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The Ancient Background of Kant's Conception of Virtue

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I. Aristotelian approaches to Kant's ethics

There can be no doubt about the philosophical interest of a body of work that, largely since the 1990s, has recovered an ethical tradition distinguished by the recognition — identified as shared by Aristotle and Kant — that reason can be practical, which is to say that reason itself can be the source of ends and can produce action.[1] The significance of this work not limited to the challenge thereby lodged to the default status of Humean moral psychology in Anglophone philosophy. Indeed, by showing how the exercise of practical reason itself both expresses and constitutes character, this work shifted the focus of Kantian ethics from the decision procedure some have found described in Kant's *Groundwork* to a far richer re-examination of the nature of practical judgment, revealing a distinct Kantian contribution to topics of interest in contemporary virtue ethics, such moral perception.[2] These philosophical advances have reinvigorated contemporary Kantian ethics and Kant scholarship alike. A by-product of their success, however, is that Aristotle is invariably assumed to be the appropriate ancient reference point for Kant's conception of virtue. But this assumption is textually unsound, and it has misled us about the relevant philosophical questions raised by Kant's conception of virtue. My initial aim is to make the case that we have been thus led astray, to establish the rationale for the inquiry that will then occupy me for the remainder: namely, to show how Kant develops a conception of virtue that draws on Stoic ethics and natural teleology.

Grounds for doubt about the importance of Aristotle for Kant's conception of virtue might be apparent from a first-pass survey of the text that will chiefly occupy me here, the Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue, or Tugendlehre, in the 1797 *Metaphysics of Morals* (hereafter abbreviated TL-Introduction).[3] Kant indicates that his conception of virtue opposes "three ancient dicta", one of which he identifies as Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, and

[1] *Loci classici* are Korsgaard (2008, esp. ch. 6), Korsgaard (2009), and Engstrom (2009).
[2] E.g. Herman (1993, chs. 4 and 8).
[3] Except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is conventionally cited by the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions, references to Kant's works follow volume and page of the Academy edition; occasionally, when paraphrasing a very particular point, the citation includes the *line number*. Translations are my own, though I have closely consulted the standard English translations, especially those in the relevant volumes of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), series editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. The following abbreviations, which track German titles, are also used: **Anth**=*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; **EE=** "First Introduction" to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; **G**=*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; **KpV**=*Critique of Practical Reason*; **KU**=*Critique of the Power of Judgment*; **MS**=*Metaphysics of Morals*; **Rel**=*Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone.*

straightforwardly dismisses as "false" (MS 6:404).[4] That remark itself is not necessarily of great significance: he could after all accept as true and important other elements of Aristotle's theory. More telling is Kant's gloss of the doctrine not by citing or commenting on Aristotle's texts, but by quoting a mixture of commonplace Latin phrases and well-known lines from Ovid and Horace that have the gist "too much of anything is a bad thing".[5] We might then agree that Kant shows no sign, at least here, of having thought long or hard about *Aristotle*.[6] Moreover, Kant contrasts, perhaps deliberately, the banality of these putative formulae of Aristotelian doctrine with an apparently approving nod, in his own account of "virtue in general", to the so-called Stoic "paradoxes" — arresting theses that are pointedly contrary to popular opinion:

> Only in its possession is the human being free, healthy, rich, a king etc. and can suffer no loss by chance or fate, since he is in possession of himself and the virtuous man cannot lose his virtue. (6:405)

The remark is not a vague murmur of familiar Stoic themes: it hits all the particular notes struck by Seneca in *Constantia* (3.1-5)[7] — or we could just as well point to the fifth and sixth paradoxes discussed by Cicero in *Paradoxa Stoicorum* and the culmination of Cato's speech in *De Finibus* (DF 3.75) for nearly the same coverage. Further, Kant devotes two sections of the TL-Introduction (§§XV-XVI, 6:407-409) endorsing, as part of his own account, the characteristically Stoic idea that virtue requires apathy. Yet Kant's quotation of the Stoic paradoxes has gone largely unremarked by commentators,[8] and his endorsement of apathy either downplayed as a mere

[4] The other two are that "there is only one virtue and vice" and that "virtue (like prudence) must be learned from experience" (6:405). The first might refer to the Socratic and Stoic tendency to speak of virtue as wisdom, and vice as ignorance. Kant himself typically speaks of virtue *simpliciter*; and while he acknowledges that we "unavoidably" think in terms of a multiplicity of virtues, he maintains that we must understand them to fall under "one principle of virtue", and likewise with vice (6:406; see also 6:403-4). There is no straightforward objection to Stoicism in these remarks.

[5] Horace is quoted in fragment, the way an English speaker might quote "To be or not to be..." trusting her audience to know the source and complete the line. Evidently working from memory, Kant slightly misquotes the bit of Horace's *Epistle* 1.6 he indicates (lines 15-16, swapping a *ferat* for a *habeat*). The indicated lines advise one to deem even the wise man a fool should he "pursue virtue beyond what is sufficient [*ultra quam satis*]"; Kant returns to them later in the Introduction (6:409), granting the point only on the supposition that the putative "wise man" at issue is really a delirious moral enthusiast.

[6] Wood (2018a:251n4) suggests that Kant's explicit references to Aristotle's ethics consist exclusively of derisive remarks about the doctrine of the mean, and that his view of Aristotle "was apparently based entirely on [… the] cursory account" in J.J. Brucker's 5-volume 1742-44 survey *Historia critica philosophiae* (2018a:234). Perhaps. But Wood severely mischaracterises Kant's knowledge of the history of philosophy when he suggests that it was mostly confined to modern works of the previous century, getting his ancient philosophy only second-hand through Brucker's survey and "Cicero's Latin popularisations" (2015:120). Cicero is no mere populariser; and an education in Hellenistic philosophy even solely via Cicero would not be a paltry thing, as he remains indispensable for our knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy (for context see Mansfeld 1999:6-13). Kant moreover read Greek to a high standard from his student days (Kuehn 2001:47-49), and continued to read classical authors, especially Roman, into old age (Groß 1912:137-8).

