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The Concept and Necessity of an End in Ethics

TL, AA 06: 379-389

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In this text¹ Kant introduces into his moral philosophy a concept that does not appear in any earlier writings: the concept of an end which is also a duty. It is a concept central to the *Doctrine of Virtue*, perhaps even its linchpin, since an adequate understanding of what Kant says in the *Doctrine of Virtue* depends on a correct interpretation of the concept. Thus, in what follows, we intend to define this concept and also, more importantly, reconstruct what prompted Kant to introduce it precisely when he did. What is the 'logic', the *necessity*, that led to its introduction? In order to answer this question, we must first of all recall what Kant said about the concept of an end in the *Groundwork* and also what various commentators have said about the apparent inconsistency of the theory of ends brought forward there. It is only against background that we can understand what Kant says about ends which are also duties in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Hence, we begin by calling to mind what Kant tells us about the concept of an end in his foundational writings on moral philosophy.

I. The Alleged Inconsistency in Kant's Theory of Ends

In the second section of the *Groundwork*, in the context of his reflections on the three ways of representing the supreme moral principle, Kant writes:

Rational nature is distinguished from the rest of nature by this, that it sets itself an end. This end would be the matter of every good will. But since, in the idea of a will absolutely good without any limiting condition (attainment of this or that end)

¹ I'd like to express my gratitude to Oliver Sensen and Ron Tacelli for their detailed and constructive comments on an earlier version of this text.

abstraction must be made altogether from every end to be *effected* (this would make every will only relatively good), the end must here be thought not as an end to be effected but as an *independently existing*, and hence thought only negatively, that is, as that which must never be acted against and which must therefore in every volition be estimated never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end. Now, this end can be nothing other than the subject of all possible ends itself, because this subject is also the subject of a possible absolutely good will; for, such a will cannot without contradiction be subordinated to any other object.²

The point of this text is that all ends to be effected which originate from sensibility and, hence, are merely subjective and relative ends, are precluded from the idea of an absolutely good will. Only the subject of all possible ends which is an independently existing end is admitted as principle of the universal categorical imperative as *merely a negative, restricting condition* of the maxims.³

On the other hand, the examples of duty three and four in the *Groundwork* (the examples of imperfect duties)⁴ suggest that the human being should also be understood as an 'end in itself' *in a positive sense*. As in the ethical thought of the ancient world certain goals are understood as goals which *should be desired and striven after*, Kant apparently wants to say in this context that one's own perfection and the happiness of others are ends that *ought to be adopted* as one's own *in a positive sense*. If these examples teach us that one should promote humanity in one's own person and in that of another in this two-fold way, by in some way perfecting ourselves and by contributing to the happiness of others, then these positive determinations of ends of the wide (imperfect, meritorious) duties at least *prima facie* appear to contradict the assumption that the idea of an objective end can only be thought of as negative.

At any rate, this is what Herbert J. Paton and Lewis W. Beck held; whereas the former considered the alleged contradiction only an imprecision and thus did not attach importance to it, the latter saw in it the manifestation of a tension which, so he thought, pervades all of

² *GMS*, AA 04: 437.21-33. (44f.) All references to Kant's writings include an abbreviation of the German title and the corresponding volume, page numbers and line numbers in the German academy edition of Kant's works. In brackets the page numbers of the relevant work in the Cambridge edition are given.

³ Cf. Schmucker, 1997, p. 134f.

⁴ Cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 422.37-423.35; 430.10-27. (32f.)

Kant's moral philosophy.⁵ John Atwell, who takes the credit for the clarification of the concept of an end in Kant's moral philosophy, has contradicted both these great Kant interpreters, pointing out that Kant never held anything like a conception of objective ends.⁶ Since by this Atwell means merely, in the words of Mary Gregor, "no end in the positive sense of some state of affairs to be brought into being by our action"⁷, we can agree with him. But nevertheless, there *is* an objective theory of ends *of a totally different kind* in Kant's moral philosophy—one that does not have a teleological basis. On this point I can also agree with Atwell. But it is my contention that one does justice to this rational 'matter'⁸ in Kant's moral philosophy only if one assumes - with Manfred Baum, Georg Geismann, Georg Römpp and others - that (a) the *Metaphysics of Morals* is Kant's principal work in moral philosophy and that (b) his system of duties of right and virtue in its entirety is only found here.⁹ What is crucial for an adequate understanding of Kant's theory of ends which are also duties in the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*—ends which for the sake of simplicity I will henceforth call 'obligatory ends' or 'ends of duty'—is their systematic place in the multi-dimensional or multi-level 'edifice' of Kant's moral philosophy.

