KANT ON RADICAL EVIL

by

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A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Philosophy

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2015

ABSTRACT

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015
Under the Supervision of Professor Julius O. Sensat

The purpose of this thesis is to propose an interpretation of Kant's claim that the human being's evil nature is the effect of the free power of choice. I suggest that if his concept of free choice is properly understood, Kant's claim should be interpreted as follows: the human being's radical evil is the effect of a failure to use freely the power of choice that determines its fundamental disposition, a failure that is to be presupposed as universal for all human agents. According to this reading, we are evil by nature since evil lies in our fundamental disposition. Still, our evil nature can be thought of as acquired, since we could constitute our fundamental disposition as morally good through freedom of choice. In the end, it turn out that for Kant, the concepts of free choice and of evil nature are closely connected.

To my mother, with gratitude.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Julius Sensat, Bill Bristow, Luca Ferrero, and Joshua Spencer. Whoever struggles in the graduate student life will find, as the answer to one of his temperate wishes, that the approval of enlightened and competent teachers strongly encourage him to engage in efforts whose benefit is great for himself, but remote and hence quite unrecognized by the eyes of others. For such teachers and to their gracious attention I am sincerely grateful, and remain with the deepest reverence.

1. Introduction

Making sense of Kant's doctrine of radical evil has been one of the most perplexing problems facing his interpreters. Kant proposes the doctrine mostly in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere reason,* which is a very rich but difficult text. Since the major theme of the text is philosophy of religion, it is often hard to distinguish his philosophical thesis of evil from his interpretation of the Christian idea of original sin. Moreover, the claim that the human being is radically evil seems strikingly contrary to his belief about human dignity and the possibility of morality. While these issues themselves provoke serious interpretative tasks, the most embarrassing problem is that the doctrine itself seems self-contradictory. Kant remarks, "The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil," and "These two [good and evil characters] must be an effect of his free power of choice" (R 6: 44).[1] In other words, our being evil results from our free choice, according to Kant. Nevertheless, he also maintains that 'the human being is evil *by nature*' (R 6: 32). These two claims seems contradictory.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a consistent reading of Kant's claim that the human being's evil nature is the effect of the free power of choice. I will try to resolve the seeming contradiction of the claim in light of Kant's moral psychology. I will suggest that if his concept of free choice is properly understood, Kant's claim should be interpreted as follows: the human being's radical evil is the effect of a *failure* to use freely the power of choice that determines its fundamental disposition, a failure that is to be presupposed as universal for all human agents. According to this reading, we are evil by nature since evil lies in our fundamental disposition. Still, our evil

[1] Apart from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where references follow standard A/B pagination, references to Kant's other works are abbreviated as follows: G (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*), KpV (*Critique of Practical Reason*), MS (*The Metaphysics of Morals*), R (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*), A (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*). Citations of these works refer to volume: page number of the Prussian Academy edition of Kant's complete works. Translations of Kant's works will be from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

nature can be thought of as acquired, since we could constitute our fundamental disposition as morally good through freedom of choice. In the end, it will turn out that for Kant, the concepts of free choice and of evil nature are closely connected.

To explicate this reading, I will first examine Kant's notion of the free power of choice in section 2. This section will make it clear how a particular evil maxim can be the effect of free choice. I will then articulate his notion of disposition in section 3. The section will show how an evil disposition can be the effect of free choice and why it can still be thought of as innate. In section 4, I will discuss Kant's doctrine that all human beings have an evil nature. In this section, it will explain how for Kant, our universal evil nature is a necessary presupposition for having freedom of choice.

2. Choice, Freedom, and Bad Choice

Kant's claim that the human being's evil nature is the effect of the free power of choice is based on his distinctive concepts of freedom and choice. In order to understand this claim, therefore, we need first to examine these two concepts.

2.1 To begin with, what is the power of choice (*Willkür*)?[2] According to Kant, it is a capacity of an agent to bring about objects of desire through action while being conscious of this capacity (MS 6: 213).[3] When an agent desires something achievable, he can be conscious that he is able to bring about the desired effect through action. And to act to bring about the object of desire, he should decide to commit himself to that action— he should make a choice to do so. The

[2] In this paper, I will use "the power of choice", "choice", or its verbal form "choose" interchangeably to denote *Willkür*. For *Wahl* that means a particular choice as an effect of *Willkür*, I will use "a choice" or "a particular choice."

[3] Kant says, "The faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, insofar as the ground determining it to action lies within itself and not in its object, is called a faculty to *do or to refrain from doing as one pleases.* Insofar as it is joined with one's consciousness of the ability to bring about tis object by one's action it is called *choice;* if it is not joined with this consciousness its act is called *wish"* (M 6:213).

power of choice (*Willkür*) is the power to make this particular choice (*Wahl*). If I desire to eat ice cream and am conscious of my capacity to fulfill this desire through action, I will be capable of making a choice to go to a nearby grocery store to buy ice cream rather than to stay at home watching TV.

Note that when I make a choice to eat ice cream, I should choose not only the object of my desire as an end, but also a means to that end, considering my situation. Thus, what I choose by my power of choice is this entire set of considerations that constitute a subjective principle Kant calls 'a maxim.' In other words, I make a choice for a maxim that tells me to achieve a certain end by means of a certain action in certain circumstances.[4] Moreover, it should be clear that when I choose a maxim, I do not merely *desire* some end—I am committing myself to realizing that end by means of a certain action.[5]

In many cases, an agent has a desire or aversion toward an object because that object pleases or displeases him. So he often makes a choice for a maxim because of this pleasure or displeasure. According to Kant, however, a human agent's power of choice is not fully determined by pleasure, or by the habitual pleasure Kant calls inclination (MS 6: 213). A human agent can choose to pursue some desires, not because he is pleased by them, but because he reasons that he ought to choose to satisfy those desires. Kant calls this faculty of desire 'the will (*Wille*),' which is practical reason itself.[6] The will gives a normative reason for choosing a maxim.[7]

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[4] For Kant's own definition of maxim, see G 4: 400n; 421n; KpV 5: 19. Rawls (2000, 168) gives a canonical form of maxim as follows: "I am to do *X* in circumstances *C* in order to bring about *Y* unless *Z.* (Here *X* is an action and *Y* is an end, a state of affairs)."

[5] For the distinctiveness of choosing an end from merely desiring it, see Korsgaard (1997, 245).

[6] Kant remarks, "The faculty of desire whose inner determining ground… lies within the subject's reason is called the *will.* The will is therefore the faculty of desire considered not so much in relation to action (as choice is) but rather in relation to the ground determining choice to action. The will itself, strictly speaking, has no determining ground; insofar as it can determine choice, it is instead practical reason itself" (M 6: 213).

