

Kant's Departure from Hume's Moral Naturalism

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Abstract

This thesis considers Kant's departure from moral naturalism. In doing so, it explores the relationship between ethics, naturalism, normativity and freedom. Throughout this exploration, I build the case that Kant's ethics of autonomy allows us to make better sense of ethics than Hume's moral naturalism.

Hume believes that morality is ultimately grounded in human nature. Kant finds this understanding of ethics limiting. He insists that we are free – we can critically reflect upon our nature and (to an extent) alter it accordingly. This freedom, I contend, renders the moral naturalist's appeal to nature lacking.

Of course, a Kantian conception of freedom – some form of independence from the causal order – is fairly unpopular in contemporary circles. In particular, a commitment to naturalism casts doubt on such a notion of freedom. I argue with Kant that such a conception of freedom is essential to the conception of ourselves as rational agents. The critical turn, unlike naturalism, warrants this conception of freedom, accommodating the point of view of our rational agency. It thus allows Kant's ethics of autonomy to better grasp certain key elements of morality – normativity and our agency – than Hume's moral naturalism.

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Introduction

The concept of freedom is the stumbling block for all empiricists, but also the key to the most sublime principles for critical moralists.

(Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Preface, 12a)

Immanuel Kant develops an ethics of autonomy, where morality is essentially involving of (and in a sense just is) freedom. This insight, he claims, stands as a ‘stumbling block’ for empiricist accounts of morality. I concur. In this thesis, I seek to critically contrast Kant’s ethics of autonomy with Hume’s moral naturalism. I argue that Kant allows us to make better sense of morality than Hume.

Accordingly, much of this thesis explores the relationship between morality and naturalism. I believe this to be an important exploration. Naturalism is prevalent in contemporary (analytical) philosophy. One of the pre-eminent issues facing this philosophical tradition concerns how we are to reconcile our overall understanding of ourselves with a naturalistic world view. Much of contemporary philosophy focuses on this very issue, exploring what sense we can make of consciousness, intentionality, freedom, ethics (or indeed normativity in general) within a resolutely scientific understanding of the world.

For our present purposes, it suffices to understand naturalism as roughly the view that all phenomena can be explained as natural, i.e. that nature is the world. In this way, naturalism stands as contrary to supernaturalism and metaphysical speculation.¹ Stemming in part from the scientific revolution, a naturalistic world view has become prevalent in modern times. The world is understood to be an (efficient) causal order, governed by natural laws. All that the world contains in that case lies within the potential explanatory reach of science.

¹ It also stands opposed to the more modest position that natural science has limits. We will return to this later (chapter 3).

In these terms, naturalism (as a counterpoint to super-naturalism and wild metaphysical speculation) obviously has its merits. However, I believe there are several drawbacks to the prevalence of naturalism in contemporary (analytic) philosophy. In particular, it strikes me that a strong commitment to naturalism leaves one unable to fully make sense of ethics. In this thesis, I build a case towards this point, inquiring as to the cogency of moral naturalism.

No doubt, this is a grand topic. This issue has gathered the attention of countless philosophers, is subject to numerous debates (the ‘is-ought’ gap, the ‘fact-value’ distinction, the normative fallacy) and has given rise to endless theories: egoism, emotivism, error theory, evolutionary theories, human nature theories, and even utilitarianism can all be seen as attempts to provide a naturalistic account of ethics.

In this thesis, I cannot address all of the issues surrounding ethical naturalism. Instead, as I noted at the outset, I will consider two key historical figures in the debate, namely David Hume and Immanuel Kant. I take these two philosophers to represent well the naturalistic perspective and an alternative. Moreover, I believe that exploring their thought will provide an illuminating perspective on contemporary debates. To this end, I will also consider the work of several contemporary thinkers who fall very much within the traditions of these philosophers – chiefly, Christine Korsgaard, Henry Allison, and Simon Blackburn.

Hume’s thought will constitute the focus of our exploration of moral naturalism. Hume provides a thoroughly naturalistic account of morality, arguing that it finds its basis in human nature, not reason. I focus on Hume as his work has been hugely influential. Indeed, much that we find in his position still remarkably remains at the forefront of a lot of discussion of ethics, and in particular of moral naturalism, today.

Kant provides a significant counterpoint to Hume's naturalism. Kant himself was concerned about naturalistic trends in philosophy. While he admired much of this thought, he felt it had several limitations. Kant famously sought to synthesise the British empiricist tradition with the rationalist tradition to create a new 'critical' philosophy. Contained in this philosophy is an ethics of autonomy. Kant, while acknowledging much of worth in thinkers such as Hume, nonetheless departs from such naturalism to provide an account of ethics that emphasises the importance of reason and freedom.

In contrasting these two thinkers, I hope to show that a divergence from moral naturalism is required. Morality, I claim is (categorically) normative, and essentially involving of freedom. Kant's critical turn accommodates this whereas Hume's moral naturalism does not. My exploration of both the Kantian and Humean conceptions of morality thus leads me to the conclusion that Kant is better able to make sense of ethics than Hume. In the following section of this Introduction, I briefly canvas the basis of this discussion.

Naturalism, Ethics and Freedom

Morality, or ethics, concerns how we ought to live.² This concern permeates throughout much of our existence. Modern society possesses moral codes, whether explicit – such as the law – or not, an example being common courtesy. We all possess various moral beliefs and attitudes and partake in moral practices.

A wealth of naturalistic explanations of these practices is available. Disciplines as varied as anthropology, biology, sociology, genetics, cultural studies, and psychology can all provide insight into our ethical practices. Such endeavours are

² Of course, morality does not concern all aspects of how we ought to live. The normative is larger than the ethical.

very useful. In describing and outlining the origins of our moral beliefs and practices, they can help explain nuances, reveal underlying determining factors, and in general further our understanding of ethics.

It should be noted that these enterprises are primarily descriptive; that is, they concern themselves mainly with the ethical beliefs and practices that do obtain, and their genesis. Ethics though is essentially normative; it concerns how we ought to live. The above disciplines seem to be providing us with information about how we in fact do live, and even how we think we ought to live. The question of how we *ought* to live, however, remains unaddressed. Simply put, whereas naturalism primarily considers the way the world is, ethics considers the way the world ought to be.

Here we begin to see glimpses of a tension inherent between naturalism and ethics. The question of ‘how we ought to live’ is a question of agency. Naturalism’s very orientation makes it unsuited to address this question. Naturalism seeks to answer all questions in terms of an obtaining natural order. Ethics though, is essentially practical, it concerns our agency.

Kant’s ethical thought accommodates this. His ethics of autonomy sets freedom at the forefront of morality. Kant recognises the significance of our rational agency to morality and accordingly makes room for a practical perspective. Moral Naturalism, however, is unable to do this. The naturalist perspective overlooks this key dimension of ethics.

Thesis Structure

I begin in Chapter 1 by outlining relevant aspects of Hume’s thought. I consider the motivation behind his naturalism, and outline what his empiricism consists in. Here, I briefly discuss his treatment of causality, so as to illuminate his empiricism.

The bulk of the chapter then puts forth Hume's moral philosophy. I look at how, for Hume, morality finds its basis in human nature, not reason. This exposition of Hume serves as the starting point of our exploration of moral naturalism.

In Chapter 2, I critically consider moral naturalism, looking at the extent to which Hume's theory of morals can grasp normativity. I outline some of the classic difficulties that moral naturalism faces concerning normativity – the ‘is-ought’ gap, and the naturalistic fallacy. I then draw on the work of Christine Korsgaard, in particular her discussion of the ‘normative question’ to demonstrate that it appears Hume's moral theory can indeed be suitably normative. This occurs through reflective endorsement of our nature.

I introduce the work of Kant in Chapter 3. I begin with a discussion of Kant's thought in general. Kant effects a ‘critical turn’, what he takes to be the Copernican revolution in philosophy. I outline the basis of this position, again looking briefly at causality so as to contrast Kant's and Hume's respective approaches. As with Chapter 1, the bulk of the chapter consists in an exposition of Kant's moral thought. I set out Kant's ethics of autonomy, discussing the Categorical Imperative, and the tight connection between freedom, reason and ethics that we find in Kant.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I turn to address in depth Kant's departure from moral naturalism. (I also include an appendix that parallels these chapters (and the thesis in general), in that it explores Kant's departure from the rationalist tradition. I undertake this task to provide a fuller understanding of Kant's ethical thought. Solely emphasising Kant's departure from naturalism is limited in that it paints an overly rationalistic picture of Kant. Considering his divergence from the rationalist tradition allows us to overcome several common criticisms of his ethical thought.)

Chapter 4 focuses on Kant's discussion of heteronomy. Here I show that moral naturalism is inevitably heteronomous, and contrast this with Kant's ethics of autonomy. This leads into a crucial discussion of normativity. The shortcoming of heteronomy lies in its inability to grasp categorical normativity. That morality is categorical, I argue, is something that our freedom requires.

In Chapter 5, I re-visit Korsgaard's treatment of Hume and normativity from Chapter 2. Korsgaard argues that Kant's understanding of morality goes further than Hume's, and is better suited to make sense of reflective endorsement.

Chapter 6 follows on from Chapters 4 and 5. Here, I turn to critically consider the conception of freedom underlying Kant's ethical thought, and indeed much that has been said in the previous two chapters. This discussion is paramount. I draw on the work on Henry Allison to argue with Kant, and against Hume and Simon Blackburn, that a Kantian conception of freedom is requisite, and thus warranted.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I draw together what has been said in the previous six chapters to argue that Kant allows us to better grasp ethics – and its questions concerning how we ought to live – than Hume. I follow on from our discussion of freedom from Chapter 6, to argue that considerations of freedom, normativity and the practical perspective illuminate the limitations of moral naturalism.

Throughout these seven chapters, I build the case that Kant's ethics of autonomy grasps several key aspects of ethics whereas Hume's moral naturalism does not. The key to this lies in a discussion of normativity, and freedom. This exploration thus signals several significant limitations of the naturalistic perspective, and the value of the insights of Kant's critical turn.

Chapter 1

Hume

Introduction

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher who constructed an elaborate and sophisticated empiricist philosophy. This philosophy has been enormously influential, and still exerts quite an influence on contemporary thought. Many of the issues that Hume raises in his writings on morals – the ‘is-ought’ gap, the role of reason – still remain at the forefront of discussion in ethical theory. Accordingly, Hume’s theory of morality shall constitute the focus of our exploration of the relationship between ethics and naturalism.

1.1 Hume in General

Before we turn to explore this account of morality, it is worthwhile to consider Hume’s philosophy in general. This will provide us with an appreciation of Hume’s project in totality, which in turn, will aid our understanding of his ethical thought. I begin by considering some of the background and motivation behind his empiricism. Following this will be a brief exposition of what his empiricism consists in, a discussion of his treatment of causation, and his scepticism.

Hume’s motivation: To debunk Speculative metaphysics

At the forefront of Hume’s motivation sits his disdain for speculative metaphysics. Tied up with this is his aversion to both rationalism and religion. In contrast to this supernaturalism and metaphysical speculation, Hume presents a naturalistic philosophy.

In discussing naturalism, we must make mention of empiricism. Empiricism takes many different forms, but in general revolves around the idea that our beliefs

find their origin (and perhaps justification or even meaning) in experience. Both empiricism and naturalism claim that the foundations of our knowledge are in experience, natural phenomena. Empiricism and naturalism thus go hand in hand.

Hume is without doubt an empiricist. Following Locke, he believes that all the materials of cognition are given to us through experience. He writes (in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, hereinafter *Enquiry I*, §VII, p.59):

all our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions ... it is impossible for us to think of anything, which we have not antecedently *felt*, either by our external or internal senses.

He holds that every idea has its origins in sense experience.

By providing an empiricist account of our understanding, Hume attempts to undermine the speculative metaphysical claims of rationalist and religious types. It is apparent that he hopes to show that human understanding is “by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects” (*Enquiry I*, §I, p. 15). Ending the first section of *Enquiry I*, Hume reflecting on this incumbent task, writes (§I, p. 19):

And still more happy, if, reasoning in this easy manner, we can undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have hitherto served only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error!

Undermining a conception of reason which shelters such speculative metaphysics appears to be a – if not the – principal motive behind Hume’s work.

Causality

Hume famously discusses causation. It is worthwhile here to canvas this discussion. It provides us with an example of how Hume utilises his empiricism. Hume clearly realises the importance of causal beliefs, namely the crucial role they

play in (almost) all of our judgements about matter of fact; “All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of *Cause and Effect*” (*Enquiry I*, §IV, p. 29). In line with his project of limiting the domains of human understanding, Hume presents a vigorous and powerful attack on causation (and induction), aiming to establish that “[a]ll inferences from experience ... are effects of custom, not of reasoning” (*Enquiry I*, §V, p. 44). For Hume, reason therefore does not ultimately impinge on many of our beliefs.

Our concept of causality, Hume recognises involves a notion of necessity; crudely put, when we declare that A causes B, we hold that if A occurs B *must* also occur. However, he also realises that experience does not present us with any necessary connections:

When we look about us towards external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connexion. (Hume, *Enquiry I*, §VII, p. 60)

Through experience we are only ever given ‘constant conjunction’ of objects without ever being able to comprehend any kind of necessary connection.

How then does Hume account for our concept of causality? He offers the following account of its origin: We experience various regularities in nature, certain events are usually proceeded by others. As such, the mind becomes used to these repetitions and grows to expect the latter event when the former is present. Our idea of there being a necessary connection here (or anywhere else in experience) is merely a result of this psychological habit.

Hume seems to have established that our notion of causation can only be accounted for through custom and habit. Reflecting on this, he proclaims:

And what stronger instance can be produced of the surprising ignorance and weakness of the understanding than the present. ...

