

## The education of the categorical imperative

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**Abstract** In this article, I examine anew the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant and its contributions to educational theory. I make four claims. First, that Kant should be read as having the Categorical Imperative develop out of subjective maxims. Second, that moral self-perfection is the aim of moral education. Third, that moral self-perfection develops by children habituating the results of their moral maxims in scenarios and cases. Fourth, that character and culture, Kant's highest aims for humanity, are the ultimate beneficiaries of this process.

**Keywords** Kant · Moral education · Categorical Imperative · Self-perfection · Pedagogy · Character

Decades have passed since Immanuel Kant has figured prominently in the discipline of philosophy of education as practiced in the English-speaking world. To my mind the last article-length, sympathetic exposition of Kant's contribution to the philosophy of education was Donald Butler's *Idealism in Education*, and this was published in 1966. This state of affairs continues, despite the many criticisms of Kant extant in the disciplinary literature and the presence of much new scholarship on Kant, particularly in the areas of ethics, politics, and anthropology. German scholarship on Kant has long had Traugott Weisskopf's *Immanuel Kant und die Pädagogik* (1970) and more recently, Jürgen-Eckhardt Pleines's edited volume, *Kant und die Pädagogik: Pädagogik und Praktische Philosophie* (1999). However, neither of these is available in translation. Recently, Barbara Herman and Felicitas Munzel, from within the discipline of philosophy, have made much of the central importance of pedagogy in Kant's critical framework for Anglo-American readers. But these exceptions merely serve to prove the rule: there is a near-complete absence of Kant scholarship in the field of philosophy of education. Almost all of the discussion on moral theory in philosophy of education is of the particularist and/or virtue-ethics varieties. Drawing on the works

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of Aristotle, John Dewey, and other, like-minded thinkers, philosophers of education have made abundantly clear that moral theory is best served in and through a non-Kantian approach. When Kant is discussed, it is generally in regards to his supposed moral absolutism.<sup>1</sup> The time has come, I believe, to challenge the received view of Kant that dominates the philosophy of education. This I do by drawing upon a number of recent Kant scholars and their arguments: arguments that suggest that Kant is a much more nuanced and context-bound moral thinker than older exegetes suggest. This will, I hope, place Kant scholarship in a position to be taken seriously by those philosophers of education that study moral theory.

I develop an argument as to why we should read Kant as making education central to the notion of the Categorical Imperative. Here, I make a number of claims. (1) That Kant's talk of the Categorical Imperative suggests that universalizable maxims develop out of specific contexts and are not universalizable because a timeless rule bears on them. (2) That Kant's talk of moral self-perfection as a duty is coeval with the Categorical Imperative. (3) That this perfection in turn requires an education in the capacity to formulate moral judgments. (4) That this education is casuistical, involving the examination of cases and scenarios of moral maxim-formation. (5) That the business of pedagogy is to develop a child's character through attention to forming maxims of moral worth. (6) That this process is both a way of thinking and necessary to achieve humanity's final end-culture. What links these claims together is the premise that the Categorical Imperative is coeval with autonomy-Reason's self-legislating capacity-and Virtue, the capacity to obey duties, both perfect and imperfect.

It will do to discuss this a bit further before launching into a defense of this position. First, I am claiming that there is *a fortiori* a relationship between virtue and autonomy: that is, to have or to practice virtue is to presuppose autonomy. This is so because autonomy is the ground for the very possibility of virtue. I am also claiming that when maxim-formation is underway what is central is the attainment of universalizability. As well, I claim that education is the means to the development of these subjective maxims. Education assists the child in developing his or her subjective maxims and in so doing, assists in the development of the virtues. This is so because I claim that to develop ones' subjective maxims is equally to develop ones' virtues: ones' subjective maxims, universalized, *are* duties.<sup>2</sup>

In Part 1 of this paper, I attempt in very brief detail the basic argument for the Categorical Imperative as discussed in the *Groundwork*. In Part 2 I provide an overview of duties as outlined in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and the role and scope of imperfect duties (duties of wide latitude) to oneself, and the duty to moral self-perfection. In Part 3, I address the issue of how the C.I. is educated, drawing primarily from Kant's statements on education in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. I make the argument that the education of the C.I. *is* the goal of moral self-perfection. In all of this, I take Kant to be arguing (quite rightly, in my estimation)

<sup>1</sup> Examples of philosophers of education taken with Kant's moral theory are hard to come by. Some notable exceptions of the last 15 years are Lee and Wringer (1993), Lovie (1997), Okshevsky (2000). For a recent and generally sympathetic reading of Kant's first Critique, see Campbell (2002).

<sup>2</sup> Translations are from the following (now standard) Cambridge Edition texts unless otherwise noted (Kant 1996a, b, c, d; 2005).

that education is to be taken in both the classic sense (education through the practice of duties) as well as the more modern sense (education through rational contemplation). I then turn to Kant's statements in the *Lectures on Education* and *The Critique of Judgment* in Part 4. I connect my thesis with Kant's statements on the importance of developing character and culture, respectively and I discuss pedagogy in relation to these. Though the argument is sketchy, I nevertheless maintain that my reading of the Categorical Imperative dovetails nicely into Kant's discussion of character formation and culture. This to my mind obviates Kant of the charges of moral absolutism often levied against him, and sets the stage for a return of Kant to the discussions central to philosophers of education: those of the intersection of moral theory, community, and culture in educational theory and practise.

### **Part 1: *The categorical imperative and the duties to self*<sup>3</sup>**

Kant famously advocated self-discipline and autonomy in thinking (O'neil 1989, p. 56). Nowhere was this more evident than in Kant's famous first published foray into the arena of moral philosophy, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. The highest capacity of a rational being, the capacity for self-legislation, was the possibility for all moral law. Autonomy—the capability of a rational being's Reason to self-legislate and thereby produce a law only unto itself (Kant 1996a, G, 4:440) was said to be the supreme principle of Reason. For Reason (the capacity for self-legislation) to give itself up to laws other than its own, to surrender itself to (as Kant says) “objects of volition (*Wille*),” is tantamount to the loss of Reason's freedom. Reason caught in such a position can no longer legislate for itself: rather, it becomes the slave of desire.