II. The Multi-dimensional or Multi-level Structure of Kantian Moral Philosophy

This multi-dimensionality which shapes the *Metaphysics of Morals* is clearest in sections I and III of the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁰, as well as in sections I, X and XIV

⁵ Paton comments on Kant's thesis that rational nature is to be thought of as a merely negative, restricting condition of the maxims with the remark: "In this negative statement he appears to forget imperfect duties." (Paton, 1963, p. 177, footnote 5.) Beck's assessment is to be found in his article "Kant on Revolution" (Beck, 1971). However, Beck's thesis is stated in the context of his claim that Kant's enthusiasm for the French Revolution is not justified by his formalistic moral system: "Kant's enthusiasm for the French Revolution is based upon his teleological conception of history, which is a forerunner of Hegel's definition of history as 'the progress of the consciousness of freedom.' That the final purpose of the world is moral, not eudaemonistic, makes it possible for Kant to have a moral enthusiasm for the Revolution which his formalistic moral system does not justify. Had Kant's approval of the Revolution been eudaemonistic, the inconsistency would have been greater. But some inconsistency remains because Kantian ethics is not adequate to resolve the painful problems of conflicting duties." (Ibid., p. 421f.)

⁶ Cf. Atwell, 1974, p. 161.

⁷ Gregor, 1971, p. 25.

⁸ 'Matter' is to be understood in this article in the Kantian technical sense of this term being the antonym to 'form'.

⁹ Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 37; Baum, 2007, p. 213. See also: Geismann, 2006; Römpp, 2006.

¹⁰ Cf. *MS*, AA 06: 214.01-30; 218.11-221.03. (11ff.; 20ff.)

of the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue*¹¹. Kant here differentiates between two domains of human freedom, the external domain and the internal domain. He does this by distinguishing

- external (juridical) and internal (ethical) *legislation*,
- external and internal *acts*,
- external and internal use of *choice (Willkür)* (two aspects of *choice*)¹²,
- external and internal *determining grounds of choice*,
- and external and internal *duties* (those in accordance with juridical, and those in accordance with ethical legislation).

The two fields of action demarcated from each other in this way may also be described as the field of the *internal determination* of ends and the field of the *external realization* or *achievement* of ends. These two domains can also be thought of in a complementary way as two levels of human action—namely, as the level of (internal) willing and of (external) acting and omitting. Regardless of whether we speak of domains of freedom or levels of human action, it is in any case crucial that the purely formal, merely negative basic law of morality be superordinate to both dimensions of the structure of Kant's moral philosophy. As the supreme, most general categorical imperative, this law simply states what obligation is (what moral duty is), but in its reference to one or the other domain of freedom it is modified.¹³

¹¹ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 379.15-382.04; 396.04-31; 406.29-407.02. (145ff., 157ff., 164f.) It is in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that this two-dimensionality first clearly comes to light because this is where the 'system' is dealt with. (See especially the preface and the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*. See also: *GMS*, AA 04: 392.06-16. (5.))

¹² See Gregor, 1963, p. 81. See also Baum, 2005, p. 37f.: "Choice is [...] the faculty of desire as guided by concepts of an end, which previously was also called 'will', as long as these concepts of an end are able to determine it to bring about the corresponding object by its acting as the means, and this in such a way that he who desires the end considers himself as sufficiently able to achieve his intention. The self-determination of the desire by means of the desiring person's concept of an end makes his faculty of desire a faculty to act as one pleases, i.e. to generate the object of his concept or to refrain from this acting. The willing of the desiring of or refraining from an end-oriented action is thus an internal act of choosing this action. On this basis concerning the theory of action the will is introduced [...]". (Translation mine (A.T.))

¹³ Cf. *MS*, AA 06:225.01-226.03 (17f.); *TL*, AA 06: 388.34-389.11 (152.); *VATL HN*, AA 23: 394.01-34. Similar formulations can be found in the foundational writings on moral philosophy, in the *Groundwork* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Nonetheless, Geismann correctly points out that the variations of the categorical imperative that are found in these writings are for the most part only foundational for ethics because they concern volition, i.e. the internal use of free choice. (Cf. Geismann, 2006, p. 36, footnote 202. See also Baum,

While in his propaedeutic writings on moral philosophy¹⁴, in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*, Kant treats the categorical imperative as the undifferentiated supreme principle of any duty, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* it first turns into the supreme principle of all duties that can be imposed on us by *external* legislation¹⁵, and then into the supreme principle of those duties that are only possible by *ethical* legislation¹⁶. This is why Höffe asserts—rightly, in my opinion—that the categorical imperative at first does not have a normative-ethical significance, but rather a meta-ethical one, because at first it only defines the concept of the moral good.¹⁷ The bifurcation of the 'general doctrine of duties' in the *Metaphysics of Morals* into the *Doctrine of Right* and the *Doctrine of Virtue* is based on the distinction between the internal and the external use of freedom,¹⁸ and the diversity of legislation which is a consequence of it. It entails two basic principles that are independent of each other and are subordinate to the supreme principle of morality, the supreme principle of right and the supreme principle of virtue.