On this [causality] are founded all our reasonings concerning matter of fact or existence. (Hume, *Enquiry I*, §VII, p. 71)

Here Hume has put into question whether reason can be brought to bear on our beliefs concerning matter of fact.

A Healthy Scepticism

Such conclusions might appear devastating to philosophy. Hume has argued that reason plays only a limited role in our lives, and that much of our existence, indeed all of our beliefs concerning matters of fact can be ultimately accounted for only through custom and habit. Hume, however, is not worried by this – he believes in a healthy scepticism. This scepticism though, is not severe. He claims that any such scepticism would be instantly defeated by action; “The great subverter of ... the excessive principles of scepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life” (Hume, *Enquiry I*, §XII, p. 143).

A healthy scepticism consists in “the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding” (Hume, *Enquiry I*, §XII, p. 146). As we have discussed, Hume aims to establish such a limitation. He attempts to do this through an empiricist account of our ideas (and what has become known as his fork). With these tools at his disposal, he has the means with which he can discredit any abstruse and remote claims, establishing limits to our understanding.

1.2 Hume and Morality

As we discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, we possess moral beliefs and attitudes and we partake in ethical practices. This serves as the starting point of Hume’s theory of morals. He does not seek to deny the reality of morality, or

undermine the claims it makes on us, but rather attempts to provide an empiricist account of it. As with elsewhere in his work, he sets out to show, in opposition to super-naturalistic and rationalist understandings of ethics, that morality has a naturalistic basis – in human nature.

In this section, I will provide an exposition of Hume's theory of morality. This will be threefold. I begin with a discussion of how morality ultimately finds its root in human nature. Connected to this, we will see how such an understanding of morality affords reason a minimal role in the sphere of ethics. I will then discuss Hume's conception of sympathy and the key role it plays in his ethics. Finally, we will consider the social dimension of Hume's account of morality, the need for a public institution of morality.

Human Nature and Reason

Hume's quest is to construct an adequate empiricist understanding of morality. Let us begin our exploration of this with a renowned passage from the *Treatise of Human Nature* (hereafter referred to as the *Treatise*). Hume asks us to:

Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or

sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. (*Treatise*, Bk.III, Pt 1, §1, p. 469)

Here in this much celebrated passage, Hume is advancing the view that morality is not to be found in objects, but rather springs forth from us.

The question then becomes, in what way does morality reside in us? Hume is insistent that reason is not the source. As we saw earlier in this chapter (§1.1), much of Hume's philosophy is devoted to an attack on the scope and influence of reason – here is no different.

Hume for the most part deploys a fairly minimal conception of reason; it concerns “the abstract relations of our ideas, or those relations of objects, of which experience only gives us information” (*Treatise*, p. 413). In the practical sphere reason is accordingly limited. It can inform us as to the best means to pursue given ends, but cannot be brought to bear upon the ends themselves. Hence Hume's famous proclamation, “ ’Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger” (*Treatise*, p. 416). Reason can instruct us as to the pernicious or usefulness of actions, but cannot by itself produce any moral blame or approbation. For this to occur, a sentiment preferring the useful to the pernicious is requisite (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, hereinafter *Enquiry II*, p. 126). Thus we arrive at another of philosophy's most famous pronouncements: “Reason is, and only ought to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (*Treatise*, p. 415).

Morality then is not founded on reason. Hume summarises this as follows:

Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd can never have

any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (*Treatise*, p. 457)

Here Hume is taking aim at the rationalist moral tradition. The central point of this criticism is that reason is inactive, whereas morality is not, and thus the two are distinct.

If morality does not find its origins in reason, from what then does it find its source? It is instructive to recall a passage from earlier:

The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but '*tis the object of feeling, not of reason*. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, *you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it*. (*Treatise*, Bk.III, Pt 1, §1, p. 469 [emphasis mine])

Moral distinctions for Hume then arise simply from the pleasure or displeasure that actions, sentiments or characters cause in us (*Treatise*, p. 471). Whenever a character pleases us, we esteem her to be virtuous, and the converse applies for vice. Our moral distinctions are thus derived from a moral sense. Consider the following:

To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no further ... We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (*Treatise*, p. 471)

This is the foundations of Hume's ethical theory. In this guise, however, Hume's theory of morals is far too simplistic to account for our morality. In order to fully account for morality as we know it, he introduces ideas of sympathy and justice.

Sympathy

Hume's contention that virtue and vice are determined through the pleasure or pain we feel, considered by itself, seems too simple to account for much of our moral phenomenology. Morality is not exclusively self-regarding. Hume himself acknowledges this; he notes that often we will approve of a person who we observe to be agreeable to those with whom she interacts, even if we ourselves never otherwise derive any pleasure from this person (*Treatise*, p. 590). To account for phenomena of this ilk, Hume introduces the concept of sympathy into his theory of morals. He affords it no small role either – it stands as “the chief source of moral distinctions” (*Treatise*, p. 618).

Hume proposes that sympathy arises from our alike constitution. To this Hume attributes much of our esteem or disregard towards others:

The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature. When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. ... No passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind. We are only sensible of its causes or effects. From

these we infer the passion: And consequently *these* give rise to our sympathy. (*Treatise*, pp. 575-576)

With this theory of natural sympathies, Hume believes we can explain our esteem for those who do not (directly) affect us. From our sympathy, we gain pleasure in viewing someone who is agreeable to others or even herself (*Treatise*, p. 591). That we are essentially similar to our fellow human beings causes us to sympathise with them, and accordingly temper our own pursuits with a view to theirs. Thus morality arises.

However, Hume recognises that this, again, is not enough to fully account for morality as we know it. In order to provide a satisfactory explanation of this, some form of public institution of morality is required. Hume discusses this under the heading of justice.

Justice

Hitherto, in discussing Hume's ethical thought, we have considered moral distinctions that arise from feelings of pleasure or displeasure and sympathy. These Hume claims constitute the natural virtues, in that they spring from our constitution. Now, we turn to discuss the artificial virtues, those that arise from the artifice of mankind.

Hume recognises that a system of morality predicated solely on feelings of pleasure or displeasure and sympathy would be incomplete. This largely stems from our situation with regard to others and nature. Human beings, Hume claims, possess a limited generosity towards others. Moreover, relative to the wants of human beings, the resources of nature are scarce. Drawing on state of nature theorists, Hume notes that these aspects of our situation are liable to inconvenience our social existence. Again, following in the state of nature tradition, he thus claims that it is in the general

interest of mankind to establish general rules governing our social interaction. He remarks quite confidently that:

‘tis only from the selfishness and confin’d generosity of men, along with the scanty provision nature has made of his wants, that justice derives its origin. (Hume, *Treatise*, p. 495)

These general rules, he claims, however, will not simply be found in our ‘uncultivated’ nature. This is, in part, due to our partiality. Hume notes that it is only natural for us to favour those close to us, our relatives and acquaintances. Abiding solely by such devices – our natural ‘uncultivated’ morality – he claims, would lead to confusion and disorder (*Treatise*, p.532). We thus find it requisite to construct general rules regulating our social existence which would remedy the inconveniences of a ‘state of nature’ like situation.³

Herein lies the origins of justice, an artifice created by humanity. We observe, with a view to our own interest, that it would be impossible to live in society without certain rules (*Treatise*, p. 533). Although this serves as the initial basis for justice, Hume holds that a separate moral basis for justice also arises. In viewing that observance of the rules of justice is conducive to public interest, Hume claims that through our sympathy, we receive pleasure (*Treatise*, pp. 499-500). Here then, a moral commitment to the rules of justice arises.

Through the artifice of justice, we are able to extend our sympathies beyond what they would naturally amount to. Thus a *system* of morality arises. This completes Hume’s account of morality as we know it.

³ These general rules are thus circumstantial. They only obtain given the scanty provision of goods from nature, relative to our wants.

Conclusion

Here then we have completed our primary exegesis of Hume's moral thought. Let us recapitulate. In opposition to both religious and rationalist understandings of ethics, Hume sets out to provide a naturalistic understanding of morality. Morality, he claims, finds its basis not in reason, but rather in feeling. Our alike constitution causes us to sympathise with other human beings. In these ways, morality springs forth from human nature. However, there is also an artificial element of morality, concerning justice, wherein we adopt general rules for the convenience of our social existence. This causes our sympathies to extend sufficiently far enough to allow for a system of morality.

Chapter 2

Hume, Naturalism and Normativity

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to critically evaluate Hume's ethical naturalism. This will revolve primarily around a discussion of normativity. The issue at hand (which we touched on in the introduction to this thesis) is whether a naturalistic understanding of morality can adequately grasp the normativity so requisite to ethics.

I begin with a discussion of the ‘is-ought gap’ and the ‘naturalistic fallacy’, highlighting some of the traditional worries an ethical naturalist faces concerning normativity. Following this, I will draw on the work of Christine Korsgaard, and her discussion of the normative question in *The Sources of Normativity* (hereafter referred as *Sources*) to propose one way in which Hume seemingly can grasp normativity.

2.1 The ‘is-ought’ gap

One of the most famous passages in Hume’s work concerns what has become known as the ‘is-ought gap’:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark’d, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am supriz’d to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ‘tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether

inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from other, which are entirely different from it. (*Treatise*, p.469)

Here Hume is criticising previous moral philosophers, whom he sees as trying to draw conclusions about what ought to be the case, from what is the case. He is questioning by what means is one entitled to move from discussions of what is the case, to what ought to be the case. This argument stands as part of Hume's attack on the view that morality is founded on reason, not on feeling. However, the scope of this criticism seems wider than this, in that it seems to afflict (moral) naturalism itself.

Related to the ‘is-ought’ gap, is the ‘naturalistic fallacy’. This fallacy involves inferring what ought to be the case merely from what is the case. It concerns the divide between the descriptive and the normative; that something is the case does not entail that it ought to be. This observation, *prima facie* at least, seems problematic for naturalistic understandings of morality. In attempting to explain ethics in virtue of the way the (natural) world is, naturalism seems to be primarily descriptive. Ethics though (as we touched on briefly in the Introduction) is essentially normative; its concerns are with how we ought to live. In this respect, naturalistic understandings of morality appear to be lacking. They can aid our understanding of our ethical practices, and their origins, but seem impotent regarding how indeed we ought to live.

Hume’s theory of morality appears vulnerable to this line of criticism. To an extent, his discussions of ethics seem to be, to use Kant’s term, practical anthropology. That is, Hume appears to primarily discuss the genesis of our morality. He concerns himself with providing a naturalistic account of the origins of our morality. As is evident from our discussion in the last chapter, he admirably tackles this task. For Hume, we happen to possess sympathy for our fellow human beings, in virtue of our alike constitution. That we possess morality is largely due to this fact.

2.2 *The normative question*

Let us now turn to critically examine this understanding of morality offered us by Hume, considering the extent to which it addresses the question I claim to be at the forefront of ethics – How ought I to live? For Hume, in virtue of our nature (and the social structures which help extend this sufficiently), we are inclined to act morally. We possess sympathy, and accordingly regard others in our lives. Moreover, we follow general rules which promote public utility. This constitutes morality for Hume.

Here, we can raise what Korsgaard names the ‘normative question’ – what justifies the claims that morality makes on us? (*Sources*, p. 13.) That is, we can ask ‘why ought I do as morality dictates?’ The basic idea is that, insofar as a naturalistic or indeed any understanding of ethics is to grasp normativity, it must answer the normative question. Mere explanation of our morals or discussion of their origin is not by itself enough. A full account of ethics must be able to justify the normative force of moral claims.

We can pose this question to any account of ethics. However, as we discussed above (§2.1), such considerations seem especially problematic for moral naturalism. One can say to the moral naturalist: Sure, my nature is such that I am inclined to act in certain ways, but should I? Am I glad that my nature inclines me so? Is it a good thing? With particular reference to Hume, we can challenge the sympathetic aspect of our nature and our commitment to public rules. Korsgaard notes that we can always ask, “whether we have reason to be glad that we have such sentiments, and to allow ourselves to be governed by them”. She continues, “The question is whether morality is good for us” (*Sources*, p. 50).

Of course, there is an ambiguity in Korsgaard’s last sentence; from what perspective are we to consider whether morality is ‘good’ for us? Hume too, at times

shares this ambiguity. In the conclusion of the *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* he writes,

what theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose, unless it can show, by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends, are also the *true interests* of each individual?
(*Enquiry II*, §9, p. 119)

Here we find Hume's attempt to answer the 'normative question'. At first glance, it might seem that he is going to make some sort appeal to self interest, to attempt to ground morality in what Kant refers to as enlightened self-love.⁴ This is not entirely untrue, however Hume's response is perhaps slightly more nuanced than first impressions would suggest.

As regards the 'goodness' of morality, Korsgaard notes that, at least for Hume, we have limited points of view from which we can consider this (*Sources*, p. 64). We can consider it from the point of self interest, or from the moral sense itself. In the conclusions to both the Enquiry and the Treatise, Hume does exactly this.

Beginning the second part of the conclusion to *Enquiry II*, Hume writes (§9, p.118):

Having explained the moral *approbation* attending to merit or virtue, there remains nothing but briefly to consider our interested *obligation* to it, and to inquire whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the practice of every moral duty.

In the remainder of this section of the Enquiry, he discusses how being a moral person is in our interest. He notes that the sole trouble virtue demands is merely "calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness" (*Enquiry II*, §9, p. 118).

⁴ David Gauthier later attempted this, drawing inspiration from this passage of Hume's.

