of duty where one is inclined to act differently. (*RL* VI 231) For this reason, it may appear that the principles of Kant's *Doctrine of Law* are heteronomous and therefore adverse to the principles of practical reason as these have been put forth in the *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. If my interpretation is correct, the concept of freedom in Kant's philosophy of law is a point of connecting law with autonomy as required by practical reason. Kant's distinction between autonomy and heteronomy applies to the will's relation to laws: the question is whether or not the will is subject to laws whose source is in the will itself. Alleged moral principles or laws are heteronomous when their source is external to the will to which they apply. When Kant initially characterizes freedom as the independence from another's constraining will and states that it is an innate right, he can be interpreted as saying that practical reason requires for law the sort of autonomy of the person that it requires for ethics, subject to the external character of law and its concern with the coexistence of persons.

Kant's Account of Virtue and the Apparent Problem with *Autocracy*

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Introduction

As is well known, Kant begins his paean to the good will in *Groundwork* I by insisting that the good will is the only unqualified good there is.[1] In an effort to analyze the goodness of this will, Kant draws a sharp contrast between duty and inclination as the two competing sources of motivation for the human will, and claims that only action from duty possesses moral worth. Given this connection between the good will and duty, the picture seems to be that 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 discussion of four kinds of conformity to duty. Neither the prudent shopkeeper, who treats customers fairly out of self-interest, nor the man of sympathy, who helps others out of a sense of sympathy, displays moral worth. By contrast, Kant finds moral worth in both the person who performs beneficent action even though his own sorrows have extinguished natural sympathy for others and in the person who performs beneficent action despite what might be characterized as a congenital indifference to the sufferings of others. These seem to be grudging moralists whose sense of duty either is sufficient in the absence of natural emotions and inclinations or must overcome countervailing emotions and inclinations.

This account of the good will has struck many readers as counterintuitive. Whereas Kant seems to think that the person in whom a sense of duty must overcome indifference or contrary inclination can and does display a good

[1] Apart from the *Lectures on Ethics*, all references to Kant are to *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (KGS), *herausgegeben von der Deutschen* (formerly *Königlichen Preußischen*) *Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 29 volumes [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter (and predecessors), 1902]. References to the *Lectures on Ethics* are to *Eine Vorlesung über Ethik*, ed. Paul Menzer (Berlin: Rolf Heise, 1924). Specific works cited in the body of the text are referred to by means of the following abbreviations: *Anthro* = *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (KGS 7). *Ethik* = *Eine Vorlesung über Ethik*. *Gr* = *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (KGS 4). *KprV* = *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (KGS 5). *MS* = *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (KGS 6) *Rel* = *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (KGS 6). The English translations of Kant's texts are from Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, introd. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), with the exception of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960). Within this paper the page in the English translation is referred to immediately following the reference to the volume and page of the German text.

will, our intuitions about human goodness suggest that there is something deficient or lacking in the grudging agent. Aristotle, for example, would think that the grudging moralist displays continence, rather than virtue, because he thinks it is the mark of the virtuous person that she does not experience a conflict between the rational and nonrational parts of the soul and that her emotions and appetites harmonize with rational judgments.

Such doubts about the moral psychology of the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* motivate and structure an examination of Kant's later and less familiar ethical texts, which appear to articulate a full conception of virtue and a more robust moral psychology. Yet the prospect for reconstructing a Kantian account of virtue from these texts that assigns a significant moral role to emotions and inclinations may appear bleak when we see that Kant conceives of virtue as moral strength of will over recalcitrant inclinations and that he characterizes virtue in terms of the *autocracy* of pure practical reason. This conception of virtue in terms of self-rule over one's sensuous nature reinforces, rather than resolves, familiar criticisms of Kant's rationalism.

The aim of this paper is to show that an adequate understanding of the self-mastery constitutive of Kantian virtue allows us to see that Kant can attribute a positive role to emotions and appetites within virtue. The paper is divided into three parts. Section I offers an analysis of Kant's conception of autocracy and its relation to autonomy. Section II sets out the apparent problem this account of virtue as self-mastery faces. Section III introduces the resources and subtleties in Kant's doctrines that create the space for a full defense against worries about Kantian autocracy.[2]

