Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Moral Autonomy, and Grace

It serves the interests of those who have power to convince us all that moral principles are relative. It also serves the interests of those who have power to keep us convinced that we cannot be virtuous without the aid of divine grace.

The strategy of moral relativism is pernicious because it both "explains" and "excuses" cultural imperialism. *Moral relativism as explanation of cultural imperialism*: Religious persecution, colonialism, and economic imperialism are explained as *the negative consequence* of moral relativism. One culture imposed its "Enlightenment" mentality on other cultures. It is taken as self-evident that *the positive correction* is the embracing of pluralism. As an explanation, moral relativism is disastrous for the victims because of their having been violated. However, it was disastrous for the perpetrators, as well, because, although they appear to have benefited in the *short-run*, their *long-term interests* have suffered perhaps irreparably. *Moral relativism as excuse*: "We didn't start the fire." Pluralism becomes a shield to continue the protection of privilege. The logic is something like: "We have learned the lesson of cultural imperialism as the violation of respect, so no one should disrespect us! We are now the good people who respect everyone!"

What is the price of this kind of respect "for everyone"? It comes at the price of continued perpetuation of and complicity in the injustices of the world. If all moral principles are relative, then there is no fulcrum that allows for the combating of injustice in our own or in any culture. This kind of pluralism is a screen that perpetuates injustice even as it believes that it is addressing injustice.

We appear to be caught in an inescapable paradox. If moral principles are absolute, we cannot escape cultural imperialism (i.e., the imposition of moral principles on others). If moral

principles are relative, we foster injustice. However, this is only an apparent paradox. Our escape from the paradox finds us in a precarious position, though, that places moral responsibility on the shoulders of the individual (to be sure, in need of community support, not censorship and rebuke). In other words, we all need to shoulder the responsibility as individuals; not even divine grace can help us – even if it cannot hurt as long as it doesn't undermine our own personal efforts.

We will propose an escape to the paradox in five steps: 1) an examination of Utilitarianism; 2) An examination of Virtue Ethics; 3) an examination of moral autonomy, 4) a proposal from Otfried Höffe that we combine moral virtue and moral autonomy; and, finally, 5) an examination of the possible role of divine grace in the development of moral character.

1) Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is the epitome of a consequentialist ethic. The guiding principles for action should be the greatest welfare for the greatest number. In order to determine what the greatest welfare for the greatest number will be, one has to be able to measure "welfare" and its impact on others. Because welfare, like happiness, is relative to the individual, it borders on being impossible to measure – despite the valiant attempts by Francis Hutcheson and Jeremy Bentham. When we add John Stuart Mill's "happy pig" analogy and recognize that we must include intellectual "pleasure" in our calculations of welfare, we quickly can recognize not just the difficulties but the impossibility of such measurement. If there is anything incapable of measurement, it is intellectual pleasure (even if self-reported) because there are no beginnings or ends in the mind that allow for measurement.

Furthermore, given that intellectual and physical welfare are governed by self-interest, we are concerned to measure something that is not only immeasurable, but self-interest is famous for its capriciousness. Self-interests not only can change, but they are relative to the individual, not universal.

In short, at its best, Utilitarianism is able to measure *some aspects of experience* within a very limited time frame. Not even "Big Data" are able to help us here, it appears, because the evaluation of data requires the assumption of a perspective in advance of looking at the data, and the assumption of a perspective involves immeasurable *a priori* principles that don't and can't appear in the data.

As if the immeasurability and short-sightedness of Utilitarianism were not problematic enough, it is clear by its formulation that Utilitarianism is unjust. The ground for its decision-taking is not human dignity, but technical and pragmatic necessities. We frequently collapse technical and pragmatic necessities, but Kant proposed that we acknowledge that our activities in

the sensuous world require viewing these as two different sets of necessities. Our recognition of material necessities should acknowledge a difference between technical and pragmatic necessities, but they, in turn, should not be confused with moral necessity.

