

# The Philosophy of Kant

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## Practical Philosophy

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MORALITY FOR KANT is reason in action; hence the critical examination of practical reason is at the same time a search for the supreme principle of morality. Just as the Transcendental Aesthetic of the first *Critique* is fundamental to the philosophy of mathematics, and the Transcendental Analytic to the philosophy of science, so the *Critique of Practical Reason* is fundamental to moral philosophy. In much the same way, also, it confines itself for the most part to fundamental questions; one should not look to it for a complete exposition of Kant's moral philosophy as a whole, and indeed there is no single work in which such an exposition can be found. The four major works of the critical period which have to be taken into account are, in order of publication:

(i) *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Groundwork, or Fundamental Principles, of—or, more strictly, for—the Metaphysic of Morals). This work, which is usually referred to simply as the *Grundlegung*, was published in 1785. It is in effect a preliminary section for a Critique of Practical Reason, directed to the discovery of the supreme principle of morality, but approaching this problem from what Kant calls 'ordinary rational knowledge' about morality, and making no attempt to show how this knowledge stems from the nature of reason itself.

(ii) The *Critique of Practical Reason*, published in 1788. This is a full-scale examination of the practical activity of reason and of the pre-suppositions involved in that activity. Taken together with the *Grundlegung*, it represents the most abstract side of Kant's ethics, concentrating as it does on the moral conduct required of man as a rational being without bringing in, except in an incidental way, considerations derived from his specific nature as a human being.

(iii) *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, published in 1793 (Part I separately in 1792). The relevant sections of this contain an account of the evil principle in man and a discussion of the relations between morality, religion, and theology.

and immediate predecessors would agree; the discontent is felt by philosophers of a later generation who are not only interested in the controversies between Kant and his opponents but also find doubts and difficulties in some of the views which they agreed in accepting.

A second point of difficulty concerns the conclusions which Kant draws about the nature of mathematics and physics. His arguments for the synthetic a priori nature of mathematical judgements have met with much opposition, and his attempt to establish a necessary connexion between arithmetic and the notion of time has been widely held to be unsuccessful. As for physics, it seems clear that Kant's account of its philosophical principles is more suited to the Newtonian physics of his own day than to the science as it has since developed—a fact which is hardly surprising, but which is awkward for a philosopher who claims to be enunciating permanent a priori truths about experience, not merely empirical, and thus perhaps transitory, ones.

Thirdly and finally, there is the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, which has perhaps proved the major stumbling-block to an acceptance of the major theses of Kant's philosophy. The part played by the distinction is so fundamental to Kant's whole philosophy that if it could be shown to be incoherent or otherwise unjustified, the entire system of the three *Critiques* would need to be drastically revised, if not completely rewritten. Most attacks on it take one of two forms. Some realist philosophers argue that Kant's view implies the absurd proposition that knowledge can make a difference to what is known; whereas it is obvious from the nature of knowledge—or from the meaning of the verb 'to know'—that if a man knows something to be in a certain condition, it must be in that condition quite independently of his knowing it. It follows that the perceptual knowledge which we derive through our sense-impressions must be knowledge of the perceived objects as they really are, for otherwise it would not be knowledge at all. Other critics, regarding the matter from a more idealist point of view, have argued that the only proper contrast with an object as it appears under certain conditions is with that same object, not as it supposedly is in itself independently of the way it appears, but as it appears under a *different set of conditions*. I may, it is said, contrast the table as it appears to me with the table as it appears, say, to a cat or an angel or God; but the notion of the table as it really is, in abstraction from all appearance, is completely meaningless.

(iv) The *Metaphysik der Sitten* (Metaphysic of Morals), published in 1797. This is a systematic working-out in their application to human beings of the rational principles of morality laid down in the *Grundlegung* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The main theses of the first *Critique* could be fully understood without investigating their application to mathematics and the physical sciences in any detail; Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (Metaphysical First Principles of Natural Science) supplements the *Critique* but adds little to our understanding of it. With Kant's moral philosophy, however, the situation is different. Important though it may be to exclude all consideration of human nature and of the eventual application of the moral law from one's investigation into the supreme principle of morality (and Kant repeatedly insists on the importance of this), to confine one's attention to this abstract investigation can give only a distorted view of his moral philosophy as a whole. In this chapter, therefore, although I shall begin by expounding the main theses of the second *Critique* (making occasional supplementary use of the *Grundlegung*), I shall go on to consider the way in which Kant connects his critical investigation with the more concrete application of the principles discovered by it.

Kant's major problem in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is to show that, and how, pure reason by itself can determine the will. If this were not possible, he thinks, the whole of morality would be an illusion; action on impulse or in accordance with desire or inclination is, like everything else that is empirically grounded, subject to the laws of physical causality, and all talk of 'ought' is therefore here irrelevant—an 'ought' can arise only when man has a choice between doing what his inclinations, if unchecked by reason, would inevitably lead him to do, and doing what reason tells him is in accordance with the moral law. Moral laws are laws of freedom, as opposed to laws of nature; and man's conduct must somehow come under the first kind of law if there is to be such a thing as morality.

Apart from a few pages at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* on the best method of educating people in correct moral standards, the work is divided simply into an Analytic and a Dialectic, the principle of division being analogous to that observed by the first *Critique*. The Analytic demonstrates the true principles of morality: the Dialectic examines the errors into which the judgements of practical reason tend to fall and, arising out of this examination, establishes the immortality of the soul and the existence of God as postulates of pure practical

reason—i.e. as truths which are presupposed by morality even though, as was argued in the first *Critique*, they cannot be theoretically proved.

A practical principle may be either subjective or objective. It is subjective when the agent regards it as applying only to himself (e.g. 'Whenever I see any chance of increasing my wealth without risk, I will take it'): objective when it is regarded as valid for all men or, more strictly, for all rational beings (e.g. 'Whenever one sees a human being in distress, one ought to help him'). Subjective principles are called maxims: objective principles are laws. Perfectly rational beings, if there are any, invariably determine their wills according to objective laws; that is, they invariably will in accordance with rational moral principles. Animals and, indeed, all things in nature except man, behave in accordance with laws of nature, not in accordance with principles (cf. *Grundlegung* IV 412, 'Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with his idea of laws—that is, in accordance with principles—and only so has he a will'). Man, as a partially or imperfectly rational being, is in a unique position; he can act in accordance with rational principles but does not invariably do so. To man alone, therefore, the notions of 'ought' and 'duty' apply, and only men can be affected by what Kant calls 'imperatives'. Imperatives (which are formulas in which practical principles of reason are expressed) are of two kinds, hypothetical or conditional, and categorical or unconditional. If the action commanded or prescribed in the imperative is good or necessary only as a means to the attainment of something else, the imperative is hypothetical: if the action commanded or prescribed is good in itself or absolutely necessary, it is categorical. 'If you want to have a prosperous old age, you must work hard in your youth' is a hypothetical imperative—one can always avoid the prescription by giving up the end. But 'You ought never to tell lies' is a categorical imperative: there is no way of evading the command or the moral requirement of practical reason which it expresses, for no end is mentioned and there is therefore no end which can be given up. Categorical imperatives and the practical laws which they embody refer only to the will itself, not to anything that may be achieved by the causality of the will. Morality, Kant is saying, cannot be regarded as a set of rules which prescribe the means necessary to the achievement of a given end, whether the end be the general happiness, or human perfection, or self-realization, or anything else; its rules must be obeyed without consideration of the consequences that will follow from doing so or not doing so. A practical principle which presupposes a desired object as the determining ground of the will cannot give rise

to a practical, moral law, but can only remain at an empirical level; that is, the morality of an act of will cannot be determined by the matter or content of the will, for when the will is materially, i.e. empirically, determined, the question of its morality does not arise. Kant is not saying here, as some commentators have supposed, that some human actions or volitions have no object, end, or purpose—on the contrary, he explicitly states that all actions or volitions have an object; what he is saying is that the morality of an action or volition is not determined by the object which is achieved by it, or which the agent intends to achieve.

This consideration leads Kant to one of his most important and characteristic theses. If the moral character of willing is not determined by the matter or content of what is willed, it must be determined by the form: 'If a rational being can think of its maxims as practical universal laws, he can do so only by considering them as principles which contain the determining grounds of the will because of their form and not because of their matter' (KPV v 26-27). But if we abstract from all material content of the will, that is from all thought of an objective or purpose that is to be achieved by action, we are left, Kant says, with nothing but the merely formal property of the universality of the rule or law that governs the will; in other words, the morality of a maxim is determined by its suitability for functioning as a universal law, applicable not just to the willing of this particular agent here and now, but to that of any agent in a situation of the same general type. An important consequence follows from this connexion of morality with the concept of a universal law. Since a moral will must be so in virtue of its form alone, the will must be capable of a purely formal determination; that is, it must be possible for a man to act (or, more strictly, to will) in a certain way for the sole reason that willing in this way is prescribed by a universal law, no matter what empirical results may be achieved by willing in this or any other way. And this amounts to saying that a will to which moral considerations apply must be, in the strictest sense, a free will, one that can function, even though it does not always function, independently of the laws of natural causality. In other words, we are first presented with the concept of morality; this has to be explained in terms of a universal moral law, and the ability to will in obedience to such a law leads us to postulate the freedom which, as we have seen, could not be demonstrated by speculative metaphysics. The freedom that has been established, however, is not a merely negative freedom consisting in the absence of constraint by empirical causes; it is a positive freedom which consists in the ability to make acts of will in accordance with the moral law for no

other reason than that they are in accordance with it (or as Kant often puts it, out of respect, or reverence, for the law). Freedom in this positive sense is called the autonomy of the will, and its absence (i.e. any situation in which the will is determined by external sources) is called heteronomy. The point is that in obeying the moral law for the sake of the law alone, the will is autonomous because it is obeying a law which it imposes on itself: heteronomy occurs whenever the will obeys laws, rules, or injunctions from any other source.

It is important to realize that in what he says about autonomy and universality Kant does not regard himself as making a philosophical discovery of a moral criterion or principle which the ordinary non-philosophical man does not understand and which he has to accept on the philosopher's authority; there is no question, as there is with Plato for instance, of philosophy being able to discover important moral truths inaccessible to the non-philosophical mind. All that Kant claims to be doing at this point is to state a moral principle which is in fact employed by ordinary people in their moral deliberation and thinking (even though he may state it more precisely and technically than they do) and to explain how the validity of the principle follows from philosophical considerations about the nature of reason and of the contrast between causal necessity and freedom.