Benevolence, friendship, humanity and kindness all have pleasing accompanying feelings; “their immediate feeling … is sweet, smooth, tender, and agreeable” (*Enquiry II*, §9, p. 121).

Moreover, as Korsgaard points out, with Hume’s theory, the sentiments of others are contagious to us – morality provides its own set of pleasures (Korsgaard, *Sources*, p. 59.) The fact that other people would approve or disapprove of your actions makes you also approve or disapprove of your actions accordingly (Hume, *Enquiry II*, §9, p. 120). Hume notes that “Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances, very requisite to happiness” (*Enquiry II*, §9, p. 123). Finally then, Hume asks us, “What other passion is there where we shall find so many advantages united; an agreeable sentiment, a pleasing consciousness, a good reputation?” (*Enquiry II*, §9, p. 122) Here, as Korsgaard notes, he has attempted to establish the harmony of two the two potentially normative points of view, self interest and morality (*Sources*, pp. 60-61).

The other point of view from which we could consider the ‘goodness’ of morality is the moral sense itself. Hume addresses this briefly in the conclusion to the *Treatise*, writing (p. 619):

a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into the composition. But this sense must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv’d, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin.

Hume is claiming that the moral sense approves of itself. Reflection on the origin of our moral sentiments strengthens those very sentiments.

Considering the normative question from both these points of view, Korsgaard concludes that:

It is human nature to be governed by morality, and from every point of view, including its own, morality earns its right to govern us. We have therefore no reason to reject our nature, and can allow it to be a law to us. Human nature, moral government included, is therefore normative, and has authority for us. (Korsgaard, *Sources*, p.66)

For Hume, there are only two standpoints from which we could consider whether we should allow morality to govern us – self-interest and the moral sense. Hume has attempted to show that from both of these standpoints, we can accept the claims that morality makes on us.

This Korsgaard terms reflective endorsement. Thus, insofar as we are to make sense of normativity from a Humean understanding of morality, it will involve reflective endorsement of the dispositions and sentiments which human nature provides us. She summarises this approach (which she also attributes to Mill and Bernard Williams) as follows:

Morality is grounded in human nature. Obligations and values are projections of our own moral sentiments and dispositions. To say that these sentiments and dispositions are justified is not to say that they track the truth, but rather to say that they are good. We are the better for having them, for they perfect our social nature, and so promote our self-interest and our flourishing. (*Sources*, p. 91)

Thus completes our initial exploration of the relationship between morality and naturalism in Hume.

Conclusion

A classical difficulty for moral naturalism concerns normativity. It is unclear whether a thoroughly naturalistic account of morality would be able to grasp the normative element of morality. The ‘is-ought’ gap and the naturalistic fallacy are both expressions of this worry. Hume provides an avenue through which a naturalistic account of morality can not only explain the origins of our ethical practices, but, as Korsgaard demonstrates, indeed grasp the normativity so requisite to ethics. That is, it appears that Hume can answer what Korsgaard terms ‘the normative question’ – what justifies the claims that morality makes on us? This occurs through reflective endorsement of our nature.

We now turn to discuss the work of Immanuel Kant, who in many respects, stands as a counterpoint to Hume. We shall see to what extent Kant’s theory of morality differs from Hume’s, and whether this necessitates divergence from a naturalistic position.

Chapter 3

Kant

Introduction

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a Prussian philosopher, rightly regarded as one of the greatest thinkers of the modern age. Throughout his philosophy, he sought to overcome many of the oppositions pertaining between the two dominant philosophical traditions of his time, empiricism and rationalism. In effecting a synthesis of these two traditions, Kant's thought is especially relevant to our discussion of Hume and moral naturalism. While he is well disposed to Hume, and does take many of the insights of his empiricism on board, Kant counters this where he takes Hume to err, drawing on his appreciation of rationalism.

In effecting this synthesis, Kant brings about what he deems to be the 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy. Just as Copernicus fruitfully effected a change in viewing the earth as rotating around the sun instead of the other way round, Kant wishes to go against the traditional assumption that our cognition must conform to objects and rather take as a starting point that objects must conform to our cognition (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, hereafter *CPR*, B xvi). This change of focus is Kant's Copernican revolution.

This 'revolution' in philosophy has far-reaching consequences. It affects not only epistemology and metaphysics, but aesthetics, theology, politics, education, and of course, ethics. While the latter will be our primary concern here, it is worthwhile to briefly outline some of Kant's general philosophy. Kant is a thoroughly systematic philosopher, and a full understanding of any aspect of his work to a large extent requires an appreciation of the whole of his philosophy. Towards this, here I will

begin by outlining some general points about his approach. Following this, we will consider Kant's ethical thought.

3.1 The Critical Turn

Kant espouses what he calls a transcendental idealism as opposed to traditional transcendental realism. Transcendental idealism mainly consists in Kant's taking what we experience (phenomena) not to be things *in themselves* (noumena). All of our experience for example is subject to the forms of intuition, space and time. These forms however, do not stand alone independently of us, but are rather conditions of our experience. This provides one example of how for Kant, human cognition rests on certain a priori conditions of possible experience. Space and time are conditions of possible sensibility, for they structure the way in which the mind can in the first place receive its sensory data (Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p. 27). Kant also discusses how the mind contributes certain pure concepts of the understanding to the form of possible experience. The forms of sensing and thinking that underlie all experience are thus, for Kant, contributed (in a sense) by the subject. Accordingly, the objects of our experience are not knowable to us as they are in themselves, but are knowable to us only as they are in experience. This constitutes what Kant calls the 'critical' or 'transcendental' turn in philosophy

It is Kant's claim that this position – transcendental idealism – allows us to overcome (amongst other difficulties) the scepticism we found in Hume. Kant holds that taking the objects of our experience not to be things in themselves allows us to justify things that empiricism could not. This is to be done through transcendental argumentation. That something is required for the very possibility of our experience, Kant deems justifies it.

Here let us explore this further with particular reference to causation. Earlier we looked at Hume's naturalistic approach to this topic (§1.1). In what follows, we shall outline Kant's treatment of causation. This will provide a concrete example of transcendental argumentation, and also help highlight the difference between Kant's critical and Hume's naturalistic approach.

Causality

The principle of causality is that "All changes occur according to the law of the connection of cause and effect" (Kant, *CPR*, A 189 / B 232). As we noted earlier in our discussion of Hume (§2.1), our concept of causality involves a notion of necessity which is not forthcoming from experience. Here Kant agrees with Hume that necessity is the essential and problematic feature of causation; he writes "the concept of cause brings the trait of necessity with it, which no experience at all can yield" (Kant, *CPR*, A 112-113). How then does Kant seek to ground the objectivity of such a principle? Let us turn to address this now.

In exploring Kant's treatment of the principle of causality, I draw on Henry Allison's illuminating discussion of Kant's Analogies in his book *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* – hereinafter *Idealism*. Allison notes that Kant here is essentially presenting an argument from the nature of event perception to the conditions of its possibility (Allison, *Idealism*, p. 252). It perhaps helps to consider Kant's examples of viewing a house from top to bottom and seeing a ship float downstream (Kant, *CPR*, A 192 / B 237). With the former we do not regard our successive perceptions as perceptions of a change or succession in the object itself, whereas with the latter, we do regard our perceptions in exactly this way (Allison, *Idealism*, p. 250). Here in order that we do consider this succession of perceptions as perception of successive states, Kant holds it is necessary that we regard their order as

irreversible (Allison, *Idealism*, p. 252). Of course, as Allison notes (Allison, *Idealism*, p. 250) one could imagine a different order of perceptions, say a ship sailing upstream, but in doing so one is considering a different event (namely a ship sailing upstream). However, to consider our perceptions in this way is just to subsume them under an a priori rule, where “what precedes an event as such must contain the condition ... whereby this event always and necessarily follows” (Kant, *CPR*, A 193 / B 239), namely the schema of causality.

Let me recapitulate. In order for us to regard changes in our perceptions as changes in objects, we need to regard the order of these perceptions as irreversible. To do this though, is precisely to subsume our perceptions under the schema of causality. This conceptual determination is granted objectivity, as prior to it, there is no thought of objects at all and, *a fortiori* no experience (Allison, *Idealism*, p. 251). It is thus required for the very possibility of our experience. Here, through this employment of transcendental argumentation, Kant has established the objectivity of the principle of causality.

Through effecting the ‘critical turn’ in philosophy, Kant is thereby in a position whereby he can ground the objectivity of causal beliefs. That every event has a cause is not something we are to deduce from the observation of things in themselves (whatever those may be) rather it stands as a principle requisite for the very possibility of the kind of experience we possess. Remember the critical turn, transcendental idealism takes reality to be moulded by the conditions of human cognition. Kant thus warrants that which is required for the possibility of our experience. As such, the principle of causality gains a transcendental justification – it is necessary for the very possibility of our experience, and thus justified. This employment of transcendental

argumentation thus provides a response to Hume's treatment of causality, and more broadly, to Hume's attack on the scope of reason.

This completes our brief exposition of Kant's general philosophy. However, before we turn to discuss Kant's moral thought, it is worth briefly reconsidering what naturalism consists in. At the beginning of this thesis, I gave a preliminary description of naturalism as the view that all phenomena can be explained as natural – that nature is the world. I noted that this stood as contrary to super-naturalism and metaphysical speculation. Kant's philosophy provides another counterpart to naturalism, albeit through the more modest position that natural science has limits; naturalism can also be expressed as the view that all that the world contains lies within the potential explanatory reach of science. As we have just discussed, Kant's critical turn involves recognising that there are certain things that are requisite for the very possibility of our experience. To question these things, and attempt to justify them through reference to experience (as empiricism is inclined to do) is thus misguided, in that these things are required for the very experience in question. In this respects Kant is a non-naturalistic philosopher.

3.2 An Ethics of Autonomy

In this section, I will introduce Kant's moral thought. I begin with the famous Categorical Imperative, before moving to discuss the importance that Kant attaches to reason and freedom in his ethics.

The Categorical Imperative

There is perhaps no better place to begin an exposition of Kant's moral philosophy than with a discussion of the renowned Categorical Imperative. Let us start by considering exactly what a categorical imperative is. An imperative

commands us. Such a command can be hypothetical or categorical. The former consists in ‘means-ends’ statements – if you desire X, do Y, where Y is a suitable means of achieving X. To consider a banal example, the *Little Book of Calm* suggests that if one wishes to relax, one should invest in a fruit bowl. Here the imperative is hypothetical, as the command to perform Y (in this case to invest in a fruit bowl) is dependent on whether one desires X (to feel relaxed). If one does not wish to relax, one is by all means free not to invest in a fruit bowl.

In contrast to such hypothetical imperatives, categorical imperatives are unconditional. ‘Do X’ commands you to do X and this command is not dependent on any antecedent desires. The imperative is categorical – it holds regardless of what one’s desires are. This, Kant thinks characterises morality. Moral claims, he holds, are categorical. Consider for instance, an extreme example, the wanton murder of innocent people – one ought not to do this. Here it seems, as Kant suggests, that this is a categorical claim. It is not that one should not wantonly murder innocent people *if* one values others, or *if* one doesn’t especially enjoy killing, or *if* one is fearful of the consequences. One moral phenomenology suggests that one just should not wantonly murder innocent people, full stop.

Kant believes that this idea, of categorical commands binding on us irrespective of our particular desires, lies at the root of morality. He also relates this to discussion of moral laws. Morality, he claims, is law-like, in that its principles are universally binding. The question then arises from what source does such law-like commands spring forth, and what serves to justify the claims they make on us. Let us explore this.

A principle regulating our action, a practical principle or maxim, has two aspects, the matter – the object of the principle – and the form. The matter is whatever

is the object of the will. Kant notes that if this object were the determining basis of the will, then any resulting practical principles would be subject to an empirical condition, namely the pleasure or displeasure received from the object in question. Kant believes that such an empirical condition can never form the basis of any practical laws. (In the next chapter we will return to consider this in more detail.) Therefore, he claims that if practical principles are to be laws, it will not be in virtue of their matter. When we abstract all matter however, all that remains of practical laws is their form, the form of a law or universal legislation. It is this, Kant claims – one's principle's suitability for universal legislation – that makes them practical laws.

This leads us to what Kant considers to be the basic law of pure practical reason: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation”(Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, hereafter *CPrR*, 30, p. 45a). Here we arrive at what has become known as the Categorical Imperative. This Kant claims is the moral law. It establishes how we are to act. When I act, I should consider concerning the maxim that I will, whether I will it that such a maxim become universal legislation, that is, everyone adopt this maxim. If I do not will this universalisation, my willing the initial maxim is thus incoherent, and ought not to be acted upon. We are thus to act in an impartial universal way, a kind of *coherence* is demanded of us.

For ease of illustration, let us consider an example. Say on Friday night after a hard week of philosophising (!), some friends and I hit the local drinking establishment. Since it is Friday night, I would be likely to consume beer at a rate my wallet (and body) would not allow, and thus, after a short time, my glasses would be empty. Several of my more measured friends however would likely still possess beer. Spying an opportunity to pilfer this, I might consider whether I really should.

Let us consider what would result if my maxim, or principle of action, were to be universalised. Of course, this depends on what the maxim in question is. If my maxim were, ‘As I want something that rightly belongs to someone else, and have an opportunity to take it, I shall’, one can easily foresee how I would not wish to universalise this maxim. I would be willing an impulsive anarchist order. However, if my maxim were instead, ‘As I am out drinking with (good) friends, I shall take the liberty of (playfully) taking another’s drink’ it is not as clear whether I would find the universalisation of such a principle to be as undesirable as in the previous case. This might merely result, at least amongst good friends, in a playful game of keeping an eye on one’s drink and reaping the fruits or lack thereof of one’s vigilance. This seems to help illustrate (with reference to the first principle we considered) why theft, *ceteris paribus*, should not be committed, but also how under certain circumstances (captured in my second maxim, above) may not after all be altogether seriously reprehensible.⁵

I should point out that there is somewhat of an industry regarding the interpretation of the Categorical Imperative. For our purposes however, the preceding (simple) discussion should suffice. There are also two other formulations of the Categorical Imperative, the formula of humanity, and the formula of the kingdom of ends. We shall return to consider these shortly. For now, let us explore the connection of the categorical imperative to freedom.