The expression of self-legislation in section one of the *Groundwork* is: “...I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law” (Kant 1996a, G, 4:402). This is famously known as the Formula of Universal Law. The maxim developed, having moral worth, must meet the requirements of self-legislation. The C.I. is thus an expression of Reason's self-legislative activity: an expression that has both logical and practical arms. First of all, it demands that Reason not contradict itself. Reason ought to act in such a way that all other rational beings would act. Maxims that herald logical contradictions have no moral worth. Such maxims are “contradictions in conception.” Furthermore, Reason ought to act only in ways that suggest that the practical outcomes of those actions Reason engages in are not self-defeating. Maxims that are logically consistent but practically inconsistent are also considered as morally unworthy. These maxims are “contradictions in the will.” A maxim that cannot be universalized because the agent who acted upon it would be unable to, under the conditions set by universalization act as she desires, falls

<sup>3</sup> I wish to consider only those areas of Kant's moral theory salient to my project. As such, I will not discuss in depth certain of the various “formulae” that Kant discusses in the second section of the *Groundwork*. These I relegate to a later footnote. I will limit myself to discussing only the notions of autonomy of the will, freedom, and the Categorical Imperative.

into this contradiction.<sup>4</sup> The act, done from duty alone, has moral worth. If it is done from some other basis than duty, it is morally unworthy, even if the “right” action is the outcome (Kant 1996a, G, 4:390; 4:399–400).

Top-down imposition of the C.I. in the determination of specific moral choices does not occur. It does not need to. As Kant says “Some actions are so constituted that their maxim cannot even be thought without contradiction as a universal law of nature, far less could one will that it should become such” (Kant 1996a, G 4:424). On the other hand, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that in certain instances, a person may have two grounds of obligation that necessitate a choice. Practical Reason mandates that when faced with such a choice, one is to choose the stronger ground of obligation: the ground that, characteristically, is done in accordance with duty alone (Kant 1996b, 6:224). Most moral decisions are or are not morally worthy on the face of them.<sup>5</sup> Our duties often carry sufficient moral “weight” to determine the bulk of one’s moral acts without further deliberation of moral worth. Furthermore, Kant claims that the point and purpose of the specific examples provided in the *Groundwork* are to demonstrate how we can say that there is such a thing as a universal self-giving law and *not* how to go about testing maxims for moral worth. After discussing examples of morally and non-morally worthy maxim formations, Kant states,

Thus, then, we have arrived, within the moral cognition of common human reason, at its principle, *which it admittedly does not think so abstractly as a universal form (allgemeinen Form)* but which it actually has always before its eyes and uses as the norm for its appraisals. Here it would be easy to show

<sup>4</sup> Christine Korsgaard notes that contradictions can be both logical and practical. Logical contradictions are contradictions in which the universalization of immoral maxims destroys the maxims themselves, are inconceivable, or cannot be thought without immediate and obvious contradiction. Kant’s famous example is of the destitute man (G, 4:422), who borrows money knowing that he cannot repay it. His maxim would be “...when I believe myself to be in need of money I shall borrow and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen.” Now Kant argues that it is immediately apparent that this maxim can never be universalized, because to do so would evidence the entirely inconsistent nature of its law-giving premise. No one would ever make a promise if this were a universal law. Practical contradictions are contradictions in which the agent has to go out of his way (violating moral law) in order to complete a moral act. Christine Korsgaard looks to G, 4:417, for insight into this sort of contradiction. Here, Kant argues, “Whoever wills the end also wills...the indispensably necessary means to it that are within his power.” In other words, one’s means must be every bit as moral as one’s end. If we take a look at the previous example used to illuminate the sense of the logical contradiction, we see that it also and equally involves a practical one. The maxim’s end-getting the money-can only be achieved by immoral means, which is to say, it can only be achieved by making a false promise. In this case, even if the end were to have moral worth, the means themselves have no moral worth and therefore the maxim itself is immoral. The detailed argument for considering both logical and practical consistency in moral maxim construction is found on pp. 77–106 (Korsgaard 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Herman has an elaborate and eloquent argument for this approach to understanding Kant. She believes that the C.I. is used infrequently in actual moral judgments. It is restricted to judging amongst competing grounds of obligations. Rather, the C.I. gives rise, through its legislative powers, to duties, which combine with existing social practices into a social/cultural matrix of rules that she terms “Rules of Moral Salience.” These rules carry us through most of our day-to-day moral decisions. The constant use and refinement of these rules for various situation and contexts (casuistry) gives rise to a “deliberative field” of moral decision-making, which moral education contributes to the formation of. In this way, Kant’s seemingly inflexible moral laws become tailored to specific situations, as various “cases” are integrated with moral obligations to provide moral guidance for a potentially infinite number of situations. See esp. pp. 147–148 and 189–190 (Herman 1993).

how common human reason, with this compass in hand, knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty, if, without in the least teaching it anything new, we only, as did Socrates, make it attentive to its own principle; and that there is, accordingly, no need of science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous (Kant 1996a, 4:404).<sup>6</sup>

The C.I. does not operate as an overt procedure to test out maxims for moral worth: rather, morally worthy maxims are so in large part because of prior moral judgments. I claim, with Lewis White Beck, that the various formulae, and particularly the Formula of Universal Law, exist as objective expressions of Law and as a subjective maxim: in this sense, the law exists as the end achieved.<sup>7</sup> However, this end cannot be other than the construction of morally worthy maxims, for this is the only way to preserve self-legislative activity (autonomy) hence, Reason. When Kant claims the FUL is the *end* of our subjective maxims, we must be aware that this end cannot be actualized other than through the construction of morally worthy maxims. As such, it is a legislative expression of Reason, itself the conclusion of the logic of carrying out the construction of morally worthy maxims. The construction of morally worthy maxims and the ends to which the maxims serve are thus inseparable.<sup>8</sup> The separation of maxim from law can only be one of functional, and not principled, significance.