[7] Strictly speaking, this is the faculty of the will in a narrow sense, and it differs from the will in a broad sense. Both concepts are referred by the same German term "*Wille*" throughout Kant's texts. Nevertheless, these are different in

When an agent is considering whether to choose a certain maxim, he can make a choice based on his consideration whether this choice is reasonable or not. That choice will be reasonable if he can will that all agents in his situation choose in the same way as he does; that is, if his subjective principle can accord with an objective principle or *a practical law*. The will represents this practical or moral law, which is in itself an incentive by which a human agent can be motivated to choose a maxim according to that moral law (KpV 5: 72).

How does this work? First, an agent has a desire for some object. He will then consider whether to pursue this desire through action— whether to make a choice for the maxim aiming at the satisfaction of that desire. And then he tests whether or not this maxim can become a universal law. If the maxim passes the test, he will have an acceptable reason to choose the maxim, a reason which can be universally held (MS 6: 225).[8]

These are not, however, separate steps for Kant. The power of choice and the will work *simultaneously* and need each other. The will does not represent a practical law unless a relevant maxim of choice is considered, nor can its law be immediately actualized without being mediated by a chosen maxim. The will can be practical only by virtue of the power of choice. On the other hand, whenever we are considering a maxim, our will always represents a relevant law that can regulate our choice. In other words, we can always know what we ought to choose. This is what Kant calls 'the fact of reason' (See especially, KpV 5: 30-1).[9] Moreover, as we will see, the power

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that the will (*Wille*) in a broad sense, as the general faculty of volition, includes both the power of choice (*Willkür*) and the will (*Wille*) in a narrow sense. In the *Groundwork*, Kant did not distinguish *Wille* and *Willkür* in this way. He begins to distinguish them in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and clearly does so in the *Religion* and in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In this paper, I will use "the will" to denote *Wille* in a narrow sense, and "the faculty of volution" to denote *Wille* in a broad sense.

[8] It should be noted that the process of testing maxims is not an actual psychological process an agent has when he is trying to make a reasonable choice. This is rather conceptual analysis of reasonable choice. When an agent makes a reasonable choice, that choice can be viewed *as if* it is tested by pure practical reason.

[9] The idea of the fact of reason will be an important part of many arguments throughout this paper. According to Rawls (2000, 260), "The fact of reason is the fact that, as reasonable beings, we are conscious of the moral law as the

of choice can be free only by virtue of the will. Strictly speaking, therefore, the will and the power of choice are not distinct faculties: these are two components of the same general faculty of volition.[10]

2.2 Given this relationship between the power of choice and the will, we can now understand why Kant thinks that the human agent's power of choice is free.[11] Kant thinks of the human being's sensible nature, from which desires stem, as passive or heteronomous; for sensible nature is determined by external natural laws. Nevertheless, the human being's choice of maxim can be determined independently of sensible desires and inclinations. We can ignore, or even repress, our desire if it seems inappropriate. This ability to choose independently from external impulses reveals *negatively* our freedom of choice: "*Freedom* of choice is this independence from being *determined* by sensible impulses; this is the negative concept of freedom" (MS 6: 214).

Furthermore, we are able to make choices based solely on our own will that legislates practical laws. Our own principle derived from our practical reason can determine our own action. For instance, if through practical reasoning I conclude that I ought not to eat ice cream, then I can choose not to eat ice cream regardless of how much I want to eat it.[12] In virtue of my will, my

supremely authoritative and regulative law for us and in our ordinary moral thought and judgment we recognize it as such." Three features need to be emphasized. First, the fact of reason is the fact about our being aware of the moral law, not about the moral law itself. Second, we are conscious of the moral law as supremely authoritative. Third, the fact of reason is not an empirical fact, but a fact given directly to us by reason.

[10] See footnote 7.

[11] On the other hand, the will is neither free nor unfree. Kant says that "the will [*Wille*], which is directed to nothing beyond the law itself, cannot be called either free or unfree, since it is not directed to actions but immediately to giving laws for the maxims of actions (and is, therefore, practical reason itself)" (MS 6: 226). The will cannot be either free or unfree, because it is related only *indirectly* with actions by presenting laws to the power of choice. More specifically, the will cannot be seen as negatively free because it is not tempted by inclination; nor be it seen as positively free because maxims are not decided by the will but by the power of choice. Nor is it unfree because it is not passively governed by external laws.

[12] Someone might think that in this example, the reason why I choose not to eat ice cream doesn't seem to be a moral reason, but a prudential one. But suppose that in this case, I think I *ought* not to eat ice cream for my self-perfection, which is an end of the moral law for Kant, not for other ends such as diet.

power of choice has freedom in that I can choose to follow my own law, a law from my own will. This ability to follow the law of the will reveals *positively* our freedom of choice: "this *lawgiving of its own* on the part of pure and, as such, practical reason is freedom in the *positive* sense" (KpV 5: 33).

It should be noted that according to Kant, freedom of choice cannot be proved theoretically. Rather, this freedom is a *postulate* justified by the fact of reason. This postulate is necessary for us to think of ourselves as moral and accountable agents. If we have no freedom of choice to follow laws from our will, all our choices will be ultimately determined by external natural laws. If this is the case, we will not be responsible for those choices. For it would be absurd to impute actions to us if those actions are not decided by us. Thus, the freedom of the power of choice, and the will by virtue of which the power of choice can be free must be postulated to regard ourselves as moral agents, because we will be responsible only if we can make choices freely.

2.3 After all, our power of choice is the *free* power of choice in the sense that it has freedom to make a choice to obey a moral law from the will. Admittedly, however, this concept of freedom of choice is somewhat counter-intuitive. Someone might think that whenever we consciously make a choice to pursue some desire, this is our free choice, even if the ground of this choice is desire. Let us call a maxim whose ground is not a moral law but a desire a *bad* maxim. Even this bad maxim seems to be freely chosen. Suppose that someone chooses to go to a Halloween party rather than to stay at home preparing for an exam tomorrow, although his will's law commands him not to go to the party.[13] It seems that he chooses *freely* to reject his will's command and to enjoy the party. In this regard, some might argue that freedom of choice should be defined

[13] Some may think that this example is improper, because to go to the party may still be a morally permissible action. But suppose that the will commands him not to go to the party for developing his talent, which is a categorical imperative for Kant (G 4: 423). In this case, the rejection of the will's command will not be morally permissible.

as an ability to choose between a bad maxim and a moral maxim, not as an ability to obey laws of the will.

