ABSTRACT. How can we understand human agency, and what does it mean to educate character? In this essay Klas Roth develops a Kantian notion, one that suggests we render ourselves efficacious and autonomous in education and elsewhere. This requires, among other things, that we are successful in bringing about the intended result through our actions and the means used, and that we act in accordance with and are motivated by the Categorical Imperative. It also requires that we are or strive to become virtuous and that we engage in moral reflection, and, furthermore, that actions are done for the sake of duty, that is, out of respect for the moral law. We accomplish such aims by developing our predispositions, namely the technical, the pragmatic, and the moral predisposition in a society. The extent to which we achieve this, Roth contends, demonstrates what we are prepared to make of ourselves.

INTRODUCTION

David Carr claims that Immanuel Kant defined autonomous moral agency in terms of “obedience to self-legislated general principles that are nonetheless independent of empirical evidence” and, further, that the moral relevance of emotion and character in Kant’s practical philosophy has a “top-down” quality and is “determined by reference to principles that are nevertheless logically independent of such psychological states and dispositions.” Carr also believes that the development of a “Kantian moral character is mainly a matter of conformity to the requirements of his categorical imperative, rather than — as for Aristotle — the development of a range of ratiocinative and desiderative sensibilities that are no less affective than cognitive.” In this essay, I contend, however, that such readings are misleading and do not give a fair account of Kant’s mature practical philosophy, nor do they capture the complexity and significance of it. I demonstrate here that the relation between predispositions and principles is more nuanced than Carr seems to believe, and that it is indeed a question of developing our sensibility to our different kinds of predispositions — affected by, among other things, different social and cultural conditions — through our conduct of thought.


Moreover, I show that the Kantian agent is not isolated and not conceived of as naturally asocial, atomistic, or individualistic, as claimed by Jean Rumsey. I argue instead, and more importantly, that Kant formulated valuable insights concerning how we can understand agency and what it can mean to educate character, insights that remain relevant for us today. In other words, my analysis in this essay shows that we can understand ourselves as rational beings that can be efficacious and autonomous, and that how we relate to the Categorical Imperative is neither merely “a matter of conformity” nor of “obedience,” but rather a question of whether we as human agents are motivated by it. I argue further that educating character suggests that we develop our predispositions, that is, the technical, the pragmatic, and the moral predisposition in society.

**Understanding Human Agency**

According to Kant, human agency is motivated by both an incentive and a principle — they work in pairs. Christine Korsgaard is quite explicit about this in her work. An incentive is, according to Korsgaard, an object and the features of it that make it appealing or attractive to you. It may be something that you actually perceive or something you think of that may satisfy your needs. It may also give you pleasure and interest you and awaken the use of your faculties. On the other hand, an incentive may be an object whose representation is neither appealing nor attractive to you — an object that you may not only consider or come to feel and think of as threatening, painful, or repulsive, but one that may also cause you to respond in different ways. Korsgaard sums this up as follows:

Strictly speaking incentives are … features of the represented object that make it, from some point of view, attractive or aversive. When we say that a person has an inclination for something, what we mean is that he is responding to the incentive that makes that thing attractive.

Korsgaard gives the example of dancing: “For instance, if dancing is pleasant, that means there is a natural incentive to dance, and if a person’s awareness of that

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An incentive is drawing him towards dancing, then we say that he has an inclination for dancing. An incentive, then, does not in itself cause an action. This is because of the reflective structure of our mind, and our will, according to Korsgaard. In other words, since we can be or become aware of what works as an incentive, distance ourselves from it, and reflect upon it as a (possible) reason to act, we can decide whether we should take it as a reason to act or not. This is a distinctive feature of human beings, according to Kant and Korsgaard, that is, that we can act based on reasons, and that we are able to conceptualize ends and act for the sake of achieving them.