Kant attempts to demonstrate in a systematic way that all previous efforts to provide a fundamental principle of morality have offended against the requirement that such a principle must refer only to the form of the will, not to its matter. Many suggested principles have been empirical, and therefore obviously inadequate; the principle that morality consists in doing whatever will contribute most to the agent's physical pleasure, for example (a view which Kant somewhat misleadingly attributes to Epicurus), or that one's whole duty consists in obeying the laws of the political society of which one is a member. There are also, however, some a priori principles which, no matter how important obedience to them may be, cannot function as fundamental principles of morality; these are the principle of perfection (which Kant attributes to the Leibnizian Wolff and the Stoics) and the principle that one's duty consists in doing the will of God. We cannot regard a man's perfection (in the sense of his fitness for any kind of end or purpose, i.e. his talent or skill) as the ultimate moral principle, for the moral value of perfection will clearly depend on the morality of the ends which it is to serve. And although Kant thinks that morality can in a sense be regarded as consisting in obedience to the commands of God, he insists



that we cannot think of the will of God as the fundamental principle of morality without transgressing the principle of autonomy; if we help other men merely because we think God has commanded us to, we are implicitly making our supposed moral principle depend on the principle of securing satisfaction or happiness for ourselves. If we say that an action is our duty because God commands it, then to the question 'Why is it our duty to do what God commands?' there can only be two general types of answer. If the answer is 'Because God commands only what is good and right', God's command in itself is clearly not being taken as fundamental; but if the suggestion is that we ought to obey God's command without having any independent ground for believing that it is our duty to obey his commands, our motive for obedience to them, Kant thinks, can in the end only be some form of desire for our own happiness, such as a prudential desire for reward or dislike of punishment.

The supreme principle of morality, then, is the supreme principle of practical reason; and this is the principle of autonomy, which implies that the determining ground of the moral will must be, not any empirical rule or concept, but the formal concept of lawfulness in general, which is a concept of pure reason. Now, even if morality depends on the principle that the will can act in obedience to a law of reason, or of freedom, as opposed to a law of physical necessity, we still need to know how this apparent escape from physical causality is possible. The *Critique of Pure Reason* demonstrated the impossibility of a valid theoretical proof that freedom exists; but if morality presupposes freedom, could it not still be maintained that freedom does not exist and that the whole of morality is consequently an illusion? How do we know that we are justified in taking this step beyond the boundaries of possible sense-experience (for the autonomous will must be a cause which does not itself have a cause preceding it in time—if it did it would not be autonomous—and such an uncaused cause cannot possibly be met with in experience, as the first *Critique* has shown)? Kant's answer is that, although the category of causality, like all the other categories, can give us knowledge only when it is applied to objects met with in actual or possible sense-experience (i.e. to appearances as opposed to things in themselves), the *Critique of Pure Reason* has by no means ruled out as meaningless all non-sensuous application of the categories; in particular, the impossibility of any theoretical application of the categories to noumena in order to gain knowledge of them does not entail the impossibility of their application to noumena in practical contexts for a different purpose. There are two reasons why this is so. First, all the demonstrations in the Dialectic of

the first *Critique* that there could be no valid theoretical proof, and hence no knowledge, of the existence of God, freedom, and immortality could serve equally well to demonstrate that there could be no theoretical proof of their non-existence; the possibility of there being rational grounds for accepting or believing in the existence of any or all of these three things is left open. But secondly, when we consider the position of practical, as opposed to theoretical, reason, we are on even firmer ground in our attempt to justify the assumption of freedom. For morality is not an option which we can dismiss as meaningless or illusory if we choose; as long as no theoretical impossibility or contradiction can be exhibited in it or in its presuppositions, morality and its claims must be taken as an inescapable fact—a fact of reason, as it were. The concept of a *causa noumenon*, which is entailed in that of a being with a free will, cannot be given a theoretical justification or deduction, as can that of a *causa phaenomenon*; but it has been shown to be free from contradiction and, since it is itself obviously not an empirical concept, it cannot be maintained that its application must be in all respects and in all contexts limited to objects of possible sense-experience—as long as the application has a practical purpose, that is, is directed to the use of the concept in the establishing of a moral principle, and is not supposed to give us theoretical knowledge, no possible objection can be taken to it.

Through it [sc. the concept of *causa noumenon*] I do not strive to know theoretically the characteristic of a being in so far as it has a pure will; it is enough for me to denote it as such by means of this concept and thus to couple the concept of causality with that of freedom (and with what is inseparable from it, i.e. the moral law as its determining ground). I have this right by virtue of the pure non-empirical origin of the concept of cause, since I here make no other use of the concept than in relation to the moral law which determines its reality; that is, I hold that I am justified only in making a practical use of it. (KPV v 56.)

So far, Kant has argued (i) that morality presupposes autonomy of the will, that is the ability of the will to obey a law which it has imposed on itself as opposed to a law prescribed by some other being, such as God or a political sovereign, and (ii) that the law which is obeyed by the autonomous will (a will which is reason in its practical aspect) must be capable of being shown to be valid because of its purely formal characteristics. Both these theses, however, require further defence and elaboration.

Just how, in the first place, can the claim of autonomy be reconciled with the thesis of universal physical causality? It is not enough to say that the former belongs to man as noumenon, while the latter applies to him only as phenomenon; for this, taken by itself, is more a statement of the

problem to be solved than a solution of it. It is an obvious fact, Kant thinks, that respect for the moral law can compete as a rival motive for action with inclinations, appetites, and, in general, incentives that belong to the sphere of feeling. A man may contrast his desire to perform a particular action because he thinks it will conduce to his own happiness with his knowledge that performing it would be contrary to his duty; and if it is his duty to avoid it, it must be possible for him to do so. Now the *prima facie* difficulty about freedom, Kant thinks, is not that alterations are of necessity causally determined, for there is no reason why an action, as a kind of alteration, should not be determined by an autonomous act of will; the difficulty is that alterations are causally determined by something preceding them in time.

Suppose I say of a man who has committed a theft that this act, by the natural law of causality, is a necessary result of the determining ground existing in the preceding time and that it was therefore impossible that it could not have been done. How, then, can judgement according to the moral law make any change in it? And how can it be supposed that it could still have been left undone because the law says that it should have been left undone? That is, how can he be called free at this point of time with reference to this action, when in this moment and in this action he stands under irrevocable natural necessity? (KPV v 95.)

We cannot solve the problem by suggesting that freedom consists in being determined by one's own desires or feelings, as opposed to those of others, or in being determined by thought rather than by feeling; for as long as the determination is by something, no matter what, which precedes the action in time, it must follow that the action, at the time of its performance, could not have been avoided, its determining causes being outside the agent's control. Psychological causality is as inconsistent with freedom as is mechanical. What is required for morality is the existence of transcendental freedom, that is complete independence of all natural or empirical determination. Now the first *Critique* showed that such independence could not possibly exist within the world of appearances; if it exists at all, therefore, it must belong to man as noumenon, to man as he is in himself. And since noumena do not stand under temporal conditions, the laws of natural necessity cannot apply to them; the temporally ordered actions of man as appearance are causally determined, but the will of man as noumenon is not temporally ordered and therefore the notion of causal necessity simply does not apply to it. Now at first sight this seems absurd, for a man's volitions or decisions, even if they have not yet led or never lead to bodily action, still occur in time; one can put an exact date and time to a decision or to a mental effort just

as easily as one can to an intentional physical movement. Kant, however, is not denying anything as obvious as this. What he is saying is that, when we blame or praise a man or hold him accountable for something he has done or tried to do, although his action or volition was a temporal occurrence, it is, as it were, a person considered independently of any temporal considerations whom we are holding responsible. I am the same person that I was ten years ago, in spite of the physical and psychological changes that have taken place in me during that time; as Kant would put it, temporal changes affect the self as phenomenon, but are irrelevant to the self as noumenon. The 'I' that is the object of moral approval or condemnation and to which the moral law applies is the self considered as noumenon: the 'I' whose activities are determined by causal necessity is the self considered as phenomenon. But since the 'I' as noumenon which is condemned if it disobeys the commands of reason expressed in the moral law is a timeless 'I', no one can claim exemption from such condemnation on the ground that his disobedience to the moral law was irresistibly necessitated by some temporally preceding appetite, inclination, or other factor.

From this point of view, a rational being can rightly say of any unlawful action which he has done that he could have left it undone, even if as an appearance it was sufficiently determined in the past and thus far was inescapably necessary. For this action and everything in the past which determined it belong to a single phenomenon of his character, which he himself creates, and according to which he imputes to himself as a cause independent of all sensibility the causality of that appearance. (KPV v 98.)

Even if we knew so much of a man's character that we could infallibly predict his entire future conduct, this would not prove him any the less free; for his character, which leads him to act in these predictable ways, is itself under his control and derives from that spontaneity which he possesses as a noumenon. For the same reason, we are entitled to judge a man guilty of great moral wrongdoing, even after he has become so fixed in his bad habits that he really does have no choice but to act badly; for, assuming that he was free to choose at some earlier stage in his life, he must be held responsible even for his present irresponsibility—the vicious acts spring from his will, considered as a timeless noumenon, since he freely willed the acts which caused his present condition.

Kant, no doubt rightly, had misgivings about the lucidity and intelligibility of this resolution of the supposed conflict between freedom and necessity. He claims that no other solution that has been, or might be, offered is any clearer, and that philosophical difficulties ought to be

brought out into the open and not hidden or removed with palliatives, as has been the case with earlier treatments of the problem. But his solution is difficult to accept, as well as difficult to understand, for it does not seem to meet the requirements for a solution which Kant himself lays down. Suppose that I am wondering whether to pay back a loan from a friend as I have promised, or to spend the money on my own entertainment. It is clear that I can pay back the loan and that I can, in exactly the same sense, spend the money on myself. Suppose now that after long consideration I yield to temptation and spend it on myself. Kant, as a moralist, will say, 'You ought not to have done that' and also 'You could have refrained from doing that'. But as a metaphysician, believing in the universal applicability of causal necessity to events and thus to actions, he will also say 'Your doing what you did was causally necessitated, and therefore you could not have done otherwise'. There is an apparent contradiction here between two different statements about the same action, considered as a temporal occurrence; and it is not clear how reference to the timelessness of man as an intelligible being or noumenon can remove it.

Kant would, I think, have dealt with any objections to his attempted solution of the problem of freedom and its reconciliation with universal causal necessity by saying that since freedom is required by morality and causal necessity by metaphysics or philosophy of science, there must be some way of reconciling the apparent contradiction between them, even if that way has not yet been discovered. Of course, if there were a real contradiction, belief in freedom would have to be given up (that Kant would have chosen this horn of the dilemma is made clear in the *Grundlegung* IV 456); but the *Critique of Pure Reason* showed at least that the supposition of freedom does not of itself lead to theoretical contradictions, and we should be justified in abandoning freedom, and with it morality, only if it could be proved to be in contradiction either with itself or with any other firmly established principles. The discovery of the distinction between man as noumenon in the intelligible world and man as appearance in the sensible world, Kant would say, at least gives us some ground for holding that the apparent conflict arises from previous failures to grasp the distinction, even if a clear and precise explanation of the difficulty has not yet been achieved.