Granted, this is an intuitive idea about human agent's freedom of choice. And in *some* sense, this is what we ordinarily mean by freedom of choice, because it is *we* human agents who make decision whether to follow desires or moral laws. In fact, Kant sometimes seems to suggest this sense of freedom of choice.

> …freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself)... Now, if the law fails nevertheless to determine somebody's free power of choice with respect to an action relating to it, an incentive opposed to it must have influence on the power of choice of the human being in question… and this can only happen because this human being incorporates the incentive (and consequently also the deviation from the moral law) into his maxim… (R 6: 23)

In this famous passage, Kant suggests that the power of choice has freedom, only insofar as an agent himself incorporates any incentive, including one from sensible desire, into a maxim. Contemporary commentators take this passage as evidence that Kant holds the so-called 'Incorporation thesis.'[14] Roughly speaking, the Incorporation thesis claims that in order for an agent to act, she must incorporate an incentive into a maxim, whether the incentive is from the law of the will or desire. In other words, an incentive must be governed by an agent to motivate an action. Advocates of the thesis further claim that this is why human agent has freedom of choice, because she can

[14] This term was originally made by Allison (1990, 5-6; 29-53). Many following commentators agree that Incorporation thesis is a plausible interpretation of Kant's moral psychology (See for instance, Wood (1999, 51-53), Korsgaard (1996, 94), and Schapiro (2011)), while some disagree with the thesis (See McCarty (2008)). In my opinion, although the thesis provides a significant explanation about Kant's concept of rational agency, it is problematic if the thesis is intended to explain human agent's freedom of choice and its responsibility of heteronomous action. We can imagine that an agent who has a rational power to decide whether to incorporate a certain incentive but nevertheless does not have the will. The agent chooses all maxims only based on its sensible desires. Then, it will be hard to say that the agent has freedom of choice in a positive sense. All its actions will turn out to be heteronomous. Given that the agent cannot act autonomously, it will also be hard to assert that the agent has responsibility for its heteronomous actions.

determine whether to incorporate a certain incentive. They also maintain that this thesis can explain why an agent is responsible for a bad maxim, because even a bad maxim is freely chosen by an agent as the result of incorporation.

However, this concept of freedom of choice seems inconsistent with freedom that we've discussed in the previous section. Freedom as an ability to choose between bad and good differs from freedom as an ability to choose to follow the law of the will. In fact, it is a well-known criticism against Kant's notion of freedom that he uses two different senses of freedom inter-changeably.[15] If it is true that Kant tries to secure freedom of choice by the Incorporation thesis, he will be vulnerable to the criticism.

But if we closely look at the quoted passage, we can find that Kant is suggesting a condition of freedom of choice, not the definition of it. The human agent has freedom of choice only *in so far as* he incorporates incentives into maxims, but the fact that he incorporates incentives into his maxims doesn't necessarily entail that human agent has freedom. This point will be clear if the process of incorporating an incentive is illustrated. Suppose that an ice cream has an incentive for me and I have desire for it.[16] But my incentive or desire for the ice cream is not sufficient to lead me to an action, unless I decided to pursue it as my end. Only when I incorporate the incentive of ice cream into my maxim, or in other words, only when I choose that desire as the end of my maxim, will I commit myself to an action to eat the ice cream. Given the meaning of the power of choice we've discussed in the section 2.1, it turns out that incorporating an incentive into my

[15] Sidgwick (1981, 511-6), for instance, argues that Kant holds two incompatible concepts of freedom—'Good' or 'Rational Freedom,' and 'Neutral' or 'Moral Freedom,' which means respectively an ability to follow the moral law and an ability to choose between good and bad.

[16] Kant uses the term 'incentive (*Triebfeder*)' equivocally. Sometimes it refers to an object of desire and other times to a subjective motive or force of desire (KpV 5:72; 78). It is beyond the topic of this thesis to discuss the difference between incentive and desire (and inclination). For the purpose of the thesis, it would not be necessary to distinguish those terms explicitly. For more explanation about incentive in relation to the Incorporation thesis, see McCarty (2008, 431-2).

maxim means nothing other than exercising my power of choice. And given that the law of the will is presented only when the maxim of choice is considered, the will cannot govern my general faculty of volition except insofar as I am choosing a certain object of desire to be pursued. Although it becomes somewhat trivial, what the passage suggests is that the human agent has freedom of the power of choice, only insofar as he has the power of choice.

2.4 In fact, Kant is explicit that the freedom of choice must not be defined as an ability to make a choice between good and bad, but as an ability to follow the law of the will. He says:

> But freedom of choice cannot be defined … as the ability to make a choice for or against the law (*libertas indifferentiae*), even though choice as a *phenomenon* provides frequent examples of this in experience. …freedom can never be located in a rational subject's being able to choose in opposition to his (lawgiving) reason... **Only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really an ability…** (MS 6: 226-7, my emphasis).

According to this passage, freedom of choice must not be defined as an ability to reject moral laws of the will and to make bad choices. Instead, freedom must be the ability to make a choice to follow our lawgiving reason— the will.

Why should freedom of choice be defined as an ability to follow the will? Recall that freedom of choice is a postulate. The concept of free choice is an idea; it is conceptually defined, such that our choice must be independent of experience and be governed by moral laws of the will. Freedom *must* be defined as such for the practical purpose of regarding ourselves as moral agents, although we can't theoretically prove it. Even though someone may experience his choice for a bad maxim as his *free* choice, this empirical evidence is insufficient to define free choice as an ability to deny moral laws. Whatever experience tells us about freedom of choice, it falls short of the definition of freedom.

Indeed, a particular choice for a bad maxim is a failure to use the ability of freedom. For a moral law from the will fails to determine that bad choice. Instead, when an agent makes a bad

choice, the power of choice is influenced by desire and makes it the ground of this particular choice. Note that the *ability* of freedom differs from the *power* of choice, given that the power of choice and the will are distinguished.[17] An agent who chooses a bad maxim exercises his power of choice, while fails to exercise the ability of freedom that his power of choice possesses. A bad choice is still a choice, but not freely chosen one.

However, the fact that one fails to use freedom of choice in a particular case does not show that he doesn't have that ability. A failure to use freedom is compatible with the possession of it. As we have seen, our power of choice is free by virtue of the will, not by itself. The power of choice can be affected by desires, although the will regulates our power of choice. Thus, desires at times can influence the power of choice, and it can make heteronomous choices. Nevertheless, it is postulated that we are always *able* to choose to follow our own law.