[7] Seneca (1928:52-7).

[8] Vogt (2008:228n23) is an exception; she puzzles, however, over Kant's failure to make explicit "that he is quoting Stoic ideas". But this is no more mysterious than his failure to make explicit that he is quoting Horace and Ovid when glossing the doctrine of the mean (see n4): he trusts his original audience to know the reference.

rejection of 18th-century sentimentalism or refashioned as an Aristotelian recommendation for moderating the emotions.[9]

Commentators who assume that Aristotle is the most relevant ancient interlocutor for Kant's conception of virtue generally find themselves troubled by one question in particular. Kant repeatedly explains virtue as "a moral strength of will" (6:405; with related formulations at 6:380, 384, 387, 394). Since Aristotle distinguishes "continence" (ἐγκράτεια), the strength of self-control, from genuine virtue, it is then supposed that Kantian virtue is nothing more than Aristotelian continence — with the unwelcome implication that the Kantian virtuous person never acts wholeheartedly, or with any kind of ease or joy.[10] I think this worry is fundamentally misplaced, since Kant is simply not thinking seriously about Aristotle in the Doctrine of Virtue: therefore, his virtue-as-strength idea has nothing, really, to do with Aristotelian continence. The bulk of this chapter aims to show *how* we should reorient inquiry; but first I want to make more of a case about *why* we should, which requires outlining some systematic issues.

Aristotle is a psychological dualist, inasmuch as he takes there to be distinct rational and non-rational parts of the soul (Aristotle 1900 [1102a28]).[11] Some non-rational elements of the soul, like those concerned with nutrition and growth, are irrelevant for ethics; so Aristotle fixes his attention on the "desiring" element that — although it belongs to the non-rational part of the soul — nevertheless "partakes somehow in reason" (μετέχουσα ... πῃ λόγου, 1102b14), inasmuch as it is able to listen to reason and obey it (1102b31). This account sets up a series of distinctions between weakness (*akrasia*), strength (*enkrateia*), and virtue that can be outlined as follows. Those who are "weak" and "strong" in the relevant sense are alike "summoned" by reason to the right objects: i.e. they, at least in some attenuated way,[12] judge correctly about what ought to be done. And in both the desiring element "fights and opposes the rational part" (1102b14-18). Yet the strong person overcomes the contrary impulses of the non-rational part of the soul, and acts as reason directs, whereas the weak person is instead overpowered by such impulses, and does not act as reason directs. But there are no opposing impulses to overcome in the virtuous person: the non-rational desiderative part has been developed or trained so that it "speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as reason" (1102b28).

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9 Sherman (1997:116-20); Denis (2000:68) and Formosa (2011:103).
10 A version of the worry goes back to Schiller; for discussion see Baxley (2010:40-2).
11 My remarks draw just on Aristotle's programmatic account of the "facts of the soul" relevant to ethics in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13.
12 Aristotle refines the point in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.1-3.

Aristotle has no commitment to two distinct orders of being, governed by physical and moral law respectively.[13] Hence there can be no temptation to suppose that his psychological dualism reflects any such distinction. At this point we might wonder whether *Kant*'s psychological commitments should be unpacked in relation to such a distinction, which he plainly draws. Most commentators take Kant to be a psychological dualist, and at least tacitly suppose this position to be transposed from the metaphysical dualism just indicated. I doubt that Kant is a psychological dualist, but I will not make a thoroughgoing case for that claim in this chapter. My immediate concern lies with what results for the interpretation of Kant's virtue-as-strength idea on such a supposition: virtue is taken to be reason's mastery over our *sensible nature*. Thus Anne Margaret Baxley explains the strength of virtue as "an executive power of the will to master one's sensible nature and compel oneself to comply with norms legislated by pure practical reason" (2010:60). She acknowledges that the virtue-as-strength idea remains troubling: our sensible nature would appear to be "inherently problematic" inasmuch as it gives rise to contrary-to-virtue feelings and desires, and "a persistent impediment to morality" (67). The virtue-as-strength idea seems then to be of a piece with a moralistic disparagement of our sensuous nature.

Responding to this worry, Baxley acknowledges Kant's denial that "the ground of this evil" — radical evil, or the origin of human moral badness as such — "cannot be placed, as commonly done, in the sensuous nature of the human being, and in the natural inclinations originating from it" (Rel 6:34-5; see Baxley 2010:71). To elucidate this point, she attributes to Kant the view that *some* inclinations might be morally valuable inasmuch as they support the fulfilment of moral ends. By the lights of her account, they provide this support as something that is understood to be physical, in a sense meant to contrast with what is rational, in our mentality. There is no wholesale disparagement of our sensuous nature, she concludes — no call to "suppress, extirpate, or silence" it (2010:64-67). But we are called to work on it, "weakening or limiting the scope of feelings and desires that are *foes of duty*" (described as "recalcitrant forces" resisting the rational will), while cultivating those that "can be *allies of duty*" (73). By these lights, the strength of virtue is reason's effective management of our sensuous nature, specifically its "feelings and desires" which are tacitly conceived as a kind of physical tug that either works with or against the determination of the will by pure reason alone.

