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Healing the Wound: Rossi on Kantian Critique, Community, and the Remedies to the "Dear Self"

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Abstract
The main purpose of these introductory remarks is to give the reader a sense of Philip Rossi's philosophical project and its importance (§§1-2). I will then advance an interpretation of what motivates Kant's commitment to community (§3), and, on its basis, object to Rossi's views on radical evil –a point which affects how one should conceive the moral vocation of humanity and the role that politics and religion play within it (§4). My reconstruction concludes with a sketch of how the five contributions to this Symposium fit together and deepen our understanding of Rossi's overall project (§5).

Keywords Kant · Critique · Community · Dear self · Anthropological turn · Radical evil · Politics · Religion

1 Critique

In his new book, *The Ethical Commonwealth in History: Peacemaking as the Moral Vocation of Humanity* (henceforth ECH), Philip Rossi introduces an "anthropological turn" into Kantian studies.[1] As anyone familiar with the Jaësche *Logic* would concede, this turn is long overdue:

> The field of philosophy in this cosmopolitan sense can be brought down to the following questions:
>
> 1. What can I know?

[1] Rossi (2019). This book is part of the Elements series, which –in the words of the publisher's website– aims at "combining the best features of books and journals" through "original, concise, authoritative, and peer-reviewed (…) research" by "leading scholars.".

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2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?
4. What is man?

> Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the second, religion the third, and anthropology the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one. (9:25)[2]

Yet, in spite of Kant's grand cosmopolitan aspirations for philosophy, many Kantians have remained stubbornly "parochial." At the root of this parochialism Rossi sees the traces of Cartesian anxiety, the obsession among modern philosophers with ensuring the certitude and validity of human knowledge against the ravages of skepticism.

When seen against this epistemology-centric backdrop, Kant's critical project appears to be essentially devoted to debunking metaphysics and erecting in its place a contrite theory of knowledge, intended to humble and keep in check our "natural predisposition to metaphysics" (4:353). Although Rossi acknowledges that there is a grain of truth in this picture, he grants it no more than a grain. For, this approach to the Kantian corpus, stuck as it is on the first of the questions that philosophy is called to answer, misrepresents Kant's own architectonic vision, according to which anthropology is the capstone of the whole system. In Kant's self-understanding, the need to overcome Cartesian anxiety by devising a new conception of objectivity is only a first step, not the destination. As his writings throughout the 1780s and 1790s (on morality, politics, history, religion, aesthetics, education, race, and much more) clearly show, Kant's goal is to extend the "critically disciplined use of reason" to the "the full range of human inquiry and activity" (ECH, p. 4). These writings are neither distractions nor aberrations; on the contrary, they are the outgrowth of a project that aims, from the very beginning, "to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (KrV B this issue). The analytically minded Kantians who, through much of the twentieth century reduced the project of critique to epistemology, condemned as ancillary what is in fact the *raison d'être* of Kant's whole system.[3]

ECH is a strong repudiation of this tendency. The anthropological turn Rossi advocates aims at repairing the damage that this narrow epistemological interpretation does to Kant's cosmopolitan conception of philosophy. Essential to that goal is to restore religion and politics to their rightful place in the corpus (the attainment of which I will discuss later). Such a restoration is important, for it allows us to recalibrate the hermeneutic focus and realize that what motivates Kant's philosophizing is not the demise of rationalist metaphysics, but a cluster of

[2] Citations to Kant will be from the *Akademie Ausgabe* by volume and page, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* where citations will use the standard A/B edition pagination. English translations will be from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, 1992-).

[3] In a footnote, Rossi names W. H. Walsh and J. Collins as representative figures, but one suspects the specter of P.F. Strawson is here to blame (ECH, p. 2 n.).

"anthropological questions of what it is and what it means to be human" (ECH, p. 4). This line of questioning puts Kant much closer to Socrates than to Descartes: what drives critique is not the search for certainty, but the Delphic injunction to "know thyself" (ECH, p. 17).

Rossi's understanding of Kantian "anthropology," however, is not to be confused with the standard interpretations of the term. It points to something larger and more elusive. As Rossi sees it, "anthropology" does not designate a *Beobachtungslehre*, the kind of doctrine based on the observation of human beings which Kant develops in his numerous lectures and published work on the subject. Nor does it designate what Robert Louden has aptly called Kant's "impure ethics," the often neglected, though key aspect of Kant's practical philosophy, which is concerned with "the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of the metaphysics of morals" (6:217; Louden, 2000). Although these standard interpretations capture important aspects of Kant's thought, they fail to express what Rossi sees as most distinctive in Kant's view of humanity, namely, that we are creatures standing at "the crucial juncture upon which nature and freedom converge" (ECH, p. 16). This position is both fragile and exciting. Fragile, for it places human beings at the verge of an abyss, forcing them to straddle the incommensurable, yet equally constitutive demands of a universe governed by physical laws and a world of human relations governed by the moral law. Exciting, for it is this predicament that calls humanity to "subject itself to the self-limiting discipline [Kant] terms 'critique'" (ECH, p. 7) and gives rise to our moral vocation, namely, "to make 'the highest good in the world' possible through the exercise of human reason" (ECH, p. 6).

In Rossi's mind, our defining anthropological trait, i.e., to be the juncture of nature and freedom, reveals a fundamental tension within Kant's conception of humanity: it points to the presence of an ineradicable duality, combined with the demand for overcoming it. A "juncture" so conceived is as much a sign of rupture as it is a plea for closure –a demand to bind and heal what heretofore was laid asunder. Rossi sees this demand as the driving force of Kant's whole philosophical enterprise.

This peculiar take on Kant's "anthropology" is intended by Rossi to offer two important heuristic advantages over the more conventional understandings of the term. First, it helps to account for the centrality of Kant's doctrine of the highest good, which postulates the possibility of a synthetic connection between virtue and happiness, or, as Kant puts it in a more eloquent moment, "the combination, which we simply cannot do without, of the purposiveness deriving from freedom and the purposiveness of nature" (6:5). In Kant's system, these two kinds of purposiveness are ineluctably at odds with one another, yet, Rossi argues, the vocation of human beings is to reconcile them –i.e., to be a "peacemaker."