Analogous to this bifurcation, one can also distinguish two levels of action where the guiding question of Kant's practical philosophy 'What should I do?' arises—namely, the level of volition, which involves the choosing of maxims and the determination of ends, on the basis of which one acts, and the level of action in the more narrow, external sense, which involves the execution of ends determined in accordance with the chosen maxims, i.e. the realization of ends. The basis of this distinction is the insight that *the freedom of willing which is concerned with setting ends* is something totally different from *the freedom of acting which is directed at ends*. This is very clear in the following assertion by Kant:

Another can indeed *coerce* me to do something that is not my end (but only a means to another's end), but not to *make this my end*; and yet I have no end without making it an end for myself. To have an end that I have not myself made an end is self-contradictory, an act of freedom which is yet not free.¹⁹

Principles of freedom for the one field are quite inappropriate for the other. If ethical principles are supposed to serve to restrict freedom materially in such a way that the specific

2005, p. 35.) Thus, Kant speaks, for instance, of an end that must be estimated *in every volition*. (Cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 437.23-30. (45.))

¹⁴ Cf. Kersting, 2004, p. 198, p. 219.

¹⁵ Cf. *RL*, AA 06: 231.10-18. (24f.)

¹⁶ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 395.15-21. (157.) See also Gregor, 1963, p. 80.

¹⁷ Cf. Höffe, 1979, pp. 9-10. See also: Höffe, 1987, p. 89.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. *TL*, AA 06: 380.16-25. (146.)

¹⁹ *TL*, AA 06: 381.30-35. (146f.)

human faculty for the determination of ends itself dictates the end for all acting persons,²⁰ then these principles are completely useless as principles of right since the domain of right by definition involves bringing into agreement the external freedom of action of several persons.²¹ Admittedly, it is essential to all duties that they imply a constraining of free choice by the idea of a maxim that qualifies for a universal law. But the substantial difference between the *Doctrine of Right* and the *Doctrine of Virtue* consists in this: The determining ground of choice in the *Doctrine of Right* directly makes the external action necessary (and external action, of course, also is an acting on maxims)²², whereas in the *Doctrine of Virtue* the necessity is found in adopting and having maxims which make the willing *rational*. Here the relation to external action is only *indirect*²³: "Ethics does not give laws for *actions* (*ius* does that), but only for *maxims* of actions."²⁴ The *Doctrine of Virtue* deals with the internal determining ground of choice, a self-constraint exercised by reason on *willing*, which is the indication of internal freedom.²⁵ If maxims are adopted because they are in conformity with the law of reason for maxims, for which self-constraint is required, they turn into *internal determining grounds* of choice.²⁶ Precisely *this* is what no one can be constrained to do by another. As long as this internal determining ground remains restricted to the idea (the representation) of duty as the internal incentive to action, it can also bear on duties of right; it makes *indirect ethical* duties out of them.²⁷ But this internal self-constraint is only the *formal* principle of virtue, which does not constitute any specific duties of virtue. Kant does not speak of 'duties of virtue' until the setting of ends is made obligatory, i.e. once a definite *matter* of choice is represented as necessary.²⁸

III. The Upward and Downward Movement of Practical Reason and the Ambiguity of the Theory of Ends

The two-level structure of Kant's concept of action, which has been mentioned several times already, makes reference to another significant structural element of Kant's moral philosophy;

²⁰ Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 42.

²¹ Cf. Geismann, 2006, p. 24.

²² The maxim of the action is the ground determining choice to action.

²³ Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 39; Geismann, 2006, p. 30.

²⁴ Cf. *TL* AA 06: 388.32f. (152.). See also *VATL HN*, AA 23: 379.06-32.

²⁵ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 379.15-382.01; 394.15-32; 401.33-35. (145ff.; 156f.;161.)

²⁶ Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 41.

²⁷ Cf. *MS*, AA 06: 221.01-03. (22.)

²⁸ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 394.33-395.01; 398-picture. (157; 159.)

a correct assessment of the doctrine of objective ends depends on a consideration of this element. It could perhaps be described as the upward and downward movement of practical reason. In the *Groundwork*, what is decisive for "the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*"²⁹ (the upward movement) is that the will's *material determining grounds* be precluded because they are all categorized as sensible (*sinnlich*). However, it in no way follows that the moral legislation resulting from this process does not have any matter. This has already been pointed out emphatically by Julius Ebbinghaus:

The categorical imperative *abstracts from all ends* because, in deriving from it an absolute demand as such, I cannot rest my case on any end that I presuppose; but this does not mean that the categorical imperative demands a will *that has no ends at all* and so wills nothing.³⁰

Still, at the very summit of the meta-ethical upward movement in the *Groundwork*—which inquires into the concept of the moral good and in the course of this purifies the will from any matter—the matter (the end) can only be thought of as negative. The rational being as the subject of all possible ends is at this level the supreme limiting condition of all relative ends.³¹ However, in the normative-ethical *downward* movement of reason in the *Metaphysics of Morals*—a movement effected by relating the supreme moral principle to the internal and external use of free choice—the matter is then thought of as *positive*. The following should make this clear.

In terms of the meta-ethical upward movement, which aims at determining the concept of the moral good, the end is understood as "[...] what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination"³². As a result, one must abstract from all subjective-sensible ends. Hence, Kant writes in the *Groundwork*: "The [searched-for]³³ categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end."³⁴ What remains after this process of abstraction is only the objective end, which as a law is the highest limiting condition of all subjective ends. But in the case of the descent of practical reason to the level of human action—the level at which human beings act as

²⁹ *GMS*, AA 04: 392.03f. (5.)

