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There is an important difference between socially constructed rules/laws and internally, self-legislated moral principles.¹ The former, socially constructed rules, govern solely the external affairs of individuals and groups, and we can call that the concern of ethics. The latter, internally, self-legislated moral principles, however, can trump external rules, and we can call that morality.

For example, if there are EPA rules on the disposal of chemical waste that apply to my company, and my co-workers and I discover a loop-hole in the rules that would save us a huge expense but only by allowing us to dispose of the chemicals in a way that we knew was damaging to the environment and, perhaps, even to the health of our community, the demand that our action be based upon a moral principle that we would want to be universal as if a law of nature (i.e., not to act merely on self-interest) and the moral criterion of not treating the other as a mere means prohibits our use of the loop-hole to enhance our company's profits. In other words, simply adhering to social rules or the civic law is no guarantee of virtue. The key facet: social rules and civic laws require a citizenry committed to moral principles for institutions and society to function properly.

Although morality is concerned with the individual's proper exercise of her/his autonomous, creative freedom, no individual is an island or able to withdraw from the social world shared with others. We are always practitioners of both morality and ethics. However, the fact that personal morality can trump social ethics may give the erroneous impression that the individual is left in isolation with her/his moral conundrums. In fact, though, a powerful role in support of the individual can be played by a moral culture or what Kant called in the *Critique of Judgment* the "culture that promotes the [moral] will."

¹ This difference is entirely overlooked by Hegel and the Frankfurt School, particularly by Axel Honneth. See Honneth's *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, Joseph Ganahl (tr.) Columbia University Press, 2014).

To be sure, this is not what Kant called the “culture of skills,” which is all of that techné that humanity places on top of nature (e.g., economics, political systems, technical skills, the plastic arts, etc.). The culture of skills is the culture of institutions, which do indeed provide us with ethical systems with respect to proper and expected. However, these are ethical systems not of creative freedom but of status and prestige. Ethical systems are what Kant calls in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* the territory of “humanity” in distinction from “animality” (the territory of appetites) and “personality” (the domain of creative freedom and its moral laws). Status and prestige can be a powerful motivator for “doing the right thing” in the eyes of the bestowers of status and prestige. Nonetheless, if the institution is ethically corrupt and the bestowers of status and prestige are morally numb, status and prestige can lead to atrocities of the worst form – as has been too frequently demonstrated in the past.

By moral culture we mean that invisible community that supports the individual’s moral development as an invisible kingdom of ends that cannot be heteronomously imposed on the individual externally. It is that culture that understands explicitly that, as a citizen of the realm of understanding and not merely as a citizen of the sensuous realm (a distinction Kant makes in Section III of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*), humanity possesses an intelligibility that goes far beyond instrumental reason. It is an intelligibility that includes the pre-logical as well as the logical, but it is an intelligibility that is committed to rational, lawful order both when it comes to understanding the physical world and when it comes to that self-legislation of moral laws to govern one’s own creativity. A moral culture reminds its members of their capacities; it does not tell them how they are to exercise their capacities. In other words, moral culture fosters autonomy (i.e., the self-legislation of the moral principles that accompany one’s creativity).

In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant asks “... how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood” (111) that is humanity? One answer would be, “We can’t, and, therefore, we’re dependent upon the grace of God to straighten us out.” Such a strategy, though, threatens the exercising of the capacity it is meant to assist. As with the case of miracles, once such transforming grace is invoked, the individual immediately ceases to be concerned with “doing the right thing because it is right” to be concerned about receiving the blessings of this divine agency (a shift from morality to exclusive self-interest). It is a short step from this assisting grace into an entire system of prevenient, transforming, sustaining, and salvific grace precisely because humanity is incapable of “earning” the grace it needs for such salvation. If we could earn that divine assistance, we would be succumbing to “works righteousness.” All of these consequences would be devastating for our moral capacity because pure self-interest is elevated to the exclusive motivation for our decision taking.