I. Kant's Conception of Virtue as Autocracy

Kant's fullest discussion of virtue as a character trait appears in *The Doctrine of Virtue* where he defines virtue in a number of different ways. What is common to most of these definitions is the notion of self-constraint or self-mastery, as well as a contrast between virtue and holiness. While holiness is the highest moral station for perfect beings who need no constraint in order to act in conformity with the moral law, Kant insists that virtue is the highest condition that finite rational beings can strive to attain. He describes virtue as "strength of mind," "soul," "will," or "maxims," and characterizes it in terms of an "ability" or "capacity" (*Fertigkeit*) or "courage" or "fortitude" (*Tapferkeit*). The definition of virtue as "a self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom, and so through the mere representation of one's duty in accordance with its formal law" seems best to bring together the different elements involved in Kant's conception of virtue (*MS* 6: 394; 525).[3]

[2] This full defense can be found in my unpublished dissertation, entitled *Kant's Theory of Virtue: The Importance of Autocracy.*

[3] On this point, see Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 163.

The particular term Kant uses to describe this moral capacity for self-governance is *autocracy*. This notion of autocracy is the overriding metaphor throughout Kant's treatment of virtue as a character trait, and it provides the key for reconstructing Kant's conception of virtue. Since Kant consistently contrasts the autocracy of practical reason with autonomy, we need to spell out the distinction between these two concepts in order to determine why Kant thinks we need autocracy, and not merely autonomy, for virtue.

In the Introduction to *The Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant distinguishes between a doctrine of morals, which he connects with the autonomy of pure practical reason, and a doctrine of virtue, which also includes autocracy. The latter, he tells us, involves "consciousness of the *capacity* to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law, a capacity which, though not directly perceived, is yet rightly inferred from the moral categorical imperative" (*MS* 6: 383; 515). In the *Lectures on Ethics,* Kant claims that self-mastery is the highest duty to oneself.[4] He equates self-mastery with autocracy and explains: "Autocracy, therefore, is the power to compel the heart in spite of every obstacle. Mastery over oneself, and not merely directing authority, belongs to autocracy" (Ethik 176). Elsewhere in these lectures, Kant reiterates the view that virtue requires autocratic constraint over oneself when he insists, "man must have an autocracy over his inclinations; he must curb his inclinations for things which he cannot have or can have only with great difficulty; if he does so he is independent with respect to them" (Ethik 216).

These passages tell us that autocracy is actual moral strength of will in overcoming obstacles that stand in the way of the will's conformity to the law, or the power to control and to subordinate inclinations when they conflict with duty. Failure to acquire autocracy is characterized in terms of surrendering authority over one's self and becoming a "plaything" of sense. The autocratic person disciplines and masters herself instead of yielding to emotion and inclination, and by doing so is portrayed as having securely subordinated her sensible nature to her moral nature. As a result of having acquired this moral strength of will, she is largely immune to temptation and is able to do her duty with a cheerful heart.

The reason we need this moral capacity for self-constraint is that what defines our ontological status, on Kant's view, is that we are *finite* rational beings, that is, imperfect beings whose needs provide a potential obstacle that can stand in the way of the conformity of our will with the moral law.[5] Thus,

[4] The lectures in this volume, first published by Paul Menzer in 1924 and translated into English by Louis Infield in 1931, are from the manuscripts of three students: Theodor Friedrich Brauer, Gottlieb Kutzner, and Chr. Mrongovius. According to Lewis White Beck, these manuscripts provide us with an accurate transcription of Kant's lectures on ethics as he gave them during the period from 1775 to 1780. (*Foreword* by Lewis White Beck in *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), p. x.) In this paper, I use *Lectures on Ethics* to refer to Menzer's collection and have used my own translations instead of Infield's.

[5] More precisely, we are *merely* finite rational beings. That is, on Kant's taxonomy, our will stands in contrast to both the infinite holy will and the finite holy will. Whereas the former has no sensible nature by which it could be affected, the latter is saddled with the sorts of

for non-holy beings like us, there is, as Kant often puts it, a distinction between the objective and subjective necessitation of the will by practical reason. In virtue of our autonomy, we stand under the moral law, which we recognize as authoritative; but because we have needs that can run contrary to the law, we sometimes fail to follow its universally valid dictates. We require autocracy because recalcitrant inclinations must be subdued so that we consistently act in accordance with our moral ends.