I shall defer for the moment an account of the way in which the nature and content of the moral law is connected by Kant with the formal characteristics of the rational will, and deal briefly with some topics discussed in the second part of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the Dialectic. Practical reason, like speculative, has its natural dialectic; that is, it is

involved in illusion or contradiction through its inevitable attempt to find the unconditional principle of everything that is conditioned—here the categorical moral principle or law which stands over and above all the lower-order, conditioned principles, based as they are on inclinations. Practical reason tries to find a law which men must obey unconditionally as opposed to a collection of rules which they need to obey only on condition that they want to achieve their own happiness, or some other less extensive end. The task then is to define the concept of the highest good, in the light of which the conditioned goodness of all other good things must be judged. As Kant puts it in the well-known words at the beginning of the first chapter of the *Grundlegung*, 'It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken without qualification as good, except a good will' (IV 393). Kant goes on there to say that other qualities of mind or temperament such as *intelligence* and courage, and gifts of fortune such as wealth or health, though they are good and desirable in many ways, can also at times be bad and hurtful, and that the test of their goodness is the goodness of the will which controls or employs them.

Now the phrase 'the highest good' (*summum bonum*) is, Kant says, ambiguous. It can mean either the supreme good (*bonum supremum*) or the complete or perfect good (*bonum consummatum*). The former is the unconditioned condition, viz. the good will, or virtue, to which all human action must be subordinate. But although a man's possession of moral virtue is a necessary condition of the complete goodness of his state or situation, it is not a sufficient condition; the concept of virtue carries with it the concept of worthiness to be happy, and it is impossible for a rational being to approve of a situation in which a being who needs happiness and deserves it should nevertheless be unhappy. The complete good (*bonum consummatum*) consists then in virtue together with happiness in due proportion to virtue. Now the question arises as to the nature of the relation between virtue and happiness. It is clearly a synthetic connexion, not an analytic one: to be happy is not necessarily to be virtuous, nor does the possession of virtue carry happiness with it as a logical necessity. But given that it is a synthetic connexion, either the desire for happiness must be the motive for virtuous conduct or the maxim of virtue must necessarily produce happiness. Yet neither of these alternatives seems in fact to be true (hence the antinomy of practical reason). For the Analytic has shown that to subordinate moral considerations to the desire for happiness is to destroy morality entirely, because of the consequent violation of the principle of autonomy: while,

since a man's happiness depends at least in part on factors outside the control of his own will and determined by ordinary physical laws of nature, it cannot be expected that the pursuit of virtue will always in fact bring a man happiness, however much he may deserve it.

Kant says that the resolution of this antinomy resembles that of the antinomies of speculative reason which were dealt with in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*. The resemblance is only partial, however; for in the earlier work, once the distinction between things in themselves and appearances had been introduced, both the thesis and the antithesis of each antinomy were seen to be on a par with one another, in two cases both false, and in two cases both true. Here, however, the first alternative is firmly and unconditionally rejected; there is no sense in which the search for happiness can provide a rational expectation of attaining virtue. The objection to the second alternative, on the other hand, can be removed, Kant thinks, if we apply it to man as noumenon rather than to man as appearance. Under conditions pertaining in the physical world of appearance it is indeed untrue to say that a virtuous disposition necessarily produces happiness; but to suppose that this is the last word is to mistake a mere relation between appearances (between the happiness of a man considered as appearance—i.e. the satisfaction of his appetites and inclinations—and the physical conditions of that happiness, which belong only to the world of phenomena) for a relation between things in themselves and appearances. Man *qua* noumenon is not subject to the changes and chances of the physical world; and it is to man *qua* noumenon that morality, and the consequential worthiness to be happy, pertain.

Speculative reason could not prove either the immortality of the soul or the existence of God, although the possibility that these propositions are none the less true was left open by the conclusions of the first *Critique*. But the problem raised by the concept of the highest good can be solved only on the assumption that they are true; in other words, they are both postulates of pure practical reason. We are commanded by the moral law to achieve the highest good possible in the world. But the complete assimilation of the will to the moral law is holiness, a state which is not attainable in the world of sense (a holy will, unlike a human will, cannot be tempted by inclination or appetite to disobey the moral law). Since, however, holiness is both required by the moral law and impossible in this physical existence, its possibility requires the possibility of a different, non-physical existence in which the moral development of a will can reach perfection. 'Thus the highest good is practically possible only on

the supposition of the immortality of the soul, and the latter, as inseparably bound to the moral law, is a postulate of practical reason' (KPV v 122).

Just as the problem presented by the place of the concept of morality in that of the highest good could be solved only by postulating immortality, so, Kant thinks, that presented by the requirement that happiness should be attained in proportion to virtue can be solved only by postulating the existence of God. A man is not the cause of nature and his will is therefore unable to ensure that nature metes out the happiness which through his virtue he deserves, or the unhappiness which he might deserve through vice. But the existence of a connexion between virtue and deserved happiness is postulated as necessary by the moral law and its requirement that we should seek to further the highest good; it follows that the moral law also postulates the existence of a supreme cause of nature which can bring about the required correspondence of virtue and morality which would otherwise not exist, i.e. it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.

Thus the immortality of the soul and the existence of God have been shown, like the freedom of the will, to be presupposed by morality. The propositions which could not be proved by speculative metaphysics have still not been proved; but, Kant thinks, it has been shown that we may rationally believe them, since without them morality, or at least the concept of the highest good which morality bids us achieve, would be impossible. The concepts of God, freedom, and immortality belong in the end not to metaphysics but to morality:

Granted that the pure moral law inexorably binds every man as a command (not as a rule of prudence), the righteous man may say: I will that there be a God, that my existence in this world be also an existence in a pure world of the understanding outside the system of natural connections, and finally that my duration be endless. (KPV v 143.)

The existence of a need based on inclination does not, of course, entail the existence of an object which can satisfy that need; but the existence of God, freedom, and immortality are postulated because of a need for them which is based on practical reason, not on inclination, and a need of reason, Kant holds, cannot remain unsatisfied.

Kant's treatment of these last two postulates is brief and, even by his own standards of difficulty, hard to follow. It is not easy to see, for example, why an obligation to pursue the highest good need presuppose the possibility, in some existence or other, of achieving it. Could we not regard the highest good, however it is defined, as an ideal of morality,



to which we are required to approach as closely as our own abilities and the restrictions placed on our activity by the conditions of our physical existence allow? Again, Kant seems to take it for granted that there is something radically unsatisfactory about a distribution of happiness that is not directly proportional to virtue. But, apart from the difficulty of establishing a proportion between two such disparate concepts as virtue and happiness, it would be interesting to have some rational argument for this thesis, however obvious its truth appeared to Kant; is it really so obvious that the world is an unsatisfactory place if it contains a not very good man who is very happy, and that it would become less unsatisfactory if he were to be made unhappy instead? There are often, no doubt, reasons why it is expedient that the wicked should suffer for their wickedness and the virtuous be rewarded for their virtue—reasons connected with the desirability of discouraging vice and encouraging virtue; but Kant treats the connexion between virtue and happiness as self-evident, not as a matter of expediency.

We must now turn to examine the relation between the basic principle of Kant's moral philosophy and the lower-order principles, rules, and judgements which accord with this principle. The principle of universality, which we may take as our starting-point, enables us to express the categorical imperative of morality in its most abstract form: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (*Grundlegung* IV 421). Kant's systematic exposition of the various different types of moral prescription or duty as exemplifications of this formula is found in the *Metaphysic of Morals*. Some important remarks on this subject, however, are to be found in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and, more especially, in the *Grundlegung*, and these deserve some preliminary attention.

It is easy, Kant says at one point in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, to distinguish the formal quality of a maxim which makes it suitable or unsuitable as the case may be for universal lawgiving. Suppose I have in my possession some property which has been deposited with me by its owner, who has subsequently died without leaving any record or informing anyone else of it; and suppose that I have adopted the maxim (the personal, subjective rule of conduct) of increasing my property by every safe means.

Now I want to know whether this maxim can hold also as a universal practical law. I apply it, therefore, to the present case and ask if it could take the form of a law, and consequently whether I could, by the maxim, make the law that every

man is allowed to deny that a deposit has been made when no one can prove the contrary. I immediately realize that taking such a principle as a law would annihilate itself, because its result would be that no one would make such a deposit. (KPV v 27.)

Kant does not discuss this example at any great length, and the brevity of his treatment has often led to misunderstanding. He is not, as some have suggested, putting forward a disguised form of utilitarianism; i.e. he is not saying 'If there were such a universal law, no one would make deposits of this kind; but this would be a bad or undesirable state of affairs; therefore, there should not, or could not, be such a universal law'. His point is, rather, that the man who holds on to a deposit in such circumstances is behaving irrationally because (i) if his own maxim is to be a rational one, it must be possible to will a universal law that everyone should act in the same way and (ii) a universal law to the effect that everyone may deny that a deposit has been made when there is no record of it would not serve the purpose it is intended to serve (*viz.* that of safely enriching the agent), for if there were such a law, deposits of this kind would never be made. No one would perform an immoral act of this kind if he did not think that he would gain some advantage from it; but the universal permissibility of the act would ensure that the hoped-for advantage would never result.

The other moral examples in the second *Critique* receive equally cursory treatment, though there is one feature which requires mention. Instead of asking whether a certain maxim could hold as a universal law, Kant now asks whether it could hold as a universal law of nature. The addition of the reference to nature does not affect the general principles of his argument; the law of nature is regarded as a type or analogue of the moral law, and its introduction serves the purpose of making the relevant question (Could one will that this maxim should become a universal law?) easier to answer, because we now have something more concrete to consider.

The rule of judgement under laws of pure practical reason is: Ask yourself whether, if the action which you propose should take place by a law of nature of which you were yourself a part, you could regard it as possible through your will. Everyone does, in fact, decide by this rule whether actions are morally good or bad. Thus people ask: If one belonged to such an order of things that anyone would allow himself to deceive when he thought it to his advantage, or felt justified in shortening his life as soon as he was thoroughly weary of it, or looked with complete indifference on the needs of others, would he assent of his own will to being a member of such an order of things? (KPV v 69.)