What I am claiming is that the Categorical Imperative does *not* exist outside of or beyond the universalization of a subjective maxim. The Categorical Imperative forms *in* the process of maxim formation and *not* before this.<sup>9</sup> As such, the Categorical Imperative operates as a general warrant that indicates to us that we must form our maxims in such a way that they become universalizable. Becoming universalizable and achieving moral worth means that the subjective maxim *is*

<sup>6</sup> Alan Donagan, in his book *A Theory of Morality*, trades on this ability of reason to accord for our moral needs. The Judeo-Christian tradition, including the Decalogue, and the teachings of the gospels, provide a sufficiently rich set of ‘rules of moral salience,’ to carry those in the Western world (Donagan 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Lewis White Beck (1960). Beck makes a trichotomous distinction in his handling of maxims. There is first the subjective maxim to be tested for moral worth. There is also the Formula of Universal Law, which exists as an objective principle. When the subjective maxim is tested and found morally worthy, it joins with the FUL and the two are considered synonymous. My reading differs in that I do not think the objective principle exists outside of the construction of morally worthy maxims other than as an abstraction to ensure that maxims are not grounded in inclination. In this sense, ends are never truly detached from the maxims that construct them.

<sup>8</sup> I take seriously Kant at Groundwork 4:404 wherein it is suggested that the formulation of the Universal Law is an abstraction for the purpose of demonstrating the self-legislative capacity of Reason. I do not think Kant requires or wishes us to subject our daily routines and interactions to judgments of moral worth, if judgment means bringing the FUL “down” to bear on one’s maxim. As I argue further on, I believe that the C.I. is built up through the formation of one’s maxims.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, duties to us and to one another do exist. I am not denying this. What I am saying is that the Categorical Imperative functions in maxim-formation only. Previous acts of moral worth may function as duties. We might call these general warrants. They are inviolable, to be sure. They exist to guide present and future actions. However, they too, have developed out of specific maxim-formations. Duties spin out from the Universal Law. However, the Universal Law can only function in the setting of specific moral judgments. It has its genesis in its use. Furthermore, building into some duties wide latitude suggests that these duties depend a great deal on the particular situation in which they function.

categorical and imperative. Since the Categorical Imperative, shorn of all content, is but a mere form, it cannot operate under any other conditions than this. Otherwise, it falls prey to Hegel's classic objection; the objection that it is a bare formalism.

In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant claims, "If a rational being is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not be their matter but only by their form" (1996b, 5:27). And further, "Now, all that remains of a law if one separates from it everything material, that is, every object of the will (as its determining ground), is the mere *form* of giving universal law. Therefore, either a rational being cannot think of his subjectively practical principles, that is, his maxims, as being at the same time universal laws or he must assume that their mere form, by which *they are fit for a giving of universal law*, of itself and alone makes them practical laws" (1996b, 5:27).

Kant asks us to think of our maxims as universal laws. To do so, he says, we must abstract the principle from all content. Only then can we see that the law we have formulated is free from empirical conditioning. Universalizing the maxim accomplishes this task. Must we assume, though, that there exists a practical, universal law *before* the universalization of a maxim? I claim the answer is 'no.' Kant says that we must separate the principle from the matter, the form from the content. This is a thought-process, only. True enough, the result is plainly a universal law. This law, however,

can be represented only by reason and is therefore not an object of the senses and consequently does not belong among appearances, the representation of this form as the determining ground of the will is distinct from all determining grounds of events in nature in accordance with the laws of causality, because in their case the determining grounds must themselves be appearances. But if no determining ground of the will other than universal lawgiving form can serve as a law for it, such a will must be thought as altogether independent of the natural law of appearances in their relations to one another, namely the law of causality (1996b, 5: 28–29).

Kant claims that if we want to make a moral judgment that is empirically conditionless, we must think of a law that is independent from natural, causal laws of appearances. In other words, we must develop our subjective maxims in such a way that they are pure. I see no conflict between my claim that the universal law builds up in the formation of subjective maxims and the claim that we must think of the universal law as a form distinct from empirical conditioning. In those cases when we construct a subjective maxim, we are already gauging its moral worth. We do this by constructing the Categorical Imperative out of our maxim and ask whether this maxim accords with all that may potentially assent or dissent from the proposed act. The Categorical Imperative remains a part of the construction of the maxim. I see no reason why we must claim that the practical law is the form and the subjective maxim the content or matter for other than functional or heuristic purposes. I see every reason why we ought to think of the subjective maxim as containing both its form (the Categorical Imperative) and its matter (the specific act one wishes to pursue).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Rawls (2000).

## Part 2: The categorical imperative and moral self-perfection

Reason gives rise to certain formulae. These are The Formula of Universal Law, which is just the Categorical Imperative placed in the context of a statement of law. Two other important formulae prescribed are as follows: The Formula of Universal Humanity (FUH) mandates that every rational being is to be treated as an end in itself, and not merely as a means (Kant 1996a, 4:428). This is the formula that virtuous duties are derived from. The Formula of the Kingdom of Ends (FKE) mandates that there is a systematic union of individuals possessing rational ability that can be ruled through common objective laws and that every rational being is a will giving universal law (Kant 1996a, 4:431; 4:433–434). This has important considerations for Kant's political thinking.

The Formula of Humanity, an expression of the C.I., evinces duties. These are duties that accord logically and practically with the C.I. One could say that the capacity to self-legislate, in this case to treat rational beings as ends-in-themselves, expresses these duties both logically and practically. Kant describes these various duties as “perfect” and “imperfect.” A perfect duty is “one that admits no exception in favor of inclination ...” (Kant 1966a, footnote, 4:421) while an imperfect duty, while having an end that is obligatory, allows for latitude in the means by which the end is reached. Perfect duties are comprised of such duties as self-preservation and respect to others. Imperfect duties consist of duties to perfect oneself naturally and morally. It is to the latter duties that I now turn.

Imperfect duties are a subspecies of duties in general. The duties under consideration here are duties that Kant also calls “ends” (Kant 1996b, 6: 381). These duties belong to the “system of ends” that Kant famously labels Ethics (Kant 1996b, 6: 381). These duties arise as a result of the categorical nature of their law-giving status (self-legislation) (Kant 1996b, 6:379). They differ from rights in that there is no authorization to coerce another (Kant 1996b, 6: 383). Duties concern the maxims of actions, rather than actions themselves. The subjective principle upon which actions are based is what counts here. Latitude in terms of free choice as to what actions are undertaken is present with all imperfect duties provided that the maxim guiding the action has moral worth (Kant 1996b, 6: 390).