Technical necessities are required for us to accomplish any physical task. One cannot begin the construction of a house by hanging the roof in the air. One must follow a necessary sequence before hanging the roof. Any civil engineer can tell you about the ubiquitous nature of such technical necessities.

Pragmatic necessities are concerned with "personal welfare," and they constitute those necessary steps one must take to achieve personal goals. These necessities are not universal in the sense of technical necessities – although they border on universality within a specific region of experience. For example, I can choose to become a civil engineer or to practice medicine. Acquiring the skills to perform in a profession is different from actually engaging in the professional activities of a profession. Even within a given professional field, the acquisition of the necessary skills can be different depending upon the perspective one decides to pursue. If I want the satisfaction of a career in school medicine, it is necessary that I go to medical school. However, one can choose to practice Asian medicine instead or in addition to school medicine, and the necessary steps to do so are not the same for Asian and school medicine. Although the personal satisfaction derived from the actual practicing of the profession in both is the same.

Both technical and pragmatic necessities presuppose categorical imperatives. For a person to exercise either set of necessities, s/he must have the ability to initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish exclusively on its own. No plant and no other species can become a civil engineer or a physician, and no one can acquire the skills of a civil engineer or a physician for someone else. At the level of categorical imperatives, then, we encounter a very different set of necessities than those of technical and pragmatic necessities in themselves. These other categorical necessities are illustrated by the fact that I can acquire the skills for and exercise the skills of a profession either with mediocrity or excellence. Only the individual can discern the difference for her-/himself. Plato's claim that no one wants just the appearance of goodness but the reality of goodness indicates the difference between appearance and reality that is discerned only by the individual. Only the individual can determine internally the level of achievement with which s/he will be satisfied. In short, the metrics come only from the self – unlike the external metrics that can measure technical and pragmatic achievement by means of the external consequences.

An example to illustrate the insufficiency of external metrics for measuring excellence: Every child knows the thrill and the vacuity of praise. Given the desire to be appreciated, even esteemed, by others, the child is highly sensitive to external praise and critique. However, as with all desires, the child quickly leans that it is not in control of the external praise or critique

but is dependent upon the other for them. Yet, it does not take a child long to determine her/his level of achievement in a particular activity. What can aid the child is a coach who sees the potential of the child and is not deterred by the insufficiency of the intermediate achievements on the way to excellence. However, as soon as the child senses that the other does not possess the knowledge, skills, or insight to evaluate the accomplishments of the child, the child experiences disappointment and even can exploit the incompetency of the reviewer to achieve its personal aims. The bottom line: the external source of praise and critique is no substitute for the child's own self-appraisal. The child knows the degree of excellence achieved and determines for her-/himself the degree of personal satisfaction s/he feels with the achievement. Even in the case of a devastating critique for an external evaluator does not necessarily deter the child. The devastating critique can be a spur to higher achievement.

Utilitarianism cannot begin to include such internal necessities and processes in its calculations of the greatest welfare for the greatest number. Because it has no ground for appreciating much less taking into consideration the meaning of human dignity, its exclusively external metrics can lead to huge injustices as it ignores with its calculations the necessities and needs of its minority(ies) – much less as it is incapable of any meaningful measure of long-term consequences of actions.

Utilitarianism offers no satisfactory escape from our paradox because, ignoring categorical necessity, it doesn't even recognize the conditions that are necessary to do so.

2) Virtue Ethics

The archaeological origin of Virtue Ethics is Aristotle's discussion of "moral virtues" in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here we encounter a surprisingly modern embracing of moral relativism. However, this is not the moral relativism concerned with the "social construction" of culturally relative, moral norms. Rather, moral virtues have to do with the cultivation of personal "habits." To be sure, not all habits are morally virtuous so that Aristotle's point is not merely that morality is a matter of habitual actions alone.