It is clear, Kant thinks, that a negative answer would have to be given in all three cases. Truthfulness is morally required of us for a reason similar to that offered in the deposit example; suicide through weariness of life is wrong because no permanent natural order could be constituted in which any member was entitled to put an arbitrary end to his life; and no system would be tolerable to reason in which individual members needed, but could not rely on receiving, help from others. Since there is scarcely anything here in the way of argument, there is no point in discussing the moral examples of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in any further detail.

There is something to be said, however, about the examples in the *Grundlegung*, where the discussion is rather less sketchy and a good deal more systematic. The system, however, according to which various types of duty are divided is not one to which Kant attaches any great importance; he says that he will reserve his method of classifying duties for the *Metaphysic of Morals*, which had yet to be written, and this later method differs in some respects, as we shall see, from the provisional one of the *Grundlegung*. Following a twofold distinction, that between duties to oneself and duties to others, and that between perfect<sup>1</sup> and imperfect duties, Kant discusses four examples. The first is of a perfect duty to oneself. A man contemplating suicide as a result of great misfortune asks himself whether his maxim ('From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure') can become a universal law of nature. The answer, Kant says, is clearly that it cannot; for a contradiction would arise if in one system of nature the feeling (self-love) whose function it is to prolong and preserve life were at the same time to promote its destruction. The second example is of a perfect duty to others. A man in need of money wonders whether to borrow some on a promise (which he knows he will not be able to keep) to pay it back within a certain time. His maxim ('Whenever I believe myself short of money, I will borrow money and promise to pay it back, though I know that this will never be done') cannot become a universal law of nature, for it would, if put in universal form, contradict itself.

For the universality of a law that everyone believing himself to be in need can make any promise he pleases with the intention of breaking it would make

<sup>1</sup> A perfect duty, unlike an imperfect one, allows of no exceptions in the interests of inclination. It is my duty to keep all my promises, whatever I may feel like doing; but since I cannot develop all my talents or help every man in distress, I have some latitude in deciding which talents to develop and which men to help.

promising, and the very purpose of promising, itself impossible, since no one would believe he was being promised anything, but would laugh at utterances of this kind as empty shams. (*Grundlegung* IV 422.)

The third and fourth examples (of imperfect duty to oneself and to others, respectively) differ in an important respect from the first two. There the notion that a law of nature which embodied the universalized form of the relevant maxim could exist was said to involve a contradiction: now, although the maxim could exist as a universal law of nature, it is impossible for anyone to will its existence. Suppose, in the third example, a man who is reluctant to take the trouble necessary to develop some useful talent which he possesses, and who prefers a life of pleasure. A system of nature based on the universalization of the maxim of neglecting one's natural gifts would not be self-defeating nor, by itself, give rise to any self-contradiction; nevertheless it is not a possible object of a rational will. Such a man

sees that a system of nature could indeed always subsist under such a universal law. . . . Only he cannot possibly *will* that this should become a universal law of nature or should be implanted in us as such a law by a natural instinct. For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all his powers should be developed, since they serve him, and are given him, for possible ends of all kinds. (*Grundlegung* IV 423.)

Fourthly and finally, a man wonders whether it is not morally permissible to refrain from helping others who are in need or distress, as long as he does not, inconsistently, demand help from others. A state of affairs in which no one helped anyone else is theoretically possible, but it is impossible to will that a universal law of nature should exist according to which no help was ever given to people in need;

for a will which decided in this way would be at variance with itself, since many a situation might arise in which the man needed love and sympathy from others, and in which, by such a law of nature sprung from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the help he wants for himself. (*Grundlegung* IV 423.)

This last is not intended by Kant as a prudential argument. He is not saying that a man had better help others in need in order that he may receive help from them in his turn, but that it is inconsistent and irrational to refuse to help others if you are going sooner or later to need and expect help from them.

In general, Kant notes as an addendum to his discussion of these four examples, a man who wills or acts wrongly does not will that his morally bad maxim should become a universal law, but that the universal moral

law should remain in force while he, exceptionally, is allowed to transgress it; moral wrongdoing implies a contradiction or inconsistency in the will of the wrongdoer.

Kant proceeds to restate his objections to the moral wrongdoing illustrated in his examples in a number of different ways: the categorical imperative which prescribes conduct according to maxims which can at the same time be willed as universal laws of nature can also be formulated as prescribing that we treat humanity, whether in our own person or in that of others, always as an end, and never simply as a means, and this leads Kant to the concept of a kingdom of ends—a society of rational beings each obeying a common law, but a law which he has imposed on himself, in accordance with the principle of autonomy.

Because the *Grundlegung* has always been one of Kant's most frequently studied works (partly, no doubt, because of its brevity), there has been a regrettable tendency to treat it as containing everything, or almost everything, of importance that Kant wished to say about moral philosophy, apart from the highly abstruse epistemological theses of the *Critique of Practical Reason* itself. This approach is explicitly contradicted by Kant himself in the preface to the *Grundlegung*, where he discusses the purpose of the work quite clearly and unambiguously. He is not yet ready, he says (IV 391), to proceed to a full Critique of Practical Reason, which would 'show the unity of practical and theoretical reason in a common principle'; on the other hand, he is not writing a Metaphysic of Morals, but is discussing only the foundations for such an enterprise. He is not saying everything he has to say about the relation between the fundamental principle of morality and particular, lower-order, moral principles; and the concrete examples which we have discussed are examples designed to explain the meaning of the fundamental principle rather than part of a systematic attempt to explain the working-out of that principle in moral practice. This systematic attempt is reserved for the *Metaphysic of Morals*.

Before we consider this work, however, two points arise out of what Kant has said so far. The first concerns his suggestion that a great deal of moral wrongdoing involves the agent in an attempt to make an exception in his own interest to a rule which, as applied to other agents, he accepts. This is no doubt true; but Kant seems to exaggerate the scope and importance of this kind of inconsistency. A man who refuses to help others when they are in need acts irrationally and inconsistently, he holds, because there will inevitably be occasions on which he will need help from others, and yet the universal adoption of his way of acting

would deprive him of this help. In other words, such a man does not really accept a world in which no one received help when he needed it; what happens is that he accepts the general principle that men should help one another but fails to live up to it himself. Now although behaviour of this kind is admittedly inconsistent and wrong, the reduction of a refusal to help those in need to a formal inconsistency is, to say the least, an oversimplification. It can hardly be maintained that this is the only reason why we ought to help others, even if it is one reason. For one thing, if Kant were right, no one would be morally obliged to give more help than he expects to receive from others; and if there were, *per impossibile*, a man who needed no help, Kant would have to admit that he had no duty to help others—but if suffering and death are evils, as they are held to be by moralists of all kinds, it is hard to see why everyone should not have some obligation to reduce or remove them, however invulnerable he might be himself.

The second point concerns Kant's deliberate concentration on formal elements in such cases as the deposit and the false promise. One could without much difficulty construct examples formally parallel to Kant's which would lead to moral conclusions of a paradoxical kind. If it can be shown on purely formal grounds that it is wrong to break a promise for reasons of pleasure or convenience, or to make a promise one does not intend to keep, then it can likewise be shown that it is wrong to fail for the same reasons to fulfil a threat or to make a threat one does not intend to carry out. Yet it is by no means obvious that it is always wrong to act in either of these ways; but the difference between threats and promises, which leads naturally to our drawing different moral conclusions in the two cases, is not, in the Kantian sense, a formal difference at all. What Kant seems to overlook in his treatment of the false promise example is that the keeping of a promise is normally of benefit either to the promisee or to someone in whose welfare the promisee is interested. Making a promise which one does not intend to keep may involve some kind of contradiction or inconsistency in the will, as Kant maintains; but it is morally wrong partly, at least, because it leads the promisee to expect some benefit, direct or indirect, which the promisor has in fact no intention of providing. If the expectation were of a harmful or neutral action, the morality of the situation would be quite different.

The *Metaphysic of Morals*, although it was envisaged by Kant when he wrote the *Grundlegung*, was not written until much later (it was published in 1797, when he was seventy-three). It is in some ways an unsatisfactory work, and the fact that it is a composition of Kant's old age may help in part at least to explain why. He had for some time

been complaining in letters to his friends that he was feeling his age and was no longer as capable as he had been of engaging in difficult abstract thought. We might well expect to find, and indeed we clearly do find, some signs of this deterioration in the *Metaphysic of Morals* and other works of this period. Because of this, my treatment of the work will contain a somewhat higher proportion of criticism than is to be found elsewhere in this book; most of this criticism, however, is made as far as possible from within Kant's own general philosophical position. Purely external criticism I have tried here, as elsewhere, to avoid.

The *Metaphysic of Morals* is divided into two parts, the '*Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre*' ('Metaphysical Elements of Justice') and the '*Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre*' ('Metaphysical Elements of Virtue'). It is a work of metaphysics, in Kant's own sense of the word; that is, it is not speculative metaphysics but attempts to explain and establish the principles of morality by a priori methods, without drawing on any empirical knowledge of human nature (which Kant calls 'anthropology'). There is a parallel here, to which Kant himself calls attention, with his earlier *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (published in 1786), which dealt with the a priori principles of physics, i.e. with principles which are not tested or testable by the experiments of scientists but which are presupposed by all scientific observation and thinking. These metaphysical essays form a halfway house, so to speak, between empirical generalizations about the behaviour of matter or the conduct of human beings on the one hand and the examination of the functions and limitations of reason which we find in the first two *Critiques* on the other.

It is not, on the whole, Kant's purpose in the *Metaphysic of Morals* to give reasoned advice to his readers as to how they ought to live, even though he cannot resist talking on occasions as if it were; his considered view is that the ordinary well-intentioned man knows quite well without the aid of philosophy what he ought to do. His is not an applied ethics in the sense of a manual of moral precepts; he sometimes lists casuistical questions, but rarely answers them. His main purpose is to establish the a priori principles of morality which apply, not merely in the abstract to all rational beings qua rational, but to all men as men. For their detailed application these principles require a systematic study of human nature (anthropology), although they cannot themselves be derived from anthropological sources. The application of moral principles which can be discussed in the *Metaphysic of Morals* is of a general kind, and does not take into account any racial, national, or individual differences between men.

Both parts of the *Metaphysic of Morals* are concerned with what Kant calls laws of freedom (as opposed to laws of nature, which determine the behaviour of physical objects); these are moral laws which prescribe the use man ought to make of his freedom of choice.

In so far as they [moral laws] are directed to mere external actions and their legality (*Gesetzmässigkeit*), they are called juridical (*juridisch*) but when, in addition, they demand that these laws be the determining grounds of actions, then they are ethical (*ethisch*). Accordingly we say: agreement with juridical laws constitutes the legality (*Legalität*) of action, whereas agreement with ethical ones constitutes its morality (*Moralität*). (MdS VI 214.)