Now, "peacemaking" has a twofold sense in ECH. Rossi means it literally, since humanity is supposed to "[bring] about a definitive end to the social form of radical evil that we call 'war' and, in so doing, [establish] a lasting order of peace for the peoples of the world" (ECH, p. 33). But he also means it in reference to philosophy itself, since the goal of critique is to develop the conceptual apparatus that will put metaphysics into the "course of a secure science" (KrV B this issue), and, on this basis,

establish the primacy of pure practical reason (5:120 ff.). The avowed purpose of Kant's intricate conceptual moves is to relieve reason from its inner torment (the fate of being burdened by questions it can neither answer nor set aside (KrV A VII)), as well as to resolve the antinomies that threaten to tear it apart.[4]

When seen through this lens, the overarching goal of critique –be it in its world-historical function of bridging the gulf between nature and freedom or in terms of its place within the history of philosophy– is to overcome division and conflict, to achieve unity and peace. By introducing a revolution in our mode of thinking about objectivity (a drastic shift that gives human agency a constitutive role in the *making* of the natural and the moral worlds), Kant hopes, the "battlefield of metaphysics" with its endless controversies, no less than the historic battlegrounds where conflict is paid with blood, will become woeful memories of a violent past that humanity has left behind.

2 Community

The second heuristic advantage Rossi sees in his approach to "anthropology" is that it contains the key to understanding what unites these seemingly disparate aspects of Kant's thought, the doctrine of the highest good and the therapeutic dimension of philosophy. What binds them together, and with it the two senses of "peacemaking" discussed above, is the inseparable connection Kant draws between the activity of thinking and the need for community.

This is a point Rossi developed more fully in his prior book, *The Social Authority of Reason* (Rossi, 2005). In ECH, it remains largely tacit. Given its strategic importance, I will reconstruct what I believe are its defining features and provide textual evidence in support of Rossi's view.

Thinking, Kant claims, is not something individuals do on their own, as Descartes did in the comfort and solitude of his study. It is, rather, a social practice that requires steady institutional support. For, "how much and how correctly would we think if we did not think as it were in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts, and who communicate theirs with us!" (8:144). This type of communication, needless to say, does not occur in a political vacuum: it presupposes a mode of life, a whole set of institutions where all voices are heard, no matter their prestige or rank, and everyone "must be able to express [her] reservations, indeed even [her] veto, without holding back" (KrV A 739/ B 767).

Kant placed much of his historical optimism regarding the attainability of the highest good on the mutually reinforcing effect that this mode of life and a rational mode of thinking can have on one another. His assumption is that institutions that

[4] As is well known, Kantian antinomies posit side-by-side opposed, yet equally plausible arguments. This type of contradiction arises from reason's lack of awareness of its own limits, yet it is a self-inflicted wound that works as an engine of philosophical progress. For, Kant tells us in *Prolegomena*, this type of impasse is a "remarkable phenomenon [which] works most strongly of all to awaken philosophy from its dogmatic slumber, and to prompt it toward the difficult business of the critique of reason itself" (4:338).

secure freedom and equality will create social conditions that promote communication, and communication will, in turn, generate habits of mind and heart that reinforce freedom and equality. The last sentence of *What is Enlightenment* nicely sums up this virtuous circle:

> Thus when nature has unwrapped, from under this hard shell, the seed for which she cares most tenderly, namely, the propensity and calling to *think* freely, the latter gradually works back upon the mentality (*Sinnesart*) of the people (which gradually becomes capable of *freedom* of acting) and eventually upon the principles of *government*, which finds it profitable to itself to treat the human being, who is now *more than a machine,* in keeping with his dignity. (8:42)

The hope here is that, as people refrain from deception and manipulation, the free use of public reason will generate patterns of conduct that are conducive to morality, and this shift in attitudes will gradually induce governments to recognize the dignity of their subjects. Although what initially motivates this recognition is a strictly prudential calculation (to avoid the appearance of despotism in order to prevent social unrest), self-interest will eventually lead governments to treat citizens in genuinely moral fashion, i.e., as ends in themselves to whom a justification is actually *owed*.[5] In this way, the story goes, the participation in free argumentative practices will not only produce *good* (i.e., obedient) *citizens* and secure *good* (i.e., republican) *governments*, but, more importantly, it will also yield *good* (i.e., virtuous) *human beings*, i.e., subjects who do not merely obey civil laws but do so out of respect for justice itself. At the end of this process, and thanks to the unimpeded use of reason, Kant anticipates that human beings will have managed to span the gap between observable conduct and inner dispositions, creating social conditions where *right is might*. In such conditions, peace will be finally attained –and with it, our moral vocation.

This optimistic account of moral progress has had a lasting influence among contemporary political philosophers in the liberal tradition –Habermas and Rawls are perhaps the most influential examples. Together with them, Rossi shares Kant's trust in the power that the free exercise of reason, combined with the political institutions that make it possible, have to moralize human beings and produce peaceful and stable social relations.

[5] The extent of this justificatory debt of governments is a matter of dispute. For, Kant restricts political legitimacy to *possible* consent –not the kind of agreement (actual or tacit) we expect in contemporary liberal democracies. In *What is Enlightenment*, he makes the point this way: "what a people may never decide upon itself, a monarch may still less decide upon for a people" (8:399–40). But he is more explicit in *Theory and Practice*: "if a public law is so constituted that a whole people *could not possibly* give its consent to it […], it is unjust; but if it is *only possible* that a people could agree to it, it is a duty to consider the law just, even if the people is at present in such a situation or frame of mind that, if consulted about it, it would probably refuse its consent" (8:297). In any case, it is always the sovereign, not the people, who judges what counts as having met the standard of justification –a situation that casts a shadow of arbitrariness upon the role of popular "consent" in Kant's conception of the "general will." The finality of the sovereign's judgment about what counts as a "legitimate" law, combined with his monopoly of coercive force, makes of Kant's unconditional prohibition against revolution one of the most troubling aspects of his political philosophy.