³⁰ Ebbinghaus, 1954, p. 107.

³¹ Cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 430.24-431.09. (39.)

³² *GMS*, AA 04: 427.22f. (36.) This end of morality has to be distinguished from that of prudence and skill: Cf. *GMS*, AA 06: 415.06-416.06. (26f.)

³³ Text in square brackets supplemented by me (A.T.)!

³⁴ *GMS*, AA 04: 414.15-17. (25.)

"rational *natural* beings"³⁵, the level at which not only the will and its determination is concerned, but also free choice³⁶—the matter is the object or the end of *free choice*, the representation of which determines it to an action (by which the object is brought about).³⁷ As a result of this process of descent to the sphere of specific *human* action, the thesis holds: *No determination of choice without an end*. Or: No action without an end.³⁸ And this is valid both on the level of external action and on the level of willing. What is involved on the level of external action are the "[...] ends the human being *does adopt* in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature [...]"³⁹. Kant calls the doctrine of ends on this level based on empirical principles "[...] the technical (subjective) doctrine of ends," and adds that "it is really the pragmatic doctrine of ends, containing the rules of prudence in the choice of one's ends."⁴⁰ On the level of willing, however, we have the "[...] objects of free choice under its laws, which he [the human being]⁴¹ *ought to make* his ends"⁴². Kant names the doctrine of ends at this level "[...] the moral (objective) doctrine of ends [...]"⁴³ because it rests on principles given *a priori* in pure practical reason. Basically, only two possible relations between duty and end are conceivable: either the concept of an end proceeds from that of duty, or vice versa. The *Doctrine of Right* takes the first path; the *Doctrine of Virtue*, the second.⁴⁴

IV. The Doctrine of Virtue is a Treatise on Ends in a Positive Sense

We have only reached the *Doctrine of Virtue* when we are dealing with duties of virtue that are commanded, that is, with obligatory ends that are objects of legislation. A doctrine of virtue could also be thought of as a theory which remains restricted to the formal aspect of the moral determination of the will and only requires a certain form of ethical motivation. It might, for example, only demand that any action in conformity with duty should also be done from duty. However, Kant distinguishes clearly between 'ethical duties' that merely concern

³⁵ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 379.17-25. (145.)

³⁶ Cf. *MS*, AA 06: 226.04-11. (18.)

³⁷ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 381.04-06; 384.33f. (146; 149.)

³⁸ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 385.01. (149.)

³⁹ *TL*, AA 06: 385.19f. (249.)

⁴⁰ *TL*, AA 06: 385.22f. (149.)

⁴¹ Text in square brackets supplemented by me (A.T.)!

⁴² *TL*, AA 06: 385.20f. (149.)

⁴³ *TL*, AA 06: 385.24. (149.)

⁴⁴ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 382.08-27. (147.)

the form and 'duties of virtue' that also relate to an end, i.e. the matter (the object) of choice.⁴⁵ Only an end that is also a duty may be called a duty of virtue. Ethics is primarily about ends in a positive sense; it is, as Kant says, "[...] the system of the ends of pure practical reason [...]"⁴⁶. And the principle of virtue superordinate to them is an affirmative principle.⁴⁷

This must be emphatically emphasized since the imperfect duties mentioned in the *Groundwork* are only derived indirectly. Here the impossibility that the will can be universally legislative by means of the material determination of the negative maxims on which these duties are based (indifference in principle to one's own talents and the need of other human beings for help) is the reason why the *opposing* maxims become moral necessities (due to the autonomy of freedom) and why it thus becomes a duty to have these opposing maxims, i.e. to determine oneself to action by means of the end-setting implied in them.⁴⁸ In this derivation, however, the end-oriented nature of human action is tacitly presupposed—something Mary Gregor (among others) has pointed out.⁴⁹ And certain natural orientations of human beings—Ebbinghaus has emphasized this point⁵⁰—are also taken for granted. If one reflects about what one can *will* without contradiction, an understanding of the *specific constitution* of the relevant rational being is needed. In the case of human beings, this is their sensible-rational dual nature (human beings are rational *natural* beings). Hence, we can only fully recognize humanity as an end in itself in human beings if we act in accord with humanity not only negatively, but also positively—if, that is to say, we try to promote to a certain degree their subjective ends of human beings, too.⁵¹ It is with this in mind that O'Neill writes:

⁴⁵ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 383.08-17. (147f.)

⁴⁶ *TL*, AA 06: 381.18-19. (146.)

⁴⁷ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 395.15f. (157.) See also Gregor, 1963, p. 85.

⁴⁸ Cf. *GMS*, AA 06: 422.37-423.35. (32f.)

⁴⁹ Cf. Gregor, 1963, p. 88.

⁵⁰ It is thus, for instance, a case attested by experience that human beings need mutual assistance for the realization of their happiness. (Cf. Ebbinghaus, 1959, p. 210f.)

