INTRODUCTION

Kant's views about moral and non-moral motivation in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* have been the basis for some of the most familiar objections to Kantian rationalism. In reply to these texts, historical and contemporary critics have objected to Kant's rigid moral psychology, which appears to deny sensibility any role in moral agency and to understand moral activity as a matter of rational conscience, not character, virtue, emotion, and desire. As readers of the *Groundwork* will recall, Kant begins his analysis of morality in that work by proclaiming that the good will is the only thing that is good without limitation (Gr 4: 393; 49). In explicating the special mode of volition that makes the good will absolutely good, Kant draws a sharp contrast between duty and inclination as two opposing sources of motivation for the human will, and insists that only action motivated from a sense of duty possesses genuine moral worth. In light of the connection Kant insists on between the good will and duty, it looks as if having a good will amounts to doing one's duty for the sake of duty, not from emotion or inclination. Kant famously contrasts action done from duty and action done from inclination in his illustrations of four kinds of conformity to duty. Neither the prudent shopkeeper, who treats his customers fairly out of self-interest, nor the man of sympathy, who helps others out of a sense of natural sympathy, displays moral worth in his maxim of action. By contrast, Kant finds moral worth in both the person who is beneficent even though his own sorrows have extinguished natural sympathy for others and in the person who is beneficent despite what might be characterized as a wholesale indifference to the suffering of others (Gr 4: 398–9; 53–4). These two characters seem to be unsympathetic, cold philanthropists,

whose sense of duty is sufficient in the absence of natural emotions and inclinations, or even trumps countervailing emotions and inclinations.

Although Kant explicitly claims that his account of the good will is universally agreed to by "common understanding," it has struck many readers as counterintuitive (Gr 4: 394; 50). Whereas Kant thinks that morally favorable emotions and inclinations are unnecessary for a good will, on what would appear to be a widely held view of character and human goodness, a good will actually requires morally favorable emotions and inclinations.

Further remarks Kant makes about the very nature of inclination lend additional support to the idea that he regards inclination as duty's natural adversary. In Section II of the *Groundwork*, for example, he writes that inclinations "as sources of needs, are so far from having an absolute worth, so as to make one wish to have them, that it must instead be the universal wish of every rational being to be altogether free from them" (Gr 4: 428; 79). We are told that reason, "in the consciousness of its dignity, despises [empirical inclinations] and can gradually become their master" (Gr 4: 411; 65). Similarly, in the second *Critique*, Kant depicts inclinations as "blind and slavish," insisting that inclinations are "always *burdensome* to a rational being, and though he cannot lay them aside, they wrest from him the wish to be rid of them" (KprV 5: 118; 235). From the perspective of Kant's foundational works in practical reason, it looks as if reason has antipathy for inclinations and that a morally good will involves nothing more than doing one's duty in the face of opposition from inclinations.

Given their significance in Kant's moral theory, we might expect these views about the good will, moral worth, and duty to be important ingredients in any attempt to reconstruct a complete Kantian account of virtue. Accordingly, I begin, in Chapter 1, by analyzing the details of Kant's account of the good will and his well-known examples of acting from duty in *Groundwork* I. I then investigate four distinct objections that have been raised in response to Kant's rationalist moral psychology. Distinguishing between criticisms that Kant has the resources to answer on the basis of the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* from a central charge that can only be addressed by turning directly to his theory of virtue, I conclude with a challenge to Kant that this book as a whole aims to assess. Although Kant does not develop a complete account of virtue in the *Groundwork*, his account of what is required for a good will has led some of his critics, especially virtue theorists, to claim that Kantian moral character appears to be a recipe for nothing

more than continence – strength in overcoming feelings and desires contrary to morality. In other words, these critics have suggested that, in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*, Kant seems to ignore or overlook a distinction between virtue and continence, a distinction understood to be central to classical virtue theories.