Moral virtue is concerned with all of those *external things* of which one can have "more" or "less" in the sense of excess and deficiency. These include possessions, food, sex, exercise, work, etc. The aim of moral virtue is to discern a "mean" of excellence somewhere between excess and deficiency in such cases. However, this is not a merely mathematical calculation of the "middle point" between excess and deficiency. What is sought is that excellent point, which is relative to the individual's needs.

One can illustrate such a calculative process with the case of diet. The aim of diet is health, and the achievement of health involves avoiding the extremes of too much and too little

nourishment. However, there is no magic number of calories that can govern diet because of the differences in metabolism and nutritional needs of individuals. As a consequence, when it comes to diet, each individual must determine the "mean" of excellence between excess and deficiency for her-/himself.

Aristotle observes that a productive, conscious engagement of the theme of cultivation of habits that are morally virtuous requires not only the satisfaction of an adequate standard of living but also a certain experience with good habits. In other words, moral virtue is nothing programmed by nature but is a genuinely human task. Unlike mathematical skills that don't require life experience for their acquisition, Aristotle points out, moral virtue is inseparable from accumulated experience.

Virtue Ethics, then, is concerned with living well and faring well, and its goal is what Aristotle calls eudaimonia. The latter is not simply sensuous happiness, but, far more, its goal is that internal satisfaction that comes with having achieved a good end (in this case, an excellent "mean" between excess and deficiency). This is a satisfaction that is entirely independent of the applause or condemnation of others because it is a satisfaction that only the individual can experience for her-/himself.

There are some obvious limitations to virtue ethics. It completely ignores what Aristotle called "intellectual virtues." The latter are absolute moral principles legislated by reason, which every rational being can "obey" or "ignore" but which are universal to all times and all places – we today would say that they are analogous to the laws of nature. For example, one cannot "more" or "less" lie, and there is no culture that encourages lying (except under the conditions of Utilitarian calculation of the greatest good for the greatest number, which takes injustice as a necessary given for the welfare of the whole – yet even here, lying is viewed as a "necessary" technical or pragmatic evil). We will see that moral autonomy requires only one Aristotelian "intellectual virtue" to justify its embracing of the ground of moral responsibility, but this discussion takes us to moral autonomy.

However, virtue ethics also ignores technical and pragmatic necessities for which there is no (or little) variation of "more" and "less." One can't more or less hang a roof of a house before one has constructed the foundation and the walls. One's selection of a career path can be initially, perhaps, viewed as a "more" or "less" serious commitment, but the pragmatic necessities that prescribe "excellence" in the profession are not a matter of "more" or "less."

In short, although Aristotle talks about (distributive and retributive) "justice" as calculable either proportionally or arithmetically, virtue ethics itself is focused on the individual to the exclusion of justice according to the civic law or those aspects of the external dimension of reality that constituted the shared world.

3) Moral Autonomy

The archaeological origin of moral autonomy is Aristotle's notion of "intellectual virtue" in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, the individual with whom it is most legitimately identified is Immanuel Kant. With moral autonomy, the focus of ethical reflection is unequivocally shifted from the *external world of effects and calculations* (including shifted away from technical and pragmatic necessities in and of themselves) to the illumination of the *internal conditions of possibility that make moral responsibility not only possible but also necessary in the first place.*

Whereas Utilitarian consequentialism and Virtue Ethics focus on principles derived from external experience to determine goals and outcomes, moral autonomy seeks its ground internally. That ground is what Kant calls *autonomous freedom*. However, this label can evoke metaphor interference that leads to misunderstanding Kant's point. To be sure, "autonomous freedom" is a metaphor with multiple possible meanings. These multiple possible meanings can create confusing interference in understanding. *Autonomous* here means the degree to which humanity is independent of physical nature, and *freedom* here means the degree to which the individual is capable of initiating a sequence of events that physical nature cannot accomplish on its own. We are not talking about mere *self-determination* or *choice* as if freedom had to do with independence from society, institutions, and the family. Other sentient beings are capable of self-determination and choice. Freedom for Kant does not mean "nobody's going to tell me what to do," and self-determination and choice have already *presupposed* an efficient causality not reducible to the efficient causality of nature and not merely the capacity to make a decision.

