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The Effect of Rousseau on Kant's Resolution of the Antinomy of Practical Reason

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Abstract

I examine chapters I and II of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, to show that Kant resolved the antinomy of practical reason by first giving an accurate representation of the cause of a properly moral act and then recognizing that this accurate representation raised further problems, problems that were anticipated by Rousseau, especially in his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Rousseau's reveries allowed Kant to explore, and to some extent overcome, the darker implications of their common understanding of virtue. In the second *Critique* this takes the form of explaining how one can understand and existentially achieve one's own satisfaction based on *contentment with oneself* rather than enjoyment.

Keywords: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Immanuel Kant; Critique of Practical Reason; Reveries of a Solitary Walker; antinomy of practical reason

1. An antinomy revealed

By way of introduction, consider the following passage, taken from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's posthumous book, the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*.

This is what greatly modifies the opinion I long had of my own virtue; for there is none at all in following our inclinations and in giving ourselves the pleasure of doing good when they lead us to do so. But virtue consists in overcoming them when duty commands in order to do what duty prescribes, and that is what I have been less able to do than any man in the world. (SW, 8. 51)¹

On the one hand, this quotation articulates an understanding of the relation between virtue and the inclinations that could have come from the pen of Immanuel Kant. On the other hand, the lived position it articulates expresses a problem that emerges only in the light of this proper understanding of the relationship between virtue and inclinations. As long as one is mistaken about that, and, as we shall see, everyone has been mistaken about it, the problem remains philosophically invisible.² Once the problem emerges, however, it threatens to undermine the proper understanding that has been achieved. Rousseau gives voice to his change of opinion regarding his own virtue, and in so doing challenges Kant's moral theory. For Rousseau, as soon as

something becomes a duty, he can no longer tolerate it. Rousseau understands that for him 'to do good with pleasure', he has 'to act without constraint' (SW, 8. 51). He is without virtue. Keeping this passage in mind, as we read from the central part of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, namely section II, Critical Resolution of the Antinomy of Practical Reason, helps us to focus on the latter's attempt to resolve an antinomy between living from the moral law and living from inclinations. In the context of resolving this antinomy Kant tells us that everyone before him has been mistaken concerning this relationship between the moral act and its cause or determining ground (see 5: 112).³

Only in the light of an exact 'representation of the law as the determining ground' of an action that is to be truly moral can Kant properly identify the antinomy of practical reason, that is, the seeming impossibility of a 'natural and necessary connection between the consciousness of morality and the expectation of a happiness proportionate to it' (5: 118–19). The proper articulation of the antinomy of practical reason allows the existential double binds that ensnare our attempts to live virtuous lives to become palpable. Further, only once the antinomy of practical reason is resolved can the challenge of Rousseau's lived position of being incapable of virtue become intelligible and pressing. In the Sixth Walk Rousseau reflects on the futility of trying to live one's life based on one's inclinations and explores other ways of resolving the conflict between what we desire and what we ought to do. Kant follows Rousseau with his own attempt to resolve the antinomy by distinguishing between the 'enjoyment of happiness' and the 'negative satisfaction with one's state' (5: 117).

I will show that Kant offers us another option beyond the alternatives outlined in Rousseau's life and writing. First, however, in order to appreciate Kant's option, we need to have a proper grasp of the antinomy of practical reason and its resolution, because it is only in this light that the particular problem Rousseau poses appears. So, let us first set some context for the antinomy.

2. Setting the context

2.1 *The paradox of method in the Critique of Practical Reason*

One of the differences between speculative and practical reason is that in the latter human beings have a tendency, against which they must guard, to reverse proper orders of grounding. All of the theories of practical reason before Kant have confused the proper relationship of cause and effect. This universal confusion brings Kant to the 'paradox of method in a *Critique of Practical Reason*' (5: 62). The paradox is 'that the concept of good and evil must not be determined before the moral law (for which, as it would seem, this concept would have to be made the basis) but only (as was done here) after it and by means of it' (5: 62–3). 'It would seem', as Kant suggests, that we first know what good or evil is, and, based on that, we formulate some moral law. For example, we know that killing innocent people is evil, therefore we formulate the law, 'Thou shalt not kill'. But Kant challenges this approach with his paradoxical method, which first expresses the form of the moral law and from this determines good and evil. According to Kant, he is simply following good philosophical practice in that 'it is contrary to all basic rules of philosophic procedure to assume as already decided the foremost question to be decided' (5: 63). If we start with the concept of the good and from this derive our moral laws, then 'this concept of an object (as a good object) would at the same time

supply this as the sole determining ground of the will' (5: 63). This concept of a good object has 'no practical *a priori* law for its standard', so the only criterion of good and evil would be the 'agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure' (5: 63). This way of proceeding would reduce the status of reason to determining pleasure and finding the means to obtain the object which produces such pleasure. Now, reason can certainly do this, but since the pleasure is known only through experience, there is no possibility here of an *a priori* practical law, and thus the specifically moral disappears.

We can no longer look first to the object to determine the will, rather it becomes necessary to investigate whether there is an *a priori* determining ground of the will. If we persist in looking first to the object, then 'the possibility of even thinking of a pure practical law [would] already [be] removed in advance' (5: 63). Kant's claim is straightforward:

if the latter [pure practical law] had first been investigated analytically it would have been found that, instead of the concept of the good as an object determining and making possible the moral law, it is on the contrary the moral law that first determines and makes possible the concept of the good, insofar as it deserves this name absolutely. (5: 63–4)

Kant stresses the importance of this remark, 'which concerns only the method of ultimate moral investigations', because it explains the 'occasioning ground of all the errors of philosophers with respect to the supreme principle of morals' (5: 64). Philosophers, ancient and modern, have sought some object of the will to be the matter and the ground of the law, but they should have been looking for a law that would determine the will *a priori* and immediately. Only having found this, should they have 'determined the object conformable to the will' (5: 65). According to Kant's analysis, any object of the will one chooses to determine the end ends by making the principle of morality heteronomous. For all the criticism of formalism in ethics, it remains a fact that 'only a formal law, that is, one that prescribes to reason nothing more than the form of its universal lawgiving as the supreme condition of its maxims, can be *a priori* a determining ground of practical reason' (5: 64).

