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## The Cyclops and the Philosopher’s Stone<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract:

Regardless of national, ethnic, religious, and/or gender identity, or commitment to/rejection of the natural sciences, we are all pragmatic, instrumental cyclops today. Thankfully, we are not genetically cyclops, but we have so long ignored, and become so comfortable with blocking, our “second” eye that we are threatened with evolutionary mutation to a single eye. With Homer’s “Cyclops” representing the *mere empiricism* of “opening one’s eyes” and the Bacchae Dionysian representing a portrayal of *insightful rapture* that is the “closing of one’s eyes” (the exact opposite to the Cyclops’ empiricism), Odysseus and Athena are taken to represent the power of *pragmatic, instrumental reason over nature*. Nonetheless, the Cyclops, the Bacchae, Odysseus, and Athena are all various *forms of monocularity*. In order to preserve our “second eye,” we need the “Stone of the Wise” or “Philosopher’s Stone<sup>2</sup>” (*der Stein der Weisen*) that reminds us of the importance of *practical reason* to complement *mere empiricism and its pragmatic, instrumental reason*.

Homer tells a story (Gk: *muthos* in contrast to *logos*, a rational account) of Odysseus and his men blinding the Cyclops by driving a stake into his one eye. They then escape from the Cyclops cave by tying themselves to the bellies of the Cyclops’ sheep. Because the Cyclops only felt the backs of the sheep as they left the cave, they were able to ride out of the cave to liberty. A rational allegory (Gk.: *logos*) for the story is that the Cyclops is limited to the mere *perception of empirical surfaces* whereas Odysseus represents the importance of *pragmatic, imperceptible insight* that has rational sovereignty over the world.

A second story, however, underscores *the danger that lurks in imperceptible insight* when ecstatic unity blinds perception of multiplicity. In Euripides’ play *The Bacchae*, the “feminine”

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Volker Gerhardt, *Immanuel Kant. Vernunft und Leben* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007): 11, 56, for calling to my attention Kant’s use of the Cyclops metaphor, and to Birgit Recki, *Ästhetik der Sitten. Die Affinität von ästhetischem Gefühl und praktischer Vernunft bei Kant* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2001): 41, 280; for calling to my attention Kant’s use of the Stone of the Wise or Philosopher’s Stone (*der Stein der Weisen*) metaphor.

I am also indebted to James R. Cochrane’s insightful reading, grammatical corrections, and reformulation of multiple infelicities of expression throughout. Of course, I alone remain responsible for all the errors that remain.

<sup>2</sup> “Philosopher’s Stone” is the usual translation of *der Stein der Weisen*, which literally means “the Stone of the Wise.” Although “philosopher” literally means “lover of wisdom,” which everyone is capable of being, “Philosopher’s Stone” implies a certain kind of philosophical knowledge or skill that only a few are capable of possessing.

is taken to represent a monocular, “double sight” (that emphasizes unity in addition to multiplicity) that leads to the eclipse of the otherwise normal perception of multiplicity when the imperceptible intellect is experienced in *Dionysian ecstasy*. The feminine, *Dionysian moment* celebrates that ecstasy capable of being experienced in the unity of the imperceptible, which in the play leads to blindness for multiplicity and the destruction of the “other,” in this case, the “masculine.” Pentheus’s murder is not the mere consequence of his secretly seeking to participate in a feminine ritual. It is the consequence of *Dionysian ecstasy* blinding the celebrants.

A third story provides an explanation for Athens’ flourishing under Pericles by valuing *the pragmatic power* of the imperceptible/intellect over the perceptible, material world by *instrumental reason*. According to Herodotus (d. 425 BCE), Poseidon offers Athens a fresh-water spring on the Acropolis. In his account, Athena offers the olive tree, the symbol of peace. Granted that there is no certainty what the original scene of the west pediment was, what dominates the ‘traditional’ images are horses. Athena “wins” the minds of the Athenians because, having been *born directly from the mind* of Zeus, she gave Bellerophon the horse harness so that he could tame the prodigious, wild horse, Pegasus, *born from the ground* when the blood of Medusa hit the ground when Perseus severed her head (aided by Athena and Hermes). Before applying the harness to tame Pegasus, Athena told Bellerophon to sacrifice to Poseidon. However, her acknowledgment of humanity’s dependence on the material realm by calling for a sacrifice to Poseidon is eclipsed by the horse harness because it symbolizes the *pragmatic power* over physical reality on the part of the imperceptible intellect by means of *instrumental reason*. With the mind, humanity can tame nature.

As advantageous as Odysseus’ and Athena’s *instrumental reason* is for furthering human interests in contrast to the Cyclops single eye of mere empiricism, instrumental reason, nevertheless, involves blinding of the “second eye.”

