially the repeated ones, I gradually construct an abiding moral portrait of myself, like an artist’s self-portrait, proclaiming implicitly, ‘This is the kind of person I am’.”

Clarke reproaches modern phenomenologies for “the failure to do justice to the substantiality pole of the person,” pointing out that, for there to be an activation from outside, there must be first a “potential being” or a “potential self-possession” to be activated into actual self-possession. The mistake corresponds, for Clarke, to not realizing the difference between “being awakened to the actual exercise of personhood” and “being constituted in being as

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134 Ibid., p. 45.
135 Ibid., p. 47.
136 “The fully mature moral person does good and avoids evil, not primarily because he will be rewarded or punished according to some law imposed from without, but precisely because he sees it as something good to do (or avoid), in creative harmony with his own nature and the whole order of the good as willed by God.” (Ibid., p. 51.)
137 Ibid., p. 55.
138 Ibid., p. 58.
person,” the former corresponding to the pre-existing substantiality of the person, even if in a potential state.\textsuperscript{139}

In the language of substantial being, it is indeed a problem to speak of a self-constituting existence; but in a quote from Karl Rahner that is given at the end of Clarke’s discussion of self-possession, the sui generis status of the person again receives expression in a way that highlights the existence of the person in a separate sphere:

Because man’s having responsibility for the totality of himself is the condition for his empirical evidence of self, it cannot be derived completely from this experience and its objectivities…. [Man] is the one who shows himself to be something other than the subsequent product of such individual elements…. To say that man is person and subject, therefore, means first of all that man is someone who cannot be derived, who cannot be produced completely from other elements at our disposal.\textsuperscript{140}

The problem with an assertion of “substantial being” as a latent potency, as opposed to an autonomous “self-constitution,” lies in the failure to account for the “surplus” quality of personal being that comprises the gist of the Rahner quote. Once an irreducible opposition is established between “self-constitution” (or “consciousness” or “autonomy”) and substantial being, it becomes hard to account for the non-objectiveness (in the sense of “transcendence”) of personal existence. This opposition is at the basis, for instance, of Wojtyła’s claim that the person is “a reality that exists also apart from consciousness.” Consciousness, in this linguistic oppositional context (signified by the “apart from”), acquires a connotation of objective unreality or arbitrariness. It does not have to be so, however, once it is realized that consciousness is a part of reality, and in certain cases reality is constituted through practice, in consciousness. The idealist

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 62-3.
insight contained therein does not have to be seen as devaluing the objectivity of reality, but giving a richer account of reality, focusing on the “part” or “mode” of reality that can only be known “subjectively,” through participation, but that is nonetheless real or authoritative on that account.

Reading Kant in the existential key of the person

The thinkers just examined can be considered “Thomistic personalists” to the extent that they add to a Thomistic metaphysical basis an understanding of personal existence that goes beyond the traditional Thomistic categories of being. Although they do not give up central concepts and categories such as potency and act, suppositum, or substantial subject, nature, etc., and correspondingly continue to maintain the priority of the intellect over will in the production of an ethically guided free action, they allow their sensitivity to the sui generis reality of the person to draw them towards a more existential view of the person. In this view, something very central pertaining to the person is irreducible to more static or objectifying conceptions of being or substance, because it exists at the level of the I-Thou relation, or language and meaning, or self-transcendence, retaining a certain autonomy from other spheres of being.

Nevertheless, they still criticize an idealism like Kant’s, as they understand it, for the fact that it isolates (substantial) being from its expression through action, as Clarke puts it, or, using Wojtyła’s terms, because it negate the personal suppositum as “a reality that exists apart from consciousness.” In these criticisms is implicit the traditional Thomistic metaphysical realism,
already present in Mercier and Garrigou-Lagrange, that affirms the priority of an objective order of being that can be known by speculative reason, abstracted from sense experience and organized into the diverse “degrees of being” of Thomistic metaphysics. But what about the different utterances that imply a certain resistance, on the side of the personal subject and its ethical life, to being objectivized, or reduced to more basic determinations of a causal nature, be it formal, teleological, or material?

As a matter of fact, Karol Wojtyła continued to maintain an ambivalent attitude towards the insights of contemporary philosophy, and in particular towards Kant’s ethics, in writings that followed his analyses of *The Acting Person*. In a work that did not reach final edited form due to the responsibilities Wojtyła acquired by becoming Supreme Pontiff, but that has recently been published in English in its unfinished format, his critical attitude towards what he still saw as Kant’s destruction of teleology’s role in morality was tempered by an acceptance of what is perhaps the central insight of Kant’s moral ethics:

> How are the end and the norm related to one another? Does the end determine the norm, or does the norm rather determine the end? In light of our conclusion so far one must say that the norm determines the end (and perhaps within those limits one must accept in ethics the position of Kant); however, this primacy of the norm grows at the same time on the basis of teleology, and above all of the autoteleology of man.¹⁴¹

In this work, Wojtyla focuses directly on the experience of duty as key to the “initial understanding of morality.” Duty, which is essentially expressed by means of moral norms, is seen as the main source of every moral end’s character as bonum honestum, or the moral end’s suitability to the nature of man, or man’s dignity. Due to the focus on duty and the moral norm

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as keys to the understanding of morality, Wojtyla even reassessed the Thomistic emphasis on the intellectual apprehension of the hierarchy of the goods:

Perhaps in many commentaries [on St. Thomas] the entire idea takes on a too one-sidedly intellectual or rationalistic character—while in reality that “truth of the good,” as the norm essentially is, has a fuller character and is not only a truth of thought, but at the same time a truth of action and a truth of the very being of the person.142

Accordingly, Wojtyla would come to accept a certain “demotion” (rather than the “destruction” he still believed was the result of Kant’s thought) of teleology in the domain of ethics, in the light of the centrality of the norm for morality.143

In the chapters that follow, we will present a reading of Kant’s thought that interprets his endeavor to limit the scope of speculative reason as an attempt to deal with a similar question. Following Walsh’s suggestion, we will read Kant’s critical stance according to the goal of “[erecting] the ultimacy of practical reason,” with the purpose of “[asserting] the moral perspective as the most comprehensive one available to human beings.”144 If the person irreducibly is a moral being, then the assertion of her independence—at least in the decisive moment of choice—from the fixities discovered by the intellect in reality is not such a reckless move, at least when one takes morality as seriously as Kant did.

142 Ibid., p. 46.
143 Ibid., p. 54.
144 Walsh, Modern Philosophical Revolution, p. 32.
Chapter II
Kant’s new proposal of a moral metaphysics

Introduction

To achieve this dissertation’s objective, namely, to develop an alternative reading of Kant’s thought that is also more faithful to the Kantian text, we have not chosen a strategy that entails directly countering the above outlined criticisms. Rather, we shall argue that those theses meet Kant’s ideas at a relatively superficial level, failing to reach the depths of Kant’s own text and his intentions for the critical philosophy. The exploration of these depths will show that Kant’s philosophical insights and their implications are much more amenable to a fruitful dialogue with Christian anthropology than it may seem from the reading of the critics. Additionally, by way of certain extrapolations of the lines along which Kant’s thought directs the reader, it may turn out that Kantian philosophy actually illumines more of Christian philosophy than could be thought possible.

This chapter focuses on the first “indictment” of Kant’s philosophy by thinkers in the Thomistic tradition: the problem of Kant’s destruction of a realistic metaphysics of being that provides the ground of morality through the hierarchy of ends. The argument starts by clarifying the critical philosophy’s actual purpose of protecting metaphysics and morality from the threats of absolute idealism and skepticism, rather than joining these two currents and their denial of a stable objective reality outside the mind. To this end, we go over Kant’s arguments and some contributions to the recent literature that emphasize the difference between the critical
philosophy and the skepticisms of René Descartes and David Hume, as well as George Berkeley’s idealism. Then we examine the origins of some of Kant’s central philosophical concerns in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s understanding of reason, in order to reveal the character of the critique of pure reason as a necessary propaedeutic to a practical metaphysics. Reason is seen as a unifying and regulative faculty of principles that stands above theoretical knowledge per se (even if it must observe the “strictures” of the critique of reason in its theoretical use), being guided instead by practical intentions; the latter are the true foundation for the metaphysics and the moral philosophy Kant wants to secure against skeptical attacks. Having established the primacy of the practical interests of reason, we look at how Kant grounds his practical metaphysics of morals on the idea of an unconditionally good will and its attendant instantiations in human morality (i.e., a morality of sensible beings): the idea of duty and the categorical imperative. Thus, instead of a morality based on the attraction of the will to the good discovered by the intellect in the latter’s contemplation of the hierarchy of being, Kant proposes a morality in which the will is directly oriented towards the good, a conative relationship that is symbolized by the subordination of the will—as pure practical reason—to the universal moral law, or rather to sheer lawfulness. We suggest that, by promoting this inversion, Kant is not invalidating the role of teleology in morality, but revealing the inner core of the moral judgment about something as a moral end or a good. Morality, in this view, is always prior to any possible empirical experience; in order to pronounce on any object’s goodness, we must already have the idea of the good within us. Kant’s formulations of duty for duty’s sake or for the sake of mere lawfulness are ways of talking about this our participation in an always antecedent and higher moral reality.
The critical project: Kant’s attempt to rescue metaphysics from absolute idealism, skepticism, and the contradictions of dogmatism

In order to analyze the issue of Kant’s challenge to a realistic “metaphysics of being,” we may as well begin by conceding that Kant does intend to question traditional or, as he calls it, “dogmatic” metaphysics. Ernst Cassirer’s classic interpretation of Kant’s thought, for instance, concentrates on this “negative” aspect of Kant’s critical philosophy, which sets boundaries to the scope of human cognition and restricts the latter to the realm of “appearances”, or “possible experience” (as succinctly expressed in the Conclusion to the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics). Thus, to posit from a theoretical point of view the determinate existence of entities that lie beyond the human cognitive experience of objects, as well as to investigate these entities’ inner structure, is prohibited to a reason that has become conscious of its own limits.

The “Copernican Revolution” is at the center of this interpretation of Kant’s project, whereby ontology is replaced by epistemology and the lawfulness of the rules of the understanding assumes the role previously assigned to the “fixity of being”:

While ontology takes being as the starting point, here being is taken as a problem or a postulate. Whereas heretofore some sort of definite structure of the world of objects was assumed as a secure beginning, and the task consisted simply in showing how this form of objectivity passes over into the form of subjectivity, as in cognition and representation, the demand here is for an explanation as to what in general the concept of reality and the claim to objectivity assert, before any theory of this transition is propounded.

The new concentration on the process and the functions of reason, which “must take the lead with principles for its judgments according to constant laws and compel nature to answer its

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1 Ernst Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.
2 Ibid., p. 146.
questions,” (*KrV*, B xiii) takes to task the traditional metaphysical treatment of the soul, free will, and even of the Supreme Being as legitimate objects of knowledge. For by considering these concepts—all related as expressions of the *unconditioned* in the order of causes—in continuity with other objects of human cognition, while ignoring the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, dogmatic metaphysics involves itself in contradictions: the paralogisms and antinomies. These latter have their origin in the asymmetry between that which is subject to the measures and rules of the understanding and that which stands beyond, as conditions for the measuring and ruling activity.³

Kant goes beyond a mere preoccupation with theoretical contradictions, though, and points out the risk dogmatic metaphysics poses to morals, or practical reason:

> The principles with which speculative reason ventures beyond its boundaries do not in fact result in *extending* our use of reason, but rather, if one considers them more closely, inevitably result in *narrowing* it by threatening to extend the boundaries of sensibility, to which these principles really belong, beyond everything, and so even to dislodge the use of pure (practical) reason. (*KrV*, B xxiv)

The threat of “wip[ing] out the practical use of reason” (*KrV*, B xxv) comes from the application to the unconditioned of concepts and categories that are normally applied to the realm of nature as a uniformly lawful field of relationships of cause and effect. This diagnosis could well be, in fact, applied to Garrigou-Lagrange’s view of a human freedom that is only preserved by means of a limited intellectual apprehension of the good as it is found, mixed with non-good, in “undetermined beings”.⁴ Otherwise, were it able to behold the “perfect good of being”, the human will would be just a part of the chain of cause and effect as any other

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³ See the Preface to the 2nd Edition of *KrV* (B xx) and the interesting discussion on the “bounds of pure reason” in the Conclusion to the Prolegomena, specifically *P* 4:353-4.

⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 29.
determined phenomenon of nature. Thus the critical philosophy justifies its challenge to traditional metaphysics through its negative and positive role in the “defense of reason.”

Contra Hume, Descartes, and Berkeley: the distinctiveness of transcendental or formal idealism

Regarding the merely negative role, however, it is important to understand that Kant is not thereby simply advancing the method of radical doubt inaugurated by Descartes, who posited the self’s own mental activity as the only source of certainty, or agreeing with the skeptical thrust of David Hume against the metaphysical concepts of causality and necessity. Nor is Kant, with Berkeley, denying the existence of a reality “outside the mind.” As Frederick Beiser and Karl Ameriks have recently noted, Kant’s transcendental idealism includes explicit corrections to these philosophical views.

Starting with Cartesian doubt, Beiser remarks that, in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant directly refutes the Cartesian claim that knowledge of outer things is not certain because their existence can only be problematically inferred and not immediately cognized, as opposed to the self’s existence and representations, which can be immediately known by virtue of being “inner.” In that part of the first critique, Kant maintains that Descartes’s skepticism is the result of transcendental materialistic premises (according to which true cognition must fully and accurately correspond to objects that lie outside the human mind).

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5 The “defense of reason” is an expression used by John Rawls in his treatment of Kantian metaphysics and ethics (Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).
For Kant, if these premises are conceded, it truly is impossible to affirm the existence of an external world, since we cannot go outside our representations to compare them to a world that is independent of them. But in Kant’s idealism, any theoretical knowledge is knowledge of the appearance of things; there is no “getting out of” one’s representations in order to find the external object that could be compared to its respective representation. By construing the concept of “object of experience” partly as a result of the mind’s spontaneous activity, Kant forecloses for Cartesians the possibility of doubting an external world of “objects.” Insofar as objects of possible experience are concerned, there is no “external world” to be put in doubt, no thinking of comparing representations to some hypothetical reality. (KrV, A 371) Instead, in order to verify the actuality and objectivity of one’s representations, the most that can be done is to compare some representations to others and evaluate their coherence and their belonging to a system of representations according to laws. (KrV, A 376)

Ameriks has pointed to an even more decisive Kantian refutation of Descartes’ method in the KrV second edition’s “Refutation of Idealism,” in which Kant inverts the Cartesian priority of inner sense over outer sense, showing that the consciousness of self as determined in time needs to be grounded in the persistence of things as existing outside of the self, so that “outer experience—which here means knowledge of something spatial—is prior to inner experience.”7 Knowledge of “inner” states, Kant teaches against Descartes, is of the same nature as knowledge of “outer” things, inasmuch as both consist of theoretical knowledge of objects of sense.

Regarding Hume’s skepticism, the critique of the concept of cause as a necessary connection between consistently observed co-occurring phenomena is explicitly considered by Kant in the context of his reformulation of the concept of experience, as for example in the first critique’s Transcendental Analytic (in the section on the “Transition to the transcendental deduction of the categories”) and in the Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics. In these two cases (KrV A 95 / B 127-8 and P 4:310-313), Kant shows that a significant result of his transcendental idealism is to overcome Hume’s doubts concerning the legitimacy of the concept of cause, by virtue of considering that concept not in reference to a relationship between things in themselves, but “as a concept necessarily belonging to the mere form of experience.” (P 312) i.e. a pure concept of the understanding:

This complete (though to its originator unexpected) solution of Hume’s problem rescues for the pure concepts of the understanding their a priori origin and for the universal laws of nature their validity of as laws of the understanding, yet in such a way as to limit their use to experience, because their possibility depends solely on the reference of the understanding to experience, but with a completely reversed mode of connection which never occurred to Hume: they are not derived from experience, but experience is derived from them. (P 313)

Regarding the status of Kant’s idealism, both Ameriks and Beiser dispute interpretations that place the critical theory alongside Berkeley’s strong form of idealism, which denies any immediate connection between an external world of matter and the inner world of representations, thus positing only spiritual substances as real. Ameriks distinguishes Kant from Berkeley on the grounds that the latter takes the whole of a representation to be ideal, which in turn makes the content or matter of that representation fully “mind-dependent;” hence, for
Berkeley “to be is to be perceived.” Kant’s transcendental idealism, however, affirms the ideality merely of space and time as forms of sensible intuition proper to the kinds of beings human beings are. In consequence, there remains a whole field of “beings,” impossible to cognize as “objects of experience,” for sure, but whose existence is not dependent upon being represented. And even in the context of cognition, there remains the awareness that not all of the contents of cognition are a product of the mind, but only the forms and categories which allow the matter of sensations to be constructed into experience of objects proper.

Beiser, in this case attempting to emphasize the distinctions between Kant and the antecedent subjectivist tradition that started with Descartes, focuses on a similar topic, distinguishing the former (idealist) conception of ideas as mere representations from the Kantian categories of understanding. Rather than complex representations (i.e., representations of representations), the latter should be seen as determining “the conditions for having conscious states and for these conscious states representing objects.” By pointing to this aspect of the Kantian categories, Beiser brings out a central feature of Kantian idealism, namely, its focus on forms, or the rule-like character of the transcendental concepts. As such, concepts and categories are not idiosyncratically subjective:

Rather than reducing experience down to the level of individual consciousness, the critical philosophy makes both the subjective and objective—understood as the representations of inner and outer sense—equal and coordinate parts of a single intersubjective structure or form. This normative order is neither mental nor physical but transcendental, the necessary condition for the possibility of experience of any rational being equipped with a human sensibility.

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8 Ibid., pp. 69 and 72-3. Karol Wojtyła uses the same expression to characterize Kant’s idealism.
9 Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 137.
10 Ibid., p. 138.
Thus, based on this more careful view of Kantian idealism, Ameriks attributes “a very serious commitment to realism” to Kant’s thought, as Kant “nowhere even tries to argue that the domain of being as such must be cut down to the domain of representation or human accessibility.”

Even if the extreme brevity of these considerations is conceded, merely touching on such distinctions is important, in any case, before engaging the question of Kantian ethics, to dispel some of the caricature-like interpretations found about Kant’s philosophy in some of the Thomistic personalist critics we surveyed above. Intellectual accusations such as Wojtyła’s extension of the “esse est percipi” principle to Kant, for instance, as well as his grouping Kant together with Berkeley and Hume, are at least strongly problematized as being insufficiently aware of significant differences between these philosophers and their theories.

Now, all this may be challenged by the realistic metaphysician as distinctions without a difference. From the standpoint of traditional Thomism, perhaps after Kant we find ourselves in an even worse situation, since we are not even allowed to doubt (with Descartes) that which we, now, know does not exist—an external world of objects whose existence and structure we can theoretically discern. Even if Kant does not place under radical doubt the existence of an external world of mind-independent things, or disavow reason’s capacity to assign the features of necessity and universality to crucial aspects of the structure of nature, the ground of nature’s order and of human morality—the Being of beings—is removed from its central place to give way to (in the most favorable interpretation) a modestly realist and limited understanding of reality and man’s cognitive access to it. Furthermore, as regards the teleological order that

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11 Ameriks, Historical Turn, p. 77.
orients the human will towards the proper end of its powers of free choice—man’s fulfillment of his objective ends—, the intellect is bereft of the means to reach the ultimate Good, which, as necessarily located beyond the bounds of experience of limited human creatures, is an exclusive property of transcendent Being.

The critique of pure reason as a propaedeutic for a practical metaphysics

It should be a cause for further reflection, however, that the same consideration of the highest good’s location beyond all experience is precisely one of the motives underlying Kant’s denial of moral significance to objects of cognition as such, be they inclinations, pleasures, or material ends. If we keep in mind this concern with the protection of morality from the “mechanism of nature,” we can begin to appreciate Kant’s refusal to allow empirical nature to rule over the faculties that must of necessity give the rules for a fully law-like order to emerge and orient human moral nature and the theoretical experience of nature in general.

Here it is necessary to take a step back, in order to understand Kant’s larger and ultimate intentions for the critical philosophy. For that purpose, Richard Velkley’s meticulous analysis of Kant’s debts to the moral philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau (as well as the distance between Kant and Rousseau regarding crucial aspects of the relationship between freedom, virtue, and nature) is very useful.¹² Velkley finds the origins of Kant’s conception of the “primacy of the

practical” in Kant’s reflection about Rousseau’s moral and political works. By exploring the first documented manifestations of Kant’s discovery of Rousseau’s criticism of instrumental reason—located in the Remarks to the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, a work Kant wrote as he read the recently published works of Rousseau—Velkley reveals the origins of the central role of the practical use of reason among Kant’s philosophical concerns.

What Kant “learns” from Rousseau, according to Velkley’s interpretation of the Remarks, is that instrumental (or theoretical) reason is embroiled with human passions in a dialectic that enslaves man to the appreciation of others, the expectations of society, and the artificial desires that arise from this process. As nature, as Rousseau sees it, is no longer a possible, or even desirable, guide for the reconstruction of human relations according to virtue, man is forced to rely on the dynamics of his own “perfectibilité,” in which reason occupies a central place, to correct the distortions generated in the history of the development of civilization’s arts and sciences. But this rehabilitated reason cannot be subordinated to feeling, inclinations, or moral sense, since these are—by virtue of their corruption in human history—among the very sources of disorder. Nor can reason be shaped by a theoretical metaphysics that would rely on given natural ends of man; in Rousseau’s view, man has lost touch with his original nature. Thus it is from reason itself that the reorganization must come, but a reason that is practical, centered on freedom, and that seeks an “equilibrium between human desires and human power to satisfy desire.”

Velkley summarizes Kant’s “debt” to Rousseau as follows:

Kant finds in Rousseau the suggestion that humanity itself, through the development of reason, inflicts on itself all the forms of alienation tending to destroy both freedom and virtue. And that it is also reason in a certain self-legislative form (as the source of

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13 Ibid., p. 67.
autonomy) that can restore humanity to wholeness and soundness, uniting freedom and virtue....

In the account of reason as instrumental or subservient to passionate human nature, reason has no reliable guidance from something that is itself internally coherent. Rousseau shows how reason as subordinate to such “nature” is exposed to self-contradiction and “dialectic.”14

Kant’s project, in this reading, is moral from the start, or, as Velkley puts it following Kant’s own words, “the practical sciences are ‘first in intention,’” whereas the theoretical are “first in execution.”15 The critical philosophy does not “go after” traditional or dogmatic metaphysics with the attitude, usually attributed to the Enlightenment as a whole, of dismissing the outdated beliefs of a past age in the name of an instrumental reason modeled after the natural sciences. In fact, it is theoretical reason as a whole—which includes the natural sciences—that is placed under the suspicion, as seen with the above quote of the Preface to the second edition of KrV (B xxiv), of threatening the rightful practical use of reason. Instances such as this, in which Kant defends the “positive” aspect of critical philosophy, appear throughout the first Critique. It will be useful to examine a few of those.

The Critique as Kant’s Defense of Morality against Instrumental Reason

In the Preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, after noting the threat that an uncritical theoretical reason poses to its use in the practical sphere, Kant touches on the possibility of thinking objects as things in themselves, even if it is impossible to cognize them as objects of experience. In a footnote, Kant states that thinking “whatever I like, as long as I do not

14 Ibid., p. 37.
15 Ibid., p. 92.
contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought,” (KrV, B xxvi), is perfectly possible if the actual possibility of such an object of thought is still not affirmed. For “real possibility” to be ascribed to the object, however, “something more is required,” and that “something more” may come from practical sources of cognition, beside theoretical ones.

Kant then goes on to note the Critique’s implications to central metaphysical ideas such as the soul, God, and immortality. By circumventing the action of speculative reason and its experience- and intuition-based cognition, the Critique allows these ideas to be thought without the contradictions that come from looking at objects in just one way, as a “thing in general (as a thing in itself).” (KrV, B xxvii) Hence, from the vantage point of the distinction between the perspective of appearances and that of things in themselves, the “mechanism of nature” is restricted to the realm of appearances and does not threaten freedom and morality, which are found in a realm beyond appearances, i.e. the practical sphere. This is the immediate context of Kant’s claim to have denied knowledge to make room for faith. (KrV, B xxx) As a result, the critical philosophy can be considered under the aspect of a defense of morality and religion against objectors “in a Socratic way, namely by the clearest proof of the ignorance of the opponent.” (KrV, B xxxi)

This defense is articulated in the Paralogisms of Reason, which deal with reason’s “illusions” about the properties of the rational soul, and in the chapter on the Ideal of Pure Reason, where Kant explores the ideal of the highest being and the problems of speculative theology. In both cases, Kant claims that the critical philosophy disarms those who would deny,
on speculative grounds, the existence of the immortal soul and of God. In both cases, too, Kant starts from a practical perspective on these topics, which can be defended against speculative attacks. In the case of the soul as a rational substance,

since it is likewise possible that I may find cause, drawn from somewhere else than mere speculative grounds, to hope for an existence of my thinking nature that is self-sufficient and persisting through all possible changes of my state, much is still won if, through the free confession of my ignorance, I can nevertheless repel the dogmatic attacks of a speculative opponent, and show him that he can never know more in which to deny my expectations about the nature of my subject than I can in order to hold to them. (KrV, A 384)

Similarly, from the point of view of a theology based on the moral necessity of a Being that is at the ground of the fulfillment of the ends of reason, not only are speculative claims to the effect of the non-existence of God unwarranted by the critical philosophy, but the latter is very useful to purify moral theology of anthropomorphisms and other illegitimate claims,

since the same grounds for considering human reason incapable of asserting the existence of such a being, when laid before our eyes, also suffice to prove the unsuitability of all counter-assertions. For where, by pure speculation of reason, will anyone acquire the insight that there is no highest being as the original ground of everything? (KrV, A 640 / B 668)

These statements of the critical philosophy’s implications suggest that Kant is very concerned with doing justice to the common experience of morality and religion, which are fields in which human beings see their action as lying beyond the necessities and restrictions of observable physical phenomena. In terms of a more specific cultural context such as modern Western civilization, Kant is thereby replying to the objections of a “scientist” view of the world
to morality, freedom, and faith by means of, first of all, a critical investigation of the conditions and limitations of theoretical cognition.\(^\text{16}\)

Running behind all these considerations, Kant’s concerns are clearly metaphysical in nature, and not just in the “transcendental” sense that focuses merely on the epistemological conditions for any possible experience. This is clearly announced with the first words of the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Metaphysics, a “battlefield of… endless controversies” arising from the attempt to discuss principles that transcend the bounds of experience, is composed of a set of questions that are given “by the nature of reason itself.” (*KrV*, A viii) Its inquiries are such that human nature “cannot be indifferent” to it. (*KrV*, A x) Kant’s “problem” with the traditional metaphysics of his time, as he goes on to say, is that it has not reached the level of a true science, in which cognition a priori is established as a firm foundation and reason, as a “court of justice,” differentiates between its “rightful claims” and “groundless pretensions,” “according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws.” (*KrV*, A xii)

But even though the metaphysical method has been, as Kant repeats in the Preface to the second edition, “a mere groping… among mere concepts,” (*KrV*, B xv) there is no question of giving up the search for the “secure course of a science” for metaphysics, since nature has “afflicted our

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\(^{16}\) This view of Kant has been proposed in the context of a criticism of the excessively narrow focus of the literature on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, by Eric Weil in *Problèmes Kantiens*, Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970, pp. 16, 40-44. For instance, Weil affirms that the Preface to the second edition of the first *Critique* was motivated by Kant’s reaching the conclusion that “it is never too early for Kant to speak of questions of a positive metaphysics, [nor can he] remind us too often that it is not for him a question of the destruction of all metaphysics, but rather of founding ‘a systematic metaphysics according to the critique of pure reason…’ which must remain ‘to posterity as a legacy.’” (*B XXX*) Kant considers himself a metaphysician, although a metaphysician of a new species. He wants to erect and he is certain he has erected metaphysics on unshakable grounds, after so many arbitrary constructions, which were mutually contradictory and which could not but provide the skeptics with weapons against metaphysics.” (Ibid., p. 16)
reason with the restless striving for such a path, as if it were one of reason’s most important occupations.” (*KrV*, B xv)

If we consider in this light the remaining paragraphs of the Preface to *KrV* (B), in which Kant makes a brief disquisition on the need for a transcendental solution for the problem of metaphysics as a science of a priori concepts, (*KrV*, B xvi-xviii) it becomes clearer that Kant’s transcendental idealism, in its restriction of the theoretical cognition of objects to objects of possible experience, means to save or “make room for” a different kind of cognition a priori that is independent of experience, i.e., metaphysics. Indeed, Kant talks about a “first part of metaphysics,” which consists of this investigation of “concepts a priori to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience,” (*KrV* B xix) and the “second part of metaphysics”, which concerns itself with what is “beyond the boundaries of possible experience.” It is the latter that happens to be “precisely the most essential occupation of this science [of metaphysics].” (*KrV*, B xix-xx)

Still, the former restriction of theoretical knowledge to possible experience would seem to be a pretty tight corner into which Kant has painted himself regarding the “second part of metaphysics.” But, as he himself notes, in fact that restriction is what spares the unconditioned (that which lies beyond possible experience) from the contradictions that arise when unconditioned realities are placed alongside empirical objects as “things in general,” for empirical objects are by definition bound to the conditions of space and time, or the laws of nature. As Ameriks has noted, transcendental idealism, by ascribing ideality specifically to space

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17 This is where the analogy to Copernicus is made, as Kant finds that, since experience is not a secure source of a priori concepts for metaphysics, it is the a priori concepts that will be the key to uncovering how experience is produced, in such a way that “objects must conform to our cognition.” (*KrV*, B xvi)
and time as “forms of sensible intuition,” does not negate the reality of things in an absolute way, and

never denies that there are items other than our mind…. It should be obvious that the ideality of such relational properties [of the sensible world through determination of space and time as forms of intuition] does not immediately endanger the reality of the intrinsic non-relational features of things.\(^{18}\)

Moreover, even if Kant finds a limited employment of the unconditioned in theoretical reason as an “idea of reason” which only acts as a “regulative principle” (as emphasized in the Dialectic of Pure Reason and in the Ideal of Pure Reason, as well as in the *Prolegomena*), or “an idea invented for the purpose of bringing the cognition of the understanding as near as possible to the completeness indicated by that idea,” (\(P\ 4:332\)) he can still ask of reason (which is not limited to the functions of sensibility and the understanding)

... whether there are not data in reason’s practical data for determining that transcendent rational concept of the unconditioned, in such a way as to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, in accordance with the wishes of metaphysics, cognitions a priori that are possible, but only from a practical standpoint…. We remain at liberty, indeed we are called upon by reason to fill [the empty space left by the restrictions of theoretical reason] if we can through practical data of reason. (\(KrV\, Bxxi\))

**Metaphysics based on the primacy of the practical**

The answer to this metaphysical question is a viable one, for Kant, in view of the primacy of the practical, or the primacy of reason in its practical use over its theoretical use. We refer back to Velkley’s study of the Kantian debt to Rousseau, in which Velkley shows how Kant

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discovers, in Rousseau’s opposition between nature and (a “dialectical” but redeemable) reason, the need for a moral attitude that is independent of natural determinations and the passions of humankind. Susan Shell has corroborated that insight, pointing to how the critical philosophy’s animus comes from the moral concerns Kant picked up in Rousseau:

The only needful science serves morality. It teaches man what he is so that he may learn what he ought to be. It does so, however, in a negative way, by destroying that false knowledge which has seduced man away from his rightful place. It protects him from these false seductions by exposing them as such, that is, by teaching man his limits. This science of man points towards the path which critical philosophy will take, establishing the limits of reason and thereby removing the illusive seductions which deflect man from that which is, morally speaking, his proper course.  

Shell’s remark about the critical philosophy’s connection with a “science of man” echoes Eric Weil’s insight that Kant’s whole philosophy is ultimately an anthropological quest, as the questions about the “interests of reason” reveal man’s search for himself. In this quest, Kant will follow the leads of humanity’s mystery beyond the boundaries of theoretical reason; in this reading, the “strictures” of theoretical reason are not well understood if considered as merely restrictions to knowledge, but should be seen as the springboard to a kind of knowledge that is truly practical and particular to the human being.

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20 Weil, *Problèmes Kantiens*, p. 33: “Kantian philosophy’s ultimate ground must be sought in Kant’s theory of man, in his philosophical anthropology, not in a ‘theory of knowledge,’ or even in Metaphysics, although both represent essential parts of the system.” The reason this may have not been so clearly understood is for Weil that “Kant does not make this ground of his thought into a subject of reflection, he does not thematize it.” (Ibid.)
In order to accede to this perspective, what must be understood is that reason is for Kant not restricted, or even preferentially oriented, to its theoretical use in experience. In Kant’s “hierarchy” of the faculties of the mind, reason is the architectonic one, and it starts from a practical interest. This can be understood by a brief description of Kant’s view of the different roles of sensibility, understanding, and reason as faculties with which the mind deals with reality. Sensibility is a passive function, defined as “the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way.” (KrV, A 51 / B 75) The understanding displays a certain spontaneity in that it constructs cognitions by synthesizing intuitions under its own concepts and categories; yet, it is limited to using its a priori resources in the synthesis of objects of experience, as “the faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition.” (KrV, A 51 / B 75) But reason, as a “faculty of principles,” is independent of experience to the extent that its concepts reach the unconditioned, and so “deal with something under which all experience belongs, but that is never itself an object of experience.….” (KrV, A 311 / B 367) This remains the case even if reason must refer to the experience of objects in order to affirm the actual possibility of the cognitions with which it deals, for the ideas and the ideals of reason retain their significance as regulative principles for the completeness of the system of experience, and in the case of some of the ideas, receive a stronger determination by reason in its practical use.\(^{21}\)

\(^{21}\) The problem of the status of the pure concepts of reason, of ideas and ideals of reason as regulative principles for theoretical cognition and “postulates of practical reason” is discussed in the next chapter. Although Kant is always very strict, when discussing the ideas of reason, in observing the cognitive limitations of such ideas, there is a lot more to be said about their role in the critical philosophy and what they may signify in the context of a more comprehensive view of reason, especially from the point of view of the primacy of the practical.
Reason as unifying and regulative

Recent treatments of reason’s architectonic, regulative, or self-foundational character have been developed by Onora O’Neill\textsuperscript{22} and Susan Neiman.\textsuperscript{23} Both authors focus on reason’s function as “regulative,” or, as O’Neill puts it, as mandating “precepts for the conduct of thinking, acting, and their coherent connection, hence as ways of achieving an active grasp rather than a passive response to the manifold of life….”\textsuperscript{24} For O’Neill this means that reason, as a giver of precepts for the most fundamental and properly human activities, does not have any prior foundation from which it may legitimize its principles except its own law-like activity.