It is appropriate here to distinguish between "reasons" and "causal explanation." We can give reasons for our actions (e.g., I went to the grocery store because I needed to buy groceries). However, such explanations are not *causal* explanations. In addition to such reasons, there are physical causes that must necessarily be invoked in order for me to get to the store. However, there is also the invocation of *creative, autonomous freedom* involved in my going to the store. I am capable of transforming natural ingredients into a meal that the natural ingredients themselves could never bring about on their own. At this level of the event of going shopping, we are not invoking a "reason" but a "causal capacity" that nature itself does not exercise.

Of course, we can say that we are simply the products of physical, efficient causality, and we can say that our *autonomous freedom* itself is capable of being explained by physical, efficient causality. However, here we run up against one of reason's many limits, and it is insurmountable. We can only experience the effects of causes, not the causes themselves. We employ our understanding of an efficient causal sequence in order to account for the appearances that are events. Where we can carefully control the appearances and can establish a control group with which to compare the effects of a sequence, we can with a high degree of confidence conclude that our causal explanation is correct. Not only is the range of experience limited for

which we can apply such rigorous conditions, but even here we can never be absolutely certain of our causal explanation because our grasp of the physical laws that we invoke for our explanation is not and can never be absolutely certain. It is not merely that we cannot get to all times and all places that we cannot prove (or disprove) that the physical laws of nature apply to all times and to all places. Rather, it is because we never have direct access to the causes (but only to their effects) that we can never be absolutely certain of our causal explanations.

An indication that we acknowledge that we cannot establish absolute certainty is the degree to which we experience uneasiness when we fly. However, our confidence is high enough that engineers have examined the range of options and built in enough redundancy into the airplane's system that we vote with our bodies that there are universal laws of nature involved in flying – even though we cannot absolutely prove or disprove them.

It is no different when we seek to prove (or disprove) our *autonomous freedom*. We only experience its effects; we don't experience the efficient causality itself that is autonomous freedom. As a causal system, autonomous freedom also has laws, but these laws cannot be external laws either physical or social because by definition external laws would negate freedom. Such external laws would be *imposed upon* the individual, not autonomously imposed. This is the very meaning of *autonomy* in Greek: "to give oneself the law" (auto-nomos).

Yet, before we examine the question of this internal law and its origin, we must underscore that *autonomous freedom* is the condition of possibility for any search for moral principles. Were we not to experience ourselves as autonomously free, we could not hold ourselves (morally) responsible for our action. We hold no other species to be morally accountable for their behavior because they act instinctually, not freely. Without *autonomous freedom* there would be no need for moral principles.

Furthermore, were we not to experience ourselves as autonomously free, we could not pursue external, technical and pragmatic necessities. This is not a trivial point because there are attempts to provide an evolutionary, biological account for "morality" on the basis of such rule-governed behavior involved in technical and pragmatic necessity. Supposedly, we developed the grasp of the rules that are technical and pragmatic necessities, not to speak of altruism, as a part of a successful adaptation strategy to survive in our ever-changing environment. However, such a "biological" account of the emergence of morality as the *consequence of* an evolutionary strategy presupposes, once again, the very efficient causality that makes morality necessary in the first place. Autonomous freedom is not a consequence; it is the condition of possibility for our actions and our assumption of (moral) responsibility for our actions.