Some may see in Odysseus’ and Athena’s victories Nietzsche’s rational, Apollonian power whereas the Bacchae represent the ecstatic, Dionysian power. The Nietzsche of the *Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872) could have learned something from Kant. Apollo and Dionysius do not constitute two ontological regions or powers that need to be “balanced,” as the young Nietzsche proposed. His reason/ecstasy dichotomy succumbs to a merely pragmatic agenda that acknowledges the physical laws of the universe but overlooks the respect owed to the moral law that Kant emphasizes because humanity as a rational animal exercises a form of causality not reducible to physical causality – although complementary with physical causality. These two systems of causality each has its own lawful order: physical and moral laws.<sup>3</sup> Together imperceptible physical and moral laws constitute humanity’s two eyes,<sup>4</sup> according to

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<sup>3</sup> See Section VIII (“Account of the Duties of Virtue as Broad Duties”) in the “Introduction” to the “Doctrine of Virtue” in contrast to the narrow duties of the “Doctrine of Right” in *The Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 390-391. Kant rejects the charge that morality is a form of tyranny in *ibid.* AA VI: 409). Kant also denies that morality requires the denial of “sensuousness.” See *ibid.* AA VI, 408 but also 384, 390, 394, and 405. Finally, Kant rejects “ethical asceticism”, as well. See „Ethical Ascetics §53” of The Doctrine of Virtue in *ibid.* AA VI, 484-485

<sup>4</sup> Physical and moral “laws” are metaphors for imperceptible, physical and spiritual “orders” that extend far beyond the notion of a “mathematical” law. Rarely, today, do even the natural sciences speak of physical laws. They

Kant for our grasp of these laws along with the coherent order that, when combined, they represent makes possible understanding and responsible action.

Nonetheless, the staggering progress (one might say revolutions) in physics and biology made possible by instrumental pragmatism over the last century combined with the explosive growth in the application of computer technology to every aspect of daily life appropriately demands our admiration as well as justifies the public and private funding that makes it all possible. Those who resist these revolutions whether anti-evolutionists or climate change deniers are no different than defenders of animism, ancestor veneration, and magic<sup>5</sup> who account for causal powers in terms of the intentionality of “spirits” and/or the mere interaction of physical substances rather than to imperceptible, non-substantial, functional relationality.<sup>6</sup>

Animism, ancestor veneration, and magic fuel the paranoid fears to this day of witchcraft that sometimes result in public lynchings in Africa and South America. However, the northern hemisphere is no exception to paranoid fears of causal threats from people believing that they act “on behalf of God” when they further their personal, political, and social interests, and these paranoid fears drive, as well, such things as the private accumulation of weapons, the building of walls, and the ignoring of human dignity with the implementation of general travel bans for particular religious groups.

Furthermore, the vitriolic politics of our day all over the globe fuels division between “progressives” and “conservatives” and is exploited as a manipulated binary that has led to the erosion of democratic institutions as well as threatens open and free access to information in countries.

Fake-news spreads like wild fire and is embraced as fervent truth merely because it is screamed loudly, serves the interests of some, and results in social media hits, which, regardless of their source, make it a “must read” and lend a “must be true” valence to them. A “pizza parlor” conspiracy theory is taken by some to justify vigilante justice; opening fire with automatic weapons in an elementary school or a gay bar; suicide bombers in public venues; knife and acid spray attacks on open streets; the driving of trucks into public crowds; and an attack on a mosque in north London; all have become so terrifyingly “normal” that politicians plot their path to power on the basis of the fears on all sides that drive or thrive on the atrocities.

There is something profoundly wrong with this polarized climate. It behooves us to seriously consider options that provide a clear and productive path toward the better world that we are obviously capable of creating as is confirmed by our creative insights in the natural sciences and technology.

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employ statistical analysis and algorithms (functions) in order to draw conclusions about order in physical phenomena. However, both orders of physical functions and moral laws are rules that must be *added to the* phenomena concerned. They are not given directly in the senses.

<sup>5</sup> This is an erroneous caricature of animism, ancestor veneration, and magic because it is a claim only with respect to their historical manifestations, not in terms of their significance for pure, practical religion. See the, hopefully, forthcoming manuscript *Promoting Life: Animism and Ancestor Veneration in a Cybernetic World*.

<sup>6</sup> See Ernst Cassirer, *Die Begriffsform im mythischen Denken*. Leipzig/Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1922.

The proposal offered here: Whereas this “first eye” of *pragmatic, instrumental reason* focuses on *what is/can be*, the cultivation of a “healthy second eye” of *practical reason* with its concern for *what ought to be* can aid humanity to assume its *responsible* place in “the order of things.” In short, *the one-eyed Cyclops of pragmatic, instrumental reason* (what is) *should not be permitted to blind the second eye that is the “Stone of the Wise”* (what ought to be).

Because of its “obvious” success, we have become increasingly *pragmatic cyclopes*. We assume that what counts and is “true” is what brings “success” to our enterprises. No one documents more shockingly and disturbingly the seductive power of pragmatic “success” even in the natural sciences than the work of the “Meta-Research Innovation Center” at Stanford University. The Co-Directors, Steven Goodman and John Ioannidis have gathered a team to investigate the statistical role of “p-value” (probability value) in research by examining research publications committed to “outcomes assessment.” Goodman and Ioannidis point out that all too frequently *the probabilities involved are compromised by the assumptions and desired outcomes of the research*. The work of the “Meta-Research Innovation Center” is not driven by a desire to undermine but, rather, to strengthen scientific research by warning of the dangers lurking in the silent assumptions of researchers as they pursue the expected “success” of publication and dramatic discoveries that lead to the holy grail of a Noble Prize.