⁵¹ Cf. on this point the following statement from the *Groundwork*: "[...] concerning meritorious duty to others, the natural end that all human beings have is their own happiness. Now, humanity might indeed subsist if no one contributed to the happiness of others but yet did not intentionally withdraw anything from it; but there is still only a negative and not a positive agreement with *humanity as an end* in itself unless everyone also tries, as far as he can, to further the ends of others. For the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also *my* ends, if that representation is to have its *full* effect in me." (*GMS*, AA 04: 430.18-27. (39.))

Only by making the ends of others to some extent our own do we recognize others' agency fully, and acknowledge that they are initiators of their projects as well as responders to our projects, and moreover vulnerable and non-self-sufficient initiators of projects. That (I think) is the point of the idea that we should agree 'positively' with humanity as an end-in-itself.⁵²

One should also make the humanity of other human beings one's end in a positive way because human beings, as sensible rational beings pursuing their natural end (an end which—just like their rational-moral destiny—represents a *necessity*), are dependent upon this 'external' support. In the *Groundwork*, of course, these imperfect duties are only derived indirectly and are not yet an object of positive legislation (which is understandable given Kant's intention in the *Groundwork*). It is only in the *Doctrine of Virtue*—despite numerous parallels between the *Groundwork* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*—that a positive theory of ends is to be found.

V. *The Why and the How of the Positive End*

The question then arises: Why precisely are these ends of duty needed in ethics? What grounds the necessity⁵³ of the determination of positive ends required in this context? Kant's answer to this question is found in the following paragraph:

The *Doctrine of Right* dealt only with the *formal* condition of outer freedom (the consistency of outer freedom with itself if its maxim were made universal law), that is, with **right**. But ethics goes beyond this and provides a *matter* (an object of free choice), an **end** of pure reason which it represents as an end that is also objectively necessary, that is, an end that, as far as human beings are concerned, it is a duty to have. - For since the sensible inclinations of human beings tempt them to ends (the matter of choice) that can be contrary to duty, lawgiving reason can in turn check their influence only by a moral end set up against the ends of inclination, an end that must therefore be given *a priori*, independently of inclinations.⁵⁴

And a few sentences later, he adds:

[...] if I am under obligation to make my end something that lies in concepts of practical reason, and so to have, besides the formal determining ground of choice

⁵² O'Neill, 1989, p. 140.

⁵³ For the central importance which the concept of necessity has in Kant's moral philosophy see e.g. *MS*, AA 06: 221.19-223.05. (14f.)

⁵⁴ *TL*, AA 06: 380.19-381.03. (146.)

(such as right contains), a material one as well, an end that could be set against the end arising from sensible impulses, this would be the concept of an *end that is in itself a duty*. But the doctrine of this end would not belong to the *Doctrine of Right* but rather to ethics, since *self-constraint* in accordance with (moral) laws belongs to the concept of ethics alone.⁵⁵

Hence, the material guiding principle of ethics, which commands the adoption of specific objective ends, is necessary as a complement to the supreme formal principle of morality. These ends are absolutely necessary as a *material* counterweight to the subjective ends based on the sensible impulses that everyone has.⁵⁶ Though these ends are not necessarily contrary to duty, they can be so because they arise from spontaneous, unreflected stimuli. For this reason, from the perspective of duty, a force in the form of a *rational matter* is needed which opposes their influence.⁵⁷ In the field of internal freedom characteristic of the *Doctrine of Virtue* a categorical imperative of pure practical reason is required, "[...] which connects a *concept of duty* with that of an end in general"⁵⁸.

With this, the question concerning the *why* of the positive theory of ends is answered. But what has not yet been dealt with is the additional, closely related question concerning the *how* of this necessity. For according to what we have learned from Kant in the *Groundwork* about ends in moral philosophy, it is uncertain *whether* and—if so—*how* this kind of theory of ends can be integrated consistently into Kant's moral philosophy. We may well stand in need of objective ends as efficacious antagonists to the subjective ends. But this says nothing about whether and how these ends are *possible*.⁵⁹ Hence, we need to ask: How does this positive theory of ends come about?

The decisive step on the way to justifying these ends seems to be that the supreme principle of the doctrine of morals⁶⁰ (the general principle of morality) is applied to *one's own*

⁵⁵ *TL*, AA 06: 381.09-27. (146.)

⁵⁶ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 389.14. (152.)

⁵⁷ This oppositional function of the obligatory ends is no surprise if one considers that Kant defines virtue as a form of courage (*fortitudo*), namely as "the capacity and considered resolve to withstand a strong but unjust opponent" (*TL*, AA 06: 380.13f. (146.)).

⁵⁸ *TL*, AA 06: 385.08f. (149.)

⁵⁹ This is exactly the question that Kant wants to answer at the very beginning of the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Section I ends in the following way: "But how is such an end possible? That is the question now. For that the concept of a thing is possible (not self-contradictory) is not yet sufficient for assuming the possibility of the thing itself (the objective reality of the concept)." (*TL*, AA 06: 382.01-04. (147.))