Such an interpretation fails to register that the obstacles to virtue, by Kant's lights, are "passions" (*Leidenschaften*), which he identifies both as genuine vice and as a kind of inclination

[13] This is generally true of philosophers of antiquity, apart from "Plato and the Platonic schools, who are very much the exception" (Annas 1992:3-4).

(MS 6:408). Such obstacles cannot be correctly conceived as something merely left over and in the way, owing to mismanagement of the non-rational element of our mentality. For Kant takes these obstacles to be themselves imputably bad, and something that we place in our own way (6:405.24): and if we are thus responsible for them, they must themselves be expressions of rational mindedness — though not, of course, rational mindedness in a state of health or excellence. To accommodate such an idea, Kant must recognise a sense in which a mental state can be "rational" that is distinct from what is "rational" because it (e.g.) expresses a person's commitment to the moral law, or any other normative standard of rationality. Passions, as we will see, are rational in the former sense. This is why Kant's virtue-as-strength idea cannot be understood as mastery over our sensible nature: there may be a conflict in view, but it is one internal to human rationality. These considerations show, from one angle at least, why we set off on the wrong foot if we assume that Kant's conception of virtue should be interpreted with reference to Aristotle.

Some of what may seem Aristotelian in Kant's remarks about virtue — such as his likening it to "the state of *health* proper to a human being" (6:384.13-4) — are correctly identified as nods to ancient Greek ethics, and specifically its common approach to ethics as a dimension of natural teleology.[14] Ethics, on such an approach, is centrally concerned with how the human being develops naturally towards the *telos* of virtue, conceived as the completion of our essentially rational nature. Certainly that much is common to Aristotelian and Stoic ethics. But Kant is engaged with a specifically Stoic way of thinking about ethics as a dimension of natural teleology, one that has a notion of "appropriate" or completion-promoting action — *officium* — at its heart. Kant presupposes this conceptual framework, as I will explain, when he presents the work of his doctrine of virtue as *doctrina officiorum virtutis*. Once this context is established, we will be able to reconsider Kant's virtue-as-strength idea in the correct light.

II. Reorienting inquiry

A. Stoic background: *oikeiōsis* and human development[15]

[14] Cf. Engstrom (2002:289n2).

[15] Primary texts are cited according to internal divisions within the texts. The following abbreviations are used in citations: DL= Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*; Ep= Seneca, *Epistulae*; Fin= Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*; TD= Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*. Quotations typically follow the English-only editions in the bibliography (i.e. not those in the Loeb editions, which I consult as original-language texts).

What we find at the intersection of ethics and natural teleology in Stoicism is the theory of *oikeiōsis*.[16] The term *oikeiōsis* is drawn from the standard word for expressing relations of belonging within a family (*oikeios*);[17] through this root, it carries connotations of affinity, endearment, attachment. The associated verb (*oikeioō*), in ordinary usage, is to make a claim on something as one's own, or appropriate it. It is contrasted against alienation or estrangement (*allotriōsis*). Stoics deploy these terms to describe, as Brad Inwood puts it, "their novel theory of the basic state of affairs which grounds all human and animal action" (1985:184). My aim is just to outline, in the barest terms, how the theory serves as a foundation for an account of human development in Stoic ethics.

It is well known that Stoics take the universe to be rationally governed. It may be somewhat less well known that Stoics take animals, but not plants, to be alive — a division they mark by taking animals to have souls, where plants have only natures.[18] An animal's nature is not completed just by a process of growth; rather, an animal has to *do* certain things — act appropriately — to complete its nature. Such actions are called *kathēkonta*, or *officia* in Cicero's Latin (Fin 3.20). Now, it follows from the rational governance of nature that animals must be set up so that they will be compelled to act appropriately. Nature does this by orienting each animal to its own constitution: "Every animal, as soon as it is born (this is where one should start)" — for this is when it acquires soul, and is no longer plant-like — "is concerned with itself and takes care to preserve itself. It favours its constitution and whatever preserves its constitution, whereas it recoils from its destruction and whatever appears to promote its constitution" (Fin 3.16). And this affinity for its constitution must be based in an awareness of that constitution (*sensum haberent sui*, Fin 3.16): that awareness, not pleasure and pain, guides appropriate action (Fin 3.16; Ep 121.7-8; DL 7:85-6).[19]

Nature, then, orients an animal to its own constitution; and the animal has an impulse to act appropriately on this basis. "Impulse" (*hormê*) in Stoic theory is sufficient for action: in non-rational animals and pre-rational human beings, it is a movement in the soul stimulated by the presence of something that accords with the creature's nature, so that it is directly compelled to act appropriately.[20] Impulse in human beings who have acquired reason is the product of assent to proposition-like items (*axiōmata*), so that human action expresses commitment to views about

[16] My schematic outline cannot enter into interpretive debates; and while the accounts in Inwood (1985:182-215), Frede (1999) and Klein (2016) differ on significant points of interpretation (for discussion see Klein 2016), I am nevertheless particularly indebted to all three.
[17] See Long (1996:253), Inwood (1985: 184-6), and Pembroke (1996 [1971]).
[18] This is, of course, a departure from Aristotle. Kant's definition of life at KpV (5:9n) implies that he takes the Stoic, not the Aristotelian, position for granted.
[19] Pleasure may however be an aftereffect of appropriate action (DL 7.85, Ep 116.3).
[20] See Inwood (1985:187); Kidd (1971:155).