This error of thinking that because X is good, we ought to do X, is not harmless. It is widespread and ultimately quite pernicious in that it ends up, as we have seen, destroying the specifically moral. Kant claims that we confuse ground with consequence here and that our thinking ought to follow the opposite course: because we ought to do X, X is good. The moral law determines what is morally good. Indeed, in much of life we set ourselves a goal or an object and then rationally choose the means to obtain that goal. But Kant is speaking here, as we just mentioned, of 'the method of ultimate moral investigations', and concerning this, all other philosophers, ancient and modern, have been wrong about their approach to moral philosophy (5: 65). The ancients showed the error openly by 'directing their moral investigation entirely to the determination of the concept of the *highest good*, and so of an object which they intended afterward to make the determining ground of the will in the moral law', while the moderns hide their error behind ambiguous wording (5: 64).

Kant will, somewhat in the spirit of the ancients, represent the highest good as the determining ground of the will, but only after he has established that the supreme

principle of the highest good is itself the moral law, thus justifying this version of the highest good as capable of fulfilling this function.

2.2 *The synthesis of virtue and happiness*

This search for the a priori principle, and the further discoveries it occasions, continues and deepens the understanding of the ambiguities that led us to mistake the consequent for the ground in moral matters. The first ambiguity which presents itself, when we reach the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, is that the concept of the 'highest', when we speak of the 'highest good', could mean either supreme or complete.⁴ In the Analytic Kant has proven that, while virtue is the supreme condition and therefore the supreme good, it is not the whole and complete good. Happiness is also required for the highest good in the latter sense. Even when these two elements, virtue and happiness, are viewed as joined analytically, as both the Epicureans and the Stoics did, one must still specify which is the ground and which is thereby grounded. The two possible relations allowed these schools to disagree on whether virtue was the ground or the consequent, with the Stoics saying it was the former and the Epicureans the latter. While Kant admires the two schools for having 'already tried all conceivable paths of philosophic conquest', he does see this dispute as regrettable in that they were vainly trying to find 'identity between extremely heterogeneous concepts' (5: 111). Kant says that it became 'disputes about words' and an attempt 'to devise a specious unity of concept under merely different names' (5: 111–12). The cause of this dispute was fear, not simply an intellectual misunderstanding. The philosophers were afraid to penetrate deeply into the real difference between virtue and happiness, because then they would have found that unifying them 'would require so complete a transformation of the doctrines assumed in the rest of the philosophic system' (5: 112). Having one's philosophic system destroyed requires a self-abnegation that is difficult to imagine, much less achieve. It is easier to hide behind words. For his part Kant had already accomplished this transformation of his own philosophy in the years leading up to the *First Critique*.

The accusation of fear and of hiding behind words is not directed solely against the ancient philosophers. Rather, all other philosophers have been afraid when confronted with moral insights that would require the transformation of other doctrines within their philosophy. We saw above how Kant, in explaining his paradoxical method of ultimate moral investigation, sees it as explaining 'the occasioning ground of all the errors of philosophers with respect to the supreme principle of morals' (5: 64). These errors have been made by both ancients and moderns, and the moderns resemble the Stoics and the Epicureans in using the same strategy, that is, they 'hide the above error [of seeking an object of the will as a ground of the law] . . . behind indeterminate words' (5: 64). Thus, all philosophers have been afraid to see the truth of the relationship of ground and consequence in moral matters.

This fear is not hard to understand. If virtue and happiness split apart, it opens the possibility of a vicious happiness on the one hand, and the woeful end of a virtuous person on the other. We are afraid of the world that the split reveals. Perhaps we are mistaken not only about the relationship between virtue and happiness, but even about what constitutes virtue or happiness. We are afraid of calling into question

what, at least up to the time of Kant, seemed like a connection necessary for social order and individual sanity. Kant holds that everyone has been wrong about what morality is and about the relationship between virtue and happiness. Further, everyone has been mistaken in seeking after happiness in this life, rather than looking for contentment. Finally, everyone is mistaken as to the question '*How is the highest good practically possible?*' It 'still remains an unsolved problem despite all the attempts at coalition that have hitherto been made' (5: 112; Kant's italics, my underline for emphasis).

If all the attempts at a coalition between virtue and happiness have failed, then the difficulty resides in this required synthesis of concepts. These two concepts are not easy bedfellows. Rather, 'they greatly restrict and infringe upon each other in the same subject' (5: 112). Nevertheless, bringing them together is Kant's goal, even as he criticizes any conception of their relation based on the law of identity. The difficulty is that, in order for virtue and happiness to be synthesized a priori, in other words, in order to carry out a transcendental deduction of the concept of the highest good, the antinomy that seems to make this deduction impossible has to be resolved.⁵ 'It is a priori (morally) necessary to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will: the condition of its possibility must therefore rest solely on a priori grounds of cognition' and a priori grounds of cognition are not easy to investigate (5: 113).

To realize this moral necessity, virtue and happiness must be thought of as necessarily combined, and so pure practical reason cannot assume either virtue or happiness without the other also belonging to it. Kant has already shown that their relation must be synthetic, 'indeed, as the connection of cause and effect',⁶ but neither alternative of virtue as the cause of happiness or happiness as the cause of virtue seems possible (5: 113). The connection of cause and effect has been Kant's focus throughout the second *Critique*, because he is concerned with 'a practical good, . . . one possible through action' (5: 113). It is only when we correctly understand this relationship that the true dialectic and the antinomy of practical reason can emerge and thus be resolved. It is to the antinomy that we now turn.