I will argue below (§4) that we have good reason to be skeptical about this view.[6] Yet, we must first note that Rossi's liberal leanings reach no further than this optimistic view of moral progress. Indeed, ECH is as a sustained rejection of a fundamental premise in liberalism's origin story, which is built upon the myth of an atomistic, self-sufficient individual, whose beliefs and conception of the good are formed independently from her relation with others. Such a picture of the human condition, Rossi explains in the reply to his critics, embodies what Charles Taylor has called the "modern social imaginary": a distinctive mode of understanding the human condition, which gained impetus in the seventeenth century and served to "[make] possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (Taylor, 2004, p. 23)." This view of humanity takes the "punctual self" as its primary datum, and thus yields an "inwardly enclosed self-understanding of human selfhood that stands apart from and is resistant to encounter and engagement with others" (Reply, p. this issue). For this kind of self, relationality is artificial and suspect, a dubious construct to be dismantled and built anew from the ground up. The Cartesian meditator, separated from her prior opinions, her body, and other people, Taylor argues, is the epistemic crystallization of this modern imaginary. And there is but a small step, Rossi believes, separating the *cogito* from Hobbes' *"homo homini lupus,"* the insatiable arrant wolf who, in the state of nature, preys on other human beings and is unable to recognize the common bonds of their humanity. In this social imaginary, the *war of all against all* is not a passing nightmare, a tumultuous state we ever leave behind. It is, rather, the necessary social corollary of a detached and unsociable selfhood, "the dynamics of a relationality construed and constructed in atomistic fashion" (Reply, p. this issue). Cartesian anxiety, the metaphysical despair of a "punctual self" that has fallen "into a deep whirlpool which tumbles [it] around," (Descartes, 1996, p. 16.) is the epistemological counterpart of the Hobbesian fear of violent death, the horror this kind of self must feel as soon as she bumps into one of her equally deracinated neighbors.

Kantian critique, seen through the anthropological lens Rossi proposes, is meant to cure the twofold pathologies associated with this modern view: the alienation of unencumbered thinking and the anomie of selfish agency. For, Kant believes, by submitting themselves to the discipline of reason, human beings learn to develop an alternative social imaginary. No longer lonely meditators or egotistic actors, they come to conceive of themselves as primarily relational/communal creatures, subjects whose sense of self is embedded in bonds of mutual trust and recognition.

As we briefly discussed above, Kant's account of communication and the sociopolitical benefits of the use of public reason give us a preliminary glimpse into that transformation. But the importance of community goes much deeper in Rossi's reading of Kant: relationality does not simply mark the direction of historical progress (from a bellicose state of nature, to a political society, to a federation of states), but

[6] For a more robust version of this argument, see my "Kant's Religious Constructivism," in *The Critical Companion to Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Gordon Michalson (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, 2014, 193–213).

has also *redemptive power*.[7] This is so, Rossi believes, because only in connection with others can the "punctual self" escape the trap her "inwardly enclosed" subjectivity has placed her in.

Kant makes this point, for instance, in the Jaësche *Logic*:

> An external mark or an external touchstone of truth is the comparison of our own judgments with those of others, because the subjective will not be present in all others in the same way, so that illusion can thereby be cleared up. The incompatibility of the judgments of others with our own is thus an external mark of error and is to be regarded as a cue to investigate our procedure in judgment, but not for that reason to reject it at once. For one can perhaps be right about the thing but not right in manner, i.e., in the exposition. (9:57)

The same touchstone is at play in the Canon of the first *Critique*, where Kant deploys it to distinguish "persuasion" from "conviction." For, "the experiment (*Versuch*) that one makes on the understanding of others" by trying to communicate "an appearance in our own mind" serves to determine whether what one (privately) holds to be true can be (publicly) shared, and hence count as objectively valid (KrV A 821/B 849). Unlike the *fundamentum inconcussum veritatis* Descartes was searching for, Kant's criterion of truth is eminently fallible: it yields at most "the presumption (*Vermutung*) that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among subjects, rests on the common ground, namely the object" (ibid.). And Kant's touchstone is fallible in still another, more troublesome way. To the extent that bias and superstition (epistemic or moral) can be so deeply entrenched in a community as to become self-evident and self-justifying, "the comparison of our judgment with those of others" (9:57) will often yield spurious agreements –a form of social validation that fosters our self-righteousness and perpetuates our dogmatic slumber.[8]

Seen in this light, Kant's unflinching commitment to universality throughout the corpus is not an empty abstraction, as some of his detractors have argued. It is, instead, the antidote necessary to counteract the influence of arbitrariness and bias, along with the "laziness and cowardice" (8:35) that make them so pervasive. For, the scholar (*Gelehrter*) who seeks –and finds– the agreement of "the entire reading public" (8:37) is no longer trapped in the appearances of her own mind. She is no longer a solitary *cogito*, but has become a *cogitamus*, a subject who shares the space of reason with others and can build with them a common world of experience. And the same is true of the agent whose maxims can be elevated to universal law: her will is a standing invitation for others to join her in a moral community, to enter a

[7] Rossi writes: "Put in traditional Christian vocabulary, the horizon regarding the way to 'salvation' is understood and imagined beyond exclusively individual terms. 'Saving one's soul' requires a more encompassing social horizon in which each one's salvation is implicated in the salvation of all; one is truly and freely saved if all are saved" (ECH, p. 46).

[8] Pasternack makes a similar point. See Pasternack (2014). In the age of social media, we are no strangers to this problem.

dynamic of relationality where all say "I will that *you* will," and form a "we" out of a collection of isolated "I's".

3 Error and the "Dear Self"

At this point, I need to part ways with Rossi and introduce a thesis of my own. The purpose of this departure is to make explicit what motivates Kant's conception of community and the value he attributes to universal agreement. Clarity on this issue will allow us to gauge whether Rossi's reading of politics and religion squares with the Kantian view. In that spirit, I would like to suggest that, underpinning the importance of community and agreement, and explaining his rejection of the modern individualistic conception of the self, is Kant's enduring preoccupation with the nature of error.