However, Kant provides another answer in his *Reflexionen Kants zur Anthropologie* (*Kant's Reflections on Anthropology*), a supplement to his writings on themes concerned with life wisdom. Here in answer to the issue of the crooked wood of humanity, he applies an analogy to the forest. The way one gets crooked wood to grow straight is for it to be part of a forest that encourages (but obviously doesn't impose) all trees to grow toward the light. In other words, the individual needs the encouragement of the social order in order to exercise her/his autonomous, creative freedom properly.

Nr. 674: „Just as trees grow straight and tall by standing next to one another in the forest because the neighboring trees take up the space next to them, they must seek elevation above ground by growing upward. They protect one another from wind, and each benefits from the shade as well as providing better protection and nurture for their young while creating a place for themselves. So too, human beings in their natural condition and freedom become bent and crippled, but in a civil society they can grow straight. They have to educate and nurture one another. Initially, morality is isolated; but then it becomes built into general sentiment and is of interest because it has an impact on others.”

Nr. 676: „An individual achieves actually his entire natural character (i.e., the development of his talents) as a consequence of social pressure. One can only hope that he will acquire his entire moral character through moral pressure because when all the seeds of moral good are developed they asphyxiate all the physical seeds of evil. All kinds of seeds without differentiation are cultivated by social pressure. That is the way of humanity; but not the way of the mere individual but of the group. For that reason, there must be differences of order but, nonetheless, the maximization of the whole.”

One can readily understand why Nietzsche would view such a strategy as indicative that Kant succumbed to the Lutheran, bourgeois, value system of his society. However, there is an alternative reading to Nietzsche's.

Kant's social forest is not the prevailing value system of any particular society (secular or religious, bourgeois or aristocratic, western or eastern) but the invisible "Kingdom of Ends" that is constituted out of the autonomous (not heteronomous) moral order and dignity of all human beings. This Kingdom of Ends is what Kant calls "culture." Without a supporting culture that encourages the individual to do what is right merely because it is right and not because it satisfies personal interest, it is extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible, for the individual to even strive for the realization of her/his creative, moral potential. In such an invisible Kingdom only the individual knows whether or not s/he has acted on the basis of a moral principle. In other words, moral culture is not the product of attempting to legislate morality through the civic

law. The community can legislate all that it wants, but in the end the individual must self-legislate the principle to govern her/his actions. We give ourselves permission to do things. Nonetheless, it is a great assistance to one's consideration of moral principles to govern one's actions if the individual knows that s/he is acting with the moral support of a community committed to moral means and ends.

Autonomous, creative freedom is dependent upon the "givenness" of the universe that includes its own moral as well as the physical order without which creative freedom is impossible. It is dependent upon the assumption of creative freedom as well as the mutual support of the community not to be something that one is incapable of being (given our limits it is impossible for us to be perfect) but to make one's best moral effort regardless of one's personal interest. In other words, autonomous freedom requires an invisible, internal Kingdom to which *the entire community is committed* in order for straightening out the crooked wood of humanity. Autonomous, creative freedom is the highest expression of faith because it is anchored in an "as if" (*für Wahrhalten*) that empowers us to exercise the capacities that we have been given without being able to provide proof that we even possess this extra-ordinary efficient causality of creative freedom much less to provide proof that there is a moral law that governs this efficient causality. Of course, there is no proof that the law of physics apply in all places and at all times either ...

Autonomous freedom is the only freedom that is *good for something* because it is the freedom that is inseparable from a moral order. This is not the moral order acquired through *heteronomous*, external, culturally relative conditions (texts, institutions, families) with their socially constructed ethical systems. It is the *autonomous* moral order that is "given" along with the creative freedom that alone can act in light of such a moral order. Autonomous freedom is grounded in faith in the good in a non-moral sense (creative freedom without which we could not be what we experience ourselves to be, not that creative freedom always does the good) that requires the assumption of the only order that can accompany such freedom: an autonomous, moral order.