Human perfection for Kant is an imperfect duty. That is, though its end (the end of perfecting oneself) is prescribed, there is latitude in how one goes about reaching that end. One's activity in reaching the end prescribed may be different from another's. According to Kant, we have duties to perfect both our natural state (Kant 1996b, 6: 392; 444–446), as well as our moral state (Kant 1996b, 6: 446–447). The two are not synonymous. Perfection of our natural state for Kant implies cultivating “the crude dispositions of [our] nature, by which the animal is first raised into the human being” (Kant 1996b, 6: 392). To do this, Kant argues, requires one “to cultivate his [sic] capacities (some among them more than others, insofar as people have different ends), and to be in a pragmatic respect a human being equal to the end of his [sic] existence” (Kant 1996b, 6: 444).<sup>11</sup> The individual has a choice as to which of his powers to cultivate. Only the end is prescribed here.

<sup>11</sup> Here, we can think of the example of a child who shows potential in playing a musical instrument. The child should be assisted to perfect his natural talents such that she rises to the highest capability that she can.

In contrast, the duty to moral self-perfection is both a perfect and an imperfect duty. “This duty to oneself is a narrow and perfect one in terms of its quality; but it is wide and imperfect in terms of its degree because of the frailty...of human nature...Hence while this duty is indeed narrow and perfect with regard to its object (the idea that one should make it one’s end to realize), with regard to the subject it is only a wide and imperfect duty to himself [sic]” (Kant 1996b, 6: 446). The duty to increase moral perfection is perfect in terms of its end; it is imperfect in terms of the particular acts the subject might choose to realize this end.

Moral self-perfection consists of two commands. The first is “be holy” (Kant 1996b, 6: 446). This command has to do with the purity of moral self-perfection and requires that, in one’s disposition to duty, one act not only in conformity with duty, but also from duty. The second is “be perfect” (Kant 1996b, 6: 446). This command requires that one attain one’s moral end with regard to oneself. But though we strive for such perfection, we cannot achieve it (at least, as Kant maintains, in this lifetime). Continual progress is, as Kant maintains, the best compliance one can hope for.<sup>12</sup> The means one adopts to arrive at one’s end are multifarious. Often, Kant thinks, some of these means are less aligned with the end to be achieved than are others. Indeed, Kant thinks it likely that, among the mass of qualities one adopts in attempting to reach the goal of moral self-perfection, at least a few are lacking in virtue. As such, Kant finds it necessary to conclude that the duty here, inasmuch as it often contains non-virtuous qualities in the quest for a virtuous end, is but an “imperfect duty to be perfect” (Kant 1996b, 6: 447).

There has been some contention as to how much latitude Kant allows in his quest for moral self-perfection.<sup>13</sup> Most of the discussion has been directed at Kant’s duty to natural, and not moral, self-perfection. Indeed, where moral self-perfection is concerned, there seems to be a good argument that less latitude is allowed.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Kant argues that we cannot omit our duty to perfect ourselves morally. And equally clearly, Kant argues that there is less leeway in terms of moral self-perfection than in natural perfection, inasmuch as the end of moral self-perfection (the obedience of the commands “be holy” and “be perfect”) is more rigorous than the rather open-ended command to “cultivate one’s talents.” What is left open, of course, is the decision as to what maxims constitute self-perfection and what do not. This can be a

<sup>12</sup> The paradox of ever achieving moral perfection does have a solution, though it is not to be found in the MPV. Rather, it is for Kant a religious issue; one that touches upon the possibility of man’s holiness, and is found in his work *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. In this text, the argument to moral self-perfection (and perfection of humanity) in the MPV has its corollary in a strongly religious sense. Here Kant argues that there is a duty to elevate oneself to moral perfection (6: 60). But precisely because we are not the authors of this idea [because we are imperfect], we must say that the idea has come down to us from heaven and that it has “taken up humanity” (in the union of God and man) (6:61). In this way, man is seen as able to raise himself up to holiness. This practical faith in the Son of God allows us to see, in a perfect moral disposition, the possibility of moral perfection. We are able, as Kant says, to “...follow this prototype’s example in loyal emulation, only such a human being, and he alone, is entitled to consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure” (6:62). In the Son of God, morality and faith combine.

<sup>13</sup> Both Gregor (1963) and Hill (1992) argue that Kant allowed much leeway as to what to do on varying occasions. This leeway extends to the duty to perfect oneself morally. So on this read, one can sometimes choose maxims that progress oneself and other times choose maxims that do not.

<sup>14</sup> Marcia Baron argues that less latitude is accorded the duty to perfect oneself morally than the duty to cultivate one’s talents (natural perfection). Hill and Gregor are not sensitive enough to these distinctions, she argues, and so they miss Kant’s argument that we must “...do all that we can do to make ourselves (morally better people...” (p. 99).

difficult task, as some of these maxims have moral worth, and others do not. Only a maxim that has moral worth (done from duty alone) will serve in the quest for moral self-perfection. One certainly has the obligation to construct those maxims that clearly do. But how many, how often, and under what circumstances these maxims are to be constructed is left up to the individual. There is not a finite set of maxims necessary to construct. Nor does there seem to be an admonition to adopt only those maxims that clearly promote moral self-perfection in each circumstance the individual encounters. In fact, the context itself will probably play a far greater role here than it would, for example, in the admonition to treat others always with respect, as Marcia Baron rightly notes. But if moral progress is to be made, it seems that the bulk of the maxims one constructs must be in line with duty and furthermore, particularly egregious maxims must be scrupulously avoided (these will no doubt violate other duties as well, and may be forbidden, thereby, on other grounds).

### Part 3: educating the categorical imperative

Kant famously sees the role of education as one of “...the development, spreading, and strengthening of moral principles...” (Kant 1996b, 6: 217). Education belongs to the division of Practical Philosophy that Kant calls Moral Anthropology. Moral Anthropology is necessary, inasmuch as it provides for the conditions that help or hinder people in the development of their moral principles. But it has nothing to say about the moral law itself. As such, it is only a “counterpart” to a Metaphysics of Morals. Together, these divisions compose what Kant calls Practical Philosophy.