As Kant sees it, error –in all its forms– results from a confusion between subjective and objective grounds of judgment. This confusion is made possible by various processes of surreptitious reasoning by which human beings are seduced into embracing as objective claims that are in fact expression of their subjective preferences, and thus they *hold to be true* what they *want to believe*, not what they have reason to assent to. Locke's dictum elegantly captures the point: "*quod volumus, facile credimus*; *what suits our wishes, is forwardly believed*."[9]

In cognitive matters, this conflation of grounds of judgment arises by allowing sensibility to have undue influence upon the understanding. What Kant finds most vexing in this process, however, is that it takes place below the threshold of consciousness, making it impossible to eradicate by mere introspection:

> The ground for the origin of all error will therefore have to be sought simply and solely in the *unnoticed influence of sensibility upon the understanding,* or to speak more exactly, upon *judgment*. This influence, namely, brings it about that in judgment we take merely *subjective* grounds to be *objective*, and consequently confuse *the mere illusion of truth with truth itself*. For it is just in this that the essence of illusion consists, which on this account is to be regarded as a ground for holding a false cognition to be true. (9:53-4)[10]

A similar pattern can be found in the moral domain, albeit with a different set of characters. The place of sensibility is here occupied by the feeling of pleasure and the principle of self-love, while the rules of the understanding are replaced by the categorical imperative and the moral law of reason. Yet, in all cases, Kant contends that human beings, unbeknown to themselves, set in motion complex stratagems of self-deception: they distort evidence, selectively marshal grounds, manipulate norms of belief formation, and find exceptions to rules they know should apply to

[9] See Locke (1975), Book IV, chap. 20, p.715.

[10] Kant employs the same language in the first *Critique* to describe how transcendental illusions come about (see KrV A 294/B 351).

themselves. Thus, in all sorts of underhanded ways, they corrupt their own judgment and become incapable of discerning *truth* from *illusion*, reality from mere wish.

As a result of these obfuscating stratagems, Kant reckons, error places those who incur it in a predicament similar to prisoners in solitary confinement. Deprived of the chance of comparing their beliefs and desires with the understanding and will of others, the isolated individual retreats into her imagination and ends up blurring the lines between reality and madness (*Wahnsinn*).[11] For, lacking an external touchstone of truth, the subject ascribes to herself the monopoly of epistemic and value interpretation, raising a psychological wall between herself and the world. This barrier further reinforces her sense of isolation and deprives her of the very (communicative) tools she could use to overcome it. Thus, the individual who is in error, like the prisoner left in her cell long enough, becomes blind to her own blindness: her illusions grow more and more entrenched, harder "to battle, because they justify themselves and are, as it were, their own judges" (9:81).[12]

Unlike the prisoner, however, the person in error is not placed in this predicament by external forces beyond her control. On the contrary, she contributes to her own "incarceration," acting simultaneously as victim and perpetrator in her delusion, colluding in the very process of being duped. Kant believes this is so, because behind every (mistaken) judgment there is a free act of *assent*, a spontaneous "taking as" for which we are responsible. Seen this way, the corruption at the basis of error can only be possible by a *failure of self-knowledge*: a failure to come to terms with the desires that underlie our desire-motivated-judgment.[13] The Delphic injunction to "know thyself" holds in full force, yet human beings find all manner of excuses *not* to heed it. For, Kant thinks, the self-deceptive stratagems that give rise to error are part of a desperate attempt, on the part of the subject, to protect something she deeply cares about, something so enmeshed with her identity that sacrificing it –she fears– would represent a kind of "death"–a loss for which there can be no compensation. The aspect of our personality that voices this fear Kant elsewhere calls the "dear self," a protector who "is always turning up" in situations that "require self-denial" (4:407). The function of this protector is to shield us from the pain that such a denial would entail, a goal in pursuit of which self-deception is a most powerful ally.

We can see traces of the dear self in the prosaic forms of error Kant dubs "prejudices" in the *Logic*. But nowhere in the epistemic field is its presence felt more vividly than in transcendental illusions. Here, the natural desire of our reason to *know* the unconditioned, to gain access to the thing in itself, entices us to forget our cognitive limitations and take refuge in transcendence, where we can feign to be God –if only for a little while. Although the self-knowledge of critique exposes the *hybris* of this pretension, it does not eradicate the temptation to indulge it. A "transcendental

[11] "Delusion" (*Wahn*) Kant tells us in *Religion*, "is the mistake of regarding the mere representation of a thing as equivalent to the thing itself." When this mistake becomes habitual, it turns into "madness": "Madness (*Wahnsinn*) too is so called because it is the habit of taking a mere representation (of the imagination) for the presence of the thing itself, and to value it as such" (6:168n.).

[12] Kant uses this image to refer to "prejudices" in the *Logic*. It applies, however, to all forms of error.

[13] See Scott-Kakures (2002).

illusion does not cease even though it is uncovered" (KrV A 297/B 353), since what generates it is not an arbitrary and wanton whim, but our natural predisposition to metaphysics, a tendency we may discipline and train but cannot do without. The dear self exploits this duplicity at the heart of human reason, the clash between its critical and metaphysical interests, and "holds out to us the semblance of extending the pure understanding" (KrV A296/B352) in order to prevent the sacrifice of what we value so highly: our desire to commune with the divine understanding.[14]

The same self-protective mechanism is set in motion in the practical domain. In the second *Critique*, for example, we can see it at play in the "error of subreption (*vitium surreptionis*)." Here, in order to evade the pain and humiliation that accompany the experience of moral respect, the dear self produces "as it were, (…) an optical illusion in the self-consciousness of what one *does* as distinguished from what one feels –an illusion that even the most practiced cannot altogether avoid" (5:116). This self-deceptive strategy helps the subject evade the thwarting effect the moral law exerts over her inclinations, generating in its stead the comforting fantasy that duty and pleasure are interchangeable concepts. This illusion allows the agent to believe that she could obey morality gladly (*gerne*) (5:83), without effort, "like the Deity raised beyond all dependence" (5:82).