I explain that this important residual worry about the moral psychology in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* motivates and structures an examination of Kant's later and less familiar ethical texts, including *The Metaphysics of Morals*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and the lectures on ethics. In these texts, Kant sets out a theory of virtue and a richer moral psychology, and thus assessing Kant's fuller account of moral character requires us to look carefully at these less widely known Kantian works in ethics. Kant's various claims about virtue require reconstruction, but, in Chapter 2, I argue that the key to this reconstruction is the concept of autocracy (*Autokratie*). Initially, this conception of virtue in terms of rational self-rule over sensibility seems to reinforce, rather than resolve or even mitigate, familiar criticisms of Kant's rationalism. This is because autocracy at first glance appears to be a rigid form of moral self-governance, one requiring the suppression or even wholesale extirpation of feelings and inclinations. If this picture of Kantian autocracy turns out to be accurate, it raises doubts about the adequacy of Kant's theory of virtue. Kant would seem to reject the commonsense view that certain feelings and desires are significant for virtue, and he would appear to reduce virtue to continence, a state of character widely understood to be second best.

But these objections ultimately misunderstand autocracy. What Kant objects to in the non-autocratic person is not the mere presence of sensible feelings and inclinations, but her tendency to take sensible feelings and inclinations as reasons for action that trump moral reasons. Kant thinks of this tendency as a propensity on the part of finite rational beings to subordinate morality to considerations based on happiness (a propensity he terms "radical evil"). It is thus this propensity to evil that must be overcome and subsequently guarded against if we are to live morally good lives in accordance with duty. Once we understand that Kant thinks that it is our tendency to place our inclinations above the law that is the real obstacle to morally good character, we see that an account of virtue in terms of autocracy does not require the extirpation, suppression, or silencing of sensibility. According to the more subtle interpretation of autocracy I set out in Chapter 2, the rational self-rule

constitutive of Kantian virtue involves three things: controlling affects and passions that disrupt proper moral health of the human soul, (2) maintaining feelings and inclinations to accord with moral concerns, and (3) cultivating feelings, desires, dispositions, and attitudes that facilitate moral action. It is these three functions together – control, maintenance, and cultivation – that provide a complete and adequate picture of Kantian moral character. Thus, in spite of his own initial suggestion that autocracy demands the rational repression of sensibility, Kant denies that virtue should be understood in such harsh terms. On the contrary, the virtuous person takes the right attitude toward her sensible nature, managing and cultivating her sensible nature appropriately. Because she has successfully managed and cultivated her feelings and inclinations in accordance with reason, the virtuous person has a healthy soul, one demonstrating inner freedom, tranquillity of mind, and a cheerful heart in living a life committed to principles of practical reason.

Any attempt to reconstruct Kant's considered moral psychology on the basis of his lesser-known works in practical reason would be incomplete without a detailed investigation of Kant's exchange with Schiller, which is the topic of Chapter 3. In "On Grace and Dignity," Schiller sets out an incisive critique of Kant's rationalist moral theory, when he argues that genuine virtue involves the full psychic harmony of reason and sensibility and that the fully virtuous person (the beautiful soul) is inclined to do her duty. This beautiful soul, as Schiller portrays her, takes pleasure in moral action, without experiencing moral laws as categorical imperatives, and the free conformity of her conduct to moral principles manifests itself in the pleasing aesthetic quality of grace. By contrast, Kant's good-willed agent, who does her duty from duty without inclination, displays dignity in obeying the moral law out of obligation, where dignity generally signifies conflict and disagreement within the soul. Schiller therefore insists that the person who has so thoroughly internalized principles of practical reason that she acts morally without being commanded, that is, the person who is fully in agreement with herself, represents an ideal of psychic harmony to which we should ultimately aspire. Although Kant and Schiller claim to agree on matters of principle in their exchange and portray their disagreement in terms of the presentation of doctrine, I argue that there is a substantive disagreement between them concerning the nature of virtue and moral health. A careful analysis of their debate reveals that competing conceptions of human nature underlie the competing political notions

about moral self-governance for finite rational beings that ultimately set Kant and Schiller apart.