One suggestion of how to spell out the contrast between autonomy and autocracy is to distinguish between a mere capacity for self-control (which we all have as rational beings) and the realization of this capacity (which we have if we have acquired virtue). For it appears that what is central to Kantian virtue is a distinction between actual strength of character or self-control and the mere capacity for it, and we might think that this distinction between *actual* self-mastery and the mere *capacity* for it is just what the autocracy-autonomy distinction amounts to.[6] That is, an autocratic agent is a finite being who not only has the *capacity* for autonomy and thus the *capacity* to accomplish her moral task, but *actually is* autonomous in the sense of having her will conform to the moral law. If this is correct, autocracy is really just a special case of autonomy, in that it is the realization of autonomy for finite imperfect beings. And this would suggest that there is really no essential difference between these two notions.

In order to understand why Kant thinks he must introduce autocracy in his theory of virtue as something over and beyond autonomy, we need to recall how Kant understands the autonomy of pure practical reason. In the *Groundwork*, Kant defines autonomy as "the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of every property of the objects of volition)" (Gr 4: 440; 89). Thus, autonomy is foremost a capacity for self-*legislation*, which Kant understands as a capacity to make universal law through one's own will, that is, to adopt maxims which are valid for oneself only because they are valid for all other rational agents. With Kant's particular conception of autonomy, the laws we give ourselves are prescriptions of our own reason, through which we constrain ourselves in virtue of the recognition of their validity for all rational agents.

needs that burden us. Thus having no inclinations (as God has no inclinations) is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for having a holy will. That is, the mere existence of a sensuous nature is consistent with a will's being holy because either (a) its inclinations always accord completely with reason and thus do not pose any temptation to act contrary to reason; or (b) even if they do pose such temptation, the will has no propensity to prefer incentives of inclinations to those of reason when the two diverge. But what distinguishes both types of will from ours is that they possess a perfect disposition and so always act in accordance with the moral law. (I thank an anonymous referee at *Kant-Studien* for clarifying this point about the two species of holiness of will and the compatibility of holiness with the mere existence of inclination.)

6 The idea that the contrast is between a capacity and its realization is implicit in Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 164 and explicit in Bernard Carnois, *The Coherence of Kant's Doctrine of Freedom*, trans. David Booth (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 120.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant assumes that morality requires acting on the basis of the Categorical Imperative. He then introduces autonomy as the supreme principle of morality in the sense of being the necessary condition of its possibility. The key point to Kant's argument in the *Groundwork* is that action on the basis of the Categorical Imperative presupposes a capacity to determine oneself to act independently of, and even contrary to, one's particular interests as a sensuous being with needs, that is, one's empirical interests. The idea of such a capacity for self-determination is built into the characterization of autonomy as a property of the will. A will and only a will with the property of autonomy is capable of acting on the Categorical Imperative, because only a will that is capable of determining itself independently of its needs as a sensuous being can act in accordance with a practical principle that commands unconditionally because of its mere form.[7]

This reminder of how Kant conceives of autonomy reveals that the distinction between autonomy and autocracy is not one of a capacity for self-control versus its realization, because autonomy for Kant isn't really a capacity for self-control. Rather, the difference here is more adequately captured by distinguishing between a capacity for *creating* laws that are universally valid and the actual strength of will to *observe* such laws consistently because they are universally valid. The former we all possess as autonomous beings, and this is what defines our moral personality; the latter we can acquire through a process of self-discipline, and it describes our actual moral condition.

Finally, while this creating-versus-observing universal laws formulation explains the way in which autocracy is something essentially different from autonomy, we must remember that there is still an important connection between these two concepts. This is evident from Kant's repeated remark that virtue requires the autocracy of practical reason *in addition to* autonomy. What we have seen is that not all possible rational wills (or all autonomous wills) need autocracy, for the holy will has no inclinations that need to be mastered. Nonetheless, autonomy is a necessary condition for acquiring autocracy. That is, a prior condition for acquiring the capacity to master oneself so that one actually observes the dictates of morality and does so with a willing heart is that the will possesses the capacity for self-legislation, or the capacity for creating universal law. Thus, a will can be autonomous without needing to become autocratic (as in the case of the holy will), and a will can be autonomous and fail to have acquired autocracy (as in the case of weakness of will), but autocracy presupposes the autonomy of practical reason.

7 My understanding of Kant's conception of autonomy is greatly influenced by Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 85-106.