The "dear self," in short, is a great dialectician, whose sophisms are mobilized to protect an aspect of our subjectivity we are unwilling to surrender. At the end of *Groundwork* I, this dialectical skill is, once again, used to help us avoid the pain that comes from accepting our finitude. But unlike the error of subreption (which plays on our feelings), the ruse here targets our practical reason and consists in downgrading the unconditional demands of morality. The goal of this demotion is to create the illusion that our finite, pathologically determinable self is coextensive with our whole moral personality. For, on the basis of this false identity, the agent feels justified in investing her self-love with law-giving powers –and this move, in turn, allows her to bestow upon her *empirical* practical reason the authority that exclusively belongs to *pure* practical reason. Like in all other cases, underlying this "natural dialectic" is a clash of fundamental interests: a collision between the demands of happiness and the demands of duty, each expressing an essential, yet incommensurable dimension of our finite rationality:

> The human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so deserving of the highest respect –the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which he sums up under the name happiness. Now reason issues its precepts unremittingly, without thereby promising anything to the inclinations, and so, as it were, with disregard and contempt for those claims, which are so impetuous and besides so apparently equitable (and

[14] In a passage Rossi often refers to, Susan Neiman puts it this way: "Of the many distinctions Kant took wisdom and sanity to depend on drawing, none was deeper than the difference between God and all the rest of us. Kant reminds us as often as possible of all that God can do and we cannot. Nobody in the history of philosophy was aware of the number of ways we can forget it … Kant's relentless determination to trace the ways we forget our finitude was matched only by his awareness that such forgetting is natural." See Neiman (2002).

> refuse to be neutralized by any command). But from this there arises a natural dialectic, that is, a propensity to rationalize against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, that is, to corrupt them at their basis and to destroy all their dignity –something that even common practical reason cannot, in the end, call good. (4:405)

The modus operandi of the "dear self," it should be clear by now, bears a family resemblance with the volitional structure Kant identifies as "radical evil" in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Their difference lies, I believe, in the scope of the transgression: while radical evil is a propensity Kant attributes to the whole human species, "even the best" of us (6:32), he uses error to designate specific forms of epistemic and moral dysfunction. But this distinction pales in comparison with what the notions with what the notions have in common: the inversion of the ethical order of priority between incentives, by which we make of self-love "the condition of compliance with the moral law" (R 6:36), is isomorphic to the inversion of the order of priority between grounds of judgment, by which we sacrifice truth to illusion. And the consequences are identical: in both cases, the reversal of the lexical order leads us to "throw dust in our own eyes" (6:38) and adopt a mode of thinking (*Denkungsart*) that is "corrupted at its root" (6:30).

Like in error, what Kant finds most problematic with radical evil is its *incorrigibility*: the agent who harbors an evil will refuses to submit her subjective conception of the good to the objective demands of morality –and revise her desires accordingly. She obeys the moral law on the condition that its commands do not interfere with her happiness, and if a clash is unavoidable, the dear self of the evil agent will find reasons to persuade her that her happiness should have the last word. In this way, the agent manages to feel justified, in her own eyes, in taking her desires and inclinations (be they permissible or not) as a sufficient reason for action. For, she has made her subjective feelings of pleasure and displeasure the measure of all things, allowing her self-love to displace pure practical reason from its sovereign position. Thanks to such displacement, the evil agent manages to render the demands of moral objectivity, if not completely irrelevant, at least a nuisance which can be wished away.[15]

Although this ruse results primarily from an act of moral self-defilement, it nonetheless has profound consequences in relation to other people. For "[t]his dishonesty," Kant believes, not only "hinders the establishment in us of a genuine moral disposition, [but] then extends itself also externally to falsity or deception of others" (6:38). Deception is unavoidable, for, unlike the good agent whose maxims open up a space for community, the evil agent proclaims in all her volitions "I will what *I please*." Such a cast of mind identifies relation with submission, and thus must conceal itself in order to succeed.

[15] The demands of morality cannot be rendered completely irrelevant, for they belong to our "personality," the third of the human predispositions to the good (*Anlage zum Guten*) (6:27–8). Were we able to graft onto it all sorts of vices (as we can do with "animality" and "humanity"), moral regeneration would turn out to be impossible (6:46).

The most dismal aspect of this situation is that an evil agent will find nothing wrong with her volition. The unacceptability of her view will largely go *unnoticed*, for she will think of herself as being authorized to dominate and deceive. Furthermore, the rationalizing strategies that make her moral delusion possible will also work to reinforce it: little insight will she gain by introspection, "[f]or no matter how far back [she] direct[s] [her] attention to [her] moral state, [she will] find that this state is no longer *res integra*" (6:58 n.). In this way, the corruption of an evil will, Kant argues, goes *all the way down* –a descent into the unfathomable depths of self-deception that accounts for evil's radicalism (from the Latin "*radix*," root) and explains the difficulty of extricating ourselves from it.

Only a revolution, Kant believed, could restore the proper order of priority between our incentives. He describes this shift in terms of a "single and unalterable decision [through which] a human being reverses the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was an evil human being (and thereby puts on a "new man")" (R 6:48). But this moral rebirth contains its own form of morbidity: it entails the death of the "old man," "since the subject dies unto sin (and thereby also the subject of all inclinations that lead to sin) in order to live unto justice" (6:74). The dear self of an evil agent, we must expect, will ruthlessly fight against its own extinction, since what is at stake for it is –literally– a matter of life and death.

4 Politics and Religion

In light of Kant's conception of error and (by extension) radical evil, it makes good sense for Rossi to place community at the center of his "anthropological turn." As Rossi sees it, attaining our moral vocation, i.e., realizing the highest good in the world, is tantamount to "peacemaking" –an achievement which entails the twin tasks of critique and eradicating war, "the paradigmatic and most challenging social form of radical evil" (ECH, p. 37). In performing the second task, politics and religion play complementary roles, for each gives a characteristic "inflexion" to the social good of community we are pursuing: "one bearing on the external structuring of an international order for establishing enduring peace, the other bearing on the inner orientation and the dynamics of human relationality, as made socially manifest in an ethical commonwealth" (ECH, p. 37).

Although I fully agree with Rossi on the importance of community for Kant's critical project (the first dimension of peacemaking), I believe that his identification of the highest good with a peaceful cosmopolitan world order is a serious mistake. For, this way of conceiving the historical task of humanity not only misinterprets the nature of the threat that radical evil poses, but what is even more problematic, it unwittingly aggravates it, since it gives our dear self an alibi to continue its deceptions –a "lease on its life," so to speak.