Having analyzed the important details of Kant and Schiller's central disagreement concerning the proper relation between sensibility and reason in virtue, we turn, in Chapter 4, to the fuller moral psychology of Kantian virtue (what we can think of as "the positive" side of autocracy). On the more expansive moral psychology of Kantian virtue that I set out, Kant holds that a range of moral feelings, desires, interests, and attitudes shaped by reason are integral for moral agency, instrumental for the actual fulfillment of duty, and part of the content of virtue. While Kantians have noted that, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant characterizes sympathy as a feeling implanted in us by nature, one enabling us to do what the mere thought of duty alone may not be able to accomplish, I explore precisely how sympathy might function within a Kantian-inspired ethics of virtue. Kant himself suggests that sympathy is important for virtue because sympathy makes us sensitive to the joy and pain of others and thereby facilitates our ability to fulfill our duty of beneficence. Expanding upon Kant's own brief discussion of sympathy, I specify four roles sympathy might play in a fully worked-out Kantian virtue ethics, and explain how sympathy based on moral principles is important for Kantian virtue, even though the natural sympathy Kant discusses in the *Groundwork* is not a properly moral motive.

Finally, in a brief conclusion that brings together the overarching themes of this work, I recap the considerations establishing the idea that Kant does not reduce virtue to continence. Although Kant is able to distinguish between virtue and continence in his own terms, he nevertheless thinks that virtue presupposes some element of self-control, because he believes that finite imperfect beings have a tendency to evil that must be overcome and continually managed in a fully ethical life. Yet, as I emphasize, Kantian virtue is not exhausted by the notion of rational control over sensibility, for we are also obligated to strengthen and cultivate feelings, desires, and interests in accordance with principles of practical reason. The moral psychology at the heart of Kant's theory of virtue thus marks an important development within his ethics. At the same time, it might also seem to raise a question about the relation between Kant's considered account of moral character and the picture of the good will with which we began this investigation. In addressing this issue about the consistency of Kant's overall doctrines, I explain that while the requirements for full virtue are different from the requirements for a good will, this does not imply that there is a

tension across Kant's texts, for he does not hold that the good will is equivalent to a fully developed moral character. In retrospect, then, if the fuller moral psychology at the heart of Kant's theory of virtue reveals what many have taken to be deficient or lacking in the *Groundwork* account of the good will, this is not a problem for Kant, because the good will is not intended to serve as Kant's complete picture of moral character.

In sum, this work attempts to show that Kant has the resources to answer a number of the most familiar criticisms directed at his rationalist moral theory and that he is able to distinguish virtue from continence in his own terms. Furthermore, although certain aspects of Kant's theory bear favorable comparison to more familiar Aristotelian claims about virtue, I aim to highlight the distinctive features of Kant's conception of virtue that have not been properly appreciated. To anticipate, on the Kantian view of virtue set out here, virtue involves a (fundamental) moral disposition not to place our inclinations above the law, virtue, as full rational self-governance, is an ongoing, lifelong project that takes continual effort and hard work, and the virtues themselves are volitional dispositions conceived of as maxims of practical reason, not mean states with respect to feeling and action. As one Kant scholar has recently written, "We may reasonably hope that as Kantians further clarify Kant's theory of virtue, its richness will be more widely appreciated."[1] In setting out a systematic account of Kant's theory of virtue, this book aims to show that Kant provides us with a distinctly modern, egalitarian conception of moral character, one that surely deserves a hearing alongside the more traditional Greek views that have dominated so much of contemporary virtue ethics.

[1] Lara Denis, "Kant's Conception of Virtue," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 530.