3. The antinomy of practical reason

In the highest good virtue and happiness must combine, and must combine so that 'either the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue or the maxim of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness' (5: 113). I read this as Kant presenting us with a dilemma that is meant to do more than simply reject the common view that one can both see happiness as the motive to virtue and see virtue in turn as causing happiness. Rather, I think that Kant is saying that since the desire for happiness cannot be the motive to maxims of virtue on pain of losing the specifically moral, our only alternative is that action on the maxim of virtue by its very nature is the efficient cause of happiness (even though that cannot be experienced).⁷ Kant himself in the next section, the 'Critical Resolution of the Antinomy of Practical Reason', lists these two 'propositions' as the content of the 'foregoing antinomy' (5: 114). These two propositions do form an exhaustive dilemma and both of these propositions are false, but I follow Bernhard Milz here in seeing the antinomy proper as consisting in the propositions that (1) virtue and happiness must be combined to form the highest good, but then either virtue is the cause of happiness

or happiness is the cause of virtue, but both of these exhaustive alternatives are false, so (2) the combination of virtue and happiness does not form the highest good.⁸ This is the antinomy that threatens 'the combination of morality with happiness in accordance with a universal law, but only from a misrepresentation, because the relation between appearances was held to be a relation of things in themselves to those appearances' (5: 115).⁹

I would add that, since this is the antinomy of *practical* reason, there is more to the antinomy than a contradictory relationship between propositions.¹⁰ Therefore, Kant goes on to tell us that the moral necessity of promoting the highest good, when the highest good is correctly represented as containing the combination of virtue and happiness in such a way that virtue is the cause of happiness, means that if happiness is not the result of virtue, then the moral law which commands us to promote the highest good is false, because the happiness does not, in fact, obtain. This dimension of the antinomy forms what today we would call a double bind: we are commanded by the moral law to promote the highest good, but in so commanding us, the moral law falsifies itself. But since this is a falsification of the moral law, it too has moral import, and by it we are forbidden from following the moral law. We must follow it; we cannot follow it. When I promote the highest good at the behest of the moral law, I prove that the moral law is false. I end in despair. Below we will examine the way Rousseau's thought helped Kant to think through this problem.

If we revert for a moment to the antinomy of practical reason constituted by the two opposing propositions, namely, happiness and virtue must coalesce versus happiness and virtue cannot coalesce, then we can appreciate Kant pointing out the 'similar conflict' in 'the antinomy of pure speculative reason' (5: 114). The similarity consists in an exhaustive dilemma. In theoretical reason the dilemma runs: either there is natural necessity and freedom or there is only natural necessity. There is no third option. Similarly, in practical reason either virtue must be combined with happiness or virtue and happiness cannot be combined. There is no third option. The practical antinomy parallels the speculative antinomy in that the latter's antithesis, that there can be no freedom, must be seen as false, since the solution to the antinomy is precisely that both forms of causality can occur. The thesis that there can be two kinds of causality, natural and free, can only be disproved if one falsely assumes the '**absolute reality** of appearance' (A536/B564). So too the second proposition of the practical antinomy, 'that a virtuous disposition necessarily produces happiness, is false *not absolutely* but only insofar as this disposition is regarded as the form of causality in the sensible world, and consequently false only if I assume existence in the sensible world to be the only kind of existence of a rational being; thus it is only *conditionally false*' (5: 114).¹¹ When the conflict is 'between natural necessity and freedom in the causality of events in the world', as in the antinomy of practical reason, then it turns out to be 'no true conflict', because the 'events and even the world in which they occur are regarded (and they should be so regarded) merely as appearances' (5: 114). Practically, one and the same acting being can be regarded either as appearance or as noumenon.

Thus, the conflict of practical reason with itself becomes a 'seeming conflict' (5: 115). This parallels the 'deceptive delusion that must inevitably arise if we misinterpret our own concepts of experience' that Kant writes about in the first *Critique* (A497/B525). That is, the double bind disappears when we see that the logical

conclusion that we are not to follow the moral law, since it has been shown to be false, holds only if virtue cannot cause happiness. That certainly seems to hold in the sensible world, but it is not absolutely ruled out. That is, 'it is not impossible that morality of disposition should have a connection, and indeed a necessary connection, as cause with happiness as effect in the sensible world, if not immediately yet mediately (by means of an intelligible author of nature), a connection which, in a nature that is merely an object of the senses, can never occur except contingently and cannot suffice for the highest good' (5: 115).

So, while it is 'not impossible' for virtue to lead to happiness, it is not in any way obvious that it does. In fact, it is so obscure that Kant tells us it is 'strange' that both the ancients and moderns held that they could find 'happiness in precise proportion to virtue already in *this life* . . . or persuaded themselves that they were conscious of it [happiness in *this life*]' (5: 115). We know that part of this self-persuasion is based on their fear of having to go so high or so deep in their thinking that their philosophical doctrines would have to be transformed. These thinkers would have had to entertain the idea that virtue and happiness are not only not the same but are quite heterogeneous.

Behind this last strange fact Kant sees two different ways of confusing cause and effect. In the first case Epicurus 'fell into the error of presupposing the virtuous *disposition* in the persons for whom he wanted first of all to provide the incentive to virtue' (5:116). One cannot know the enjoyment of life of a virtuous person before one has become virtuous, so how 'can one commend to him the peace of mind that would arise from consciousness of an uprightness for which he as yet has no sense?' (5: 116).¹²

In the second case, the error is one of subreption, the mistaking the feeling (which is a result) for the cause, doing the moral thing. This mistake is more subtle than that of the Epicurean. Kant sees thinkers mistaking the satisfaction that a person feels when they do the right because it is right, for the motivation for doing the right thing. 'This pleasure, satisfaction with oneself, is not the determining ground of the action: instead, the determination of the will directly by reason alone is the ground of the feeling of pleasure, and this remains a pure practical, not aesthetic, determination of the faculty of desire' (5: 116). Nevertheless, the two have 'exactly the same inward effect' (5: 116). That is, both produce a feeling of the agreeableness expected from the desired action, and so one can end up taking 'the moral incentive for a sensible impulse' (5: 117). Kant admits that the feeling 'is sublime', that it is even to be cultivated, but one must be

on guard against demeaning and deforming the real and genuine incentive, the law itself . . . by such spurious praise of the moral determining ground as incentive as would base it on feeling of particular joys (which are nevertheless only results). (5: 117)

Again, results or effects get mistaken for being the cause of something.