Neiman shares O’Neill’s interpretation of reason’s autonomous status as regards the knowledge of objects, but as she is more concerned with outlining reason’s unified structure and with understanding reason as a single faculty that displays a common operation in its regulation of both theory and practice, she reaches further into the insight of the primacy of the practical:

If reason as a whole is regulative rather than cognitive, providing ends and standards for activity rather than knowledge, this question becomes less puzzling. For theoretical reason is in this sense already practical, concerned not with contemplation but with directing us to realize its ideas.\textsuperscript{25}

It should be remarked that, in their interpretations of the ultimate source of reason’s regulative role, both O’Neill and Neiman view this autonomy of reason in a purely immanentist way. For Neiman, Kant’s ultimate intentions are political, stemming from his repulsion towards

\begin{itemize}
  \item O’Neill, “Vindicating Reason,” p. 287.
  \item Neiman, \textit{Unity}, p. 126.
\end{itemize}
paternalistic, despotic governments that rule their subjects by catering to their inclinations, instead of treating them as free persons who should live by categorical imperatives of self-rule. Kant’s main philosophical opponent would be the conservatism of an Edmund Burke, which in Neiman’s view is characterized by the mere affirmation of “what has worked before,” that is, (historical) experience. In this context, according to Kant

reason’s role is to provide laws that tell us what ought to happen, even if it never does, not laws of nature, which tell us what does happen. The rightfulness of reason’s laws is not to be determined by experience; rather, the worth of experience is to be judged by its ability to meet the ideals of reason. Neiman’s philosophy assumes, for Neiman, a revolutionary, all-destroying and fully original character, which dismisses all human moral experience in favor of his “grand theories.” Neiman sees a proof for this in that even the ultimate goodness of God is subjected to the ideal of moral perfection existing in man, as the passage about “the Holy One of the Gospel” from the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* seems to imply. Thus, as she reads Kant’s critical philosophy from the point of view of Kant’s political essays (especially *On the Common Saying: ‘This May be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice*), the motive and intention behind the new role ascribed to reason, which “turns the tables” on the restrictions experience places on “abstract” ideas, comes from an emancipatory animus that is part and parcel of the Enlightenment *Zeitgeist* and makes of Kant “the philosopher of the French Revolution.”

O’Neill similarly locates the meaning of the autonomy of reason at a political level, although in a way that is more abstract and less historically contextualized than Neiman’s. For

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26 Ibid., p. 108.
27 Ibid., p. 111. We will come back to the flaws of this view of Kant’s philosophical stance towards experience and in this interpretation of the *Grounding* mention of “the Holy One of the Gospel.” See below, note 45, and the subsection on the ultimate source of morality in the will as pure practical reason (p. 101-106).
O’Neill, Kant’s “antifoundationalism” is simply a strategy to obtain “vindication” for reason in a world that has lost the certainty of insights into the transcendent good as a norm for action. Reason, as the new and legitimate regulator of the “innumerable differing ways of thought and life” found in human societies, becomes “reasonableness.” As such, it becomes a “modest affair” that precludes transcendent knowledge, enforces discipline toward itself, and acts in a law-like manner.

Neither Neiman nor O’Neill go further into the metaphysical and moral implications of that apparently merely immanent character of reason as a regulative faculty of persons involved in public discussion, a problem that is further explored in the following two chapters. Nevertheless, they point to an important aspect of Kant’s view of reason as regulative or autonomous, and consequently, primarily practical. This understanding places reason above determined human acts, certainly as regards desires and inclinations, but also as regards the theoretical knowledge of the world of objects. It is, in part, an implication of the theoretical concern with the dynamics of principles that reach the unconditioned and in that way point to the impossibility of finding evidence for the process of finding evidences. But the “place” where this new reason is found will turn out to be—by virtue of the very nature of its relationship with the world—morality as an order of pure practical reason. In any case, the practical receives a new signification in this context.

29 These observations located O’Neill and Neiman squarely in the field of Rawlsian Neo-Kantian scholars, who take their inspiration from Rawls’s “Kantian constructivism.” The next two chapters, especially Chapter 4, Rawls’s stance will be often brought forth and critically examined as a competing interpretation.
30 As noted by Walsh, *Modern Philosophical Revolution*, p. 35.
The meaning of the primacy of reason in its practical use

Here we can return to Velkley’s study, in which he criticizes interpretations of the primacy of the practical as an “innocuous” characterization, according to which practical cognition is in fact of secondary importance and has its primacy restricted to the “empty space” left by the critical philosophy’s limitation of theoretical reason. In this innocuous sense, the doctrine of the primacy of the practical would be “simply a retroactive and disingenuous effort to lend respectability to what must otherwise seem to most readers of Kant to be a bleak and ‘all-destroying’ dismantling of traditional supports of the moral order.”

Indeed, taking into account the considerations made so far, it would take a lot of oversight to give the practical use of reason a secondary role in Kant’s philosophy as a whole. Additionally, it is only in the context of these considerations that the few passages in the Kantian corpus that deal directly with the concept of primacy receive their full import, as the following example from the first Critique will show.

In the Canon of Pure Reason, Kant deals with the roles of theoretical and practical reason using language that might seem to support the “innocuous” view criticized by Velkley. In the specific section where this language is found, Kant displays his usual strictness in maintaining the understanding and reason, when applied to theoretical questions, within their limits. Thus the questions of the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God are examined as regards their theoretical use, which turns out to be null and void:

31 Velkley, End of Reason, p. 5.
These three propositions always remain transcendent for speculative reason, and have no immanent use, i.e., one that is permissible for objects of experience and therefore useful for us in some way, but are rather, considered in themselves, entirely idle even though extremely difficult efforts of our reason. (KrV, A 799 / B 827)

These conclusions come at the end of a long paragraph in which Kant once more highlights the sheer uselessness of concepts which, because they cannot be objects of experience, can never be included in the chain of cause and effect that give things their status as valid explanatory elements. Excluded from the range of speculative interest, but as they are yet “insistently recommended to us by our reason, their importance must really concern only the practical.” (KrV, A 799 / B 827) Reading these passages, a so inclined interpreter might find in the phrase “only the practical” an indication that freedom, the soul, and God are not really that important for Kant, and are “relegated” to the practical sphere, where they may have their assignations as “postulates” as a sort of consolation prize for being declared irrelevant where it counts, i.e., “knowledge.” But that would mean ignoring Kant’s whole argument anteceding the paragraph just quoted. In effect, Kant starts the Canon section by emphasizing the negative utility of all philosophy of pure reason, but he soon counters that there must somewhere be a source of positive cognitions that belong in the domain of pure reason…., that in fact constitute the goal of the strenuous effort of reason. For to what cause should the unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience otherwise be described? (KrV, A 796 / B 824)

It is, Kant goes on, in reason’s “nature” (Natur) “to go beyond its use in experience” and “to find peace only in the completion of its circle in a self-subsisting systematic whole.” (KrV, A 797 / B 825) In this sense, the highest ends of reason, “in respect to which all other ends merely have the value of means,” (idem) are precisely those three ends which, although lying beyond experience and having “no immanent use,” alone can “advance, in a united manner, that interest
of humanity which is subordinated to no higher one.” (KrV A 798 / B 826) Consequently, in Kant’s critical philosophy, reason, which is one, finds its highest employment in the practical sphere, which directs and unifies all the efforts of reason, including (as has been noted) its propaedeutic, immanent self-criticism. Pure practical reason, moreover, is found only in the domain of rational moral laws, since other considerations of what should be done (pragmatics) always involve empirical determinations. Therefore, Kant will affirm that “since [the three propositions around which the final end of reason is organized] concern our conduct in relation to the highest end, the ultimate aim of nature which provides for us wisely in the disposition of reason is properly directed only to what is moral.” (KrV, A 801 / B 829) Morality turns out to be the most important of reason’s concerns, rather than a secondary area with a precarious claim to reason’s assent.

The doctrine of the primacy of the practical receives a fuller exposition in the second Critique, in a section that ends with a statement repeating part of what had been developed in the Canon of the first critique: “all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone.” (KpV, 5:121) The notion of the interest of a faculty of the mind (such as the understanding, or reason, etc.) is defined by Kant as “a principle that contains the condition under which alone its [the faculty’s] exercise is promoted.” (KpV, 5:120) Primacy is a relationship between “two or more things connected by reason;” it implies “the prerogative of the interest of one insofar as the interest of the others is subordinated to it (and it cannot be inferior to any other).” (KpV, 5:119)

Therefore, Kant is stating explicitly, as a part of his examination of a dialectic of pure reason in its practical use (regarding the difficulties in the determination of the concept of the
highest good) and as a prologue to the exposition of the postulates of pure practical reason, that reason—even when concerned with speculative questions, that is, in its speculative use—must accept the insights or propositions that “belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason” as “sufficiently authenticated,” and “compare and connect them with everything that it has within its power as speculative reason…. ” (*KpV*, 5:121)

As he reaches these conclusions, Kant makes a number of important statements, such as that “pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be,” that “it is still one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles,” and that the incorporation of practical insights into reason’s theoretical use is “not in the least opposed to its interest,” which is limited to “the restriction of speculative mischief.” (*KpV*, 5:121) With these statements, Kant works out a picture that goes well beyond the scientific, instrumental, or skeptical view of reason that many commentators, including the Thomistic personalists that have been the object of the first chapter, have attributed to Kant in common with Descartes and Bacon. To state the more obvious distinction, it is a notion of reason that includes in itself the moral determinations that are by no means invalidated by the incapacity of reason to theoretically cognize and determine the full teleological structure of the world. On the contrary, Kant’s insight is that the moral law belongs to a different order of existence than the phenomenal order of objects of experience that reason and the understanding cognize theoretically. The moral order has, furthermore, “prerogative” over the theoretical order, as its interest subordinates and grounds the interest of theory, as long as both interests (as interests of one single faculty of reason) are not in contradiction.
The good will as pure practical reason: a key to understanding the ultimate ground of morality

Having established the full import of the practical use of reason in Kant’s critical philosophy, whereby practical reason imposes upon its own theoretical activity the acceptance of its moral propositions “as something offered… from another source” (KpV, 5:121), we proceed to examine the content of the interest of practical reason, namely, “the determination of the will with respect to the complete and final end.” If the moral will does not have access to a prior teleological order known by the intellect, how can it stand on its own as a principle of ethical orientation? And does that different perspective illumine in any way the Thomistic one?

As the first chapter has shown, chiefly among the Thomistic critics’ concerns is the Kantian conception of the will, untethered from a stable order of being. In traditional Thomism, the hierarchy of ends is the source of moral orientation by means of the intellect’s grasp of the potentiality of all beings towards their proper final ends. But for Kant, as the critics understand his ethical theory, morality becomes a subjective reality inasmuch as it is shorn of its connection with the order of ends. Additionally, even if Kant attempts to establish a new moral criterion by means of the mere “form of the law,” the richness and the full significance of ethical action are thereby lost from sight, as the critics see it.

Again, here it is necessary to inquire into Kant’s ultimate intentions and goals, as he focuses on the essence of an unconditionally good will. A fair reading must ask what central feature animates Kant’s argument about the ground of morality, which in the Grounding for the
Metaphysics of Morals concludes with the famous categorical imperative. In order to reach an adequate answer, firstly we shall consider some of the more influential interpretations developed in the literature.

A critique of some interpretations of the good will found in the literature

An interpretation like Ernst Cassirer’s looks at the good will in much the same way as it views the understanding and reason in their theoretical use. Indeed, Cassirer makes a point of repeatedly stressing the parallelism between the “necessity of the basic logical principles of cognition” and the lawfulness of the ground of morality, insofar as both are a priori, reason-based, formal structures of the mind’s functioning. Thus the good will replaces “affects” with “function”\(^{32}\) and aims at external agreement among free individuals and internal unity of the inclinations, as expressed in the idea of “character.”\(^{33}\)

Some of the more recent Rawlsian interpretations of the good will in Kant seem to echo Cassirer’s emphasis on function and formal agreement around non-material principles, which, translated into Rawls’s famous perspective, become a consensus-building procedure among free and reasonable individuals. The “good will” is understood by Rawls as “the principles from which a fully ideal reasonable and rational agent would act,”\(^{34}\) in order to be able to be a member of a possible realm of ends and thus to give worth and meaning to human life.\(^{35}\) In Rawls’s view

\(^{32}\) Cassirer, *Kant’s Life*, p. 243.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 245.

\(^{34}\) Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 151.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 158.
of Kantian ethics and his own theory (which Rawls labels as “Kantian constructivism”\textsuperscript{36}), this is at the basis of the priority of the right over the good, which subordinates the goodness of all objects, talents, and actions to “the substantive requirements on actions and institutions imposed by [the formal conceptions of the good will and of right].”\textsuperscript{37} In more concrete terms, as Rawls explains,

Kantian constructivism holds that moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept. Apart from the procedure of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts.\textsuperscript{38}

As David Walsh has noted, Rawls’s political appropriation of the Kantian project misses the clearly moral nature of the priority of the right over the good, as Kant “insists that it is not the consequences of an action but rather the principle by which it is intended that makes the action good.”\textsuperscript{39} In contrast, Allen Wood’s detailed account of the first section of the \textit{Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals} is more faithful to Kant’s definition of the good will as above all a moral enterprise, as opposed to a political or quasi-political problem. Wood goes through a point by point analysis of the \textit{Grounding}’s first section argument, trying to lay out the implicit meanings and implications of Kant’s propositions and defending them against incomplete or bad faith

\textsuperscript{36} Rawls does not fully identify his own theory to Kant’s thought down to the last detail, but calls it “Kantian” inasmuch as it “resembles Kant’s in enough fundamental respects so that it is far closer to his view than to the other traditional moral conceptions that are appropriate for use as benchmarks of comparison [such as intuitionism, or utilitarianism].” (John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} 77, no. 9 (Sep 1980), p. 517.) The modifications Rawls applies to Kantian ethical theory reflect, as Rawls states, similar criticisms made by John Dewey about the many “dualisms” found in Kant’s doctrine. Although there is nothing unusual about the development of a new theory from an older one, in which some fundamental aspects are maintained even if important corrections and additions are made, it seems that Rawls’s presentation of Kantian thought displays evidence of a reverse movement, that is, Rawls’s own theoretical concerns may have influenced his own (and his students’) understanding of Kant’s thought, leaving some aspects of the latter obscured.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 156.

\textsuperscript{38} John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism,” p. 519.

\textsuperscript{39} Walsh, \textit{Modern Philosophical Revolution}, p. 68 (footnote 28).
interpretations. Wood argues especially against those readings that find absurdities and inconsistencies in the examples Kant provides to illustrate the moral purity of the good will (like Schiller’s satire of the need to despise a friend in order to do one’s duty to him).

However, Wood’s concentration on clarifying and defending the Kantian account of morality with the support of Kant’s implicit anthropological premises probably prevents him from devoting more attention to the central metaphysical concern of isolating the good will as an a priori concept that opens the door to an adequate understanding of morality, or pure practical reason. This is illustrated by a concluding thought from Wood’s discussion about the motives of moral actions, which betrays a certain view of the argument about the good will as being chiefly about the actual behavior of agents in a moral setting. In the case at hand, Wood observes that “the good will does not always act from duty, nor do all acts of the good will have this special moral worth. Even with the best conceivable will, it would clearly be impossible for a human being to act from duty on every occasion.”

Wood seems to get entangled in the problem of showing how “someone with a good will” may not necessarily “act from duty on every occasion.” However, to present the “good will,” that is, the principle behind actions done for the sake of duty (aus Plicht), as an actual

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41 Wood’s stated objective is to refute the accusation that many critics have made (the specific critic quoted is Alasdair McIntyre) to the effect that Kantian morality implies that having a good will means only to act for the sake of duty. For Wood, besides not being true of a perfectly rational and holy being, as God, this conception limits the actions of a good will exclusively to moral actions that deserve the highest estimation, or esteem, and ignores other, less praiseworthy but still worthy of approval, actions of the good will. Wood’s argument leads to propositions that, on their face, go directly against what Kant claims elsewhere and includes a distinction between “moral worth” and “approval from the moral standpoint” that sound problematic. In order to defend his concept of “moral approval,” he states that “obviously all actions that conform to duty are valued from the moral standpoint or they would not be commanded as duties.” (Ibid.) In this case, he fails to take into account that for Kant moral duty is a matter of the internal setting of ends (as expressed in the *Metaphysics of Morals*), or acting from the motive of respect for the law (G, 4:400).
human will in action in the world seems to be a misunderstanding of Kant’s proposal of the “good will” as an idea of reason and the ground of a metaphysics of morals. This is apparent from the first lines of the *Grounding*’s first section, where Kant progressively isolates the “good will” as a source of moral value from other human talents and properties, using human experience as understood by “ordinary rational knowledge of morality.” Before reaching the tenth paragraph of his exposition, Kant announces the development of “the concept of a will estimable in itself and good without regard to any further end….” (*G*, 4:397) That this is just an idea of reason is clear from the fact that no human will can ever be imagined “without regard to any further end,” as Kant himself will affirm later in the book.

A similar perspective is present in Ameriks’s discussion of different interpretations of the good will, its nature and role in human action. In this particular work, Ameriks examines different theories that have in common the concern with locating the good will in the clearest way in concrete circumstances, or with judging the moral worth of specific actions according to a determinate concept of the good will. In his assessment of the different views, Ameriks judges each notion of the good will based on its success in the elucidation of concrete examples, plausibly and without serious contradictions with Kant’s own thought and commonly accepted human moral experience. So, Ameriks notes that the good will has been adequately described as a particular intention underlying specific actions, or a general capacity for the production of good actions present in (all) persons, or still a description of the whole character of certain human agents.

In instances such as this, the definitions of the good will are sought for the sake of illuminating and explaining concrete examples of moral action, thus contributing to a detailed
ethical theory that would help to understand all kinds of human moral action. In order to fulfill this goal, the good will would need to be located in some particular complex of human faculties, and the description of its functioning alongside the other faculties would show how it is the will that gives any action its moral content. Now, there is certainly a worthy philosophical interest in the investigation of the application of ethical concepts to actual human life, as well as in the harmonization of the functioning of the will with other human capacities in the production of human actions. Nevertheless, at least in the case of the _Grounding_ and the _Critique_, as metaphysical books, it is rather the examples of concrete actions (understood from the standpoint of “ordinary rational knowledge”) that are laid out for the sake of a better grasp of the a priori concepts and ideas of practical reason, starting with the good will. In other words, as Kant explains in the Preface to the _Grounding_ his main concern is not a psychology or a practical philosophy, but rather a pure moral philosophy, or metaphysics. (_G_, 4:389-390)

We shall take this standpoint to examine Kant’s development of the concept of the good will and the related concept of duty in the first section of the _Grounding_ in order to show that for Kant the will as pure practical reason, or the domain of freedom and morality, has its own dynamic and comes, in a way, before the “intellect,” or the understanding applied to theoretical cognition. Before turning to the _Grounding_, however, it will be useful to consider Kant’s criticism of the traditional eudaemonist account of ethics, which is the foil for Kant’s own assertion of the centrality of duty in moral action.
Kant’s critique of the teleological grounding of morality: an inverted order of priority

Stated briefly, according to Kant, to ground morality on the knowledge of a teleological order of being to which man is connected ultimately chains moral action to the order of cause and effect that exists among substances in the physical world, according to empirical experience. If the will as a “rational appetite” needs to be confronted with a teleological “truth” or “being,” by way of the intellect, in order to initiate morally good action (to do its duty), it is not acting on a motive of duty, but driven by an attraction to external goods which determine it, according to a dynamic of pleasure.

The heteronomy of an ethical order based on a hierarchy of goods is treated at greater length in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In Theorems 1 and 2 of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason, Kant states that the determination of the will by objects of the faculty of desire is always empirical (Theorem 1) and reducible to a determination by the feeling of pleasure, whether those objects are sensuous or intellectual in nature (Theorem 2). (*KpV*, 5:21-22) This means that, whenever certain known ends are the ground of the motivation for actions, the logic that rules the determination of the will is the logic of satisfaction of the willing subject’s desires, since these known ends are nothing but the matter of his faculty of desire. Kant describes this logic as “the relation of the representation [of an object] to the subject by which the faculty of desire is determined,” (*KpV*, 5:21) which is the definition of the concept of *pleasure in the reality of an object*, and which as such belongs to a “lower faculty of desire.” At the center of Kant’s refusal of this logic for moral actions is the impossibility of creating an a priori representation of any object of desire that may satisfy or fail to satisfy a subject, since in the case of objects this
satisfaction necessarily depends on experience, or on the specific empirical conditions of the subject in question. Therefore, for Kant it does not matter whether the ends sought are of an intellectual or spiritual nature, as opposed to the satisfaction of one’s fleshly needs: inasmuch as the ends are sought because they elicit a response in the subject (satisfaction or pleasure in the attainment of one’s ends, and in the long haul, happiness), the subject is mainly affected in his “receptivity,” which is for Kant the characteristic mark of sense and of dependence on empirical experience. But laws, as universal and necessary (objective) principles of reason, cannot be deduced from empirical experience, since the former create the latter \textit{qua} experience, as seen in the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. In other words and more briefly stated, objects (either intellectual or physical) can only cause pleasure, i.e. satisfaction of the lower (empirical and receptive) faculty of desire. As Kant will add when discussing the concepts of \textit{good} and \textit{evil} as objects of pure practical reason, the “errors of the philosophers” lay in that they sought an object of the will in order to make it into the matter and the ground of a law…, whereas they should first have searched for a law that determined the will a priori and immediately, and only then determined the object conformable to the will. Now, whether they placed this object of pleasure, which was to yield the supreme concept of good, in happiness, in perfection, in moral feeling, or in the will of God, their principle was in every case heteronomy and they had to come unavoidably upon empirical conditions for a moral law, since they could call their object, as the immediate determining ground of the will, good or evil only by its immediate relation to feeling, which is always empirical. \cite{KpV, 5:64}

Therefore, for Kant even those eudaimonists or virtue ethicists who center the moral life on the highest intellectual activities are, all things considered, Epicureans who happen to be working with a different notion of pleasures. Kant’s criticism of those who would ascribe the pleasure received from activities of the understanding and reason to a higher faculty of desire, thus calling it a “higher pleasure,” concentrates our focus on that element of choice and desire
that produces, not the satisfaction for a choice well-made, but the rightness of the choice itself, independently of the pleasure it may occasion. It is not that there are not higher pleasures or even a pleasure that attaches to doing the good (Kant will call this “self-approbation” in *KpV*, 5:81), but that the criterion that determines the kind of pleasure as higher or lower comes from another sphere:

The principle of one’s own happiness, however much understanding and reason may be used in it, still contains no determining ground for the will other than such as is suitable to the lower faculty of desire; and thus either there is no higher faculty of desire at all or else pure reason must be practical of itself and alone, that is, it must be able to determine the will by the mere form of a practical rule without presupposing any feeling and hence without any representation of the agreeable or disagreeable as the matter of the faculty of desire, which is always an empirical condition of principles. (*KpV*, 5:24)

Here a certain effort must be made in order not to understand pleasure, as Kant uses it, as restricted to a physiological reaction to certain physical stimuli, but rather as what is felt by the human receptive capacity, irrespectively of the source of the information it receives. The problem, then, is not that there is a difference in quality between types of goods and the satisfaction they cause (such as in the Thomistic distinction between the *bonus honestum* and the *bonus delectabile*), but that this merely receptive capacity is unable to discern the moral or non-moral nature of the good that it feels, whether it is perfection or the will of God;⁴² nor can reason used for theoretical cognition do the task, because in its theoretical work it can only use what it receives from the senses. For that moral discernment, a special practical use of reason is needed.

⁴² Consider, for example, Kant’s affirmation in the *Grounding*, that in pure practical philosophy “there is no need to inquire into the grounds as to why something pleases or displeases, how the pleasure of mere sensation differs from taste, and whether taste differs from a general satisfaction of reason, upon what does the feeling of pleasure and displeasure rest, and how from this feeling desires and inclinations arise, and how, finally, from these there arise maxims through the cooperation of reason.” (*G*, 4:427)
What is at stake, then, is a matter of priority, concerning what makes a moral good, or an end of morality, moral. Without really going against, but in the last analysis confirming, a tradition that makes of the free accomplishment of moral acts the apex of human personality and spirituality, Kant isolates the element of morality from the other human circumstances that receive their moral status from that element, calling it the principle of pure practical reason, or the moral law. Having understood Kant’s concern with the pure sources of morality, one can then see how an order of ends that may be perceived by the intellect cannot be the ultimate principle underlying moral actions. This does not mean that moral actions must not refer to any material ends (which would be absurd, as no action can be performed without reference to any end, and Kant repeats that many times in his ethical works), but rather that what makes the ends “good” is something that is found beyond and comes “before” them (i.e., is a priori): the good in itself is a principle of reason, based on a moral law from which the ends’ varied goodness ultimately derives. In the case of human beings, this is manifested in the reality of duty. Duty must be, for Kant, an inescapable and inexplicable first principle, behind which one cannot go.

Towards a metaphysics of morals: the ultimate source of morality in the will as pure practical reason.

Going back to the *Grounding*, where the criticism above is already at work, although not fully fleshed out as in the second critique, we can follow Kant’s development of the concept of the unqualified good as the good will. The argument starts at the common rational moral knowledge about the good. Kant’s considerations about the good will as the only “good without
qualification” (G, 4:393) go right to the heart of the question of the “organon” of morality in man, or the seat of conative processes of the moral kind in rational beings. Kant touches on the general moral perception of what is (morally) good, in contrast with the useful and the agreeable, i.e. good for some further purpose or for someone’s inclinations. The morally good, which is good in itself, requires a special kind of motive, the sake of the moral law itself (G, 4:390) and a specific activity of the soul. So, the good will is good only by virtue of its willing—thus good in itself, without any further motive—(G, 4:394) and willing is “a summoning of all the means in our power”, a choice to create a new reality. (G, 4:394)

Kant is, in that way, reaching for the reality expressed by the concept of the good—not a matter of truth, what things are, a correspondence of a statement to its object as actual, but a matter of good, what one ought to do, the tensional reality or the pull which calls forth for something (that is not now) to be produced and the answer to that pull in a conscious choice of the good, for the sake of the law.

This concentrated look allows us to perceive a significant fact about the essence of human ends, in themselves or as parts of a whole teleological order. Any moral telos, as cognized, already brings within itself the tensional component that is especially defined by the will. Truth must certainly be a part of it, but this does not exhaust the question, for there is no “object” there yet—the object that is to be produced or achieved is a function of the pull, so that it is not first cognized, but is called forth by the “ought” into cognition as a good. Men should

43 This way of expressing the specific character of the “good in itself”, as Kant understands it, is taken from the reflections on consciousness made by Eric Voegelin in The Search of Order, volume 5 of his multivolume work, Order and History (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000). Consciousness is, in Voegelin’s terms, formed from one’s inner relation with the ground of being as sensed within. Normativeness, in this conception, comes from the relation to the ground, which is not conformed as a subject-object relation, but as an experience of participation in an overarching “It reality.”
certainly will their proper ends, but in the concept of a “proper (moral) end” there is already implicit the prior tensional aspect that allows it to be affirmed as such.

Looking at the same question from a different perspective, of anything that is cognized as good, it can always be asked, “Why is this good?”, until the question rests at the good in itself, which for this reason cannot be an object of that question, or an object at all. So the good as such qualifies all other powers and objects, which are only good (and morally good) if the will behind their use is good, or if the purpose toward which they are used, developed, and toward which they act, is envisioned according to a good will. Morality itself is not a property of the world of objects as such (as appearances), or the “sensible world,” but is part and parcel of the reality of personality, which Kant will define in the second critique as “freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity of a being subject to special laws—namely pure practical laws given by his own reason….” (KpV, 5:87)

Because the unconditioned good is only found beyond the fixity of objects of experience, it is only reason as a practical faculty that “creates” the will in its goodness. As Kant will suggest in a very Rousseauian statement, instinct would suffice to produce the feeling of happiness according to natural inclinations, and is usually better suited than reason for that purpose. (G, 4:395-6) More, however, needs to be said about what it means for reason in its practical use to originate the good will, especially regarding the relationship of reason and the law. The approach Kant takes to further articulate the idea of the good will as a “product” of reason and law is the elaboration of the concept of duty. In duty, whose experience is known in common rational

44 This insight is similar to Wojtyla’s observation in The Acting Person that morally good actions (re)create the action’s agent as good.
moral knowledge, the core of what a good will means is exposed, especially in contrast with the competing sources of motivation that are usually active in the human soul.

Duty, as Kant develops it (negatively through contrast and attrition with natural and morbid inclinations), includes in its concept the compliance to the subjective maxim of an action, which emphasizes the “inner” nature of the experience of duty. Through the diverse examples Kant shows that even actions that are outwardly good can be motivated by natural, selfish, or disordered factors. But it is only at the end of the examples, when describing the last example of the person with gout, that Kant introduces the idea of a law, which is what connects willing to pure practical reason:

But even in this case, if the universal inclination to happiness did not determine his will and if health, at least for him, did not figure as so necessary an element in his calculation; there still remain here, as in all other cases, a law, viz., that he should promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty and thereby for the first time does his conduct have real moral worth. (G, 4:399)

The element of law is introduced formally in the “third proposition” of Kant’s development of a philosophical concept of duty. The second proposition, after the examples given to illustrate and specify the particularities of dutiful actions, had placed the moral worth of actions done from duty in “the maxim according to which the action is determined,” the “principle of the will,” or “the formal principle of volition.” (G, 4:400) The third proposition now states that “duty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law,” (G, 4:400) where respect can only exist in relation to that which is connected to my will solely as ground and never as effect..., in other words, only the law itself can be an object of respect and hence can be a command…. Hence [once the influence of inclination and other objects of the will is excluded] there is nothing left which can determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this
practical law, i.e., the will can be subjectively determined by the maxim that I should follow such a law even if all my inclinations are thereby thwarted. \((G, 4:400-1)\)

In these few paragraphs at the beginning of the *Grounding*, Kant packs a lot that has not yet been made explicit, such as the relationship between the “law” as ground of the will and the respect that can only be directed to that kind of (rational, lawful) reality. He begins to develop these specific ideas in the following paragraphs, connecting them to “rational nature.” Kant starts precisely by saying that “effects of actions” can have many motives behind them that are not necessarily the peculiar activity of the “will of a rational being, in which the highest and unconditioned good can alone be found.” \((G, 4:401)\)

Therefore, the pre-eminent good which is called moral can consist in nothing but the representation of the law in itself, and such a representation can admittedly be found only in a rational being insofar as this representation, and not some expected effect, is the determining ground of the will. \((G, 4:401)\)

The footnote attached to this paragraph deserves a closer inspection, in view of its treatment of respect as a “feeling… that is self-produced by means of a rational concept….” \((G, 4:401, \text{footnote 14})\) In it, Kant focuses on the “tensional” character of the good will as “subordination to a law” that is self-imposed:

What I recognize immediately as a law for me, I recognize with respect; this means merely the consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without mediation of other influences upon my sense. The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness thereof, is called respect…. \((G, 4:402)\)

The law is immediately recognized as a law for the will (in its universal, objective authority), since the subordination of the will is “without mediation of other influences.” This recognition is already a subordination of the will to the law, and in a purely rational being would need no more incentive to motivate action. Kant, however, includes a particular feeling—respect,
which is the consciousness of the subordination to the law—as necessary for a “subjective
determination” in the feeling-bound being that is the human person. The existence of respect as a
motivational feeling, however, does not negate that reason, through its recognition (or
enactment) of the practical law, is the main factor determining the will in rational beings as a
moral faculty, the “organon” of morality. Accordingly, Kant will state, in the beginning of
Section 2 of the *Grounding*, that

> everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the power to act
> according to his conception of laws, i.e., according to principles, and thereby he has a
> will. Since the derivation of actions from laws requires reason, the will is nothing but
> practical reason…. (*G*, 4:412-3)

In reason applied to a pure practical use, in which it finds the moral law, the will is
formed as a capacity to recognize and affirm the good. Thus formed, the human will comes to
the world of experience and organizes a teleological order, which Kant will present as the
legislation of a kingdom of ends. The law of duty is not one extracted from experience, but
necessarily belongs to the realm of pure ideas, because the latter are universal, valid for “rational
beings generally,” and serve as the model for concrete moral actions, or the criteria to judge the
fitness of experience to the precepts of duty. This is the context of the apparently unorthodox
statement on “the Holy One of the gospel,” who says of himself that “None is good (the
archetype of the good) except God only (whom you do not see).” (*G*, 4:408) What Kant must
mean here is that human beings are only able to recognize the incarnated Son of God as holy
because they already have within themselves the idea of the good through the will’s
conformation to the moral law, or the “ideal of moral perfection.” (*G*, 4:408) This ideal cannot
come from the experience of an order of ends, because it actually grounds the rational apprehension of such an order. 45

The questions elicited by Kant’s development of the argument so far concern, one the one hand, how the moral law of pure practical reason can guide human beings in their actual experience, and on the other hand, the justification for Kant’s claim that there is such a moral law as found by practical reason (in Kant’s terms, its deduction). Among the potential challenges to answering these questions are problems that the Thomistic thinkers we have surveyed (among others) have pointed out: the apparently strict formalism of Kant’s system, which cannot create concrete human ends out of the mere form of universal law, and the warrant for such strong claims about the moral law, once all reference to a realistic conception of being has been forbidden by critical philosophy. Both challenges imply that, shorn of its ground in a stable concept of the human being, integrated into a hierarchy of ends, morality might not be the elevated and authoritative reality that Kant depicts, but the result of arbitrary and precarious claims made by isolated individuals.