⁶⁰ Cf. *MS*, AA 06: 226.01. (18.)

will; in contrast to right, ethics requires that we think of the supreme principle of all duty as the principle of *one's own will*, not as a principle of *will in general*:

The concept of duty stands in immediate relation to a *law* (even if I abstract from all ends, as the matter of the law). The formal principle of duty, in the categorical imperative "So act that the maxim of your action could become a universal *law*," already indicates this. Ethics adds only that this principle is to be thought as the law of *your own will* and not of will in general, which could also be the will of others; in the latter case the law would provide a duty of right, which lies outside the sphere of ethics.⁶¹

By relating the general principle of morality to one's own will, it turns into the requirement that one must be able to be the *legislator of everybody's ends* by means of one's maxim: "The supreme principle of the *Doctrine of Virtue* is: act in accordance with a maxim of *ends* that it can be a universal law for everyone to have."⁶² Freedom of choice is restricted here, not as in the field of right in a negative way, but rather in a positive, end-setting way.⁶³ Kant accordingly comments on the distinction between the rightful principle of external freedom and the principle of ends distinctive of the *Doctrine of Virtue* in his preparatory notes to the *Doctrine of Right*:

The doctrine of right is the doctrine of duties insofar as it is determined by the choice [Willkür] of others in accordance with the principle of freedom - the doctrine of virtue insofar as it is determined by one's own choice in accordance with the principle of ends.⁶⁴

And about the fundamental distinction between 'the constraint by means of the choice of another in accordance with laws of freedom' and 'the constraint by means of one's own representation of the law' he says in the preparatory notes to the *Doctrine of Right*:

⁶¹ *TL*, AA 06: 388.34-389.06. (152.)

⁶² *TL*, AA 06: 395.15f. (157.)

⁶³ Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 43; Geismann, 2006, p. 40. The *restriction* occurs by *subordinating* the subjective ends to the objective ends: "Only the concept of an *end* that is also a duty, a concept that belongs exclusively to ethics, establishes a [positive] law for maxims of actions by subordinating the subjective end (that everyone has) to the objective end (that everyone ought to make his end)." (*TL*, AA 06: 389.12-15. (152.) Text in square brackets supplemented by me (A.T.))

⁶⁴ Cf. *VARL HN*, AA 23:269.01-04. See also *VATL HN*, AA 23: 376.25-27: "In the first [in the duties of right], the choice [Willkür] of others can be determining for my own, in the second [in the duties of virtue], only my own choice can contain the determining ground (*ius et ethica*)". (Text in square brackets supplemented by me (A.T.))! All translations of preparatory notes into English are mine.)

A rational being has duties if the *freedom* of his *choice* [Willkür]⁶⁵ is restricted by a law [...] If it is restricted by the *choice* [Willkür] of *another*, then a rational being has *duties of right*; if, however, it is only restricted by the internal law of the practical reason of the subject itself, it has duties of virtue. [...] that [obligation] in which the constraining subject must be another person [is] the *rightful* [obligation]; that in which it must be the very same person, the *ethical* obligation. In the first case the *obligatus* is constrained by the *choice* of another in accordance with laws of freedom, in the second merely by the representation of the law.⁶⁶

When the supreme moral principle is related to *one's own will* such that it turns into the principle of an *internal legislation* and the principle of freedom of *internal action* (of the internal freedom of a person, the freedom of his own willing), then a law results for *one's own internal use of choice*, which manifests itself in internal actions of setting ends or adopting maxims. It is, then, a law *for the ends of every rational being*, which prescribes that one must be able to make one's own determination of ends an object of the legislation of everyone (including oneself). The lawful determination of the *internal* use of choice can relate only to *my own* choice. The supreme principle of virtue, which is a law for having maxims concerning ends, is a direct consequence of the supreme principle of the doctrine of morals, if this principle is applied to the determination of ends by means of my own choice.⁶⁷

For this reason, the route from right to virtue which Kant chooses in the *Metaphysics of Morals* implies a 'transition from one order to another'⁶⁸. One might perhaps also speak of a 'change of perspective': Virtue is something which is closely linked to decisively adopting the first-person perspective for practical purposes. This is already made clear at the beginning of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, when the concept of virtue is being introduced. Here (a) the doctrine of morals in general is divided into *Doctrine of Right* and *Doctrine of Virtue*, (b) the two fields are identified with the 'outside' and 'inside' of freedom, (c) the internal dimension of freedom is defined as free self-constraint and (d) this free self-constraint is identified with virtue in the

⁶⁵ Text in square brackets supplemented by me (A.T.)!

⁶⁶ *VARL HN*, AA 23: 344.19-23; 345.01-05.

⁶⁷ Cf. Geismann, 2006, p. 40; Baum, 2005, p. 39. The law of right differs from the ethical law since, on the one hand, it does not concern internal, but rather external action, and, on the other, it does not concern one's own, but rather the acting of everyone in its external relation to everyone else. (Cf. Geismann, 2006, p. 83.)