The English word 'legality' is liable to mislead here, suggesting as it does conformity with the law of the land; Kant, however, means conformity with the moral law, and the distinction between *Legalität* or *Gesetzmässigkeit* on the one hand and *Moralität* on the other is a more technical-sounding version of that, already familiar to readers of the *Grundlegung*, between action in accordance with duty and action from duty (between action that is correct according to the rules of morality and action which is performed with respect for those rules as its motive). The first part of the distinction is concerned with the question Is action X right or wrong, just or unjust? and an action, in Kant's view, can be right or wrong whatever its motive or maxim may have been. I am acting rightly or justly when I repay a debt, even if I repay it only in the hope that my creditor, whom I hate, will drink himself to death on whisky bought with the money; and I am acting wrongly or unjustly if I refrain from paying the debt on the agreed date through forgetfulness or in the genuine belief that repayment was not due for another month—i.e. it is not necessary that I should intend to neglect a duty of justice before I can properly be held to have neglected it. The second part of the distinction is concerned with the question Was action Y performed from a moral motive (i.e. Does it have moral worth in addition to being morally right or just?)? Kant is reluctant to accept the possibility that an act which was performed simply because the agent believed it was his duty to perform it might nevertheless be morally wrong or unjust; but it is clearly possible, even on his own principles—for a man who is trying to obey for its own sake the legal, as opposed to the ethical, version of the Categorical Imperative ('Act externally in such a way that the free use of your will is compatible with the freedom of everyone according to a universal law' (MdS VI 231)) may believe that his action is thus compatible when in fact it is not. The application of the Categorical Imperative, Kant tells us (*Grundlegung* IV 389), requires the use of judgement in addition to a knowledge of the



law itself, and one's judgement may err without thereby rendering one any less conscientious.

A surprising feature of the *Metaphysic of Morals* is that in spite of the way in which Kant formulates the division between the two parts of the work, the actual contents of the two parts are arranged quite differently. What we should expect from the preliminary sections is that the first part would discuss the meaning and justification of such rules as 'It is wrong to break promises' or 'We have a duty to help any of our fellow men who are in need', and that the second would discuss the nature of acting from duty (making the moral law one's motive) and explain how this could happen. These expectations are, however, unfulfilled in two major respects: first, the *Rechtslehre* is devoted almost entirely to the philosophy of law, and in particular to a discussion of the nature of legislative authority and the difference between just and unjust laws, and secondly, duties of justice are distinguished from duties of virtue, and the latter are said to belong to the *Tugendlehre* only. The first of these apparent anomalies is understandable up to a point, since the justice or injustice of a law or a legal system is one aspect of justice or injustice in general. Kant does, however, tend to lose sight of the general in his concern for the particular; perhaps because he begins by distinguishing duties of justice from duties of virtue by saying that the former, unlike the latter, admit of external legislation and compulsion, and fails, temporarily at least, to see that there may be many actions which a man can, in principle, be compelled to perform or refrain from performing, but which it is not necessarily right that he should be compelled to perform or not perform. I can be compelled by threat of punishment to keep a promise which I should otherwise break; but this does not mean that the duty of promise-keeping belongs to anything that can properly be called jurisprudence (the duty of fulfilling contracts, as opposed to promises, perhaps does, but that is quite a different matter). The class of just positive laws and the class of valid laws or rules of moral justice do not coincide, as Kant makes them do.

Duties of justice can, and duties of virtue cannot, be the subject of external legislation because the former require the performance of specific actions for their fulfilment, whereas the latter merely require us to adopt an end, and do not prescribe the precise actions we must perform in our pursuit of that end. It follows, Kant thinks, that ethical laws prescribe maxims for action rather than actions and that ethical duty must be conceived as wide, not narrow, duty—as what Kant in the *Grundlegung*, following contemporary terminology, had called duty of

imperfect, as opposed to perfect, obligation, i.e. as duty which allows a certain freedom of choice to the agent who sets himself to fulfil it. If it is a question of fulfilling my duty to pay a debt by a certain date, I have no option, and the money must be paid on the date in question; but if it is a question of fulfilling my duty to help my fellow men in distress, I have some choice as to which of my fellow men I should help and how I should help them. Narrow duties always take precedence, for Kant, over wide ones.

Now the meaning of the question whether the fulfilment of a duty can be the object of external legislation is not altogether clear; but what Kant seems to have in mind is not merely the question whether there can be a rule prescribing or forbidding an action or a maxim, but also the question whether such a rule can in principle be backed by effective threats (the notion of a law for Kant includes the notion of an incentive to obey a rule as well as that of the rule itself). And of course, to the extent that threats do influence a man's action, he is not acting from a purely moral motive; in other words, a legislator or sovereign cannot say to one of his subjects 'You had better pay your debts from a sense of duty, because if you do not I will put you in prison' (or rather, he cannot sensibly say it in the expectation that the threat or warning will be heeded), whereas he can say 'You had better pay your debts, because if you do not I will put you in prison'.

Suppose then that we allow, for the sake of argument at least, that a legislator cannot prescribe duties of virtue, as opposed to duties of justice, if this means that he can prescribe actions only and not maxims. Why should it follow that he cannot prescribe wide, as opposed to narrow, duties? Why, in other words, cannot wide duties be duties to perform certain kinds of action (even if the decision as to what precise action is required admits of a certain latitude), rather than duties to act on certain maxims? Kant recognizes that there are some duties which cannot plausibly be expressed in the form of universal rules of action; it is absurd to say to a man 'Develop all your talents' or 'Help all men in distress' if he has more talents than he can develop or if there are more people in distress than he can help. (It makes some sense, on the other hand, to say 'Keep all your promises', for even if a man finds on occasion that he cannot keep all the promises he has made, at least the making of them was under his control—though even here it might unfortunately prove impossible to keep one promise without breaking another, a situation which, as far as I know, Kant fails to recognize—and it makes perfectly good sense to say 'Tell the truth to all men', as long as this is taken

to mean not 'Tell all the facts you know to everyone you meet', but simply 'Do not tell lies to anyone'.) But it is a mistake to conclude from this that there are no occasions on which our wide duty is uniquely determined. The good Samaritan's maxim of helping people in distress (if we may assume, for the sake of the illustration, that this was his maxim) required him to help the man who had fallen among thieves, as long as he was not under any more stringent obligation which conflicted with this one; that is, it required him to help one particular man, and did not entitle him to pass by on the other side merely because there might possibly be other men in distress somewhere else whom he would prefer to help. In general, the fact that one has some freedom of choice in the fulfilling of wide duties does not mean that one's freedom is unlimited. For the same reason, Kant is clearly wrong, or at least in conflict with most enlightened moral opinion, in supposing that narrow duties must always take precedence over wide ones. The fact that the latter admit of an element of choice does not make them necessarily less important or less stringent. A doctor may suddenly be faced with twenty seriously injured people and may have to choose, somehow, which of them he is to treat first; he has some sort of option here, but he cannot refuse to treat any of them on the ground that he has promised to buy his wife a pair of nylon stockings before the shops shut. In other words the fulfilment of a strict or narrow duty is sometimes relatively trivial, and the fulfilment of a wide one (and by 'fulfilment' here I mean the performance of a specific action) is sometimes of the greatest moral urgency and importance. Kant's own moral sensibility or judgement seems never to have grasped this somewhat elementary point, and some of the deficiencies of his classification of duties spring from this failure.

An important feature of Kant's distinction between duties of justice and duties of virtue is, as we have seen, that the former prescribe actions, the latter ends or maxims of action.<sup>1</sup> The two 'ends which are also duties', to use Kant's own phraseology, are one's own perfection<sup>2</sup> and the happiness of others. He relates this distinction to that between duties to oneself and duties to others, and his use of this latter distinction has some puzzling features. It is quite characteristic, of course, of Kant's mature philosophical style to use existing classificatory terminology, either that of ordinary language or that of his philosophical predecessors, to refer

<sup>1</sup> In the *Metaphysic of Morals* the 'Rechtslehre' precedes the 'Tugendlehre'; in order to preserve continuity of exposition, I have here reversed the order of treatment.

<sup>2</sup> By 'perfection' here Kant means the development of a man's natural capacities, especially his intellectual and moral powers.

to a somewhat different classification of his own; and it is usually pointless, therefore, to look for elucidation of his terminology in earlier uses of the same words or expressions. Whatever Kant means by 'duties to oneself' it is clearly not what is ordinarily meant by the expression nor, as far as I know, what his philosophical predecessors meant by it; it does not mean a kind of duty to look after one's own interests or to follow one's own wishes (as in 'In making up his mind whether to work less hard and devote more time to recreation, he ought to consider his duty to himself as well as his duty to his employers'). A man has duties to himself, according to Kant, to the extent that he binds or necessitates himself; the law which binds him proceeds from his own practical reason, that is from his own will. But since all our moral duties, according to Kant, are in some sense self-imposed (for otherwise they would not be consistent with the principle of autonomy), how does this leave room for the existence of duties to others? My duty to anyone, whether myself or another, is moral necessitation by the rational will of that person. Philanthropic or benevolent or sympathetic conduct is required of us because of the requirement of respect for humanity in the person of others; and the principle of one's own perfection forms the basis of duty to oneself because of the requirement of respect for humanity in one's own person.<sup>1</sup>

There are two major difficulties in this account, the first concerning the classification itself, and the second the way in which Kant makes use of it. For all Kant's attempts to elucidate the notion in a literal way, it seems clear that much at least of what he says about duties to oneself is metaphorical, and parasitic on the notion of duties to others. He supports his claim that there are duties to oneself by reference to ordinary usage: 'Thus when it is a question, for example, of vindicating my honour or of preserving myself, I say "I owe it to myself". Even in what concerns duties of less importance . . . I speak in the same way: for example, "I owe it to myself to increase my aptitude for social intercourse and so forth"' (MdS VI 417n.). But 'I owe it to myself' makes sense, if at all, only as a metaphor derived from 'I owe it to others'; and the same can be said of other similar contrasts, for example that between respecting the rights of others and respecting one's own rights (or, as Kant puts it, respecting the rights of humanity in the person of others and in one's own person)—it is not literally possible either to respect or

<sup>1</sup> I can have no duties to animals, Kant thinks, because animals have no wills; nor can I have duties to super-human beings such as God or angels, for they are not possible objects of my experience—we can have duties with regard to animals or God, but these are still duties to ourselves.

to transgress one's own rights, as it is to respect or to transgress the rights of others.