The manner of teaching ethics, as outlined in Section two of the MPV, the “*Doctrine of the Method of Ethics*,” is well known. Here Kant agrees with Aristotle in that virtue is acquired (Kant 1996b, 6: 477); argues that virtue is the product of the moral law and not a rival or separate concept (Kant 1996b, 6:477); and that the role of the teacher is to guide the pupil in the development of her concepts in a Socratic fashion (Kant 1996b, 6: 478). Kant’s examples of good actions (e.g. people behaving virtuously in various situations) act not as models but rather as proofs of acting in conformity with duty (Kant 1996b, 6: 480). For Kant what is important for children to grasp is not that there are right actions, and that these are to be imitated. Rather, it is that they must see that there is a moral law and that one’s maxims (one’s principles) that one constructs in these circumstances have moral worth. Though Kant nowhere denies that virtues develop through practice in everyday circumstances, these virtues are only a result of the moral law, and it is this law that designates a maxim as having moral worth.

The example that Kant provides, the example in which a teacher guides a student Socratically through maxim construction with the aid of exemplars and cases, to see that the student’s maxims must be in accord with the moral law, is a species of casuistry.<sup>15</sup> Casuistry is a helpful tool for getting children to form dutiful maxims in varying circumstances. Of course, different maxims will be constructed, depending

<sup>15</sup> Henrich Kanz disagrees that catechism is the method of Kant. “The principle need is to teach children to think’ and not to train them like animals. Learning to think can best be achieved using the Socratic method and not by what may be termed the mechanical-catechetic method. ‘The education of the future must be based on the Socratic method.’ I agree; any mechanical use of method is foreign to Kant. Nevertheless, it is cases judged according to their moral worth and this is precisely what is catechistic of Kant’s approach (Kanz 1993).

upon the circumstances in which the child finds herself. Differing circumstances will help the child formulate differing maxims for those circumstances, but importantly, will also help her to construct maxims having only moral worth (Kant 1996b, 6: 484).

Kant believes that instances of moral worth are pedagogically useful. He specifically recommends teachers to “[search] through the biographies of ancient and modern times in order to have at hand instances for the duties presented, in which, especially by comparison of similar actions under different circumstances, they could well activate their pupils’ appraisal in marking the lesser or greater moral import of such actions...” (1996d, 5: 154). This allows the child to, “...hope with confidence that frequent practice in knowing good conduct in all its purity and approving it and, on the other hand, marking with regret or contempt the least deviation from it, even though it is carried on only as a game of judgment in which children can compete with one another, yet will leave behind a lasting impression of esteem on the one hand and disgust on the other, which by mere habituation, repeatedly looking on such actions as deserving approval or censure, would make a good foundation for uprightness in the future conduct of life” (1996d, 5: 154–155). Kant bases the claim that children begin to form an understanding of duties on the fact of that habits that just do form. It is ‘common human reason’ that leads us to this conclusion, and not abstract principles. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant develops exemplars of moral judgments for children from this very fact. He aims to cultivate admiration for a struggling person. He does so because he, “yet remains firm in his resolution to be truthful, without wavering or even doubting; then my young listener will be raised step by step from mere approval to admiration, from that to amazement, and finally to the greatest veneration and a lively wish that he himself could be such a man...; and yet virtue is here worth so much only because it costs so much, not because it brings any profit” (1996d, 5: 156). Kant insists that what is important for children to grasp is that respect for the law and not merit, magnanimity, or nobility, is to be counted as moral (1996d, 5: 157).

Through maxim construction and the subsequent application of these, a child establishes what Kant calls “a transformation of [one’s] way of thinking and the basis of character.” As the transformation takes place, so Kant argues, does the establishment of a moral character (Kant 1996c, 6: 49). As reason develops, and maxims are constructed that have moral worth, children become better and better at constructing those that have no admixture of inclination. The process becomes a habitual one: that is, it takes on the characteristic stamp of a virtue in the empirical sense, similar to Aristotle’s notion of the same. The process of constructing maxims and recognizing the presence or absence of moral worth in them becomes a predisposition and an attitude of mind. Duty as one’s obligation to construct only maxims having moral worth and follow those maxims in and through one’s actions eventually does, according to Kant, take its place “... in the heart of the apprentice” (Kant 1996c, 6: 48–49). Maxims constructed as having moral worth develop in response to those circumstances examined, and, once this procedure of maxim construction is learned and practice is underway, internalization as duties (virtues) occurs.

Moral education consists of training oneself to autonomy. This means that education is involved in the development of one’s ability to legislate for oneself moral law. Moral self-legislation is none other than constructing one’s maxims in conformity with a law that is at once neither logically nor self-contradictory. And inasmuch

as all rational beings share the capacity for this lawmaking, the duties expressed in the moral law applies equally to all. Self-legislation gives itself as a law to be obeyed. And the C.I. is that law.

In sum, the education of the Categorical Imperative is manifest in cases and exemplars. Through cases of involving and moral exemplars, children construct maxims that have moral worth. Eventually, after many examined cases, the child begins to develop the habit of constructing and recognizing morally worthy maxims and rules for moral living. A large stock of these amasses. These are rules that the person, teacher, community and society share. Because these rules have moral worth, they not only obey, they indeed are, the C.I., inasmuch as the moral imperative of each of these duties builds up in the construction of the morally worthy maxim. These maxims become what Barbara Herman has famously called the “Rules of Moral Salience,” guiding us through most of our day-to-day moral decision-making.<sup>16</sup>

The education of the C.I. does not stop at habituation of community-wide norms through case and exemplar. There is another sense in which the C.I. is educated. I would like to express this sense in some detail. Recall that on occasion, a person must construct worthy maxims from amongst seemingly competing grounds of obligations. These sorts of maxim constructions are complex ones to make. They require us to go outside of our normal stock of duties and maxims, beyond our everyday “Rules of Moral Salience.” Very occasionally, Kant says, we come across quandaries in which we form competing maxims. These maxims are different and, indeed, while both seeming to have moral worth, only one possesses such quality (Kant 1996b, 6: 224). Consider the following example:

“If I go next door and borrow a silver soup tureen, it goes without saying that I am expected to return it as soon as my immediate need for it is over: that is not an issue and gives rise to no problem.