Outcomes assessment and silent assumptions are not limited to the empirical sciences, however. Some examples: 1) the fervent believer in witchcraft is driven by “outcome assessment.” “My malheur” (the death of my child, failure of my crops, etc.) occurred shortly after I was given “the evil eye” by a witch. The outcome “justifies” tire-burning the witch. 2) After I cut off my little finger as “demanded” by the ancestors, my life-situation improved so that my conviction that my dead ancestors are looking after me is “confirmed by” the outcome. 3) I am a “good” person so that the fact that I raped someone “must be the consequence” of demon possession. I personally avoided death, for example, 4) in a skiing incident, 5) by surviving a terrorist attack, 6) by having endured a harrowing airplane flight, or, 7) by having experienced armed, escaped murderers come out of the woods toward me and lay down on the driveway to surrender rather than to attack me – all of these “outcomes” are taken (by some) to confirm that a divine power was protecting me. The evidence proves it! Just open your eyes!

However, not everyone survives a health crisis or natural catastrophe, not every life is improved by cutting off of a finger, the accident, the terror incident, the harrowing flight, or the escaped murderers, and any and all excuses for atrocious behavior always overlook that the excuse and superficial forgiveness (forgive and forget) constitutes a “second wounding” of the victim (the burned “witch,” the rape victim, etc.). Undeterred, the survivor or perpetrator can insist, of course, that “obviously” God has a special plan for her/him that motivates “doing good” or “eradicating evil” of some kind or by some manner – perhaps, even by violence. Again, though, the victims’ life is changed forever, and it is a perverse logic that claims that their recovery and perhaps future success in life somehow justifies the atrocity. In other words, “divine special plans for an individual” can be empowering of “good,” but they can also lead to extremely destructive acts of violence, as we know full well.

Outcomes assessment alone is “knowing by fruits” that are clearly perceivable. Surely, they are not to be ignored. However, to the extent that it ignores the significance of the “second eye,” it is short-sighted and potentially, blind and incredibly destructive.

Although in *De anima*, Aristotle prizes touch above all of the senses, he famously begins his *Metaphysics* with “All men [*sic.*] naturally have an impulse to get knowledge. A sign of this is the way we prize our senses; [...] especially sensing with the eyes.” Limiting ourselves exclusively to “outcomes assessment” has led to our emphasis so exclusively on the senses and sense data that we forget that even Aristotle insisted that more is involved with knowledge and truth claims than simply *opening our “eyes.”*

At the other end of the experience spectrum, the contemplative and ecstatic traditions of Eastern Religions/Philosophies, Mysticism East and West, and the Bacchae emphasize exactly the opposite: knowledge and truth come from *closing our eyes*. They point out that our personal experience consists of two dimensions: 1) the physical world that is perceptible, material, divisible, measurable, and changing; and 2) the mental/spiritual world that is imperceptible, immaterial, indivisible, immeasurable, and unchanging. Wisdom for these traditions comes from “turning inward” to explore and embrace the spiritual dimension that is “superior” to the material dimension because it is eternal – even as it is experienced in the present. The concepts of the mind are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and they are necessary for us to make sense of the phenomena that we perceive: We must apply the correct concept (e.g., “chair”) to the phenomena for which it applies. If we apply the concept stove to the phenomena for which the concept chair is appropriate, we can get seriously burned. These concepts don’t increase or decrease, they do not change appearance in the mind, and they are ever available for our judgment. One can even employ an anthropomorphic analogy to maintain that the physical world is mere “copy and shadow” of the eternal, conceptual order of the mind. “Creation” occurs by thinking a thought first followed by the “externalization” of the concept by use of the proper materials, tools, and sequence. Philo of Alexandria, for example, accounted for the two stories of creation at the beginning of the book of Genesis by proposing that in the first account God “thought” and in the second God “externalized his thoughts into matter.”<sup>7</sup>

For contemplative and ecstatic traditions, the ultimate reward is (perhaps) not a physical paradise beyond the material world but a reabsorption into the ultimate unity of reality to escape from the “suffering” of the physical world (e.g., to become “one with Christ” as claimed by the “divinization” traditions of Christianity or to enter Nirvana). Nevertheless, the emphasis is on “pragmatic outcomes” in this physical world. For example, not only do these contemplative and ecstatic traditions offer a pragmatic solution to suffering in the world (even if only a momentary

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<sup>7</sup> Philo of Alexandria explained the need for the two accounts of creation in the opening of Genesis precisely on this anthropomorphic model of “original” and “copy.” The first account is the ultimate origin of creation that occurred when God thought internally (Logos endiathtos, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), literally, the “word within;” the second account is the “copying” of those thoughts into matter (Logos prophorikos, λόγος προφορικός), literally, the “spoken word”). See §1 of Philo’s “On Creation” (*de opificio mundi*; *περὶ τῆς κατὰ Μωσῆα κοσμοποιίας*) as well as, David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis, 1993). Philo is so indebted to Plato that Jerome, apparently, coined the famous aphorism: “either Plato follows Philo or Philo Plato—so great is the similarity in doctrines and style.” (*Ibid.*, 313, see as well, 4, 188, 208, and 338).

escape in ecstasy), but also, they frequently claim, if all people would practice spiritual meditation, there would be peace in the world.