Freedom, Reason, and Autonomy.

The Categorical Imperative finds its basis in reason. How we are to act is not determined by the matter of principles, but rather their form. It is thus pure reason which is legislative here. This stands as a large part of Kant’s project, to establish that

⁵ For the record, I claim that *my* maxim is the second.

pure reason is practical.⁶ It also signals a departure from Hume, for whom: (as we saw in Chapter 1, §1.2) “Reason is, and only ought to be the slave of the passions” (Hume, *Treatise*, p. 415).

Another departure from Hume is signalled here by the conception of freedom invoked in Kant’s discussion of the Categorical Imperative and reason. As we saw concerning the moral law, there is to be no determining basis of the will other than its universal legislative form (Kant, *CPrR*, §5, p. 42). Kant notes that this involves an independence from the causality governing empirical conditions, namely freedom. The principle of practical reason consists in an independence from all matter of the law – this constitutes the ‘negative’ aspect of our freedom. However, he claims, the free will must, independent of the matter of the law, find a determining basis in the law. All that remains is conformity to the mere form of universal legislation – the ‘positive’ aspect of our freedom (Kant, *CPrR*, §6, pp. 42–43). The moral law, pure practical reason, and freedom are thus inextricably linked; freedom and the unconditional practical law reciprocally refer to each other (*ibid.*).

This freedom, independence from all matter of the law, and yet conformity to pure reasons own universal legislation, Kant calls *autonomy*. It stands as the “sole principle of all moral laws.” (Kant, *CPrR*, §8, p. 48) We shall continue to explore this in the next two chapters in particular focussing on how this idea of an ethics of autonomy underlies Kant’s departure from moral naturalism.

The Formula of Humanity and the Kingdom of Ends

Before we turn to do this, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the two other formulations of the categorical imperative that Kant provides, the so-called ‘formula

⁶ At the beginning of the preface to the second *Critique*, he writes (*CPrR*, preface 3, p.3): “This *Critique* is to establish merely *that there is pure practical reason*”.

of humanity' and the 'kingdom of ends'. Kant takes both of these to be equivalent to the previous (universal law) formulation we considered. Let us begin by considering the formula of humanity.

Humanity, Kant claims is the ultimate source of value. Humanity for Kant is our rational nature, the ability to set ends for ourselves. Looking for the source of value, Kant asks us to consider the objects of our inclinations. He argues that these only possess conditional value; "for if there were not inclinations and the needs based on them, their object would be without worth" (Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, hereafter *GMM*, 4:428, p. 37). We take (certain) objects of our inclinations to be valuable, yet their value is not ultimately to be found in them, they are only valuable relative to our inclinations. It is we who confer value.

In treating the objects of our inclination as important, we are in effect taking ourselves as important. Kant claims that this is an objective principle of human action; we necessarily represent our own existence in this way (*GMM*, 4:429, p. 37). Thus, humanity, or rational nature, is the source of value. It is accordingly unconditionally valuable; it exists as an end in itself.

Pursuing subjective ends at the expense of one's own or another's humanity is thus incoherent. The subjective ends in question only derive significance from our status as end setters – our rational nature or humanity. Whereas the first formulation of the categorical imperative ("So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation") considers the form of morality, the second formulation considers the end:

So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.

We are to act in ways that respect both our own and other's nature as autonomous rational beings.

Let us finish by briefly considering the third formulation of the Categorical Imperative, concerning the ‘Kingdom of Ends’. Drawing on the first two formulations, we are to act on laws determined in virtue of their universality and also in ways that respect others (and ourselves) as ends in themselves. This, Kant claims, leads to a ‘systematic union of various rational beings through common laws’, or a Kingdom of ends (*GMM* 4:433, p. 41). This stands as an ideal, the highest expression of our autonomy, rational agents both creating and obeying laws. We are to regard ourselves as both law-giver and subject.

Conclusion

Kant’s critical turn provides an interesting counterpoint to the moral naturalism that we explored in the first two chapters. Kant emphasises the importance of reason and freedom. Indeed, as we have seen, morality for Kant just is, in a sense, freedom. Kant thus provides us with a picture of morality as categorical, and essentially involving of freedom. In the next two chapters, we will critically explore this, contrasting it with Hume’s moral naturalism.

Chapter 4

Heteronomy and Autonomy

Introduction

In this Chapter, we consider in greater depth Kant's divergence from (moral) naturalism. In Chapters 1 and 2, we discussed ethical naturalism, and some of the problems associated with it. Kant's moral thought is highly relevant here. He himself was worried by what he saw to be overly naturalistic conceptions of morality, springing from several Empiricist philosophers, including Hume. Kant admired much of this thought, especially its relating morality to the world of experience; he thought, for example, that it helped state the importance of moral feeling, or sense, where other rationalist conceptions did not.⁷ Yet, he found this approach lacking in that it seeks for too much in experience, to the extent that it leaves a very minimal role for reason and freedom in morality.

In response to these perceived deficiencies in both empiricist and rationalist accounts of ethics, Kant thus constructs a new position which he takes to be a synthesis of these two traditions – an ethics of autonomy. In the previous chapter, we outlined some of the key features of this position. In this and the next chapter, I will continue to explore Kant's moral thought, in particular highlighting its divergence from Hume's naturalistic approach. Through this, we can begin to critically contrast and compare the Kantian and Humean approaches, exploring whether a departure from naturalism is required.

In this chapter, I present a discussion of heteronomy and normativity. I begin by introducing Kant's thoughts on heteronomy. This will continue into an exploration of Kant's claim that a practical law could never have an empirical basis, where I

⁷ See, for example, Engstrom in the introduction to *CPrR*, p. xxiii

consider the relationship between morality and happiness. Finally, we will return to a discussion of the shortcomings of heteronomy. I argue that it is unsuited to make sense of the categorical nature of morality. That morality is categorical, moreover, I contend our freedom makes requisite. I thus conclude that Kant's ethics of autonomy makes better sense of morality than moral naturalism, which is inevitably heteronomous.

4.1 Kant and Heteronomy

In the last chapter, in our discussion of the Categorical Imperative (§3.2), I noted Kant's assertion that a practical law could never have an object as its basis. This falls under Kant's discussion of heteronomy, and is worth considering in more detail, in that it signals one of Kant's main departures from moral naturalism. In both the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR*) and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*GMM*), Kant discusses heteronomy and contrasts it with his own approach, that of autonomy.

Let us begin by considering Kant's discussion of heteronomy in the second *Critique*. In Chapter 2 of the Analytic, Kant considers the concept of an object of pure practical reason. Kant's central claim is that the concept of good and evil is not prior to the moral law, but rather determined by it. This constitutes what Kant considers to be a key departure from previous moral philosophers; "It explains all at once the basis that occasions all the strayings of philosophers with regard to the supreme principle of morality" (*CPrR*, p. 85, 64).

Let us explore this, considering what would be the case if the concept of good and evil were prior to the moral law. Kant notes that if this were the case, as the concept has no practical law for its standard, the concept of good and evil could have

no other touchstone for determining the will than experience – the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure (*CPrR*, p. 85, 63). This empirical basis, Kant claims eliminates the possibility of practical a priori laws. He writes (of previous thinkers):

because an object, according to concepts of good and evil, was already being laid at the basis of any practical law, while this object – without an antecedent law – could be thought only according to empirical concepts, one had deprived oneself already in advance of the possibility of even thinking a pure practical law.
(*CPrR*, p. 85, 63)

Kant believes that both empiricists and rationalists have both committed this mistake, positing the determining basis of the will in an object, whether it be happiness, perfection, moral feeling, or God's will:

their principle was always heteronomy and they had to come unavoidably upon empirical conditions for a moral law; for they could call their object – as direct determining basis of the will – good or evil only according to its direct relation to feeling, which is always empirical. (*CPrR*, p. 86, 64)

In contrast to such heteronomy, Kant offers an ethics of autonomy, where the moral law itself is the determining basis of the will. For Kant, the concept of good and evil are determined by the moral law.

4.2 Happiness and the Moral Law

Before we continue to further discuss the shortcomings of heteronomy, it is worthwhile to critically consider Kant's line of thought here. Of particular interest is his claim that no object of the will can serve as the basis of practical laws.

Happiness provides an intriguing example of this. It is a crucial element of human existence, and accordingly figures to play a large role in considering how we ought to live. Empiricist theories of ethics moreover, often accord great status to happiness, even to the extent that it stands as the ultimate ground of morality. Kant provides an interesting contrast here. He certainly acknowledges the importance of happiness, but insists that it cannot serve as the *grounds* for any practical laws.

Consider the happiness of others. Kant claims that this can be the object, but not the determining basis, of one's will. If it were to be the basis, then we would have to presuppose that human nature was constituted so that there exists a natural gratification in the wellbeing of others, and a need (such as sympathy) for us to act in this way (*CPrR*, p. 50, 34). However, as we have seen, those theorists, like Hume, who seek to ground ethics in human nature do claim that we can (to an extent) presuppose a common nature in all human beings. Remember, for Hume, human beings are constituted alike. This moreover gives rise to sympathy, which in turn stands as the basis of morality. Kant however, does not deny this. He does note though that we cannot presuppose this natural sympathy in every rational being, and accordingly, such a basis is unsuitable to ground any laws.

Perhaps then, Kant's criticism of moral naturalism (at least this aspect of it) rests on a difference in the perceived scope of morality, humanity or rational beings.⁸ Kant notes that human beings do possess natural sympathies, but that this cannot be assumed of every rational being. However, it seems we can leave this question unaddressed here, in that Kant's criticism goes further, in a way which encompasses both of these alternatives.

⁸ This does raise some interesting issues, that for the sake of space, I shall not deal with here. Consider for example, aliens. How would we treat and expect to be treated by alien rational beings? Perhaps we would make ethical demands on them, and vice versa.

Kant holds that *even if* (finite) rational beings did think thoroughly alike in regard to what objects cause pleasure and pain, any practical principles resulting from this could still never stand as laws (*CPrR*, 26, p. 39). This, he claims, is because the determining principle would still be only subjectively valid, and merely empirical, that is, it would not have any *a priori* basis. *Prima facie*, this response seems unsatisfactory, as this is the very claim in question – whether practical laws could have an empirical basis.

Let us consider exactly what Kant's claim is. He holds that in order for a practical principle to be a *law*, it must involve necessity (*CPrR*, 26, p. 39). As we noted earlier in our discussion of causality (§1.1, §3.1), no concept of necessity is forthcoming from experience. However, the concept of necessity involved here is ethical. That a practical principle be necessary means it poses to us an unconditional obligation, or indeed a categorical imperative. This stands as the basis of Kant's claim that no practical law could have an object as its basis. We will return to examine this shortly, under our discussion of autonomy (§4.3). For now, let us continue our discussion of Kant, happiness, and laws.

If something is to be a law, Kant insists, it must be so in virtue of its universality. He asks us to consider the pursuit of one's own happiness – something that all (finite) rational beings have as their end. In order that any principles of action concerning this pursuit become laws, they must be universalised, that is, they need to take into account the happiness of others as well.

This stands as the grounds for any law regarding the happiness of others. It,

arises not from the presupposition that this is an object for everyone's power of choice, but merely from [the fact] that the form of universality, which reason requires as condition for giving

to a maxim of self-love the objective validity of a law, becomes the determining basis of the will. (*CPrR*, p.50, 34)

Practical reason demands universality in our principles of action. It is this which accords principles regarding the happiness of others their status as practical laws. As Kant notes:

“Solely this restriction, and not the addition of an external incentive could then give rise to the concept of the obligation to expand the maxim of my self love to the happiness of others as well.” (*CPrR*, p.51, 35)

Let us consider the implications of this for empiricist conceptions of ethics. Empiricist conceptions of ethics usually seek their basis in some aspect of human nature – our regard for our own happiness or preservation, or natural sympathies for others. From this, they attempt to construct a universal moral theory. Such an endeavour is not without problems. One classic difficulty is that it is unclear what one should do if the dictates of the moral code ultimately based upon the pursuit of something conflict in particular instances with the pursuit of this very thing. (We shall return to consider this in the next chapter — in §5.1.)

Moreover, it seems that these theories only really begin to gain a purchase on morality when they universalise. These theories all claim to have their ultimate basis in experience, yet they all display the crucial role universalisation plays in morality. Consider for example Utilitarianism, where morality can be seen as arising from the universalisation of the importance one affords to one’s own happiness, or some form of Hobbesian account, where morality arises from the tempering the pursuit of one’s own interest, in a way that recognises others, to the mutual benefit of all. Here, insofar

as these theories seem to grasp morality, it appears that universalisation is doing the work.

Leaving these particular issues aside, let us now return to Kant's discussion of heteronomy in general. It is here I believe (and in the discussion of freedom that results from it – see Chapter 6) where we are led to depart from moral naturalism to a Kantian ethics of autonomy.

4.3 Autonomy over Heteronomy.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant writes of the shortcomings of previous authors:

For when they thought of man merely as subject to a law (whatever it might be), the law had to carry with it some interest in order to attract or compel, because it did not spring as a law from *his own* will ... all the labour spent in trying to find a supreme principle of duty was lost beyond recall; for what they discovered was never duty, but only the necessity of acting from a certain interest (*GMM*, pp. 94-95, 73).