45 In this light, Neiman’s use of this example to illustrate Kant’s character as an “anti-Burke,” by virtue of an enmity towards the authority of experience, is revealed as a flawed analogy. Indeed, at this point in the *Grounding*, Kant has just finished the first section affirming the ordinary rational experience of morality, which has an advantage over philosophers in knowing the right thing to do (G, 404). In fact, Kant’s issue here is with equating the concept of the good will or the pure idea of duty as the one single motivation for morality with concepts abstracted from experience, as if the empirical experience of human actions could provide, insofar as it is empirical and limited to human conditions, the universal rational criteria to judge experience itself. Yet, somehow, ordinary human moral experience has access to these universal principles, as Kant believes he has shown in the first section, even if it “does not think of this principle abstractly in its universal form.” (G, 403) These principles underlie moral experience and practice in an inarticulate form, so much so that “neither science nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one must do to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous.” (G, 404) This position, in the end, is not so far from Burke’s conceptions of the “eternal contract” and the historical consciousness; Kant only goes further than Burke in looking for a metaphysics that grounds this basic human experience. (See Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, pp. 6-7, for his conception of Kant’s modest conception of autonomous rationality.)
These two areas of concern are, of course, also among Kant’s preoccupations in the remainder of the *Grounding*, of which sections 2 and 3 proceed to develop a metaphysical account of the principles of pure practical reason (the categorical imperative and its diverse formulations) and a deduction of the moral law through a “critique of pure practical reason.” The same preoccupations remain active in Kant’s subsequent ethical works, such as the second *Critique* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In the latter, Kant develops a full catalog of the doctrine of right and of virtue that results from this new conception of morality. And in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant sets out to justify his claims about the existence of a moral law and its attendant “postulates,” although it should be noted that he reverses his deduction strategy.46

These two concerns will be dealt with in the following chapters, which take up Kant’s notion of morality as practical reason and apply it to achieve a better understanding of the “postulates of practical reason” and to the concept of autonomy, or more precisely, autonomous legislation of the universal moral law. In the remainder of this chapter, we shall limit ourselves to considering some of Kant’s indications about the nature of the law that determines the will as pure practical reason, and therefore morality.

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46 As Ameriks has shown in detail, Kant gives up proving the moral law through the metaphysical demonstration of the concept of freedom as a spontaneous faculty of man, analogous to judgment in theoretical reason (research and rewrite), which he had tried in the *Grounding*. Instead, Kant grounds freedom and his moral system on the “fact of reason,” as a self-evident reality that human beings discover in their common practical experience. See Ameriks, *Kant’s Critiques*, Chapter 6.
Law as a symbol for participation in the order of Being

As early as the *Grounding*’s first section’s closing pages, Kant reaches a preliminary formulation of the categorical imperative, merely by following the logic of the conformity of the will to pure practical reason, namely, that the only kind of law which is able to subordinate the will without any conditions, external “impulses,” or empirical particularities is “conformity to law as such.” (*G*, 4:402) Without this kind of lawfulness, duty is a “vain delusion and a chimerical concept,” and this is something that finds complete agreement in the “ordinary reason of mankind in its practical judgments.” (*G*, 4:402) Kant goes on to illustrate the concept of conformity to the universal form of law by means of the example of the maxim of lying to get out of distress as a hypothetical universal law, which invalidates itself as a possible moral law as soon as it is elaborated. (*G*, 4:402-3) Any human maxim is only in agreement with morality to the extent that it can be seen as compliant with the universal authority of a law that is equally valid for all rational beings.

Beyond the “procedural” nature of these examples (which Rawls greatly emphasizes and develops), there is the affirmation of the universally authoritative character of the rules of morality, as the main criterion for what will be called “good.” For Kant, universality is the chief feature of any law, be it a law of nature or one of morality; this is the main point of the decisive second premise of Kant’s syllogism that results in the categorical imperative’s formula of universal law:
Premise 1: A categorical imperative contains only the necessity of a maxim conforming to law, regardless of material conditions;

Premise 2: Without its attendant conditions, law as such is nothing but its universality;

Conclusion: The categorical imperative contains only conformity to universality, or the condition that any maxim could be willed as a universal law. (G, 4:421)

The formula of universal law is complemented and “brought closer to intuition” (G, 4:436) by the subsequent formulations of the categorical imperative, of humanity (or rational nature) as end in itself, of the legislation of members in a kingdom of ends, and of autonomy as a self-legislation of universal law. As Wood has noted, these formulations provide a much fuller picture of what the moral law entails, resulting in a morality that is very far from the formalistic and individualistic image that is usually found in certain critical accounts. But Kant’s insistence on emptying morality of all motivation except for duty or the moral law itself gives formality or universality the major role in defining the essence of a moral choice. Kant himself will affirm that the first formula is more appropriate for moral judgment, whereas the other two are of aid in “securing acceptance for the moral law.” (G, 4:436-7)

Still, after all the emphasis on duty and law, as well as the considerations Kant makes about the infinite worth of rational nature because it alone is capable of morality, (G, 4:435) it would be a misunderstanding of Kant’s ultimate intentions to consider mere formality or universality per se as the final explanatory terms of morality, as if any content that might be universalized through a hypothetical agreement of likeminded individuals would fit the requirements of moral law. Rather, formality and universality are better understood as concepts.

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Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 75.
through which the reality of law may be translated into a procedure for guiding moral action in
the world. In other words, the moral law does not depend on a world filled with sensible but
rational beings who are able to construct it through universalizing procedures, once they figure
out that only following their individual natural inclinations will not result in a satisfactory social
organization. Rather, the moral law is an a priori reality of universal authority to any rational
being; as such, it can be expressed or enacted through a procedure that separates individual
empirical inclinations and conditions from universalizable precepts. Such a procedure does not
amount to the “creation” of the moral law, but is rather an approximation to it.48

The question then becomes, what lies at the core of this law which is expressed by formal
lawgiving but is not reducible to it? Allen Wood, as mentioned above, tries to refute the
“formalistic” view of the moral law by bringing into his account of Kant’s ethical thought the
other formulations of the categorical imperative, as well as treating the concepts of rational will
and agency as the capacity for rising above inclinations and submitting them to rational criticism.
In this context, “the conception of oneself as an agent,”49 or as “someone who is rational in the
pursuit of ends,”50 gains a motivational power that is based on “living up to” that conception in
one’s actions. For Wood, even in the case of instrumental reason, the motivation for following a
rational course of action is not primarily in the ends that are set (and for which the rational

48 Paul Guyer has reached a similar conclusion in his defense of freedom as the ultimate value grounding the first
principle of morality in Kant. The formula of universal law of the categorical imperative, in Guyer’s reading, is not a
monolithic and free standing statement of what morality is, but “the principle we must follow in order to give our
unique freedom full expression in the phenomenal sphere, where the effects of our choice take place.” (Paul Guyer,
Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 131.) We discuss the
issue of freedom’s role as an ultimate ground of the moral law, which we find more problematic, in the following
pages.
49 Ibid., p. 55.
50 Ibid., p. 73.
course of action is a mere means), but in one’s conception as a rational agent. Wood further differentiates between the conception of a rational agent and the “desire” to live up to that conception, as different kinds of “reasons” for acting. The main reason for rational (and moral) action would be the conception itself, which would naturally produce a desire to live up to the conception.

Therefore, Wood defines the fundamental reason any agent follows rational imperatives as “a rational being’s conception of its self-worth.”^51 And the difference between the motivation to act on technical, prudential, or categorical imperatives lies in the “depth of the self-conception” of each rational agent, from that of an (instrumentally) rational being “who happens to have a certain end” to that of “a single self with a conception of its own good” to that of a “merely rational being, subject only to laws equally valid for all rational beings.”^52

The problem with this approach is that, no matter how much Wood may point to the difference between a “conception” and a “desire” as reasons for acting, it still runs against Kant’s own warning about making of an end the ultimate reason for acting, and the conception of a merely rational being as an ideal to live up to is an end nonetheless, even if intellectual in nature. In Kant’s pure moral logic, as we have seen, focusing on the self-worth of a rational being as a source of motivation still begs the question of where that infinite worth comes from, and “nothing can have any worth other than what the law determines.” (G, 4:436) Put in another way, the conception of rational self-worth as an end still begs the question of what it is that is good

^51 Ibid., p. 74.
^52 Ibid.
about rationality, and that can only be found in the pull of morality itself, the experience of duty, or of the unconditional good will, which is where Kant, not by chance, starts the *Grounding*.53

Paul Guyer54 follows a similar path when he defends freedom as the ultimate value underlying and giving motivation to the moral law. Guyer tries to show that there is a value, after all, which grounds the moral law for Kant; but this value is not one based on empirical data about man, or on the pleasure originated from the satisfaction of certain inclinations. Instead, it is the regulative idea of freedom that “can serve to motivate our practical behavior and guide it toward rational coherence, just as the regulative ideal of the systematicity of natural laws can serve to guide as well as motivate our theoretical inquiry.”55 Freedom, not being provable in any theoretical manner, would be “ultimately a conception by means of which we ourselves can make sense of our own nature, not something that nature imposes upon us.”56

In order to place freedom at the ground of the motivation to be moral, Guyer has to present it as prior to the moral law itself, a move that goes against Kant’s own conclusions, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, that “it is… the moral law… that first offers itself to us and, inasmuch as reason presents it as a determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions and indeed quite independent of them, leads directly to the concept of freedom.”

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54 Guyer, *Freedom, Law, and Happiness*.
55 Ibid., p. 169.
56 Ibid.
So instead Guyer goes back to the *Grounding*, where he sees freedom given a more central role, and to Kant’s *Lectures on Ethics* from 1784. Guyer finds therein an affirmation of freedom as the root of man’s status as an end in himself and a view of the necessity of law as merely a protection against the diminishment of freedom itself through lawlessness, which leads him to conclude that “by means of this argument Kant could justify adherence to the moral law on the basis of the absolute value of freedom itself without begging the question of the antecedent validity of that law.”

Although Guyer examines briefly the reasons why “lawlessness” would diminish freedom, both from an exterior or political perspective and from an inner perspective, his analysis of Kant’s arguments limits lawfulness to a concept of “consistency”, the lack of which would imperil the existence of freedom. What Guyer does not go on to consider is that, more than a concern with internal and external consistency, the moral law is at the core of what it means to be free. Freedom—which is independence from the natural mechanism of cause and effect,—in the Kantian view, crucially depends on the existence of a moral law in order to orient itself in the “intelligible world,” in certain cases against the inclinations and desires that come from the natural realm. Whereas in the *Grounding* Kant still hoped to justify morality from the basis of an intelligible world of free beings, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he realized that is was only the moral law that could provide access to the intelligible world. Once the primacy of reason in its practical use is taken into account, it can be understood that only through pure practical reason is man able to escape the logic of determinism and thus open the space for his

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57 Ibid., p. 159.
capacity to act freely, that is, according to a universal law of his own legislation, i.e., for autonomy.

Guyer’s use of freedom as an ultimate (regulative) value undergirding the moral law allows him to escape the metaphysical questions that will result from a stronger grounding of freedom in practical reason and the universal moral law. But these questions are unavoidable if we want to follow Kant’s thought through to its final implications. For even in the *Grounding*, Kant’s whole discussion about the dignity of rational nature as an end in itself (and thus as a possible objective ground for a practical law) is based on the access to a law that goes beyond the mechanism of nature and, for this reason, can only be self-legislated. (*G*, 4:427-9) With the primacy of the practical, a path is opened for a metaphysics of the practice of reason in which the law itself remains the ultimate and legitimate motivation for morality.

At this point, one may realize that even the image of law has limitations to depict the reality to which Kant is finally referring. Without a prior source of authority to legitimize or sanction it, how can it yet subordinate the will? Law, or more precisely the idea of law in this context has become a symbol for a reality in which man participates through reason in its practical use. The very question, “What ought I to do,” refers to the prior context of a law (according to which one ought to act) that gives the question any sense it may have. Without the law, there would be no “ought,” so that every time one asks about his obligation he has already located himself in this preexistent reality. As Walsh has expressed it, “we do not create the imperative but discover that it creates us. When we search out the supreme principle of morality,

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58 This particular line of questioning will be further explored in Chapter 4, when we consider this “metaphysics of participation” as an adequate solution to the “paradox of autonomy” (see pages 187-208).
we find that it is already present within us in the awareness that the only unqualified good is a
good will.” Guiding that awareness is the idea of law, representing for Kant existence under a
“tension towards Being,” as Eric Voegelin has put it.

The idea of the law increasingly becomes, for Kant, the port of entry into the “intelligible
world” of rational beings, which have access to their reality as *noumena* by virtue of their
awareness of the application of reason to the practical sphere. After a not very successful attempt
to ground the possibility of pure practical reason on freedom in the *Grounding’s* third section,
Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* will ground freedom itself and justify practical reason
through the awareness of the moral law in the “fact of reason.” And in that same work, the moral
law will be the warrant for a stronger affirmation of God, freedom, and the immortality of the
soul as postulates of practical reason. Therefore, in the light of the primacy of the practical, the
inauguration of a new kind of metaphysics can be observed in Kant’s ethical works. The
strictures of the first critique are still observed; the existence of the postulates, similarly to the
positing of the unconditioned in *KrV* (which was a corollary of the practice of theory), is not
directly cognizable, but depends on looking back at the consequences and implications of moral
practice. And yet, nothing is higher for man than existence in a realm of independence from
nature and of freedom.

Therefore, with Kant a new way of grounding the moral order is inaugurated, one that
emphasizes the spiritual, or personal character of morality. The separation of man from a stable
teleological order of being that encompasses the whole cosmos, which seems for the Thomistic
personalists a crucial misstep, is in reality a refinement or a “heightening” (as Walsh puts it) of a

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Christian insight that received its clearest expression in the personalists’ own writings. As we saw with Wojtyła’s and Guardini’s exploration of the specific reality of the person, to treat moral reality as a response to a “call in esteem,” or defining action in opposition to activation—as transcendence—is to highlight the independence of the moment of choice from the influence and determination of the mechanism of nature. Persons do not act as cogs in a teleological structure, but to the extent that they participate in a teleological order, they do it by virtue of their own free assent to the demands of the moral law to which they have access through reason. The way in which this personalist teleological order must now be understood, with its crucial elements such as its divine author, each person’s soul, and the highest end; and how persons have access to a law to which they freely assent (an apparent contradiction in terms), are the subjects of the next two chapters.
Chapter III

The postulates of practical reason according to the priority of morality: reclaiming the moral sources of religious experience

Introduction

Jacques Maritain took Kant to task for having reversed the order of priority of being, as a result of which God, the “subjective ultimate end of man” and “objective ultimate end of creation” according to Thomistic ethics, became “an appendix to morality,” or an “after the fact addition” that was only necessary to bring about the harmonization of the worlds of morality and nature, with regard to the end of reason. As such, the “postulate” of God’s existence remained foreign to the core of moral existence and served at best as “a ‘recompense,’ in the most anthropomorphic and extrinsic sense, a reconciliation offered in reward for good conduct.”

Maritain’s critique is in line with the general Thomistic interpretation of Kantian metaphysics and ethics, according to which Kant forecloses the possibility of knowledge of the ontological foundations of moral existence in a realistic sense, resulting in a subjectivist and formalist theory of morals. With the denial of the understanding’s realistic grasp of being, i.e. the understanding’s limitation to the cognition of objects of possible experience, there remains no sure way theoretically to affirm the reality of the Supreme Being that lies precisely beyond all possible experience, as an ens realissimum that grounds all other beings, either as an efficient cause (through a cosmological proof) or at the ontological level (through an ontological proof

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1 Requoted from Chapter 1, p. 32.
focusing on the necessity of the existence of an object for the concept of a necessary Being). Allied to Kant’s denial of an ultimate teleological ground for the moral law, this seems to leave the reality of God uncertain for theory (no more than a “regulative principle”) and in any case irrelevant for ethics, at least regarding what really matters. Moreover, this conception of a morality that is independent of the Being of beings but, instead, relies solely on the internal resources of the practical rational faculty of finite beings lends weight to the claim that Kantian morality (and politics) is an immanentist and formalist construction that is subjected to nothing more than consensus obtained according to rational procedures.

Such a hypothesis seems to have been confirmed by the constructivist interpretation of Kantian ethics of John Rawls and his students, which avoids metaphysical questions and pursues instead a political reading of Kantian principles of morality. Rawls himself, for instance, dismisses the postulate of God’s existence (along with that of immortality) as a requirement of practical reason. Rawls believes that the construction of an earthly “realm of ends” is a more proper end of the moral law than a conception of the highest good as a final harmonization of virtue and happiness effected by the Supreme author of nature, despite what Kant himself wrote. And Paul Guyer, who, as noted in the previous chapter, puts great emphasis on the import of freedom as the main (non-material) value and ground of Kant’s ethics, also takes a dim view of the postulates of God and immortality as rational beliefs required by the moral law. A brief exam of his argument will reveal the central point of this interpretation.

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Guyer assigns varied levels of importance to the three postulates of practical reason in Kant’s thought. While freedom remains central, for instance, it is better secured elsewhere in Kant’s philosophy, as a consequence of the validity of the moral law. As to the immortality of the soul, Guyer believes Kant goes too far in requiring holiness for the attainment of happiness, which grounds for Guyer the need for an endless extension of moral effort. Thus, having reduced the three postulates of practical reason to a single one, the existence of God, Guyer proceeds to undercut the strength of that postulate itself as a rational belief. He begins by pointing to Kant’s own affirmation that it is impossible to posit the existence of the ideals of pure reason theoretically, as they can never be connected with any possible experience. Then, faced with Kant’s own defense of the postulates’ necessity from a practical point of view, Guyer reinterprets Kant’s point as an adjustment of his strict ethics to human weakness of character, equating practical rational beliefs to thoughts with a mere psychological function:

Kant’s position seems to be that while assurance that the noncontradictoriness of an end would be all that is needed from a theoretical point of view to make a course of action aimed at that end rational, human psychology is such that in fact it needs a greater incentive, a positive reason to believe its end is realizable, but that to accommodate that feature of human psychology we can ourselves introduce and then act under the ideas of positive grounds for the reality of the highest good as well as under theoretical proof of its noncontradictoriness.

In other words, in Guyer’s immanentist interpretation of Kant, God would not be necessary after all for the rationality of acts done for the sake of duty—as is the case with the continuous progression towards perpetual peace—again, despite Kant’s own assertions otherwise. Instead, the idea of God would be a mere psychological prop to compensate for a

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4 Ibid., p. 352.
5 Ibid., p. 364-5.
particularly human shortcoming, a suggestion that supports Maritain’s suspicions of a Kantian logic of extrinsic rewards for those who cannot act on the basis of practical reason alone.

Both Rawls’ and Guyer’s analyses present a picture of Kantian ethics that is cut apart from any transcendent implications, even from a practical point of view. For both Rawls and Guyer take their reference of the scope of the ends of practical reason from images of (hypothetical) immanent human realizations that are present in Kant’s corpus (as perpetual peace), or even—in the case of Rawls—from an immanentist view of the realm of ends as a secular ideal. It is as if they wished to reinsert, even within the practical perspective inaugurated by Kant, the skeptical and atheistic arguments that Kant thought he had blocked by his critique of theoretical reason. The way to do this would be to leave the practical point of view restricted to a human, terrestrial, and even political perspective that is more in line with the theoretical strictures of the first *Critique*.

The tenor of Guyer’s text gives the impression that he intends to be even more “enlightened” than Kant, a major Enlightenment philosopher. According to Guyer, it is not reason that requires postulates of practical reason but human sensibility (non-reason), which can (and needs to) be motivated by “faith,” even when reason knows there is no theoretical warrant for it. Guyer states that, for “imperfectly rational creatures” as humans, “there is no reason why the religious ideas and symbols cannot have the same subjective power to affect human emotions and impel human actions—from the theoretical point of view they are illusions, but from the psychological point of view they remain natural.”

Reason, even in its practical use, is once more closed to what theory cannot justify, except for its own immanent autonomy. As such, the

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postulate of God’s existence becomes a mere psychological illusion created by something like a Feuerbachian projection of man’s own power to achieve a world of happiness and virtue by his own resources.

Another perspective on the postulates of practical reason is possible, though, which takes Kant at his word and tries to understand how the transcendent realities of a divine creator and an endless existence can be accommodated within Kant’s apparently immanentist philosophy. John E. Hare, for instance, has criticized what he calls the “cushion hermeneutics” put forward by some contemporary exegetes, according to whom Kant was less than forthcoming about his true agnosticism in order to “cushion his disagreement with the authorities or perhaps his faithful old manservant.” To counter this narrative, Hare points to Kant’s consistent inclusions of God in his theoretical and practical philosophy as a proof of his sincere philosophical conviction about God’s existence and role. Hare singles out significant instances of this conviction, such as the development of the pure practical principles of morality in the *Grounding*, where Kant unmistakably includes God as the head or sovereign of the kingdom of ends as independent and all powerful being. (*G*, 4:434)

Another example of a less skeptical engagement with the reasoning behind the postulates is the work of Chris Firestone on Kantian thought and theology. Firestone is concerned with mapping out the many ways in which Kantian philosophy may be a suitable basis for sound Christian theology. Towards that goal, Firestone surveys a number of scholars who have uncovered the “theological resources” marked out by Kant in his works; by so doing Firestone

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arrives at a working principle according to which “faith, if it is to be rational, must be located in the transcendental recesses of reason and developed via the transition from theory to practice along with the critical expansion of the rest of his philosophy.” Firestone documents and synthesizes different accounts of the role and legitimacy of religion in Kant’s thought, reviewing works in philosophy and theology by Ronald Green, Adina Davidovich, Gordon Kaufman, Stephen R. Palmquist, Rudolph Otto, and Paul Tillich. In diverse ways, these authors try to depict religious thinking or the religious perspective in Kant as a way to ground, unite, or transcend the specifically practical and theoretical uses of reason. Green, Davidovich, and Kaufman, in their particular ways, tend to recreate a constructivist perspective in which the religious comprehends practice and theory from a third (historical or aesthetical) point of view. In their turn, Palmquist, Otto, and Tillich go into the way religious thinking underlies human reason and man’s very existence at a deeper level, which appears once the different uses of reason have been critically examined.

In Firestone’s view, Tillich seems to have reached the deepest elaboration of this perspective by finding at the core of the man who knows and thinks man the questioner and question: “Man is the question that he asks about himself before any question has been formulated.” For this reason, man “occupies a pre-eminent position in ontology, not as an outstanding object among other objects, but as that being who asks the ontological question and

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in whose self-awareness the ontological answer can be found.”

Tillich sees man at the “center perspective,” between the extremes of the concrete world—whose structure is revealed by objective reason—and being itself, of which man, as a question about himself, is the self-conscious manifestation.

Firestone seems not to grasp the full import of Tillich’s conception of man as questioner, as he suggests Tillich leaves undefined the object of the question. But the problem of the question’s object disappears once one realizes that the religious reason of which Tillich speaks has its source in the pre-conceptual depths of man, where man finds himself in relation to the ground of being through the mode of searching or questioning. In this sense, Tillich’s approach to theology seems to be similar to Eric Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness, in its existential outlook upon man and the ground of being. For Voegelin as for Tillich, the “question of man” cannot be objectively formulated, because it is an existential mode of being that exists before any discursive elaboration. Instead it can only be contemplated by repeating the experience of the questioner, who can only enter into a relationship with the ground through the mode of questioning, as a response to a prior inner call.

In a similarly existential perspective is included David Walsh’s characterization of the postulates of God and immortality in Kant as “in the Platonic sense a ‘true myth’.” As Plato

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10 Tillich, Systematic Theology, p. 187, quoted in Firestone, ibid.
11 “Tillich does not actually tell us what this question is and why he believes that man is this question, but it appears from this Kantian analysis of his system that man is the question of human identity in as much as this question is prior to or the summation of all other ontological questions.” (Firestone, ibid.)
12 Voegelin’s complex meditation on the “paradox of consciousness” and “the complex of reality-consciousness-language,” in which the search for order and meaning of human existence are seen to be found only in the context of the unfolding of a non-objective “It-Reality” is found in the fifth volume to his series, Order and History: In Search of Order. Vol. V. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000, p. 28-42.
13 Walsh, Modern Philosophical Revolution, p. 50.
used myth to talk about experiences and truths which lay beyond the scope of philosophy’s conceptual structure, God and the immortality of the soul represent realities that exist beyond the grasp of theoretical reason, but that are nonetheless central to human existence in its non-spatio-temporal aspect, namely, the pure practical or the moral.

For the purposes of this work, the specific question of the construction of Christian theology on a Kantian foundation, as taken up by Chris Firestone, will not be directly addressed. Rather, we shall focus on the status and the meaning of the postulates of practical reason, specifically those of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Moreover, taking into account Kant’s consideration of the difference between biblical and philosophical theology, the former based on revelation, the latter on mere reason, we refrain from entering into the debate about the “orthodoxy” of Kant’s theological and religious view. Such debate would be, in any case, the result of a misunderstanding of Kant’s own intentions, among which the competition with biblical theology as a rival contender for influence on the religious beliefs and practices of the faithful is not included. Instead, we intend to suggest, according to the general goals stated in the Introduction, that the interpretation of the Kantian doctrine of the postulates put forward by some of Kant’s Thomistic critics is the result of a superficial reading of his critical project.

In the context of this dissertation’s general goals, which include the identification and exploration of an alternative view of Kantian metaphysics and ethics, this chapter follows up on the considerations reached at the end of Chapter 2, about the existential character of the moral law and the opening it provides into a world beyond “possible experience” through moral participation.

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14 As expressed in the Preface to the First Edition of Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason.
Kant’s methodological strictures on knowledge about the soul, freedom, and God

We must start by recalling a topic broached in Chapter 2, namely, Kant’s insistent and emphatic warnings about the limits of theoretical knowledge when it feels the natural pull to overcome the boundaries of experience toward the “unconditioned.” The same limitations are imposed on the consideration of things in themselves, or *noumena*, and on the treatment of the “regulative” role of the ideas of reason that aim at the completeness of the chain of cause and effect, or the ultimate ground of the world of experience, or yet freedom as a principle of uncaused causality. These constant warnings are found chiefly in the first *Critique*, where perhaps the main point of the Transcendental Dialectic consists in showing that pure reason enters into paralogisms and antinomies when it attempts to treating appearances as things in themselves, or to consider their properties qua appearances as properties of things in themselves (such as the soul, or the magnitude and division of appearances in the world). But they also go on in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where for all the importance Kant places in the postulates these are still bereft of theoretical justification.  

15 These restrictions are stated as soon as the Preface to the second *Critique*: “The ideas of God and immortality, however, are not conditions of the moral law but only conditions of the necessary object of a will determined by this law, that is, of the mere practical use of our pure reason; hence with respect to those ideas we cannot affirm that we cognize and have insight into—I do not merely say the reality but even the possibility of them.” (*KpV*, 5:5) And, after presenting his theory of the postulates of practical reason, Kant spends three sections of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason meditating on the conflicts between the perspectives of theoretical and practical reason, and their possible resolution. One source of conflict is the (always emphasized) impossibility of the theoretical knowledge of the postulates. (*KpV*, 5:132-146)
The soul as an “after-thought”

The restrictions start early on in the first *Critique*, for already in the Transcendental Aesthetic, where Kant investigates the role of space and time as pure forms of sensibility and intuition, Kant repeatedly states that to say space and time are forms implies that we cannot cognize any “things in themselves,” but those only insofar as they are represented as appearances in our experience of them, or according to how they affect our human sensible cognition, based on sensibility and sensation. One of the first applications of this principle regards the knowing self, represented by Kant as the “synthetic unity of apperception.” Kant emphasizes the distinction between this unity of apperception and an “analytical unity of apperception,” which is an “empirical consciousness that accompanies different representations,” a secondary representation added to prior representations, or a representation of “the identity of the consciousness in these representations.” (*KrV*, B 134) This analytical unity “is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.” (*KrV*, B134) This latter, however, is fully a priori, and as such, not directly observable.

It is noteworthy that in this section of the work, Kant makes use of different linguistic strategies to express this a priori character of synthetic apperception: terms and expressions such as “not yet,” “presupposition,” and “precedence” are found in different contexts in which Kant compares the phenomenal self to the synthetic unity of apperception. Kant is thus searching for something that is there before the consciousness of the self exists as a cognition, but that already is that conscience, at least as its uncognizable ground; it is the synthesis that makes that consciousness possible. Throughout the lengthy description of the inner sense as the product of a
cognition of our self only as an appearance, (KrV, B 150 - 156) it remains clear that the transcendental synthesis of the imagination and the understanding, uniting representations under concepts in the unity of apperception, is always “before” or a priori in regard to the proper results of cognition itself. We can never get behind those first actions that go on without witness, except for their results as cognitions. As a consequence, a part of the self’s inner constitution remains a mystery, even if a very productive one:

In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general, on the contrary, hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. (KrV, B 157)

Later on, in the first edition’s Paralogisms section, Kant will elaborate on these restrictions in view of his critique of the traditional rational psychology’s doctrine of the soul, which intends to transcend “all the powers of human reason:”

I obviously cognize this thinking Self no better as to its properties, nor can I have any insight into its persistence, or even the independence of its existence from whatever transcendental substratum of outer appearances there may be, for this is just as unknown to me as the self is. (KrV, A 384)

The unconditioned beyond the world

The restrictions also apply when reason thinks the world “outside” the knowing self. As reason acquaints itself with the empirical world through the mediation of sensibility and the understanding, the appearances that make up this external world, seen as conditioned within a chain of cause and effect, lead to the idea of the “absolute totality in the synthesis of appearances,” according the principle that “if the unconditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given.” (KrV, A 409 / B 436) This
dynamic leads reason “naturally,” as Kant puts it, into antinomies, whose solution lies in recognizing that the elements of the chains of cause and effect, composition, and division are merely appearances, which are always synthesized by the understanding as conditioned, and to which the concept of whole, or totality, can never be given in the finite experience of human beings:

the antinomy of pure reason in its cosmological ideas is removed by showing that it is merely dialectical and a conflict due to an illusion arising from the fact that one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of things in themselves, to appearances that exist only in representation, and that, if they constitute a series, exist in the successive regress but otherwise do not exist at all. (KrV, A 506 / B 534)

The concept of the unconditioned and its diverse applications according to the series of conditions can never be “constitutive” for reason’s cognition of the world, but instead it constitutes a regulative principle for reason, which “postulates what should be effected by us in the regress, but does not anticipate what is given in itself in the object prior to any regress.” (KrV, A 509 / B 537) In this way, Kant finds in reason’s operation a rule of constant regression towards the unconditioned, denying however that the unconditioned is or may be an object of experience: “the [unconditioned] will never be reached. For the absolutely unconditioned is not encountered in experience at all.” (KrV, A 510 / B 538)

Kant points to an important difference between the two kinds of antinomies of reason, the mathematical-transcendental antinomies (regarding division of all appearances into component parts and the composition of all towards a whole) and the dynamic-transcendental ideas (regarding the existence of a non-conditioned first being and that of an uncaused cause of the chain of cause and effects). Whereas in the former case the resolution makes both positions of
the antinomy false, because in both thesis and antithesis the purported final terms of the two series (the simplest, indivisible part and the whole of appearances) remain necessarily appearances and as such self-contradictory, in the latter case a harmonic solution is possible because the unconditioned in both series (the first being and uncaused cause) is of a rational, not sensible character. (KrV, A 531 / B 559) Appearances cannot be thought outside their empirical conditions, because that is how they are known as objects of experience in the first place; but from the moment one can look at certain causes of effects as not sensible but intelligible, subject to universal rules that determine not what is but what ought to be, a window is open into a non-phenomenal sphere. Thus the possibility remains open for a transcendental freedom of things in themselves that has its place alongside the mechanism of nature.

Kant spends a reasonable amount of paragraphs going over the problem of how freedom as a mode of uncaused causality may take place “in regard to the very same effect that is determined by nature.” (KrV, A 536 / B 565) Such freedom, Kant thinks, proceeds from

an intelligible ground [that] does not touch the empirical questions at all, but may have to do merely with thinking and the pure understanding…; and the intelligible character, which is the transcendental ground of the [empirical character or lawfulness that in turn grounds the explanations of the effects of action], is passed over as entirely unknown, except insofar as it is indicated through the empirical character as only its sensible sign. (KrV, A 546 / B 574)

Here Kant follows up with a “proto-Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals,” establishing the special character of moral imperatives as a kind of rational causality founded on the principle of duty, or on the ought that can only be a principle of pure practical reason. As purely rational, coming as it were from outside the flow of appearances (and thus of time itself as the form of inner intuition), this causality cannot be said to “arise or start working at a certain
time in producing an effect” (KrV, A 551 / B 579), but it nevertheless corresponds to an empirical character in man. As Kant puts it, “if reason can have causality in regard to appearances, then it is a faculty through which the sensible condition of an empirical series of effects first begins.” (KrV, A 551 / B 580) Not being a part of the series of conditions, practical reason is still “the persisting condition of all voluntary actions under which the human being appears.” (KrV, A 553 / B581) The paradoxical nature of Kant’s formulations here is striking, as he is attempting to unite two forms of engagement with reality, the intelligible and the sensible. So, while all empirical conditions are contained in the series of natural effects in time,

in regard to the intelligible character, of which the empirical one is only the sensible schema, no before or after applies, and every action, irrespective of the temporal relation in which it stands to other appearances, is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason…. (KrV, A 553 / B 581)

Reason, whose transcendental idea freedom is, is “present to the all the actions of human beings in all conditions of time, and is one and the same, but it is not itself in time, and never enters into any new state in which it previously was not; in regard to a new state, reason is determining but not determinable.” (KrV, A 556 / B 584) In this sense, some of the limits of reason and cognition are acknowledged and accepted. For instance, there is no possible answer to the question “Why has [reason] not determined appearances otherwise through its own causality?” (KrV, A 556 / B 584) Or, in other words, “why the intelligible character gives us exactly these appearances and this empirical character under the circumstances before us, to answer this surpasses every faculty of our reason, indeed it surpasses the authority of our reason even to ask it…. ” (KrV, A 557 / B 585) Kant believes only to have shown that reason and nature
are posited about different and separate kinds of relations between actions and their effects, so that they can co-exist without contradiction.