Our Greek stories of the Cyclops, Dionysius, and Athena provide a framework for examining the dominance of instrumental pragmatism in our age, which has clearly triumphed over Bacchaeian ecstasy although the drug plague confirms that destructive ecstasy remains a constant, powerful threat. Nonetheless, the narrow, sensuous Aristotelian and the sense-denying contemplative or rapture experiencing ecstatic are each in her/his own way cyclops. They all deny the “reality” of one of the two, ordered dimensions of experience: the spiritual with its moral law or the material with its physical law. In the name of knowledge or truth, they figuratively pluck out the other, offending eye.

In his *Handwritten Papers on Anthropology*, Immanuel Kant (d. 1804), the son of a harness maker, speaks of the cyclops as an “egoist” who has “forgotten his [*sic.*] humanity.” The missing “second eye” Kant identifies as “[...] the self-recognition of human reason without which we have no assessment of the grandeur of our understanding [...] [It is] not the strength but the monocularly [that] makes the cyclops [...] [What is missing in the cyclops is] the self-recognition of understanding and of reason.” (McGaughey trans.) (AA XV: 394-395) Just what might Kant mean? To speak of the “grandeur of our understanding” hardly sounds like humility or an antidote to egoism!

A crucial step toward recognizing the significance of what Kant means by a cyclops is to sort out his distinction between *theoretical* and *practical* reason: the lawful orders of the two eyes.

When one refers to the notion “reason” in our age, as stated above, most likely one means only *instrumental* reason: the ability to calculate, predict, manipulate, and control phenomena to pragmatic ends. This is the form of reason that drives what Kant calls in the *Critique of Judgment* the “culture of skills [*Geschichtlichkeit*]” in contrast to the “culture of rearing [*Zucht*]” or self-discipline (AA V: 431-432). In contrast to the cultivation and application of particular skills, a “culture of rearing” that requires both autodidactic self-discipline and communal support seeks the “liberation of the will from the despotism of desires.” Furthermore, skills are dependent upon “inequality” among people whereas liberation from the despotism of desires is beneficial to all and is a capacity that everyone is able to develop through self-discipline (not externally imposed social and political power). Autodidactic self-discipline involves the deepening and broadening of our *insight* to include a consideration of all that each individual on her/his own must *add to* the phenomena of the empirical in order not only to understand (e.g., physical laws) but also to act responsibly (moral laws) because neither set of laws is given directly in sense perception. In other words, autodidactic self-discipline involves an “education to make us receptive to higher ends than nature itself can afford.” (AA V: 433)

In our materialistic age that ferociously seeks to give a physical explanation for all of our experience, what on earth would make us believe that there are goals that are higher than nature itself? The answer involves more than the spiritualists’ observation that our experience consists

of two irreconcilable and irreducible dimensions, which would constitute a dualism of two ontological regions: mind and matter.

How is it possible for the two realities to be related to one another? The answer requires entertaining the possibility that we don't actually experience two, distinct ontological realities at all but only one limitless world of appearances some of which are governed by empirical "laws" (or functions) and others of which are governed by broad, moral laws. In order to grasp the imperceptible laws that govern the appearances of experience, we need "two eyes:" one for the empirical laws (order) and one for the non-empirical laws (order). While instrumental reason has its grasp of imperceptible, empirical laws (which are not to be limited to mathematical "laws" but include statistical order and algorithms) confirmed by physical phenomena, what would make us believe that we also experience an imperceptible, moral law?

The empirical hint that there is a *practical, moral* reason, not just *pragmatic, instrumental* reason, is that we do not experience ourselves as machines but as capable of *intentionally* (or purposively) transforming nature. We don't have to be satisfied with the world as *it is*, but we can change *intentionally* the world/nature in terms of our conception of what *out to be*. We share with other species the ability to change nature, but other species do so primarily by instinct not purposive intention. There is no other species that can change nature to the degree that humanity is capable, as far as we have encountered. Remarkably, already in 1775, Kant pointed out that our ability to intentionally exercise this causality that is complementary, but not reducible, to nature gives us the power to destroy nature.<sup>8</sup> Oh, that he were wrong!

The capacity of intentional creativity that is the manifestation of *practical reason* confronts us with the issue not only of *what we can do*, but also with the issue of *what we ought to do*. Nowhere else in nature do we find this confrontation between *what is* and *what ought to be* to the degree that we find it in humanity<sup>9</sup> – although our ability to experience the capacity only *internally* under profoundly limited rational conditions and physical circumstances makes it impossible for us to know whether there may be other species somewhere in the universe with the capacity to distinguish between *is* and *ought*. However, *the fact that we can and do is a strong indicator that the capacity has something to do with what it means to be the species that we are, that is, to be human*.

Kant spoke of mind and matter as two *domains*,<sup>10</sup> not two ontological substances, to the extent that they are appearances governed by distinctly different, yet discernable, laws/order. Neither set of laws is given directly in perception. When it comes to those physical laws that govern *what is*, we don't see the law of gravity when we observe a falling apple, we don't see our statistics in the phenomena, and we must create the algorithms that we employ to understand the "big data." The reaction to Newton's proposal of the law of gravity is instructive. The proposal was, in fact, greeted at the time with derision precisely because gravity is not

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<sup>8</sup> Kant, *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie* (Berlin; de Gruyter, 2004): 177).