how things are and what is worth doing. At this point we might be tempted to explore how the acquisition of reason, on the Stoic view, transforms the psychology of the human being. But that would lead us into complications that are extraneous to our task: to sketch how, with *oikeiōsis* as a premise, nature leads the human being to virtue. Such an account does need to adduce the resources that become available with the acquisition of reason. But since it is concerned just with what follows from natural principles, it can also hold at some remove the fact that, by Stoic lights, we corrupt ourselves from the first exercise of reason: for such corruption is, precisely, a departure from what follows from natural principles.[21]

Thus the story continues with the supposition that the human being acts appropriately, selecting what accords with nature and rejecting its opposite; and eventually the human being gains some "understanding" and thereby "sees and order and as it were concordance in the things which one ought to do" and "then values that concordance much more highly than those first objects of affection" (Fin 3.21). The human being, in other words, comes to recognise the reasonableness of *officia*, and is now moved by that fact: he recognises that the good lies in this agreement with the rational order of the cosmos, which Cicero's account names as "moral action and morality itself" (*honeste facta ipsumque honestum*, 3.21). Such action is "not included among our original natural attachments", but it still follows from nature (*secundum naturam*, 3.22). Though the human being still acts appropriately — performs, as it were, *officia* — her evaluative outlook is transformed. For what she now values, in so acting, is the agreement of such actions with the rational order of nature.

Features of Seneca's discussion of *oikeiōsis* will help us clarify a relevant point about the Stoic conception of the good. Seneca begins with vivid observations about skilful actions of non-rational animals, offered as evidence for the position that animals are compelled to act in these ways from an awareness of their own constitution. So endowed, they are set up on rational principles by Stoic lights. But while they are thus compelled to act in ways that promote the completion of their natures, this end is only "good" in a qualified, species-relative sense (Ep 124.11). Strictly speaking, "the good cannot in any way occur in a dumb animal; it belongs to a better and more fortunate nature. There is no good except where there is room for reason" (Ep 124.13). What is *good* cannot consist in the mere presence of rational order, since such order can be found in non-rational animals, and indeed in creation generally. *Good* can therefore only be rationality recognising and valuing itself — a contemplation of its own nature that is itself manifest in a practical attitude, and thus in action.

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[21] Hence Ciero's Cato mentions human corruption extremely briefly (Fin 3.35) and outside of the two-part account of *oikeiōsis* (Fin 3.16-26 and 3.62-66)

In this way, Stoics offer an account of human development flowing from natural principle. It gives us the only general moral principle to be found in Stoicism: our final aim is "to live consistently and in agreement with nature" (*congruenter naturae convenienterque vivere*, Fin 3.26). It is also what Kant recognises as the "first principle" of duties of virtue to oneself:

> The first principle of duty to oneself lies in the dictum 'live in agreement with nature' (*naturae convenienter vive*), that is *preserve* yourself in the perfection of your nature; the second, in the saying '*make yourself more perfect* than mere nature has made you' (*perfice te ut finem, perfice te ut medium*). (6:419).

As we can see, by Kant's lights this perfection must be the work of reason, which for him is importantly distinct from whatever may be the work of nature — even if we have good reason to suppose that we have been created with some kind of providential care.

B. Kant's idea of a doctrine of virtue

Kant's first topic in the TL-Introduction is the very idea of a "doctrine of virtue", which he glosses *doctrina officiorum virtutis* (6:381). My aim in this section is to explain how he arrives at this gloss, and begin to establish its relation to the Stoic account of human development outlined in §II.A.

Let us start entirely on Kant's own terms, though, and consider how he locates the work of the doctrine of virtue within ethics. The doctrine of virtue presupposes the results of pure ethics, which is concerned with the derivation of "the necessary moral laws of a free will in general" — considering those laws "under the obstacles [Hindernisse] of the feelings, inclinations, and passions to which human beings are more or less subject" (A55/B79). This passing remark from the first *Critique* might lead one to expect that the creaturely facts adduced in a doctrine of virtue would essentially consist of things about us that get in the way of our meeting the normative standard in question. It is silent about the possibility that the relevant facts might need to include positive endowments that make it possible for us to meet this standard in a specifically human way. Yet on the principle that ought implies can, we may assume that we must not be bereft, in the way we are created, of the resources needed to complete our essentially rational nature. The positive expression of that premise is the "original predisposition to good in human nature" invoked at the outset of Part One of *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (6:26).[22] As an *original* predisposition, it is understood to be laid in us in the way we are created; and as a predisposition *to good* it is understood to be the disposition that orients us towards our constitution and its completion, or perfection, in virtue. As we will see,

[22] For further discussion of the Stoic origin of this premise, see Merritt (2021).

Kant's account of duties of virtue in the TL-Introduction draws on the idea of such an endowment. Let us first consider the particulars of this predisposition as presented in the *Religion*, since this will help us recognise how they are invoked in the doctrine of virtue — and ultimately help us understand why Kant takes "the doctrine of virtue" to be a doctrine of the *duties* of virtue, or *doctrina <u>officiorum</u> virtutis*.

Kant distinguishes three elements of this predisposition, orienting us respectively to our "*animality* … as a *living* being", "*humanity*, as a being at once living and *rational*", and "*personality*, as a being at once rational and subject to *imputation*" — which together comprise the original predisposition *to good* (6:26). The original predisposition is an affective orientation, on the basis of which one has an affinity for certain actions or objects as appropriate to one as a creature of this kind. The first element predisposes one to actions that preserve one in life and contribute to the preservation of the species, which includes affinities for the care of one's own children, and for congregating with others, and doing things that preserve and sustain human communities (6:26). The second predisposes one to develop one's own abilities in a social context, and to find it fitting to be recognised by others for such (6:27); and the third predisposes one to act simply from one's recognition of what morality requires — draws one to such actions as appropriate — which is the moral feeling of respect (6:27).