If, however, it is a pistol that I borrow and if, while it is in my possession, the owner becomes violently enraged, and threatens to kill one of his other neighbors as soon as he gets back the pistol, I shall find myself in a genuinely problematic situation. I cannot escape from it by lamely invoking the general maxim that borrowed property ought to be returned promptly.”<sup>17</sup>

In this example, nicely drawn by Jonsen and Toulmin in their work, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, a moral problem unsolvable through our existing stock of rules, occurs. It is just these sorts of moral quandaries that require conscious deliberation in maxim construction. The maxim must be complex enough to take into consideration all of the information available to the person charged with making a moral judgment, together with anticipation of the consequences in acting upon that judgment. The weak maxim might presumably be:

<sup>16</sup> There is some degree of similarity between Herman’s Rules of Moral Salience, and Alan Donagan’s Judeo-Christian moral tradition: Each serves the purpose of providing a stock of rules from which moral judgments can be exercised.

<sup>17</sup> This is an example of Jonsen and Toulmin’s in *The Abuse of Casuistry*, that the authors’ use to highlight the difficulty of ascribing to moral cases, abstract principles, and a telling indicator of the need for a return to case-based ethics, to a variant of which, as I believe the reader now anticipates, I believe Kant subscribed (Jonsen and Toulmin 1998).

In all cases of borrowing a pistol from my neighbor and my neighbor becoming violently enraged and threatening to kill one of his neighbors upon return of the pistol, I should nevertheless return the pistol because it is a violation of duty to keep another's property against her will.

*Prima facie*, this maxim seems counter to the principle of prevention of a murder and thus protection of life, and as such, lacks moral worth. It goes against our already built-up stock of the 'rules of moral salience.' The constructed maxim must be robust enough to take into consideration the (anticipated) consequences of one's action: one cannot clearly provide the means to a murder. One's obligation is to return the property on demand, but one's obligation is also to thwart a murder. This latter obligation can be met through the notification of the authorities before the return of the pistol.

A more robust (and dutiful) maxim, then, would look something like this:

In all cases of borrowing a pistol from my neighbor and my neighbor becomes violently enraged, threatening to kill one of his neighbors upon return of the pistol, I should return the pistol. However, I must first do my best to ensure the safety of the intended victim and to prevent a crime. I must contact the authorities before returning the pistol.

These difficult cases require careful deliberation in maxim formation to ensure that one's maxim has moral worth. When we examine carefully the grounds of the obligation that we wish to base our maxim constructions upon, we get clearer about how to construct our maxims. Such clearing up improves the individual's overall moral acumen, and can arguably make a further, positive contribution to the community in terms of how to settle rare disputes amongst grounds of obligation in similar situations and circumstances. Educating the C.I. must also involve this sense as well. Interestingly enough, Kant thinks that children can adequately master both senses of moral education, though admittedly, the carrying-out of one's maxims (what we might call the "follow-through") is a life-long process.

I now want to connect the education of the C.I. to Kant's notion of moral self-perfection. For, inasmuch as I see the procedure of the C.I. and the duty to moral self-perfection as coeval, I see the education of the C.I. as the means towards furthering one's duty to progress morally. I will first address the issue of how it is that the C.I. and moral self-perfection are complimentary and indeed, that moral self-perfection is the logical and practical conclusion of forming and acting upon maxims that have moral worth. I will then be in a position to discuss the place of education in fostering the progression of one's duty.

The Categorical Imperative is the principle by which reason mandates its own self-legislative activity. To follow the principle-to produce and act on only maxims that are done from duty-is to ensure that whatever maxims one formulates have moral worth. It is the capacity to develop the ability to construct maxims that have moral worth that is characteristic of a Kantian moral education. To obey only maxims that have moral worth-to do one's duty from duty's sake alone-is the requirement for autonomy and the ground of all freedom. The C.I. is both the law that commands such obedience and the possibility of this freedom.

The commands for moral self-perfection, to repeat, are two. The first is to be holy. This requires that we construct and act upon only those maxims that are dutiful. The second is to be perfect. This requires that we act to achieve a moral

end for ourselves. Both of these commands emanate from, and are in keeping with, the imperative of Reason to act autonomously. Indeed, these commands are further instances of the C.I. inasmuch as they are conditions that the C.I. sets as duties for it, to ensure that Reason itself obeys, to the very best of its abilities, its own law. Thus, moral self-perfection is itself a duty that is in turn, the Categorical Imperative, inasmuch as the maxim of each duty is constructed in such a way that preserves self-legislation. Of course, this condition applies to all duties imbued with moral worth.

The duty to moral self-perfection *is* the Categorical Imperative. All duties are Categorical Imperatives. They are ends that exist to safeguard Reason's self-legislative capability. Though they differ as to their specific tasks (e.g. the duty to perfect oneself; the duty to respect others, etc.), they do not differ as to their ultimate ends. These ends are those set out in the *Groundwork*, and formulated in that text as various commands of Reason (the FUA, the FKE, the FUH, etc.), as well as the maxims of Understanding and the ultimate end of humanity discussed in the *Critique Of Judgment*, both of which I discuss shortly. Imperfect duties, though varying as to their means, do not vary as to their end. Thus, it is that they are coeval with the various formulae that Kant equates with Reason as its self-legislation.

The duty to perfect oneself morally is facilitated through moral education. Moral education provides assistance to the child in constructing dutiful maxims. This is a necessary condition to perfecting oneself morally. Perfecting oneself morally finds its means in the two senses described above, in which a child is educated for autonomy. A child is beginning her path toward moral self-perfection when in an environment with a responsible teacher, given instruction, via specific cases, in the construction of morally worthy maxims. She does so as she encounters cases requiring maxim construction. As she becomes more familiar with the construction of maxims, she not only learns how to determine morally worthy maxims, she also begins to develop the moral attitude that comes with the habituation of various duties. As a result, she (hopefully) produces and follows moral maxims. Inasmuch as she does this, she is fulfilling the basic conditions necessary in moving towards self-perfection. Such an environment functions in accord with what Barbara Herman calls 'the field of deliberation.'