It should now be clear why we are responsible for a bad maxim. Keep in mind that a particular bad choice is still an effect of the power of choice, although it is a failure to use the power *freely*. The ground of a bad choice is desire that is based on external natural laws and the law of the will fails to determine the choice. But it is our power of choice that makes desire as a ground, a power that we are always *able* to exercise in accordance with the will. Hence, even when we fail to exercise the ability of freedom and make a bad choice, we could use our power of choice freely, and so avoid that failure. We are thus responsible for a bad choice, because we are always able to choose a good one.

[17] More correctly, the power of choice and the ability of freedom are *conceptually* distinguished. The power of choice is a faculty of desire to make a principled action, and freedom is an ability to exercise that power of choice in accordance with the will. However, although the power of choice and its ability of freedom are conceptually distinguished, for human agents they are expressed as same in that freedom can be manifested only by choice and the power of choice is able to follow a moral law (see section 2.1).

I have explained Kant's notions of the free power of choice and of a bad maxim. This explanation, however, is far from Kant's doctrine of radical evil. According to our discussion thus far, a human agent can choose sometimes a morally good maxim and sometimes fail to do so. Sometimes one's behavior is good and sometimes evil. But this explanation does not confirm Kant's claim that a human agent chooses to be *innately* evil.[18] In order to understand this claim, we need to articulate his idea of disposition.

3. Disposition, Timeless Choice, and Evil Nature.

According to Kant, the nature of the human being, whether good or evil, is antecedent to all actions in that it is the ground of them. Nevertheless, he thinks that this ground is still an act, which is based on freedom of choice. He writes,

> …by 'the nature of a human being' we only understand here the subjective ground –wherever it may lie – of the exercise of the human being's freedom in general (under objective moral laws) antecedent to every deed that falls within the scope of the senses. But this subjective ground must, in turn, itself always be a deed of freedom. (R 6: 21).

This seems an odd claim about human nature and action. How should we understand it? One way, I think, is to clarify the hierarchical relationship among maxims. It will turn out that there is a fundamental maxim on which all ordinary maxims rely. But as a maxim, this fundamental maxim will still be the effect of freedom of choice.

[18] Kant doesn't distinguish between 'innateness' and 'nature' (See R 6: 22; 25; 31). I think that this is because for him when we choose timelessly our practical nature, this choice is like *rebirth* for us. I will discuss timeless choice and practical nature in next section.

3.1 We do not choose each maxim arbitrarily and separately. Each maxim is hierarchically related to others.[19] Some maxims are more fundamental and some are dependent. Imagine that I have three related maxims:

(1) I will take a shuttle bus to campus tomorrow morning in order to exercise in the university gym.[20]
(2) I will exercise every morning in order to be healthy.
(3) I will do actions conducive to my health and avoid actions deleterious to it in any circumstance in order to live longer.

These maxims are hierarchically related. Maxim (2) gives a reason for maxim (1) and maxim (3) gives a reason for maxim (2). If I were asked why I will go to the gym tomorrow morning, I would say it is for exercising. But if I were asked about a further reason why I exercise, I would say it is for my health. Someone can keep asking me about my reason for going to the gym, until he hears my fundamental reason for which there is no further reason. Notice that maxim (3) can subsume many subordinate maxims, not just maxims (2) and (1). If I choose a maxim aiming at living longer, I should not only exercise but also, for instance, eat healthy food.

What then can be the fundamental principle for all reasonable actions? Kant thinks that if we are able to abstract an ultimate principle from all reasonable maxims, that principle will be a *formal* principle. For the contents or *materials* of maxims depend on contingent and empirical desires (See especially KpV 5: 27-8). Because he thinks that all moral principles must be unconditionally universal, if we exclude all materials from them, what remains is the abstract notion of

[19] For the hierarchy of maxims, see Allison (1990, 91-4) and Korsgaard (1996, 57-8). But it should be noted that this way of interpreting maxims is itself controversial. For instance, O'Neill (1989, 83-9; 150-2) suggests that maxims must be distinguished from specific intentions.

[20] See footnote 4. I didn't use an unless clause here. It may be closer to Kant's definition of maxim if the sentence contains a clause such that "unless there is a good reason not to do so," but it is not important for our discussion here.

universality. Therefore, according to Kant, if there is a moral law, it will be the categorical imperative expressed as the Formula of Universal Law (FUL): "*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*" (G 4: 421). This is the fundamental law of the will, a law on which all its moral laws are based.

Hence, if there is an ultimately reasonable maxim, it will conform to FUL. It might be hard to make sense of choosing FUL as the fundamental maxim. But if we consider other formulae of the categorical imperative or the moral law—Formula of Humanity (FHU, G 4: 429) and Formula of Kingdom of Ends (FKE, G 4: 434), the meaning of choosing the moral law as the fundamental maxim will become more intuitive. For any maxim to be good, it ought to contribute to humanity or the kingdom of ends, and this is easier to understand. Although there are controversies, Kant thinks that these three formulae are merely different expressions of the same moral law, and this difference is intended "to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby to feeling" (G 4: 436).[21]

Suppose that I choose freely my fundamental maxim of actions to be the moral law. Then, *all* of my ordinary maxims must be subject to that fundamental maxim, because it is so formal and abstract that it can constrain any maxim. It means that this fundamental maxim will give me an enduring ground to direct and regulate my faculty of choice universally. This *sort* of fundamental maxim as the subjective ground of choice is what Kant calls 'disposition (*Gesinnung*).'[22]

[21] If it is still hard to make sense, we can think of the end of the moral law as *self-perfection* and *the happiness of others*—the ends that are also duties (R 6: 4n; MS 6: 385f). I believe that it is not so counter-intuitive that we choose self-perfection and the happiness of others as ends of our fundamental maxim, setting aside the issue whether or not these are the same as the moral law.

[22] See R 6:25. Note the fundamental maxim to follow the moral law is one sort of disposition. There is one more candidate for a fundamental principle for *unreasonable* maxims: the principle of self-love or happiness. According to Kant, to choose the fundamental maxim means to make an incentive from one of these two candidates fundamental. I will not discuss the principle of self-love here, however, because the aim of this section is to understand the timeless choice of a good disposition. I will discuss it briefly in section 3.3.

As a maxim, disposition is also adopted by the power of choice, according to Kant: "The disposition, i.e. the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims, can only be a single one, and it applies to the entire use of freedom universally. This disposition too, however, must be adopted through the free power of choice, for otherwise it could not be imputed" (R 6: 25). But, it is unclear how this fundamental and enduring disposition to follow the moral law can be chosen. Is our disposition chosen freely? But if we can freely choose and so change our disposition, how can it be an *enduring* principle? Is our disposition chosen once and for all and will be unchanging after that? But if this were the case, it would entail the absurd conclusion that once I choose my disposition, all my subsequent actions are limited by it and there is no room for a free choice in ordinary cases.[23]

3.2 Unfortunately, Kant's own explanation makes it even harder to solve these problems. He suggests that disposition differs from ordinary maxims in that whereas maxims are chosen *in time*, disposition is chosen *timelessly.*[24] Therefore, disposition is enduring in time, though it can still be chosen timelessly, according to Kant. But what then does *timeless choice* mean?