We can now turn to the status of moral principles. Moral principles are an issue for us only if we are *autonomously free*. If we are *not* (!) autonomously free, than we are mere

mechanical toys, and we could never hold ourselves or the other responsible for her/his behavior. Nonetheless, the status of moral principles goes deeper that a mere *must*. In other words, we don't hold ourselves morally responsible for our *autonomous freedom* because we *must*. That, again, would mean that we are accountable to some external set of moral principles to which we are accountable analogous to our accountability to the physical laws of nature. However, moral principles are different from such heteronomous, external laws. The only laws that can apply to *autonomous freedom* are *internal*, self-legislated moral principles. Only the individual can impose such principles on her-/himself. Why would we do such a thing given that our *autonomous freedom* gives us such power over our external world? This power is immense, and it is understandable that we would be inclined to exercise it only to serve our self-interest. In fact, Immanuel Kant pointed out in 1775 that in principle *autonomous freedom* or the ability to initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own gives us the power to destroy nature. Little did he know …

Do we self-impose moral principles on ourselves only out of fear? Aristotle proposes in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that humanity will never be convinced by arguments so that it requires fear for it to do "the right thing." Moral autonomy is not so naïve that it believes that humanity will always do the right thing, but it is confident that, so long as humanity exists, the capacity to do the right thing can never be eradicated. Fear, of course, is a motivator of *must*. Moral autonomy is motivated by its capacity. We are not moral beings because we *must be*. Rather, we are moral beings because we *can be*. Given that we are the only species, apparent to us at least, that is capable of *autonomous freedom*, we are the only species that *can be moral*. That is a powerful motivation to encourage us *to be moral*. The capacity for morality is what makes us human and not some other kind of species!

How do we know that there are universal, absolute moral principles? We don't and can't know! Remember, though, that the same is true of physical laws of nature. We don't and can't know that they are universal and absolute. Nonetheless, no one has to convince us that we had best adhere to them.

It is helpful to examine dreams when it comes to the question of our confidence that *autonomous freedom* is governed by a set of *universal, absolute moral principles*. What dreams certainly indicate (if there is anything whatsoever certain about dreams!) is that experience must involve more than merely clarity and distinctness of sense perception. The content of dreams is as clear and distinct as any perception of our waking life. Yet, there is a profound difference. Our waking life is governed by laws because it is a causal system. The effects of our waking life convince us that we can understand events if we approach them as if they were governed by physical laws. To the degree that such a strategy enhances our insight and control over events, it proves to be an extremely valuable strategy that no one would challenge.

The lesson: causal systems are lawful systems, not just spontaneous and random systems as in the case of dreams. Just like physical laws, so, too, moral laws, are the necessary assumption in order for us to understand the causal system to which they apply. Can we prove (or disprove) that there are moral principles? No! What difference does it make? All the difference in the world if we are to be(come) the species we are apparently capable of be(com)ing.

4) Combining Moral Virtue and Moral Autonomy

Otfried Höffe proposes in his *Lebenskunst und Moral oder macht Tugend glücklich?* (English translation: *Can Virtue Makes us Happy? The Art of Living and Morality*, trans. by Douglas R McGaughey [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010]) that Virtue Ethics and Moral Autonomy are complementary. Moral virtue accounts for relative principles in experience and moral autonomy accounts for absolute principles. However, where it comes to a conflict between moral virtue and moral autonomy, moral autonomy has precedence.

The situation is analogous to the relationship between moral autonomy and the civic law. The civic law is a system of rules to govern external relationships, and there is no one absolute system of civic law valid at all times in all places. For example, a nomadic community requires a different civic law from a sedentary; an agrarian community requires a different civic law from an industrial community; and a post-industrial community requires a different civic law from an industrial community. This does not mean that there can't be continuity of civic laws that apply over all social systems, but the differences in civic laws for these different communities does not require the establishment of continuity. In fact, the success of the civic law does not depend upon its universality but upon 1) the establishment of a "fair" system of judicial justice to adjudicate conflicts and violations of the civic law and 2) the existence of a moral citizenry committed to *doing the right thing* in light of the civic law. The latter point is simply: Justice cannot be established simply by adherence to the civic law. Rather, justice requires that the citizenry holds itself to a higher, *moral* law for there to be justice.