The second difficulty is that, whatever one may think of the nature of Kant's distinction between duties to oneself and duties to others, the first of his two categories contains some surprising members. One would think that a paradigm case of a duty to others would be the duty of truth-telling; if I tell a lie without justification (Kant did not, in fact, believe that there could be any justification for lying), then I do not merely act wrongly, I act wrongly towards the person to whom I tell the lie, and he has a right to complain about my conduct. Yet, for Kant, lying is a violation of duty to oneself, indeed the most serious of such violations. Lying is accompanied by dishonour in the eyes of others, and by shame in one's own: 'By a lie a man throws away and, as it were, annihilates his dignity as a man. A man who himself does not believe what he tells another . . . has even less worth than if he were a mere thing' (MdS VI 428). (The argument seems to be that a thing has some use, whereas a man, to the extent that he is lying, is of no use to anyone; but what if he is lying in order to help someone else? Would his lying not be useful, even if it was wrong?) One of the objections to this passage is obvious, namely that Kant is dogmatically putting forward a strong personal opinion concerning a moral issue as though it were a reasoned philosophical principle—a practice which is regrettably common in the *Metaphysic of Morals* and of which many more examples could be given. Kant is apt throughout this work to forget his own insistence that moral feeling should be subordinate to the thought of the moral law, and that it is for the judgement of reason to validate or criticize feeling, not for feeling to support or oppose reason. Many of the moral rules which Kant claims to derive from his metaphysical principles are not validly derived; and with many of them, indeed, there is hardly any attempt at reasoned derivation. A second objection is more specific, and concerns Kant's use of the concept of self-respect, which is central to his treatment of duties to oneself. Whatever the purpose for which a man tells a lie, Kant says, his decision to use this way of achieving his end 'is, by its mere form, a wrong to his own person and a baseness which must make him contemptible in his own eyes' (MdS VI 428). Now in spite of this dogmatic insistence that lying must make a man contemptible in his own eyes, it is clear that sometimes, with some men, it does not have this effect. There is, however, a more serious objection than this disregard of plain fact. What Kant overlooks is that, to the extent that one's moral judging is rational (and Kant's, above all, claims to be this) one's feeling of shame or loss of self-respect is a valid

indication that one has acted wrongly only if the action of which one is ashamed is wrong antecedently to the fact that one is ashamed of it. I may feel ashamed of lying if I think that I ought not to have lied, and lying is, of course, in general wrong; but the fact that one feels ashamed of an action is not conclusive evidence that it was wrong. For it is quite possible to feel ashamed of actions which are not wrong, but which one has been led or trained to believe wrong; a young man who has been brought up as a strict teetotaler may feel ashamed after he has drunk his first pint of beer, but he has not done anything to be ashamed of. Whatever, then, may be the reason why lying is wrong, it cannot be because it evinces lack of self-respect or because a man feels ashamed after he has told a lie.

Kant could perhaps retort that he is not relying on the concepts of shame or self-respect alone; for there is, he thinks, a further reason why the man whose conduct makes him ashamed or fails to evince self-respect is acting improperly. 'Man as a moral being (*homo noumenon*) cannot use his natural being (*homo phaenomenon*) as a mere means (a speaking machine), as if it were not bound to its intrinsic end (the communication of thought)' (MdS VI 429). In other words, lying is wrong because the liar is using one of his natural capacities in a way or for a purpose contrary to that assigned to it by nature. And Kant uses teleological or purposive arguments of this kind in many other contexts besides that of lying: it is wrong, for example, to commit suicide because this is 'to abase humanity in one's own person, which was yet entrusted to man for its preservation' (MdS VI 422), and beneficence towards the needy is a duty 'because men are to be considered fellow-men—that is, rational beings with needs, united by nature in one dwelling-place for the purpose of helping one another' (MdS VI 452). Now the argument that, because some capacity has been given us by nature for a certain purpose, it is wrong either to use it for a different purpose which conflicts with the first one or not to use it at all is in itself a dubious moral argument; it is not clear how the original claim of the purposiveness of nature could be substantiated nor, if it could, how it could be proved that the thwarting of this purposiveness is morally wrong without first substantiating the moral claim which is supposed to follow from its being thwarted. And Kant certainly provides no argument to show that either of these things is possible. But the argument is not only dubious and question-begging in itself, it is also at variance with two of Kant's own most fundamental philosophical theses, the principle of autonomy and the view that the purposiveness of nature is a regulative, and not a constitutive, principle

of reason. If some faculty or capacity has been given me by nature, or by God, or anyone else for a particular purpose, it cannot for this reason alone be my duty to use it for this purpose and no other; for if it could, my will would then be subordinate to the will of God or to the 'will' of nature—that is, it would cease to be autonomous and thus cease to be a moral will. As to the purposiveness of nature, it is, as we shall see,<sup>1</sup> one of the most important theses of the *Critique of Judgement* that the attribution of purpose, in some sense of the word, to nature is not to be taken as an objective fact about nature, but as an assumption which we, because of the limitations of our human intellects, must make if we are to achieve any scientific understanding of nature, and in particular of plant and animal life. It is still conceivable, Kant thinks, that a superhuman understanding could explain the whole of nature as a product of straightforward causal laws.

When teleology is applied to physics, we speak with perfect justice of the wisdom, the economy, the forethought, the beneficence of nature. But in so doing we do not convert nature into an intelligent being, for that would be absurd; but neither do we dare to think of placing another being, one that is intelligent, above nature as its architect, for that would be presumptuous. On the contrary our only intention is to designate in this way a kind of natural causality on an analogy with our own causality in the technical employment of reason, for the purpose of keeping in view the rule upon which certain natural products are to be investigated. (KU v 383.)

We cannot assert that nature *is* purposive, although we cannot understand nature unless we investigate her as if she were. But no moral conclusions can be validly derived from an 'as if' proposition of this kind.

It might be thought that the morally irrelevant introduction of the concept of objective purposiveness is an accidental excrescence, as it were, and that the same moral point might have been made in a less objectionable way; but the difficulty is not so easily resolved. We might, admittedly, doubt the objectivity of the statement that the purpose of the heart is to circulate blood through the body, and yet be content with the plain statement that if the heart stops beating the blood stops circulating. But from an analogous translation of statements about the purpose of nature in giving man his various instincts and capacities, the required moral conclusions do not follow. Instead, for example, of saying, with Kant, that man has been given the power of speech for the purpose of communicating his thoughts, and that the use of it to conceal his thoughts or to deceive is therefore wrong, we could say only that if all men tell lies

<sup>1</sup> See especially pp. 112–18 below.

indiscriminately they will not be able to communicate their thoughts; but even if this is true, no moral conclusion to the wrongness of lying follows unless we assume that the communication of thoughts is a good thing, and the impossibility of communication bad. All Kant's statements, in fact, to the effect that man has been given this or that capacity for this or that purpose are disguised ways of saying or implying that the purposes in question are good; and the goodness of these purposes must be proved, not assumed, if the moral conclusion is to be rational.

The field of jurisprudence, or the science of right or justice,<sup>1</sup> which is the topic of the first part of the *Metaphysic of Morals* but about which little has so far been said, consists in all those laws which can be enacted as external legislation, that is as laws which prescribe actions, as opposed to maxims for action. A man is morally good to the extent that his will is good, even if on occasion his good will fails, through no fault of his own, to translate itself into action; but jurisprudence or the science of right is concerned with laws which require certain things to be done—a morally good intention is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the lawfulness of an action, even though it may be so for its morality. The laws of jurisprudence are nevertheless still laws of freedom; that is, they concern behaviour only in so far as it is free and under the control of the agent. In referring to laws of this kind Kant is not, of course, speaking of the actual positive laws of any existing state; he is referring to conditions which such positive laws must fulfil if they are to deserve the name of law instead, for example, of being merely arbitrary instructions of a tyrant or of a despotic government.

The fundamental universal principle of justice, Kant thinks, can be derived from three simple considerations. First, justice is concerned with those relationships in which one man can, by his conduct, influence the well-being or, in general, the condition, of another; a man can be just or unjust only in his behaviour to others. Secondly, the concept of justice has nothing to do with the relation between the will of one man and the wishes or needs of another (i.e. laws of justice do not prescribe acts of benevolence or charity), but concerns only a relation between one man's will and the will of another. It concerns, in short, those intentional actions which may affect the power of others to act according to their choice. Thirdly, justice concerns only the form of the will, not its matter;

<sup>1</sup> There is no exact English equivalent of the German noun *Recht*; it means something like justice or right or law in the abstract, and must be distinguished from *Gesetz*, which refers to a concrete, enacted law.



in assessing whether an action is just or unjust we ignore such questions as whether it will help the agent to achieve some objective of his, such as personal profit, and inquire only into its formal properties. Justice then, Kant concludes, is the sum total of the conditions under which one person's will can be united with another's under a universal law of freedom; and the universal law of justice, corresponding to the Categorical Imperative of morality, is 'Act externally in such a way that the free use of your will' is compatible with the freedom of everyone according to a universal law' (MdS VI 231). Kant insists that, although this is the fundamental principle of justice, justice itself does not require that we adopt it as a maxim. As long as I do not in fact infringe a man's freedom, it is not unjust of me to be indifferent to his freedom or even to desire to infringe it; these last attitudes, as indications of volition not expressed in outward behaviour, may well be morally wrong, but they are not unjust.

Since injustice is the arbitrary imposing of constraints on the freedom of another, constraint is legitimate, in Kant's view, in order to prevent unjust acts; men may be compelled to act justly because it is legitimate to prevent hindrances to freedom. Hence a universal law which at once prescribes rules of justice and lays down sanctions against their non-observance is a law which promotes, rather than destroys or limits, freedom.

When it is said that a creditor has a right to demand from his debtor the payment of a debt, this does not mean that he can persuade the debtor that his own reason itself obligates him to this performance; on the contrary, to say that he has such a right means only that the use of coercion to make anyone do this is entirely compatible with everyone's freedom, including the freedom of the debtor, in accordance with universal laws. (MdS VI 232.)

Freedom is thus man's sole innate right, a right which belongs to him solely in virtue of his humanity. (The right to equality is not, as some have thought, an independent basic human right, but is derivable from

<sup>1</sup> In his latest writings on moral questions Kant introduces a technical distinction which is not found in the *Critique of Practical Reason* or the *Grundlegung*, that between *Wille* and *Willkür*. The distinction is not easy to render in translation, since 'will' is usually the nearest English equivalent for both. *Wille* is the rational will, practical reason, regarded as the source of laws of freedom, both ethical and legal: *Willkür* is the individual will, regarded as the author or source of each particular choice or act of volition. *Wille* is neither free nor unfree, since it issues in laws, not actions: *Willkür* is free or unfree according as it is immune from, or subject to, constraint (cf. MdS VI 226). Hence 'will', in such passages as the present one, always translates *Willkür*, not *Wille*.

the right to freedom; it is equivalent to the right not to be constrained by others to a greater extent than that to which one is entitled to constrain them.)