Moral self-perfection demands an ongoing effort to get better and better at constructing (and following), moral maxims. Though one can arguably learn many, if not all, of the duties to oneself and others in the context of a formal education, Kant believes that the work of perfecting oneself is never done. Though the duties that Kant details in the *Metaphysics of Morals* are relatively few, they require practice in construction and application. The task is to formulate and practice maxims that evince these duties, and *a fortiori*, the moral law. This is an ongoing task. Inasmuch as moral self-perfection is a duty that is unachievable, moral self-perfection, and thereby, education, does not end with the growth of the child into adulthood. Rather, it continues as the person progresses in developing her stock of dutiful maxims, encounters troubling moral situations that demand the construction of new maxims having moral worth, and practices the virtues that lead one to a dutiful life. Formal education (Pedagogy) begins the process by facilitating the formation of moral maxims. Acting on those maxims continues this education. What begins as formal, moral education in a home or classroom becomes practical, self-education (*Bildung*) as the person puts what she has gained in the way of maxim construction into the practice of living a dutiful life.

Education to autonomy is to educate oneself and assist others to construct maxims that are dutiful and thus morally worthy. It is developing the faculty of Practical Reason to promote, maintain, and discipline itself with respect to its self-legislating activity. Such autonomy is represented in the formula that is the C.I. What is being educated is none other than the C.I. in and through, various cases. And inasmuch as the C.I. gives itself the duty of moral self-perfection (to get better and better at being morally worthy in one's maxims), the progress that one makes in perfecting oneself morally is equally the education (both formal and practical) of Reason itself.

#### **Part 4: pedagogy, character, and culture**

In the *Lectures on Education* Kant tells us that the development of a child's character is primary. "The first endeavour in moral education is the formation of character. Character consists in readiness to act in accordance with 'maxims.' At first they are school 'maxims,' and later 'maxims' of mankind. At first the child obeys rules. 'Maxims' are also rules, but subjective rules. They proceed from the understanding of man" (2005, 9: 78). Kant talks again of the importance of the formation of character elsewhere. "Morality is a matter of character. Sistine et abstine, such is the preparation for a wise moderation. The first step towards the formation of a good character is to put our passions on one side. We must take care that our desires and inclinations not become passions, by learning to go without those things that are denied to us" (2005, 9: 93). As well, Kant says, "Our ultimate aim is the formation of character. Character consists in the firm purpose to accomplish something, and then also in the actual accomplishing of it" (2005, 9: 94).

Character is the aim of moral education; duties however, are the means. Examples and rules, Kant tells us, are the way to educate a child to obey. "We must place before them the duties they have to perform, as far as possible, by examples and rules. The duties which a child has to fulfill are only common duties towards himself and towards others. These duties must be the natural outcome of the kind of question involved" (2005, 9: 95). Kant urges the schools to formulate "catechism[s] of right conduct," and use cases to help the child develop his or her sense of duty (2005, 9: 97). Kant prefigures his later statements on moral catechism in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Everything in moral education depends on the establishment of correct principles. This is the chief responsibility of schools and teachers. The establishment of principles is prerequisite for character and character is the final aim of education.

What does Kant say of character? Kant, in the final pages of the *Critique of Judgment*, tells us that the ultimate end of nature is culture. Kant puts it this way.

In order...to discover where in the human being we are at least to posit that ultimate end of nature, we must seek out that which nature is capable of doing in order to prepare him [sic] for what he must himself do in order to be a final end, and separate this from all those ends the possibility of which depends upon conditions which can be expected only from nature.... Thus among all his ends in nature there remains only the formal, subjective condition, namely the aptitude for setting himself ends at and (independent from nature in his determination of ends) using nature as a means appropriate to the maxims of his free ends in general, as that which nature can accomplish with a view to the

final end that lies outside of it and which can therefore be regarded as its ultimate end. The production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom) is culture. Thus, only culture can be the ultimate end that one has cause to ascribe to nature in regard to the human species..." (Kant 2000, 5: 431).

What counts as culture? Kant tells us that skill does not qualify as the ultimate end of nature. This is so because, "The culture of skill is certainly the foremost subjective condition of aptitude for the promotion of ends in general...it is not sufficient for promoting the will in the determination and choice of its ends, which, however is essential for an aptitude of ends." (Kant 2000, 5: 432). Rather, the "...formal condition under which alone nature can attain this its final aim is that constitution in the relation of human beings with one another in which the abuse of reciprocally conflicting freedom is opposed by lawful power in a whole, which is called civil society for only in this can the greatest development of the natural predispositions occur." (Kant 2000, 5: 433). The condition under which the attainment of humankind's natural ends, that of culture is possible, is only in a civil society. Moreover, what counts as civil is the presence of a constitution that balances the presence of (conflicting) freedoms of the citizens therein. This constitution is coercive: it makes demands upon the citizenry such that one's freedoms do not invoke or imply the dissolution of another's.

Nevertheless, even civil society is, by itself, not enough to guarantee the establishment of culture. Kant claims that, "For this [establishment of culture] however, even if humans were clever enough to discover it and wise enough to subject themselves willingly to its coercion, a cosmopolitan whole, i.e., a system of all states that are at risk of detrimentally affecting each other, is required." (Kant 2000, 5: 433). War, an unintended consequence of the state of unfreedom, is the means that "prepare[s] the way for the lawfulness together with the freedom of the states and by means of that the unity of a morally grounded system of them..." (Kant 2000, 5: 433). The ascription of cosmopolitan society to the state that is lawfulness is intentional: lawfulness, connoting both legal and moral varieties, is the *conditio sine qua non* of a cosmopolitical nation and world. To be lawful is to be moral. And to be moral is to provide a means for the development, through education, of the capacity of the citizens therein, to cultivate their (moral) character.