<sup>9</sup> We don't hold other species morally responsible for their actions. However, if we were not able to hold one another responsible for our individual actions, then there would be no justification for courts and prisons, and contracts and constitutions would be meaningless.

<sup>10</sup> See the *Critique of Judgment* AA V: 174-176.

observable. He was accused of introducing “invisible forces” into nature, which is equivalent to throwing the doors open to blind speculations. If gravity, why not benevolent and malicious spirits?

Similarly, frequently today the other set of laws that govern *what ought to be* are derisively dismissed as an illusion. It is claimed that there are only relative, socially determined norms (not universal laws) that arise as a consequence of our being a *social species* from birth.<sup>11</sup> We need to be instructed in how to *successfully negotiate* our social world. If successful negotiation of a social world is our definition of morality, then every drug cartel and mafia family can call itself “moral.” Yet, the claim that there is a set of universal laws, which “rise above” even our socially constructed realities, suggests to many today that we would not only be throwing the doors open to view as moral all kinds of even contradictory, social systems because the notion of universal moral laws is taken to be indefensible. It also risks all of the dangers and destructiveness that comes from *externally imposing* such erroneously, “universal” moral principles on one another as individuals as well as the dangers and destructiveness that can occur when one culture *takes itself to be superior* to all other cultures. In other words, it smacks of moralizing imperialism.

However, we all have a very intense, *internal experience* of recognizing harm that has been done by individuals and corporate entities who have adhered rigorously to “social rules” (e.g., the civic law) but who do things that *ought not to occur*.<sup>12</sup> When a politically powerful person asks someone to give false witness against an opponent, we all recognize that the false witnessing is morally wrong even though we may understand why the false witness might be made. When a corporation secretly manipulates the exhaust emission readings for its diesel engines, we don’t need to consult any external institution or check with prevalent social practices to decide that it is wrong. Furthermore, we have, unfortunately, countless examples of where individuals, groups, businesses, and corporations have conformed to the “civic law” and, nonetheless, have done incredibly immoral and unjust acts. If all maxims that govern what *ought to be* are relative, how it is possible for us universally to experience shock at the injustices perpetrated by others (and ourselves)? There is, obviously, a hint here that there are universal, moral laws that govern our creative capacity to transform nature that are neither derived from physical laws nor are merely relative, social constructions.

Kant defines human freedom precisely in this respect: Freedom is not the capricious exercising of the will with respect to physical options. This he calls free will (*Willkür*) in the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of Judgment*.<sup>13</sup> Rather, freedom is the exercising of a non-

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Churchland, Patricia. *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Kant’s example is the situation where a ruthless ruler demands of a subject under threat of his own execution that he testify falsely against an individual that the subject doesn’t even know. See the *Critique of Practical Reason* §6 Remark AA V: 30.

<sup>13</sup> See the First Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* AA XX, 197-198. See, as well, his distinction between “choice” (*Willkür*) and “freedom” (*Wille*) in *The Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 213.

material causality that itself must *give, individually*, the rules (the moral laws) that govern it.<sup>14</sup> This is the etymological meaning of *autonomous*. Autonomous freedom is not freedom-from social institutions and traditions. Rather, it involves both a freedom-from and a freedom-for: freedom-from the causal determinations of the physical world; freedom-for the responsible, intentional, self-initiation of a unique causal sequence. Kant calls this “autonomous freedom” because it requires the ability to “give oneself the law” (Gk: *auto*- self; *nomos*-law).<sup>15</sup> By definition, this law cannot be imposed *externally* because, then, it would not be *autonomous* but *heteronomous*.

Nature and social institutions impose *heteronomous laws* upon us. The two sets (!) of “Ten Commandments” (Exodus 20 and 34) in the Judeo-Christian, Muslim scriptures are not moral laws but *heteronomous*, civic laws from two different social contexts (a nomadic and a sedentary community) that require that the individuals who adhere to them do so under the guidance of a “higher” moral law. The categorical, moral law above both nature and the civic law is nothing that can be taught or acquired externally! The moral law is part of a set of internal capacities made possible and necessary by *autonomous freedom* that must be cultivated by the individual her-/himself through personal effort.

These internal capacities of freedom and the moral law are not *natural* in the sense of arising out of or being reducible to physical phenomena and laws. If they were to arise out of or be reducible to physical phenomena and laws then they would be the consequence of blind, mechanical processes, not *autonomous freedom*.

Admittedly, here is where the reader is tempted to conclude all too quickly that “such freedom and its moral laws are an illusion!” Yet, we must be careful that we don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater. To be sure, there is no proof (or disproof) of autonomous freedom. There is also no proof (or disproof) that there are laws of nature that apply at all times and all places – even if we limit “all times and all places” to our universe or acknowledge with string theory that there can be additional dimensions beyond the three dimensions we seem to actually experience in this universe.

Both freedom and its laws as well as nature and its laws are matters of causality (they explain our effects in our experience), *and causes are notoriously and perplexingly imperceptible to the senses, hence, incapable of proof/disproof in themselves* (as David Hume pointed out in the “Conclusion” to “Book I” of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, the key insight that raised Kant from his intellectual “slumber”<sup>16</sup>). We can point to the effects of causes and laws, but causes and the laws to which physical events conform are inaccessible to us. They are only indirectly experienced through their effects.