⁶⁸ In the preparatory notes to the *Doctrine of Right* Kant speaks under the heading 'Transition from the doctrine of right to ethics' of a "transition from one order of things to another (*metabasis eis allo genos*)" (*VARL HN*, AA 23: 353.22f.).

sense of a *fortitudo moralis*.⁶⁹ It is one thing to act according to a maxim that can function as a universal law of external freedom, but it is quite another to make the idea of the universality of the maxim the principle of *my own will*⁷⁰ and, hence, the principle of *my own determination of ends*. In the first case, the question involved is which of the possible maxims of action one *can* have; in the latter, however, the question is which maxims one *should* have. If I make the idea of universal validity the internal principle of my willing, my ends will be restricted to the condition that I must be able to make my own determination of ends the object of the legislation of everyone (including myself). The resulting law for the adoption of maxims reads as follows: "act in accordance with a maxim of *ends* that it can be a universal law for everyone to have."⁷¹ Hence, the duties of virtue are precisely those *a priori* commanded ends that I can have in accordance with a universal law.⁷² They are those ends that can be duties in accordance with a universal law of setting ends.⁷³ In this way, internal freedom is restricted to the conditions of its universal consistency with itself.⁷⁴ In other words, the necessity of this determination of ends is based on the fact that it is the condition for the *consistent* use of internal freedom.⁷⁵

The necessity of setting ends thus concerns the individual. Moreover, it relates only to his maxims, since this necessity is located on a higher level than his subjective ends (the level of ends one *ought to have*, not merely of ends one *actually has*).⁷⁶ It is the answer to the

⁶⁹ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 379.05-380.18. (145f.)

⁷⁰ On this also see Gregor, 1963, p. 83, footnote 18. Ethics apprehends the supreme moral law as what it originally and primarily is, namely the law of one's *own will*. For in terms of their origin all moral principles are laws of *one's own pure will*. They originate directly from the self-legislation of practical reason; their authority is grounded in this. And this is valid not only for the laws of virtue, but for the laws of right, too. Admittedly, they are conceived quite deliberately in such a way that they can be enforced by means of external incentives. But their *moral* validity derives from the fact that every person wills them to be enforceable by external coercion—*assuming his own rational will*. Hence, one could say: The *morally-binding* power of the external legislation is rooted in the self-legislation of one's own will, as it is with ethical legislation; this, however, is not true for its *rightfully-binding* power. (Cf. Tiefertunk, 1798, p. 90. All translations of Tiefertunk into English are mine (A.T.))

⁷¹ *TL*, AA 06: 395.15-16. (157.)

⁷² Cf. Baum, 2005, p. 43.

⁷³ Cf. Baum, 1998, p. 49f.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Refl* 7249-7251 *HN*, AA 19: 294.13-24.

⁷⁵ Cf. *VAMS HN*, AA 23: 250.07-18. See also Geismann, 2006, p. 30.

⁷⁶ If it would not be so ambiguous, one might also say: The necessity of the determination of ends concerns only the *intention* of the individual. In the preparatory notes to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant distinguishes between maxims or laws of *intention* and those of *execution*. (Cf. *VAMS HN*, AA 23: 381.34-382.04.) However, he did

question how I ought to determine my willing and—since there is no volition without object— which ends I should set in this respect. What is demanded here is that not only the maxims but also the 'maxims for the adoption of maxims' qualify for universal laws; the matter of choice, too, ought to be determined by law. The guiding principle of the *Doctrine of Virtue* is a principle of ends for me alone; it is the law of my own will.

VI. One's Own Perfection and the Happiness of Others

Why are the duties of virtue directed at one's own perfection and the happiness of others? A brief answer to this question could be this: Because only these two determinations of ends are concerned with the very capacity for setting ends. For the setting of ends which is commanded by the duties of virtue always has to do with the human capacity for setting ends as the possibility of freedom under the conditions of imperfect beings.⁷⁷ In principle, this capacity for setting ends can be promoted in two ways. If *one's own person* is concerned, the only end that one can make one's own with regard to the promotion of the capacity for setting ends is one's own perfection in a teleological and qualitative (formal) sense, understood as "[...] the harmony of a thing's properties with an *end*"⁷⁸. This does not mean that one should become a perfect human being in a *definite* sense, as demanded by a perfectionist account of ethics. Quite the contrary, it implies that one should maintain and cultivate a certain *personal*

not take up this distinction in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. The same thing is also true for the interesting distinction between 'maxim of will' and 'maxim of choice', which is found in the preparatory notes to the *Doctrine of Virtue*. (Cf. *VATL HN*, AA 23: 376.05-20.) That the necessity of setting ends concerns 'only' the maxims, has been clearly explicated by Tieftrunk who wrote: "Now an *obligation* is called *wide* when what one is to do and to omit is not determined for all possible cases with perfect strictness, but only the general rule is provided as an internal principle of the will, whereas the determination of the *cases* (of the individual and the particular [...]) is left to the free judgment and own's own decision: All ethical duties as such only provide the principle of willing; they tell us which maxims one should have, what the 'way of thinking' (*Denkungsart*) should be attuned to generally, without specifying and determining the particular real-life cases as that which is determinable by them; hence, they are wide duties. – So reason by commanding merely the having of a *maxim*, without as it were listing and exactly determining the *particular actions* which fall under it, thus *extends* the field for practicing virtue, gives a certain *latitude* to it, which is not available at all for the *narrow* duty. For narrow duty determines what one is to do and to omit in a most measured and precise way; thus it determines not only the *maxim* but also the *action*." (Tieftrunk, 1798, p. 97.) In the footnote we read: "Hence, choice has a latitude (*Latitudinem*) here; but not in view of the maxim, for that is determined unchangeably by the rule of morality, but only in view of the *application* of the law of duty to real-life cases of life." (Tieftrunk, 1798, p. 98, footnote.)