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THE GOOD WILL, MORAL WORTH, AND DUTY: CONCERNS ABOUT KANT'S RATIONALIST MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Kant's views about moral and non-moral motivation in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* have been the basis for some of the most familiar criticisms of Kant's rationalism. On the basis of these texts, historical and contemporary critics of Kant's ethics have objected to his rigid moral psychology, which appears to ground moral duty in a thin conception of rational agency, making moral activity a matter of rational conscience, rather than a matter of character, virtue, emotion, and desire. Given their role within the foundations of Kant's moral theory, these views about the good will, moral worth, and duty will be important components in any attempt to reconstruct a complete Kantian account of virtue. In addition to motivating and structuring an examination of Kant's later and less familiar texts, which articulate a theory of virtue that accords moral value to a range of feelings, desires, and dispositions connected with sensibility, these doctrines may also constrain the details of Kant's moral psychology as elaborated in his theory of virtue, at least on an interpretation that seeks to preserve consistency across Kant's texts. After looking at the details of Kant's account of the good will and his well-known examples of acting from duty in *Groundwork* I, we consider four distinct worries about Kant's rationalist moral psychology. The main goal of this chapter is to distinguish the charges Kant has the resources to answer on the basis of the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* from those that are best addressed by turning directly to his theory of virtue, as it is set out in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and the lectures on ethics.

1.1 The good will, moral worth, and duty

Kant begins his analysis of what he considers to be common rational cognition about morality (*gemeine sittliche Vernunfterkenntnis*) with his famous proclamation that, "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation [*ohne Einschränkung*] except a good will" (Gr 4: 393; 49). In support of this key claim that we judge a good will and it alone to have unlimited goodness, Kant proceeds to rule out other plausible alternatives, arguing that all of the other various things we value are merely limited or conditioned goods. Talents of the mind, including understanding, wit, and judgment, as well as qualities of temperament, such as courage, resolution, and perseverance, are good and desirable for many purposes. Nevertheless, Kant insists that their goodness is conditional, because we know that these gifts of nature (*Naturgaben*) can be "extremely evil and harmful" without a good will (Gr 4: 393; 49). Some of these intellectual and practical virtues extolled by the ancients might be conducive (*beförderlich*) to the good will, making its work easier, by facilitating moral action. Furthermore, certain qualities of temperament, especially moderation, self-control, and a capacity for calm reflection, can appear to "constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person" (Gr 4: 394; 50). Their usefulness and perceived value aside, Kant is certain that, at least upon reflection, our shared understanding of morality informs us that these character traits are only contingently good, for they possess "no inner unconditional worth but always presuppose a good will, which limits the esteem one otherwise rightly has for them and does not permit their being taken as absolutely good" (Gr 4: 394; 50). We might, for instance, consider it desirable to have a sharp wit and a formidable intellect, admiring these qualities, which are instrumental for a number of good purposes. Yet, if Madge uses her wit and intellect to mock and humiliate anyone who disagrees with her moral and political views, these qualities in her are harmful. Since these traits can be good or bad depending on the moral character of their possessor, their goodness is qualified, conditioned, or limited. On Kant's view, the villain's moderation in affects and passions, self-control, and calm reflection are iniquitous, making her more abominable than she would have otherwise been (Gr 4: 394; 50).

Kant makes a similar claim about the merely conditioned or limited value of what he terms "gifts of fortune" (*Glücksgaben*), which encompass power, wealth, honor, health, and happiness (as the complete

satisfaction with one's condition) (Gr 4: 393; 49). As he explains, these external goods fortune may bestow on us are good only in conjunction with a good will; without a good will, they tend to produce boldness and often arrogance (*Übermut*) (Gr 4: 393; 49). Happiness, Kant holds, is something we cannot approve of unless its possessor has a good will, the very condition under which a person is worthy of being happy. Precisely in virtue of the fact that a person deserves to have her life go well only on the condition that she has a morally good character, we rightly feel no pleasure in seeing the vicious person content: "an impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will" (Gr 4: 393; 49). In sum, Kant insists that the good will, whose distinctive constitution he explicitly refers to in this opening section of the *Groundwork* as "character" (*Charakter*), is the only thing that has unlimited or unconditioned goodness.[1] In relation to everything else we value, desire, and pursue, only the good will is supremely and absolutely good, good in all possible circumstances, under any conditions, and regardless of whatever else might accompany it.