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<sup>14</sup> See the “Third Antinomy” in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, especially B 560 ff. References to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* are provided according to the convention of distinguishing between the “first edition” (A) and the “second edition” (B) followed by the page number.

<sup>15</sup> See the *Critique of Practical Reason* AA VI: 43-

<sup>16</sup> See *Prolegomena* AA III: 260, although he criticized Hume for never having considered that causal explanations are not derived from experience but are the condition of possibility for experience. *Ibid.*, AA III: 313

This is not a trivial insight. Our limitation to effects is what accounts for why we can come up with such contradictory *explanations* for “how something happened.” On the one hand, the animist can point to the capriciousness of events to claim that “obviously” spirits are what drive bodies to do things (e.g., the massive stone to roll down the hillside and hit the car killing its occupants). E.B. Tylor’s theory of animism in *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (1871) rests upon the following analogy:<sup>17</sup> I experience myself as capable of making my internal decisions and agency to *cause* my body to do things. I am unable to experience your internal self directly, but my observations of how you conduct yourself make it reasonable for me to conclude that you, too, have an imperceptible capacity to make internal decisions and initiate actions. Other animals appear to be able to do the same. Plants, as well, appear to respond to their environment. It is a small (some, of course would say huge) step to conclude that all physical bodies have an internal “spirit” (*animus*) that accounts for their “capricious behavior.” On the other hand, the natural scientist invokes invisible physical laws to account for the event, but s/he must remain silent in front of the question “Why did it happen?” – except to deny the validity of the question. We can submit ourselves to all kinds of therapies for cancer, but none of them can give more than a speculative answer to the question, “Why me?” Nature doesn’t allow for “Why me?” It can suggest answers for “how” but not “why me personally”

However, if we want to even hope to understand nature, we must assume that it is governed by a coherent, ordered system of physical laws (which, again, are not to be limited to mathematical “laws” but include statistical regularity and illumination through algorithmic functions). Were nature truly just a random aggregate of elements, then we would only experience chaos and could understand nothing.

The same can be said for our autonomous freedom. If human creative agency is not just a random aggregate of spontaneous confusion, it not only must be complementary to natural causality and its system of physical laws without which it can do nothing, but it is also necessary for us to approach our own autonomous causality as governed by a coherent, lawfully ordered system. The physical and moral, lawful systems are our best option for understanding our place in the order of things, but they require two eyes. Only with the discovery of the moral law is it possible for us to escape the loss or deterioration of the second eye.

How do we discern laws? Physical laws are most convincing when they can be expressed mathematically. When the law can be so expressed, it can be called a *determining judgment* because the phenomena have been “determined” to fall under this law. The thrill of scientific research, however, is not the mere repetition of determining judgment but the quest to identify the missing law for phenomena for which we do not yet possess a law. This process Kant calls *reflecting judgment*.<sup>18</sup> This seems quite straight-forward for physical phenomena because, at

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<sup>17</sup> See Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Culture*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871): 452.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Kant has his distinction between determining and reflecting judgment from Aristotle’s distinction between “being obedient to reason” and “exercising thought” in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, Revised ed., Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11. For Kant’s

least in principle if increasingly rarely done because of the expense, the phenomena can be duplicated under controlled conditions to test the validity of the law. Even here, then, there is ambiguity, not just statistically but with the applicability of the mathematical law. The question is even more pressing, then: How do we go about identifying the moral law for unique, unrepeatable circumstances if there is no list of “dos and don’ts” that we acquire from a social institution?

Yes, there is a major difference between physical laws and moral laws: physical laws are “hypothetical” whereas moral laws are “categorical.” This formulation is perhaps confusing because we tend to take the determining judgments of the physical sciences to give us the “categorical” laws that we all *must acknowledge*. Why are physical laws hypothetical?

A *hypothetical necessity* is one that is demanded by *given phenomena* if we are to understand and to act in conformity with the phenomena. The hypothetical is announced by an “if.” If I want to understand properly the falling apple, it is necessary for me to apply the law of gravity. The hypothetical nature of the imperative is not because it is tentative but, rather, because it is demanded by an external situation given in advance of our grasp of the necessity involved. If there was not this external situation (a falling apple), I would not ever encounter this necessity (the application of the law of gravity to the falling apple).

Physical laws that govern technical and pragmatic skills are *hypothetical necessities*. Were we not to experience a world of physical appearances, we would never encounter these necessary laws. Moral laws, on the contrary, are categorical not because something in the *external* world demands them of us but precisely because they come from us, *internally* as demanded by our own autonomous freedom. No physical causal sequence demands or can provide us with the moral law for that would be the elimination of the very conditions for a moral law (i.e., it would be the denial of *autonomous freedom*).

Because we are to a degree autonomously free, it is necessary that we employ moral principles to govern our creative agency if we are to properly exercise this causal power – as the system of laws that govern this extra-ordinary causality. Such internally necessary laws, therefore, are *categorical* in contrast to the technical necessities of physical laws in nature that are *hypothetical*. To be sure, as far as we have experienced, we would never encounter these necessary moral laws were we not to experience a world of physical appearances, but these moral laws are not derived from physical phenomena. If so, to repeat, then we would not be autonomously free but mechanical toys.