Kant arrests this taking the results or effects for the cause by means of a correct representation. Correctly representing the ultimate cause, the cause that is not the effect of anything else, would be one way doing this, but this way is closed to human beings. We have no experience of ultimate causes. The indirect way that Kant finds

leads us to a correct interpretation of that which is the cause and that which is the effect. We interpret the feeling of respect for the moral law as coming directly from reason and as the *necessary result* of ‘necessitation of the will by the law’ (5: 117). This feeling then leads us to something that is final: the moral law. This direct necessitation by the law is not a feeling of pleasure, but neither is it totally unrelated to pleasure, and so to desire. This will raise, as we shall see via Rousseau, profound issues for the way Kant will proceed. Kant tells us that ‘in relation to the faculty of desire it [respect] does the same thing but from different sources’ (5: 117). We see here the basis of our confusion. The faculty of desire experiences respect coming from necessitation by the law much in the same way that it experiences overcoming an obstacle to achieve a non-moral goal. Struggling to win the marathon feels ‘the same way’ as doing one’s duty because it is one’s duty. But the difference between the two is crucial. Kant’s way of representing the doing of one’s duty, because it is one’s duty, removes all our other desires *as well as the desires of others* from the representation. Thus, by removing all these desires, we finally achieve our desire:

Only by this way of representing things, however, can one attain what one seeks, namely that actions be done not merely in conformity with duty (as a result of pleasant feelings) but from duty, which must be the true end of all moral cultivation. (5: 117)

4. Rousseau and Kant

Kant thus articulates a way by which practical reason can operate, unaffected by any desire, especially others’ desires. Kant represents the moral life in this way because he was aware of the noxious influence of our inclinations and of the desires of others on our morality. Accepting Kant’s representation of practical reason frees us from this influence and its distortions, but it also introduces its own problems and to these Kant (and we along with him) must now turn. We know that Kant read *all* of Rousseau,¹³ although explicit references, particularly in the published writings, are rare. Still, the problem being treated and sometimes even the vocabulary employed point towards Kant’s engagement with Rousseau. Here I present such textual evidence as there is, and it is not inconsiderable, but regardless of the explicit textual connections, I am arguing that reading Kant’s resolution to the antinomy of practical reason, in the light of the specific problem that Rousseau presents, illuminates what is going on in the Kantian text. The controversies surrounding this section of the second *Critique* are so deep and long-standing that depriving ourselves of any resource to deepen our understanding seems irresponsible.¹⁴

Rousseau understood well, perhaps better than Kant, the problems that Kant confronted in the antinomy of practical reason, for Rousseau had lived out their contradictions. We saw above in the introductory section how Rousseau’s articulation of the relationship between virtue and inclinations closely aligns with Kant’s own, but the lives they lived were quite different. Rousseau’s autobiographical writings would have allowed Kant to explore some of the darker implications of their common way of understanding virtue and to seek ways to overcome them; they certainly allow us to do that. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* this takes the form of explaining how one can understand and existentially achieve one’s own satisfaction that is not based on

enjoyment. Kant will recommend the concept of ‘*contentment with oneself*’ (5: 117). It is a road that Rousseau himself recommends, even though his own attempts at it did not all end well.

4.1 The Reveries’ ‘Sixth Walk’

My larger argument is that the problem of the antinomy is not simply a logical problem but constitutes a kind of existential double bind. In other words, the problem with which we are confronted does not confine itself to the logical parameters by which the grasping of the impossibility of obtaining happiness in this life implies that the moral law is false. There is also the larger, more existential problem that using inclinations as the motivation of doing good leads to despair of fulfilling the moral law and renders humans unfit to live. Kant saw an example of this in Rousseau. We all have the experience of doing something that held out the promise of making us happy, but then, in fact, ended up making us miserable. Something goes wrong in a life that is sincerely attempting to be and do good. Rousseau provides a sort of case study of this in this ‘Sixth Walk’.

Rousseau begins this reverie with the remark: ‘There is hardly any of our automatic impulses whose cause we could not find in our heart, if we only knew how to look for it’ (SW, 8. 49). Thus, Rousseau too examines the cause and effect relationship as it operates in our moral life. Rousseau’s ‘automatic impulses’ are a somewhat larger category than Kant’s inclinations, but they would include the feelings that incline us to act one way or the other. Rousseau is going to analyse these impulses and show that perhaps they are not as ‘automatic’ as they seem. He recalls and reflects on what became a habitual detour that he made on his walks in Paris whenever he approached the ‘Enfer tollgate’.¹⁵ He looks inside himself for the cause of his behaviour.

At this tollgate, he recalls, a woman had set up a stand to sell fruits and bread. The woman had a son who was lame. The little boy would ask passers-by ‘quite graciously’ for alms. Rousseau became acquainted with the boy, and each time he went that way he would pay him some compliment and give him some alms.

At first I was charmed to see him; I gave to him very good heartedly and for some time continued to do so with the same pleasure, quite frequently even prompting and listening to his little prattle which I found enjoyable. This pleasure, having gradually become a habit, was inexplicably transformed into a kind of duty I soon felt to be annoying, especially because of the preliminary harangue to which I had to listen and in which he never failed to call me Monsieur Rousseau many times, to show that he knew me well. But to the contrary, that only taught me that he knew me no more than those who had instructed him. From that time on I passed by there less willingly and finally I automatically got in the habit of making a detour when I came close to this crossing. (SW, 8. 49)

Reflecting on this experience Rousseau recounts that he has often felt the ‘*burden* [*poids*] of my own good deeds by the chain of duties they later entailed’ (SW, 8. 50; italics JA). He then reports that ‘these chains did not appear very *burdensome* [*pesantes*]

as long as I lived in obscurity, unknown to the public' (SW, 8. 50; italics JA). And the conclusion that he reaches is that 'all natural tendencies, including *beneficence* [*bienfaisance*] itself, carried out or followed imprudently and indiscriminately in society, change their nature and frequently become as harmful as they were useful in their first direction' (SW, 8. 50; italics JA).