God as an ideal of pure reason

Finally, a similar result obtains for the idea of a necessary being, which can be thought outside the chain of appearances and thus not restricted by the conditions that are valid for any possible experience. This necessary being outside the chain of conditions, posited as a possible resolution to the second dynamic-transcendental antinomy, remains—from the theoretical point of view—“a mere thought entity,” a transcendental object, about which it must be said that “for the assumption of such an object, in thinking it as a thing determinable by its distinguishing and inner predicates, we have on our side neither grounds of its possibility (since it is independent of all concepts of experience) nor the least justification….” (KrV, A 566 / B 594)

Therefore, in the last Chapter of the Transcendental Dialectic, on the Ideal of Pure Reason, Kant treats the concept of God as an ideal, i.e., “an individual thing which is determinable… through the idea alone.” (KrV, A 568 / B 596) This ideal is reached through the extension of the idea of the “thoroughgoing determination [of all things] in our reason.” (KrV, A 575 / B 603) Kant’s argument develops the metaphysical insight that the possibility of anything is determined through the relation (of identity of contradiction) between its predicates and “the sum total of all predicates of things in general.” (KrV, A 572 / B 600) The comparison between the individual predicates of a thing and the sum of all possible predicates is a transcendental process, since it can never take place through the actual observation and cataloguing of sensible
things by the understanding. Yet, the reflection about this transcendental relationship shows that every determination of a finite being is not a positive affirmation of its exclusive predicates as if found in themselves, but that it is in fact the negation or limitation of some of the predicates of this “All of reality” that is implicit in the idea of the sum of all possible predicates. As Kant puts it,

all negations (which are the sole predicates through which everything else is to be distinguished from the most real being) are mere limitations of a greater and finally of the highest reality; hence they presuppose it, and as regards their content they are merely derived from it. (*KrV*, A 578 / B 606)

This ideal of an individual “All reality,” which corresponds to the concepts of *ens realissimum, ens originarium, ens summum, and ens entium*, is to be considered not in the same order of the derivative beings whose concepts are limitations of its idea, but as a *ground* of the possibility of all things. Kant emphasizes, however, that this ground is not in a relationship as that of “an actual object to other things, but only that of an idea to concepts, and as to the existence of such a being of such preeminent excellence it leaves us in complete ignorance.” (*KrV*, A 579 / B 607)

Hence, after going through the transcendental contours of this “one single genuine ideal of which human reason is capable,” (*KrV*, A 576 / B 605) Kant declares its hypostatization into the being called God to be a misuse of the ideal itself. Kant calls it “a mere fiction, through which we encompass and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as a particular being.” The problem lies in looking at the ideal in the same way we look at beings in general, in view of their dependence on the “All reality” for their thoroughgoing determination; which is the same as considering an ideal or transcendental dependence as an empirical or ontological relationship:
Now in fact no other objects except those of sense can be given to us, and they can be
given nowhere except in the context of a possible experience; consequently, nothing is an
object for us unless it presupposes the sum total of all empirical reality as condition of its
possibility. In accordance with a natural illusion, we regard as a principle that must hold
of all things in general that which properly holds only of those which are given as objects
of our senses. (KrV, A 582 / B 610)

Kant’s analysis of the shortcomings of the three metaphysical proofs of the existence of
God can be summed up in the assertion that the passage from the concept of a necessary and
unconditional Being to the claim of its actual existence is illegitimate, because it lacks (as
already signaled in his previous considerations about transcendental theology) that which allows
any object to be considered as “existing”: the connection of a concept of the thing with a
perception, in accordance with empirical laws. But by its very nature, the ideal or concept of an
unconditioned and necessary being and the idea through which it is reached cannot ever be found
in experience. (KrV, A 601 / B 629)

The conclusion, “On the final aim of the natural dialectic of human reason,” gives Kant’s
last clarification of the dialectics reason enters into by following its natural and proper activity as
regards the world of appearances. The being of the soul, the infinity of the universe, and finally
of God are brought up again under their legitimate regulative function. As he explains in the case
of the highest being,

one leaves it entirely open what sort of constitution in itself is this ground, which eludes
our concepts, might have, and posits an idea only as a unique standpoint from which
alone one can extend the unity that is so essential to reason and so salutary to the
understanding; in a word, this transcendental thing is merely the schema of that regulative
principle through which reason, as far as it can, extends systematic unity over all
experience. (KrV, A 681-2 / B 709-10)

Kant affirms the necessity and legitimacy of thinking all these ideas, provided they are
limited to their status as regulative ideas and not regarded as determined objects. In this section,
Kant specifically focuses on the dependence observed of the idea of God on the world of appearances, whose nature of an ordered and conditioned manifold of appearances is the reason why the idea of a ground is elicited by reason's systematizing activity. An inversion of this order of precedence entails, for Kant, risks such as that of a lazy and a perverted reason, which short-circuits reason's methodical investigation of the system of nature for the facility of an immediate "explanation" in divine intentions.

As regulative principles, however, the ideas are extremely useful and necessary for reason—irrespective of any empirical considerations, since in this case the operative principle is that of reason's own direction of the investigation of conditioned appearances. Kant is very emphatic in affirming reason's independence in this regard, to the extent that it becomes natural to look at a higher reason doing for the whole of nature what human reason does in its piecemeal investigation of it:

The greatest systematic unity, consequently also purposive unity, is the school and even the ground of the possibility of the greatest use of human reason. Hence the idea of it is inseparably bound up with the essence of our reason. The very same idea, therefore, is legislative for us, and thus it is very natural to assume a corresponding legislative reason (*intellectus archetypus*) from which all systematic unity of nature, as the object of our reason, is to be achieved. (*KrV*, A 694-5 / B 722-3)

In a preceding passage, Kant mentions the importance of taking into account the interests of reason in its speculative use. The inner being of God, as well as its perfection and necessity, are inaccessible to the understanding; but the idea of God is what provides the motivation and the general framework for reason to continue its knowing activity so as to achieve "the most perfect satisfaction in regard to the greatest unity for which [reason] is searching in its empirical use…."
Reason is thus justified by its interest, and not by any insight acquired through sensibility and the understanding.

In this sense, the idea of this ground is transcendentally necessary—because the world is “a sum of appearances” which lack their own ultimate justification—, and it should “by all means” be used as “different from the world in accordance with an analogy with objects of experience,” (*KrV*, A 696 / B 724) as long as it is thought as idea. The assumption of a wise and perfect world creator is warranted as long as it is kept within the bounds of a regulative use for reason, as “it belongs to the legislation of our reason to seek for [the perfection of a world in which systematic and purposive unity are found everywhere to infinity] and presume it everywhere, and it must always be advantageous for us, and can never become disadvantageous, to institute our consideration of nature in accordance with this principle.” (*KrV*, A 700 / B 729)

A relativizing of knowledge by what lies beyond it

These regulative ideas and ideals may seem at times to be merely useful props for the autonomous activity of reason, which is how most realistic metaphysicians must have read these pages and reacted to them. But some considerations should always be in mind in order to understand the import of this inversion. First, there remains Kant’s concern with not denying, as much as not affirming, the existence of such realities, through the constant reminder that speculative or theoretical reason is ever limited to objects of experience, and these realities are by definition outside of that bounded experience. They remain necessary, furthermore, for any use of reason if reason wants to be coherent with its own principles. But perhaps what is more
significant is that Kant is opening the way to a meditation about an order that is not the order of things in nature, but an order of reason, which may be limited and tentative in human beings, but that through its “regulative” principles reaches for a perfect and all-encompassing view of reality, the legislating reason of a hypothetical being that may actually look at nature “from without,” as its creator and ground. The ideas of reason are, as Kant constantly reminds us, presuppositions that are discovered as reason does its work of organizing the principles according to which the knowledge of reality must be achieved; as such, they are presuppositions that can never be the object of human cognition. In the same way, the Highest Being, in which idea the perfection and the fullness of reason are schematized, can never be an object for the understanding, but is only found by human reason’s participation in its original activity.

The interpreter here is presented with the choice between looking at this different way of talking about God and the other postulates as “useful fictions” (when fiction refers to the framework of theoretical reason, in which the only “reality” is the empirical reality of possible experience) and recognizing that these are realities which lie beyond the grasp of theoretical reason. If, on the one hand, they are hypothetical from theory’s point of view (i.e. as objects), on the other hand they perform the central role of grounding reason’s interest and its functioning, so that they are no less “real” than empirical reality, but actually are at the basis of our capacity to establish such reality in the first place. It is very significant in this respect that we can assume this standpoint at all, even if by necessity it cannot be corroborated by empirical findings. Rather, a surer access to this higher reality, which we find ourselves able to assume through reason’s regulative role, would be through participation in the mode of practical reason. As we proceed to
show, in its practical use, reason opens up a whole new way of understanding what lies beyond cognition of objects.

**The postulates of the practical use of reason**

In its practical use, reason is not limited to cognition of objects of experience, for there its principles create the reality, through action, of that which is thought. Moreover, since it is in the moral realm that our greatest worth lies, Kant concludes that it makes sense even from the point of view of our moral nature that we not be able to cognize the postulates of practical reason: so that duty can remain what it is, as the motive of our moral actions, all that is sensible must be subordinated to it, and what would be “above” it must not be sensible.\(^{16}\)

In this sense, freed from the rules of objectivity that remain in force in the theoretical use of reason, God, immortality, and freedom may become presuppositions in a still stronger sense. Kant’s many reminders of the restriction of their cognition to a practical respect have the ultimate intention of protecting their special status, rather than placing it in doubt. But the question remains, are they “created” by an autonomous practical reason in the sense of projections of a fully human rational power that needs to cater for the other side of humanity’s existence as finites creatures, as Guyer seems to suggest about immortality and God? What does it mean to call them a “subjective need of reason”? (*KpV*, 5:5)

Reality, appearances and things in themselves for Kant

A useful approach to these questions involves a closer consideration of the nature of the non-phenomenal for Kant. Inasmuch as Kant has limited reason in its theoretical use, concerning the knowledge of beings, to appearances or objects of possible experience, a different mode of engagement must be found to deal with those parts of reality that are not, or can never be, given to the senses. In part, critical philosophy is exactly such a mode of engagement, which reflects on the activity of reason in order to show that man himself, as a finite and sensible being, contributes with certain a priori elements to the construction of his experience. Transcendental idealism is, then, a claim about the ideality of space and time as forms of intuition as well as of the categories as forms of the understanding; this claim, however, already reveals the existence of something, namely, the source of these human contributions to experience, that lies beyond human intuitive cognition.

Kant’s idealism also entails, as Ameriks has noted, that there necessarily are “things” that are the source of the representations produced in sensibility and that are not in themselves of a spatio-temporal character, allowing Ameriks to call the Kantian position “a form of realism”: “the point of calling something a mere appearance in this sense is to claim not that it fails to exist
at all but is rather to say that it (including all our empirical mental properties) requires something else, something of a much more fundamental kind, to exist as it does.”

In one of the places in the first *Critique* where Kant expressly defends this position, the discussion brings him to the concept of a *noumenon*, as a purely negative “thinking of something in general, in which I abstract from all form of sensible intuition.” (KrV, A 252) Kant’s concern is with limiting the use of the notion of *noumenon* to that of a “boundary concept” that establishes clear limits to what sensibility can claim to represent. Any other cognitive use of the concept is unwarranted even through a possible extension of the pure categories of the understanding, as Kant elaborates further in the second edition of the first *Critique*, for the only way open to human beings to prove the possibility and the existence of something is through the correspondence of a sensible intuition to that thing’s concept:

If, therefore, we wanted to apply the categories to objects that are not considered as appearances, then we would have to ground them on an intuition other than the sensible one, and then the object would be a noumenon in a positive sense. Now since such an intuition, namely intellectual intuition, lies absolutely outside our faculty of cognition, the use of the categories can by no means reach beyond the boundaries of objects of experience…. (KrV, B 308)

For this reason, human reason is precluded from positing “a greater sphere of objects” (KrV, A 254 / B 309) or a division of “objects into *phaenomena* and *noumena*, and of the world into a world of sense and a world of understanding… in a positive sense….” (KrV, A 255 / B 309)

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18 “It… follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside of our kind of representation; thus, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word ‘appearance’ must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility.” (KrV, A 251-2)
311) For that to be permissible, human reason would have to have access to a different kind of intuition, one that would be receptive to non-sensible or intellectual stimuli. Instead, human beings are left with one world of objects of experience, which is, however, revealed by transcendental idealism as a partial understanding of the whole of reality. *Noumena* and things in themselves represent, through their very unknowability, a relationship between man as a finite knower and a reality to which his specific kind of theoretical knowledge allows only partial and qualified access.

Eric Weil has expressed well this facet of the critical project, whereby we do not know (*Wissen*) that through which we know, and that which we know we do not “immediately” comprehend, because we receive its data or content in a passive way.\(^{19}\) However, as Weil suggests, this reflection leads us to think about a kind of intellect that has immediate access to reality and, through positioning ourselves in relation to this unconditioned or archetypal intellect, to see the limits of our mode of knowledge and allow for a legitimate engagement with what lies beyond knowledge. In consequence, by attempting to understand itself, reason finds the way towards a reality that is only touched through practice:

> The reifying understanding reifies even that in which there is no longer any res in this sense. In other words, the critique, far from being destructive, is eminently positive, inasmuch as it alone allows for the demolition of those reifications that obstruct the access to that which is and is in act, is for itself and may be thought as such, not merely as one of those beams of relationships that are the objects of the understanding and natural science…. In the last analysis, the critique of pure reason is a critique of the understanding and a liberation of reason, a reason that, because it has conceded to the understanding everything that is part of its domain, may now proceed with authority and a good intellectual conscience.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 31-2.
Karl Ameriks’ interpretation of the metaphysical import of Kantian thought reveals an important facet of this acknowledged partiality of knowledge. Ameriks points out that it is only by affirming this relationship that Kant can maintain both a non-sensible “ground” of appearances and freedom’s capacity to be an intelligible cause of sensible effects. Elsewhere, Ameriks elaborates on this insight in regard to Kant’s (and some Kantians’) defense of free causality as incompatible with natural causation, i.e. as taking place fully independently of natural processes. For Ameriks, Kant’s strong conception of freedom’s capacity to be an intelligible cause in the empirical world requires the assumption of a non-sensible but real foundation in the intelligible side. This, in turn, is what allows moral responsibility, merit, and guilt to be legitimately assigned; if just the empirical character of freedom was considered “real,” no one could be blamed for acting according to the natural chain of cause and effect.

In particular, Ameriks dialogues with Henry Allison’s treatment of incompatibilist freedom in Kant. The latter considers the Kantian characterization of transcendental freedom as a “timeless causal power” a “cryptic account” that has made Kantian ethics “virtually unintelligible and irrelevant” for many critics. Allison would rather support Kant’s incompatibilist concept of freedom on the rational agent’s own conception of himself as rational, which implies only “a model of deliberative rationality” constituting no more than a practical perspective that harmonizes well with human agents’ empirical character. For Ameriks, though,

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this still does not solve the problem of a non-natural determination of actions, inasmuch as “any actual determining must itself be regarded ultimately as either caused naturally or not so caused.”

In other words, what Kant is concerned with is not merely how our rationality may be included in a theoretically consistent account of the world (or our rationality’s “empirical character”), but how the experienced and undeniable reality of assigning merit and guilt can have any plausible sense in the context of our theoretically limited access to the world. Without the transcendental metaphysics, it would be very hard to talk about true merit and guilt in the fundamental sense we normally ascribe to them; in every moral judgment of a past action, there is always implicit a moment of the agent’s exclusive responsibility, as the latter could not be blamed or praised if the determination of his actions could be ultimately traced to the natural chain of cause and effect. In his defense of the agent’s transcendental freedom, Kant is not afraid to admit that

the real morality of actions…, even that of our own conduct, therefore remains entirely hidden from us. Our imputations can be referred only to the empirical character. How much of it is to be ascribed to mere nature and innocent defects of temperament or to its happy constitution… this no one can discover, and hence no one can judge it with complete justice. (KrV, A 551 / B 579)

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26 Ibid. Regarding the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism, we treat the questions involved in more detail in Chapter 4, in the context of our discussion of autonomy.

27 This is clearly stated in the second Critique, in Kant’s Deduction of the Principles of Practical Reason. After showing that the moral law, as a “fact of pure reason,” cannot be proved by any theoretical deduction, but on the contrary is “the principle of the deduction” of freedom in a practical sense, Kant explores the concept of freedom’s causality as a causality of non-sensible beings. There, he explicitly notes that reason cannot and needs not seek to “show how the logical relation of ground and consequence could be used synthetically with a kind of intuition different from the sensible, that is, how a causa noumenon is possible.” As practical reason, “it does not even concern itself with this inasmuch as it only puts the determining ground of the causality of the human being as a sensible being (which is given) in pure reason (which is therefore called practical), and accordingly uses the concept of cause itself… not in order to cognize objects but to determine causality with respect to objects in general, and so for none other than a practical purpose.” (KpV, 5:49)
As mentioned above, the unknowability of morality from the theoretical point of view is no obstacle to its defense; on the contrary, it is part and parcel of the reality of moral life and a proof of its integrity. The *noumenon*, or the thing in itself, are necessary components of a reality that is more comprehensive than human sensible knowledge can attain, and in a way give witness to the possibility of morality and freedom.\(^{28}\) It is, then, natural that Kant refers to the free being of man or the existence of God as *noumena* that find validation, so to speak, through the practical reality of freedom and morality. However, the use of *noumenon* or thing in itself in these cases represents but the negative sense of a reality inaccessible (and incomprehensible) through sensible knowledge; any positive claim about these realities can only be made in the mode of practice, or participation. As Walsh has put it, we share in a divine viewpoint by virtue of our morality: “We also share the divine perspective in the unconditioned causality of our nature, for nothing can compel us but the requirement to act only out of a sense of duty.”\(^{29}\)

Eric Weil also points to the same issue by noting that man occupies, through moral action, the position of a thing in itself, or rather of a subject for itself (as opposed to that of an object for others). This latter is the same regulative principle reason finds at the end of its theoretical search for the unconditioned. But what must remain a hypothesis for theory, seen

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\(^{28}\) Eric Voegelin has made exactly this point about the thing in itself in Kant, comparing it to what Voegelin calls the “It Reality”:

“By clarifying the meaning of spatiotemporal experience, it is true, the Critique had left no doubt that there was more to ‘Reason’ than physics; the area of the It-reality had been, if not reestablished, at least brought into view again as the area of “Reason” that could not adequately be expressed through the application of ‘*natürliche Erkenntnis*,’ of thinking in subject-object categories…. In this situation of philosophical deterioration it is no wonder Kant had difficulties in finding the language that would match his revolutionary effort. In fact, in order to denote the ‘more’ than physics that is to be found in ‘Reason,’ he could do no better than to coin the symbol *Ding-an-sich*…. It will not be improper to stress that ‘in-itself’ the thing is not a ‘thing’ but the structure of the It-reality in consciousness.” (*In Search of Order*, p. 64)

through the mode of practice is the foundation of the very possibility of man’s existence as a responsible and free agent. Through moral practice, by following the moral law, Weil suggests, man finds his true shape, which alongside his given phenomenal nature shows that although man is for himself, he is not from himself but comes from a higher ground:

   Man is a creature and imago dei…; God is not anthropomorphic—nothing would have seemed more scandalous to Kant than a theological anthropomorphism—man is theomorphic, which results in that man only understands himself as a creature and a copy, as ectypal not archetypal reason, understands himself starting from his original, his origin.

   The question, then, becomes not how we can gain access to a sure knowledge of God through this or that “way” or “proof” of His existence, but how can we talk about the unconditioned reality that grounds all being, including our own, all the while respecting the integrity of the system of nature that includes all conditioned beings and, most importantly, our “practical interest” in free and moral acting. Walsh suggests that Kant was still too attached to the theoretical mode of explanation and the power of science to organize and investigate the world of appearances, so that he could not fully indicate the extent to which the practical “subtends the theoretical as a deeper mode of knowledge.” Nonetheless, it is only by starting from a practical or existential type of understanding, which gives morality its full import as a

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30 “To sum up what is essential, essential for man, man has to do not with phenomena, but with the thing in itself; because what is essential is not knowledge, but action, and more precisely, decision with a view towards action. And decision belongs to an order fully foreign to that of knowledge: it has to do with things in themselves, being the act of a thing in itself.” (Weil, Problèmes Kantiens, p. 36-7.)
31 Ibid., p. 43.
32 Walsh, Modern Philosophical Revolution, p. 51.
“mode that is deeper than science,”\textsuperscript{33} that one can truly appreciate Kant’s appropriation of the most crucial dimension of the transcendent for man.

(Mis)Understanding the truth of the postulates

According to Kant, from the moral point of view, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are strictly necessary:

\begin{quote}
[The ideas of God and immortality] are...conditions of applying the morally determined will to its object given to it a priori (the highest good). Consequently their possibility in this practical relation can and must be assumed, although we cannot theoretically cognize and have insight into them…. By means of the concept of freedom objective reality is given to the ideas of God and immortality and a warrant, indeed a subjective necessity (a need of pure reason) is provided to assume them…. And this need is not a hypothetical one for some discretionary purpose of speculation, where one must assume something if one wants to ascend to the completion of the use of reason in speculation, but rather a need having the force of law, to assume something without which that cannot happen which one ought to set unfailingly as the aim of one’s conduct. (\textit{KpV}, 5:5)
\end{quote}

Although the concept of a subjective need of reason seems not to be enough to ground a firm concept of God and His existence, the “subjective” is actually the \textit{locus} where we find “what we did not seek and yet need, namely, a view into a higher, immutable order of things in which we already are and in which we can henceforth be directed, by determinate precepts, to carry on our existence in accordance with the highest vocation of reason.” (\textit{KpV}, 5:108) And, according to this vocation, the “unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason” is the highest good.

However, the “subjective necessity” of the postulates can be and has been interpreted in a weak sense, as we have noted above about John Rawls’s and Paul Guyer’s arguments. This view

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
involves lowering the sights of reason regarding its highest end, from a highest good that is transcendent of all efforts of human beings as finite creatures to an achievement of happiness that is possible “in this life (in the sensible world),” similarly to what the Epicureans and Stoics—Kant’s specific foils in his exploration of the nature of the highest good—posited in their day. In contrast with the Stoics, though, who in Kant’s view posit the identity between complete virtue and happiness through the Stoic sage’s independence of nature, Rawls and Guyer let the element of happiness according to nature stand as a possibility, even if practically unachievable in its fullest extent.

For Rawls, the conception of the highest good as a full correspondence between virtue and happiness, in which there exists a proportionality between virtue (or worthiness to be happy) and happiness, is not adequate to his constructivist view of Kant’s moral theory; rather, this concept of the highest good is a kind of “Leibnizian” survival in Kant’s philosophical theology, “which [Kant] never reworked so as to make it consistent with his moral philosophy.”34 Rawls claims that ideas such as the proportionality between virtue and happiness, the existence of an impartial reason capable of assigning merit and blame, and that of rewards and punishments by an author of nature are not consistent with “the moral law as it applies to us by way of the categorical imperative and the CI-procedure that interprets it for us.”35 Instead, for Rawls, the idea of the “realm of ends as object of the moral law,” as laid out in the Grounding, is a much better candidate for reason’s final end. Rawls construes the realm of ends as “a natural good, one

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34 Rawls, Lectures, p. 317.
35 Ibid.
that is possible (though never fully achievable) in the order of nature,”

 Rawls supports his belief in the realization (in good part, as he concedes) of the realm of ends on passages from the first *Critique* and the *Grounding* in which Kant talks about the idea of an intelligible world or a moral world which, even though it does not take into account “all the hindrances to morality,” still can be a guiding idea for the action of human beings in the natural world. Rawls also mentions the distinction made in the second *Critique* between a system of (physical) nature that subjects the will and a system of (supersensible) nature “possible through freedom.” (*KpV*, 5:44) For Rawls, according to these arguments,

 a realm of ends can be in good part realized in the order of nature when all act, as they can and ought to act, from the totality of precepts that meet the conditions of the CI-procedure. A moral world, an intelligible world, a *mundus intelligibilis,* is a world that consists of reasonable and rational persons acting as they ought under the idea of freedom within the world as we know it. What makes an intelligible world is not our being in another world ontologically distinct from this world, one not in space and time, but all of us, here and now, acting from the moral law under the idea of freedom. The realm of ends is a secular ideal.38

 So, inasmuch as the object of the moral law is a “secular ideal of a possible realm of ends,” the need for God and immortality as postulates, or objects of rational belief, is nullified or at least diminished, to the point that they become a kind of “belief necessary for us to uphold our moral integrity,”39 lest we are psychologically discouraged by the actual fate of the good and the wicked, in a similar sense to the one given the postulate of God by Guyer.

36 Ibid., p. 311.
37 Ibid., p. 312.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 322.
There are, however, some clear problems with the deduction of this thesis from the Kantian passages used by Rawls. For, when Kant is talking about the intelligible world, even if it has an effect in the sensible world through the causality of the freedom of human beings, he is describing ideas, whose objects by definition are never found in the sensible world, as they belong to the realm of the unconditioned and the regulative. As we have seen, they make up a fundamental existential element of the reality of rational beings, but cannot be so easily and fully transferred from their sphere into the sensible world. Kant is quite clear about this in the very passages Rawls quotes from the first Critique, in which Kant separates the ideas of morality from the “difficulties to which morality is exposed (weakness or depravity of human nature)” or the “hindrances to morality (the desires).” Curiously, Rawls includes these elements in his quotes, but chooses not to give them much importance, even as he defends his stance as not one of “deluded visionaries unmindful of what is actually possible.” Instead of seeing them as crucial elements of the human sensible character that prevent the pure idea from becoming reality in the sensible world as it is, he merely allows for them through the concession that the construction of the realm of ends is possible “in good part,” but not completely.

Nor is his criticism of the notion of “another world ontologically distinct from this world” enough to directly establish the sensible efficacy of the idea of a realm of ends. As we have seen above, the distinction between an intelligible reality of things in themselves and the sensible world of appearances does not entail a second universe hidden from view, but it does imply that

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40 Ibid., p. 311.
41 In the interests of completeness, it should be mentioned that Kant goes beyond the role of desires as obstacles to the concretization of the ideas of practical reason; as he will make it clearer in the Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, human depravity or evil is first and foremost a condition of the rational character of man. Rawls does not deal with that dimension of the problem in his discussion of the highest good.
human sensible existence, as captured by theoretical reason, is marked by a limited capacity to understand and to incorporate its rational or intelligible ground. The mode of existential participation in the moral law, which is open to reason in its practical use, is thus not easily externalized into express rules and concrete structures, if only because some of its moral realities, such as merit and guilt, are never fully apparent and clear; rather, our access to them is defined as moral postulates, subjective beliefs, etc.

So when, a few lines later, Rawls claims that the realm of ends is “a secular ideal,” he portrays the alternatives as an opposition between a “real” world of individual rational agents in the “here and now” and an imagined world of perfectly rational beings, “not in space and time,” which might open up the door to a religious view of the highest good. Rawls thinks the “secular” conception is more faithful to Kant’s intentions. But secularity, as a concept that describes the counterpart of a religious view that includes God as a basis of morality, is misapplied to Kant’s account inasmuch as it is Kant’s moral philosophy, and not hidden theological commitments, that opens up the vista to a more comprehensive concept of human existence which includes, through the mode of participation through reason in its practical use, the “here and now” of appearances within a more fundamental and original perspective.

Rawls’s use of the *Grounding*’s passages on the realm of ends is also marked by an attempt to transform what are merely principles of pure practical reason, and specifically the idea of the autonomy of reason in the legislation of a realm of ends by its members, as the description of a possible society of finite, sensible beings who need but use the CI-procedure to deal with their failings and moral defects. But the primary conceptual focus of the realm of ends is not really the efficient distribution of justice and happiness in the sensible world; rather, it is an idea
of the universal and mutual setting of ends by each rational being as such, as they consider each and every one as ends in themselves and include their dignity and happiness in their own end-setting. The problems of the sensible nature are still not relevant in that sense, for as Kant states the kingdom of ends is a possible “world of rational beings (mundus intelligibilis),” which displays an orientation to create an actual world but that, as legislated by each rational being, finds insurmountable obstacles in the uncertainty of universal compliance and in the opacity of the kingdom of nature to the realization of the kingdom of ends. So it is not as a philosophical blueprint for a society of reasonable beings, but as an idea of autonomous reason, a rational self-legislating of universal laws, that the kingdom of ends works in Kant’s ethical thought. The idea of the kingdom of ends works, in other words, as an inner principle of pure practical reason that commands the individual will absolutely, even if its final configuration might never take place:

And just in this lies the paradox that merely the dignity of humanity as rational nature without any further end or advantage to be thereby gained—and hence respect for a mere idea—should yet serve as an inflexible precept for the will; and that just this very independence of the maxims from all such incentives should constitute the sublimity of maxims and the worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislative member in the kingdom of ends, for otherwise he would have to be regarded as subject only to the natural law of his own needs. (G, 4:439)

Here lies, perhaps, a sign of Rawls’s eminently political and procedural reading of Kantian morality, as a matter of individuals following a rational procedure to accommodate their interests and define rules of fair distribution of goods. By leaving in the background the

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42 This is how Kant puts it, in a somehow ambiguous way, but with the result of clarifying the ideal, and what is almost the same in this context, moral nature of the kingdom of ends:

“Such a kingdom of ends would actually be realized through maxims whose rule is prescribed to all rational beings by the categorical imperative, if these maxims were universally obeyed. But even if a rational being himself strictly obeys such a maxim, he cannot for that reason count on everyone else’s being true to it, nor can he expect the kingdom of nature and its purposive order to be in harmony with him as a fitting member of a kingdom of ends made possible by himself. i.e., he cannot expect the kingdom of nature to favor his expectation of happiness.” (G, 5:439)
preeminently internal character of the principles of practical reason, in the sense that they cut to the heart of individual moral motives, under the light of personal participation in the moral law, Rawls misses the depth of the Kantian exploration of human experience. As the previous chapter attempted to show, the “CI-Procedure” or the test of universalization is better understood, rather than the ultimate expression of the moral law, as a means of cutting through the forest of individual sensible motives to the unconditioned good that is found as a universal pull in the heart of each rational being.

If that is so, the idea of a possible realm of ends is not an alternative to, but it is included in the idea of the highest good, which is “the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason.” (KpV, 5:108). The latter joins its supreme condition, i.e., the fulfillment of morality—as a system of ends legislated by its members on the basis of the autonomy of reason—to the complete realization of the human need of happiness in proportion to virtue (or worthiness to be happy). (KpV, 5:110) 43 At this point, we realize that Kant finally cannot be considered a formalistic ethicist, who ignores the actual condition of the concrete human beings that act and suffer the consequences of each other’s actions. In the concept of the highest good, the sensible component of happiness is elevated, along with the first condition of the fulfillment of virtue, to the rank of “determining ground of the pure will.” (KpV, 5:109)

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43 Also, in this light, the demand for the proportionality of happiness to virtue is more easily understood as a simple requirement of the virtue of (distributive) justice which gives to each what is owed. If virtue is a necessary element of the fulfillment of the human person as a finite rational being, to the extent that one lives up to the rational demands of one’s own dignity as a rational creature, one becomes worthy to partake in the sensible fulfillment that is part of the requirement of duty for oneself in relation to others and others in relation to oneself.
Man is found, through his participation in the supersensible reality of moral existence, alongside his finite and needful nature, to be a witness to the necessity of a completeness that requires more than what he knows. Here is the heart of the antinomy of practical reason: after one acknowledges that happiness and its search can never be the motive of maxims of virtue, reflection will show that it is also impossible to consider actions taken from maxims of virtue as fully efficient causes of happiness, because

any practical connection of causes and effects in the world, as a result of the determination of the will, does not depend upon the moral disposition of the will but upon knowledge of the laws of nature and the physical ability to use them for one’s purposes; consequently, no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected from the most meticulous observance of moral laws. (*KpV*, 5:113)

The simple extent of the goal of creating a world in which there can be (and there will eventually be) both a complete rule of virtue in the heart of each person and the fulfillment of the corresponding share of happiness is well beyond human efforts.⁴⁴ God and immortality are then, the realities we find to exist as we contemplate the immensity of the task we are given through reason. As “theoretical propositions (undemonstrable as such),” they might be considered secondary grounds in relation to the participation in the moral law; but as realities affirmed on behalf of the practical interest of reason in man, they stand at the summit of the moral law,

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⁴⁴ As Kant expressly affirms in his discussion of the postulate of God’s existence:
“The acting rational being in the world is… not… the cause of the world and of nature itself. Consequently, there is not the least ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and the proportionate happiness of a being belonging to the world as part of it and hence dependent upon it, why for that reason cannot by his will be a cause of this nature and, as far as his happiness is concerned, cannot by his own powers make it harmonize thoroughly with his practical principles.” (*KpV*, 5:124)
granting it the possibility it must have and which is the undeniable fact of reason upon which we
build our conviction of a supersensible world.