I suggested that the original predisposition to good can be admitted on the principle that ought implies can. We must suppose that we are endowed with everything we need to complete our essentially rational nature; we must then be predisposed to act appropriately, or in completion-promoting ways — which just is to say that we must be predisposed *to good*. (I am bracketing, for now, Kant's view that we invariably corrupt the original predisposition to good just as soon as we come into the use of reason: i.e., the thesis of radical evil.) Thus by Kant's lights, the original predisposition to good can be admitted as a premise without making any theoretical assertions about the teleological order of nature. Since Kant takes such assertions to be epistemically unwarranted, he cannot say that the human being (or indeed any creature at all) *has* any end by natural endowment.[23] Ends, as Kant emphasises in the TL-Introduction, can *only* be freely adopted (6:381): we can be coerced into outward performances, but never to make some performance for *some particular end*. Thus while nature may *orient* a human being to good, what a person actually does can only be determined in reference to her freely adopted ends. Now, Kant claims that the moral law derived in pure ethics is a synthetic a priori principle that

[23] Compare Baumgarten, who like most German rationalists asserts a conception of nature as rationally governed; thus when he endorses the Stoic principle "live in agreement with nature", he takes it to require that the human being "intends the same ends as are fixed in advance by nature" (Initia §45).

determines, from itself, the necessary object of a pure rational will, the good.[24] He revisits the point in the TL-Introduction (6:380.22-5), where he reasons as follows: if there were no morally obligatory ends, outwardly dutiful actions would be performed for reasons independent of the agent's recognition of the moral law; such actions would not be completely dutiful; therefore there must be ends internal to the law, ends that it is a duty to adopt (6:385). The upshot can be expressed thus: the human being must adopt certain morally obligatory ends in order to take up the lead of the providential endowment at issue, or act appropriately.

Kant conceives of these morally obligatory ends — which he names, without ostensible argument, as *one's own perfection* and *the happiness of others* (6:385) — as the "material" determining ground of the choice, in dutiful action (6:381). Although Kant explicitly identifies the duties of virtue with the adoption of these morally obligatory ends (6:383, 385), his account of this point, as we are about to see, is not entirely straightforward.

C. *Officia virtutis*

Now we will look into some of the details of Kant's account of duties of virtue, which, as we have noted, consist in the adoption of morally obligatory ends. I am able to consider here only the duty of virtue that consists in the adoption of the end of self-perfection. My aim is to show how, in this context, Kant presents an account of human development that draws on the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* outlined in §II.A.[25]

When Kant expounds upon the duty of virtue that, by his own account, should consist in nothing other than the adoption of the morally obligatory end of self-perfection, he points instead to particular things a human being must *do*. This duty, he says, "can be nothing other than *cultivation* of his *faculty*" — *Vermögen*, in the singular, which in non-philosophical contexts means "property" or "assets" — "or natural predispositions [Naturanlagen]" (6:386-7). The duty, in other words, would seem to consist in *doing faculty-cultivating things*, rather than adopting the end of self-perfection: I will return to that issue. One elementary point is clear: virtue cannot consist in a given natural endowment, though it may result from what we do with such an endowment (see 6:386). Now, Kant presents this duty in two counts. Here is the first:

> (1) It is a duty for [the human being] to work himself up [*sich … empor zu arbeiten*] from the crudity of his nature, from animality (*quoad actum*[26]) more and more towards

[24] See the transition marked by Chapter II of the KpV Analytic (5:57ff.).

[25] Owing to restrictions on space, I cannot elaborate here on how this approach would suit the duty of making the happiness of others one's end — nor on how the two duties of virtue are united, as Kant indicates, in the idea of making "the human being as such" one's end (6:395).

[26] "insofar as he is driven": *actum* is perfect passive participle of *ago* (drive, lead, put in motion).

> humanity, through which alone he is capable of setting himself ends; [e.g.] to amend his ignorance through instruction and to rectify his errors, and this is not merely technically-practical reason [deeming] it *advisable* for his further purposes (of art), but rather morally-practical reason *commands* it absolutely and makes this end into a duty for him, to be worthy of the humanity that dwells in him. (6:387)

We should be puzzled by several features of this account. First, Kant appears to suggest that we are bound by this duty in a pre-rational condition: for the human being, he says, is *required* to "work himself up" *from* his animality, glossed as the human being insofar as he is driven (*quoad actum*), i.e. by instinct. Kant cannot take a pre-rational human being to have ethical obligations. He must rather suppose that there is some developmental process of growth, which can be understood to operate on physical — and thus mechanical — terms, which leads the human being up to a certain point where this developmental process, though it continues, can no longer be understood in the same terms at all. That point would be the moment at which the human being becomes a fledgling person, subject to imputation; in the opening section of the *Anthropology*, Kant invites us to suppose this moment to be the dawn of apperceptive self-consciousness (7:127). Only from this point can the human being act as an imputable person; for now his actions, Kant supposes, are expressions of commitment to maxims — to views about what is a reason for doing what. The human being may continue to be *led* by instinct, i.e. *oriented* by a sense of what is appropriate to one as a creature of a certain kind: but anything he does, as an imputable person, will express a practical commitment and involve the adoption of ends.