Rousseau describes for us the way the pleasure of an act disappears and gets transformed instead into a kind of affliction. Following the impulses of his heart to make another heart content led to a kind of pleasure, such as is 'sweeter than any other' (SW, 8. 50). Nevertheless, he tells us, this sweet pleasure, being mixed with the 'burden of my own good deeds by chains of duty ... disappeared and the continuation of the very attentiveness which had charmed me at first no longer struck me as anything but an almost unbearable annoyance' (SW, 8. 50). In more general terms, he writes that when he had become more prosperous, he was generous with people, but 'from these first good deeds, which my heart poured out effusively, were forged chains of subsequent liabilities I had not foreseen and whose yoke I could no longer shake off' (SW, 8. 50). The chains themselves 'did not appear so burdensome' until Rousseau became famous (SW, 8. 50). His celebrity then attracted all kinds of people, 'who, under the pretext of the great authority they pretended to attribute to me, wanted to influence me in some manner or another' (SW, 8. 50). The desire of the other to influence him disturbs Rousseau. Rousseau's conclusion, we saw above, is that 'all natural tendencies' done in society 'change their nature and frequently become as harmful as they were useful in their first direction' (SW, 8. 50). This conclusion is not abstract. Rousseau goes on to delineate the harmfulness in his own life and, as we shall see below, this harm is what Kant's moral philosophy is meant to address.

As we alluded to in our introduction, Rousseau's own moral practice appears to be the opposite of Kant's. For Rousseau, as soon as something becomes a duty, he cannot tolerate it. Rousseau understands that for him 'to do good with pleasure', he has 'to act without constraint' (SW, 8. 51). In admitting to this, Rousseau still maintains a theoretical position that anticipates Kant's on virtue. In terms of behaviour, the best Rousseau can do, when his duty and his heart conflict, is abstain from evil.

But to act against my inclination was always impossible for me. Whether it be men, duty, or even necessity commanding, when my heart is silent, my will remains deaf, and I am unable to obey. ... In everything imaginable, what I do not do with pleasure soon becomes impossible for me to do.

There is more. Constraint, though in harmony with my desire, suffices to annihilate it and to change it into repugnance, even into aversion, as soon as it functions too strongly; and that is what makes painful for me the good action which is demanded of me and which I did of my own accord as long as it was not demanded. (SW, 8. 51)

A purely spontaneous good deed is something Rousseau is happy to perform. But these spontaneous good deeds awaken in the other (and quite rightly according to Rousseau) an expectation of further favour. Thus, the one who receives the good deed

often transforms it into a claim and by this exacts its continuation. The 'law' enters in and Rousseau's heart leaves (SW, 8. 51). Henceforth, the act is done from 'weakness and mortification' and Rousseau takes no joy in it; rather his conscience scolds him for doing good reluctantly (SW, 8. 52). Further, 'the pleasure of fulfilling our duties is one of those that only the habit of virtue engenders; those which come to us immediately do not rise so high' (SW, 8. 52). Since he has no virtue, Rousseau will never experience this particular form of pleasure.¹⁶

'Sad experiences', such as Rousseau describes, affect the person who experiences them. Rousseau tells us: 'I learn to anticipate the unpleasant consequences of my impulses and to abstain from a good action I had the desire and power to do, frightened of the subjection I would submit myself to afterward' (SW, 8. 52). Now abstaining from the good one wants and can do is no small thing. Rousseau distinguishes here between those kinds of adversity that 'elevate and strengthen the soul' and those that 'strike it down and kill it' (SW, 8. 53). Being made to abstain from the good is one of the latter and it is this that preys on him. Rousseau lays out for the reader a scenario of the death of the soul. Rousseau was constitutionally incapable of virtue and gradually becomes incapable of spontaneous good as well. He withdraws from others, convinced that even apparently benign opportunities to do something that benefits others will end up ensnaring him. This is why, beyond the factual question of whether Kant was consciously thinking about this particular Rousseauian text or not, the question which it raises, if left unanswered, could render Kant's approach to ethics, at least for those who resemble Rousseau, otiose.

Recall that Rousseau began by reporting that the pleasure of his spontaneous good deed 'was inexplicably transformed into a kind of duty I soon felt to be annoying', continues by saying that not only has he no joy, but his conscience 'scolds [him] for doing good reluctantly', and ends with the death of the soul (SW, 8. 49, 52). How are we to understand the way our inclinations get transformed from being a pleasure to being a burden, so that they become associated with feelings of guilt and end in a withdrawal from relationships? Kant not only explains what goes on in Rousseau's 'inexplicable transformation', he is retrospectively trying to save Rousseau, and to do so he appeals to something that Rousseau himself saw as his form of salvation, a way of becoming like God.

4.2 Return to Kant

In order to show the textual links between Rousseau's reverie and Kant's treatment of the antinomy, allow me to quote from the 'Critical Resolution of the Antinomy of Practical Reason' at some length:

For the inclinations change, grow with the indulgence one allows them, and always leave behind a greater void than one had thought to fill. Hence they are always *burdensome* (*lästig*) to a rational being, and though he cannot lay them aside, they wrest from him the wish to be rid of them. Even an inclination to what conforms with duty (e.g., to beneficence (*Wohltätigkeit*)) can indeed greatly facilitate the effectiveness of *moral* maxims but cannot produce any. For in these everything must be directed to the representation of the law as determining ground if the action is to contain not merely *legality* but also

morality. Inclination is blind and servile, whether it is kindly or not; and when morality is in question, reason must not play the part of mere guardian to inclination but, disregarding it altogether, must attend solely to its own interest as pure practical reason. Even this feeling of compassion and tender sympathy (*des Mitleids und der weichherzigen Teilnehmung*), if it precedes consideration of what is duty and becomes the determining ground, is itself burdensome (*läßtig*) to right-thinking persons, brings their considered maxims into confusion, and produces the wish to be freed from them and subject to lawgiving reason alone. (5: 118; emphasis in the original)

We see that Kant uses the word ‘burdensome’ twice in the passage, highlighting it once, and that he adduces as his specific example of such burdensome inclinations ‘beneficence’. These are the same concepts that Rousseau used in describing his experience in the ‘Sixth Walk’. More generally, Kant is dealing with the same problem as Rousseau’s reverie: why is it that following one’s inclinations to do good to another, in other words following inclinations that conform to the moral law, ends up with the person wishing to be free from these very inclinations. For Kant, as we have seen, everything depends on how things are represented. He does not shy away from stressing the paradox that it is only by correctly representing our submission to the law that one avoids being legalistic: ‘Everything must be directed to the representation of the law as determining ground if the action is to contain not merely *legality* but also *morality*’ (5: 118). The only way to get beyond the law is through it. This is particularly true in those cases in which the inclinations more or less already conform to moral maxims.