Kant is insistent that the moral law must be categorical. The essence of his criticism of heteronomy resides in the fact that its commands are always hypothetical:

Wherever an object of the will has to be put down as the basis for prescribing a rule to determine the will, there the rule is always heteronomy; the imperative is conditioned, as follows: '*If, or because*, you will this object, you ought to act thus or thus'; consequently it can never give a moral – that is, a categorical – command. (*GMM*, p. 105, 93)

Kant's criticism of heteronomy thus revolves around his supposition that the moral law is categorical. Henry Allison writes of this that:

Since the antiheteronomy argument in both works presupposes the account of morality as based on a categorical imperative, its overall cogency cannot be determined independently of an evaluation of this account. In short if morality does not rest on a categorical imperative, then the whole critique of heteronomy loses its point. Moreover, critics of Kantian morality are very often critics of the very idea of a categorical imperative. (Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, hereafter *KTF*, p. 101)

Insofar as we conceive morality as essentially categorical, Kant's criticism of heteronomy holds greater force; here, like much else in Kant's philosophy, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of one part in isolation, it is strongly connected to other parts and indeed the whole.

As I noted previously in Chapter 3 (§3.2), the thesis that morality is categorical does seem plausible. The phenomenology of moral experience seems to indicate that moral imperatives are categorical imperatives – they dictate how we ought to act, not how we ought to pursue a certain end (Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 158).

Perhaps the force of Kant's thought here (as I hinted earlier in §4.2) is to be found in a discussion of obligation, and the normativity that ethics requires. Were morality to spring from without, I could always question this extrinsic source. Again, Henry Allison ('Justification and Freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*' p.120) has noted here that for heteronomous theories, moral scepticism remains a possibility.

It is important to point out here that the shortcomings of heteronomy are related to our freedom. Our freedom affords us the ability to critically consider our own desires and beliefs, and alter them accordingly. This negative aspect of our freedom, a mere independence from the efficient causal order of the world, seems problematic for heteronomy. If the moral law is commanded from without, it, as Kant notes, finds

its basis (in one way or another) in our natural constitution, and thus it is nature which makes this law (*GMM*, p. 105, 94-95). Yet, our freedom affords us a form of independence from our natural constitution, we can reflect upon, critically evaluate, and (to a degree) change it accordingly.

In this way, heteronomy fails to grasp the normativity that ethics requires. In making morality – how I ought to act – dependent on something else, one calls into question the normative status of this ‘something else’. Why ought I pursue this? Here the hypothetical imperative afforded us by heteronomy seems unable to grasp the normativity that Kant’s categorical imperative offers us.

This seems to stand as the best explanation of Kant’s claim that a practical law could not have its basis in experience. Kant’s discussion of the failings of heteronomy appears to successfully back up this claim. Heteronomy does not appear to grasp necessity, the (unconditional) normativity that ethics, given our freedom, requires.

Conclusion

Again, we find Kant’s position inextricably bound to other aspects of his thought, namely his conception of freedom. This should come as no surprise. For Kant, the moral law just is freedom (in the positive sense, a fitness of our maxims for universal legislation). The key departure of his work from his predecessors consists in his grounding the moral law not in heteronomy, but autonomy. Were we to ground the moral law from without – heteronomy – morality would lack the categorical normativity that, given our freedom, it requires. In the next two chapters, we shall continue to consider this, exploring in more detail freedom and normativity in Kant and Hume.

Chapter 5

Kant, Hume and Normativity.

Introduction

In this chapter we further discuss Kant's departure from moral naturalism. Previously, in Chapter 2, we critically explored whether a Humean naturalistic understanding of morality could grasp normativity. Drawing on the work of Christine Korsgaard, we noted that this does seem possible, through reflective endorsement of our own nature. In this chapter, we shall reconsider this in light of our discussion of Kant. It is Korsgaard's contention that a Kantian picture of morality provides a richer understanding of reflective endorsement than the Humean naturalistic alternative. This again is involving of the tight connection between freedom and ethics.

5.1 The normative question re-visited

As we discussed in Chapter 2, a Humean naturalistic understanding of morality can make sense of normativity through reflective endorsement of our own nature. It is instructive to recall a passage of Korsgaard's here, where she summarises this approach as follows:

Morality is grounded in human nature. Obligations and values are projections of our own moral sentiments and dispositions. To say that these sentiments and dispositions are justified is not to say that they track the truth, but rather to say that they are good. We are the better for having them, for they perfect our social nature, and so promote our self-interest and our flourishing. (*The Sources of Normativity*, hereafter *Sources*, p. 91)

Korsgaard however, thinks that such an approach does not go far enough (*Sources*, p. 89). The 'reflective endorsement' Hume requires for his account to grasp normativity, she claims, is more thoroughly worked out in Kant, where it stands not

only to establish the suitability of our general nature and social arrangements, but indeed our particular desires, motives, and inclinations. Let me elaborate.

Korsgaard notes that the normative question arises “in the heat of action” (*Sources*, p. 91) – “[i]t is as agents that we must do what we are obligated to do, and it is as agents that we demand to know why” (*ibid.*). An example will be instructive here. Consider an agent who accepts a Humean picture of morality, she believes her moral dispositions – her sympathies – and the wider social institution of justice are justified. Now suppose that she faces a moral dilemma, a real pickle, where it is unclear whether what her general moral beliefs suggest seems the best course of action. It is likely she will have to question her various motives and inclinations in *this* case, in order to decide what she ought to do.

The Lawyer’s Dilemma

Korsgaard’s own example of this (*Sources*, pp. 86-87) is illuminative. She asks us to consider the lawyer of a recently deceased (rich) man who left all his wealth to medical research. Upon searching through various documents, the lawyer of this man stumbles across a more recent will in which the rich deceased client leaves all his wealth to his nephew, who (the lawyer knows) will spend it all on beer and comic books (which for the sake of the example, we are to assume, would be frivolous). The lawyer finds it in her power to suppress this latter will – what should she do?

In this case, moreover, (as noted above) the lawyer happens to be a Humean. She knows that if she did destroy the will she would disapprove of herself, and she knows why this would be the case – we sympathise with public interest, and unjust actions have a tendency to bring down the system of justice thus negatively impacting on public interest. However, she can also note that her distaste for such actions is

caused by their general tendencies not their actual effects. In *this* case, it seems the action will not prove destructive to the system of justice, but instead merely help fund medical research (at the expense of a nephew's comic books and beer). As Korsgaard notes, in this situation, the lawyer might believe that the claims that her moral feelings (disapproval of the destruction of the recent will) make on her are unjustified.

This worry parallels a traditional criticism of Utilitarianism. 'Rule Utilitarianism' recommends against acting in a simple (Act) utilitarian manner, and proposes that we should act according to certain rules (and dispositions) which would maximise happiness. The criticism is that this introduces a kind of 'moral schizophrenia' into our moral thinking, which is brought out especially in cases like the present example of the lawyer. Recall Chapter 4, where I noted one classic difficulty for empiricist theories of ethics which try to ground morality in the pursuit of some particular thing. The difficulty involves what happens when the rules established to promote this particular thing, seem in a particular case to clearly conflict with the pursuit of this thing.

However, this is not a criticism of reflective endorsement *per se*, but rather of the guise in which it appears in Hume, namely reflective endorsement at the level of general rules. Korsgaard notes that such reflection can go further. Our lawyer, in this case, might decide to be moved by considerations of public utility rather than her feeling of disapproval in destroying the will. However, she can also question *this* commitment, her inclination to promote public utility, and what makes this a *reason* for action. Here, Korsgaard writes:

If the reflective endorsement of our dispositions is what establishes the normativity of those dispositions, then what we need in order to

establish the normativity of our more particular motives and inclinations is the reflective endorsement of those. (*Sources*, p. 89)

Thus, it is “not just our dispositions, but rather the particular motives and impulses that spring from them, that must seem to us to be normative” (*Sources*, p. 91). This however, Korsgaard claims leads us to a Kantian understanding of morality, where a reflective endorsement test is used by “agents to establish the normativity of all their particular motives and inclinations” (*Sources*, p. 89). Here, reflective endorsement, instead of serving to justify morality, is in fact, morality itself (ibid.). Let us consider this further.

5.2 Autonomy as the source of normativity

Freedom is crucial here. Korsgaard notes that, it is our nature as self-conscious beings that allows us to reflect as such, and thus raises issues of normativity for us. We are constituted in such a way that we can turn our attention onto our perceptions and desires, and think about them (*Sources*, p. 93). This affords us a degree of independence from our own desires and so forth, we can step back from them and call them into question. Here Korsgaard urges that the “reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire … It needs a reason”(ibid.). The question then is how do we come across such a reason, how do we gain reflective success (*Sources*, p. 97).

She finds the answer to this in Kant:

According to Kant, as each impulse to action presents itself to us, we should subject it to the test of reflection, to see whether it really is a *reason* to act. Since a reason is supposed to be intrinsically normative, we test a motive to see whether it is a reason by determining whether we should allow it to be a law to us. And we do that by asking whether we should allow it to be a *law* to us. And

we do that by asking whether the maxim of acting on it can be willed as a law. (*Sources*, p. 89)

Let me summarise this. The reflective mind requires a reason to act. Korsgaard and Kant both address this in terms of laws; a law possesses the ingredient of necessity, and thus provides a reason to act. However, such a law could not be dependent on anything else, as this (through reflection) would call into question the normative status of this other thing. The law, as we saw in the previous chapter, cannot be a law of heteronomy. The law must therefore be the will's own law, that is, the will must be autonomous. So nothing is to determine what that law is to be. All that remains is that it be a law. This in turn, Korsgaard claims, is precisely the Categorical Imperative. In choosing maxims, we are to choose those that could be a law (*Sources*, p. 98). Here, for Korsgaard, we gain authority over ourselves, due to such reflection. It is thus our autonomy which stands as the source of obligation (*Sources*, p. 165, p. 104).

5.3 *The Kingdom of Ends*

Korsgaard however, thinks that this Kantian line of thought establishes that we are bound to choose laws, but not that we are bound by the *moral* law (*Sources*, p. 100). That is, following other commentators on Kant, she differentiates between a commitment to universal legislation and the moral law. In order to establish the latter, she claims “the agent must think of *herself* as a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends” (*Sources*, p. 100). Here, she invokes the idea of practical identity, and employs a transcendental move in order to establish obligation to the moral law. Let me elaborate.

As noted above, our nature as reflective beings means we need reasons to act. Here, Korsgaard claims that we require a normative conception of ourselves – a

practical identity – in order to have reasons to act (*Sources*, pp. 100-101). This is “a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking” (*Sources*, p. 101). So we must have a conception of who we are, which is normative for us if we are to act. That we must have such a practical identity if we are to act is not up for grabs, it is a fundamental part of being human (*Sources*, p. 123). This reason for conforming to a particular practical identity therefore does not originate from any particular practical identity, but rather from the sole fact that you are a human being. It is a reason you have “only if you treat your humanity as a practical, normative, form of identity” (*Sources*, p. 121).

As such, Korsgaard claims if you are to value anything at all, you must also value your own humanity itself:

Since you cannot act without reasons and your humanity is the source of your reasons, you must value your own humanity if you are to act at all. (*Sources*, p. 123)

Korsgaard finds a similar line of thought in Kant, when he discusses the Formula of Humanity (which we looked at in Chapter 3). The basic idea here is that the value of humanity is implicit in every human choice – we take things to be important because they are important to us, and we must accordingly take ourselves to be important as well (*Sources*, p. 122). Korsgaard thinks that here she has established the moral law:

if you value anything at all, or, if you acknowledge the existence of practical reasons, then you must value your humanity as an end in itself. (*Sources*, p. 125)

This, in essence, constitutes Korsgaard's position. We are self-conscious reflective beings. This reflection confers us authority over ourselves – we are free. This freedom takes the form of autonomy, conformity to universal laws that respect humanity. The source of normativity is thus to be found in our nature as autonomous creatures, human beings.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, we looked at whether a moral naturalist could make sense of normativity. In this chapter, we re-addressed this issue in light of our discussion of Kant. We found that Kant makes better sense of reflective endorsement than the Humean naturalist. Where reflective endorsement for the Humean only occurs at the level of general rules, for Kant it takes place with our particular desires, motives and inclinations; morality for Kant just is, in a sense, reflective endorsement. This moreover is essentially involving of freedom, the ability to reflect upon, and endorse or reject our desires, motives and inclinations.

Chapter 6

The Reality of Freedom

Introduction

We have seen throughout this thesis (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) that freedom is central to Kant's conception of morality. Indeed for Kant, morality just *is* autonomy. In Chapter 4, we found that such a conception of freedom underlined Kant's discussion of the shortcomings of heteronomy. Korsgaard's discussion of reflective endorsement from the previous chapter also relies heavily on the assumption that we possess an independence from our desires.

In this chapter, we turn to critically consider the concept of freedom underlying Kant's conception of morality. I begin with a brief discussion of naturalism and freedom, laying out Hume's position. I then explore Kant's conception of freedom. I claim, against the naturalist, that such a conception of freedom is essential, and indeed real. Here, I look at criticism that Simon Blackburn has made against Kant's understanding of freedom. I draw on the work of Henry Allison to highlight that such criticism is misguided.