Second, as noted earlier, Kant suggests the duty consists in *doing faculty-cultivating things*, when by his own lights it should consist in *adopting an end* — namely, self-perfection. To examine this issue, let us consider an example of faculty-cultivating action offered in the passage: *amending one's ignorance through instruction*. (Hereafter abbreviated *amending ignorance*.) The passage suggests that a human being might do this either because it is useful for some other purpose, or because the moral law commands it categorically, as a duty. But it is worth remarking that any normal human being is bound, at some point, to do such a thing. Now, Kant supposes throughout the TL-Introduction that there are ends any human being is bound to adopt "in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature", and it therefore cannot be a *duty* to adopt such an end (6:385). Anyone is bound to take an interest in the discovery and development of her own powers, simply in the orientation to her own humanity, the power to freely set ends and act on them. *Amending ignorance* will normally fall under the scope of such an interest. That is: *amending ignorance* allows a person to *do* more, making it the sort of activity that a human being will find appropriate in some basic way. But even *amending ignorance* in that spirit, which we could suppose to be relatively uncorrupted, does not promote the end of self-perfection as it is conceived here. For Kant says that the human being must make this end that he invariably adopts into a duty (*macht diesen Zweck ihm zur Pflicht*, 6:387.11). He must adopt it anew, in an entirely different spirit.

Schematically, at least, it is not hard to see how this story continues: the human being must do such things simply from the recognition of their being morally required. Hence the second count of the duty of virtue at issue:

> (2) The cultivation of his will up to the purest virtuous disposition, where namely the *law* is straightway the incentive of his actions that accord with duty, and to elevate and obey the law from duty, which is inner morally-practical perfection […]. (6:387)

The human being continues to do faculty-cultivating things like *amending ignorance*, but now from some recognition of their being morally required. Such actions must thereby become something else altogether: for actions are determined as the actions that they are only with reference to their maxims, i.e. as the concrete engagement *of* a certain evaluative point of view. But the evaluative point of view is transformed, and with it an action like *amending ignorance*. From here we can see that virtue is not simply the "inner morally-practical perfection" named in (2): virtue is not another perfection to be acquired, alongside a perfected understanding and whatever else. Virtue is a transformation of the entire package of creaturely resources. I believe that this is what Kant has in mind when he says that virtue is properly "represented not as if the human being possesses virtue, but rather as if virtue possesses him" (6:406).

This schematic account sheds some light on why Kant speaks of *duties* of virtue — *officia virtutis* — rather than just virtue. Kant alludes to a Stoic notion of *officium*, action that results from a creature's sense of its own constitution, and preserves it in this constitution. In this context it will not suffice to think of virtue as a disposition to perform dutiful actions simply from one's recognition of what morality requires. That is a merely formal notion of ethical obligation (*obligatio*) that Kant distinguishes from duty (*Pflicht*, which he glosses *officium*) that includes also "the matter" (6:383 and R6504 [c.1776-8] 19:40) or the concrete ways in which the human being is oriented, by providential endowment, to his own constitution.

Yet we are still in the dark about how this picture bears out the general conception of duty that Kant offers in this context:

> What everyone wants unavoidably, of his own accord, does not belong under the concept of *duty*; for duty is a *necessitation* to an ungladly adopted end [*Nöthingung* zu einem ungern genommenen Zweck]. (6:386)

Take duty to be required action (φ). We can then think of duty as an action one is constrained to perform because one is committed to an end (E), but where one is not committed to E "gladly".

Nevertheless φ itself might be performed gladly. For example, *amending ignorance* — something Kant suggests is required under the scope of the duty of virtue at issue — may, as we have seen, normally be performed gladly. But we are compelled to φ, as duty, owing to an end we have adopted ungladly. When we consider Kant's account of duties of virtue in relation to its Stoic background — that is: when we consider this "duty" at the same time in the Stoic framework of *officium* — we are invited to think of E as something like the role of being human. Thus: *amending ignorance* is compelled by our commitment to the role of being human, where we undertake this commitment "ungladly". Now, Kant suggests that we think of E in these terms when he indicates that the duties of virtue are united in the idea of making "the human being as such one's end" (6:395). But why suppose that the adoption of this end — the commitment to this role, as it were — would be taken up *ungern*, or "ungladly"?

A clue lies in the Stoic idea that a creature is endowed with psychic and somatic predispositions that compel it to act appropriately, i.e. in completion-promoting ways; and that this guidance comes not through pleasure and pain but rather through the creature's orientation to its own constitution through some kind of sense of it, a *sensus sui* (Fin 3.16, Ep 121.5, DL 7.85). Now, we have been considering how Kant takes duties of virtue to consist in the adoption of morally obligatory ends: we have specifically been considering the end of self-perfection. Kant's definition of duty suggests that this end must be adopted "ungladly". Since an end can only be freely adopted, it is perhaps off-key to translate Kant's *ungern* with "reluctantly".[27] Kant rather means that the end is adopted independently of the "sensible impulses" of our nature; therefore, we cannot be oriented to adopt this end through the basic satisfaction we find in doing things that, say, develop our resources to freely set ends and act on them. But this end could still be adopted simply from a sense of what is appropriate to us as imputable persons. That is to say that it could be adopted from the human being's predisposition to personality, or moral feeling.

Kant explains moral feeling in the continuation of (2) as "a feeling of the effect that the lawgiving will within the human being exercises on his capacity to act in accordance with his will", and grants that it can be understood, albeit with certain qualifications, as "a special *sense* (*sensus moralis*)" (6:387). Kant is anxious to reject a conception of moral feeling as a quasi-cognitive "sense" for good and evil, the presumption to which — like that to a "sense of truth" — he sees as a source of fanaticism or enthusiasm (6:400). Moral feeling is effectively a way of being *impressed* by one's recognition of moral requirement: the cognition lies entirely in the judgment of pure practical reason; but moral feeling is this cognition's registering as *implicating*

[27] As Gregor translates (6:386).

me. Thus Kant deems it to be "something merely subjective" (6:400): it is a self-manifestation bound up with the recognition of an action or attitude as morally required. And it is the only way we can fully commit ourselves to the role of being human.