But this is not all. Not only can we make ourselves aware of what functions as an incentive, and decide whether we should take it as a reason for taking a particular action, we also have to view the reason as part of a principle in order to understand our agency and how we constitute ourselves as human beings. For instance, say you want to become an artist. Then you can use this end as a reason for your action, and as part of a principle, namely I-will-do-act-A-for-the-sake-of-end-E — or, less formally, I will do whatever it takes to become an artist. This is the instrumental principle or, to use Kant’s term, the hypothetical principle.

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6. Ibid.
9. See Christine M. Korsgaard, “Acting for a Reason,” in *The Constitution of Agency*, 207–229. Here she discusses reasons as constituting part of a principle and as something a person can choose to act upon. Moreover, she also shows that “Aristotle’s view of the nature of action is the same as Kant’s,” namely that it has the structure of “to-do-this-act-for-the-sake-of-this-end” (Korsgaard “Acting for a Reason,” 218). See also Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), in particular book 6, for a discussion of the structure of action. Korsgaard continues, “The view that actions, acts-for-the-sake-of-ends, are both the objects of choice and the bearers of moral value sets Aristotle and Kant apart from many contemporary moral philosophers” (Korsgaard, “Acting for a Reason,” 219). What sets Aristotle and Kant apart, however, is, among other things, the understanding and value of contemplation. According to Korsgaard, “Contemplation, as Aristotle understands it, is not research or inquiry, but an activity that ensues on these: an activity that consists in understanding. We have understanding of something when we have grasped its essence — its nature, function, characteristic activity, and final purpose — and see how its other universal properties arise from its essence. The best objects of contemplation are God [the final purpose of the world] and the heavens. Aristotle also believes that what God does is to contemplate and that since God is the best thing, God must contemplate God. God is the activity of thinking on thinking and the aim of the contemplative life is to engage in this divine activity” (Korsgaard, “Aristotle and Kant on the Source of Value,” 229). Kant, on the other hand, did not think that contemplation has unconditional value. It is only good will that has unconditional value for Kant (see GMM, 4: 393). Korsgaard sums this up in the following way: “Contemplation in [Aristotle’s] sense is not strictly speaking possible on Kant’s view. For it involves a grasp of the teleological order of things and a participation in it through knowledge, through the theoretical faculty. But for Kant, scientific knowledge associated with this kind of understanding does not exist; teleological thinking is not knowledge, and such grounding as it has lies in practical religious faith and so in ethics. We cannot, through theoretical thinking, participate in the final purpose of the world. We can only do this in practice [according to Kant]” (Korsgaard, “Aristotle and Kant on the Source of Value,” 245).
imperative \((GMM, 4: 414)\); it requires that we take the means to our ends and act so that the end is achieved. This principle can be used not only to describe what people do — namely, that they use specific means and perform certain acts in order to achieve their end(s) — but also as a normative principle that motivates those concerned to act for the sake of achieving an end. However, since the ends and the means used in order to achieve certain ends vary among people, and since actions performed and actions that are possible to perform are different, the content of the principle varies. This is why the instrumental principle is called the hypothetical imperative: the content can vary when it comes to ends, means, and actions, as well as the purposes for achieving the ends, but not its form.

A second principle is the principle of prudence, which in broad terms says that we act for the sake of maximizing the satisfaction of a specific end, such as happiness, and that others can be used for the sake of achieving it \((GMM, 4: 415–416)\). It is different from the instrumental principle in that the instrumental principle is formal and the principle of prudence is substantial because it specifies the end in question. Stated differently, the instrumental principle does not tell us what our ends should be but basically says that we should take the means to some end and act accordingly; the principle of prudence, in contrast, specifies the end to be achieved.\(^{10}\) The principle of prudence can also be used to describe what people do and to motivate those concerned to achieve a specified end, such as happiness.