6.1 Naturalism and Freedom

Let us begin by briefly discussing Hume's naturalistic account of freedom. As we discussed in Chapter 2, Hume accepts the principle of universal causation. Admittedly he holds that this principle is founded merely on psychological habit, but nonetheless, he believes that every event has a cause. This, he claims, holds just as true for the workings of nature as it does for the workings of humanity. Every human action has a cause, which necessarily produces the action in question. He writes:

We may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. (*Treatise*, Bk.II, Pt 3, § 2, pp. 408-409)

Here, we can glimpse a tension between the principle of universal causation and the idea of human freedom – what is known as the problem of freewill.

However, this is not to say that Hume must, in virtue of his adherence to the principle of universal causality, give up entirely on the idea of human freedom. The so called ‘compatibilist’ approach still remains. Compatibilism is the position that acknowledges that every human action had a cause which necessarily produced this action, whilst claiming that we can still regard such actions as free. That is, the actions I perform which stem from me in a relevant way, resulting from my desires, beliefs and so forth, can be said to be free. Moreover, that in this sense one is the cause of one’s actions, is, the compatibilist claims, just what we mean (or should mean) by freedom. Shortly, we shall consider this position in more depth. For now, let us turn to explore Kant’s conception of freedom.

6.2 The need for freedom

Kantian ethics is heavily dependent on an assumption of human freedom. In very general terms, the very discipline of ethics presupposes at least some conception of freedom. That we consider how we ought to live assumes that the question is up for

grabs. Were we entirely devoid of any concept of freedom, questions of ethics (at least in the terms I have described it) would not present themselves to us.⁹

Kant, as we have seen, holds (what many consider) a strong conception of freedom, he conceives us as possessing an independence from our desires, motives and inclinations. Some philosophers though (especially in the contemporary analytic tradition) find this conception of freedom extravagant. Of particular concern is how it can be accommodated within a naturalistic framework. Recall the previous passage from Hume for example: “We may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character”. A (strong) commitment to naturalism casts doubt on the reality of Kant’s conception of freedom, suggesting it is illusory.

With this however, Kant can, in part, concur; the concept of freedom does, in a sense, stand as an illusion. From the point of view of theoretical reason, Kant acknowledges that freedom does indeed seem chimerical, and that no theoretical grounds can be provided to support it. However, from the practical perspective, he claims the concept of freedom is requisite.

Kant believes that rational agents cannot act but under the concept of freedom. He writes:

Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principles independently of alien influences. Therefore as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, it must be regarded by itself as free; that is, the will of a rational being can be a will of his own only under the Idea of freedom, and such a will must therefore – from a

⁹ The divide between the normative and the descriptive that we considered in chapter 2 (§2.1) would be bridged. For it to be fallacious to infer what ought to be the case merely from what is the case assumes that things could be otherwise; ought implies can.

practical point of view – be attributed to all rational beings. (*GMM*, p. 109, p. 101)

In this section, I will consider this in more detail. In discussing this, I will draw on the work of Henry Allison, who deals with this topic extensively.

As we noted in §3.2, freedom and rational agency are inextricably bound together. Allison notes that, for Kant, this is a conceptual claim. Freedom is not something to be added to our conception of ourselves as rational agents, but is rather the defining feature of this conception (Allison, *Idealism and Freedom*, hereafter *Freedom*, p.126). He summarises this conceptual claim of Kant's in the following manner: (Allison, *Freedom*, pp. 126-127)

1. To think of oneself as a rational agent requires presupposing that one is capable of projecting ends, acting on the basis of self-imposed general principles (maxims) and in light of objectively valid norms.
2. But to think of oneself as having these capacities requires the assumption of an independence from determination by antecedent causes, including one's own desires. It is not that one's desires are irrelevant to the determination of what one chooses to do (they are obviously the source of reasons to act); it is rather that they are not *sufficient* reasons.
3. To attribute such independence to oneself is to conceive oneself in light of the idea of spontaneity.
4. Consequently, I cannot coherently think of myself as a rational agent without attributing to myself such spontaneity.

Allison recognises that step (2) is likely to be resisted by ‘compatibilists’ – those who hold that we can still make sense of freedom whilst allowing our actions to be wholly governed by the efficient causal order of the world.

Allison poses the obvious compatibilist response: Why can’t what is described in (1) be “the outcome of a cognitive process that is completely explicable in naturalistic terms?” (Allison, *Freedom*, p. 127) The Kantian response, he notes, is that it could very well be the outcome of such a process, but that it cannot be regarded by the agent, qua agent, as such:

Insofar as we take ourselves as rational agents, we necessarily regard our decisions and the actions ensuant upon them as “up to us,” not simply in the sense of being arrived at independently of any extrinsic causal factors such as passions or overwhelming urges, but also in the sense of not being merely causal consequences of our antecedent states. (*ibid.*)

Allison further notes that were we to deny the Kantian conception of freedom (with its spontaneity from the natural causal order) we would indeed lose the ‘I’ – the first – person perspective through which we confront the world.¹⁰ He quotes (*Freedom*, p.127) a passage from one of Kant’s lectures:

If I say I think, I act, etc., then either the word “I” is used falsely or I am free. Were I not free, I could not say: I do it, but must rather say: I feel myself in an impulse to do it, which something has incited in me. If, however, I say: I do it, this signifies a spontaneity in the transcendental sense.

¹⁰ Allison also notes that from the Kantian standpoint, removal of the ‘I’ is not only pragmatically impossible – as the I must do the removing – but deeply incoherent in that: “the broadly mechanistic world in which the I is dissolved in the thoroughly naturalistic story is itself only for the I” (*Freedom*, p.128).

Blackburn's criticism

This discussion of Allison's allows us to overcome a seemingly powerful criticism of Kant, made by Simon Blackburn. Blackburn, a contemporary Humean, in his book, *Ruling Passions* (hereafter *Passions*), presents a vigorous critique of the Kantian moral tradition. He believes that the Kantian conception of freedom relies upon a crucial misunderstanding of the nature of deliberation. Moreover, he holds that this is “the leading, characteristic mistake of a whole generation of theorists wanting to go beyond Hume.” (*Passions*, p.254)

His concern is that Kantians make out desires themselves as the objects of deliberation, and that this leads to the positing of some sort of separation of ourselves from our desires. (*Passions*, p.255)¹¹ When we deliberate, he claims, it is the world that we contemplate, not our own psychology. Furthermore, the ‘Kantian fantasy’ that we possess a vantage point over our desires is false. It amounts to a mere “romantic, existential illusion” (ibid.). When we consider our own desires, we do so from the very vantage point of our own desires (ibid.). With this criticism in hand, he believes he can show how those in the Kantian tradition, including Korsgaard, with her discussion of the ‘normative question’, go astray.

We find a compelling reply to this criticism implied in Allison’s discussion of Kant. Allison talks at length about what he calls the ‘Incorporation Thesis’, the view that desires by themselves are not reasons to act (*Freedom*, p.130). They must be ‘taken up’ by the agent, that is, adopted as a maxim. Kant’s (classic) formulation of this, to be found in, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (Kant, 6:24;19), is as follows:

¹¹ Sartre, I believe, identifies the seemingly paradoxical nature of this well, when he claims that we are separated from ourselves by nothing!

[F]reedom of the will is of a wholly unique nature in that an incentive can determine the will to an action only so far as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim (has made it the general rule in accordance with which he will conduct himself); only thus can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the will (i.e., freedom)

In order for my inclinations to be *mine*, qua rational agent, they must be accompanied by me ‘taking them up’ (Allison, *KTF*, p. 40).¹²

Blackburn’s response to this would likely be to restate what I outlined above, that this is not what happens in the process of deliberation; the entire process of deliberation can be made out in terms of desires. Kant and Allison invite us to see that this may well be the case, but that it cannot be regarded by the agent, *qua agent*, as such. Again, the conception of freedom involved may very well, in one sense, be a “romantic, existential illusion”, but it is also a necessary one.

6.3 A practical point of view

Here, given the transcendental nature of Kant’s thought, from a practical point of view, we really are free. That as rational agents, we cannot but act under the idea of freedom, serves to justify our employment of this concept (at least from the practical point of view). In the *Groundwork*, Kant (almost somewhat uncharacteristically) puts this simply:

I assert that every being who cannot act except under the Idea of freedom is by this alone – from a practical point of view – really free (*GMM*, p.108, 100)

Here, Kant makes mention of the practical point of view. This helps cast light on one of the more controversial and indeed commonly misunderstood aspects of Kant’s

¹² As Allison notes, this parallels the necessary accompaniment of experience with the ‘I think’.

thought – his conception of an ‘intelligible world’. Consider the following passages from the *Groundwork*:

A rational being must regard himself qua intelligence ... as belonging to the intelligible world, not to the sensible one. He has therefore two points of view from which he can regard himself (GMM, pp. 112-113, 108)

Later, he echoes this same thought:

The concept of the intelligible world is thus only a *point of view* which reason finds itself constrained to adopt outside appearances *in order to conceive of itself as practical.* (GMM, pp.118-119)

From the practical point of view, we are compelled to conceive of ourselves as free. Kant’s conception of freedom, as Allison notes, thus provides conceptual space in which the thought of freedom can be held alongside the thought of nature (Allison, *Freedom*, p.128).

There seems on one level to be something relatively uncontroversial about this conception of freedom (at least as detailed here). The idea is that even those who are (theoretically) so called ‘hard-determinists’ must from the practical point of view act under the idea of freedom. Their commitment to ‘hard-determinism’ in the theoretical sphere, I contend, does not impinge on their commitment to living under the assumption of freedom in the practical sphere; indeed if Kant is right, it *cannot*. In this way, such a position undermines itself, displaying a basic incoherence, a disharmony between the theoretical and the practical. (We shall consider this again more fully in the next chapter.)

Kant, in a passage from *The Metaphysics of Morals* (hereafter MM) addresses this disharmony. He writes:

The cause of these errors is as follows. People who are accustomed merely to explanations by natural sciences will not get into their heads the categorical imperative from which these laws proceed dictatorially, even though they feel themselves compelled irresistibly by it. Being unable to *explain* what lies entirely beyond that sphere (*freedom* of choice), however exalting is this very prerogative of a human being, his capacity for such an *idea*, they are stirred by the proud claims of speculative reason, which makes its power so strongly felt in other fields, to band together in a general *call to arms*, as it were, to defend the omnipotence of theoretical reason. And so now, and perhaps for a while longer, they assail the moral concept of freedom and, wherever possible, make it suspect; but in the end they must give way. (*MM*, p. 143, 6:378)

This Kant famously notes leads to a dialectic of reason – how reason has a need to assume both a natural necessity and a freedom from this necessity. The former assumption is required for the purposes of speculation, where the latter is required for the purposes of action. As Kant notes, “for purposes of action the footpath of freedom is the only one on which we can make use of reason in our conduct. Hence to argue freedom away is as impossible for the most abstruse philosophy as it is for the most ordinary human reason” (*GMM*, p.116, 114-5). However, the concept of natural necessity cannot be easily disposed of either. Both it and the concept of freedom are requisite; “[Reason] can abandon the concept of nature as little as it can abandon the concept of freedom” (*GMM*, p.116, 115).

The critical turn, Kant believes allows us to truly make sense of this dialectic, in that we can reconcile two of reason’s strong, and apparently conflicting commitments. Through transcendental argumentation, we can grant objectivity to both of these commitments (remember §§ 1.1 and 3.1), the principle of universal causality did not

descend from the heavens) and moreover accept both through the introduction of an ‘intelligible world’. This however, represents no flight to the supernatural, but rather consists in the adoption of a practical point of view.¹³

Conclusion

Kant possesses a strong conception of freedom – an independence from our desires, inclinations and so forth. In the previous two chapters, we saw that such a conception of freedom underlined Kant’s departure from moral naturalism. Here, we turned to critically consider this conception of freedom. Drawing on the work of Henry Allison, we found that we must, insofar as take ourselves to be rational agents, conceive ourselves as free. As agents, we must adopt this point of view, what Kant refers to as a practical perspective. I argued, with Kant, that such a conception of freedom is thus warranted.

¹³ I discuss this further in the appendix.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: A Practical Perspective

Introduction

In this final concluding chapter, we shall further critically evaluate (Hume's) moral naturalism and Kant's ethics of autonomy in light of what has been hitherto discussed. Following on from the previous chapter, I draw on our discussion of freedom to argue that Kant provides a better understanding of morality than the (Humean) naturalist. Hume's appeal to nature, I contend, is not enough. I then turn to address the question raised at the start of this thesis – how ought we to live? I re-emphasise the importance of the practical perspective for morality. I contend that it allows Kant to answer this question, and thus make better sense of morality than the (Humean) naturalist alternative.

7.1 An Appeal to Nature

In the middle of this thesis (Chapters 4 and 5), we saw that a strong conception of freedom led Kant (and Korsgaard) to depart from moral naturalism. After critically considering this conception of freedom in the last chapter, we found it essential, and thus warranted. We are now in a position to follow Kant in his divergence from moral naturalism.

Hume believes that morality is to be found in human nature. Kant however, insists that we need to go further than this. We possess freedom and can thus reflect upon our nature, reject or accept our desires and inclinations and (to an extent) alter them accordingly. We are (to put it simply) to accept those suitable for universal legislation, and which treat humanity as an end in itself. For Kant, it is here – our rational freedom – where morality is to be found.

The Humean though is likely to disagree with this picture of morality. Simon Blackburn, for one, as we have seen, vigorously opposes the ‘Kantian fantasy’ that morality involves something more than our desires and sentiments. Consider the following passage from his book *Ruling Passions*:

There is no necessary object of concern. There are only contingent profiles of desire and value. To be sure, we share enough of a common nature for it to be practically certain that we can find common ground with others when conversation about our aims arises. But to the Kantian this is not enough. She is afflicted with an overwhelming ('existential') sense of loss, a sense of resulting 'arbitrariness' or 'absurdity', when our concerns are left to stand on their own feet, and digs the ground for something else to shore them up. The Humean, here like the Aristotelian, is satisfied that appeal to nature is enough. (*Passions*, p. 253)¹⁴

As we have seen however, the appeal to nature (by itself) is not enough. It is unable to account for the categorical nature of morality, the (practical) reality of freedom, or the normativity so requisite to ethics.