Kant mentions in particular ‘this feeling of compassion and tender sympathy’ (5: 118). He claims that it is precisely confusing cause and effect, that is, when this inclination ‘precedes the consideration of duty and becomes the determining ground’, that causes it to be ‘burdensome to right thinking persons’ (5: 118). This is the confusion that Rousseau has described in the ‘Sixth Walk’ of the *Reveries*. Kant somewhat generously interprets Rousseau’s wish to be free from the burden, not as a wish to be free from the duty itself, but rather as a wish to be free from the domination of the inclinations and to be ‘subject to lawgiving reason alone’ (5: 118).

4.3 ‘Like God’

Rousseau seeks a happiness in following the moral law that includes what Kant would exclude, namely ‘enjoyment’ (*Genuß*) (5: 117). Rousseau seeks this, but in following his inclinations, he finds that this leads not to enjoyment but to the death of his soul. Kant also sees this way of pursuing happiness as condemned to failure. He differentiates another state, one that indicates a ‘satisfaction with one’s existence’ or ‘contentment with oneself’ (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) (5: 117). This emphasis on being content or satisfied with one’s existence may have its roots in what Rousseau described in his ‘Fifth Walk’ of the *Reveries*. There have been moments in his life, especially during his two-month stay on Île Saint-Pierre in Lake Bièvre, that Rousseau achieved a state that he could call ‘happy’ (SW, 8. 46).

But if there is a state in which the soul finds a solid enough base to rest itself entirely and to gather its whole being into, without needing to recall the past or encroach upon the future; in which time is nothing for it; in which the present lasts forever without, however, making its duration noticed and without any trace of time's passage; without any other sentiment of deprivation or of enjoyment, pleasure or passion, desire or fear, except that alone of our existence, and having this sentiment alone fill it completely; as long as this state lasts, he who finds himself in it can call himself happy . . .

What do we enjoy in such a situation? Nothing external to ourselves, nothing if not ourselves and our own existence. As long as this state lasts, we are sufficient unto ourselves like God. (SW, 8. 46)

Kant's description of the state of contentment with oneself does not go as far as Rousseau in suspending time, nevertheless there are parts that bear striking resemblance to what Rousseau seeks. In gaining mastery over one's inclinations, one enjoys an 'independence from inclinations and needs' in determining one's will, so that 'at least in its origin, it is analogous to the self-sufficiency that can be ascribed only to the supreme being' (5: 118). This kind of self-satisfaction has its 'sole source' in freedom, but freedom understood as 'consciousness of . . . an ability to follow the moral law with an unyielding disposition', so that freedom is 'independence from the inclinations, at least as motives determining our desires' (5: 117). This state of 'unchangeable contentment' is what Kant calls 'intellectual contentment' in order to distinguish it from an improperly called 'aesthetic contentment . . . which rests on satisfaction of the inclinations, . . . [and] can never be adequate to what is thought about contentment' (5: 117–18). This intellectual contentment is consciousness of pure practical reason's ability to determine the will.

4.4 The social dimension

When Kant speaks of '*independence from the inclinations*' he does not mean that one becomes like *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock, making one's moral decisions in a purely logical fashion. We have already seen above that following the moral law produces a pleasure, a pleasure that is 'sublime' (5: 117). This pleasure is 'exactly the same inward effect' as the feeling of agreeableness and therefore the two are easy to mistake (5: 117). Kant represents the moral life as being independent of one's own feelings, especially insofar as those feelings find their source in the influence of others and of society. Kant is pointing towards this when he writes that 'inclinations change, grow with the indulgence one allows them, and always leave behind a greater void than one had thought to fill' (5: 118). On a first reading this can sound like the changing, growing and leaving of a void, all as processes that occur within an isolated individual. But while it does occur within the individual, this individual is not isolated. A closer look at what Kant means by inclinations will show that they are primarily social in nature. We have the individual experience of expecting that some object will satisfy us, and then of obtaining, perhaps after much struggle, the object, only to discover that it, in fact, leaves us with a 'greater void' than we had thought to fill. What we can lose sight of here is how much of the original inclination

toward the object as desirable, of the ensuing struggle, and even of the experience of the void is mediated by others.

Feelings of *Mitleid*, compassion or sorrow, and *der weichherzigen Teilnehmung*, translated above as ‘tender sympathy’ but literally meaning ‘tender-hearted participation’, are feelings which are social in nature and which Kant wants totally removed from the sphere of rational morality (5: 118). These are also the kinds of sentiments that bring about the dreaded transformation Rousseau’s reverie describes.

We can grasp this better by looking at what Kant says about ‘Sympathetic joy and sadness’ (*Mitfreude und Mitleid*) in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6: 456; §34). He there characterizes these feelings as a kind of ‘shared feeling, sympathetic feeling’, and following Rousseau sees sympathetic feelings of pleasure at another’s joy and pain at another’s sadness as ‘implanted’ in us by nature.¹⁷ Kant is willing to grant a conditional duty, that is a ‘duty of humanity’ to use this fact ‘as a means of promoting active and rational benevolence’. But then he poses an important question. Where precisely is this character of ‘humanity’ located? There are two possibilities.