I believe, however, that we are already in a place to understand the timeless choice of disposition. Moreover, I think that this concept of timeless choice will resolve the questions that Kant's theory of disposition raises.[25] Keep in mind that maxims are hierarchically related, and

[23] O'Connor (1985) holds that these difficulties can be resolved only with regard to Kant's metaphysics of self, but this metaphysics eventually makes Kant's notion of disposition untenable. According to O'Connor, the concept of disposition relies on Kant's metaphysical distinction between noumenal and phenomenal self. But because the concept of noumenal self who can causally determine the choice of phenomenal self without being affected by it is incredible, the entire thesis of disposition is untenable. See O'Connor (1985, 293-6). Nevertheless, I think that there is a way to understand disposition without relying on this metaphysical distinction. See the following section.

[24] Kant says, "Moreover, to have the one or the other disposition by nature as an innate characteristic does not mean here that the disposition has not been earned by the human being who harbors it, i.e. that he is not its author, but means rather than it has not been earned in time" (R 6: 25; see also 31). I will discuss the relationship between the timeless choice of disposition and human nature in section 3.3.

[25] On the contrary, Silber (1960) insists that Kant should have abandoned the notion of timeless choice. He thinks that Kant introduces this notion in order to resolve the problem of the interaction between phenomenal and noumenal

that the fundamental maxim of following the moral law is so formal that it constrains every maxim. In light of this, the timeless choice of disposition can be understood in three senses.

First, timeless choice is a choice independent of past choices or future expectations—independent of the condition of time.[26] The materials of maxims are from sensible desires formed by past experience or for expected future objects. But because of the formal characteristic of the moral law, those materials are irrelevant to the choice of the moral law. The reason why I choose my fundamental maxim to become the moral law is only because it is the moral law. The condition of time provides no reason for this choice.

Second, the choice of disposition in accordance with the moral law is timeless in that an agent can make that choice *at any moment.* Given the fact of reason, according to Kant, human agents are always conscious of the moral law. In addition, as we've seen, the choice of disposition to follow the moral law is independent of past experiences. Therefore, *at any given time*, agents can decide to be disposed to act according to the moral law. In principle, it is possible that even though I have never acted from the moral law and my disposition was constituted only by sensible desires, I can *resolve* at a certain moment to have a completely different disposition, to be a completely different person. This is Kant's idea of *revolution* in an agent's mode of thought: "that [a

worlds, while maintaining the thesis that the latter is the only moral realm. But this attempt is "disastrous" according to Silber, because the moral realm must be temporal, not timeless. He says, "The will is tempted in time, decides in time, and, depending on its decision, feels guilty or satisfied in time" (Silber 1960, xcviii). Nevertheless, in my opinion, the gap between a timeless choice and a temporal choice is not as distant as Silber thinks.

[26] Allison (1990, 138) also characterizes timeless choice as a choice independent of the condition of time, although he doesn't relate it with the formal characteristic of disposition.

human being become morally good]…must rather be effected through a *revolution* in the disposition of the human being… And so a 'new man' can come about only through a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation" (R 6: 47).[27]

Third and most importantly, the choice to be disposed toward the moral law can be accomplished only by *endless* efforts to make particular choices according to particular moral laws.[28] In a case of *a* free choice for *a* maxim, this choice can be achieved whenever I make a choice from *a* relevant moral law, because this choice is only about that particular maxim. In a case of choice for the fundamental maxim, however, whenever I resolve to follow *the* moral law, all of my maxims after that resolution must follow my fundamental maxim in order to accomplish my resolution; for the resolution is about all maxims. There is no finish line for this resolution insofar as I am an agent and making maxims. Strictly speaking, therefore, I do not choose a disposition *once and for all*; rather, I am choosing it *incessantly.* The momentary revolution in a mode of thought can be achieved only by a constant progress in actual choices.[29,30] I can achieve my choice to go to the

[27] Kant also describes the moment of revolution as follows: "One may also assume that the grounding of character is like a kind of **rebirth**, a certain solemnity of making a vow to oneself; which makes the **resolution** and the **moment** when this transformation took place unforgettable to him, like the beginning of a new epoch" (A 7: 294, my emphases).

[28] This interpretation of endless choice is inspired by Korsgaard (1996)'s account of our being timelessly free: she notes, "So we do not exactly need to adopt moral ends freely in order to be free. If we come, over time, to act purely for the sake of moral ends, it will come to be true that we are, timelessly, free" (Korsgaard 1996, 183). However, I doubt this account of freedom. I think if we come to act purely for the sake of moral ends, we come to be a good person, not a free agent; and if we become a good person, we will be neither free nor unfree (see section 4.3). As we've seen, we already have freedom of choice as an ability— we are already (to be postulated as) free agents.

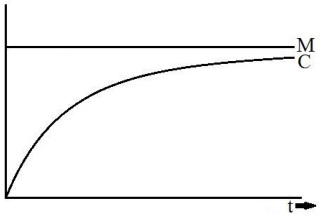
[29] Kant says, "If by a single and unalterable decision [resolution] a human being reverses the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was an evil human being (and thereby puts one a "new man"), he is to this extent, by principle and attitude of mind, a subject receptive to the good; but he is a good human being only in incessant laboring and becoming; i.e. he can hope – in view of the purity of the principle which he has adopted as the supreme maxim of his power of choice, and in view of the stability of this principle – to find himself upon the good (through narrow) path of constant *progress* from bad to better" (R 6: 48).

[30] It may be thought that even if endless free choices are made, it would fall short of 'timeless' choice, because endless choices are still in time series. However, it is not the case that the timeless choice is achieved at the end of endless choices; rather, the endless choices somehow correspond to the timeless choice. See the graph below.

gym today, whenever I go to the gym during the day. I cannot, however, achieve my choice to be healthy for living longer just by going to the gym one time. All my actions regarding my health must follow my choice to be healthy.[31]

In sum, the timeless choice of disposition consists in two steps. First, an agent resolves to follow the moral law, which she can be conscious of as an enduring and ultimate principle for all maxims.[32] But this resolution falls short of the choice of the moral law as disposition. Because the moral law is merely a formal principle, an agent cannot yet commit to particular actions merely in light of the resolution of the moral law. She needs particular choices in particular situations, and those choices must be according to the moral law in order for the moral law to be chosen. This requires the second step for choosing the moral law as disposition: an agent must make incessant efforts to make particular maxims in accordance with the moral law to choose a moral disposition.