Kant and Allison demonstrate that, insofar as we take ourselves to be rational agents, we must conceive ourselves as free. This freedom, as we saw in Chapter 4, is problematic for any heteronomous theory of ethics. In attempting to ground morality in something else – our natural sympathies and the social institution of justices for Hume – one calls into question the normative status of these things.

Christine Korsgaard explores whether a naturalist might be able after all to secure the normative status of morality. Through reflective endorsement of our own nature, it appears that the naturalist can grant normative status to morality. However,

¹⁴ Against his derisive labelling such worries ‘existential’ the existential dilemma here seems real. A retreat to human nature is not enough due to our freedom – see Sartre. That, we as agents, must act under the idea of freedom, makes an appeal to nature unsatisfactory, nigh even bad faith.

in the end we saw that a naturalist understanding of reflective endorsement did not go far enough. In order to fully grasp reflective endorsement, a Kantian conception of morality is required. That is, Korsgaard highlights that in order for morality to be suitably normative, it must be grounded in autonomy. Korsgaard's discussion thus backs up the central claim of Chapter 4. Given our freedom, any heteronomous theory, including (Hume's) moral naturalism – which in one way or another seeks to ground morality in human nature – is unable to grasp the normativity that ethics requires.

Kant, Korsgaard and Allison show us that in order to fully grasp morality, we must go further than the (Humean) naturalist. Stopping at desires and inclinations is not enough. In order to get to morality, these need to be taken up, and endorsed (in virtue of their suitability for universal legislation). As such, morality involves reflective endorsement of our nature that is involving of human freedom. This is our autonomy.

7.2 Misguided emulation of Science

Ethics, as I noted in the introduction to this thesis, concerns 'how ought we to live?' This is intimately connected to the practical perspective. Issues of agency – questions of how we ought to live – require a practical perspective. Naturalism however, does not adequately accommodate, or allow for such a perspective. The question of 'how ought we to live' is accordingly something naturalism cannot fully answer.

The key normative element of this stems from our agency, indeed our freedom. As Kant (and Allison) note, as rational agents, we must conceive ourselves as free – a

practical perspective is required. This, as Kant recognises, serves as the stumbling block for naturalistic accounts of morality.

Kant's conception of freedom is non-naturalistic in that we must (as rational agents) conceive ourselves as independent from the natural causal order. As Blackburn points out, for the naturalist such a conception of freedom amounts to a mere 'romantic existential illusion'. Kant's critical turn however, establishes as warranted that which is required for the very possibility of our experience as such. That this conception of freedom is requisite for the practical perspective – the point of view of our rational agency – Kant deems, warrants our employment of it. In warranting our employment of the concept of freedom, Kant displays commitment to the practical perspective.

Hume's strict adherence to naturalism does not allow him to grant that warrant obtains to the practical perspective. Naturalism, as I noted at the start of this thesis, is the view that all phenomena can be explained as natural. As we saw with Hume, this takes the form of a thoroughgoing empiricism, where justification is sought in experience. Whatever the other flaws of this empiricism maybe, our concern here is primarily with its scope. Theoretical reason should not be treated as all-encompassing; we must, as Kant demonstrates, save room for practical reason, the point of view of our rational agency. In virtue of his commitment to naturalism, Hume does not do this, and thus is unable to fully make sense of morality.

Christine Korsgaard has noted here that the traditional (British) Empiricist and contemporary analytic philosophical approach to morality have (often) overlooked this insight of Kant's. This brief, but interesting, discussion occurs in the Preface to *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (hereafter *Ends*). She writes:

If I am right about this, Kant approaches moral philosophy in a very different way than the British Empiricists and their heirs in the analytic tradition do. The basic problem, set by the plight of rational agency, is “what should I do?” The approach is to raise practical questions as they are faced by the reflective moral agent herself. Moral philosophy is the extension and refinement of ordinary practical deliberation, the search for practical reasons. This makes Kant’s enterprise very different from that of philosophers who talk about morality and the moral agent from the outside, third-personally, as phenomena that are in need of explanation. Kant’s arguments are not about us; they are addressed to us. (*Ends*, p. xii)

Kant’s moral philosophy does not, as Korsgaard notes, look primarily upon morality from a distance, as something that needs to be explained. Rather, it approaches it from the practical perspective. Korsgaard points out that to treat morality in the former way results from “misguided emulation of science” (*Ends*, p. xii). This helps illuminate a significant limitation of moral naturalism.

Moral naturalism seeks to provide a thoroughly naturalistic understanding of ethics. Naturalism though, in virtue if its very orientation is unsuited to this task. Naturalism seeks to explain phenomena with respect to the workings of the natural world; as I noted in the introduction to this thesis, naturalism can be understood as the thesis that everything lies within the potential explanatory reach of science. An enterprise like moral naturalism accordingly attempts to account for morality in this way. Consider for example Hume’s conception of morality, where ethics arises from a combination of sympathies we possess and certain social structures which help extend these. Such endeavours can be very worthwhile. However, in the end, they cannot adequately address the essential practical element of morality.

As Korsgaard notes, these approaches address morality from the third person perspective. Yet, as we have seen, morality is inextricably caught up with the first person perspective. We engage with moral issues from the practical perspective – the point of view of our rational agency. In another work, *The Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard again briefly addresses this. She has the following to say:

The Scientific World View is a description of the world which serves the purposes of explanation and prediction. When its concepts are applied correctly it tells us things that are true. But it is not a substitute for human life. And nothing in human life is more real than the fact that we must make our decisions and choices ‘under the idea of freedom.’ (*Sources*, p. 97)

Solely providing naturalistic explanations of morality is limiting in that it overlooks this crucial, and indeed essential practical element of morality. As rational agents we are compelled to conceive of ourselves as free. With regard to ethics – concerns of how we ought to live – we must adopt this point of view.

It is again worth returning to our discussion of freedom from the previous chapter here. As I have emphasised, we must (insofar as we take ourselves to be rational agents) act under the idea of freedom. There is thus (as we briefly touched on in Chapter 6) a sense of disharmony in denying the warrant of a genuine conception of freedom. This I believe again highlights limitations of the naturalistic perspective. Recall again Kant’s passage that we looked at in §6.3. Kant writes:

The cause of these errors is as follows. People who are accustomed merely to explanations by natural sciences will not get into their heads the categorical imperative from which these laws proceed dictatorially, even though they feel themselves compelled irresistibly by it. Being unable to explain what lies entirely beyond that sphere (freedom of choice), however exalting is this very

prerogative of a human being, his capacity for such an idea, they are stirred by the proud claims of speculative reason, which makes its power so strongly felt in other fields, to band together in a general call to arms, as it were, to defend the omnipotence of theoretical reason. And so now, and perhaps for a while longer, they assail the moral concept of freedom and, wherever possible, make it suspect; but in the end they must give way. (*MM*, p.143, 6:378)

Kant remedies this, in that he grants reality to the practical. As we have seen, Kant outlines how morality is essentially involving of freedom. This moreover, is inextricably bound up with the practical point of view. Unlike naturalism, for which theoretical reason is omnipotent, Kant's critical turn offers us genuine purchase for the concept of freedom, and accordingly the reality of moral demands. Kant thus affords us the ability to reconcile the practical and theoretical to an extent to which a Humean naturalistic account cannot.

This is not to dismiss (moral) naturalism outright, but rather to acknowledge that it has limitations. Kant himself is favourably inclined towards naturalism; he displays the utmost respect for natural science. He does though demonstrate that it should not be treated as omnipotent. We cannot dismiss or attempt to explain away the practical point of view – it is an ineliminable part of our situation.

Conclusion

We can now return to the question I claim to be central to ethics – ‘how ought we to live?’ This is first and foremost an issue of agency, and is accordingly involving of the practical perspective. As such this question is something that naturalism cannot fully address. This question of ‘how ought we to live?’ however, is at the forefront of Kant’s conception of morality. Kant, through the critical turn grants reality to the

practical perspective. He thus allows for moral demands to have rational warrant. As we have seen such a position involves the practical perspective, (transcendental) freedom and categorically normative morality. These go hand in hand, and are unavailable to the Humean naturalist. Insofar as we are to genuinely grasp morality, the critical turn is thus required.

Appendix

Kant's departure from Rationalism

Introduction

Kant is operating with two traditions in the background, empiricism and rationalism. Throughout this thesis, I have primarily considered how Kant deviates from empiricism (represented by Hume). This might paint an overly rationalistic picture of Kant. Indeed, such a picture is common. In order to fully appreciate Kant's position, it is instructive to consider Kant in reference to the rationalist tradition as well.

Here, in this Appendix, paralleling what occurred throughout the main body of this thesis, we will consider Kant's departure from rationalism. I seek to address a powerful and common criticism of Kant's thought, the worry that it effects too sharp a divide between the rational and the sensible, in this case, morality and feeling. I will first consider this in reference to Kant's view on duty and motivation. This will continue into a more general discussion of whether Kant's moral philosophy does divorce the sensible, in particular, happiness and morality. Finally, I will consider Kant's moral thought in reference to the rationalist tradition, in particular Plato, and the extent to which Kant diverges from this tradition. I attempt to show that Kant's position is defensible.

A.1 Duty and Inclination.

In this section, I address a common criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. Kant's contention that only actions done for the sake of duty can possess moral worth has received much criticism. Kant's claim is that legality, conformance with the moral

law, is not sufficient for morality. In order for an action to be moral, it must be motivated by the moral law. Let us explore this further.

Actions which conform to the moral law, but are motivated by selfish concerns, Kant claims, are not moral. His example of a shopkeeper illustrates the point nicely (*GMM*, 397, p.63). A shopkeeper (when certain conditions pertain) does not overcharge inexperienced customers. However, in this case, this occurs solely because it is in the shopkeeper's best interests to do. If conditions changed suitably, and it were in the shopkeeper's best interests to overcharge certain customers, she would. That the shopkeeper (in the first situation) does not overcharge customers then, Kant claims is legal, in that it conforms with the moral law, but not moral.

More controversially, Kant claims that an action done solely from inclination, however right and however amiable it may be, has still not genuinely moral worth. ... for its maxim lacks moral content, namely, the performance of such actions, not from inclination, but from *duty*. (*GMM*, 400, p.66)

This position has been frequently criticised. Perhaps never more eloquently than by Schiller (in Allison, *KTF*, p.100):

Gladly I serve my friends, but alas I do it with pleasure.
Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not a virtuous person.
To this the answer is given:
Surely, your only resource is to try to despise them entirely
And then with aversion do what your duty enjoined you.

Schiller displays nicely the seeming unsatisfactory nature of Kant's claim that a moral action is one performed from duty, not inclination. That is, it appears that feeling and emotion are not to be disparaged. They seem to play a positive role.

A standard reply to this, is to note that Kant is pointing out that such an inclination, by itself, is not sufficient for an action to be moral. An example will help clarify this. Imagine that I help a friend in dire need. In this case, I happen to care for the individual in question and have a desire to help them. The moral content of this action, for Kant, depends not on my favourable inclination towards this individual, but rather on whether I would perform the action if I did not possess a favourable inclination towards them (or indeed any individual). If my favourable inclination was the *sole* motivating factor of my aid this begins to cast doubt on the moral worth of this aid. My helping was not motivated by the fact that this was the right thing to do, but merely because I was favourably inclined towards my friend. Faced with similar situations, where people are in dire need, but where I do not possess favourable inclinations towards them (or people in general), I would not help. The initial action then, Kant claims would possess legality, conformance to the moral law, but not morality.

However, this is not to say that possessing favourable inclinations lessens the moral worth of one's actions. Schiller was wrong. Kant's point is that these alone are not sufficient. Moreover, such inclinations can be of value. Here, it is worth making mention of Kant's inclusion of 'virtue' into his ethical thought – the firmly rooted disposition to perform one's duty (Körner, *Kant*, p. 131). Körner points (*ibid.*) towards an insightful passage of Kant's (in *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*, p. 6:23 footnote) here:

Now, if we ask, "What is the *aesthetic* constitution, the *temperament* so to speak of *virtue*: is it courageous and hence *joyous*, or weighed down by fear and dejected?" an answer is hardly necessary.

Without wishing to dispute Kant's above claim, let me briefly provide an answer. In choosing to pursue what is right, one will become favourably inclined towards this. Fulfilling this purpose is likely to produce positive emotions.¹⁵

A.2 A Divide? The Analytic and the Dialectic

Let us continue to explore in more general terms the supposed divide between the rational and the sensible in Kant's (ethical) thought. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, this is a powerful and common criticism of Kant's thought. In this section, we shall consider this in relation to the analytic and the dialectic of the second *Critique*.

The *Critique of Practical Reason*, in line with the other works in the critical system, is divided into two parts – the Analytic and the Dialectic. In the Analytic, Kant seeks to effect a divide between the doctrine of happiness and the doctrine of morals. In the Dialectic, through discussion of the highest good, Kant attempts to re-unite morality and happiness. Here I will explore this, outlining relevant features of both the Analytic and the Dialectic, before critically engaging with the divide and eventual uniting of happiness and morality that Kant offers us.