Eric Weil has suggested that God in this sense exists for the sake of man:

God is only affirmed by man, inasmuch as the problem of the ultimate ground is revealed
only to man, to the only being who asks the question of its sense because, before anything
and after all, he is for himself and not for something else….Without man, the claim that
God is would be void of sense: there would be no one to formulate it. If one is allowed to
go beyond the Kantian formulas, we might say that man is only man through God, but
also that God only exists for the sake of man, in the sense that even the question
positively answered about the existence of God in himself, without relation to man, is a
question posed by man.45

This, however, is only partially true; in philosophy, where man finds the order of reality
within his own soul (as Voegelin puts it), the first way in which man is able to affirm the
existence of God is in relation to his own moral existence. The relationship between God and
man takes place first of all through the order towards the good, and is followed by explorations
into God’s role in the creation and ordering of the other dimensions of human life. To know God
as He is in Himself is in any case impossible to finite beings, but it is even only partially
achievable through His own self-revelation. Kant’s philosophical way of reaching God is, then,
continuous with a long standing tradition of finding the transcendent at the origin of the internal
pull of order in the soul. We proceed to examine how this search is articulated in Kant’s
reasoning about the postulates of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.

45 Weil, Problèmes Kantiens, p. 51.
Immortality as an index of the immeasurability of the law in us

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant ends his discussion of the highest end and the antinomy of pure practical reason by calling attention to the only way out of the sensible world’s obtrusiveness to the unconditional demands of practical reason, namely, resorting to the “supersensible relation of things.” (*KpV*, 5:119) He follows this by proposing to set forth the grounds of the possibility of a supersensible resolution to the antinomy, starting with what is “immediately within our power,” which will be complemented by the “outside help” that reason posits as a necessity to guarantee the validity of the moral law. The postulate of the immortality of the soul deals with the former (what is immediately in our power), and the postulate of the existence of God provides the outside complement to our efforts.

What is immediately within our reach, however, turns out not to be exactly that. As Kant puts it, no rational being that also belongs to the sensible world has the capacity at any time to display “complete conformity of the will with the moral law,” or “holiness.” (*KpV*, 5:122) Therefore reason posits the need of a practical, *endless* progress (*Progressus*) or progression (*Fortschreitung*) toward complete conformity, which in the case of a single rational being amounts to an affirmation of the immortality of the individual soul. It strikes us as strange, however, that what is impossible at any time for a sensible being becomes achievable within an infinite length of time. If man is incapable of reaching full virtue, it does not seem helpful, but rather cruel, that man should spend an eternity straining for it. Can there be any real, substantial progress (a change or progression from one condition to another) if the end of this progress is never reached? But Kant goes on to suggest that, if from our point of view the eternal straining
serves to deflect the temptations of making the moral law lenient and of making ourselves more than we know ourselves to be (theosophical enthusiasm), but still does not allow us to know moral perfection, from God’s point of view things are different.

*The eternal being*, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in what is to us an endless series the whole of conformity with the moral law, and the holiness that his command inflexibly requires in order to be commensurable with his justice in the share he determines for each in the highest good is to be found whole in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings. (*KpV*, 5:123)

For Kant, God looks at this endless progression as a completed series, and thus the demands of justice are satisfied. To the finite person who does not have direct access to the eternal perspective is left the hope of this fulfillment in view of a “consciousness of his tried disposition,” or the “immutable resolution he has thereby come to know.” (*KpV*, 5:123) Kant adds to this discussion an interesting footnote about the “immutable resolution” or “immutability of disposition” towards progress in the direction of the good, which—always beyond the reach of sensible beings—can never be for them a guarantee of justification. Yet, what is for creatures merely hope “holds for God as a possession.” (*KpV*, 5:123) For Kant, then, the eternal series of moral straining is what most approaches the idea of a complete fulfillment of morality, or holiness. The latter is never possible for a finite creature such as man, and Kant is painfully aware of that—that is why an immortality of effort, as a symbol of this liminal condition of mankind, is a necessary postulate of morality. But it should be noted that in the passage from the infinite progress to the completed series in the eyes of God there seems to be an element of substitution (or perhaps grace) that completes the incomplete efforts of man. Kant is thus actually meditating on the boundary between justice and love, without giving up the demands of duty through which man first becomes acquainted with a transcendent measure for his life.
that case, an endless existence as such and by itself becomes incoherent without the surplus of God’s timeless perspective, in whose figure the accumulation of time and effort (signified by immortality) is transformed into the creation of a new type of life. Or rather, in the divine perspective, the “immutable disposition” hoped for in the morally oriented person is already a sign of a substantial change that is not sensibly felt, but present from the moment one adheres to the motive of pure duty, or the unconditioned good will. Kant will develop this theme in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, through the image of conversion as the adoption of the good moral disposition personified in the Son of God:

*Physically*… [the man who has adopted the moral disposition] still is the same human being liable to punishment, and he must be judged before a moral tribunal of justice and hence by himself as well. Yet, in his new disposition (as an intelligible being), in the sight of a divine judge for whom the disposition takes the place of the deed, he is *morally* another being. (*R*, 6:74)

In conclusion, to achieve the highest good, towards which the infinite measure of the moral law points, the first postulate—which concerns our own immediate efforts—needs the concourse of the second postulate, which is already suggested through the inherent limitation of the first. But the postulate of the existence of God answers not only the question of the justification of each individual man (where morality is actually enacted), but the problem of the configuration of the whole world of appearances to the hidden law of morality.

The postulate of the existence of God: belief as a moral necessity in empirical creatures

Limiting the role of God in Kant’s system to that of a dispenser of rewards and punishments, as a way merely to even out the final score of the correspondence between virtue
and happiness, vice and suffering, may lead to relativizing this postulate’s importance compared to the self-motivating power of the moral law. As a result, the postulate may be then considered a psychological prop (as with Rawls and Guyer), or at least seen as the equivalent of adopting an “as if” attitude that merely reinforces the already existent and self-sustaining moral determination. Once the moral law is established for rational agents, nothing else needs to be “known” or “affirmed” regarding the supersensible, so that even an agnostic may be fully able to sustain a coherent moral life (as Allen Wood has suggested), an outlook that approaches the Stoicism Kant criticizes in his discussion of the antinomy of practical reason. The existence of God is, then, not only “after the fact” but also beside the point.

But if one views morality not simply and mainly as a quasi-Stoic “attitude,” but as an existential participation in a fundamental dimension of life that is not empirically provable but nonetheless real, the needs of sensibility and the final configuration of the empirical world demand of reason a resolution. As Eric Weil has put it, if man’s empirical character is not any more or less an illusion than is his moral existence, reason demands unification:

The subject for himself exists and knows himself immediately in the consciousness of his research of a world and an existence that are sensible, in the consciousness of a rule of duty and of an ought that goes beyond and denies all that is given and that, in this way, constitutes man and reveals to himself his own self as he is in truth. From there, from that demanding presence of his own self, he may go back to God, and he must do it if he does not wish to declare as nonsensical to his own empirical self that which, according to the
surest consciousness of his supersensible self is, in obligation, the justification of his existence.\footnote{Weil, \textit{Problèmes Kantiens}, p. 54.}

For Kant, then, it is the unity of reason, in which are gathered the legitimacies of empirical knowledge and moral existence, that demands reason’s assent to the existence of God. The question is not psychological, nor is psychological weakness the main circumstance behind man’s failure to sustain the effort to create a moral world; for evil is above all an unde
diable moral failure, as it becomes clearer in \textit{Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason}.

Some important epistemic questions remain, however, in view of the ambiguous position of belief in God’s existence. The postulate of God receives its claim over human reason from the immediate authority, or the objective necessity, of moral duty. But, as a “theoretical presupposition,” it lacks the immediacy of the practical law, being as it were outside its original jurisdiction.\footnote{Kant will, towards the end of the Dialectic of Practical Reason, emphasize the moral birth of the postulate of God’s existence not only for his pure philosophy in general but also in history. He points out that in Ancient Greece, all the “physical philosophers” could only find the rational causes of the world in natural elements, and not until Anaxagoras did philosophic reflection on morality lead to the concept of an original intelligence: “once this acute people had advanced so far in their investigations as to treat philosophically even moral objects…, they then first found a determined concept of the original being; and in this speculative reason had the role of a spectator, or at best had the merit of embellishing a concept that had not grown on its own land and of furthering, by a train of confirmations from the study of nature which now came forward for the first time, not indeed its authority (which was already established) but only its display, with a supposed theoretical insight of reason.”\textit{(KpV, 5:140-1)}} On the other hand, by virtue of its lack of connection with any possible experience, it also lacks the positive status of an empirical cognition, or an empirically related concept. Accordingly, Kant will deny to the postulate of God the objective necessity he defends for the law of duty, adding that “there can be no duty to assume the existence of anything (since this
concerns only the theoretical use of reason),” (KpV, 5:126) and calling it a pure rational belief, holding authority only from its need for practical purposes.

Seen this way, the postulates are indeed “subjective needs” of reason, if not psychological aids to human weakness. But this status does not translate into a “weak” kind of cognition. In fact, Kant’s intent is to show that they are the necessary results of the strength of the moral law in human beings and of the clear-sightedness of reason about the empirical disconnect between our rational practical faculty and the causes of natural phenomena.48 Again, following the train of thought with which the last section concluded, it is the lack of a common measure between the moral law in which human beings participate and the reality they empirically apprehend that leads reason to affirm the existence of a different “logic” that transforms and fulfills the intimations of duty. So, just as God is the necessary artificer of the change of our constant but potentially faltering moral disposition’s into justification (which we saw to be involved in the symbol of immortality), as “highest original good,” by means of divine understanding and will, God is also responsible for “nature having a causality in keeping with the moral disposition,” which alone entails the possibility of the highest good. (KpV, 5:125)

The elucidation of these connections allows us to observe the inadequacy of the treatments of the postulate of God as “as if attitudes,” or merely hypothetical claims that add a certain psychological integrity to moral agents. The use of the “as if” in the literature, to describe the meaning of “belief” for Kant, usually implies a certain Stoic attitude in which the moral reasons or the conception of a rational agent that is the source of these reasons are enough to

48 See footnote n. 44 in this chapter, on p. 162, where we quote Kant’s statement of the disconnection between morality and proportionate happiness (KpV, 5:124).
justify action according to duty. The existence of God or the immortality of the soul are included as ideas that—all things considered—are not really true, but work to “ward off” the pointlessness of moral action in a non-morally ordered empirical world. J. B. Schneewind maintains, for instance, that

Kant is not saying that moral agents come to believe these propositions about religion and history through arguments. He is saying rather that each moral agent will find herself acting as if she saw the world as Kant’s propositions portray it…. Unless these conditions hold, a form of pointlessness threatens the action dictated by the categorical imperative; and the rational agent cannot act while thinking her action pointless.49

In this case, the belief about God’s existence and his Providence may be watered down to a mere “taking it that the world must allow the possibility of success,”50 lest the rational agent reasons from the impossibility of rational goals to their non-obligatoriness.

Wood, in his turn, sees that the “as if attitude” is clearly not enough for a full justification of moral action, given Kant’s premises. But he curiously allows for the possibility that Kant himself might have supposed that it was enough, against his own arguments. This possibility is found by Wood in Kant’s usage of terms that are weaker than “belief” to describe how human beings relate to the postulates, such as “assumptions,” or “presuppositions,” or even postulates as “practically necessary hypotheses.”51 The source of Kant’s “dilemma,” which in Wood’s view Kant never fully faced up to, is that “practical arguments by themselves cannot produce the

50 Ibid., p. 333.
belief whose indispensability they demonstrate,“⁵² because this belief requires theoretical evidence or nonrational motivating factors, none of which is available to Kant’s practical reason.

The problem with Wood’s thesis, as well as Schneewind’s pragmatic view of the postulates, lies first of all in their attachment to theoretical criteria of validity, which appears to negate the strength of “belief” for Kant. If anything, this makes them lose sight of the basic fact that, were belief to be based on theoretical evidence, it would cease to be belief. The power of belief for Kant is to allow the moral to continue to be what it is, for once theoretical claims take the place of duty, morality implodes and becomes heteronomy of reason to sensible desires. Kant is constantly reminding us that if God were proved to exist, it would be very hard for a morality of duty to remain; God must remain (as regards the ground of morality) in the background so that the true value of human moral action may have its space, and once that has been assured man can find—through morally derived insights—the true place of God as creator of nature and author of the precepts of the moral law.⁵³ In that way, the “subjective necessity” of belief appears as a philosophical description of what theology talks about as the delicate and subtle way of a God who invites and calls the human being to adhere to God’s own existence and invitation (as proposed, for instance, by Romano Guardini’s personalist theology).

Kant’s constant restriction of the cognitive value of the postulates is specifically turned against the constant temptation to use them “for theoretical purposes,” (KpV, 5:134) as, for instance, in the creation of a “theory of supersensible beings.” (KpV, 5:137) This restriction, however, is always juxtaposed to the affirmation of a possible extension of theoretical cognition

⁵² Ibid., p. 405.
⁵³ This is the main point of the last section of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason (KpV, 5:146-148).
to the extent that reason knows that the ideas that were mere problematic in a speculative sense do have objects that can be thought according to the categories of the understanding, if only in a practical sense. Kant comes, during his long effort to reconcile the theoretical and practical demands of reason, to a consideration of “the important question” whether the concept of God belongs to physics or to morals. (KpV, 5:138-140) His vindication of the Classical Greek philosophers, who first found through moral philosophy “the determined concept of the original being,” reflects the primacy of practical reason in the resolution of the question of the highest good, once it is seen that theoretical reason is not up to this task.

So, perhaps Wood and Schneewind are right in pointing out that arguments (practical or otherwise) cannot lead to firm belief; the source of the practical perspective’s authority does not lie in the discursive reasoning that establishes the veracity of concepts through theoretical judgments, but in the participation of man in the fact of reason, in the guise of which the moral law presents itself. In this sense, to talk about a presupposition means, rather than an implicit logical precedent to coherent discourse, a preceding reality which grounds the necessity of the moral law, a necessity that in the practical sphere implies its existence.

By using phrases such as “necessary hypothesis”, a kind of contradiction in terms that can only be maintained through the qualification of its being “practical,” and through his repetitive alternation of theoretical restrictions and practical injunctions, Kant points us to a more comprehensive practical mode of engaging reality. Even if Kant himself does not fully make the leap to a full acknowledgment of the subtension of the theoretical within the practical (as Walsh

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54 Sections VI through VIII of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, Chapter II, are almost fully occupied in developing and clarifying the status of the postulates as regards reason in its theoretical and practical use.
expresses it), his insistence on the primacy of the practical opens up a more than theoretical relationship between truth and man, which takes place within man (thus the subjective character he continually points to and the centrality of autonomy) who participates in the good and the true. And this is the source of what can be called, more than anything, belief, which is expressed by Kant (as an expression of the belief in God and immortality) as a “a need from an absolutely necessary point of view”:

I will that there be a God, that my existence in this world be also an existence in a pure world of the understanding beyond natural connections, and finally that my duration be endless; I stand by this, without paying attention to rationalizations, however little I may be able to answer them or to oppose them with others more plausible, and I will not let this belief be taken from me; for this is the only case in which my interest, because I may not give up anything of it, unavoidably determines my judgment. (KpV, 5:113)

The reason why this excerpt does not reflect a voluntaristic (and almost naïve) pretension to imagine oneself in a world that must exist just because one wills it is that the will to which it refers is not an individual and idiosyncratic power of choice (even if it is “organized” into a system through a universalizing procedure), but a participation in the moral law or in a reason that comprehends all rational beings. Additionally, it helps to explain how Kantian autonomy is not an arbitrary and subjectivistic condition.

Pure morality reveals its religious roots

Having delved into the epistemic challenges posed by the practical postulates, it becomes easier to have a more precise idea of the seamless linkage that exists between morality and religion in Kant’s thought. Belief in God is, for Kant in the second Critique, a recognition of His necessary role in a moral universe peopled with sensible, finite, and imperfect rational creatures.
Although the moral law is the main mode of engagement with this universe, the meditative unfolding of the moral experience leads to the idea of God as author of nature and to the idea of duties themselves ultimately as

divine commands, not as sanctions—that is, chosen and in themselves contingent ordinances of another’s will—but as essential laws of every free will in itself, which must nevertheless be regarded as commands of the supreme being because only from a will that is morally perfect (holy and beneficent) and at the same time all-powerful, and so through harmony with his will, can we hope to attain the highest good, which the moral law makes it our duty to take as the object of our endeavors. (KpV, 5:129)

We might add that, already in the postulate of immortality—although Kant does not fully and explicitly unfold this insight—the need of divine grace for the transformation of the endless series of human efforts into a qualitative change of the imperfect character of man already implies the existence of God and the hope of fulfillment that is proper of religion. In this case, it is not happiness that depends on God’s intervention, but the completion of human merit for the acquisition of a constant moral disposition and the fulfillment of the moral law for duty’s sake.

A few paragraphs below, Kant will again display the order in which one reaches the need of religion—first the “moral wish,” then the wish for happiness in accordance with the fullness of virtue. (KpV, 5:130) But through the highest good, the hope of happiness joins the moral law as a matter of necessity, so that ethics is only fulfilled by religion. As such, morality turns out to have been a religious pursuit all along, even if in an indirect way, inasmuch as our entryway into the realm of grace and justification remains in the moral path, as Kant would reemphasize in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. 
The Beyond and the Beginning: moral existence as a key to the ultimate things

Eric Voegelin unearthed a connection historically existing in diverse symbolizations of order, or spiritual traditions, between the orientation discovered within the soul towards the ground of existence and the positing of that same source for the organization of the overarching cosmos. In his investigation of the history of the major world-historical symbolizations of order, which included the Middle Eastern cosmological civilizations, Classical Greek philosophy, Israelite revelation, etc., Voegelin was surprised to find that contrary to his first organizing hypothesis they all shared elements which he expected to find unevenly distributed, as a function of each one’s spiritual differentiation. This unexpected development was at the center of Voegelin’s revision of the project of Order and History, which he recounts in the volume where the turn takes place, The Ecumenic Age. Voegelin’s main insight into the birth of the symbol of “history” was inspired the “leap in being” represented by philosophy and revelation as fundamental differentiations of man’s inner spiritual ordering towards the transcendent good. Voegelin believed that these differentiations were at the origin of the very idea of “history” as the path of mankind ordered in relation to the spiritual experiences the philosophers and the prophets had undergone. Accordingly, Voegelin thought at first that (pre-differentiation) cosmological myth would have been displaced by the historical narrative of human development towards the clarification of the spiritual sources of order. However, as he discovered “historiogenesis” in the cosmological civilizations, alongside the persistence of myth in the more differentiated traditions, he was lead to the insight that “the differentiation of existential truth does not abolish the cosmos in which the event occurs,” which then “is experienced as divinely
created and ordered.” The Beyond and Beginning are the terms Voegelin selected to describe “the directions in which divine reality is experienced,” taken from the historical experiences of Greece (Plato’s *epekeina*) and Israel (the biblical *bereshit* narrated in Genesis 1), and applied to the “existential tension towards the ground” and its transference to the cosmos as a whole through the cosmogonic myth. Their relationship is described as follows:

While cosmogony is a constant, the manner of its symbolization is affected by the increasing luminosity of existential consciousness. By their impact on the symbolization of the Beginning, the hierophanic events that illuminate consciousness in the direction of the Beyond thus create historically a secondary field of differentiations.

Following our considerations about the priority of moral existence in Kant’s thought, it is plausible to look at it as a philosophical reflection about the same structure observed and designated by Voegelin as the *Beyond* and the *Beginning*. The more Kant deepens his investigation of morality, as he does in the *Religion* book, the clearer it appears that the questions about the reality of God and the soul are the result of a gradually increasing insight into the lived reality, the limits, and the contradictions of the experience of duty. Only from that point do we have access to the “practical extension of cognition” about the existence of the author of nature. Kant had, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, abolished the “shortcut” derivation of the being of God from the being of the world, in view of the contradictions implied by the derivation of knowledge of the unconditioned from the limited cognition of what are always and necessarily conditioned phenomena. By so doing, and turning instead to the practical, Kant seems to be rediscovering and reclaiming for modern philosophy the ancient insight according to which to

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56 Ibid., p. 54.
57 Ibid., p. 56.
reach the reality of God was always and first of all a matter of reflecting on the demands and the nature of man’s moral call. The path to God takes us first through the moral, and from there it illuminates all of reality in a way that can only be expressed by means of mythical language. The Thomistic definition of the being of God as “objective ultimate end of creation,” recovered by Maritain, would be but the philosophical representation of a cosmogonic myth having at its source the more fundamental experience of life under God’s law.

It is in this sense that we can better understand Walsh’s description of the practical postulates as “true myth.” Myth, in this sense, is the only kind of language that, applied to the cosmos, can correspond to the philosophical investigation of the constitutive ground of order in the soul. If we read Kant’s exploration of the depths of morality in the Religion as an approach to the inner tension towards the ground of existence, in which man finds his fundamental disposition to evil as the only explanation for the existence of the (moral) choice of the motives of inclination over those of reason, we can see that the God of Kant’s “moral religion” has not been emptied of religious significance. In fact, as Kant emphasizes more than once, true religion is moral because the moral is in itself the preeminent way to access the divine.

It starts with Kant’s claim—already rehearsed in the Grounding—that the idea of holiness manifested fully in a human being, or “the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity” which Christ personifies (R, 6:61) is before anything an “internal” reality, which “resides

58 As Voegelin puts it, talking about Plato’s use of the “true myth,”
“Since the philosopher cannot transcend these limits [set to the philosopher’s exploration of reality by the divine mystery of the noetic height and the apeironic depth] but has to move in the In-Between, the Metaxy, delimited by them, the meaning of his work depends on an ambiance of insight concerning the divine presence and operation in the cosmos that only the myth can provide. Plato’s answer to the predicament is the creation of the alethinos logos, the story of the gods that can claim to be true if it fits the cognitive consciousness of order created in the soul of man by the erotic tension toward the divine Beyond.” (Voegelin, Ecumenic Age, p. 56.)
in our morally-legislative reason.” (R, 6:62) Kant points to the fact that the practical knowledge of the law and its full adoption as the ground for maxims of choice can only be known in the inside, from the inside, so that “there is no need, therefore, of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason.” (R, 6:62) And that internal idea must be prior to any true adequate acceptance of miracles, since the inversion of this logic would amount to moral *unbelief*.59

Regarding justification, Kant is very concerned with emphasizing its moral content before any external signs or rituals of absolution. His criticism of “expiations,” as well as of the “invocations or exaltations” of the Son of God, has the objective of pointing out that, if they are not accompanied by an internal change in the moral disposition of the human being that can be witnessed at least partly by moral deeds, these external acts are only shortcuts or expedients that allow the person “not to forfeit too much of life’s pleasures unnecessarily and, by life’s end, to settle his accounts with speed and to his advantage.” (R, 6:77-78) Therefore, as Christ is presented as a model of the victory of the moral over the physical realm, according to the centrality of the moral reading of Christianity, miracles and revelation are not necessarily denied, but their full significance is only found in reason, or in the heart of the human being:

It might well be that the person of the teacher of the one and only religion, valid for all worlds, is a mystery; that his appearance on earth, as well as his translation from it, his eventful life and his passion, are all but miracles—indeed, that the history that ought to testify to the account of these miracles is itself a miracle (a supernatural revelation). So we may leave the merit of these miracles, one and all, undisturbed; nay even venerate the external cover that has served to bring into public currency a doctrine whose authentication rests on a document indelibly retained in every soul and in need of no

59 It may be noted that in this respect, Kant is fully in line with the Gospel examples of miracles that were preceded by the faith of their receivers, and with Christ’s denunciation of the Jews’ demand of “signs” in order for them to believe his words.
miracle: provided, however, that, as regards the use of these historical reports, we do not make it a tenet of religion that knowing, believing, and professing them are themselves something by which we can make ourselves well-pleasing to God. (R, 6:85)

The same reasoning underlies Kant’s opposition of a “religion of divine service” to a “purely moral religion” in Part III of Religion. While the former reflects the human tendency to look at religion as service and honor rendered as to a “great lord of this world,” the latter is based on the consideration that whenever [human beings] fulfill their duties toward human beings (themselves and others), by that very fact they also conform to God’s commands; hence, that in all their doings and non-doings, so far as these have reference to morality, they are constantly in the service of God; and that it is absolutely impossible to serve him more intimately in some other way. (R, 6:103)

Kant’s apparent dismissal of the historical faiths before the centrality of “one (true) religion” (R, 6:108) may be interpreted as a denial of central tenets of supernatural belief and their reduction to an immanent morality. But it should be noted that, as the quote above has shown, Kant does not preclude the veracity of miracles, the Incarnation, and historical revelation; and although he does refer to them as an “external cover” for a more essential doctrine, in the end Kant accepts the inevitability of the historical mode of faith, provided it is understood in line with the moral mode. This is better understood, as Walsh has noted, an attempt to renew the Christian project from within Christianity itself, which captures some of the core impulses and motivations of the Gospel and makes them “transparent to their source,”⁶⁰ but that at the same time is not fully able

⁶⁰ Walsh, Modern Philosophical Revolution, p. 53, 55, and 59.
to deal with the historical manifestation of that faith in the same level as his moral insights had achieved.  

Nevertheless, in his concentration on the ultimate moral significance of religious experience, which reveals the religious implications of moral existence (if only through the acknowledgment of its limitations in finite human beings), Kant points to the primary area of the experience of the divine in the human soul, namely, the moral inner universe that Voegelin called, following his meditation of the Classical Greek creation of philosophy, the experience of the tension towards the ground.

God is first of all a God of love, and only secondly of being. A similar conclusion has been reached from the point of view of theology’s own critical perspective on the philosophy of being, including Heidegger’s investigations of the “ontological difference.” Jean-Luc Marion has proposed that, in its attempt to objectivize and thus “guarantee” the being of God, philosophy has treated God, conceptually, in the manner of an idol. In Marion’s phenomenological analysis of religious experience, the contemplation of the icon is the opposite of the idolatrous relationship that, by objectifying and “freezing” the reality of the Beyond into an image, stops the searching gaze half-way to its destination, returning the gaze to itself. By so doing, the idol discloses more about the viewer than about the divine (although it does disclose the divine as experienced by the

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61 Walsh suggests that in his difficulty to see the historical Christ as “the means of the very fulfillment of grace in existence,” and his distrust of the moral insights capacity to disclose “the structure of reality as a whole” are symptoms of a not complete leap into the participatory mode of existential morality: “Kant’s own readiness to prejudge what can be known through the unfolding of practice is itself a retention of the primacy of the theoretical.” (Ibid., p. 60.)
viewer), and becomes a mirror that interrupts the view in order to make the divine “visible,” “visable,” capable of being aimed at and encompassed in the categories of the viewer.\(^ \text{62} \)

In contrast, by allowing oneself to be looked at by the face represented in the icon, the viewer no longer aims at and fixes the divine in an image, but is aimed at by what lies behind the visible surface of wood and paint:

The icon opens in a face, where man’s sight envisages nothing, but goes back infinitely from the visible to the invisible by grace of the visible itself: instead of the invisible mirror, which sent the human gaze back to itself alone and censured the invisible, the icon opens in a face that gazes at our gazes in order to summon them to its depth.\(^ \text{63} \)

Whereas the concept of being, applied to God, encloses the divine reality in an idolatrous image, God can only assume his proper “unthinkableness” through his revelation as love, or as gift. Thinking of God beyond being, as love or gift, displaces all conditions and restrictions on God’s initiative, even those of “Being.” In this way, the proper response becomes an action of the will instead of cognition:

For, in order to accomplish the response to love, it is necessary and sufficient to will it, since will alone can refuse or receive so that man cannot impose any condition, even negative, on the initiative of God. Thus no aim can any longer decide idolatrously on the possibility or impossibility of access to and from God.\(^ \text{64} \)

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\(^{62} \) “The concept consigns to a sign what at first the mind grasps with it (\textit{concipere, capere}); but such a grasp is measured not so much by the amplitude of the divine as by the scope of \textit{a capacitas}, which can fix the divine in a specific concept only at the moment when a conception of the divine fills it, hence appeases, stops, and freezes it. When a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names ‘God,’ this concept functions exactly as an idol. It gives itself to be seen, but thus all the better conceals itself as the mirror where thought, invisibly, has its forward point fixed, so that the invisable finds itself, with an aim suspended by the fixed concept, disqualified and abandoned; thought freezes, and the idolatrous concept of ‘God’ appears, where, more than God, thought judges itself.” (Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{God Without Being. Hors Texte}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 16.

\(^{63} \) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{64} \) Ibid., p. 48.
Marion finds in biblical language, through the dimension of conversion, the manner in which beings in the world can “outwit” the logic of Being. In the Pauline language of the glorification of the world as opposed to that of God, the dependence of man upon his own resources in contrast with the exclusive reliance upon the call of Christ is the difference that provides the key to a different understanding of being and non-being. It is more a matter of a response to the initiative of God, rather than a reliance on the stability of being. Marion finds that what is finally at stake in this dynamic is the intimate participation in the life of God, through the analysis of the parable of the Prodigal Son. In that tale, the prodigal son has *ousia*, as his separated substance (as “possession without gift”), from the moment he no longer participates in the life of his father, with whom he enjoyed *ousia* as gift, i.e. without the isolation implied by a being among other beings.

In the insight that God as gift—with whom the only adequate relationship is a participation—comes before God as substance and gives being its full sense we can see an agreement with Kant’s understanding of the practical and the moral law in which we participate, as the only true access to the reality of a being of God, the author of nature, which, as such, becomes secondary. The primary experience of the divine remains the participation in the moral law, which because it is prior to being itself as cognized, is defined by Kant as autonomy of reason.
Chapter IV

Autonomy as Participation in a More than Human Order

Introduction

In Karol Wojtyła’s work, the distinction between “activations” (what happens within man without his freely willed assent) and “action,” or between the nature of the individual as determined by his natural potentialities and the special nature of the person, is expressed in his treatment of the reality of free action, especially in its moral dimension, through concepts such as the “efficacy” and the “transcendence of the person.” By efficacy it is understood that the person is truly the “author” of his actions, rising above what would be physical or psychological “activations” that do not pass through the personal will or the faculty of judgment that makes a person’s decision truly that person’s. In the concept of transcendence, Wojtyła approaches the idea of human independence from the influence of external objects, remarking that man acts with a view not only to the intentional objects of willing, but especially to his own person’s moral constitution. The ego is, then, also “objectivized” by the will, as man builds himself as a moral agent through his own free acts. This reflects a certain autonomy of man as regards the natural impulses he receives both from outside and from his inner processes, and the capacity to build his very self out of his own autonomous resources.

Wojtyła adds to this picture by clearly noting the difference between the will and cognition, including a certain independence of the former from the latter. It is the dynamism of the will and its “capacity for truth” that assures the autonomy of the person from nature, since the
relationship of cognition is not free as the will must be in other to account for the efficacy and the transcendence of the person. Nevertheless, as we noted in Chapter 1, Wojtyła ultimately places the cognized teleological order of being at the top of ethical life, in accordance with the Thomistic view.

Still, Wojtyła’s prolonged concentration on the inner personal life of morality makes him detect a certain kind of autonomy of the will at the core of that life. Martin Rhonheimer has called this kind of autonomy “personal autonomy,” and recognized it in Aquinas’s characterization of rational creatures as beings who order themselves to their proper ends by virtue of their insight into the good.¹

Rhonheimer makes a distinction between different kinds of autonomy, in order to clarify the conditions under which this concept is compatible with Thomistic ethics. So he calls personal autonomy the capacity of the human person to make his own the rules of morality that correspond to the nature of the human suppositum, functional autonomy the capacity to regulate a limited sphere of norms within a more comprehensive normative dominion (of which personal autonomy is a special kind), and constitutive (or competence) autonomy as a fuller independence from other normative contexts.

Rhonheimer describes personal moral autonomy as an “autonomous theonomy,” in contrast with the idea of a “theonomous autonomy.” In his view, the good must be posited by the subject through “his own” moral judgments, thus in a legitimate kind of self-legislation.

However, the nature of this good is not fully dependent upon the subject, because it is not idiosyncratic, but rational:

It is a theonomy that the human subject possesses as its own self-lawfulness, a “participated theonomy”…. Human autonomy is thus revealed as createdness, thereby becoming a medium for understanding the theonomy of its self-governance. The knowledge of the morally good/obliging shows itself... as a noetically indispensable truth, which, despite its functionally autonomous positing, does not depend, constitutively considered, on the autonomy of the subject—that is, in its constitution qua truth. For this reason, the subject cannot claim to have the “competence” of this truth.²

In this sense, for Rhonheimer personal autonomy is another way of talking about the Thomistic concept of natural law, in its meaning of a special “participation in eternal law” by rational creatures.

We have suggested that these insights into the existence of an autonomous area of personal morality should be located closer to Kant’s thought than it is usually accepted. By focusing on what was formerly passed over as an implicit component of rational nature, now using the language of autonomy necessitated by the special subjectivity of the human supposition, Thomistic writers have come to agree in some ways with Kant’s “discoveries” about morality. It may be recalled that Wojtyła commends what he calls Kant’s emphasis on the “moment of decision” that is characteristic of moral acts, in contrast to Max Scheler’s apparently one-sided emphasis on the almost passive experience of values. And Rhonheimer affirms that Kant was essentially correct in relating the “ought” to a human dynamism that goes beyond what “pure nature” may exert on human beings through instincts or passive psychological processes.³

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² Ibid., p. 203.
³ Ibid., p. 196.
For Rhonheimer, however, when it comes to explaining or further justifying this moral autonomy, Kant exhibits a more radical and illegitimate kind of autonomous morality, more akin to the concept of a constitutive autonomy that disengages man from his nature, creating by means of his “transcendental formalism” (which for Rhonheimer denies any anthropological influence on ethics) “an anthropology of a dualistic or spiritualistic character.” In this way, Rhonheimer is in agreement with the other critics of Kantian autonomy presented in Chapter 1, for whom that concept of autonomy is marked by a formalism that strips the ethical act of all its richness, originated in the objective created nature of the human being.