To discuss the development of character, then, is to bring the argument full circle. What remains is to bind together character to culture. Kant tells us that nature's highest aim, culture, demands as its means the "discipline of the inclinations..." (Kant 2000, 5: 433). There is by nature, a "...purposive effort at an education to make us receptive to higher ends than nature itself can afford." (Kant 2000, 5: 432). This is tantamount to claiming that it is a natural end of the human species to self-cultivate to develop our humanity. The means for this development Kant is quite clear about. "Beautiful arts and sciences, which by means of a universally communicable pleasure and an elegance and refinement makes human beings, if not morally better, at least better mannered for society, very much reduce the tyranny of sensible tendencies, and prepare humans for a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power..." (Kant 2000, 5: 433).

Beautiful arts and sciences are artifacts of a society. These artifacts are means in the cultivation of a cosmopolitical citizen. Equally, they are means in the cultivation of one's moral character. The two are coterminous. To cultivate cosmopolitical

citizenry through the artifacts of the arts and sciences is to cultivate one's character. To cultivate one's character is to cultivate the disposition for the appreciation of cosmopolitanism. Culture emerges as the natural end of humanity, found to be the cosmopolitical and moral end. This end is none other than the (cosmopolitical and individual) sovereignty of Reason and this is what counts as culture. I want to spend these final lines expanding upon this sentiment.

Cultural representations and artifacts become an important means in the furtherance of Character. Expressive objects, such as can be found in painting, sculpture, poetry, oratory, language, ritual, myth, alongside what Kant calls "logical attributes," such as concepts, categories, geometry and arithmetic (Kant 2000, 5: 310), supply the 'products' of representation. Culture is both a product of character and an (natural) end of character. For culture-as the artifacts of human interactions-this is the product of humanity in its interaction with itself, is equally the end of one's *Denkungsart* and one's maxims of Understanding. The products of culture (especially linguistic, logical, and aesthetic products) serve as the means to the formation of one's *Denkungsart*. Of course, culture on Kant's account is more than artifact. Cultural products and artifacts do not exhaust the notion of culture, for culture, on Kant's account, is the sovereignty of Reason writ large. But the existence of these and other artifacts (anachronistically speaking) is for Kant akin to the tangibles necessary for the *sensus communis*-the pre-condition for all judgments of taste and for the commonality of our other faculties that Kant sets out in the *Critique of Judgment* and that we, as rational animals, just do have. The *sensus communis* is inclusive of artifacts and practices: it is a necessary element in the formation of one's *Denkungsart*.

To discuss *Denkungsart* is to occasion the development of moral self-perfection and the construction of maxims of moral worth. To say that cultural artifacts have a role to play in the development of character is to say that they have a role to play in moral self-perfection as well. There is an obligation, I suggest, that goes along with the use of cultural artifacts in cultivating one's cosmopolitical and moral (for these are coterminous) character. Our moral self-perfection must bind with the moral self-perfection of others on Kant's account of the final aim of humanity. And this requires that one's maxims of moral worth, which are the means of one's moral self-perfecting, be in league with (though not necessarily the same as) those of others.

How, precisely, do cultural artifacts occasion the development of character? It cannot be the case that one's form and presentation of the concept is somehow the correct one and that the same of the other is incorrect. Rather, it must be that what can be universally communicated *is* the form of the concept, which is at once aesthetic but equally (as Kant tells us) cognitive and moral. Delight and interest depend not on the vagaries of chance, fortune, good breeding, *simpliciter*. Delight and interest are present in all of the human species precisely because of the universality of the capacity to form and present. Artifacts, manners, chance and fortune, do play a role in what is being judged as delightful or interesting. But this is not the same as claiming that the derivation of these is largely a matter of custom or taste.

If this is the case then certain conclusions follow. First, to cultivate the conditions that occasion delight and interest is to cultivate the faculties of the Understanding and Reason. As the forms and presentation of all faculties are the same, to develop the means of delighting in these is to delight in the capacity to be logical and moral. Secondly, to develop the faculties of Understanding, Judgment, and Reason, is to obey the three Maxims of Understanding. Moreover, to do this is to cultivate one's

way of thinking; in short, one's *Denkungsart* and character, thereby. Third, to cultivate one's character is to follow a self-given law (autonomy) constructed through acting upon maxims of moral worth. To strive consciously to do so is to engage in the perfection of one's moral self.

To cultivate the faculties of the Understanding, Judgment, and Reason, is to seek out forms and presentations that delight and interest. This requires both cultural artifacts and an institution (pedagogy) that can assist the individual to accomplish this. Though we may well find many artifacts in each of our own societies and nations, the expansion of artifacts to include the logical, scientific, economic, political, and artistic artifacts and expressions of others different from ourselves increases greatly the opportunities for delight and interest. The cultivation of delight and interest is the cultivation of our faculties, including that of Reason, and as such, is a duty of both natural and moral, self-perfection. Pedagogy—the formal cultivation of delight, interest, and the faculties thereby, is the means to this end. Further, it is a requirement of humanity as a whole, to strive to achieve its ultimate end—culture. There is a human imperative to cultivate ourselves through contact with others. Not surprisingly, this occurs not only through our (shared) universally communicative capacity to form and present our concepts, but through the sharing of artifacts that produce the interest and delight that compel our faculties to grow. Pedagogy again, is the means to the development of a cosmopolitical sensibility in the citizenry. In the final estimation, we have a natural and moral duty to share ourselves, through our artifacts, with others. We must develop 'cosmopolitical maxims,' as it were; maxims that are morally worthy precisely because they seek out and maintain the conditions of cosmopolitanism. Though this requirement of moral and natural self-perfection is necessarily open-ended, the end that it insists upon is not. Culture is a necessary means to individual, moral self-perfection; a means to cosmopolitical citizenry; a means to the fulfillment of the maxims of Understanding, and a requirement of the fulfillment of the Formula of Humanity and the Formula of the Realm of Ends. Culture is, in short, indispensable, and the more cultures intermingle, the better.

## Conclusion

Kant's requirement is that we just do participate, as moral beings, in culture. We can view culture as the reciprocal ends and means of a moral being. We are the ends of culture, inasmuch as it is our beings that are to strive for moral self-perfection. But we are the means to culture because culture is the functional and social end to which our moral self-perfection aims. As such, I argue that Kant emerges as every bit as important a philosopher of society and culture as the moral particularists and virtue ethicists and ought to be given pride of place along with these thinkers in discussions of moral theory in philosophy of education.

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