I think Rossi misinterprets the threat of radical evil, because for Kant war is not the fundamental moral problem confronting humanity –dishonesty and

self-deception are.[16] If, as Samuel Johnson suspected, "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel," unless we dismantle the self-deceptive mechanisms that allow scoundrels to feel vindicated and smug, we will be fighting moral shadows. War is clearly a *symptom* of radical evil, arguably the worst of its social manifestations, but to confuse symptomatology with etiology is the kind of error that preserves the source of errors intact –precisely the type of mistake our dear self would tempt us to make. To consider peacemaking identical with achieving our moral vocation is a dubious form of consequentialism that makes of Kant, as Mill presumed, a utilitarian *malgré lui*.[17]

It is to prevent such a blunder, I believe, that Kant advanced the counter-intuitive thesis that evil can be *asymptomatic*, perfectly compatible with the legality of actions:

> So far as the agreement of actions with the law goes, however, there is no difference (or at least there ought to be none) between a human being of good morals (*bene moratus*) and a morally good human being (*moraliter bonus*), except that the actions of the former do not always have, perhaps never have, the law as their sole and supreme incentive, whereas those of the latter always do. We can say of the first that he complies with the law according to the *letter* (i.e. as regards the action commanded by the law); but of the second, that he observes it according to the *spirit* (the spirit of the moral law consists in the law being of itself a sufficient incentive). Whatever is not of this faith is sin (in attitude). (6:30)

The example of the shopkeeper in the *Groundwork* makes it clear: it is usually good for business to charge all customers a fair price, even when one could take advantage of them with impunity, for in contemporary society a reputation for honesty is necessary for commercial success (4:397). But this contingent overlap between self-interest and the prescriptions of duty teaches the *wolf of man* to walk *in sheep's clothing*, to hide its appetite without abandoning its hunger. Far from reducing the peril, the social advantages of concealment make this seemingly peaceable creature even more dangerous than its uncouth counterpart in the state of nature. The latter at least displays its intentions, allowing us to better prepare for battle –a benefit we now lack.

The specter of immorality in modern life, Kant thought, is neither violence nor war, but the fact that private vices contribute to public virtues. We have reached this situation as a result of the consolidation of the coercive power of the state, a process that turns human beings into shrewd creatures, efficient in hiding their deepest immorality under the appearance of good behavior: "Within each state [malevolence] is veiled by the coercion of civil laws, for the citizen's inclination to violence against each other is powerfully counteracted by a grater force, namely that of government, and so (…) [gives] the whole a moral veneer (*causa non causae*)" (8:375

[16] This is a problem Kant first articulated in the Concluding Remark of his 1791 essay, "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy." *Religion* extends that concern from a relatively local matter of sincerity in religious belief to a wholesale concern about the nature of human relations (including, of course, our own self-relation).

[17] See Mill (1987).

n.). The cancelation of violence allows the dear self to hide behind the legality of action –a situation that leads Kant to conclude: "We are cultivated in a high degree by art and science. We are civilized, perhaps to the point of being overburdened, by all sorts of social decorum and propriety. But very much is still lacking before we can be held to be already moralized" (8:26).

It is undeniable that Kant saw in the state a vehicle of moral progress, just as liberalism imagines it to be. He recognized that, by "checking the outbreak of unlawful inclinations," the state facilitates "the development of the moral predisposition to immediate respect for right" (8:376 n.). But it is no less true that Kant was aware of another, darker side of politics –the side that liberalism refuses to confront. For just as much as the public sword is necessary to ensure property rights and a space for the free exchange of public reasons, it has also trained human beings to send their unsociable tendencies deeper, inwardly, and deflect them toward socially expedient goals. Modern citizens have thus learned to give good names to their self-serving passions (ambition, greed, lust for domination, etc.). They call them "industriousness," "innovativeness," and "rightful honor," thereby making their self-preferential tendencies more entrenched. Instead of moralizing the world and bringing us closer to the highest good, as a naïve view of history would expect, Kant recognized that the civil condition has inadvertently contributed to turn evil into an "invisible enemy, one who hides behind reason and [is] hence all the more dangerous" (6:57). By tempting us to identify moral goodness with legal action, *political progress* sends human beings *morally backwards*: this is the shameful truth of civilization, covered up with material splendor and counterfeit goods that allow our dear self to maintain its grip on our volitional structure. This remarkable passage exposes the ruse:

> The problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is *soluble* even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding) and goes like this: 'Given a multitude of rational beings all of whom need universal laws for their preservation but each of whom is inclined covertly to exempt himself from them, so to order this multitude and establish their constitution that, although in their private dispositions they strive against one another, these yet so check one another that in their public conduct the result is the same as if they had no such evil dispositions.' Such a problem must be soluble. For the problem is not the moral improvement of human beings but only the mechanism of nature, and what the task requires one to know is how this can be put to use in human beings in order so to arrange the conflict of their unpeaceable dispositions within a people that they themselves have to constrain one another to submit to coercive law and so bring about a condition of peace in which laws have force. (8:366)

Civilized individuals can be compared to intelligent demons who, due to the efficient use of the "mechanism of nature," comport themselves as exemplary citizens, but without abandoning their "unpeaceable dispositions." With this view, Kant rejected a key assumption in the liberal tradition: the purpose of politics, Kant realized, is *not* to produce virtuous citizens, but to *pacify* them, to use their self-love to cancel the worse effects of their self-love. Thus, under modern political conditions, Kant's conception entails, it is possible to be a *good* (obedient and peaceful) *citizen*

and remain an *evil person*, i.e., someone who counts himself good because "[her] evil is common to a class" (6:33).