II. The Problem with Autocracy

Some of the central features of this initial account of autocracy lend themselves quite naturally to objections to Kant's account of virtue and the moral psychology associated with it. What is apparent from our analysis so far is that, for Kant, virtue is foremost a form of self-mastery or self-constraint that consists in the sovereignty of the rational will over one's sensuous nature. The virtuous agent is vigilant in mastering her inclinations (so that she does not take them as temptations to transgress the moral law) and constant in having duty always be the sufficient motive for her actions. The problem, however, is that this seems to amount to a rigid, repressive form of self-government, one that would appear to require the extirpation or suppression of inclination.

While the notion that virtue involves self-mastery in accordance with reason is not uncommon to traditional Greek views about virtue, including Aristotle's, the issue is the *particular form* of self-rule that appears to be constitutive of Kantian autocracy. A comparison with Aristotle's view is instructive here, for it highlights the worry.

On Aristotle's view, virtue is the condition in which the nonrational part of the soul that can obey reason does so and *harmonizes* with rational choice (*EN* 1102b 14-28).[8] In one sense, then, Aristotle and Kant agree that virtue requires an ordering of the soul in accordance with reason and that acting from virtue in the strict sense means acting rationally. Aristotle, however, holds that practical choice involves correct decision as well as appropriate desires. This means that neither desire nor reason is sufficient on its own; both are necessary factors in moral choice. First, for Aristotle, virtue is not just a cognitive state consisting in the correct decision. The correct decision must be effective, and this requires modification of affective and conative states (*EN* 1103a 15-1105b 18). Second, as the distinction between mere continence and virtue reveals, virtue does not consist simply in overcoming or subduing unruly appetites and emotions. They must be trained to harmonize and agree with correct choice.[9] Third, this harmonization does not just consist in pruning unruly affective or conative states by weakening or extirpating them, because virtue actually requires certain positive affective states (e. g., feelings and motivations).

Generosity, for example, requires the right attitude toward property and others. One's attachment to personal property must not be so strong as to overpower the correct decision to give; nor should the correct decision win by subduing selfishness or by extirpating concern for oneself and one's property. Instead, one must have the proper mix of self-regard and concern for others. Similarly, magnanimity requires not only the proper training and curbing of

[8] *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). All references to *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) will be to Irwin's translation and cited by Bekker pages and lines.

[9] Aristotle insists that virtue is no simple intellectual feat; it requires habituation and affective training in the appropriate pleasures, pains, and other attitudes (*EN* 1103a 10-1105b 18).

self-aggrandizement, but also a healthy esteem for one's own accomplishments.[10]

On Aristotle's view, the self-mastery constitutive of virtue requires appetites and emotions that agree with reason. By contrast, Kantian autocracy appears to be a form of self-mastery or self-control in accordance with reason that denies any positive role to appetites or emotions within virtue. Just as the *Groundwork* examples of the grudging moralist might seem like recipes for continence, not virtue, so too if autocracy involves the extirpation or suppression of inclination, it might likewise appear to be a recipe for mere continence.

There appear to be two different attitudes toward inclination that autocracy might require, neither of which supports the notion that Kant grants a morally significant role to inclination within his theory of virtue. In the first place, Kant at times indicates that autocracy involves wholesale extirpation of inclination. The claim that virtue requires self-overcoming (*Selbstüberwindung*) suggests such a view (Ethik 91). This interpretation gains further support from the two notorious passages from the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* in which Kant proclaims that inclinations are so problematic that rational beings do and should wish to be free of them (Gr 4: 428; 79 and *KprV* 5: 118; 235).

At other points, the idea seems to be that the domination or subordination of inclination by reason is enough for virtue. This metaphor is in line with the characterization of virtue as a "victory over inclination" and the portrayal of autocracy as the power of the soul to compel inclinations and to make them submit to one's rational free will (27: 465). On this model, virtue as autocracy can be cashed out in terms of reason having the final verdict over, or demanding the assent of, unruly or countervailing inclinations, which must be subordinated, dominated, or checked.

Whichever metaphor – extirpation or domination – is most adequate for capturing what might be required for Kantian virtue, the relevant point is that on either interpretation, emotions and inclinations appear to be the enemy which must be extinguished, conquered, or silenced by reason, and we are left with the standard picture that the moral struggle on Kant's view is a battle between our finite nature and freedom, or between sensibility and reason. If this picture is correct, Kant seems to reject the common view that certain feelings and desires rooted in the affective and conative side of human nature are necessary for virtue, and it appears that he is unable to distinguish virtue from mere continence.