In this chapter, extending the interpretation of Kantian metaphysics and ethics developed in the previous two chapters, we shall attempt to show that the notion of autonomy in Kant is not necessarily opposed to a robust metaphysically grounded anthropology nor based on a dualist anthropology, but on the contrary, reveals a fundamental dimension of personality that Kant came to describe as the “dignity of rational nature.”

We shall start by giving a fuller characterization of “autonomy as participation” as a corollary of the reading of Kant’s philosophy proposed so far in this work. Then we will show how this interpretation of autonomy provides a more satisfactory solution to a major problem ascribed to Kant’s ethical theory, an apparent internal contradiction regarding the source of the moral law’s authority that has been described in the literature as the “paradox of autonomy.” Having suggested that the paradox is in fact a result of a traditional reading that does not take into account the primacy of the practical—as primarily moral—in the critical philosophy, we turn to a clarification of the metaphysical status of autonomy as submission to a moral law that is

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4 Ibid., p. 213.
legislated by the very agent who submits. This is done by means of a commentary on the debate about the “incompatibilist” concept of freedom that Kant defends as indispensable for morality. We conclude that in order to understand morality and freedom it is necessary to take seriously Kant’s assertion of the practical metaphysical import of morality as an a priori reality that grounds human rationality, and which constitutes agents as such. This is found, in the last section, to be at the source of Kant’s concept of the dignity of rational nature.

**Autonomy as participation**

As Kant himself affirms and numerous commentators have emphasized, autonomy is the supreme condition and, in a way, the deepest meaning of moral life. Any other way of establishing the norms by which human beings must abide amounts to a necessitation of human choices through interests distinct from the moral, or pure practical reason, such as rewards, fear, physical coercion, etc. These interests, in turn, are based on man’s empirical condition, and as such do not serve as supports for universal, unconditional, or categorical imperatives.

Kant reaches the formula of autonomy in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* through a reflection on the features of the categorical imperative, which is—as we saw in Chapter 2—a formulation of the principle pure practical reason, or of the good will. The formula of autonomy is a result of the development of the two previous formulas of the categorical imperative. In that context, the formula of universal law provides the essential insight about the form of universality that must be true of any maxim that is supposed to be morally valid. In its
turn, the formula of humanity as an end in itself provides humanity or rational nature as an end in itself as the “ground of all practical legislation,” due to rational beings’ condition as the only purely rational and thoroughly universal objective ends (as opposed to the particular, sensible ends found in experience). Kant follows up these two formulas with the elucidation that the only way to concretize these general ideas in a more specific concept of rational willing is through the idea of rational nature itself legislating universal law. As Kant puts it, once it is established that the distinction between a categorical and a hypothetical imperative lies in the former’s renunciation, from duty, of all interest, a “determination” is sought that is contained in the idea of the imperative itself (irgend eine Bestimmung, die er enthielte – G, 4:432) and that indicates that renunciation of all empirical incentives. That determination, as an idea of reason, is the will of every rational being as allgemeingesetzgebenden Willen, or a “universal-law-giving” (i.e., rational) will.

Moral autonomy, then, appears in the *Grounding* and (as Susan Shell indicates) for the first time in Kant’s thought in order to guarantee the renunciation of all interest in a will that must act according to duty, or to follow the categorical imperative. The fact that the individual rational being legislates for himself, or as “the author” of the law he is bound to follow, signifies less any kind of willfulness or arbitrariness than it reflects the insight that to renounce “interest” implies that the law must have as its only motive the rational nature that the individual being finds within himself. In other words, the law must be “born” within the will, solely from the

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will’s character as pure practical reason, thus from its universal character. Kant will conclude that

If there is a categorical imperative (i.e., a law for the will of every rational being), then it can only command that everything be done from the maxim of such will as could at the same time have as its object only itself regarded as legislating universal law. For only then are the practical principle and the imperative which the will obeys unconditional, inasmuch as the will can be based on no interest at all. (G, 4:432)

Any other principle, presented as it were from the outside to the will as a source of lawfulness and the measure of the good to which the will must submit, retains the necessity of also representing for the will an interest “functioning as an attracting stimulus or as a constraining force for obedience.” (G, 4:433) As seen in Chapter 2, however, the good will must be prior to the representation of any object, or end, if it is to deserve the quality of being unconditioned or universal. Hence the only way in which the will can truly submit to a categorical imperative, or universal law, is to eschew the heteronomy of any “exterior” principle of law and find the pull towards the good in its own rational essence, which Kant calls self-legislation, or autonomy.  

We also argued in Chapter 2 that the universal moral law in Kant should be read as a symbol of participation in the order of being, in which human beings find themselves as soon as they start the reflection about what they ought to do. As a reality that cannot be the object of empirical experience, since by definition it comes before any application of the law to the objects human beings encounter in the world, the moral law can only be found within the internal space

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6 Referring to past attempts to find the universal principle of morality, Kant observes that “it was not seen that man is subject only to his own, yet universal, legislation and that he is bound only to act in accordance with his own will, which is, however, a will purposed by nature to legislate universal laws.” (G, 4:432)
where the question of duty appears. In this sense, autonomy would be another description for this kind of participation.

From this perspective, an issue that was left untreated in Chapter 2 can be better understood. In the same section on law as participation, the limitations of the image of a law which lacks a clear source of authority and sanction were indicated to suggest the symbolic character of the moral “law” in Kant’s moral thought. The law would be, in this context, a conceptual approximation to the higher reality in which man participates as a rational / moral being. But the idea of autonomy, without invalidating the suggestion of law as a symbol, answers the question about the source and the seat of authority and sanction. In Kant’s thought, the individual will, as rational, is seen as the locus where the law is “promulgated,” inasmuch as it approaches the idea of allgemeingesetzgebenden Willen. As such, self-legislation is not the autonomy of one particular individual, or even of a coordinated group of them, but rather the autonomy of reason within every rational being. This is directly affirmed in Kant’s conclusion of his discussion of autonomy in the Grounding’s second section, where he states that

the moral imperative must therefore abstract from every object to such an extent that no object has any influence at all on the will, so that practical reason (the will) may not merely minister to an interest not belonging to it but may merely show its own commanding authority as the supreme legislation. (G, 4:435)

The primary kind of sanction of such law-giving, in its turn, is produced in any individual who, after failing to live up to the demands of the moral law, looks at this failure as a fall from the high status to which he is raised by his rational nature. But, taking into account the discussion of Chapter 3, in this existential participatory mode, in which God is considered the “sovereign” member of the kingdom of ends (G, 4:434) and the author of the laws of nature and morality (in
view of the highest end), the sanctions of ultimate happiness or punishment can be thought indeed as a result of the common universal law-giving of the author of nature and all other rational beings, without invalidating the autonomous grounds of the moral law. All of this only makes sense, however, from the perspective of moral autonomy as a participation in a reality that is moral from the start, and can only be engaged as a “fact of reason,” which is the formulation that Kant finally reaches in the second *Critique*.

**Understanding the paradoxes of autonomy**

This way of looking at autonomy helps make sense, arguably better than other alternatives and in Kant’s own terms, of the issue to which some scholars have referred (following Kant himself) as the paradox of autonomy. This paradox, which is at the heart of one of Modernity’s most characteristic problems, revolves around the apparent contradiction inherent in a pure self-giving of law that leaves the legislating subject bound to that same law. One of the problems involved would be that whatever binds the subject to the law (the reason behind its binding power) would seem to have to hold some authority over the subject and thus invalidate the subject’s claim to an original legislative power. Another question raised would focus on the

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7 Terry Pinkard has expressed this problem as such: “if we are to impose a principle (a maxim, the moral law) on ourselves, then presumably we must have a reason to do so; but, if there was an antecedent reason to adopt that principle, then that reason would not itself be self-imposed; yet for it to be binding on us, it had to be (or at least had to be ‘regarded’ to be, as Kant ambiguously stated) self-imposed.” (Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 59.)
hypothetical status of the self-legislating agent “before” the act of legislation, as Robert Pippin has put it:

The image of some sort of putatively lawless person making or originating or legislating a principle and “only” thereby being bound to it—otherwise not bound at all—makes it very hard to imagine on what sort of “basis” such a law-less subject could decide what to legislate.\(^8\)

In view of the impossibility of taking the idea of self-legislation in such a literal sense, Pippin goes on to state that the formulation must be, first of all, read as metaphorical, but ultimately understood as an incomplete account of the character possessed by human morality as a kind of a priori reality. In this sense, any moral agent would have “always already undertaken the basic obligation [that grounds the self-legislation of rational maxims].”\(^9\) The possible ways to explain this priority, however, can be quite distinct. Pippin analyzes the “regress argument” used by Christine Korsgaard, according to which it is the practical identity of man as a rational being that ultimately grounds his submission to rational moral maxims; he also mentions, but without further analyzing, Allen Wood’s notion of man’s self-conception as a rational being as a possible first principle. Pippin’s own preferred explanation, which he believes is ultimately necessitated by Korsgaard’s argument, is a Hegelian source of normativity in history and specific social organizations, understood as “collectively legislated over time.”\(^10\)

Susan Shell acknowledges Pippin and Pinkard’s treatment of the paradox of autonomy, but tries to understand Kant’s defense of a paradoxical autonomy in the terms and in view of the

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 214.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 228. Korsgaard’s and Allen’s treatments of the paradoxical character of autonomy are further analyzed below, in the section on The Constructivist Strategy.
objectives of the *Grounding*. Going beyond the philosophical difficulty of a self-grounded subjection to moral law, Shell concentrates on Kant’s project to reply to the “enemies of virtue” (moral skeptics) by showing that human reason is capable of being motivated by pure morality, even in a world where that morality can never be fully encountered *in concreto*. The paradox, in this case, takes the meaning of a “public claim that contradicts general/universal opinion,” and thus risks being considered “logical egoism” or an “eccentricity.” Therefore, after developing the concept and the content of a categorical imperative in the *Grounding*’s second section, Kant will not try to “deduce freedom” from man’s capacity of theoretical judgment, as some have argued. Instead, the third section’s “modest” goal is to “parry a lingering suspicion as to reason’s ‘right’ to venture a synthetic a priori practical proposition,” by

> gaining as much insight into the ‘how’ [such a proposition is possible] as will suffice for ‘moral conviction.’ [Success in this attempt] does not involve demonstration (per impossibile) of the categorical imperative’s truth *on the basis of some non-moral premise.*

For Shell, Kant executes this demonstration by means of suggesting that while we may not be able to cognize how we are “in ourselves,” we are capable of acting “under the idea of freedom,” from a purely “active ground.” This is a “standpoint” by means of which reason can occupy its place in an intelligible world, as long as it does not fall into the experiential trap of “intuiting or sensing itself” or to the extent that “it refrains from seeking to retrieve an object from that world as motive.” Freedom, the ground of the possibility of the moral law, remains a “presupposition” that is necessary and sufficient for the practical use of reason, and as such it

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12 Ibid. p. 144 – emphasis added.
13 Ibid., p. 148.
suffices for conviction about the categorical imperative (against skeptical naysayers).
Furthermore, by limiting its theoretical ambitions in a way that is crucial for the presupposition of freedom, reason establishes a limit to its own activity that is also a boundary beyond which “something else” is found—the intelligible world. Schell characterizes autonomy as a “boundary condition” of morality, inasmuch as it means that no non-moral end can be adduced to prove or disprove freedom: the standpoint of membership in an intelligible world is not denied by theoretical philosophy, and is conversely required by practical reason, as long as it remains a non-cognitive (practical) relationship.

The constructivist strategy

The idea of a practical standpoint is adopted by Christine Korsgaard (as noted above) in her own attempt to solve the paradoxical nature of autonomy in Kant, but that is not a standpoint from where one can posit “something else” (as Susan Shell maintains), even if only from a practical perspective. Korgaard’s Kantian practical standpoint seems instead to be a closed-in conceptual state, or a circular affirmation of reason as a source of value beyond which it is impossible theoretically to go. In Creating the Kingdom of Ends, a collection of essays on Kantian morality, Korsgaard states in different ways what seems to be a self-justifying morality: in order to disavow a view of the distinction between noumena and phenomena as the affirmation of the existence of “two worlds” with different degrees of reality, or of a “mysterious form of supersensuous existence,” Korsgaard resorts to a simple act of “regarding oneself as” free rational beings when individuals take the standpoint of agents, in relation to which any other
self-conception (e.g., as a naturally determined being) is irrelevant. Other agents are not
metaphysically judged as free and rational, but simply considered “fellow inhabitants of the
standpoint of practical reason.”

For Korsgaard, as rational beings, human beings are determiners of ends, ultimate
sources of value, and for that reason ends in themselves. This phrasing contrasts with Kant’s
own formulation of “the idea of every rational being as an end in itself,” in that Korsgaard’s
conception seems to put more weight on the individual, concrete human being who is an
individual source of value. By the same token, her presentation of autonomy stresses the “self”
component of rational self-legislation, so that “there can only be one reason why human beings
must obey the moral law, and that is that we give the law to ourselves.” Later on in the book,
Korsgaard will affirm, regarding the contrast between metaphysical laws of nature and self-
legislated norms, that

14 Christine M. Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends, Cambridge, UK, New York, NY: Cambridge University

15 In Creating the Kingdom of Ends, Korsgaard makes too much of a distinction between human rationality and
human morality (or personality). The former, seen merely as a determiner of ends that is more spontaneous than the
instinctual pull in other animals, acts from operations of “comparison [with others] and foresight” to confer value to
certain objects; the latter considers all objects in regard to the universal ends (and limitations) of morality, and thus
acts from the unconditioned good:

“When Kant says that the characteristic of humanity is the power to set an end, then, he is not merely referring to
personality, which would encompass the power to adopt an end for moral or sufficient reasons. Rather, he is
referring to a more general capacity for choosing, desiring, or valuing ends.” (Korsgaard, ibid., p. 114)

She concludes saying that, even though this capacity is only “perfected and completed” by the moral aspect, the
“distinctive feature of humanity” is to be able to “take a rational interest in something.” (Ibid.) In this way, value is
“conferred,” both to things and to human beings as ends in themselves, at a lower level than morality. But there are
some important components of Kant’s thought that seem to be ignored in this interpretation, such as the
identification between rational beings as persons (G, 4:428), the distinction between price and dignity (G, 4:434-5),
and categorical statements such as “now, morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end
in himself.” (G, 4:435)

16 Korsgaard, Kingdom of Ends, p. 23.
The problem with these theories is not that their laws are positive, but that their laws are not willed autonomously, and so are not intrinsically normative. But the Kantian laws of autonomy are positive laws: moral laws exist because we legislate them.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, although Korsgaard points to the necessarily “intrinsic” normative character of moral laws, she blocks any understanding of this intrinsic character as “metaphysical,” since theoretical and metaphysical are apparently the same thing for her. This is related to her “standpoint” theory of Kantian morality, which stops short of asking what permits a rational being to stand at that particular point. In consequence, what brings value to any moral choice is the sheer fact of it being made by a rational, value-conferring human being that assumes a universal perspective, seeing all other human beings as rational value-conferring ends in themselves. The condition of rational value-conferring is simply a practical identity according to which any human being can be regarded from the practical standpoint.\textsuperscript{18} No further questions are asked regarding the kind of knowledge that is being expressed, nor about a justification for the assumption of the identity between the end-setting and the value-conferring properties of reason.

In the same work we have quoted above, Robert Pippin has expressed his criticism of Korsgaard “regress argument” by taking her interpretation of Kant’s solution to the “paradox of

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{18} Korsgaard stakes a quite overarching claim about this capacity of human agents:
“Kant’s answer, as I understand him, is that what makes the object of your rational choice good is that it is the object of rational choice. That is, since we still do make choices and have the attitude that what we choose is good in spite of our incapacity to find the unconditioned condition of the object’s goodness in this (empirical) regress upon the conditions, it must be that we are supposing that rational choice itself makes its object good. His idea is that rational choice has what I will call a value-conferring status. When Kant says: ’rational nature exists as an end in itself….,’ I read him as claiming that in our private rational choices and in general in our action we view ourselves as having a value-conferring status in virtue of our rational nature. We act as if our own choice were the sufficient condition of the goodness of its object: this attitude is built into (a subjective principle of) rational action.” (Ibid., p. 122-3)
Korsgaard follows up by noting that that value conferring status must be assumed to exist in “anyone who has the power of rational choice,” with the consequence that, for Kant, all rational choices must be harmonized.
autonomy” to its final conclusion and showing that to go back to a general value of humanity as the source of value that must be recognized in others amounts in the end to dependence on a specific human “practical identity” that is historical in nature. For Pippin, Korsgaard’s Rawlsian perspective puts her in a position whereby she must come to accept that the general concept of human rational nature depends on a more substantive, historical view of the human being as, above all, rational. As a result, for Pippin “it is unlikely that an account of the subjectivity of moral life could rely on an appeal to something like such an individual endorsement test.”

Developing a similar argument to Korsgaard’s, Allen Wood also distinguishes between “humanity” and “personality” in order to defend that it is the former and not the latter that is an end in itself. His logic is that

it follows necessarily from the role played by the concept of an end in itself in grounding the categorical imperative that rational beings cannot be ends in themselves only insofar as they are virtuous or obedient to moral laws.

On the other hand, in order to be considered ends in themselves, it is not necessary that agents be fully proficient or successful in applying their rational capacities (technical and pragmatic), because

being an end in itself cannot come in degrees, since a categorical imperative or practical law either has an objective ground or it does not. Kant’s position therefore has to be that anything possessing the capacity to set ends and act according to reason is an end in itself, however well or badly it may exercise the capacity.

At this point, one might ask: why doesn’t the “capacity for rational success” logic apply to the “capacity for moral success” as well? Especially when it is clear that the ultimate source of

20 Allen W. Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 120.
21 Ibid., p. 121.
objective value is that which does not depend on conditional goods, i.e., pure practical reason (morality)? A simply instrumental rationality devoid of the capacity for morality would not be, even in its “spontaneous” organizing of material principles and inclinations into ends, able to go beyond the logic of nature. Ratiocination might allow some leeway for man to “set his own ends,” or be aware that they are being set within himself following a desire for happiness, but without access to the source of unconditional good, a rational (but non-moral) being would have to decide on its structure of ends on the basis, ultimately, of sensible incentives, in a Humean fashion (as Pippin shows regarding Korsgaard discussion of instrumental reason). In that case, such a being would not be able to recognize even itself as a source of absolute worth and dignity, since that which allows for absolute worth to exist would not be a part of its reality. The whole account seems to effect an artificial separation between inherently connected dimensions of the human being. Kant separates between them to illustrate the different capacities of the human being, but when it is a question of finding absolute worth or the unconditional good anywhere, one is already thinking under “the idea of a will giving universal law.”

In a footnote, Wood reflects on this separation, agreeing that where humanity is personality is also present. However, instead of the value of humanity being based on personality, it is the inverse that he sees happening:

For if humanity involves the rational capacity not only to set ends but also to compare their objects and fashion a whole based on priorities among these values, then reason would seem to include the capacity to make comparative judgments of value, hence an (at
least implicit) awareness of the rational standards of value — whose ultimate foundation, Kant claims, is the dignity of humanity or rational nature as an end in itself.\textsuperscript{22}

Thence comes Wood’s own “regress argument”, parallel to Korsgaard’s:

Two points immediately seem crucial to Kant’s argument: First, it requires us to concede that setting an end for ourselves involves ascribing objective goodness to it. Second, it involves an inference from the objective goodness of the end to the unconditional objective goodness of the capacity to set the end (which Kant calls ‘humanity’ or ‘rational nature’). And it bases this inference on the fact that the capacity in question is supposed to be the source of the objective value of the end.\textsuperscript{23}

The regress argument, then, attempts to give morality a “firmer” source in something more basic, something that Kant sees human beings clearly doing in certain hypothetical imperatives, through instrumental reason. But just as morality is not reducible to instrumental rationality, there is no way from a mere instrumental rationality to morality by means of any kind of generalization. Generalization, or universalization, as we observed in Chapter 2, is not the source of morality but the fundamental test or criterion that begins to show how the reality of a moral law in which man participates can be translated into principles for action in the empirical world.

There are other similar constructivist views about the source of the normativity of self-legislation, such as Susan Neiman’s explicitly political constructivist account. For Neiman, reason’s regulative role in its theoretical use is mirrored by its activity in the practical sphere. If

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 365. Wood also proposes the argument that, if while instrumental reason implies a certain practical freedom in the negative sense, transcendental reason is given as necessary for practical reason: “But a being capable of either instrumental or prudential rationality must already be practically free in the negative sense, since it is capable of resisting sensuous impulses to act on ends it has set or for the end of its own greatest well-being.” (Ibid.)

Wood does not add, though, that in a purely instrumental reasoning, which follows the end of greatest well-being, reason is not capable of resisting sensuous impulses in a more fundamental sense, because well-being remains an external incentive to pure reason. Morality is necessary for the whole chain of ends to be ordered in a wholly autonomous fashion, that is, in a way that is free of sensuous incentives from the start. Pippin is right to see a fall back to a Humean type of ethics in regressive arguments of this kind.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 127.
in the former case reason “construct[s] science by proceeding as if nature were constructed according to empirical laws,” in the latter

practical reason must proceed as if its maxims were the basis of universal laws of behavior. Though the principles on which they proceed are not objective, they are the only possible means for constructing public, intersubjective order for free subjects.\footnote{Susan Neiman, \textit{The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant}, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 116.}

But the way in which reason “regulates” theoretical knowledge, guiding it towards systemicity and completeness in its investigation of nature (a process that is always checked against empirical developments) is not fully parallel to reason’s activity in the moral sphere, in which pure practical reason purposes to instantiate the objects of its (pure) representations, and to that extent can be “constitutive.” For Kant, as morality, reason in its practical use is free to disregard nature as it is presented to the understanding, so that it creatively limits and directs the effects of nature (incentives, inclinations, etc.) without having to worry about the empirical existence of its objects in experience. As Kant repeatedly points out, reason in the practical sphere guides agents toward creating the realities it represents within them (but not “creating” the norms) without even taking into account whether these realities can ever be empirically observed, nay, knowing that they absolutely cannot be fully instantiated in the world of experience.

Moreover, in her constructivist formulation Neiman executes an inversion in the Kantian conception of moral judgment, for in this conception isolated maxims do not become the basis of universal law, but the idea of universal moral law is the basis or the guiding norm that will select and motivate the pursuing of subjective maxims as moral. Individual maxims (as subjective
principles chosen by individual rational beings) may be the “raw material” for the creation of a concrete moral order, but the ground of this order is not constructed by the agents.

Thus it is not as if, in a hypothetical image (one instance of which is the “original position”), non-moral individual agents find themselves forced to construct a collective order and happen to have in common this useful resource, namely, a regulative reason that is able to design a common order of universal laws, which will, from then on, become a standard for legitimate behavior (Rawls’s idea of the priority of the right). Rather, agents are constructed as such by participating in reason; they are active as “enactors” of reason in the world, but reason is not idiosyncratically “constructed” by the agents, collectively or otherwise. Instead, reason comprehends them, and they are built as agents through practicing this source of norms in their lives. This is true of the instrumental use of reason (after all, rules of technique and prudence are not easily come by, but hard to devise and to master), but mostly the hallmark of morality, because morality comprises the rules that are the most “internal” to the human being, for they relate before anything to the development of that most intimate of human faculties, i.e. the will.

The question of authorship: a response to the constructivists

Karl Ameriks has highlighted this exact problem about the constructivist version of Kantian moral autonomy, in his discussions of the nature of self-legislation as the enactment of rationality, an essential feature of human existence. In his “moderate understanding of our moral autonomy,” as opposed to a radical conception of autonomy limited to human individual rationality, Ameriks remarks that while moral laws lie beyond the spatiotemporal conditions of
human existence, “[they] are still not external to our essential nature, which for Kant is our sheer rationality…. They come from something ‘in’ us even if it is not only in us….”25 This implies a denial of any concept of autonomy that locates the source of the moral law in the agent’s own phenomenal existence, be it individual or collective. For, if

the most fundamental Kantian principles of value… remain independent of space and time in their definition…, the fundamental ‘self’ that autonomously ‘generates’ the basic laws of morality is not defined as a human self, even though we actually become aware of the laws only as exemplified in concrete spatiotemporal, that is, human contexts.26

Elsewhere, Ameriks talks about self-legislation in terms of the determination of agents by their “true being in the sense of our rational as opposed to merely natural character.”27 Thus the moral order should not be seen as constructed by individuals, but enacted by them in conformance with the standards of reason.28 For Ameriks this distinction is further specified by the difference (found in Kant) between the legislative and the executive determination of moral laws. The former refers to reason’s role as a formal determination of moral laws, through standards that are not “made” by particular individuals but belong to the essence of practical reason, just as “the necessary forms of judgmental representation (which determines the

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26 Ameriks, Fate of Autonomy, p. 13.
28 In the context of a discussion about the differences between a more traditional rationality account of morality (one based solely on intellectual knowledge of the good) and Kant’s critical rationalism (which gives to the will as pure practical reason the capacity to affirm the “ought”), Ameriks defends Kant from Schneewind’s suggestion of voluntarism, and thus focuses on the non-merely human character of the law. So, even if Schneewind is correct in remarking that the moral feeling of respect is not connected to something like the Leibnizian “perception of ontological perfection,” “it would be wrong to think that the role of respect in Kant’s theory is to supplant ‘independent standards’ rather than merely to supplement them with a story about motivation.” As Ameriks concludes, “that the rule for our action is ‘relative’ to the law of rational will in general, and that we can actually bring ourselves to act on this law only by a special exercise of our own will, and not merely our intellect, does not mean that in any restrictive sense the law itself is a product of human making.” (Ibid., p. 273)
necessary conditions for particular empirical cognitive claims)” are transcendental, i.e., do not depend on any particular empirical theoretical acts. In its turn, executive determination refers to the efficient determination of the laws for the individual rational being, involving a “kind of self-making,” but not the making of laws by oneself. For Ameriks, this would deflate the contradictions of self-imposition and self-creation inherent in the paradox of autonomy.

This is a position shared by John Hare, who approaches the issue from the perspective of a concern with God’s role as a supreme lawgiver (if not author) of the rules of morality. Hare points out that, even if God is included as a possible sovereign or supreme member and legislator of a kingdom of ends, Kant still denies that anyone, even God when theoretically understood as a particular entity, can be an author of the moral demand. Hare is quite right to point that out, inasmuch as for Kant the moral law’s normativity originates in each rational agent’s self-legislation, but only insofar as this legislation’s content conforms to the law’s universality as pure practical reason. In consequence, as Hare says, no other agent could be the law’s unique author or creator. On the other hand, “[authorless] necessary laws… can have someone who promulgates or declares them, and in that sense they are subject to a lawgiver (untereinem Gesetzgeber stehen).” Consequently, when Kant talks about autonomous agents as “authors of the law” in the Grounding, a correct interpretation must observe a distinction between authorship

30 As Ameriks puts it, “…this individual causal power is not itself understood as a legislative power for creating normative authority; it is simply the executive power to be an absolutely free efficient cause of one’s own agency as a moral being, and in that way to mold one’s own actual self. The ratio cognoscendi, but not the ratio essendi, of this executive power is the moral ‘fact of reason’. This ‘fact’ reveals itself to us in the context of our particular selves appreciating—but not creating—the legitimacy of the demands of categorical practical reason in general, i.e. of appreciating that we should, and therefore really can, freely act for duty.” (Ibid., p. 276.)
of the obligation of the law and authorship as original “creation” of the law. So, Hare concludes that

This is how we are lawgivers; we declare a correspondence of our wills with the law (which we do not create). For me to will the law autonomously is to declare it my law. A good word here is appropriation, which comes from the Latin ad proprium, to make one’s own. Autonomy on this reading is more nearly a kind of submission than a kind of creation.

This special kind of submission can be described, for Hare, as “recapitulating in our wills what God has willed for our willing,” as captured in the idea of covenant, and thus can it be designated as a theonomous autonomy.

But here again the distinction between different kinds of authorship (of the obligation and of the content) of the law seems to reintroduce the question of reasons for submitting. Even if we take it—as we have done throughout this work—as Kant’s position that the moral law is not “created” by empirical rational beings such as human persons, who are “authors” only of the obligation of the law, i.e. lawgivers who “appropriate” it for themselves, it may be once again asked: by virtue of what reasons do these legislators “appropriate” the moral law and make it their own? It must be recognized that even in order autonomously to affirm “the obligation of the law” for oneself, or to “appreciate” (as Ameriks puts it) the obligatoriness of a law one has not created, somehow the law itself must be judged, to be accepted or refused within oneself. As we argued in Chapter 2, the way to the recognition of the unconditional good, which is the prior or a priori element in any moral judgment, starts at the pull by which the will is moved to “bring

32 This is not a hermeneutical “after the fact” distinction, but one made by Kant himself in the Metaphysics of Morals (6:227) and in lectures given while Kant was writing the Grounding (Moral Mongroversius II, 29:633-34), as pointed out by Patrick Kain and referred by Hare (Ibid., p. 95).
33 Ibid., p. 96.
34 Ibid., p. 114.
forth the good into cognition as an end.” In the end, it seems there must be some kind of moral “creation” in the individual will that submits to the law, although not in the way the constructivists have come to understand it.

Autonomy understood through the priority of morality

Ameriks points to this question by noting the “question-begging” nature of Kant’s account of motivation of the moral law. In the same text in which he defends Kant’s (critical) rationalist conception of morality, Ameriks finally poses (without solving) a final challenge to that conception, through the voice of a hypothetical moral skeptic who has even accepted that moral norms are a law of reason (and not of an individual rational being): “yes, I understand now that that is what the faculty of reason (even the voice of reason in me) says—but I am not going to follow that voice, I am going to follow my own natural, egocentric voice!” Ameriks observes in a related footnote that the solutions usually given to this problem, such as the “general capacity to set ends” (the route taken by Wood and Korsgaard), “may not be of clear moral worth,” whereas the capacity to set good ends “may turn out to have value only on question-begging grounds or insofar as something external to rational nature is given prior moral priority after all.”

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36 Ibid., footnote 42.
We agree with Amerik’s (and Pippin’s) diagnosis about the dubious efficacy of constructivism and similar reductions or regressions of morality, as expedients that attempt to “ground” the moral law and solve the paradox of autonomy. The constructivist strategy may assume a more political character, emphasizing reason’s regulative role (as in Neiman); or it may adopt a more philosophical basis, which tries to produce morality as the consequence of the motive power of a certain practical identity with “value conferring status” (as in Korsgaard), or of humanity as a “capacity to set ends” (as in Wood). In either case, morality’s status as a prior, non-reducible reality is either left aside or transformed into the end of a process that starts at another “non-foundational” point. This strategy ultimately alters the central meaning of the “fact of reason,” from a fact of the moral experience from which any analysis must start, to a deed of an ultimately “instrumental reason” that ascends to morality through generalization procedures.

A Hegelian strategy such as Pippin’s and Pinkard’s, however, which attempts to ground moral norms in the historically evolved norms of a particular society, as the “foundation of last resort” or the basis on which even a particular “practical conception of agency” must be supported, also fails to provide a satisfactory solution. Inasmuch as it is purely “historical” and does not view history as the necessary (if conflictual, or dialectical) mode of instantiation of the moral law, which law remains both beyond and prior to its historical manifestations, this version of a Hegelian alternative begs the question of the first (or irreducible) moral foundations of human life, or reduces it to a mechanics of history (which amounts to reducing it to nothing, or taking a Marxist direction, a mere superstructure). It also fails to account for the human capacity to stand apart from its historical conditions and to analyze and judge them morally, as for
instance Kant does from the point of view of the _idea of reason_ in the _Metaphysics of Morals_’s Doctrine of Right.

Therefore, the question of the moral law’s ultimate source of motivation remains a central problem of the paradox of autonomy, unless we adopt the perspective of a practical metaphysics of participation defended in this work. The paradox of autonomy finally lies in the fact that morality cannot be reduced to non-moral motives; Kant’s great insight was to realize that, ultimately, the only way a human being can be moral is by enacting its legislation within himself. But the only way by which man can legislate morally is by being moral in the first place. The way out of this circle is not to find a lower level of rationality from which morality may be constructed, nor is it to rest the obligatoriness of morality in a historical process and the resulting social conventions, as Pippin and Pinkard want to do from a Hegelian perspective. Instead, morality as pure practical reason is its own _Faktum_, as Kant concludes in the second _Critique_.

As Steven McGuire, who shares in this perspective of participation in the moral law, has affirmed in his PhD dissertation, as we are not able to understand ourselves as moral agents from a theoretical perspective, “we must explore the moral order that we live within from within the perspective of participants in that order.”\(^{37}\) McGuire adds that when Kant affirms that we give the law to ourselves he is in effect homing in on the insight that “only we can decide to respond to our moral obligations in way that has moral worth.”\(^{38}\) (And by “we” he must mean, in the Kantian sense, we in our moral capacity.) So, even if we do not “create” the law in a voluntarist manner (as McGuire goes on to say, in agreement with Ameriks and Hare), either directly or


\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 39.
through constructivist means, we do (re)create it within ourselves as moral beings, which is the only way we could “participate” in it, and moreover the only way in which the moral law could “be” at all. To the question of “where is the will who ‘gives universal law?’” the only answer can be: in every moral being, who is, in the mode of participation, an instantiation or an enactment of reason and of the rational universal law. In any case, this is the only possible answer in Kant’s thought, for the moral law cannot be observed in empirical experience, except through its effects. Ameriks statement to the effect that the self who legislates the moral law is “not a human self” could thus be amended to say that such self is both human and more than human.

According to the way we understand this perspective of participation, which is opened by Kant’s doctrine of the primacy of the practical, when someone says “this is good” in a categorical (and thus moral) manner, he places himself in a position of universal significance; he allows universal rationality, so to speak, to speak through him; as such, he enacts, as if for the first time, the value of that action, or object. It would be easy to mistake the source of that value with the individual subject himself, but the individual is only capable of giving this law to himself (and others who are capable of replicating that enactment) because he participates in that law, which is rationality in its most comprehensive sense.