Happiness and Morality

As we saw in Chapter 4, Kant was concerned about naturalistic trends prevalent in ethics. What he saw in various empiricist philosophers, such as Hume, was a reducing of morality to a doctrine of happiness – where our conduct is to be ultimately guided by what pleases us. Kant felt that this would erode the dignity of

¹⁵ Korsgaard also points towards an insightful passage from Kant here. He writes: "Beneficence is a duty. Whoever often exercises this and sees his beneficent purpose succeed comes at last really to love him whom he has benefited. When therefore it is said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," this does not mean you should directly (at first) love and through this love (subsequently) benefit him; but rather, "Do good to your neighbour," and this beneficence will produce in you the love of mankind (as a readiness of inclination towards beneficence in general)." (*The Metaphysical Principle of Virtue*, 402, p.59)

morality. In his ethical philosophy, he seeks to counter such a position, arguing that morality finds its basis in reason. Through this, Kant aims to provide firm ground for morality, whilst also allowing it to retain its dignity.

Thus in the Analytic of the second *Critique*, Kant effects a divide between the doctrine of morals and the doctrine of happiness. In the ‘Critical Examination of the Analytic’, he writes:

Now, the distinction of the *doctrine of happiness* from the *doctrine of morals*, in the first of which empirical principles amount to the whole foundation whereas in the second they amount not even to the slightest addition to it, is the first and foremost enterprise incumbent on the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason. (*CPrR*, p. 118, 92)

Here, Kant insists that morality has its own basis, in the autonomy of pure practical reason, and is in no way dependent on any empirical considerations. As we have seen, he constantly emphasises this point. Our freedom, which affords us the ability to be moral, consists in an independence from our own desires and inclinations. The practical laws – principles universally governing our conduct – which our freedom dictates to us, gain their status as laws not from their matter, but solely in virtue of their form.

This divide between the doctrine of happiness and the doctrine of morals however, at times, threatens to become a schism. Morality for Kant, in a sense, elevates us above the sensible world. At times, he tends to overemphasise this point, creating the impression that he overvalues the rational aspect of our existence to the detriment of our sensible lives.

Kant however does recognise the importance of happiness for us. Throughout the Dialectic, he states that it is a necessary end for all (finite) rational beings, and

even acknowledges that one's reason does have a mandate from sensibility to attend to one's own happiness (*CPrR* p. 83, 61). These comments concerning the importance of happiness, however, are by no means conclusive on the issue. They are, for one, few and far between, and are often coupled with insistence about the distinctness of the doctrine of happiness and morals, and the superiority of the latter over the former.

It is only in the Dialectic where he (explicitly at least) takes up the task of linking morality and happiness. This takes place with respect to discussions of the supreme good. After discussing the sanctity of morality in the Analytic, Kant claims that virtue is not the whole and complete good as the object of the power of desire of (finite) rational beings. This would include happiness. He notes that this holds:

not merely in the partial eyes of a person who makes himself a purpose but even in the judgement of an impartial reason, which regards a person as such in the world as a purpose in itself. For, to be in need of happiness, and also worthy of it, but nonetheless not to partake of it is not at all consistent with the perfect volition of a rational being that also has all power. (*CPrR*, p.141, 110)

Thus the highest good for Kant consists in the combination of virtue and happiness.

Postulates of Pure Reason

This appears to be problematic. The doctrine of morality – how we ought to act – is to be wholly independent from the doctrine of happiness; we are to act as morality, not happiness, dictates. Moreover, Nature is indifferent to us, we live in an indifferent efficient causal order; that morality and happiness will coincide is in no way assured. Kant seeks to overcome this through the postulates of pure reason, that of immortality of the soul and the existence of God.

Kant believes that these postulates are required in order to attain the highest good. The immortality of the soul allows us to approach, ad infinitum, holiness of the will (i.e., supreme virtuousness), whereas the existence of God assures us that we will partake in happiness proportionate to this morality. The highest good, Kant claims is an a priori necessary object of our will, and is also inseparably linked with the moral law. Without these postulates, attainment of this good would be impossible, and thus Kant claims the moral law would itself be false (*CPrR*, p.145, 113-4). No doubt these postulates may seem superfluous to modern ears, and Kant's reasoning here does strike one dubious; it is not clear as to why we must pursue the highest good, or how the moral law would be rendered false if this pursuit were never fully realisable. Perhaps we can without loss extract this aspect of his thought from his ethical philosophy.

However, Kant is a deeply systematic philosopher, and as such, it is of interest to consider the adoption of these postulates. The basic idea is one found in most major religions. The soul is immortal and there exists a supreme being, thus one's conduct in this life will determine one's happiness in the next. This 'karmic' idea is common to numerous ethical codes, especially (as noted above), major religions. Kant too makes an appeal to religion. It is only through religion he claims, the adoption of the postulates of immortality of the soul and the existence of God, that happiness and morality might be combined. Consider the following passage:

morality is properly the doctrine not of how we are to *make* ourselves happy but of how we are to become *worthy* of happiness.

Only if religion is added to it does there enter the hope of some day coming to partake of happiness to the degree to which we have taken care not to be unworthy of it. (*CPrR*, pp. 164-165, 130)

In this light, Kant's adoption of these postulates helps highlight how natural such suppositions are to ethical thought. Following the existentialism tradition, these suppositions perhaps say something deep about human nature, and the possibility, or coherence of ethical conduct in an indifferent world. We will return to this shortly.

Yet it is still unclear whether such presuppositions are required. We might be able to make ethics coherent through other means. One option would be to retain a Kantian conception of morality (as outlined in the Analytic) whilst giving up our claims to happiness. The direct alternative would be to abandon the Kantian conception of morality and keep our claims to happiness. Another plausible option, which I will attempt here, is to seek a middle ground. This will involve rethinking the divide between the doctrine of happiness and the doctrine of morality that Kant outlines in the Analytic. If we can overcome (or even construe in a different light) this divide, bridging the doctrine of happiness and morality, recourse to suppositions of immortality of the soul and the existence of God might not be required.

Bridging the (supposed) divide

Does Kant affect too sharp a divide between happiness and morality? In part, this concern might stem from a methodological aspect of Kant's work. In the Analytic, he vigorously attempts to establish that morality finds its basis in reason, not in experience. His emphasis of this point perhaps leads him to overstate the divide between happiness and morality; indeed the entire *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork* can be seen as dealing with the ‘pure’ aspect of morality. Regarding the Analytic in this light helps us to understand what Kant says there in terms of his overall project (the same can also be said for the Dialectic and his other ethical works). As Kant himself notes, “a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology but can still be applied to it.” (MM, [6:217]) Considered in its entirety,

Kant's ethical philosophy does not seem to construct too firm a divide between happiness and morality.

An interesting example of this can be found in our previous discussion. In making happiness in part constitutive of the highest good, Kant acknowledges the objective worth of happiness. Consider again, the previous passage from the Dialectic:

[This holds] not merely in the partial eyes of a person who makes himself a purpose but even in the judgement of an impartial reason, which regards a person as such in the world as a purpose in itself. For, to be in need of happiness, and also worthy of it, but nonetheless not to partake of it is not at all consistent with the perfect volition of a rational being that also has all power. (*CPrR*, p.141, 110)

Here, we can begin to see how happiness and morality complement each other. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 4, in the Analytic, Kant admits that happiness can stand as the object, just not the determining basis of moral laws. As such, it seems that there is an avenue for accommodating happiness into morality (without thereby making it the determining basis thereof) which does not require flight to the supernatural.

This though does not directly answer the Existential dilemma raised earlier. We are to act on the basis of pure practical reason, yet nature does not harmonise with this; the world is indifferent to our plight. There is then perhaps a kind of futility in

pursuing the moral law. That we are deserving of happiness amounts to just that – we cannot expect that we shall be granted this happiness.¹⁶

A Kantian conception of ethics might still be able to overcome this. The Analytic founds morality and moral obligation solely on the autonomy of pure practical reason. It makes no mention of requiring happiness to be commensurate with virtue. Insofar as we wish to preserve this picture, we could jettison Kant's discussion of the highest good in the Dialectic (which seems dubious on its own grounds). As we have discussed though, this casts doubt as to whether Kant's divide between the doctrine of happiness and the doctrine of morals was too severe. At times, this does seem to be the case. However, as I have hinted, a more nuanced understanding (or indeed an interpretation) of Kant, attuned to the entirety of his ethical thought, appears capable of overcoming this worry; happiness can stand as the object, just not the determining basis, of moral laws. That the Dialectic seeks to link happiness and morality provides us with reason to rethink, or at least offer an interpretation of, Kant's ethics (as found in the Analytic) that pays significant regard to human happiness.

A.3 Plato and Kant

In exploring this, whether Kant does effect too sharp a divide between morality and happiness, between reason and the world of sense, it is instructive to consider Kant in reference to the rationalist tradition. Kant's synthesis of empiricism and rationalism involves a departure from both traditions, accepting much of value in each.

¹⁶ Sartre in his seminal lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism' described his Existentialist project as genuinely following through on the philosophical consequences of Atheism. In this way, he can be seen as attempting to grapple with similar issues to those that this discussion of Kant raises.

Manfred Kuehn discusses this well in his biography of Kant. He claims that Kant, whilst accepting much of the empiricist outlook, was particularly concerned about its treatment of morality (which we looked at in Chapter 4 for example). Kant thought that our rationality, in a sense, elevates us beyond the world of sense, making morality possible. This is not entirely dissimilar to Plato. Kuehn writes:

Accepting the validity of the empiricist approach to science and to the growth of knowledge, Kant wanted to save morality from becoming too naturalistic and too relativistic. He wanted to show that even in the absence of knowledge of absolute reality, morality has a claim on us that is absolute and incontrovertible. It is this moral claim on us that elevates us above the beasts. It shows us to be rational in the way that Plato had insisted that we are rational.
(Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, hereafter *A Biography*, p. 265)

Here we see a reference to Plato. Kant's ethical thought does bear significant resemblance to Plato. A prime example of this occurs in the Deduction in the second *Critique*, where Kant discusses the moral law and its relation to our freedom. Consider the following passage:

This law is to furnish to the world of sense, as a *sensible nature*, the form (as far as rational beings are concerned) of a world of understanding, i.e., a *suprasensible nature*, yet without impairing the mechanism of sensible nature (*CPrR*, p.62, 43)

For Kant, the moral law elevates us above the empirical world. As sensible beings, we exist under empirically conditioned laws – heteronomy. As rational beings however, we are afforded the ability, and indeed it is demanded of us that we act according to the moral law. Through practical reason, we are to reflect on our principles of action, and instead of merely pursuing our desires (whatever they may be) we are to accept, reject, or alter such principles according to their suitability for

universal legislation. This process highlights our independence from the sensible world – our freedom. Whereas everything (else) in the sensible world is governed by laws given to it (heteronomy), we possess autonomy – the capacity to act on our own laws. Discussing this law of autonomy, or the moral law, Kant writes it is:

[it is] the basic law of a suprasensible nature and of a pure world of understanding whose counterpart ought to exist in the world of sense, yet without impairing that world's laws. (*CPrR*, p. 62, 43)

This all seems fairly Platonic. Kant discusses a “pure world of understanding” which ought to exist in this world. However, Kant does significantly depart from Plato and it is important to understand what this departure consists in, and the implication it holds for an understanding of Kant’s moral philosophy.

It is worth remembering that, in general, Kant seeks to limit the domain of reason. The first *Critique* sets out to examine Pure Reason, with the result being a demarcation of the scope of human reason. There he departs from Plato, accepting much of the empiricist outlook, to argue that our knowledge is limited to the bounds of our possible experience. Knowledge of the sort that Plato proposed is not possible. Consider the famous Dove passage from the first *Critique* (*CPR*, Intro (2nd ed.), A5, B8-9, p. 50):

When the light dove parts the air in free flight and feels the air's resistance, it might come to think that it would be better still in space devoid of air. In the same way Plato left the world of sense.

However, whilst Kant does counter Plato here, he still retains much that is in Plato, particularly concerning ethics. As Kuehn notes (Kuehn, *A Biography*, p. 265):

The *Critique* and the *Prolegomena* showed not only why Plato's own approach was wrong, but also why the Humean approach, if properly understood, was not as inimical to a more rationalistic

outlook as many had supposed until then. A healthy dose of scepticism injected into idealism was just what was needed to show that while we have a higher purpose, we cannot know what Plato thought we could know.

The worry is that perhaps Kant himself commits an error similar to the dove in the field of ethics.

In considering this, it is illuminative to recall the difference between the transcendent and the transcendental. Again, Kuehn is helpful here; he quotes a playful, yet important footnote of Kant's from the *Prolegomena* (Kuehn, *A Biography*, p. 265):

High towers and metaphysically great men resembling them, round both of which there is commonly much wind, are not for me. My place is the fruitful bathos of experience; and the word transcendental ... does not signify something passing beyond all experience but something that indeed precedes it a priori, but that is intended simply to make knowledge of experience possible.

This is the defining insight of Kant's philosophy, the critical turn. Herein lays the crucial difference between Kant and Plato's ethical thought.

In order to defend Kant against claims of 'other-worldliness'¹⁷, the *transcendental* nature of his position is key. Consider for example, our transcendental freedom, it is this which, in a sense, elevates us above the sensible world, and allows us to be moral. However, as we saw in Chapter 5, this amounts to a point of view we must adopt in order to conceive of ourselves as practical rational agents.

¹⁷ A criticism we come across in Nietzsche for example.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think it is fair to say that Kant does not over value the rational. As we have seen, such an impression of Kant results in part from misunderstanding (see Schiller for example) and also emphasis on Kant's departure from the empiricist tradition, without at the same time considering this departure from the rationalist tradition. When this is taken into consideration – the transcendental rather than transcendent nature of Kant's thought for example – we can see Kant as not over valuing the rational.

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