Now, humanity can be located either in the *capacity* and the *will to share in others’ feelings* (*humanitas practica*) or merely in the *receptivity* (*Empfänglichkeit*), given by nature itself to feel joy and sadness in common with others (*humanitas aesthetica*). The first is *free*, and is therefore called *sympathetic* (*teilmehmend*) (*communio sentiendi liberalis*); it is based on practical reason. The second is *unfree* (*communio sentiendi illiberalis, servilis*); it can be called *communicable* (*mitteilend*) (since it is like receptivity to warmth or contagious diseases) and also compassion (*Mitleidenschaft*), since it spreads naturally among human beings living near one another. (6: 456–7; §34)

This sheds light on what Kant meant when he wrote, as we read above, that ‘inclination is blind and servile’ (5: 118). Inclinations are ‘communicable’ or contagious in the same way as yawning, an example Kant himself uses (see 5: 26). Kant’s approach is to free us from any moral obligation regarding these communicable inclinations in that ‘consciousness of this ability of pure practical reason (virtue) can in fact produce consciousness of mastery over one’s inclinations, hence independence from this and so too from the discontent that *always* accompanies them’ (5: 118; italics JA). In other words one can become free of the influence of others’ desires, independent from the contagion spread by some model of desire, and so free oneself from the discontent that inevitably comes from following a model that inevitably becomes an obstacle to one’s desire.¹⁸ These are not asocial inclinations contained in the self, rather they are affects that are picked up, like viruses, from other people. These are what become burdensome.

In Rousseau’s account the social factor stands out more clearly. His troubles begin with the raised expectations of the other, but then these troubles get exacerbated through the social phenomenon of fame or celebrity. That is where the real darkness for Rousseau begins and ends. Kant emphasizes that these inclinations are ‘burdensome to a rational being’ (5: 118). The human being cannot lay these inclinations aside and yet ‘they wrest from him the wish to be rid of them’ (5: 118). We are caught here in yet another double bind, that which Rousseau describes in his ‘Sixth Walk’. The first consisted in an obedience to the moral law (no matter what my inclinations are) that

is necessarily to lead to happiness (fulfilling my inclinations), but leads instead to the moral law's falsification, and thus to a rejection of the moral law as immoral. That is, I ought to follow the moral law and I ought not to follow it. This leaves me with trying to follow my inclinations. Should I choose however to do that, this second double bind kicks in: I want to follow my inclinations, but when I do, I end up not wanting to follow them. The inclinations that we cannot lay aside are the very things that cause us to want to be free from them. Kant is showing us how we free ourselves from such a double bind. He has been accused in his moral theory of trying to have it both ways: providing no incentive for moral behaviour beyond the fact that it conforms to the moral law and yet making various attempts to provide an incentive in order to move the will to actually follow the moral law. I see the problem rather as Kant trying to negotiate his way through the difficult double binds that being moral imposes on human beings. The other ways out of the double bind in question, such as simply identifying virtue with happiness or so separating them that the one has nothing to do with the other, end up defeating their own purpose; they end in the moral disaster of either believing that the moral law is false or the despair of never achieving happiness through being virtuous. Following one's inclinations leads one to want to be free from those very inclinations. And then there is the Kantian way that allows one a certain contentment that one has done one's duty for duty's sake.

The problem Kant faces is not just that, logically speaking, since happiness is impossible, we draw the conclusion that the moral law is false (first double bind), but that existentially speaking, following the other route of spontaneously doing good leads to a kind of despair of fulfilling the moral law and leaves humans morally dead or inactive (second double bind). We saw above that, according to Kant, 'consciousness of virtue' is not, as it was for the Stoic, simply identifiable with happiness, since this consciousness leads not to happiness but rather to '*contentment with oneself (Selbstzufriedenheit)*, which in its strict meaning always designates only a negative satisfaction with one's existence' (5: 117). But this experience, properly interpreted, that is, with a correct understanding of the cause and of the effect, reveals to us one of the ways in which we experience freedom. Freedom is simply '*independence from the inclinations*, at least as motives determining our desires' and this is the 'intellectual contentment' Kant spoke of above (5: 117).

5. Conclusion

Both Rousseau and Kant seek a state of satisfaction that is comparable with the self-sufficiency of the supreme being. For Kant, this is the 'resolution of the antinomy of pure practical reason' (5: 119). From this solution 'it follows that in practical principles a natural and necessary connection between the consciousness of morality and the expectation of happiness proportionate to it as its result can at least be thought as possible (though certainly not, on this account, cognized and understood)' (5: 119). This is the best that humans can hope for. Pursuit of happiness cannot possibly produce morality. The happiness we pursue must be subordinated to this supreme good as the first condition of the highest good and then, and only then, is the '*highest good* the whole object of pure practical reason, which must necessarily represent it as possible because it commands us to contribute everything possible to its production' (5: 119).

Kant has resolved the antinomy of pure practical reason and shown the reader a way out of Rousseau's double bind that poses a threat to his or her soul. Only by resolving this antinomy so that practical reason is understood not to be the guardian of the inclinations but rather the protector and guarantee of its own interests can the demand be made that theoretical reason yield primacy to it. Practical reason has something to offer theoretical reason that theoretical reason cannot attain on its own and, even when provided to it, it cannot know. It can only seek to integrate these principles into a greater whole.

The arrow of causality does not fly backwards, but the anticipation of expected results does cause us to act in certain ways. The sublime experience of following the moral law solely because it is what one ought to do bears a striking resemblance to the delight of doing what one wants to do simply because one wants to do it. But in the first case the positive experience is a result and in the second case it is, at best, an amoral motivation. Rousseau clearly saw the difference between the two, which was much more than any other philosopher had seen before Kant. But Rousseau was unable to square the circle and properly represent how the moral law serves as the cause of moral living. For Rousseau it simply killed his soul and left him only able to abstain from evil. Kant sought to resolve these problems in the 'Critical Resolution of the Antinomy of Practical Reason'. In so doing he has provided us with a profound warning of the danger of misrepresenting our moral life.

Notes

1 All references to *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* are to the edition in vol. 1 of Rousseau's *Œuvres complètes* (Rousseau 1959–95), with translation in Rousseau 2000 (vol. 8 of the *Collected Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*); I will use the abbreviation SW. The *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* is found in vol. 3 of the *Œuvres complètes*, with translation in Rousseau 1992 (vol. 3 of the *Collected Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*); I will use the abbreviation DI. Since the English translations provides the pagination of the *Œuvres complètes*, I will simply provide the English page numbers.