⁷⁷ Cf. Römpf, 2006, p. 173. Kant writes: "[...] since there are free actions there must also be ends to which, as their objects, these actions are directed." (*TL*, AA 06: 385.11f. (149.))

⁷⁸ *TL*, AA 06: 386.23f. (150.)

indeterminacy in which the human being as a being of freedom takes possession of himself, preserves of the capacity freely to set ends for himself 'from scratch', again and again.⁷⁹ This is the very heart of Kant's idea of 'perfection'.

Perfection in a sense that is relevant to ethics is not something that is received; it is not the object of some form of receptivity. It is rather an object of spontaneity that has to be brought about self-actively. Hence, if someone wants to become perfect, to do justice to the end of humanity in his own person, that implies, among other things, that he procure and promote "[...] the *capacity* to realize all sorts of possible ends [...]"⁸⁰. To Kant the 'perfection' of a human being is primarily the "fitness of his person for all sorts of possible ends"⁸¹. And since ends can only be set by oneself, this is only possible through self-determination. In the case of perfection, only those ends are involved whose possibility of being ends rests on the subject's own *spontaneity*.⁸²

If, however, *the person of other human beings* is concerned, the obligatory end can only be their happiness because one cannot make their perfection one's own end:

For the *perfection* of another human being, as a person, consists just in this: that he *himself* is able to set his end in accordance with his own concepts of duty; and it is self-contradictory to require that I do (make it my duty to do) something that only the other himself can do.⁸³

However, *in an indirect way* I can make the capacity of other human beings for setting ends my concern, namely by making their ends—in a mode and to an extent that I determine myself—a determining factor of my free choice⁸⁴ so as thus to support them in the realization of their subjective ends of happiness. For as rational natural beings they are dependent on this kind of external support. Making *own's own* happiness one's end, however, cannot be a duty of virtue, since this is the natural end of every human being and, therefore, does not fall under the concept of duty.⁸⁵ In other words, the duty to promote the happiness of others involves

⁷⁹ Cf. Römpf, 2006, p. 279. Accordingly, an essential aspect of Kant's definition of virtue is this: "Virtue is always *in progress* and yet always starts *from the beginning*." (TL, AA 06: 409.21f. (167.))

⁸⁰ TL, AA 06: 392.05f. (154.)

⁸¹ VATL HN, AA 23: 391.35-392.02. Kant's contemporary Tieftrunk characterizes the internal, moral-practical perfection as the "human fitness to make every particular end which is also a duty one's object" (Tieftrunk, 1798, p. 82.).

⁸² Cf. Tieftrunk, 1798, p. 74.

⁸³ TL, AA 06: 386.23f. (150.)

⁸⁴ Cf. TL, AA 06: 388. (151.) See also Römpf, 2006, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Cf. TL, AA 06: 386.03-06. (150.)

those ends whose possibility to be ends rests on the *receptivity* of the subjects. It is only these ends of others that I can make my own; not those that they themselves need to make their ends in order to be perfect. The end whose ground is the receptivity of the subject is the end of happiness, the pursuit of which is a natural necessity for all human beings. By helping other human beings realize their (permitted)⁸⁶ subjective ends - thereby contributing to their contentment by helping them to satisfy their inclinations - I fulfill the duty to promote the happiness of others. To the perfection of other human beings, however, I can at best make an indirect and mediate contribution.⁸⁷

VII. Summary

The *Doctrine of Virtue* is not about which of the ends recommended as objects of choice by nature one *can* reasonably have, but rather about the ends of freedom one *should* have as a rational being. The two obligatory ends—one's own perfection and the happiness of others—are introduced into Kant's moral philosophy as the required matter of choice because they are *the material aspect of internal freedom under the conditions of finite rational beings*. This becomes evident only from the first-person perspective on the level of willing. Duties of virtue, which command that I should have certain practical ends, require only general internal principles of willing—principles which, as such, are supposed to be valid without exception.⁸⁸ They are wide duties since they only demand general rules which tell me that I should have certain types of ends, and they allow a latitude to judgment in the determination of individual, particular actions which follow from having these maxims in certain specific situations.

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⁸⁶ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 388.07. (151.)

⁸⁷ Cf. Tieftrunk, 1798, p. 74.

⁸⁸ Cf. *TL*, AA 06: 390.09-14. (153.)

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