Law has two divisions, private and public. Kant does not say much about private law, but some of his remarks are important. They are mostly concerned with the concept of property. The distinction between having an object in one's physical possession and being the legal owner of it is linked with the distinction between phenomena and noumena. It is an empirical question whether a particular object is in my physical possession or not; the question can be answered by looking to see whether the object is in my hands, or on my person, or in my house or, in general, in some sufficiently close physical relationship to myself, and possession of this kind is called by Kant *possessio phaenomenon*. Legal ownership cannot be tested in this way, however, for a thing may be in my physical possession even if I do not own it, and vice versa; an object is mine legally if it is so connected with me that anyone who uses it without my consent thereby does me an injury. Legal ownership, since it can only be defined by means of a rational concept (the concept of injury or injustice), is called *possessio noumenon* or intelligible possession.

Legal ownership ('an external mine and thine') can exist, Kant insists, only in civil society. The mere declaration that something is mine cannot make it mine by right; for my legal ownership of something implies an obligation on others to refrain from using it without my consent, and no mere fiat of mine can create such an obligation—any attempt to impose such a fiat would be an arbitrary and therefore unjust interference with their freedom. If we do speak of a man's property rights in a state of nature, Kant says, these rights must be thought of as provisional and as subject to the presumption that they will eventually be confirmed by the entry of the individuals concerned into a civil society.

Public law concerns the laws that must be promulgated and enforced in a civil society or group of such societies; in the first case it is municipal law (*Staatsrecht*), in the second international law (*Völkerrecht*). The law of a state must spring from a will which is thought of as the collective will of the community; legislative power thus belongs to the people. This does not mean, however, that all members of a state have full voting and deliberative rights. A subject is not qualified to be a citizen in the fullest sense (an active as opposed to a passive citizen, to use Kant's terminology) if he possesses an inferior social status which denies him the right to control the behaviour of others as much as they can control his. Apprentices, private servants, women and children, and

in general all those who depend for their subsistence on their subordination to others, can be citizens in the passive sense only; independent workmen and state employees, on the other hand, are free from personal subservience and are therefore active citizens.

The woodcutter whom I employ on my estate; the smith in India who goes with his hammer, anvil, and bellows into houses to work on iron, in contrast to the European carpenter or smith, who can offer the products of his labour for public sale; the private tutor, in contrast to the schoolteacher; the sharecropper, in contrast to the farmer; and the like—all are mere underlings of the commonwealth, because they must be under the orders or protection of other individuals. Consequently, they do not possess any civil independence. (MdS VI 314-15.)

As an explanation of the politically inferior position in some existing eighteenth-century societies of those whose social status implied personal service to another, this is straightforward enough; but like other a priori arguments in the *Metaphysic of Morals* for permanent moral and legal conclusions it is too cursorily stated and makes too many assumptions to be able to fulfil its intended function. The whole argument, indeed, might be turned on its head: since existing political and social conditions make it impossible for private servants to exercise the full rights of citizenship, this indicates clearly the injustice of those conditions, which prevent the equal enjoyment of freedom which is required by the fundamental principle of justice. Nor does Kant ever explain exactly why personal subordinates of citizens cannot enjoy equal political rights with their superiors; like most of his non-philosophical contemporaries he simply takes it for granted.

The state comprises three authorities, legislative, executive, and judiciary, each of which has absolute power in its own sphere. The sovereign legislator enacts positive laws, but cannot be the ruler who enforces them, for the ruler must be subject to the laws; for the same reason, although the legislator may depose the ruler, he cannot punish him, for the right of punishment belongs to the executive power alone. One might have thought that Kant's insistence on freedom as the fundamental principle of justice would lead him to a liberal view of the relation between subjects and the political authority to which they are subjected; and so indeed, in theory, it does. He believes that titles of hereditary nobility should be abolished, for they do not represent any grading of genuine merit, and he believes that the republican form of constitution is ultimately the only just one, meaning by 'republican' a constitution in which the people are in the protection of the people—

i.e. in which the people, through its representatives or deputies, is the sovereign legislating body. But where reality falls short of this republican ideal, as it does in almost, if not quite, all existing states, no forcible overthrow of non-republican power, however tyrannically that power is exercised, is permissible. Kant sympathized strongly with the moral principles which he thought were embodied in the French Revolution, or at least in those aspects of it which were opposed to arbitrary and tyrannical government, but he disapproved strongly of its violent methods. He even goes so far as to say that the origin of the supreme political authority is not open to scrutiny by those over whom it is exercised. His argument for this apparently illiberal thesis is curiously abstract: 'In order for the people to be able to judge the supreme political authority with the force of law, it must already be viewed as united under a general legislative will (*Wille*); hence it can and may not judge otherwise than the present chief of state wills' (MdS VI 318). If it were not for the legislative authority, the people would not be a people; hence it cannot legitimately challenge that authority. Illegal resistance to legislation destroys the whole political and legal constitution; for there would be a self-contradiction in any attempt to provide for the right to such resistance in the constitution. But from the fact that it would be self-contradictory for a constitution to permit unconstitutional resistance to it, Kant's conclusion to the inevitable wrongness of rebellion does not follow. If authority is being exercised with great iniquity and harshness, it is not clear why the ruler should be supposed to possess moral authority at all, nor to possess legal authority except in the obvious sense of authority under his own laws; and why should the subject obey these? In an appendix to the *Metaphysic of Morals* Kant replied to objections of this kind which had appeared in a review of the work; but his reply does not add much to the argument. He says that if a people (*ein Volk*) holds that it is justified in rebelling against a sovereign, this implies that it has a right to make violence instead of justice the supreme principle of law. But it might be retorted that the violence is intended as a once-for-all expedient, not as a principle, and that it is justified, or at least excused, if the activities of the sovereign have led to so much injustice and interference with personal liberty that the fundamental purpose of the state is no longer being fulfilled. No doubt revolution is justified only in extreme circumstances; but Kant's passionate insistence that it is never justified is difficult to square with his equally sincere and genuine devotion to liberty and republicanism and, as with some of the other views expressed in the *Metaphysic of Morals*, it seems more a matter of personal emotion

and commitment than the a priori truth of reason which it is supposed to be.<sup>1</sup>

Kant's views on punishment are worth noting. Legal punishment may be imposed only because the man to be punished has committed a crime; but it is a duty of the state to punish crime, not merely a right. Any departure from this strictly retributive approach is an injustice and a transgression of the rights of humanity. The rule which determines the nature and amount of punishment suitable for a particular crime is the principle of equality: if a man has inflicted undeserved harm on another, he must have a similar amount of deserved harm inflicted on him in turn, to redress the balance. Kant thus provides not merely a retributivist justification of punishment, but also a retributivist criterion for the form and degree in which it is to be inflicted. Murder requires the death penalty; there is no other punishment that could in any way equal, and thus be suited to, the crime.

Even if a civil society were to dissolve itself by common agreement of all its members . . . the last murderer remaining in prison must first be executed, so that everyone will duly receive what his actions are worth and so that the blood-guilt thereof will not be fixed on the people because they failed to insist on carrying out the punishment; for if they fail to do so, they may be regarded as accomplices in this public violation of legal justice. (MdS VI 333.)

It is not altogether clear what this notion of blood-guilt has to do with an a priori rational principle of justice—it seems to have more in common with superstition, a phenomenon against which Kant elsewhere makes strong and effective attacks. It might be that in such a situation it would be wrong to let a murderer loose if he was dangerous and likely to commit more murders, but this is not Kant's argument. He seems to pass too readily in discussions of punishment and desert from the relatively uncontroversial and plausible thesis that a man who has committed a crime may legitimately be punished to the more contentious, not to say dubious, thesis that such a man must be punished (even the sovereign's right of pardon is limited by Kant to the pardoning of crimes against himself); and again, he passes from the plausible thesis that a man may not be punished more severely for a crime than the nature of the crime warrants to the less plausible thesis that a man must receive punishment proportionate to the crime. For Kant, excessive punishment is, of course, an injustice, but it seems to be no worse an injustice than insufficient punishment or no punishment at all.

<sup>1</sup> It is hard to believe that Kant would have regarded Hitler as in any way representing a law and justice which it was an outrageous crime to resist.

Kant's discussion of international law is brief and of no particular philosophical importance. What is important in this context is the way in which he argues for international co-operation and peace, not on simple humanitarian grounds, but as a corollary of the general principles of justice which he has already established. Just as individual men are morally bound to pass out of a state of nature, in which conflict is possible, into a state of civil society, in which it is ruled out, so nations have a duty to pass out of their state of nature, in which war between them is possible, into some relationship analogous to that which joins individuals in civil society; thus and only thus can peace be permanently established. However impracticable union between states and the consequent perpetual peace may be, they are an ideal of justice which men must try to achieve as nearly as possible. In a separate essay entitled *Perpetual Peace*, which was published in 1795, Kant had already indicated some of the steps which needed to be taken towards this end, including, first, provisional articles of agreement and, then, the definitive articles; they are interesting as anticipations of such later developments as the covenant of the League of Nations and the United Nations charter. The three definitive articles are (i) the civil constitution of every state should be republican (not only because republics are preferable in themselves, but also because they are less likely to go to war than despotic states), (ii) the law of nations is to be founded on a federation of free states (since the success of such a federation would make war between its members impossible), and (iii) the law of world citizenship is to be limited to conditions of universal hospitality (the world citizen is to have the right not to be treated as an enemy when he is in a country not his own, but he does not have the right to be treated generously or benevolently, for it is a principle of justice that is in question, not a matter of philanthropy). 'As a matter of fact', Kant concludes, 'it can be said that the establishment of a universal and enduring peace is not just a part, but rather constitutes the whole, of the ultimate purpose of law within the bounds of pure reason' (MdS vi 355).