Since the power of the state reaches no farther than the mechanism of coercion, Kant realized, politics can only control the externalities of action but leaves our moral dispositions intact. For, as he puts it, "I can indeed be constrained by others to perform *actions* that are directed as means to an end, but I can never be constrained by others *to have an end*: only myself can *make* something my end" (6:381). But there is an important trade-off for the inner freedom liberalism cherishes: to the extent that *coercion* to have ends is self-contradictory, and that the public sword has no power over our dispositions, the effectiveness of politics to moralize a multitude of self-seeking individuals must depend on a source that is not itself political. Kant identified that source with "religion": the relation with God that allows the single individual to become a "new man," and membership in an ethical community, which, under divine legislation (6:101), will help the human species to clean its "foul stain," i.e., to overcome its dishonesty, which, "if it is not to be called malice, it nonetheless deserves at least the name of unworthiness" (6:38).

To believe that pacification and the eradication of war are tantamount to overcoming radical evil, as I take Rossi to believe, sacrifices rational religion under the idolatrous altar of politics –an inversion of the lexical order of priority that leaves the source of evil unscathed. For, as Kant makes clear in *Perpetual Peace*, peace is a goal that can be achieved by using the mechanisms of self-love (the power of the state along with the material burdens of war at the national level, and the interests of commerce in international relations), without beginning to address the underlying causes of human depravity. The moral battle, Kant realized, may *begin* with political victory, but it surely does not *end* there. To suggest it does, Kant suspected, engages us in a dangerous dilatory strategy. For, the civility, prosperity, and propriety the state brings about can disguise the menace posed by intelligent demons, but in no way change who they are. This is a job Kant squarely attributes to religion. In spite of its valiant defense of community, ECH ultimately does not break loose from the secularizing tendencies that characterize contemporary liberalism, replicating its inveterate misunderstanding of religion.

5 What Lies Ahead: the Contributions to the Symposium

Lawrence Pasternack raises a similar concern in "The Ethical Community in Kant's Pure Rational System of Religion." Instead of starting from radical evil, Pasternack reaches the same conclusion but beginning from the other end of Kant's argument: he traces the problem back to Rossi's (tacit) endorsement of the so-called "secular interpretation" of the highest good, originated by Rawls and his students (this issue). According to this reading, the connection between happiness and morality does not require reliance on the postulates of God and immortality, but is something human beings can attain all by themselves, left to their own devices. We do not need religion to heal the rupture between nature and freedom, these scholars think, for our moral vocation is a strictly immanent, this-worldly affair. For Pasternack, the Kantian texts used to support this interpretation "are being atrociously misread" (this issue).

And so is *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where Kant pursues an unapologetically "theological" agenda, namely, to determine whether a set of traditional Christian doctrines (about original sin, soteriology, the church, and various religious practices) can be made compatible with the strictures of Transcendental Idealism and our moral needs. Once Kant's texts are placed in context, we realize that the role of the ethical community cannot possibly be to help us overcome the divisiveness of war in international relations –for such divisiveness can be redressed through the "juridico-civil (political)" institution of a "'pacific league' (8:356) or 'federative union' (8:367)" (this issue). These political structures do not require the inner moral transformation virtuous agents must undergo to become "a people of God" and join the ethical community "in the form of a church" (6:100–1). To illustrate the difference between these two modes of association, Pasternack analyzes the "antinomy between politics and morals" in *Perpetual Peace*. This antinomy exhibits the clash between the logic of self-love, which sees the abandonment of war as a form of political suicide, and the incommensurably different logic used by the "moral politician," who, in spite of the traumatic evidence of history, follows the prescription of morality and deposes her weapons. A similar predicament, Pasternack believes, plays itself out inside the will of each individual, who, from the depths of radical evil, emerges a "new man." Neither in politics nor in our personal life is there a seamless transition between these opposing modes of thinking: to move between them requires a leap of volition, a "change of heart" that, due to evil's radicalism, cannot get started without hope in a divine assistance of some kind.

Steven Palmquist also shares this preoccupation. In "Humanity's Moral Trajectory: Rossi on Kantian Critique," Palmquist agrees with Rossi that the establishment of a lasting peace is the end point of our moral efforts, but believes that religion receives short shrift in ECH. This is so, Palmquist argues, because Rossi tends to conflate two different senses of finality: the "highest political good" (the construction of a cosmopolitan world order) and "the highest good in the world" (the ethical community in the form of a *church*). While the former can be construed as a political achievement, the latter is unmistakably a goal that belongs to religion. Rossi's conflation is worrisome, for it "reverses the Kantian order of things" (this issue), according to which the *external* rules of politics are a mere propaedeutic for the *internal* revolution that must take place in the religious sphere. This reversal, Palmquist believes, has important consequences for how to interpret Kant's "anthropological turn": unlike Aristotle, who considers "that human beings are essentially political animals who sometimes find religion to be a useful supplement," Kant thinks "that human beings are essentially religious" creatures who "find ourselves embodied in a particular historical context and thus have no choice but to struggle to create appropriately minimal political forms" (this issue). Since we are primarily *homo religiosus*, we will not find redemption in the juridical structures where Rossi expects to encounter it. Furthermore, Palmquist argues, the religious tropes discussed in ECH (such as a "kingdom of God," a "kingdom of grace," an "everlasting life," "son of God," etc.), are neither tools to empower our political action nor mystical cover, as Rossi seems to suggest. They should be seen, instead, as indispensable footholds for our finite rationality, which, due to its limitations, needs to find "even [in] the highest concepts and grounds of reason something that *the senses can hold on to*, some confirmation

from experience or the like" (6:109). It is those limitations that lead Kant to identify the supersensible idea of an ethical community with a *visible* church, the institutional expression of our highest moral aspiration. This ideal, however, is unavoidably distorted by human beings. The criteria Kant offers to avoid such distortions (universality, integrity, freedom, and unchangeableness) can be used to chastise the abuses ecclesiastical organizations have committed throughout history. But they also remind us, Palmquist thinks, that Kantian hope is primarily a *rational* attitude, not to be confused with its *social* instantiations. By emphasizing the latter aspect at the expense of the former, Palmquist concludes, Rossi misconstrues the logic of the Kantian text.