Given these two distinct steps for the choice of a moral disposition, it can now be explained how disposition can be an enduring principle governing all maxims and a freely chosen maxim at the same time. The resolution to follow the moral law provides me with an enduring principle in that the moral law presented to me constrains all maxims. This does not mean, however, that my initial resolution of disposition determines all ordinary maxims. It means that I must



Let M be a moral disposition, C be the sum of particular good choices, and t be time. The line C cannot meet M at any given t. However, if C is prolonged *infinitely*, it will meet M, because $\lim_{t\to\infty} C(t)$ is equal to M.

[31] Admittedly, this example of health may be misleading; for I may be able to stay healthy even if I skip going to the gym. Let us then stipulate that for my health, I also decided to exercise at the gym every morning as a necessary means for being healthy.

[32] In this regard, Kant thinks that "a human being's moral education must begin, not with an improvement of mores, but with the transformation of his attitude of mind…" (R: 6:48). I take 'the transformation of the attitude of mind' here to mean the same as 'the revolution in a mode of thought.'

choose all maxims under the formal constraint of the moral law. Disposition does not *determine* particular maxims; instead, particular maxims *constitute* disposition, being regulated by the enduring moral law.

3.3 If I choose maxims according to moral laws timelessly, then my disposition will become the moral law. Let us call this disposition a *good* disposition. A good disposition is constituted by particular choices according to moral laws—that is, particular *free* choices. In other words, if I keep making a free choice endlessly, then I will choose freely a good disposition in a timeless manner.

Only a good disposition can be chosen in this way; on the contrary, I cannot make a timeless free choice to adopt an *evil* disposition, as I cannot choose a bad maxim freely. For all principles except the moral law are subject to the condition of time. Even a very abstract principle such as self-love or happiness cannot be chosen timelessly, because the conception of happiness depends on experience in time to define what happiness is: Kant says, "happiness is not an idea of reason but of imagination, resting merely upon empirical grounds, which it is futile to expect should determine an action by which the totality of a series of results in fact infinite would be attained" (G 4: 419).

However, this fact does not mean that my evil disposition is not the effect of the free power of choice. The conclusion is similar to the case of a bad maxim. As we have seen, although a bad maxim is not chosen freely, it is still the effect of the power of choice that has freedom, an effect of failing to exercise it freely. Likewise, although an evil disposition is not chosen freely, it is still the effect of the free power of choice, an effect of failing to use *without an exception* its ability of freedom. Since my power of choice has freedom as an ability, I could use this ability *whenever* I

am choosing a maxim, and so I could constitute a good disposition. This is why I am responsible for having an evil disposition.

My good or evil disposition is my *practical* nature. For my disposition is the ground of my maxims and so my practices. Kant notes, "Whenever we therefore say, 'The human being is by nature good,' or, 'He is by nature evil,' this only means that he holds within himself a first ground [disposition] (to us inscrutable) for the adoption of good or evil (unlawful) maxims" (R 6: 21). When Kant says 'a first ground' for the adoption of maxims, he does not mean, as we have seen, that this ground is antecedent to all maxims in time; he means that this ground is *beyond* time in that it is constituted by an infinite endeavor to keep a momentary resolution. Indeed, I am the author of this practical nature, because I have freedom of choice by which I can constitute my disposition timelessly (R 6: 22).

The above explanation shows how an agent's evil nature can be the effect of the free power of choice. Yet, it is still far from Kant's doctrine of evil. According to the discussion so far, it seems that we can have a good disposition, if we choose to be disposed to follow the moral law, even though we can fail to do so. According to Kant, however, our disposition cannot be good. His doctrine of evil is more radical: not only can we be evil but we *are* evil. For him, the human being's evil nature applies to the entire species.[33] I will delve into this radical claim in the next section.

[33] Kant remarks, "by the 'human being' of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals (for otherwise one human being could be assumed to be good, and another evil, by nature) but **the whole species**" (R 6: 25, my emphasis; see also R 6: 21).

4. The Universality of the Human Being's Evil Nature

How can we understand Kant's claim that "all human beings have an evil nature?" In the previous section, I simply assumed that an evil nature is a disposition contrary to the moral law and an effect of a failure to choose a good disposition. To understand his radical claim, however, we need to investigate Kant's concept of an evil nature in more detail.

4.1 According to Kant, there are three possible ways in which the human being's evil nature could be understood: the human being is evil 1) because its sensible nature conflicts with the law of the will; or 2) because its will itself is corrupted; or 3) because its power of choice is weak to give the law of the will priority (R 6: 35-6).

Kant denies the first and second approaches to evil. The evil nature cannot lie in our sensible nature, because if this were the case, evil could not be imputed to us. Kant thinks that unlike disposition or practical nature, our sensible nature is one of our ineradicable predispositions (*Anlagen*) (R 6: 26-8). It would be absurd to impute evil to us if it lies in our ineradicable nature. Moreover, evil should not be rooted in the will. If the will itself were corrupted and thus moral laws were not represented to us, we would not be accountable for evil, since we could not do rightly. Additionally, according to Kant, an 'evil law' makes no sense, because "Only what is unlawful is evil in itself" (R 6: 58).

Therefore, if human kind is evil by nature but accountable for evil at the same time, it must be because its power of choice is weak or *frail*.[34] By the weakness of the power of choice,

[34] Kant says that the origin of evil is "the frailty of human nature, [1] in not being strong enough to comply with its adopted principles, [2] coupled with its dishonesty in not screening incentives (even those of well-intentioned actions) in accordance with the moral guide, and [3] hence at the end, if it comes to this, in seeing only to the conformity of these incentives to the law, not to whether they have been derived from the latter itself, i.e. from it as the sole incentive" (R 6: 37). Notice that there are three *degrees* of the frailty in this passage, degrees that Kant fully examined in R 6: 29-30. First, sometimes human nature is too weak to comply with its adopted principles. This is what he calls *frailty*. And second, this frailty leads human agents to mix incentives from sensible desire with the incentive of the moral law when they adopt maxims. Kant calls this level of evil *impurity*. Finally, all maxims can be determined solely by

Kant means that we can fail to exercise freedom of choice to comply with the moral law, even though we are always aware of the law (R 6: 30; 32). It is expressed paradigmatically in an Apostle's complaint: 'What I would, that I do not!' If we fail to follow the law due to our weakness, our practical nature will not be good. Nevertheless, we are still accountable for it, because this evil nature will still be an effect of our power of choice that we can always use freely. In sum, evil must be *rooted* in our free power of choice, specifically in its weakness; and this is why we are *radically* evil, since this weakness "corrupts the ground of all maxims" (R 6: 37).[35] But how can it be proved that all human beings' free power of choice is weak, and so all of them are evil?