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39 The idea of enacting the value of an action or state as if “for the first time” is a result of the view according to which the unconditioned good, or the good will, is not a fixed being in the world that can be repeatedly referred to but rather a judgment about the state of things that is made from the position of the participation of a rational being in the moral law. In this sense, perhaps it could be said that the unconditioned good is always beyond any possible concrete being—as in the case of the Platonic *apeiron*—so that at most it can be reflected, or enacted in reality each time moral judgments and choices lead to actions and states.
The metaphysics of autonomy as submission

In his discussion of the Kantian primacy of practical reason, McGuire finds an ambiguity in Kant’s affirmation of the cognitive status of practically-based claims. Even though reason in its practical use allows us to reach certain conclusions about moral realities and even to postulate the existence of God and immortality,

[Kant] never fully relinquishes the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge, of which only the latter is truly knowledge. To be sure, Kant claims that practical reason confirms that objective reality of certain ideas of reason, but, in other places, he continues to hedge his bets, suggesting that speculative reason must accept the findings of practical reason and incorporate them into its operations, but that these findings are not to be accepted as pieces of objective knowledge.\(^{40}\)

McGuire reads Kant’s distinction between “objective knowledge” and “rational belief” as a sign that Kant remained “tied to his theoretical epistemology;” as such, it amounts to a limitation of Kant’s capacity to reach the practical perspective, to treat it as authoritatively as theoretical knowledge. This sets up McGuire’s own dissertation topic, which is the development by Friedrich W. J. Schelling of a fully practical philosophy with none of the hedges and caveats that characterized Kant’s own cautious incursions into practical territory. In Schelling’s philosophy, for example, the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” knowledge would be subsumed under a more fundamental mode of “absolute” knowledge only reachable through a moral participation in the “Absolute I.”\(^{41}\)

Granted that Kant did not work out his insight of the primacy of reason in its practical use into a full blown metaphysics that would displace his own critical concentration on the limits of

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 60.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 94-7.
theoretical reason, still it could be argued that Kant’s concerns with denying theoretical validity to the practical are not merely signs of his attachment to a theoretical stance, but reflect a fundamental feature of practical reason. Even if Kant never fully elaborated the nature and the grounds of the subordinate relationship of the theoretical to the practical, along with all its implications, there is something to the insight that, in a very strong sense, the practical is not and cannot be knowledge of objects. “Rational belief” may sound like a weak characterization of what the practical perspective gives us, but that perceived weakness may be partly due to a Western general cultural reliance upon the empirical fact, that is not only Kant’s but still ours as well. Kant does go beyond this reliance, though, in his various affirmations of the objectiveness of morality and its centrality to man’s existence, over and above any restriction that the critique of reason placed over theoretical knowledge.

Although Kant does not explicitly use this terminology, the perspective of participation in the moral law as a practical reality, which is implied by his practical philosophy and specifically by the doctrine of autonomy as submission, makes this feature of the Kantian openness to living beyond theoretical knowledge appear with more clarity. Here it would be useful to explore in a little more detail and with more precision what this perspective of participation means from Kant’s own intimations.

Morality and metaphysics: the matter of priority in the incompatibilism debate

The debate (already alluded to in Chapter 2) about the nature of Kant’s conception of freedom as compatible or incompatible with natural causality will help bring the metaphysical
status of morality as participation into a clearer view. In *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, Henry Allison has compiled and dealt with many of the challenges made to Kant’s more radical affirmations of freedom as a “transcendental” faculty of rational beings. According to this particular conception (which is the main conclusion of the Third Antinomy’s thesis), freedom would be equivalent to an “unconditioned causality,” or a causality that in its inception is independent of the natural chain of cause and effect observed in experience, although it does interfere in that chain as a “first mover.” For Kant, human freedom would have to be of this kind, if autonomous morality is to have any claim to existence. In this sense, Kant’s metaphysical conception of freedom—which is not “proved” by the argument of the Antinomies but allowed as a theoretically non-refutable possibility—would have to be incompatible with natural causation in the sense of not being ultimately explained or reduced to the logic of nature. In Kant’s critical philosophy, the affirmation of this kind of incompatibilist freedom brings with it a series of metaphysical commitments to which the literature has not been very accommodating.

Allison lists the main problems as follows:

1) the necessity of the existence of “some timeless noumenal realm,” which would seem to make freedom totally unconnected from and thus irrelevant to the concrete phenomenon of human agency, as well as

2) making pure morality incongruous with all that is known about human moral psychology (the interplay of empirical interests and desires in moral deliberation, or the possibility of immoral action that is not simply a conditioned response); and
3) the “desperate” and “question-begging” nature of the ultimate foundation of this kind of freedom, which Kant described in the second *Critique* as a “fact of reason,” considered by some critics as a “lapse into a dogmatism of practical reason.”

Allison’s whole effort in the book is an attempt to reply to these challenges to the Kantian incompatibilist understanding of freedom, solving some of the objections to Kant’s theory as false problems originated in erroneous interpretations, or working out the logic of Kantian freedom by means of a deeper understanding of his transcendental idealism and the distinctions made (sometimes not without ambiguities) by Kant between key concepts as transcendental and practical freedom, intelligible and empirical character, etc.

Allison’s interpretation of transcendental idealism denies the existence of two separate “worlds,” the noumenal and the phenomenal, with separate kinds of entities that are mysteriously related with one another; by doing so, Allison deflates some of the cruder criticisms to Kant’s ethical theory. However, his alternative of a “two aspect” idealism, in which Kant proposes “two distinct ways in which the objects of human experience may be ‘considered’ in philosophical reflection, namely, as they appear and as they are in themselves,” takes him too far in the other direction. Allison’s discussion of the conceptions of intelligent and empirical character of

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43 The fact that freedom can be understood from an empirical point of view, as “practical freedom,” complicates things in this account, for it raises the question of how a rational being that is considered free can have both an “intelligible” and an “empirical” character, besides making the whole concept of a transcendental freedom with an incompatibilist nature unnecessary.
44 Ibid., p. 3-4.
rational agency and the relationship that obtains between them is illustrative. Since Allison is unwilling to grant to noumenal reality a stronger sense of causality in the empirical realm (as Ameriks has noted), Allison has to resort to a weaker affirmation of a “conception of free rational agency” as a presupposition under which agents must labor if they are to “regard themselves” as rational and free.

According to Allison, some critics see Kant’s emphasis on the “spontaneous, non-sensible nature of reason” as the “paradigmatically noumenal capacity” as an obstacle to granting it an empirical character, let alone empirical causality. The alternative, as Allison sees it, is to find a strong or “thick” account of the causality of reason in its empirical character, which allows Kant to attribute causality to an empirical functioning of reason as a concrete setting of ends, reasons, etc. Allison seems to find that account in one particular description of the empirical character in Kant, according to which “the empirical character involves not simply a disposition to behave or to respond in certain predictable ways in given situations but a disposition to act on the basis of certain maxims, to pursue certain ends, and to select certain means for the realization of these ends.” Allison believes this conception would allow for “a rich and potentially attractive form of compatibilism” that Kant, however, disavowed based on his view of a necessary intelligible character of true freedom (as independence from the mechanism of nature).

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45 The concepts of an intelligible and an empirical character of human rational agency are developed by Kant in the first Critique’s Antimony of Pure Reason Section IX, as part of the remarks about the regulative principle of reason in regard to “the totality of the derivation of occurrences in the world from their causes.” The specific discussion focuses on “the possibility of causality through freedom unified with the universal law of natural necessity,” (KrV, A 538 / B 566) and has been analyzed in Chapter 3 of this work.
46 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 31.
47 Ibid., p. 33.
Allison’s investigation of the reasons for Kant’s strong concept of an intelligible character leads him to affirm that, similarly to what takes place in apperception (where the “I” in “I think” is never separately sensed, but presupposed in one’s own cognitions), the attribution of certain actions to oneself as an agent demands that these actions be regarded as stemming from a non-observable intelligible self, which is equivalent to a self that sets rational ends to oneself in a way that subordinates the pull of sensible inclinations to rational maxims. Here, the problem of “verification” of rational nature surfaces, as Allison compares all these self-conceptions and assumptions to what we “really” would be, or possess, in some hypothetical condition of absolute self-knowledge:

Clearly, it does not follow from the fact (assuming it is a fact) that we are rationally constrained to attribute such a character to ourselves insofar as we regard ourselves as rational agents that we really do possess it. It does follow, however, that we cannot both deny such a character and affirm our status as rational agents.\footnote{Ibid., p. 41 (emphasis added).}

When the time comes to reflect on the relationship between these two conceptions of empirical and intelligible character in Kant, Allison utilizes his interpretation of transcendental idealism as a “doctrine of epistemological modesty,” possessing a “deflationary force” that limits the scope of knowledge to empirical claims, but that also leaves a “conceptual space” for non-cognitive thought of objects outside spatiotemporal conditions. Among what is allowed by these epistemological restrictions, for instance, is “the claim not that I only appear to myself and others as causally determined whereas I ‘really’ am free,” but rather that “I really am causally determined, just as I really am a spatiotemporal being.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 44.} The intelligible character, then, is an assumption based on our self-image (a possible illusion) of agents with a properly active
causality of will. The status of that assertion remains dubious, because for Allison the idea of freedom is merely “regulative,” so that freedom does not really imply the “mysterious notion of a nonempirical thought, based on an idea of reason (transcendental freedom), of something that is itself empirically accessible and knowable, namely, a human action or agent.”

Therefore, for Allison, transcendental idealism becomes problematic when it gives a particular content to the idea of a noumenal something in general, such as the concept of “rational agent,” which is an empirical reality. But that does not need to be so, as long as

we keep in mind that the transcendental idea of freedom, which provides the content to the otherwise empty thought of an intelligible character, has a merely regulative, nonexplanatory function. What it regulates is our conception of ourselves as rational agents. It does so by providing the conceptual basis for a model of deliberative rationality, which includes, as an ineliminable component, the thought of practical spontaneity. Once again, the basic idea is simply that it is a condition of the possibility of taking oneself as a rational agent, that is, as a being for whom reason is practical that one attribute such spontaneity to oneself.

Ameriks has criticized Allison’s defense of Kant’s incompatibilist freedom for its reluctance to embrace a strong sense of reason’s causality under the aspect of its intelligible character, or in other words, to take seriously Kant’s metaphysical commitment to noumena as an effective (although inaccessible to spatiotemporal beings as direct cognitions) part of reality. For Ameriks, Kant’s defense of transcendental freedom, beyond mere conceptions of rational agency, is inextricably linked to his transcendental idealist metaphysics, which “leaves room for freedom by ensuring that we do not have to take nature to be a closed system.” In Ameriks view, Kant’s incompatibilist account of freedom requires the affirmation of an actual aspect to

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50 Ibid., p. 45.
51 Ibid.
52 Ameriks, Interpreting Kant’s Critiques, p. 215.
reality that is not the object of experience, but which despite not being “knowable” in an empirical way is nonetheless posited underlying its appearance.

In an interesting turn, however, Ameriks criticizes Kant’s transcendental concept of freedom itself for having an unclear value in the justification of the experience of freedom. As Ameriks puts it, “beyond satisfying a metaphysical desire to be able to regard oneself as an uncaused cause, it does no more work by itself.”53 At the center of Ameriks’s criticism is the idea that the burden of proof for an incompatibilist notion of freedom is higher than it has been thought by Kant and other defenders of that idea. Ameriks mentions certain passages in Kant’s opus where Kant concedes that some of the theoretical demonstrations of freedom (such as strictly logical judgments) do not show that theoretical knowers possess a freedom different from that of a complex turnspit. Ameriks claims that, for this reason, the discussion of autonomy in the *Grounding*, and especially in the second *Critique*, is significant for singling out autonomous morality as the one instance that reveals absolute freedom in human agents.

Even so, Ameriks still claims that Kant never forecloses the possibility that, even in the moral context, action according to an objective rule must be ultimately caused by desires, even of a “psychologically hidden” source. The weakness in Kant’s affirmation of an incompatibilist freedom lies in inferring from the psychological absence of a particular causal content in one’s intentions (i.e. one doesn’t see that one is acting as the ‘mere’ effect of a particular force) to the metaphysical absence of any natural cause as the efficient ground of the act which has that content. Similarly, in moral contexts, the fact that certain maxims involve a rule whose content makes no essential reference to human desires still does not show that the

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53 Ibid., p. 218.
actual adoption of such maxims—and even the adoption of them for the reason that there is no such reference—is not in fact caused by desires.\textsuperscript{54}

In other words, for Ameriks the defender of incompatibility must not only prove the psychological independence of one’s maxims from sensible impulses, but also prove that the motivation to legislate universally does not “in fact” come from hidden desires. Although not denying the possibility of the incompatibilist notion of freedom, Ameriks continuously hammers on this specific point: Kant’s philosophy does not completely foreclose a “sophisticated compatibilism,” because it does not “prove” that hidden desires are not behind the moral choice. Ameriks’s point is usefully expressed in terms of the difference between “the content of a principle” and “the causal history of the being that does the following” or of “the generating of the principle.”\textsuperscript{55}

It is, for Ameriks, an issue of “the independence of the issue of the content of morality from the question of the metaphysical nature of moral agents,”\textsuperscript{56} so that morality as a system of selection and choice of maxims of action is separable from metaphysics, or at least does not depend on just one type of metaphysics (the incompatibilist). Again, here there seems to surface the problem of “what is really happening,” which is an interpretation that goes back to a theoretical stance of ultimate empirical proof based on “the reality of things” and does not accept as prior, or first of all, the reality of morality.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 219.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 221.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
In their different arguments, both Allison and Ameriks oppose a certain Kantian claim about human moral agency ("our free actions possess an intelligible character;," and "free moral action is in its origin incompatible with natural causality") to a categorical or to a hypothetical "real" condition of humanity. For Allison, that we "really" are spatiotemporal beings is a claim supported by Kant’s "empirical realism;" but that we "really" possess an intelligible character remains uncertain, so that our intelligible character remains something we "regard ourselves" to possess. For Ameriks, in turn, the assertion of free action’s original incompatibility with natural causation is left unproved because there might be a hidden way in which we "really" are motivated by desires in our self-giving of universal law, according to a possible unknown metaphysical condition of the human being.

It seems in these two cases that what is able to "close the deal" for a certain claim about the human being and human free agency, as expressed by the indicators "really" and "in fact" present in some of the statements, is a non-moral fact that has the advantage of being based (even if hypothetically) on an objective evaluation of the human condition, in an empirical or a metaphysical sense.

In this way, lost is the fundamental meaning of the primacy of reason in its practical use for Kant, which places morality above any possibility of theoretical explanation. The moral fact does not allow itself to be superseded by empirical or metaphysical explanations because it has been seen to have a higher order of priority than empirically objective or even metaphysical considerations; in fact, moral existence seems to be the first metaphysical fact in Kant’s critical
theory, when we look at the critical strictures on theoretical knowledge as what they are, namely, a “propaedeutic.” Incompatibilism can be affirmed not because intelligible character has been found to possess a firmer hold on “reality” than empirical objects, but because it (as a practical stance) is itself the position from which the other statements are produced, the source of reason’s critical project in the first place. Moral motives are not the “last observable” element in rational agency, beyond which there might be lurking other metaphysical conditions; they are the primary mode in which rational agency can be enacted, and if there were other elements underlying it, it would cease to be moral.

Participation as a solution to the Kantian dilemmas

This is why participation is an appropriate way of viewing the question of autonomy. As the term itself suggests, to autonomously legislate universal law involves an active stance (reflected in the act of legislation) of a subject who is merely a participant, thus a part, of a whole. It has a necessarily ambiguous character, since a single part is not self-sufficient, but is still a necessary component without which the whole is not possible. In that sense, morality or pure practical reason retains an existential precedence in relation to its participants or its parts, although it can only exist in a concrete sense to the extent that it is enacted by them. Consequently, to participate is distinct from “knowing,” which involves a passive (necessary)
acceptance of the given through the senses; instead, participation involves a spontaneous and active “self-creation” of a universal reality through its enactment in a particular instantiation of that reality in particular (and spatiotemporal, in the case of human) beings. Thus, from the point of view of these beings, it is unknowable as such, but finally knowable through its practice.57

This perspective solves the three problematic areas from which Allison starts in his inquiry into Kant’s moral theory and some of the related problems, such as the relationship between empirical and intelligible, phenomenal and noumenal characters of rational agency. All of the three issues revolve around the apparent incongruity between the world as experienced, including the observable signs and effects of rational agency (the “empirical character” as Kant puts it) and the strong metaphysical claims that seem to place morality above the influence of (and also incapable of influencing) the elements that are an integral part of any human moral life. These claims, in turn, seem to be the price Kant pays for the defense of a radical incompatibilism.

As we have seen, Allison’s solution of understanding transcendental idealism as a “two aspect” theory goes in the right direction, but it overreaches the goal of balancing the empirical

57 Eric Voegelin’s study of the meaning and the structure of consciousness and its “luminosity” has provided an example of how a “non-objective” kind of knowledge is the result of the formation of consciousness through the attunement to order in a practical mode. Participation, as opposed to objective knowledge, is an experience of the relationship between the conscious subject and the ground of order, which are not however “objects of knowledge,” but inseparable “poles” of a noetic experience that takes place “within” the philosopher. The subject’s “psyche” is formed through the very process of being ordered by the inner pull of order, so that it is a manifestation of that order through the reality of consciousness. Voegelin describes this not as knowledge, but luminosity. As Voegelin summarized it, “Consciousness is reality, but it is not one of the realities that the primary cosmic experience distinguishes as such within the comprehending reality. Consciousness is the experience of participation, namely, of man’s participation in his ground of being. In the optimal luminosity of the noetic experience, consciousness is, consequently, the knowledge of a relationship between things of the primacy experience; it is a knowledge of order, in the pregnant sense, concerning reality.” (Eric Voegelin, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin. Anamnesis. On The Theory and History of Politics, Vol. VI (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 373-4.
and the intelligible through an understanding of the latter as a mere “taking as” attitude. Autonomy as participation in the a priori reality of morality, however, clarifies the nature of the relationship between morality and nature, and by so doing dispels the perceived incongruity. The virtue of considering autonomous morality as a participation in the moral law lies in not opposing the noumenal and the phenomenal, and in not reducing the noumenal to a mere presupposition (as it would be if seen only from the theoretical point of view); instead, the noumenal, which starts out as a negative characterization of what lies beyond our sensible outer and inner representations of space and time, is revealed through the practical use of reason as an overarching reality which rational beings can only know through their own rational activity. This rationality, as Ameriks has observed, is not “their own” in an idiosyncratic manner but exists as their “essential nature.” As such, and as the source of human beings’ cognitive judgments, it can never be directly observed as other empirical objects or states are, neither can it be placed under conditions of space and time. As a faculty belonging to spatiotemporal beings, reason is enacted through them in time; but its ultimate source lies beyond the chains of organized succession that characterize temporal experience. Autonomy as participation, as a practical enactment of the prior reality of morality into the concrete world, allows this reality beyond time to be concretized (although never to the fullest extent) in time and space. Human rational capacity means the power to infuse the everyday empirical realities with non-empirical significance; indeed, as a transcendental condition of experience, it is what allows that very empirical life its objective, organized character. Additionally, the manner in which this happens

is not for Kant (as Ameriks has also noted about autonomy) by means of “mystical insight,” nor of a “mirrored presence,” but rather through an “exercise of judgment.”

But we are able to judge morally, that is, to subsume certain actions as “standing under a practical rule of reason,” (KpV, 5:67) by positing the action or actions under review as laws of nature (not as actual moral laws, but as “types” of the moral law) and judging through a morally determined will whether such actions could be regarded as “possible through your will.” (KpV, 5:69) Therefore, as Kant notes, while we have to take the sensible world into account and even use natural lawfulness as a “type” for the moral law (which in itself is not “in” the sensible world), the crucial determination, that of the will, is achieved through the idea of a pure will legislating universal law. In the context of moral judgments, participation helps to understand how a concrete human will can be determined by the “idea of a pure will” that is never observable in empirical experience, in a similar way as it helps to explain how moral deliberation is “timeless.”

Finally, regarding the fact of reason, participation describes the apparently contradictory cognitive process Kant describes in the second Critique’s remarks “On the Deduction of the Principles of Practical Reason.” (KpV, 5:42-50) The whole section is a prolonged meditation showing that the moral law, as pure reason, in its practical use, is sovereign over its application as a determination of the will in moral terms, and so establishes its own existence without the need for empirical verification; by so doing, it establishes the objective status of freedom and of reason itself, independently of empirical cognition.

In this section of the second *Critique*, Kant repeatedly mentions the limitations of reason applied to a theoretical cognition of the world of objects, as well as the “lack of insight” that human beings suffer as they approach the consideration of “basic powers of basic faculties.” *(KpV, 5:47)* Those called “a priori cognitions,” or “synthetic principles,” “could be had only with reference to intuition, which was sensible, and so only with reference to objects of possible experience.” *(KpV, 5:42)* However, if in reason’s theoretical use the deduction or justification of the (a priori) categories of the pure understanding required an appeal to sensible intuitions, in reason’s practical use this appeal to experience is as unnecessary as it is impossible. *(KpV, 5:46)*

Impeded from the outset from achieving cognition of the non-phenomenal world, the moral law…nevertheless provides a fact absolutely inexplicable from any data of the sensible world and from the whole compass of our theoretical use of reason, a fact that points to a pure world of the understanding and, indeed, even determines it positively and lets us cognize something of it, namely a law. *(KpV, 5:43)*

With law constantly in the background of both “sensible” and “supersensible” nature, Kant will define this supersensible nature of rational beings, constitutive of the world of understanding, as “their existence in accordance with laws that are independent of any empirical condition.” Consequently, supersensible nature can be defined as “a nature under the autonomy of pure practical reason,” *(KpV, 5:43)* i.e. under the moral law. Kant will describe this autonomy several times as a “consciousness” not of objects, but of the law “to which all our maxims are subject, as if a natural order must at the same time arise from our will.” *(KpV, 5:44)* In order to determine the will and subjugate its maxims, this consciousness is totally independent from how
the sensible world is organized, but instead is based on a “consciousness of moral laws” or “consciousness of freedom” that “cannot be further explained.” (KpV, 5:46) Finally, even if only the recourse to experience can justify the assumption of the very faculty of reason in its theoretical use, the “a priori consciousness” of the moral law as a “fact of pure reason” reverses the relationships of grounding to grounded reality, becomes the ground of the deduction of the faculty of freedom, and “is able for the first time to give objective though only practical reality to reason.” (KpV, 5:47-8) This a priori consciousness is by definition non-verifiable through any empirical observation; but the action of moral judgment and choice shows its own reality as an undeniable fact, as it is able to give (through rational empirical beings) a different kind of law to empirical reality itself, thus creating a “supersensible” nature exclusively from the resources of pure practical reason.

Hence, the analysis of the moral law as a “fact of reason” establishes morality or pure practical reason not only as a “component part” of empirical beings, but a prior metaphysical order that makes of these empirical beings, through participation, what they are in a most crucial sense, namely, rational. Autonomy as participation helps to understand how this is possible, because it is not as cognizable objects that human beings are seen to possess reason; rather, through their participation in a rational / moral order, whose most privileged access is by means

60 “For, provided that the will conforms to the law of pure reason, then its power in execution may be as it may, and a nature may or may not actually arise in accordance with these maxims of giving law for a possible nature; the Critique which investigates whether and how reason can be practical, that is, whether and how it can determine the will immediately, does not trouble itself with this.” (KpV, 5:46)

61 “Hence the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction, by any efforts of theoretical reason, speculative or empirically supported...; and it is nevertheless firmly established of itself.

But something different and quite paradoxical takes the place of this vainly sought deduction of the moral principle, namely that the moral principle, conversely itself serves as the principle of the deduction of an inscrutable faculty which no experience could prove but which speculative reason had to assume as at least possible..., namely the faculty of freedom....” (KpV, 5:47)
of the practice of pure practical reason (willing, judgment, and choice), human beings are understood as rational beings. Here lies, finally, the source of the dignity of persons.

**Autonomy as dignity of the person**

As noted in this chapter’s Introduction, Martin Rhonheimer characterizes the autonomy proper to the person, from the point of view of a Thomistic anthropology, as a “participated” or “autonomous theonomy.” Quoting Thomas Aquinas, Rhonheimer identifies the property of virtuous people of being “a law unto themselves” with “the highest degree of human dignity, because such a person is not led by others but by himself to what is good.”

The striking parallelism between this Thomistic formulation and Kant’s own development of the meaning of autonomous morality as the heart of the dignity of rational nature should not, however, conceal the fact that for Thomists Kantian autonomy is a self-centered, subjectivist philosophical concept.

The difference between the Christian or Catholic conception of dignity and the “modern” Kantian conception is usually emphasized in studies of the concept. Michael Rosen, for instance, has organized the diverse historically emergent meanings of dignity into three main currents of thought: dignity as a (divinely ordained) hierarchically based status, dignity as intrinsic value,

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and dignity as “dignified character or behavior.” Rosen recounts in detail how the Catholic Church’s stance toward human dignity and human rights changed in the twentieth century, from a defense of the natural hierarchy of social roles in which each individual accrued dignity from performing his own functions as they were teleologically ordained (ultimately by God), to a more egalitarian conception that emphasized the freedom and rights of every individual, in the aftermath of World War II and the expansion of Communism in the world. Still, Rosen attempts to show how the “modern” Catholic notion of dignity differs from the Kantian concept of humanity, or rational nature, as an intrinsic absolute worth. Rosen’s concept of Kantian dignity for the purposes of this comparison, however, is the “voluntarist” concept based on Christine Korsgaard’s interpretation of autonomy and self-legislation as “the power to set ends,” which would restrict the status of personhood “to those human beings who are actively capable of exercising moral agency.” In this sense, John Paul II’s criticism of an “absolute freedom” that becomes the “source of values,” as laid out in the encyclical Veritatis Splendor, is the evidence of the direct opposition between the Church’s concept of dignity and that of voluntarist Kantianism.

Rosen himself, however, disagrees with the voluntarist interpretation of dignity. His own view of Kant’s concept of autonomy takes into account that, for Kant, the value of humanity in every rational being is prior to the power of choice, or the rational setting of ends, and overrides claims exclusively based on the latter. The implications of this priority include the distinction of

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64 Ibid., p. 93.
one’s personality from one’s own rational life; the former is the source of inner value, and as such is not “owned” by the individual rational agent but received in trust. Rosen calls this a “Platonist” view of Kantian ethics, which consists in believing that “what is intrinsically good is something that is timeless and that right action consists not in trying to bring that timelessly valuable thing into existence…, but in acting in ways that are appropriate toward it.” However, Rosen’s agreement is only partial, as he refuses to follow Kant into the “full blown Platonism” that lies, in his view, in Kant’s grounding of human’s inner value and dignity on man’s existence in this timeless “noumenal realm.” Instead, he remains content with an ethics that requires agents to respect humanity in themselves, or an ethics primarily based on duty to oneself, which includes expressing respect to other non-human beings as symbolic actions, for the reason that “our duties are so deep a part of us that we could not be the people that we are without having them.” Therefore, Rosen’s own reading of Kant approaches it more to the Catholic theologically centered and realistic ethics, by virtue of its establishment of clear boundaries, or a direction for the development of freedom that is not dependent upon the idiosyncratic choices of rational beings. Still, there remains for Rosen the distinction that even in her acceptance of the modern conception of human rights and dignity, in which the Kantian Formula of Humanity is often quoted or paraphrased, the Catholic Church has based human dignity on humanity’s “place

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67 Ibid., p. 143.
68 Ibid., p. 157.
within a divinely established natural order,” whereas for Kant dignity lies in humanity’s capacity for morality and its consequence membership in the intelligible world.  

From a distinct perspective, namely one informed by Classical and traditional Christian ethics, Peter Lawler has written a review of a compilation of articles on human dignity in which he emphasizes the differences between the Kantian, the Christian, and what could be called a utilitarian conception of dignity. Lawler’s customary style, which involves referring the theories he engages to one particular central idea, has the virtue of clarifying the main thrust and the stakes of each view, even though it might end up concealing some of the complexity of the views behind images that are liable to descend, in less careful and discriminating minds than Lawler’s, into mere caricatures. Despite this, Lawler’s account is useful to crystalize the main points of contention behind the disagreement among different conceptions of dignity.

So, Lawler finds in Thomas Hobbes’s philosophy a “productivity” view of dignity. According to this reading, for Hobbes absolute worth can be found in an agent’s relationship to oneself alone, so that it is totally unavailable for other agents; in consequence, one’s worth to others is only measurable by how much one can provide to their satisfaction or “the price your powers can bring: your dignity is your productivity.” Lawler believes Hobbesian “misanthropy” is illustrated by the contemporary transhumanist attempt to remake, through

69 In his book, Rosen contrasts the Catholic modern view of dignity to the voluntarist interpretation of Kantian ethics, and afterwards highlights the resemblance between the Catholic view and his own interpretation of Kant, against the voluntarist view. He does not explicitly compare his view of Kant’s true intention and the Catholic Church’s modern view, but that comparison can be constructed from what seem to be his final conclusions of Kant’s ethics.

rational and technological control, human nature (a “miserably self-conscious and precarious accident”) into something more satisfying.

In its turn, Kant’s affirmation of humanity’s dignity is, for Lawler, an attempt to “counter that misanthropy with the other characteristically modern view of dignity.”\textsuperscript{71} Kant’s notion of dignity as free and rational agency contradicts the transhumanists’s and Hobbes denial of human dignity; by making dignity independent of physical and biological nature, Kant would have guaranteed the protection of persons against being treated as things. However, the price of this is for Lawler is accepting Hobbesian judgment about nature as undignified; accordingly, Lawler agrees with Leon Kass, who interprets Kant as saying that “the person is fundamentally distinct from the human animal—the whole biological being—whom we actually know and love.”\textsuperscript{72} According to this view, then, rational autonomy as the source of dignity marginalizes an important part of what human being are, their embodied nature, which includes person’s relationships to a concrete community (such as the family), as well as the human “erotic” dimension. Therefore, both Hobbes’s and Kant’s views of dignity merit being called, as “bare productivity” and “abstract autonomy,” inhuman.\textsuperscript{73}

In contrast, for Lawler, “the Catholic emphasis came to be on the natural dignity of the whole human person—in opposition to the modern view that our dignity resides only in our autonomy.”\textsuperscript{74} Yet, in his critical treatment of some of the other views on dignity, Lawler cannot help but echo some of Kant’s central ideas about dignity. For instance, in his analysis of the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Lawler does allow, in an endnote, for the possibility of a “a more positive and arguably more nuanced view of Kant’s possible contribution to our understanding of dignity.” (Ibid., p. 50)
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 44.
arguments made by Daniel Dennett, an evolutionary scientist who dispels the reality of dignity into a scientifically unwarranted but useful fiction, Lawler uses a core Kantian idea:

Dennett himself is too dignified to deny the truth of what he thinks he knows, and there is some dignity, too, in his humane intention to spare us the consequences of a dignity-free world. It seems he denies the reality of the dignity he himself displays only because to do otherwise would require admitting that human beings are mysteriously free from nature or materialistic causation.75

Similar appearances happen in unlikely places, such as in Lawler’s analysis of the very anti-Kantian Robert Kraynak,76 who concludes that “as dignified ‘whos,’ we know that we are mysteriously more than we can describe,”77 or in Lawler paraphrasing of Robert George’s definition of dignity as “our ‘rational nature’ (and not, as Kant says, our denatured reason) that elevates us, making each of us a person, not a thing, with the natural capabilities for conceptual thought, deliberation, and free choice.”78

Of course, the whole point turns on what each author means by “rational nature,” being a “who,” or “mysteriously free from nature or materialistic causation,” as Lawler’s parenthetical observation about the Kant’s “denatured reason” is quick to suggest. The coincidence in the choice of terms is nonetheless remarkable, and one can wonder whether the “natural reason” that would figure as the opposite Christian position, which surely stands above physical nature, is really so different from the Kantian type.

75 Ibid., p. 46.
77 Ibid., p. 47.
78 Ibid., p. 48.
Dignity at the center of human existence

As this dissertation’s argument has tried to show, it is possible and arguably more faithful to Kant’s own text to read Kant’s ethical theory and the central conception of moral autonomy in a different light, one that does not ignore the richness of human moral experience, including its transcendent sources. Considering, for instance, Kraynak’s concern with morality’s connection with its unfathomable divine source, there is a lot of room for the “mysterious character of human personality” in Kant’s philosophy, as the analysis of the Kantian paradox of autonomy and its “solution” through the idea of participation in the moral law attempted to show. The mystery would reside in the inexplicability of our practical knowledge of the moral law that expresses itself in human beings as a motivation by the pull of the good, regardless of other non-moral causes. It is this practical nature of moral life, the source of its mystery, which gives it its power to “elevate” the human being, as Kant powerfully expresses in his answer to the question of duty’s origin:

what origin is there worthy of you, and where is to be found the root of your noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations, descent from which is the indispensable condition of that worth which human beings alone can give themselves? (KpV, 5:86)

The answer is, for Kant, personality, which is nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world), what connects him with an order of things that only the understanding can think and that at the same time has under it the whole sensible world and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time and the whole of all ends (which is alone suitable to such unconditional practical laws as the moral). (KpV, 5:86-87)
This does not amount to a “denaturalization” of reason, as Lawler suggests, but rather to a focus on the identification of the element in human existence (an element that is provided by “nature,” as Kant is wont to remind the reader) which allows human beings to acquire the idea of the unconditioned good, or duty. As we argued in Chapter 2, the identification of the good in objects and states in the empirical world is a moral judgment that depends on this prior acquaintance with the pull of the good in itself. We have seen in this chapter that this acquaintance is only born in the rational being as a “consciousness of a fact of pure reason.” Therefore, if Kant separates the sensible from the intelligible world, it is not with a view to isolate the moral person in an unreal existence, but rather to understand the roots of the human identification of actions and states in the world as “good.” Moreover, when one takes Kant’s transcendental idealism as an account of the fullness of human experience, both theoretical and practical, it becomes apparent that this “intelligible world” is as much a part of human everyday reality as any rock, bodily sensation, or psychological feeling; it is merely not available to human empirical sensibility, because it is enacted in the sphere of reason in which human beings participate by means of the mere practice of reason. Here, and specifically in the autonomous legislation of the moral law to the individual human being and the whole world lies the source of the “dignity of rational nature.”