[1] To say that the good will is an unconditioned good is to say that it has a conditioning relation to other goods and that no other good (or conjunction of goods) has that relation to it – its goodness conditions the goodness of other goods, which have a qualified worth in relation to the absolute value of the good will. This is the aspect of the good will that Kant typically emphasizes when he contrasts it with happiness, maintaining that a good will constitutes the very worthiness of a person to be happy. The exact term Kant uses at the very beginning of his discussion of the good will in *Groundwork* I is "without limitation," indicating that there is nothing that limits its goodness, so that it is good in all possible circumstances and under any conditions, and nothing else can increase or diminish its goodness. For a helpful discussion of the different ways in which Kant and Kantians characterize the goodness of the good will and how these terms might be related, see Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 23–5 and "The Good Without Limitation" in *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Christoph Horn and Dieter Schönecker (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 25–44. It is worth noting, however, that within the first few pages of the *Groundwork*, Kant seems to treat the concepts good without limitation, unconditionally good, and absolutely good as interchangeable (Gr 4: 393–4; 49–50). See, also, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant characterizes a will whose maxim always conforms to the moral law as "*good absolutely, good in every respect* and the *supreme condition of all good*" (KprV 5: 62; 190).

Although Kant himself overlooks it, there is a clear parallel between his view that the good will has a conditioning relation to other goods and the ancients' view about wisdom. When the ancients say that wisdom is the sole good, they mean that it is the condition of all other goodness. For them, other goods are merely "putative" goods – they are good only if used wisely. Kant is therefore mistaken when he asserts that the ancients praise these other goods "unconditionally" (Gr 4: 394; 50).

Kant explains, further, that, as an unlimited or unconditioned good possessing intrinsic worth, the good will's value has nothing to do with its results or accomplishments, for these cannot add to or detract from its absolute value.[2] Indeed, even if the good will accomplished nothing at all, due to "a special disfavor of fortune" or "the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature," Kant contends that, "like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself" (Gr 4: 394; 50). In his words, the good will is "good in itself" (Gr 4: 394; 50). In claiming that the good will has full value in itself, Kant means that the provisions of nature, circumstances, luck, or fortune cannot alter the goodness of the good will. If one has a good will, no matter what else happens to be true, one has something supremely, absolutely valuable. Although it is better to have a good will accompanied by morally favorable feelings, desires, and dispositions that facilitate moral action and promote good deeds, these adornments do not make one's good will *itself* any morally better.

In an effort to give further content to a will that is good in itself, Kant goes on to explain that the good will is good "only because of its volition" (Gr 4: 394; 50). He then elucidates the unique mode of volition of the good will by introducing to us the concept of duty. This concept of duty, we are told, "contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances" (Gr 4: 397; 52). These subjective limitations and hindrances refer to the sensible inclinations we have as finite rational beings, inclinations that provide the good will (as it applies to us) with a potential obstacle to morality.[3] Although it would be natural to presume that these limitations and hindrances to which the good will is exposed somehow diminish its grandeur, Kant maintains that they do not conceal or disguise the good will, but, on the contrary, "bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the

[2] For Christine Korsgaard's analysis of the good will as intrinsically good, where intrinsic refers to the location or source of something's value, see her influential "Two Distinctions in Goodness" in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[3] Implicit in the notion that the concept of duty "contains" that of a good will under certain conditions is that the concept of a good will is broader in its extension than the concept of a will for which the concept of duty applies. For example, the divine will is a good will, but since the divine will has no inclinations that could conflict with moral laws, it needs no power of self-constraint in order to conform its will to the law. For the divine will, then, moral laws do not take the form of duties, where duty always signifies constraint of the will by reason. Wood raises this point about the extension of the concept of the good will in *Kant's Ethical Thought*, pp. 26–7.