4.2 Kant's official answer is disappointing. He insists that there are plenty of examples showing that every human being has an evil nature: "We can spare ourselves the formal proof that there must be such a corrupt propensity rooted in the human being, in view of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human *deeds* parades before us" (R 6: 32).[36] Nevertheless, Kant himself frequently argues that empirical evidence cannot truly show universality: "experience never gives its judgments true or strict but only assumed and comparative **universality**" (B 3).

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incentives of self-love instead of the moral law. This level is called *wickedness. Wickedness* differs from *diabolical* evil which means the adoption of the evil law; for even a wicked person is conscious of the moral law and can be motivated by its incentive. And human agents cannot be diabolically evil, given the fact of reason. Indeed, all these levels are based on the frailty of human nature that tends to fail to follow the moral law. They are not different *kinds* of evil, but different *degrees* of the same kind of evil.

[35] According to Allison (2012, 106), "Kant uses the term 'radical' in the etymological sense to indicate the root of all moral evil." See also Wood (1970, 217).

[36] Wood (1999) is basically satisfied with this claim, because he thinks that the notion of evil is based on Kant's anthropology, not on his moral psychology. Wood argues that according to Kant, we have natural tendency to compare and compete with others, and insofar as we are social beings and have developed society, evil arises from this tendency that Wood calls 'unsociable sociability.' Thus, even though the doctrine of evil relies on an empirical basis, it is not a mere inductive generalization, insofar as we social beings are developing society. See Wood (1999, 287; 1970, 221-6). However, although this account of evil is supported by some textual evidence (for example, Kant says "this [the human being's evil] can only be demonstrated later on, if it transpires from anthropological research" (R 6: 26)), I think this argument is untenable, because it can only explain socially rooted evil behaviors. Kant's notion of evil, however, also includes evil behaviors that are purely individual. For instance, Kant thinks that not to fully develop my potential is contrary to the moral law, and so evil. And this evil does not pertain to our nature to compare and compete with others.

There is no reason to believe that when it comes to the human being's evil nature, empirical examples will suffice to prove its universality.

To prove the universality of human beings' evil nature, I think, Kant should show the *a priori* nature of an evil disposition: this disposition should be a necessary ground for the possibility of evil practice and thus prior to it conceptually.[37] According to Kant, causality is a necessary condition for cognizing events, so that causality is universal and prior to the cognition of events. The possibility of the moral law, or freedom to follow it, is a necessary postulate to regard our behaviors as responsible and so is prior to practice. Likewise, to be universal, an evil disposition must be a necessary condition for the possibility of evil practice. In fact, Kant alludes to this way of proof, although he doesn't delve into it sufficiently:

> In order, then, to call a human being evil, it must be possible to infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim, and, from this, the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims. (R 6: 20; see also 35).

Thus, according to this passage, we may be able to derive an evil nature even from a single evil action. Let us try.

[37] As to the need of a priori argument for the human being's evil nature, I basically agree with Allison (1990). He remarks, "The claim [of radical evil], then, is to be taken as a priori; indeed, as postulate, it must be synthetic a priori" (Allison 1990, 155). Consequently, Allison disagrees with Wood's anthropological interpretation of radial evil. Allison thinks that although empirically the predisposition to humanity in which our social nature lies generates evil behaviors, the propensity to evil itself lies in our transcendental character. Thus, the propensity to evil must be derived a priori (Allison 2012, 99-109; see also 2001, 605-10). Again, I doubt that the predisposition to humanity or our social nature is the only ground of evil even in experience. Allison thinks that unlike the predisposition to animality, humanity is connected to reason and freedom, and so evil must be grounded on it, not on animality (2012, 102). I think, however, the possibility of freedom relies essentially on the predisposition to personality and it is connected not only to humanity but also to animality. Moreover, I think animality also can generate evil behaviors when the incentive from animal self-love overrides the incentive from the moral law (See R 6: 26-7). In spite of this disagreement, my entire account hereafter of the a priori presupposition of evil nature is greatly indebted to Allison's analysis. See especially Allison (1990, 154-7).

At first glance, Kant's claim seems to be based on the trivial fact that no agent is perfect. It seems quite possible that we imperfect agents perform at least a few bad actions. We have already seen that the choice of a good disposition is quite difficult to accomplish. It requires incessant success at forming particular maxims according to the moral law. One deviation of a maxim from the law makes us fail to achieve a good disposition, and so suffices for us to have an evil disposition. Given that every particular maxim constitutes our disposition and that every action relies on its maxim, even if we perform merely one bad action, this action must reveal our evil disposition. Therefore, we imperfect agents who have acted badly at least one time are too weak to choose a good disposition, and so are morally evil by definition.

Although the above argument seems plausible, it faces problems. First, someone might think that this argument simply presupposes that failing to have a good disposition is tantamount to having an evil disposition. It might be, however, that our moral nature is neither good nor evil, but in the middle between the two. Furthermore, it is possible that we perform a good action, just as it is possible that we perform an evil one. Thus, someone might argue that along the same line of the above reasoning, the possibility of a good action reveals a good disposition, since the former should be based on the latter.

In regard to the possibility of having neither a good nor an evil disposition, Kant embraces the doctrine of rigorism (R 6: 23; 39n). According to this doctrine, our disposition must be either good or bad, and there is no middle ground. If our disposition were something between good and evil, there would be two possibilities: either we would be *indifferent* to the moral law of the will, or our fundamental maxim would be a *mixture* of the good and evil law. Kant rejects the first, since for him the moral law of the will is always being presented to us with an incentive. He also denies the second, because there is no such thing as an evil law. Moreover, if our disposition were the

mixture of the good and evil law, because each law can be the sole fundamental ground of our practice, we would have two different dispositions. Since a disposition is sufficient to define one's practical nature, we would then be two different persons at the same time, which Kant thinks of as a contradiction.[38]

Furthermore, whereas a single evil action suffices to show an evil disposition, a single good action does not suffice to show a good disposition. Because the moral law must apply to all maxims, if we had a good disposition in complete accordance with the moral law, there would be no room for a bad maxim and action. A good action in time does not establish a good disposition; only an endless series of good actions can do so. For Kant, "he[a human being] is a good human being only in **incessant** laboring and becoming" (R 6: 48, my emphasis). On the other hand, since moral evil is based on the weakness of the power of choice, not on a disposition to adopt the evil law, our evil disposition is compatible with the possibility that we act sometimes badly and sometimes morally.