The same logic applies analogously to the relationship between Virtue Ethics and Moral Autonomy. Where there is no absolute moral principle because the principle must be derived from the external phenomena, there Virtue Ethics is valid. However, should there be a conflict between a "mean" of excellence and an absolute, moral principle, in such a case the absolute moral principle would apply. For example, if the "mean" of excellence with respect to one's material possessions results in destruction of the condition of possibility of existence or the violation of the dignity of the other, then the "mean" of excellence must be revised in light of the categorical imperatives criteria: 1) act on the basis of a moral principle that you would want to be universal as if a law of nature and 2) never treat the other or allow oneself to be treated as a mere means and not as an end.

Another example where moral autonomy trumps moral virtue, no situation of generosity justifies failure to fulfil one's own promises (e.g., to pay a debt) in order to be generous (according to the universal form of the categorical imperative), and at no point does generosity require that one so reduce one's own material existence that one's own sustenance is threatened (according to the ends form of the categorical imperative).

5) On the Role of Divine Grace in Morality

Grace might be desirous in three respects when it comes to moral effort: with respect to providing the conditions that make moral effort possible in the first place; with respect to influencing the positive effects of one's moral effort given that one does not have control over the consequences of one's efforts; and with respect to reward and punishment in the next life.

Grace is a form of efficient causality. To be sure, it is unlike physical efficient causality and the efficient causality of autonomous freedom because the latter two forms of efficient causality are complementary (otherwise, autonomous freedom is destructive), and grace, by definition, is capable of ignoring both physical efficient causality and autonomous freedom to establish an entirely new circumstance unable to be achieved by either physical causality or autonomous freedom.

As a form of causality, though, grace is incapable of being proved (or disproved) because we only can experience its effects, not the causality itself. As a consequence, Kant neither unequivocally denies nor unequivocally affirms divine grace with one exception. Given the appearances of the physical world and the capacities that we experience ourselves to possess (that include autonomous freedom), we know that we did not create those conditions and capacities ourselves. Furthermore, although no cosmological, teleological, or ontological argument for God is conclusive, our experience of our capacity of autonomous freedom and the moral order to which it conforms even more than our experience of the physical universe justifies our belief in God as an ultimate cause of a coherent totality that is rational reality (i.e., a universe in which efficient causality conforms to complementary systems of different laws). Nonetheless, this is neither a certain proof of the existence of God nor a suggestion about any other predicates as appropriate for God beyond the predicate of ultimate cause that is the condition of possibility for the two systems of efficient causality that we experience. Any anthropomorphic predicates, Kant tells us, are illegitimate even if we cannot escape anthropomorphic predicates. Rather, he tells us in the *Prolegomena* that we must always remind ourselves that anthropomorphic predicates are symbolic, not literal.

In short, Critical Idealism embraces the first notion of grace in light of these qualifications with respect to the appropriateness of judgments that apply to God: God is the origin of the conditions that make moral effort possible in the first place.

Can God intervene to affect the other two forms of grace: 1) with respect to influencing the positive effects of one's moral efforts given that one does not have control over the consequences of one's efforts and 2) with respect to reward and punishment in the next life? The answer must be: We don't know! However, we do know that, if we assume that God can dispense grace in this fashion, we are faced with God undermining the very moral capacity that grace is meant to aid.

First, assuming that God can violate physical laws and autonomous freedom to accomplish things that nature and we cannot do would entirely undermine the confidence that we necessarily must have in the coherence of physical laws and autonomous freedom. In other words, if God can violate the laws of nature and autonomous freedom, we could never be certain that our understanding of nature or ourselves was sufficient for us to act responsibly. Without confidence in the certainty of laws, there is no understanding and/or moral responsibility.

Kant makes two claims that seem to undermine his own faith in the physical and moral law: 1) Religion is the answer to the question: What can I hope?; and 2) No religion that denies the afterlife is a religion.