If moral laws are not given externally and demanded by hypothetical situations, how does one go about discerning a *categorical necessity*? When it comes to moral laws, we are clearly dealing with *reflecting judgments*. Whenever we act, we *give ourselves permission* to do so even if we don’t consciously reflect over the law that transforms the “can” of our action into an “ought.” In each circumstance in which we apply our creative, autonomous freedom to do things that nature cannot accomplish on its own, we are capable, though, of consciously searching out

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discussion of determining and reflecting judgment, see Section IV of the introduction to *The Critique of Judgement* (AA V, 179f.).

the appropriate moral law to govern our decision and action. There are no cookie-cutter lists of *determining judgments* that we can memorize in advance.

To be sure, Aristotle provides us with guidance for those maxims that are concerned with things in life of which we can have “more or less.” We can cultivate “habits” that approximate the “mean of excellence” for us with respect to those things (e.g., food, sport, wealth, etc.). These maxims are what Aristotle calls in the *Nicomachean Ethics* “moral virtue” (Bks II, III, and IV). As with *categorical* imperatives, moral virtue is nothing that can be learned from one’s social world because only the individual (e.g., as a consequence of metabolism, unique experience with illness, poverty, and challenges in her/his social context) can discern the “mean” appropriate for her-/himself. However, all such lists are determining and hypothetical judgments that are driven by one’s particular circumstances, not reflecting and categorical judgments of morality “above nature” and above “moral virtue.”

What gives us hope that we can discern a *categorical* law independent of all situations rather than a *merely hypothetical necessity*? Kant answers with his famous *categorical imperative*, which is not a singular but a list of criteria that require *reflecting judgment* rather than a particular list of laws/maxims that one can grasp in *determining judgment*. The three forms of the categorical imperative are found in Section II of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*,<sup>19</sup> and, when combined with the three maxims of the understanding (found in §40 of the *Critique of Judgment*<sup>20</sup>), they provide us with more than adequate criteria for split second evaluation of the moral law that we invoke to *give ourselves permission* to do something.

The first form of the categorical imperative does not say that our law/maxim must be provable as a universal law. Rather, it says that we should act on the basis of a moral law *that we would want to be universal, like a law of nature*. Such a self-expectation tests that one’s moral law is consistent with the universal capacities that make a moral law possible in the first place (e.g., autonomous freedom), that it is consistent with one’s other moral laws and complementary to the laws of physics, and that it checkmates self-interest (interest that is particular to me, not universal)<sup>21</sup> even though, as Kant points out at the very beginning of Section II of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, we can *never be certain that we are not acting on the basis of self-interest or desires*. However, we can know whether or not we are *merely acting on the basis of self-interest*.

The second form of the categorical imperative is a further check on mere self-interest and desires: I should not allow myself to be, or treat the other as, a mere means to an end but, rather, as an end in itself.

The third form of the categorical imperative acknowledges the dignity of all individuals because it requires that 3) we recognize that everyone possesses the rational capacity of autonomous freedom and, hence, is responsible for self-legislating moral laws for her-/himself.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV: 421, 429, 434.

<sup>20</sup> See the *Critique of Judgment* AA V: 293-294.

<sup>21</sup> See Julius Ebbinghaus, „Die Formeln des kategorischen Imperatives und die Ableitung inhaltlich bestimmter Pflichten“ in Ebbinghaus, *Gesammelte Aufsätze, Vorträge und Reden* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968): 140-160.

In other words, when it comes to our engagement with an “other”, we are to do so at the level of recognizing the other’s personal dignity, which makes her/him alone capable of understanding, acting, and assuming responsibility for her-/himself.

The three maxims of the understanding are 1) think for oneself; 2) think from the perspective of the other; and 3) be consistent with one’s highest capacity (i.e., autonomous freedom) as Kant had already insisted upon as early as 1775.<sup>22</sup>

Kant goes even further in his “Remark” at the end of § 44 of the “Doctrine of Virtue” in the *Metaphysics of Morals*,<sup>23</sup> though, to stress that we have a *duty to respect a person who in turn respects the two imperceptible lawful orders of nature and freedom*. As frequently as Kant is assumed to be and accused of being a racist (see “Was Kant a Racist?” under the category “Reflections” at <https://criticalidealism.org>), this “Remark” is an explicit denial of facile judging of the other on the basis of age, sex, genealogy, strengths or weaknesses, or status and prestige (i.e., judging the other on the basis of accidental particularities rather than the individuals possess and respect for her/his universal capacities).

Given these two lawful domains of nature and freedom, we are capable of recognizing that reason is concerned with more than gaining *pragmatic sovereignty* over some aspects of the physical world. We need “two eyes” if we are to understand our place in the world. In addition to learning to “see” by means of *theoretical* reason and its external, physical order, we must also learn to “see” by means of *practical* reason that is concerned with autonomous freedom and its internal, moral order. Both theoretical and practical reason require education, but in different ways.

It is education with respect to practical reason to which Kant refers when he speaks of the second eye missing for the monocular cyclops. The “grandeur of our understanding” is no blind embracing of an absolute, instrumental reason, and it is surely not the elevating of human reason into a position of pragmatic sovereignty over the world (much less God) that allows us to do with the world (and others) merely as we please because we can. Nonetheless, practical reason provides us with far, far more than merely social conventions or institutional rules for determining what we *ought* to do. At the same time, both theoretical and practical reason are profoundly limited precisely because both are confined within the limits of finite reason’s structure and *grounded by a wager*: a wager of lawful order that guides not only what we can but also what we ought to do.