2 I write 'philosophically invisible' because I believe that Paul saw this problem from a faith perspective when he wrote, 'I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do' (Rom 7:18b–19). Rousseau will admit to being unable to do the good he wants but will not go so far as to say that he does evil. Rather, all he can do is abstain from evil.

3 Citation of Kant's works employs the standard method of reference by volume and page to the Academy edition. Translations from the *Metaphysics of Morals* (in vol. 6) are from Kant 1996; those (often without further identification) from the *Critique of Practical Reason* (vol. 5) are from Kant 2015.

4 Consult Sweet (2013: 108–11) for a good summary of the debate concerning the meaning and importance of the concept of the highest good in the Anglo-American literature. The strength of Sweet's approach lies in her connecting the notion of the highest good with 'the demand for the unconditioned that characterizes reason'. For this, the whole chapter should be consulted.

5 In the final stages of completing this article, Kerimov (2023) was brought to my attention. This article clarifies the systematic importance of this (the second) transcendental deduction in the second *Critique*. Kerimov also explains how the need for the deduction produces the antinomy insofar as virtue and happiness must be causally synthesized, and while it is possible that each could be either the cause or the effect, neither alternative seems possible. In the face of this seeming impossibility Kant cannot proceed directly to a deduction but must first resolve this antinomy.

6 For the purpose of my interpretation I stress the causal relation between virtue and happiness in the world. In the text, as we shall see below, Kant construes happiness as a cause of virtue when it is a 'motive' for it. On the other hand, we also are concerned with the cause, or, better put, ground of virtue in order to understand more precisely what virtue is. Clearly, one is not virtuous according to Kant simply by enjoying happiness.

7 I express my gratitude to Prof. Richard Aquila for helping me to clarify the issues at stake here. According to Kant, we obviously do not experience the actions on maxims of virtue as the efficient cause of happiness, but this is how it must be. Resolving the host of issues raised by this passage is not my intention in this article. For further discussion see e.g. Albrecht (1978). The complexities surrounding the question of what exactly the antinomy of practical reason is are not lost on me and I appreciate the efforts of other scholars, especially Albrecht (1978) and Milz (2002) to bring some clarity, both historical and conceptual, to this question. My own view is that Kant, in dealing with the antinomy of practical reason, is dealing with a contradiction that has a foot in both the speculative and the practical realm. Again here, the theological roots of the concept of an antinomy and so the interpretation along the lines of St Paul's complaint quoted above are relevant.

8 Benzenberg sees 'the most natural reading Antinomy of practical reason' as consisting in the thesis that happiness is the cause of virtue and the antithesis that virtue is the cause of happiness (2021: 423). Förster certainly reads the Antinomy in this way (2011: 157–9). It is true that this form of the Antinomy has been criticized by interpreters such as Beck, Albrecht and Milz as not being an antinomy because the thesis and antithesis do not contradict each other. I basically agree with Benzenberg that the antinomy of both theoretical and practical reason constitute a 'relative contradiction' rather than a strictly logical contradiction (p. 424). Benzenberg sees Kant as giving a lengthy argument to show that while the thesis and antithesis do not contradict each other logically, they do contradict each other relative to their connection with the concept of the highest good (pp. 429–30).

9 See Milz (2002: 323). To summarize what is a very nuanced argument, Milz sees the antinomy of practical reason as the contradiction between asserting moral obligation and denying it (p. 322). That is, he sees the antinomy implying that a human finds himself torn this way and that between an unconditioned moral obligation due to the moral law, which he experiences as a fact of his moral consciousness, and a credible doubt about the validity of the obligation because this law demands what is impossible. This is not to say that the moral law is exacting and humans cannot meet its demands, it is rather that the moral law demands that we bring about the highest good, but we have reasons for doubting whether following the moral will actually bring that about. Hence, Milz's formulation: 'The antinomy consists in the contradiction between the "necessary hypothesis" of practical reason that "the highest good is possible" and the antithesis of theoretical reason that "the highest good is not possible." The antinomy is removed when theoretical reason allows that the demanded link between virtue and happiness is *not impossible*' (p. 328).

10 There is, as Kerimov aptly points out, an established tradition of treating the antinomy of practical reason as being, in the words of Beck but echoing Schopenhauer, 'devised and artificial' Kerimov (2023: 2, n. 1). Kerimov defends the position that the antinomies of both pure and practical reason resemble each other and that the latter is indeed the result of reason's dialectic.

11 While structured somewhat differently, my argument is supported by the reconstruction of this part of the text in Watkins (2010: 152–3).

12 Kant also tells us that first one has to be moral and only then does one experience the 'torment' of not living a moral life (5: 38).

13 Henrich emphasizes this fact as reported by Borowski (Henrich 2012: 37, n.)

14 Both Albrecht (1978) and Milz (2002) give extensive documentation of the many interpretations of this part of the second *Critique*.

15 The 'Enfer tollgate' was a real place in Paris at the time Rousseau was writing, but I also think that Rousseau is analysing the way we get trapped in a hell through our desires to do good. See Alberg (2007: 172–4). The whole chapter can be consulted for its interpretation of the *Reveries*.

16 Please see Velkley 2002, esp. ch. 3, 'Freedom, Teleology, and Justification of Reason', in which Velkley gives a masterful account of how Rousseau's 'new approach to metaphysical eros' shows that the 'ideas of wholeness and totality' as created by reason are 'the objects of the most passionate human strivings', and so this eros has 'a dialectical nature' (p. 56).

17 In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau wrote in the 'Preface': 'meditating on the first and simplest operations of the human Soul, I believe I perceive in it two principles anterior to reason, of which one interests us ardently in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance to see any sensitive Being perish or suffer, principally those like ourselves' (3. 126). From these two principles flow the rules of natural right.

18 For an in-depth analysis of mimetic contagion and its effects, see Girard 1966.

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