III. A More Adequate Conception of Autocracy

The first step toward assessing these criticisms of autocracy involves coming to terms with one crucial feature of Kant's moral psychology. This is the idea

[10] These examples reveal that part of the significance of the doctrine of the mean is the role it gives to affective states within virtue.

that what has to be mastered in the moral struggle to attain virtue is not inclinations *per se*, but the value we place on them. What Kant objects to in the nonautocratic person is not the presence of emotion or inclination as such, but her tendency to treat emotions and inclinations as sufficient reasons for action when they conflict with moral requirements, which, on Kant's view, are always overriding. This propensity is what Kant refers to as "radical evil," and this doctrine of radical evil is, in a sense, the backdrop for understanding Kant's conception of virtue.[11] By "radical" evil, Kant means the root or ground of the possibility of moral evil. For him, this amounts to the tendency to adopt maxims that are contrary to the moral law. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant sets out his doctrine that there is a propensity to evil in human nature, or, as he puts it, that "man is evil by nature" (*Rel* 6: 32; 27). There he explains, "the proposition, man is evil, can mean only, he is conscious of the moral law but has nevertheless adopted into his maxim the (occasional) deviation therefrom" (*Rel* 6: 32; 27). In other words, radical evil amounts to the tendency to give priority to the principle of happiness even when it conflicts with the dictates of morality. Kant describes this propensity with reference to the distinction between good and evil in the following way:

> the distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the difference between the incentives which they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of the maxim), but rather must depend upon subordination (the form of the maxim), i. e., which of the two he makes the condition of the other. Consequently man (even the best) is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into his maxim. (*Rel* 6: 36; 31)

Clearly this doctrine of radical evil stands in need of explanation and defense. But it reveals that the mere fact that we have inclinations or empirical interests is not what prevents us from attaining a pure moral disposition. The problem, rather, is what Kant perceives as a tendency we all have to give priority to inclinations when they conflict with the claims of morality.

The significance of this feature of Kant's moral psychology is that the suppression of this tendency to give priority to appetite or emotion unregulated by duty does not require extirpating, suppressing, or being independent of one's sensible nature as a whole. Autocracy requires the proper ordering of the soul according to reason, whereby reason is the sovereign of one's sensuous nature. This undoubtedly involves weakening or limiting the scope of inclinations that are *foes* of duty. But at the same time, other inclinations that have been cultivated by reason might be *allies* of duty. This notion – that autocracy, as the ideal state of moral health for us as finite rational beings, requires not just the regulation of inclination by reason, but, in addition, a sort of ethical cultivation of sensibility according to reason – makes sense of Kant's positive claims in *The Doctrine of Virtue* that we are obligated to cultivate certain affective and conative states that enable us to act in accordance with our morally obligatory ends.

[11] On this point, see Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 162-171.

Kant's analysis of affects (*Affekten*) and passions (*Leidenschaften*), which he characterizes in the *Critique of Judgment*, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, and *Anthropology* as pernicious states that interfere with the self-mastery required by virtue, captures the picture of autocracy requiring the virtuous agent to control and to limit the influence on her will of affective and conative states that interfere with her moral obligations. With respect to affects and passions, which obscure our judgment and lead to emotional excitement that might tempt us to neglect or to violate our duties, Kant explains that virtue presupposes a kind of moral apathy (*Affketlosigkeit*). This apathy amounts to an immunity from passion or agitation that can incite an agent in directions contrary to duty.

But while pathological affects and passions that interfere with the self-governance required by virtue must be controlled and limited by reason, Kant makes a distinction between pathological and practical emotions and inclinations.[12] Practical emotions and inclinations have been *shaped and transformed* by reason, and are responsive to the authority of reason as the ultimate source of moral value, so that they are good and helpful from the perspective of morality.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this paper to spell out precisely what constructive role (or roles) emotions and appetites might play within Kantian virtue. But our analysis of autocracy and the idea that what must be mastered in the struggle to attain virtue is the propensity for evil provides the groundwork for the positive story within Kant's theory of virtue that full moral agency involves the cultivation of a host of affective and conative states which enable us to fulfill our moral obligations.[13]

[12] This distinction can be found in the following places: Gr 4: 399; 55, *KprV* 5: 83; 207, *MS* 6: 401, 452-457; 530, 571-576, and *Anthro* 7: 236.

[13] I would like to thank David Brink for his many thoughtful conversations about Kant's conception of virtue and Aristotle's moral psychology and his insightful comments on an earlier version of this material.