Without moral feeling there can be no transformation in the evaluative constitution of the human being, so that the various resource-developing things she invariably does may so much as constitute, in a material way, her adoption of the morally obligatory end of self-perfection. This approach accords with Kant's vivid characterisation here of moral feeling as the basis of our creaturely integrity: without it, a human being "would be morally dead; [….] would dissolve (by chemical laws, as it were) into mere animality and be mixed irretrievably with the mass of other natural beings" (6:400). Our obligation with regard to it is rather "to *cultivate* it and to <u>strengthen</u> it through wonder at its inscrutable source" (6:399-400; my underscore).[28] Kant explicitly invokes a conception of "strength" as a power to maintain creaturely integrity, which is simply a conception of health. With that in mind, we can now return to the interpretation of Kant's conception of virtue as "strength".

D. Revisiting virtue-as-strength

I've been allowing myself to shuttle somewhat freely between the *Religion* and the Doctrine of Virtue because I take them to pursue ethics in a similar vein. Both take for granted the derivation of the moral law in pure ethics, and are themselves concerned with the moral development of the human being. This is an approach to ethics that bears comparison, on a number of points, with Stoic accounts of human development in the context of the theory of *oikeiōsis*. Human badness, which we bring upon ourselves, is not part of what unfolds according to natural principles; thus while Stoics think that we invariably corrupt ourselves just as soon we acquire reason, they suppose that such facts about us can be left to one side, at least when we are working directly at the intersection of ethics and natural teleology. Now, I have been arguing that there is an account of human development implicit in Kant's conception of the duties of virtue — at least that duty which consists in the adoption of the end of self-perfection. This account of human development leaves the fact of human corruption somewhat implicit, and thus bears this further resemblance to the Stoic account of human development outlined in §II.A.

But one of Kant's points in the *Religion* is that the fact of human corruption has to be part of any teleological story about us.[29] Thus while the *Religion* presupposes that the human

[28] On the "original predisposition" to personality as a proper object of wonder (*Bewunderung*), see also MS (6:483) and Rel (6:49), which are motivational passages for a pedagogical purpose. Kant often takes the proper object of *Bewunderung* to be signs of providential wisdom in nature — see also Anth (7:261), EE (20:216), KU (5:482n).
[29] The insight also drives the 1784 "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (8:17-30).

being is endowed with the "original predisposition to good", the first act of its well-known narrative is our inevitable corruption of this original predisposition (6:43.18-21) from "the first manifestation of the exercise of freedom in the human being" (6:38.1-3). This is the "radical evil" in human nature: it corrupts the predisposition so that myriad vices "can be grafted" onto the first two elements, the predispositions to *animality* and *humanity* in the human being (6:26.19, 6:27.21-2) — though the third, the predisposition to *personality*, will admit no vicious graft (6:27.37). It is telling that Kant dwells longer on the catalogue of these grafts than on characterising the rootstock in its basic and unblemished condition. Ultimately, though, the difference I am pointing to between the TL-Introduction and the *Religion* is merely a difference in emphasis. The *Religion*'s vicious grafts are the TL-Introduction's "obstacles" that need to be overcome with the "strength" of virtue. We now need to examine the nature of these obstacles, and their overcoming, in order to interpret Kant's idea of virtue-as-strength correctly.

Kant says repeatedly that these obstacles are "natural inclinations" (6:394) or just "inclinations" (6:397). On the standard interpretation of this claim, Kant is claiming that virtue's strength is its capacity to overpower these obstacles, conceived as non-rational causal forces of some kind, and thus master our *sensible nature*. Now, Kant consistently explains "inclination" as "habitual desire" (Rel 6:28, MS 6:212, Anth 7:251); and he thinks of desire as essential to life (KpV 5:9n). Thus it is plainly the case that non-rational animals and pre-rational human beings have desires, and presumably also habitual desires, or inclinations. Inclination, simply as such, does not require the resources of a rational mind. Now, a desire is habitual if it has been repeatedly gratified in a certain way — with this sort of object or by doing these sorts of things, in such-and-such circumstances. In a human being who has come into the use of reason, these acts of gratification are done intentionally, and thus express commitment to maxims. Of course, in *merely having* an inclination I might not renew that commitment: I can have an inclination but not act on it. But in us, the inclinations themselves have a history of practical commitment behind them: they are formed through accretions of rational assent. Hence it does not follow, from Kant's claim that inclinations are obstacles to *virtue*, that they are expressions of our sensible nature in a way that is meant to contrast with what is rational about us. Inclinations, in us, are expressions of rational mindedness.[30]

With that in mind we can next attend to some details of Kant's discussion of the obstacles to virtue. First, Kant emphasises that the obstacles to virtue are not something that simply crop up in us, or assail us entirely unbidden, as we might suppose if we interpreted them

[30] I develop this account of inclination at length in Merritt (forthcoming). For a similar view, see Wood (2018b:100) and (2011:76-7).

according to the received view. Rather, "the human being *himself* puts these obstacles in the way of his maxims" — meaning specifically the maxims expressing his "moral resolution" (6:394). And indeed he does not say that the inclinations *tout court* are these obstacles; he rather says that "the human being furnishes [these obstacles] *through* his inclinations" (6:405, emphasis mine). Inclinations are just features of our psychic architecture; they are not, simply as such, good or bad. But if we put the obstacles to virtue in our own way, then they are not simply something that happen to us: we are responsible for them; and inasmuch as they obstruct our progress to virtue, they must be *bad*. Therefore these obstacles must be a categorically bad sort of inclination, which is precisely how Kant explains "passion" (*Leidenschaft*): "without exception bad [*böse*]" (Anth 7:267). Kant is explicit, moreover, that passions express commitment to maxims (7:266). Invoking these ideas in the TL-Introduction, Kant explains passions as immoral evaluative commitments that we incubate or nurse (*brüten*), so that they take root deeply in us and feel fully natural (6:408). But they are genuinely bad and qualify fully as vice (6:408).[31] Thus they must be exactly what Kant had in mind as the sort of vice that gets grafted onto the affective orientation of the human being — the original predisposition to good — once it has been corrupted by radical evil. Passions can therefore be understood as the particular perversions of a corrupted person's sense of what is appropriate to her as a human being.