In order to complete this account of Kant's practical philosophy, we need to consider his view of the relation between morality and religion, and, in particular, his answer to the question how far and in what sense the requirements of morality may be regarded as the commands of God. He discusses this topic principally in his essay *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (Part I was published in 1792, and the remaining three parts in the following year). The key to his treatment of the subject lies

in his thesis that autonomy of the will is the fundamental principle of morality, together with his refutation of the theoretical claims of rational theology. The moral law, as we have seen, commands unconditionally; it says simply 'You must do this' or 'You must not do that', not 'You must do this if you want to achieve that'. Morality, then, does not lay down rules for the service of any interest, whether one's own or another's; it is not reducible to the fulfilment of the desires or commands of anyone—neither one's own desires or inclinations nor the desires or commands of an earthly or supernatural superior. The moral law can preserve its unconditioned character only if it is thought of as springing from the rational will of the very being on whom it is binding; a man is morally subject only to laws which as a rational being he has discovered and imposed on himself.<sup>1</sup>

The refutation of the claims of rational theology renders most of the popular philosophical attempts to connect theology and morality quite pointless. Locke had argued that it should be possible to provide a logical demonstration of moral truths, beginning with a proof of the existence of a supreme being possessing certain clearly defined attributes, and deducing from this the kind of conduct which such a being must will and command us to perform; and many attempts at demonstrations of this kind were made by eighteenth-century writers. But whatever the connexion may be between the will of God and our moral duties, if philosophy cannot demonstrate the existence of God (and, a fortiori, cannot demonstrate that there is a God who requires us to act in certain ways), a philosophical deduction of morality from theology becomes pointless; if we can have no knowledge of the theological premisses—as Kant insists we cannot—then even if we could deduce moral conclusions from them the result would be unhelpful. The fact that Kant himself produces arguments of a sort for the existence of God is beside the point; for these arguments presuppose morality, and cannot therefore be used to justify it.

It has often been held that morality is in some way incomplete without belief in God. The arguments for this view may take a number of different forms, but most of them fall under one of two classes. It may be maintained that there is something logically unsatisfactory about an assertion that one has a moral duty to act in certain ways rather than others unless the assertion can be supported by reference to the command or will of a supreme being: do not such assertions lack something needed in the way

<sup>1</sup> A corollary of this is that man needs no incentive to obey the moral law other than pure respect for the law itself; he can, and must, obey it irrespective of any consideration of his own pleasure or profit, or of the pleasure or profit of any other being.

of support or justification, and can this need be fulfilled otherwise than by their being grounded in the will of God? How in the end can we know that we ought to act in certain ways unless we are sure that God, the supreme creator and governor of the universe, requires us so to act? Alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, it is said that there is no rational motive for doing one's duty when it is more pleasant or advantageous to neglect it unless we suppose that virtue will eventually be rewarded and vice punished, in another world if not in this. Both kinds of argument are clearly inconsistent with the principle of autonomy, and so with the whole concept of morality as Kant understands it.

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty. (*Religion* VI 3, tr. p. 3.)

The belief that there is no incentive for a man to do his duty once the threat of divine punishment and the promise of divine reward are removed can be quickly rejected. No doubt there are people who refrain from misbehaving only because of such threats and promises; but their conduct is only outwardly in accordance with the moral law and, since its motive is not respect for the moral law itself, it is no proper object of human admiration or approval nor, for the same reason, will God think it worthy of reward. If we believe that God rewards the virtuous, we cannot think that He makes no distinction between those who are genuinely virtuous, doing their duty for duty's sake, and those who are led to perform externally correct acts for purely self-centred reasons. It is important, Kant holds, not to misunderstand biblical talk of rewards. 'When the Teacher of the Gospel spoke of rewards in the world to come he wished to make them thereby not an incentive to action but merely . . . an object of the purest respect and of the greatest moral approval when reason reviews human destiny in its entirety' (*Religion* VI 162, tr. p. 150). A system of divine government in which happiness is in the end enjoyed in proportion as it has been deserved by morally good conduct is indeed more rational than one in which its distribution is haphazard; but the happiness is deserved only to the extent that the thought of it was not part of the motive to action.

The more important, however, of the views which Kant is opposing is that morality needs a theological foundation before its claims can be regarded as rationally binding. The falsity of the view follows, of course,



from Kant's thesis of the autonomy of the will as the fundamental principle of morality. If the moral law is a universal law of reason imposed by a man's will on himself, and if man's capacity for obeying such a law is his only means of escaping the universal causality of the physical world, with its consequent exclusion of the free will necessary for morality, then the knowledge that God requires me to obey the moral law, though it may be emotionally effective, cannot make it more rational and more necessary for me to obey it than it was before.

Suppose then that the theological moralist tries to evade the force of this argument by denying the thesis of autonomy. Those who take this anti-Kantian position and hold that our duties are derived solely from the will or command of God may legitimately be asked whether any notion of goodness, analogous to, though not necessarily identical with, moral goodness is included in their conception of God. If it is not, and if God's will is supposed to be binding on us merely because of his omnipotence and omniscience, then, Kant argues, we are being asked to accept superstition, not religion. Mere power, apart from authority, can create no moral obligation at all. It is no defence against this objection to say that God cannot be the subject of moral attributes in precisely the same way as human beings—that God, though good in a sense, is good in a different sense. The difference, though it exists for Kant, does not affect the argument, for it consists merely in the fact that God has no inclinations or appetites which might lead him to will or act in a way contrary to reason, and that for Him therefore, unlike men, the moral law does not take the form of enjoining a duty which he must perform whether he wants to or not; the notions of duty and obligation do not apply to God, who has a holy will which inevitably wills what is good. But the principle of goodness is essentially the same for the divine as for the human will: for God, as for man, the good will is the rational will.

Suppose, then, that we assert that God is necessarily good and that this is a synthetic, not an analytic, proposition (i.e. 'good' is not defined, as it is by nominalists such as William of Ockham, as 'that which God wills'); cannot this notion of God function as a foundation of morality? Kant's reply is that any assertion that God, so understood, requires or commands us to act in certain ways needs itself to be tested by the rules of morality; in other words, morality is still the logical starting-point. 'Even though something is represented as commanded by God, through a direct manifestation of Him, yet, if it flatly contradicts morality, it cannot, despite all appearances, be of God (e.g. were a father ordered to kill his son who is, so far as he knows, perfectly innocent)' (*Religion* VI 87, tr. pp. 81-82).

The whole of revealed religion, including the Bible, needs to be interpreted with the requirements of morality firmly in mind; we must always prefer a moral interpretation to a literal one, if the latter has immoral implications. If we find, for example, as we are liable to find, especially in the Old Testament, stories which apparently allow or even approve of actions of personal revenge, we must either interpret them in such a way as to remove all reference to such approval (allegorically or symbolically, perhaps) or else we must say that the stories cannot represent the will of God, and that this part of the Bible cannot be as divinely inspired as the Church maintains it to be. Again, the inquisitor who thinks that God requires him to condemn a heretic to be burnt at the stake is at fault, even though he appears to do what he believes to be right; he *should* argue that the ill treatment of the morally innocent is morally wrong and that therefore God cannot want or require him to do it, whatever his ecclesiastical superiors or his own interpretation of the Bible may suggest to the contrary.

There is indeed, for Kant, no authoritative source of knowledge of God's will outside the moral judgement of the individual man, who must judge all purported revelations of God's commands in the light of the moral ideals prescribed to him by his own reason. His reason is able to tell him that, just as it is wrong for him to inflict undeserved suffering on another man, so, and for exactly the same reasons, it would be wrong for an all-powerful supernatural being to inflict undeserved suffering on men, and thus impossible for God, who is supremely rational and good, to do so.

Though it does indeed sound dangerous, it is in no way reprehensible to say that every man *creates a God* for himself, nay, must make himself such a God according to moral concepts. . . . For in whatever manner a being has been made known to him by another and described as God, yea, even if such a being had appeared to him (if this is possible), he must first of all compare this representation with his ideal in order to judge whether he is entitled to regard it and to honour it as a divinity. (*Religion* VI 168 n., tr. p. 157 n.)

Many erroneous views on this topic are fostered, Kant thinks, by faults in the upbringing of children; the ideal method of inculcating sound moral and religious ideas in the young, he suggests in his lectures on Education, although it is in the present state of society a practical impossibility, would be to prevent a child from hearing the word 'God' and learning the concept of a powerful creator and governor of the universe until he had first received a thorough moral training; the moral principles could then be safely transferred to the notion of the divine being. As

things are, however, children are taught to fear God's power rather than reverence his goodness, and fear rather than a genuine sense of duty becomes the motive of many of their dutiful actions. It is in any case far easier for a child to learn that an action is unjust or wrong than to learn and understand the concept of a supreme being. A little later on in the same lectures, Kant makes a more general attack on attempts to establish religion independently of moral considerations:

Religion without moral conscientiousness is a service of superstition. People want to serve God by praising Him and reverencing His power and wisdom, without thinking how to fulfil the divine law; nay, even without knowing and searching out His power, wisdom, etc. These hymn-sings are an opiate for the conscience of such people, and a pillow on which it may quietly slumber. (IX 495.)

Kant is sometimes criticized for passing uncritically from the thesis that morality is necessary to religion to the less plausible thesis that morality is sufficient; and his fondness for such remarks as 'Religion is morality applied to the knowledge of God' (*Lectures on Education* IX 494) and 'Religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands' (KPV v 129) might lend some support to this criticism. When Kant is emphasizing the moral content of religion he is inclined to give the impression that he regards God's only function as that of emphasizing the moral law and creating and preserving conditions in which those who obey it may in the end hope for happiness in proportion as they have deserved it. It is true also that he has no use for such Christian concepts as grace, salvation, and the service of God except in so far as they are given a moral interpretation: the service of God consists in leading a morally good life, not in rites and observances, and grace and salvation are earned by moral goodness and nothing else—Kant will have no truck with the doctrine of justification by faith. But although he does exclude from his concept of religion, and especially from that of the Christian religion, of which he regards himself as an adherent, much that is commonly held to belong to it, he is not as narrowly moralistic about it as some of his less cautious remarks, taken out of context, might suggest. The religious emotions of wonder and awe are not limited by him to moral objects, but are directed also to the vast spaces of the physical world; to recall the famous passage at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily they are reflected on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me' (KPV v 161). Kant has great feeling for the sublimity of nature and does not deny that a feeling of this kind can be essentially religious in form, provided that it is

joined to a respect for God's moral holiness; when this respect is absent, however, religion degenerates into superstition, and our attitude becomes simply one of dread for the powerful and dangerous forces of a nature which we do not understand and which we cannot control. Considered as mere animals we are indeed insignificant before the vastness of the physical universe; considered as men—i.e. as rational, and therefore moral, beings—we are its superiors, and the superiors of any display of mere power and might.

The man that is actually in a state of fear, finding in himself good reason to be so, because he is conscious of offending with his evil disposition against a might directed by a will at once irresistible and just, is far from being in the frame of mind for admiring divine greatness, for which a temper of calm reflection and a quite free judgement are required. Only when he becomes conscious of having a disposition that is upright and acceptable to God, do those operations of might serve to stir within him the idea of the sublimity of this Being, so far as he recognizes the existence in himself of a sublimity of disposition consonant with His will, and is thus raised above the dread of such operations of nature, in which he no longer sees God pouring forth the vials of his wrath. (KU v 263.)