Re. 1: What can I hope? There are two elements to hope in this context. First, I can hope that the condition of possibility for my moral effort (i.e., autonomous freedom) is what makes it possible for my moral transformation so that a revolution of my character to embrace moral effort is always possible. Second, I can hope that the consequences of my moral efforts achieve their intended end. Both forms of hope arise from my confidence generated by the effects of creative, autonomous freedom that indicate that I, in fact, do possess this form of efficient causality that is governed by the moral law and from my confidence that the moral law that is within is complementary to the physical law that is without. Neither of these claims, however, is capable of proof (or disproof). We embrace them on faith.

Re. 2: No religion that denies the afterlife is a religion: Is Kant insisting that there is an afterlife? Such a claim would be a thorough violation of humanity's limits! What we know for certainty is that we can neither prove nor disprove that there is an afterlife. Were we to deny the afterlife, we would be making not only a speculative claim but also a claim that could lead to the undermining of the moral capacity that the afterlife means to encourage. If we were to conclude that there definitely is an afterlife, then the focus of our concern shifts from "doing the right thing because it is right" in this world to obsequiously seeking to please the God or gods in control over the next life in order to ensure our acceptance into it. In short, we would be concerned with our self-interest, not with our moral effort.

Yet Kant does not simply leave the afterlife as a place holder of uncertainty. He views it as a positive motivator for our moral effort in this life in two respects. First, the possibility of an

afterlife, which would be concerned with our continued moral improvement or else it isn't rational, can assist us in dealing with the injustices of this world and the apparent success of the unjust at the expense of the just. In short, the purpose of the afterlife in this sense is to encourage our continued moral effort in this life. Second, focus on continued moral effort regardless of self-interest is underscored because what one should seek is *worthiness* of supplementary grace for one's moral efforts and with respect to the afterlife. However, this *worthiness* is not objective: It doesn't consist in some collection of points that are required for or allow us to demand supplementary grace. Rather, it is subjective: It is only through my exercising morally those capacities over which I have control that I demonstrate my *worthiness* to myself. If there is supplementary grace and an afterlife, then it is frosting on the cake. If not, I have done what I can expect of myself as a human being in this world: I have contributed to the moral improvement of humanity by seeking my own moral improvement.

As we have already seen in the posting [Ethics and Morality: External Law and Crooked Wood](), this moral effort does not occur in isolation but is aided by the awareness of an invisible kingdom of ends that unites humanity across generations.

6) The Resolution of the Apparent Moral Paradox

Our examination of Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Moral Autonomy, and Grace was undertaken in light of an inescapable paradox. If moral principles are absolute, we cannot escape cultural imperialism (i.e., the imposition of moral principles on others). If moral principles are relative, we foster injustice. The paradox proves, however, to be only an apparent paradox. The assumption driving the first half of the paradox ("if moral principles are absolute") is that moral principles can only arise within the limits of historical institutions as Hegel, for example, argued in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for the role of the family, civil society, and the state. Under that assumption, absolute moral principles are a form of false consciousness in that the relative is elevated to the unconditional and, subsequently, mistakenly imposed as absolute on other cultural traditions of the family, civil society, and the state. However, Aristotle's intellectual virtues and Kant's absolute moral principles are not tied to any external institutions or conditions. They are universal moral principles applicable at all times and in all places just as in the case of physical laws. There is no culture that encourages lying, and no one has to instruct someone that bearing false witness against an innocent person under even the threat of one's own execution if one refuses is morally right – regardless of how what the individual threatened with death decides to do.

Having corrected the error of the first assumption, the second half of the apparent paradox is also eliminated. There are absolute moral principles grounded in the dignity of the individual which provide us with a fulcrum for adjudicating injustice in the first place. To be sure, with the exception of genocide, the necessity of the self-legislation of moral principles and

the consequence inadequacy of heteronomous moral principles means that it is not the place of one culture to directly intervene in the affairs of another even in the name of justice. Rather, the only appropriate strategy is to point out the injustice cogently and unequivocally as often and as frequently as occasion allows. However, injustice must be named, and the perpetrators must be reminded of the higher calling of the human nature. No other strategy of moral transformation is ultimately meaningful or effective.