The two lawful orders by no means constitute an ontological dualism.<sup>24</sup> In light of the fact that neither lawful order is given directly in the sensed phenomena to which it applies, both are experienced and grasped only internally, and they are united by a feeling: the feeling of respect and even awe for the two imperceptible and unprovable, lawful orders that we are able to combine into “*can and ought*.”

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<sup>22</sup> See *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 467; see, as well, AA VI: 402-403.

<sup>24</sup> One is also not referring to a dualism when it comes to the necessity of using two irreducible and irreconcilable theories (wave and particle theory) to account for our experience of light.

There is no claim here that these lawful orders *are humanity's invention*. No more than particular events can generate the universal, physical laws that govern *what is* can the particular individual generate the universal moral laws by which s/he can judge what she *ought to do*. Here we encounter a limit that Kant called the “Noumenon” or God as the ultimate source of both lawful orders. However, it is the grandeur of understanding that we can intellectually assume both systems of law for understanding “what is” and “what ought to be.” Any species in possession of such capacities possesses a clear indicator of what a member of the species should strive to achieve with all of her/his best effort.

The very dignity of the individual as well as the respect that is owed to each individual is grounded in this grandeur. Only the individual can exercise her/his understanding of the invisible causal orders of external and internal experience, only the individual can exercise her/his autonomous freedom for her-/himself, only the individual can self-impose a moral law to govern her/his creative efforts, and only the individual can assume for her-/himself the two imperceptible, lawful systems that are *necessary* for us to experience the world and to act appropriately.

Nonetheless, the individual does not decide and act in a vacuum, or as an isolated atomic entity. The conditions of understanding and agency require the givenness of the natural world and a social community. In his *Reflections on Anthropology* (Bruno Erdmann ed. [1882], # 674), Kant provides an answer to the question raised in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (AA VI, 100) about humanity: “... how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?” by employing 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 (by mutual interaction, not external coercion) all trees to grow toward the light.<sup>25</sup> The individual needs the encouragement and the availability of learning opportunities of the social order in order to exercise her/his autonomous, creative freedom properly and to provide a “culture” that supports one even when one acts contrary to one’s personal interest. Already in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766), Kant spoke of such a “great Republic” of human spirits.<sup>26</sup> It is the “culture of rearing” (*Zucht*) in contrast to, but actually required by, the mere “culture of skills” (*Geschichtlichkeit*).<sup>27</sup> ()

This *imperceptible republic* (one could also call it a commonwealth) not only encourages the moral effort of its members, but it is also charged with the task of the “culture of rearing” (*Zucht*) or cultivation of autodidactic self-discipline. This is by no means a call to bourgeois conformity, as Nietzsche would have us believe,<sup>28</sup> but a call to autonomous creativity. To be sure, Kant labels the moral law the *ratio cognoscendi* of morality because a moral law is the clear acknowledgment that there is a causality to which it applies, but autonomous freedom is the *ratio essendi* of moral agency (*Critique of Practical Reason* [AA V, 4\*]. Creativity trumps morality not to the neglect of moral laws but because without autonomous freedom there is no

<sup>25</sup> See, as well, in *On Pedagogy* AA IX: 448: “... a tree which stands in the middle of the forest grows straight towards the sun and air above it, because the trees next to it offer opposition.”

<sup>26</sup> *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* AA II: 340-341.

<sup>27</sup> *The Critique of Judgment* AA 5, 431-433.

<sup>28</sup> See Section 5 in the “Preface” to *Beyond Good and Evil* and Sections 10 and 11 of *The Antichrist*.

moral law. Conversely, where there is a moral law, one must necessarily presuppose *autonomous freedom*.

The “culture of rearing” (*Zucht*) is actually quite radical: It commits itself to providing the most comprehensive accessibility to creative resources for everyone (not just the elite) in the republic of freedom, from birth onwards. As a species that must acquire its understanding through the acquisition of symbol systems (not merely by animal instinct), fostering the environment for the exercise of creative, autonomous requires a commitment on the part of the individual to acquire symbol systems that further her/his creativity, but the “culture of rearing” places a serious obligation on the community or others generally to provide access to the necessary educational opportunity for the acquisition of those symbol systems. Once again, succinctly: *the goal of the republic of freedom is not conformity but creativity*.

As instructive as all three of our Greek stories are by enabling us to question merely empirical realism to value the *insight of pragmatic instrumental reason*, we can benefit from seeking the “Stone of the Wise” (*der Stein des Weisen*) that Kant tells us in *Moral Mrongovius* is no “thing” that we can acquire in the senses,<sup>29</sup> which, if we were only somehow able to find it “out there in the world,” would do something for us that we are, otherwise, incapable of doing for ourselves. Rather, *it is the insight available to all, not just to intellectuals, that empowers us to assume our place “in the order of things” through a “feeling” of respect for the physical and moral law that harnesses nature not only through a wager of “reasoned intention” but also through a wager for what morally “ought to be.”*

The Stone of the Wise is the gift of two eyes that each of us already possesses and both require “education.”

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<sup>29</sup> See *Moral Mrongovius* AA XXVII/II: 1428.

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