4.3 Yet, there still remains a problem. It seems plausible that we act badly. But what if there is an agent who never acts badly? If there were such a perfect agent, Kant's claim that the nature of every human being is evil would be false. He cannot simply insist that a perfect agent does not exist, relying on the assumption that our badly acting is just a universal fact. For the very question is whether our acting badly is universal or not—and correlatively, whether the fundamental ground of action is universally bad or not. Without proving the universality of our evil nature, therefore, the universality of our acting badly cannot be shown.

[38] Kant says, in a case that an agent incorporate both incentives from desire and from the moral law into the fundamental maxim at the same time, "since he naturally incorporates both into the same maxim, whereas he would find each, taken alone, of itself sufficient to determine the will, so, if the difference between maxims depended simply on the difference between maxims depended simply on the difference between incentives (the material of the maxims), namely, on whether the law or the sense impulse provides the incentive, he would be morally good and evil at the same time – and this is a contradiction" (R 6: 36).

To solve this problem, it should be noted first of all that Kant does not try to prove theoretically that all human agents have an evil disposition. Rather, he thinks that our disposition is inscrutable (R 6: 21n; 43-4; 63). We cannot know empirically whether our disposition is good or evil. We must choose the disposition timelessly, but our experience is always in time. And Kant maintains that all knowledge must begin with experience (B 1).[39]

But, if our disposition is inscrutable, how can Kant assert that human beings have an evil nature? The passage below is crucial for this question.

> We cannot start out in the ethical training of our conatural moral predisposition to the good with an innocence which is natural to us but must rather begin from the **presupposition** of a depravity of our power of choice in adopting maxims contrary to the original ethical predisposition; and, since the propensity to this [depravity] is inextirpable, with unremitting counteraction against it. Since this only leads to a progression from bad to better extending to infinity, it follows that the transformation of the disposition of an evil human being into the disposition of a good human being is to be posited in the change of the supreme inner ground of the adoption of all the human being's maxims in accordance with the ethical law, so far as this new ground (the new heart) is itself now unchangeable. (R 6: 51, my emphasis; see also 32, 37, 58n).

The moral law constantly commands us, as the fact of reason, to follow it and to have a good disposition: "the command that we *ought* to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls" (R 6: 45). But we cannot regard ourselves as good persons who have already accomplished that command. If we already had a good disposition, there would be no possibility of evil actions, since any maxim we adopt would be good necessarily given that our disposition is

[39] To put it in another way, Kant thinks that inquiry about one's disposition in the sensible world will fall into infinite regress. He says, "That the first subjective ground of the adoption of moral maxims is inscrutable can be seen provisionally from this: Since the adoption is free, its ground … must not be sought in any incentive of nature, but always again in a maxim; and, since any such maxim must have its ground as well, yet apart from a maxim no *determining ground* of the free power of choice ought to, or can, be adduced, we are endlessly referred back in the series of subjective determining grounds, without ever being able to come to the first ground" (R 6: 21n). In other words, we must evaluate one's action from her maxim, not her desires. But a maxim also has its own ground, which is also a maxim. Thus we are endlessly referring back to the higher maxim without never getting at the first ground, because the first ground of maxims is chosen timelessly,

the fundamental ground of all maxims. We would have no responsibility for evil actions, because there could be no such actions. The good disposition would indeed make our power of choice unfree, or at least neither free nor unfree. For our fundamental maxim will be the same as the moral law itself and so we wouldn't need to make a choice for it at all.[40] Hence, although we don't know our disposition, we cannot regard it as good, if we are to regard ourselves as morally responsible, and as free.

The remaining option is to regard ourselves as evil, given that our practical nature cannot be between good and evil. For Kant, evil nature relies on the frailty of the free power of choice. Thus, when presupposing our nature is evil, we equally presuppose that we can fail to choose freely to follow moral laws and can act badly. Because we can fail, we need to *try* to make a good choice to follow our will, given that its command resounds unabatedly. We need to try *endlessly,* because we are always making a maxim, and there will always be the possibility of failure.

Since we don't know whether our disposition is good or evil, the only way to assure that we are following the moral law is to try to act morally *now*.[41] If I know I am and will always be healthy, I don't need to go to the gym tomorrow morning in order to be healthy. However, if I am not sure that I am (or will be) healthy so that it is possible that I am (or will be) unhealthy, but if I still want to be healthy and I am sure that exercising is good for health, then I should go to the gym

[40] In footnote 11, I've explained that the will is neither free nor unfree. I think that if we acquired the good disposition, our general faculty of volition would become the will itself that can be practical without the power of choice. This will would have an "intellectual intuition" (See especially B 145) and so actualize its own laws without striving to act for them.

[41] Related to this, Kant thinks that the effort toward virtue that is a character trait to pursue after a good disposition must start always from the beginning: "Virtue is always in progress and yet always starts from the beginning. – It is always in progress because, considered objectively, it is an ideal and unattainable, while yet constant approximation to it is a duty. That it always starts from the beginning has a subjective basis in human nature, which is affected by inclinations because of which virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all but, if it is not rising, is unavoidably sinking."(MS 6: 409).

every day, struggling to wake up early every morning. For this will be the only way to assure that I am healthy.[42]

In sum, to presuppose that we have freedom of choice which we can fail to exercise is to presuppose that we are evil. In this regard, freedom of choice as an ability is conceptually connected to the evil nature for Kant. Indeed, the evil nature is the effect of the free power of choice, an effect of its possibility of failure. Nevertheless, we are responsible for our evil nature in that we have an unavoidable duty to be a good person, even though we cannot regard ourselves as good in time.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I've argued that according to Kant, the failure to choose the moral law timelessly shows the human being's evil nature. Human agents can fail to obey a moral law, although our power of choice has freedom to follow it. If we fail to choose a maxim according to a law of the will at any given time, our disposition is evil in that it reveals the frailty of our freedom of choice. We don't know whether our disposition is good or evil, because our disposition is inconceivable in time but we are in time. Nevertheless, we must not suppose that our disposition is good. If we were already good persons, all our actions would be good necessarily. Then, we would not need the free power of choice to necessitate our actions to follow the moral law. Also, we would not be responsible for our bad actions, because there could be no such actions. Thus, given that our disposition is either good or evil and there is no middle between the two, we must instead presuppose

[42] This analogy with health may be somewhat misleading in that whereas a good disposition is unattainable, a healthy body seems to be attainable at least for a certain period. The point I try to emphasize here, however, is the assumption that I don't know I am or will be healthy, just as I don't know I am or will be good.

that we can act badly, and that we have an evil disposition. Although we have the potential to be a good person through the free power of choice, we are not good yet.

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