When Kant invokes the idea of virtue as "strength", he often links the idea to courage — for example, right before his citation of the Stoic paradoxes: "Accordingly this moral strength, as *courage* [*Tapferkeit*] (*fortitudo moralis*), also constitutes the only true war-honour [Kriegsehre] of human beings" (6:405).[32] He also indicates in this context (e.g. 6:380) that he is thinking of Latin *virtus*, not *honestum* (the standard Ciceronian term) — although he glosses "duties of virtue" with both *officia virtutis* (6:381) and *honestatis* (6:395). Presumably, though, *virtus* speaks more directly to the condition of the human being who, Kant supposes, can only progress continually towards virtue, as an ideal (6:383, 396-7, 409). Somewhat controversially, given the "mere continence" worry that thrives in the context of Aristotelian-oriented Kant scholarship, Kant illustrates this connection between virtue and courage with the figure of "Hercules, with lionskin and club, striking down the hydra, […] the symbol of all vice" in the record of his lectures on ethics (Vigilantius 27:492). Hercules also appears in a well-known footnote in the *Religion*, where Kant suggests that the virtuous person is "courageous [muthig], hence *joyous*"[33] — not bent by fear

[31] A passion is "ein *qualificirtes* Böse, d.i. ein wahres *Laster*" — it has all the qualifications of evil, and thus is a true vice.
[32] See also the gloss of virtue as *fortitudo moralis* at 6:380, where Kant's German for *fortitudo* is *Tapferkeit*.
[33] Joy (*chara*, *gaudium*) is one of the three headings of the Stoic *eupatheiai*, or elements of the affective profile of virtue (for an overview, see Graver 2007). But since we are dealing with life-threatening battle — i.e. genuine threats on our moral integrity — it might have been more appropriate (though probably less resonant for Schiller, to whom

(*ängstlich-gebeugt*, 6:24n). So we have an image of the courageous person facing life-threatening circumstances with a constitution that is untwisted by fear.

The courageous person, we should suppose, assesses the threats of battle correctly. These threats are the obstacles we ourselves put in the way of our progress towards virtue: "The vices, the brood of dispositions opposing the law, are the monsters he has to fight" (6:405). Why are they so particularly dangerous? Notice how Kant foreshadows the characterisation he goes on to give of the passions: they are offshoots, or monstrous spawn, of our corrupted original predisposition. It is as if they were our natural offspring, and we form deep attachments to them. We ourselves thereby take on a bent form or constitution that weakens our capacity to see them as the perversions that they are. That is why Kant says that virtue requires apathy "as strength" (6:408): we are fighting the illusion, manifest in the passions, about what is appropriate to us as human beings. To remove these obstacles from our path, we first need to "restore" the original predisposition "*to its power*" as Kant puts it in the *Religion* (6:44) — its power, namely, to orient us to good. We can only do this through an act of free choice, as Kant explains in the *Religion*; but this is an act that is possible only through the predisposition to personality, which Kant takes to be incorruptible in itself. Kant conceives of this restoration as a "revolution" in the human being's mindedness (Rel 6:47); but this should not be confused with the attaining of virtue itself. It is rather what puts one on the path to virtue, because it restores our capacity to do genuinely completion-promoting things, as it transforms the attitude with which the human being develops all of her creaturely resources.

III. Conclusion

If we assume that Kant thinks chiefly of Aristotle as he develops his conception of virtue, we are bound to interpret his virtue-as-strength talk as reason's overpowering, or effective management of, non-rational impulses in us. I have been arguing that Kant's view that the passions are the obstacles to virtue shows this Aristotelian approach to be mistaken.

Moreover, when we fix our attention exclusively on the battle metaphors that Kant sometimes invokes with his virtue-as-strength talk, we are liable to lose sight of the fact that he fundamentally thinks of this strength as a kind of health — in effect, a power to preserve oneself in one's proper form. Although this idea has roots in ancient ethics generally, Kant draws on specifically Stoic ways of thinking about it. We see this in his gloss of the "first principle" of the duty of virtue to oneself with the Stoic principle *naturae convenienter vive*, which he elaborates:

Kant directs this remark) to invoke the eupathic heading of "caution" (*eulabeia*), which includes watchfulness against justified censure (*aidōs*).

"*preserve* yourself in the perfection of your nature" (MS 6:419, quoted in §II.A). The Stoic background helps to bring out Kant's point: we preserve ourselves, in the relevant sense, by developing into what we were born by nature to be.[34] But what are we? We are rational animals. Virtue is the completion of our essentially rational nature in a specifically human way. We are not called to overpower our animality, or even effectively manage it; we are called to develop our creaturely resources with a certain attitude, from adopting the morally obligatory end of self-perfection. Kant, I have suggested, supposes that this development — if completed — transforms the whole package of creaturely resources, and that this transformation is the "strength" of virtue, regarded in this more positive light.

[34] See also Epictetus, *Discourses* (2.8.22).

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