In effect, in the *Grounding*, Kant affirms that “morality and humanity, insofar as it is capable of morality, alone have dignity.” (*G*, 4:435) This claim comes at the end of Kant’s development of the three formulas of the categorical imperative, and it is connected to the culminating idea of the kingdom of ends constituted by the universal legislation of its members. Dignity is used here to signify, first of all, the irreplaceability of the legislating members of this
kingdom of ends. As Kant elaborates the idea of the special dignity of the condition of a legislator of universal law, he claims this latter follows only reason in his self-legislation and cannot be led therein by any “subjective disposition or taste,” nor be “cajoled” to legislate and to act according to the law. In the example Kant gives, this is the difference between skill and diligence (which have a market price), or imagination and humor (which have an affective price), and “fidelity to promises and benevolence based on principles.” The maxims of the will whereby the latter are chosen and acted upon do not depend on foreseen consequences or felt inclinations, but are simply dispositions acquired from the legislation of pure reason, under the idea of a good will and of duty; as such, nothing else can take their place. This is the context in which Kant states that “autonomy is the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature,” because “the legislation itself which determines all worth must for that very reason have dignity, i.e., unconditional and incomparable worth.…” (G, 4:436)

In the second Critique, the concept of personality is directly connected to the ideas that make up the Grounding’s argument about dignity. There, personality is further defined as “freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity of a being subject to special laws—namely pure practical laws given by his own reason, so that a person as belonging to the sensible world is subject to his own personality insofar as he also belongs to the intelligible world.…” (KpV, 5:78) In this conception of personality, each individual human being finds himself subordinated by what we have called his own practical participation in the moral law. Personality is, as Kant claims, more than (each rational being’s own particular and contingent) life itself, even if it only takes place in the context of this sensible life:
This is how the genuine moral incentive of pure practical reason is constituted; it is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence and subjectively effects respect for their higher vocation in human beings, who are at the same time conscious of their sensible existence and of the dependence, connected with it, on their pathologically affected nature. (*KpV*, 5:88)

The person, or personality in each individual rational being, has dignity not only because it is the ultimate source of worth through its legislation of universal law, but by virtue of its irreplaceability in this legislating activity; only the person can legislate for himself the universal law, regarding his relation to himself and to others, and together with other rational beings constitute the kingdom of ends. In other words, it is only within each rational being, through his personal participation in the moral law, that the moral law can be enacted with its intrinsic moral motivation. It is not a skill that can be offered in exchange for someone else’s use and profit, or a manifestation of taste that can be enjoyed by an audience; in its autonomous self-legislation, it is irreplaceable.

Kant explores the internal logic of the “being a law unto themselves” to which Aquinas attributed the highest degree of dignity, finding its source in personality, which is nothing but the participation of a rational being in pure practical reason, his sharing in the holiness of that law that makes him an end in himself.  

79 The holiness of the law for Kant suggests that dignity can be seen as a participation of human beings, in a special way, in a divine order. As Chapter 3 argued, the argument toward the reality of God and his attributes, including that of moral legislator and

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79 From the second *Critique*:

“The moral law is holy (inviolable). A human being is indeed unholy enough but the humanity in his person must be holy to him… By virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. Just because of this, every will, even every person’s own will directed to himself, is restricted to the condition of agreement with the autonomy of the rational being, that is to say, such a being is not to be subjected to any purpose that is not possible in accordance with a law that could arise from the will of the affected subject himself…; we rightly attribute this condition even to the divine will with respect to the rational beings in the world as creature, inasmuch as it rests no their personality, by which alone they are ends in themselves.” (*KpV*, 5:87)
creator of nature, is never a direct matter of theoretical cognition for Kant, who pinpointed the
preeminently moral dimension of God’s relationship to human beings. Once this is recognized,
however, it becomes plausible to consider Kantian dignity exactly as participation in a divine
(holy) moral order, which is no less divine if it must be, by virtue of its moral nature, based on
the autonomous self-legislation of reason.
Conclusion

Kant and liberalism’s hidden metaphysics

As explained in the introduction to this work, modern Catholic critics of philosophical liberalism have accused its proponents of concealing the metaphysical premises of their positions, consciously or not, from others and even from themselves. The accusation has fallen particularly, but not exclusively, on Kantian liberal philosophers. By virtue of their concern with the lack of a metaphysical or religious common measure between the different views of the good that coexist in contemporary pluralist societies (what are called the diverse “comprehensive views”), these thinkers—epitomized by John Rawls—have emphasized the need for a method of adjudication of claims and construction of a liberal order that looks for criteria of validity in procedural norms. The Kantian inspiration is visible precisely in the formalist emphasis of the criteria that validate political values, an example of which is Rawls’s concept of “justice as fairness.” Fairness means the priority of the right over the good, or of “the fairness of the circumstances under which agreement is reached”\(^1\) over possible metaphysical bases for agreement. Indeed, the only non-constructed premise of Kantian constructivism is the conception of persons as “both free and equal, as capable of acting both reasonably and rationally, and therefore as capable of taking part in social cooperation among persons so conceived.”\(^2\) This conception, in turn, fits nicely with the constructivists’ anthropological view of the autonomous subject, who is a source of his own values due to the “value-conferring status” of rational choice.

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2 Ibid., p. 518.
The Christian critics, though, have seen through the alleged neutrality of constructivist politics based on a general concept of reasonableness, which becomes a smokescreen that conceals the autonomous subject’s metaphysical and even theological status. David L. Schindler, for instance, has detected in individual reasonableness, on which the concept of “rights”—understood as “a claim which the self has on the other”—is founded, an externality and self-centeredness that remains active even when that claim is universalized. Schindler has developed this insight in a more recent work in which he lays out a theological anthropology based on John Paul II’s “theology of the sexually-and-gender-differentiated nuptial body as gift” and Benedict XVI’s “theology of sonship in Christ,” as an alternative to the liberal individualist self-centeredness. Placed against the background of this anthropology, the allegedly “neutral” liberal worldview reveals its own hidden theological commitments:

It is only in light of this that we can interpret properly the ‘legitimate autonomy’ and indeed legitimate natural secularity of man; and to see how and why the putative purely formal freedom and intelligence presupposed by juridical liberalism is, eo ipso, however paradoxically, ‘full’ of ontological (and implicitly theological) form—revealing this ontological-theological form to be of its inner dynamic deist, pelagian, nominalist, and gnostic in nature, bearing an unwitting logic of violence toward being in its defenseless givenness and ‘transcendental’ truth, goodness, and beauty.

Rawls retreats, in Political Liberalism, to a position that affirms the need of an “overlapping consensus” about the basic conceptions of the person and the value of reasonableness as a principle for the construction of a public order. Yet he refuses to ask further into the justification of this consensus, just as the constructivist Kantians as Korsgaard, Neiman,

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and O’Neill content themselves with the “standpoint” of a regulative practical reason, beyond which it is impossible for reason to know.

By denying that we can know a more fundamental reality beyond what is merely “regarded as” the capacity to be free and moral beings, the constructivists interpret the “a priori” of practical reason as a tool at the individual’s disposal for the construction of a social order. Individuals find themselves capable of being reasonable, and for some unexamined reason this human ability to create a theoretical and a practical order is the ultimate source of value. Therefore, as we have argued throughout this work, the constructivists portray the individual at the center of the moral order as the main source and reference of that order, even when the constraints of reason are used to temper any (irrational) egotistical impulses with the universalizing procedure of the categorical imperative, or the original position.

Schindler is justified, then, in detecting in philosophical liberalism a conception of human agency that “precludes the possibility of any kind of power in which the agent is essentially a participant, and thus is anteriorly receptive and dependent and indeed obedient, in his original power.” For Schindler, this strong and exclusive view of original power is a product of Enlightenment mentality, especially indebted to the thought of Descartes and Bacon. However, in the context of this dissertation’s argument it is striking how the language used by Schindler to describe what would be a more satisfactory anthropology and theology can be directly applied to the interpretation of Kantian autonomy as participation.

This dissertation has offered an interpretation of Kantian metaphysics and ethics as a practical metaphysics that starts from a propaedeutic critique of reason in order to provide a

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5 Ibid., p. 412.
sound foundation for an ethics of autonomy as participation in the moral law. According to this interpretation, man as a rational but sensible agent is defined as a creature of sensibility, inclinations, and needs who can, however, act from unconditional reasons or from pure reason. Although pure reason regulates his theoretical activity, this agent cannot cognize the unconditioned in the sense that he cognizes the objects of his sensible experience. Thus, the theoretical objects suggested by the unifying activity of reason remain regulative ideas or ideals. But in the practical sphere, the same pure reason no longer suggests, but imposes upon man the realization of its object regardless of the constraints of experience. The force of this imposition is so independent from the shape of the empirical world that it might be defined as exactly that which can never be originated from that world nor fully achieved in it. Man finds that he is pulled by an orientation that he experiences as the necessitation of duty, which is the source of his free agency, and which can only be experienced in the world through his own (never fulfilled) enactment of that orientation. This enactment is the source of man’s unique dignity as an irreplaceable and absolute source of value, and it justifies calling human beings ends in themselves, and persons.

Autonomy is, for Kant, a moral reality whereby man participates in the order of being, by legislating for himself “in the name” of the order of reason in which he participates. This was perhaps already present in Aquinas’s concept of natural law as a special participation in divine law by dint of man’s rational nature, but Kant’s particular insight was the specification that, in the moral sphere, obedience to the pull of morality involves an enactment of principles that is autonomous from the order of nature of which man as a sensible being is part. Having secured that insight, however, Kant is free to follow through the consequences of that obedience or
submission until he reaches the deeper religious meaning of morality, in which man is a legislating member but also a subject of the sovereign of the kingdom of ends.

Similarly, in the political sphere, man is always morally mandated, even when living outside the concrete reality of a political community, to act “in conformity with the idea of a civil condition, with a view to it and to its being brought about…. ” (R, 6:265) Even in the absence of a regime of positive law, acquisitions of property are morally possible by virtue of the fact that “leaving the state of nature is based upon duty.” (R, 6:267) Thus the moral law, which is enacted in each individual agent as a free being, acts in its a priori position as a comprehensive reality where individuals are politically connected by necessity.

The case of the celebration of contracts is illustrative of the priority of the moral law to individual concrete wills. In a contract, the acts of promise and acceptance must, under conditions of time, be successive to one another. As such, there is always a space for uncertainty as to the continuing internal dispositions of each contract partner that are expressed in the temporally located acts of contract, a “gap” that jeopardizes the assured conclusion of any contract. Therefore, the reason why contracts are possible and actually take place is that possession is represented through the will, which is a rational capacity for giving laws, as intelligible possession (possessio noumenon) in abstraction from those empirical conditions, as what is mine or yours. Here both acts, promise and acceptance, are represented not as following one upon another but... as proceeding from a single common will (this is expressed by the word simultaneously); and the object... is represented, by omitting empirical conditions, as acquired in accordance with a principle of pure practical reason. (M, 6:273)

In both cases mentioned, the persons who acquire property and celebrate contracts are acting through concrete and individual phenomenal signs and gestures, but the true deeds are made possible by their participation in the ideas of the civil society or the common will, which
connect the persons according to formal or moral laws of practical reason, as presuppositions or a priori facts that are there before they come to act on them, although they find concrete expression in space and time.

**Politics in the light of the order of being**

Rather than the classic Enlightenment image of a “secularization” thinker, who devalues the experience of religious and social submission in order to substitute an individualistic and rationalistic conception of immanent morality (which hides a latent voluntarism), Kant can be more adequately seen as a carrier of the historical process of Christian differentiation of the spiritual dimension of man. This differentiation, as Eric Voegelin understood it, decouples the spiritual sources of order in man’s soul from the cosmological and political structures and symbolizations through which they were formerly expressed, in order to locate them within the experience where the differentiation takes place—the philosopher’s psyche, or the prophet’s openness to the spirit of God. The result is a clearer understanding of the scope and the role of each area of human symbolization and activity, illustrated by historical gains such as the separation of Church and State, or the discernment of the real meaning of external religious observations as expressions of an internal core of moral and religious attunement to God’s will. Significantly, however, this decoupling process does not entail a complete alienation of these different areas of symbolization, but a separation of their proper competences that is effected in
the context of a hierarchization guided by the deeper spiritual insight into the order. Thus, the realm of politics is not made fully independent of—let alone superior to—the religious insights, but subordinated to the chief existential truths about the good and the transcendent destiny of the human being. In this way, echoing Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas will say that “a law that is not just seems to be no law at all.”

In a similar way, the logic of liberal politics—based on the external lawgiving for the coexistence of each citizen’s choices “with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law” \( (M, 6:231) \)—rises in Kant from the source of autonomous morality and its emphasis on freedom. Kant is quite clear about the difference between principles of right, based on external lawgiving and coercion as a “hindering of a hindrance to freedom,” \( (M, 6:231) \) and principles of virtue, which involve internal lawgiving and command that actions be done for the sake of duty. In consequence, a system of right does not concern itself at all with the inner motives or material ends of any action (as long as it is conformable with others’ free choices), just as it is impossible to legislate externally in matters of virtue. However, the explication of the concept of right follows from the “only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity,” \( (M, 6:237) \) i.e. freedom:

We know our own freedom (from which all moral laws, and so all rights as well as duties proceed) only through the moral imperative, which is a proposition commanding duty, from which the capacity for putting others under obligation, that is, the concept of a right, can afterwards be explicated. \( (M, 6:239) \)

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\(^6\) *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. 96, art. 4. “Just” here, is a characterization given primarily to law’s conformity with the dictates of the natural law.
In other words, the imposition of external hindrances to action is a consequence of the moral imperative, which demands that actions be performed with internal freedom for the sake of duty, hence implying an external space for free choice. One could envisage a situation in which people under an authoritarian state would remain internally free, even if they never accomplish the ends of their free willing due to government control. It might even be possible to keep this internal freedom in a totalitarian state that attempts to control to its best ability even the internal setting of ends of its “citizens.”\(^7\) But there is something about the requirements of freedom in rational but sensible beings, who live in a world with other like beings, which implies the idea of a civil condition whereby some of the restrictions of the moral law will be matters of external, non-moral enforcement.\(^8\) Whether this aspect of the demands of freedom be seen as the

\(^7\) One is reminded of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s appeal to live the life of freedom and the orientation towards the good within one’s soul, even if the whole world around us is marked by oppression and lies, as it was the case in the Gulag where Solzhenitsyn was a prisoner, as recounted by David Walsh in \textit{After Ideology} (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 79-84.

\(^8\) Robert Pippin has given a “proto-Hegelian” interpretation to Kant’s defense of the duty to enter into the civil condition in which Pippin concentrates on the requirements of determining what is “mine and thine” among rational beings (i.e., \textit{possession noumenon}). Arguing against both “derivationists” (who attempt to draw a direct line from Kant’s moral principles to the doctrine of right) and “separationists” (who find a uniquely political practical logic), Pippin suggests that human beings require the state to secure, from a universal point of view, the kind of property relations that are proper to intelligible beings, that is, which do not depend on a phenomenal or physical possession of objects. This requires, as Pippin elaborates, that if man wishes to “act in a way consistent with the status of a being responsive to the demands of practical reason,” and without wronging anyone in their rational claims to property, he must enter a civil order, or act under the idea of such an order. The connection between morals and right would lie, then, in the rational character of the beings who find themselves in this concrete situation; the “proto-Hegelian” suggestion would be due to the need of the state and as a “legal system of recognition, enforcement, and resolution of disagreement.” (Robert Pippin, “Mine and Thine? The Kantian State,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy}, ed. Paul Guyer (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 434 and 438.)
conditions for the fulfillment of freedom and reasonableness as basic values,\(^9\) or as an a priori basis for the manifestation of rational (property) relations in a concrete world,\(^{10}\) the main point is that human moral existence, which discloses man’s character as a rational or noumenal being in the world, implies a political constitution that externally enforces the basic conditions of the concrete coexistence of the sensible beings who fulfill themselves to the extent that they manifest or enact their free and rational nature.

Thus the person’s moral reality, understood as participation in a moral order of being, informs political organization not as a set of heteronomous rules to which the state must submit, but as the very logic behind the liberal state’s defense of freedom and rights. In contrast with the constructivists’ approach, that liberal state is not a “product” of reasonable procedures undertaken from the point of view of rational individuals who are able to abstract from their position in the structure of interests in order to create a fair distribution of goods and entitlements. Rather, the state and its politics are themselves a priori realities (or practical ideas) that reflect the specific feature of moral autonomy as participation. Politics is surely a project to be constructed by free rational beings with a capacity for self-legislation, but its blueprint, so to

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\(^9\) This is Paul Guyer’s position as a “derivationist,” as outlined by Robert Pippin in the article just cited (see footnote 5). Paul Formosa defends a similar relationship between morality and politics in Kant, based on the common basis of both in human dignity, freedom, and independence. Coming from a constructivist perspective, Formosa claims that public autonomy is dependent upon “the norms of respect, decency, openness and honesty,” as well as “genuinely free and fair public debate open equally to all.” (Paul Formosa, “‘All Politics Must Bend Its Knee Before Right’: Kant on the Relation of Morals to Politics,” Social Theory and Practice 34, no. 2 (April 2008), p. 174.) Therefore, morality is a necessary background to the politics of right. Formosa highlights an interesting consequence of this connection, namely, the need for strong moral communities at the basis of liberal politics, even if his perspective glosses over the deeper philosophical connections between Kant’s moral theory and his doctrine of right.

\(^{10}\) See footnote 5 in this chapter for a brief description of this position as laid out by Robert Pippin.
speak, lies in the same moral order to which man finds himself submitted—through his self-legislation—in the mode of participation. This blueprint, however, must be worked out in a similar way to that in which morality in general is enacted by rational beings who are ends in themselves, that is, as a collective and historical work that stems from, nourishes and sustains these beings’ moral maturity (*Mündigkeit*). The liberal state must respect its citizens’ freedom and moral autonomy at the same time that it restricts their external actions in order to protect every rational being’s moral existence and personal sphere of freedom.

### Participation as the source of the dignity of all human beings

But here it should be noted that, in the perspective of autonomy as participation, the protection by the liberal state of citizens’ rights extends to more than just the set of rational beings who display an active and complete use of their rational capacities. For, according to the concept of participation laid out above, the idea of a self-legislated, autonomous rational being goes beyond the concrete phenomenal manifestations of rationality and indeed touches all those beings who can be considered participants, to different extents, of that dignity.

As persons do not “make” rationality and create value, but are in fact made by and valued for the higher reality in which they participate (and never do so to the fullest extent), no member of this set of sensible beings may be excluded from participating in its special dignity. We do not know how or why this intelligible character is ascribed to human beings; rather, we start from that perspective as a fundamental presupposition that provides what sense some very central
human realities we experience—such as praise and blame—may have. Consequently, there is no objective empirical criterion to distinguish between those human beings who are persons and those who might not deserve the title. Personality is a founding character of human life, which man is constantly “called in esteem” to live up to. But the distance between the empirical fulfillment and the idea is immeasurable.

As Kant often remarks, while one can observe the acts and attitudes that make up the empirical character of reason, their intelligible source remains beyond objectification. An adult with the typical mature consciousness of good and evil and the rational capacities to initiate meaningful action may carry out a relatively full experience of freedom and rationality, as well as enjoy the ability to live, in association other human beings, a life based on shared moral and rational norms. But the source of that experience does not lie in the phenomenal, measurable biological features, or the concrete rational acts and attitudes; these are but the sensible conditions and observable manifestations of the enactment of an overarching order in which the individual human will is constituted as an agent. The fact that there are some human beings who do not yet or no longer, or who never will, display the full range of rational skills of an average adult person does not exclude them from being considered under the idea of rational nature or humanity as an end in itself.

The case of moral failure may help to illustrate this point. Average morally competent human beings do not “lose” their rational dignity when they fail to live up to the fullness of moral demands. In fact, that dignity remains a reference that highlights the gravity of their immoral acts. The argument for these assertions may be developed in the following fashion: for Kant, morality is the foundation of freedom, as a law which orients man’s actions in
independence of sensible motives. Acting morally, then, amounts to a competent free use of practical reason, in which the moral law as self-legislated, or pure practical reason, is the motive for one’s actions. However, failing to act morally—acting for sensible motives against the moral law—does not mean that one has suddenly become unfree, or devoid of practical reason; that would invalidate any assigning of praise or blame to moral choices. As Kant clarifies in Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, to act according to inclinations amounts to a free incorporation of sensible incentives into one’s rational maxims for action. As a free act, it cannot be “explained,” but remains as an existential contradiction between the rational / moral order whereby one can be a rational agent and the agent’s own failed enactment of it, or rather, against it. To fail to act morally, then, does not cut one apart from practical reason, but retains a mysterious connection with the order of practical reason from which man receives his dignity as an end in himself. The empirical human being who commits immorality is still defined by his participation in the moral order, even though he has failed to manifest it concretely in his empirical will and attitudes.

Although the situations differ, the distinction between the moral order and its concrete enactment by moral agents may be used as a model for the attribution of rational dignity to all human beings, regardless of their concrete exercise of their rational capacities. From the perspective of the moral law as that order in which rational and sensible beings participate, there is no significant difference between the developed or “competent” adult human being and the incipient human embryo; both live in the light, as it were, of moral existence or personality.

Robert P. George and Alfonso Gomez-Lobo have defended the personality of the human embryo as based on the embryo’s possession in radical form of all the “capacities for mental
functions characteristically carried out (though intermittently) by most… human beings at later stages of maturity.”

Being an organism that displays from its earliest stages a self-directed and continuous development of these and other human capacities, an embryo is distinguished only in degree, but not in kind, from other human beings usually considered worthy of respect and entitled to the protection of their basic rights. Given that full moral respect is not accorded in degrees to people with different levels of control and development of their mental capacities, human embryos should also deserve full respect by virtue of “the kind of beings” they are, and not their relative early level of development.

Regarding the same subject, David Walsh has given careful consideration to the contradictions stemming in liberal discourse from a decoupling of the discussion of the rights of the mother and of the fetus from the meditation about the transcendent value of human life. As Walsh shows, any procedural or interest-based definition of rights that cuts human beings at the fetal stage from the entitlement to protection ends up placing in jeopardy the whole foundation of the dignity of human beings in general. By arbitrarily or willfully excluding fetuses from the set of entities defined as persons, liberal reasoning undermines the very definition of the person and her dignity, for every human being was once a fetus and may eventually reach the other “mysterious limits of our own existence.” Additionally, by bringing forth criteria other than the givenness of humanity, humans are approximated to the status of measurable and instrumental

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things. As Walsh reflects, if human beings are defined by some of the goods and activities they may produce, they cease to be the ends in themselves for any human activity.\textsuperscript{13}

What our interpretation of Kant brings to the discussion is to suggest that the questions about kinds of entities human beings are and the reason why they are ultimate ends in themselves are answered primarily by human beings’ participation in an order of reason that goes beyond empirical fixities and measurements. This order is the source of our capacity for empirical knowledge and measurement, and it is manifested to the fullest extent as the participation of man in the higher moral reality of the moral law.

\textbf{Kant’s enlargement of the concept of reason}

The interpretation laid out in this dissertation also implies a more comprehensive concept of reason than the one that usually features in academic discussions of public reason. As a similarly “deep” concept of reason is articulated by Eric Voeglin in his reconstruction of the early history of philosophical reason, recalling it here will be of help to visualize what is involved in Kant’s concept of practical reason. Voegelin analyzes the Classical Greek differentiation of symbolisms of order in the context of the conflict between the philosophers and the traditional mythical expressions of order in the Greek city states, centered around the cult of

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 305.
the gods of the polis. Once that mythical articulation had lost its connection to the experiential sources of spiritual order for the Greeks (as it had in the time of Socrates), political science was born in the soul of the men who found within their own consciousness the principles of correction and reestablishment of spiritual and social order. Voegelin refers to this discovery as the development of a “noetic structure of consciousness.” Noesis was discovered when, for the first time in history, the primary experience of the order of the cosmos was differentiated into the self-awareness of man’s psyche, or consciousness, as the locus of human participation in a more-than-human order, or the existence of man within the tension towards the transcendent ground of existence. In the final essay of Anamnesis, “What Is Political Reality”, Voegelin calls ratio, substituting the term for the Aristotelian nous, this “directional factor of knowledge, which is present in the tension of consciousness toward the ground,” and which reveals “the structure of consciousness and its order”. In this sense, reason (the philosophical noetic experience of order in the soul) is born as an experience of inner participation in the order of being, a relationship between the two non-objective poles of the tension—the temporal subject and eternal being—that the philosopher finds within his own soul. Rather than a narrow, technically-focused faculty of calculation and comparison, reason is first of all the attunement to the moral order of existence that allows man to organize his relationships with other men and the physical world. And rather than being opposed to faith, it centrally includes (as noesis) participation in the transcendent

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sources of that moral order, although expressed with a different emphasis from revelation, by virtue of its historically specific development through philosophy.\textsuperscript{15}

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We suggest that Kant’s concept of \textit{Vernunft}, as it gives the practical use of reason primacy over its theoretical use, and because it portrays the practice of pure practical reason as the enactment in human beings of a universal, a priori moral law, has a reach that is similar to the concept of \textit{ratio} as reconstructed by Voegelin. As noted in Chapter 3, reason—as pure practical reason—is for Kant primarily a moral reality, so much so that the acquaintance with the Being of beings and author of nature is not a matter of theoretical derivation, but the result of a moral meditation on the implications and necessary presuppositions of man’s participation in the moral law as a sensible being. Furthermore, regarding this last point, just as the relationship between the “temporal subject of the experience” and “eternal being” is not for Voegelin a relationship between two discrete “things,”\textsuperscript{16} by the same token, for Kant, man’s participation in the moral law is located outside the realm of “objects of possible experience” and the chain of cause and effect. Man’s participation is, as we have argued, of another kind, in which the moral law is in

\textsuperscript{15} Voegelin has described this difference in emphases as follows:

“In the experience of the flowing presence, there occurs a meeting of time with eternity, and of man with God. An experience of this metaxy, therefore, can put its accent modally on either the human seeking-and-receiving pole, or on the divine giving-and-commanding pole. When the modal accent is put on the human seeking-and-receiving pole and expressed in a way that the knowledge experienced about the metaxy and the order of being becomes dominant, we speak of philosophy. When the modal accent is put on the divine giving-and-commanding pole in such a way that human knowledge of the experience is reduced to a communication of the divine irruption.” (Ibid., p. 335)

\textsuperscript{16} Voegelin describes the noetic experience as

“the experience of a tension between the poles of temporal and eternal being, not an objective cognition either of the poles or of the tension itself. Whatever may be the status of man as the subject of the experience, he does experience in his soul a tension between two poles of being, of which one, called temporal, is within himself, while the other lies outside of himself, yet cannot be identified as an object in the temporal being of the world but is experienced as being beyond all temporal being of the world. From the temporal pole the tension is experienced as a loving and hopeful pressure toward the divine eternity; from the pole of eternal being, as a call and a pressing in of grace.” (\textit{Anamnesis}, p. 322-3)
fact a symbol for a more fundamental and prior order of being that is at the root of personality and the dignity of rational nature. In this sense, *Vernunft* is not merely “reasonableness,” nor a capacity for intersubjective discourse procedures, as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas respectively have defined the rational basis of their theoretical constructions of the liberal order.

As we have noted, Rawls’s explicitly disavows any search for an independent moral truth “as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine, an order apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves.”\(^{17}\) Instead, he locates the definition of right and justice within the constructivist process itself, at the center of which is “our conception of ourselves and… our relation to society”\(^{18}\) as historically effective in contemporary democratic societies. Justice is whatever is “defined by the outcome of the procedure itself.”\(^{19}\) Reasonableness, in this conception, is a substitute for “truth” inasmuch as it is the criterion for validity of the propositions as constructed by rational agents with a certain conception of the person and of society, as opposed to an external criterion of verification.\(^{20}\) Rawls’s conception is a development of his understanding of Kantian moral theory as a constructivism based on the concept of practical reason, whose nature and first principle is the categorical imperative’s universalizing procedure.

\(^{17}\) Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism,” p. 519.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 523.

\(^{20}\) See Rawls, ibid., p. 569:

“It seems better to say that in constructivism first principles are reasonable (or unreasonable) than that they are true (or false)—better still, that they are most reasonable for those who conceive of their person as it is represented in the procedure of construction. And here ‘reasonable’ is used instead of ‘true’ not because of some alternative theory of truth, but simply in order to keep to terms that indicate the constructivist standpoint as opposed to rational intuitionism.”
In Habermas’s “discourse ethics,” which he locates at a more basic level than Rawls’s, moral facts are grounded on fundamental discursive principles that must be true of any attempt to express one’s moral position. In that sense, these principles work as “transcendental arguments,” inasmuch as they are conditions *sine qua non* for any rational moral statement. As Habermas puts it,

Anyone who participates in argumentation has already accepted these substantive normative conditions—there is no alternative to them. Simply by choosing to engage in argumentation, participants are forced to acknowledge this fact. This transcendental-pragmatic demonstration serves to make us aware of the extent of the conditions under which we always already operate when we argue; no one has the option of escaping the alternatives. The absence of alternatives means that those conditions are, in fact, inescapable for us.

The “fact of reason,” in this case, is understood at the level of discourse, whose principles and procedures “always already underlie” any and all efforts at communication. The fact is then a necessary feature of human rational discourse, so that any talk about universal moral norms is premised on these universal principles.

But the concept of reason we have detected in Kant as the result of the view of moral autonomy as participation is deeply moral and at the same time prior to any discursive articulation. The moral law as an existential tension is not “constructed” by a reasonable procedure, nor is it the result of rational discourse; rather, it answers at a fundamental level why rationality, universality, and equality should be central considerations for a concept of justice as

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22 The two main principles are stated as follows:

“(U) For a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its general observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of each person affected must be such that all affected can accept them freely,” and “(D) Every valid norm would meet with the approval of all concerned if they could take part in a practical discourse.” (Ibid., p. 120.)
23 Ibid., p. 130.
fairness, or why Habermas’s discursive moral principles are valid principles for any moral discussion. And it does so not in a “discursive” or “foundationalist” fashion, which might be a target of Rawls’s and Habermas’s objections, but through the treatment of the fundamental and non-objective experience of order that is at the core of reason. The conception of the person as a free and equal moral agent is, as we have seen, a result of the human being’s special participation in the moral law that Kant describes as autonomy. It is due to this dignity that the person can be considered a “third rail” of politics, inviolable in her rights and a source of moral value.

To that the extent that Rawls and the other constructivists locate the foundation of the liberal order in that specific conception of the person, they are right to say that this order is not a simple restatement of “a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine.” They are also onto something when they focus on the procedure as the source of authoritative claims. Yet, because they stop asking questions in this newfound practical mode, they fail to disclose the ultimate moral nature of the whole enterprise. The independence of the liberal political order from an order of objects is a consequence of the non-theoretical mode in which morality exists; and the procedure is a source of legitimacy because the moral order that lies at the basis of the liberal conception of the person is only enacted through its own practice, as participation.

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We close this dissertation suggesting that, rather than an enemy of the traditional Christian conception of the person and the destroyer of ethics and metaphysics, Immanuel Kant should be considered a philosophical ally in the mission of exploring and articulating the truth about the person and her moral commitments to her neighbors, the state, and even her Creator.
As Walsh has asserted, the purpose of the revolution inaugurated by Kant was “to assert the moral perspective as the most comprehensive one available to human beings.” Kant’s primary concern was the establishment of a strong foundation for metaphysics in the primacy of the practical, which would in turn protect morality from skeptical and deterministic attacks, revealing its irrevocable place as a human (and more than human) reality. By doing so, Kant also attempted to point to the deepest significance of human beings’ relationship with their transcendent source.

Seen in this light, Kantian philosophy is not a competitor of Christian revelation and its attendant theological anthropology, but a philosophical elaboration of the moral experiences that were differentiated in history by the Christian religious and moral experience. As such, it helps to clarify and understand parts of that experience that have taken centuries to unfold in the consciousness and practices of Western civilization. It should not be considered mere chance that Kant’s moral formulations have been so widely adopted by Catholic personalist thinkers, starting with the Categorical Imperative’s Formula of Humanity.

Moreover, Kant’s philosophy should not be considered, as Kant did not consider it, a would-be substitute for an antiquated theology. His project is clearly a meditation on the sources of order from the point of view of “the human seeking-and-receiving pole” of the experience of metaxy, as Voegelin has expressed it. In his experience of transcendence from the point of view of the searching soul that participates in the moral law, Kant could not avoid touching on theological and religious subjects, and specifically the Christian form and concepts of religious

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experience. But it is fair to say that Kant never believed his moral philosophy, based on a religion within the bounds of mere reason, would replace historical faiths; instead he proposed a dynamic of purification of some kinds of religious institutional habits by means of the insight that morality, as a divine reality, lies at the core of faith as love.

On the other hand, as part of the development of philosophical liberalism, Kant’s philosophy represents an important instance of what Walsh has called the growth of the liberal soul, an “enlargement of our liberal horizons” that involves evoking “the sense of participation in an order of rightness that transcends all considerations of pragmatic success or satisfaction….“

This meaning of Kant’s enterprise has been concealed or underplayed in much of the neo-Kantian literature, but it remains in Kant’s own text to be recovered and used as a reminder to liberal philosophy itself that its concentration on autonomy, rights, and the value of freedom is based on a kind of dignity that lies beyond what our scientific measurements and discourse strategies can reach.

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