In "Preparing the Ground for Kant's Highest Good in the World," Wolfgang Ertl suggests an interpretation of Rossi's work that puts many of these worries to rest. For, as Ertl sees it, the dualisms around which the debate revolves (i.e., the opposition between the "secular" and the "theological" interpretations of the highest good, and the question of primacy between politics and religion) fail to do justice to the more capacious reading Rossi proposes. Ertl refers to this reading as the "comprehensive view," according to which the members of each pair of interpretative positions should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but as standing in a relation of complementarity. Thus, we do not need to choose between a "secular" reading of the highest good that trivializes the postulates of God and immortality, and a "theological" reading that underplays the importance of human agency and responsibility. This is a false dichotomy, for Kant proposes instead a "moral concursus," i.e., a "working together of divine and human agency" (this issue). This relation of co-determination accommodates the kernel of truth in each position, dodging the equally mistaken extremes of attributing to Kant a system of self-rewarding morality or appealing to inscrutable grace. The theological picture that emerges from this balancing act, Ertl argues, is akin to the one developed by Juan de Molina, the sixteenth century Jesuit priest who reconciled the Augustinian doctrine of pre-destination with the Renaissance commitment to human freedom. Rossi's Kant, Ertl believes, is a Molinist of sorts, and this position allows him to introduce an important distinction between "secularism," which refuses to recognize any relevant role for religion in Kant's system, and "immanentism," which makes room for divine assistance without thereby stepping into transcendent metaphysics or religious dogmatism.

In a similar vein, Sarah Holtman's "Moral Foundations, Shared Civic Projects and Rossi's Kant" explores "the implications of Rossi's work for our characterizations of justice and citizenship on a Kantian account" (this issue). She focuses on the highest political good, which, as Rossi argues, takes the form of a cosmopolitan world order in which equality and respect characterize the relations between citizens and states alike. This type of relation "anticipates and illustrates the full realizations of the good in the ethical community" (this issue), bringing politics and morality much closer than they are normally understood to be. Such proximity is due to the fact that for Rossi peace itself is a "moral accomplishment," gradually attained "by regulating our conduct in keeping with the dictates of our practical reason" (this issue). As Holtman reads Kant, the preliminary and definite articles in *Perpetual Peace* "are not prudential standards that guide us (Hobbes-style) to the realization of our long-term self-interest" (this issue), but genuinely moral demands. To comply with them, citizens

cannot behave as isolated individuals, but must act *jointly*: peace "is our project, not mine or yours" (this issue), and the collective nature of the undertaking is not ancillary to our political self-understanding, but constitutive of what it means to be a "citizen." The recognition of this fact has important motivational consequence and explains why Rossi sees hope not as something individuals cultivate on their own, but as a good that results from the "social enactment of human freedom" (ECH, p. 47). Rossi's approach thus deals a fatal blow to the methodological individualism that has dominated much of Kantian studies. This methodological framework is unable to account for *joint action*, which is the distinctive feature of the "duty sui generis" of the human species to pursue the highest good (6:97) and of the collective project of peacemaking at a global scale. If Rossi is correct in emphasizing the sociality of action, his approach then gives us grounds to replace the *thin* view of "Kantian citizens as joined not by a combination of self-focused aims and the capacity to appreciate minimal standards of fairness" (this issue), with a more robust, *thicker* appreciation for the importance of mutual commitment and the pursuit of common goals across generations.

Jeanine Grenberg concludes these reflections with "Critique, Finitude and the Importance of Susceptibility: A Rossian Approach to Interpreting Kant on Pleasure." In this essay, Grenberg uses Rossi's conception of "critique" as a springboard to think more generally about how to interpret Kant's texts. As we saw in the opening sections, Rossi refuses to reduce critique to epistemological policing; he emphasizes instead its overarching role in counteracting "the excesses of the dear self who seeks to place herself above all others" (this issue). In doing so, critique "allows us to realize humanity in its fullest," a project that is "inspired by a religiously grounded hope" and leads to the establishment of "a unified social world of perpetual peace" (this issue). So conceived, critique is not "simply a way of maintaining epistemic humility about what we can know" (this issue), but "a moral psychological and political tool for the crafting of a just human society" (this issue). The tool is effective, because it makes us "cognizant of—and [helps us] manage the excesses of—human finitude" (this issue). For, critique teaches us to embrace a modest and self-aware attitude, which many Kant interpreters ignore at their own risk. To illustrate the problem, Grenberg turns her attention to "what might at first appear to be a minor technical issue: how best to translate the term *Fähigheit* when Kant utilizes it in reference to the human experience of pleasure and displeasure" (this issue). At stake here is not a simple matter of translation, but a question concerning our anthropological self-conception, namely, whether the activity of human reason can do without the constraints of our sensibility or is ultimately bound by them, even in "the most rational of feelings, like the moral feeling of respect" (this issue). Those who embrace the first alternative (like Sonny Elizondo) believe that reason does not merely affect us, but can in some cases *fully* determine our receptivity and thus make its contributions idle. Here is where matters of translation make a difference, for the term "*Fähigkeit*" can be translated either as "susceptibility" or "capacity" –a semantic choice with weighty philosophical consequences. For, if feeling is interpreted as "susceptibility," we bring to the fore the passivity of something "being done" to us, while if we interpret it as "capacity," then feeling appears as something I am "capable of doing," and hence as an expression of my own agency. The latter point of view can trick us into believing that human reason

not only plays a hand in generating the feeling of respect, but is *solely* responsible for producing it. This overweening sense of the power of reason, Grenberg believes, ignores our finitude. It not only runs roughshod over Transcendental Idealism, but also, and more importantly, opens a backdoor for the dear self to exploit the human fantasy of holiness. This is a variant of the illusion that gives rise to the error of subreption and the natural dialectic, another cautionary sign of the wily nature of our dear self.

With Grenberg's analysis of finitude in relation to pleasure, we come full circle to where we started. No matter the reservations one might have with specific points of interpretation in Rossi's new book, it is undeniable that we are here in the presence of something large and important – a capacious and inspiring conceptual framework that will impact Kantian studies in inverse proportion to the brevity of its pages. If, as its Latin etymology indicates, "religion" is both a "religare" and a "relegere," Rossi's "anthropological turn" qualifies as a "religious turn" as well, for ECH binds together and invites us to re-read elements in Kant's corpus that seem unconnected, fractured, or divergent. Readers will be hard pressed to still find them so in the future.

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