The third principle is the Categorical Imperative \((GMM, 4: 414)\).\(^{11}\) It is in the light of this principle that people constitute themselves as autonomous beings, according to Kant: “The will is thought as a capacity to determine itself to acting in conformity with the representation of certain laws. And such a capacity can be found only in rational beings” \((GMM, 4: 427)\). That is, it is only people as rational beings that can render themselves both efficacious and autonomous.\(^{12}\) It is, however, through the hypothetical imperative and the Categorical Imperative that we, according to Korsgaard, constitute ourselves as efficacious and autonomous beings, and not through the substantive principle, namely, the principle of prudence. The reason for this is that the cause of our action is or should be our reason — in particular, our will — and not necessarily

\(^{10}\) See Korsgaard, Self-Constitution, chap. 3, for a discussion on formal and substantive principles of reason.

\(^{11}\) For the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative, the principle of the formula of universal law, see \(GMM, 4: 421\); for the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, the humanity principle, see \(GMM, 4: 429\); and for the third formulation, namely the principle of autonomy, see \(GMM, 4: 432\).

\(^{12}\) See Korsgaard, Self-Constitution, especially chaps. 4 and 5, for a discussion on how the hypothetical imperative and Categorical Imperative serve to unify the will and constitute human beings as efficacious and autonomous.
some part of ourselves such as a desire or impulse of some sort. As Korsgaard observes,

Constitutive principles . . . are normative and descriptive at the same time. They are normative, because in performing the activities of which they are the principles, we are guided by them, and yet we can fail to conform to them. But they are also descriptive, because they describe the activities we perform when we are guided by them.

She continues,

To be an agent is to be, at once, autonomous and efficacious — it is to have effects on the world that are determined by yourself. By following the categorical imperative we render ourselves autonomous and by following the principle of instrumental reason, we render ourselves efficacious. So by following these principles we constitute ourselves as agents: that is, we take control of our movements.

We see then that our agency can be understood in different ways through the different principles. In other words, we can understand ourselves as rational beings that are or can be efficacious, that is, successful in bringing about intended results, but also as autonomous human beings, namely, as creatures with the capacity to take control of and direct our actions, and thus to make ourselves authors of our actions. But this is not all. As human beings, we can also, according to Kant and Korsgaard, determine ourselves as autonomous beings, that is, whether we ourselves, rather than external forces of some kind, are the cause of our action. As Korsgaard explains,

This means that in Kant’s theory autonomy is linked, on the one hand, to the very idea of action — that is, of self-determination — and, on the other hand, to thoughts about what we ought to do. According to Kant, then, to think thoughts about what you ought to do is at the same time to think thoughts about what you would do were you a fully self-determining being. And if it possible for us to act as we would act if we were fully self-determining beings, then we are, for practical purposes, fully self-determining beings. . . . The categorical imperative, on this view, is not just the principle of morality. It is also the constitutive principle of action.

This discussion suggests not only that we can give an account of our agency in different ways, but also that we have a choice as to how we determine ourselves through our actions, specifically as to the way we understand or come to understand ourselves and our agency through the suggested principles. It also suggests that making ourselves efficacious and autonomous, in education and elsewhere in a society, is work (sometimes hard work) and, further, that we constantly are or have to be engaged in making ourselves persons in this respect.

13. See Jane Fowler Morse, “Fostering Autonomy,” Educational Theory 47, no. 1 (1997): 31–50, for a discussion of Kant and how autonomy can be encouraged in education in relation to the Categorical Imperative. In this essay, however, I argue that even though human beings can render themselves efficacious and autonomous through the hypothetical imperative and the Categorical Imperative, this can only occur through the development of their different predispositions in a society.


15. Ibid., 13.

16. Ibid., 12.
and that we create the conditions needed for this.\textsuperscript{17} This fact is demonstrated not only by the way in which we actually choose to understand our agency in practice, but also through our actions and whether they are or can be understood to be in agreement with and motivated by any of the [formal] principles mentioned here, and whether we are the legislators of our actions. In other words, whether we make ourselves efficacious is demonstrated by whether we are efficient in producing the intended results; and whether we make ourselves autonomous is demonstrated, among other things, by whether we make ourselves the cause of our action.

My discussion in this section shows that Kant does not define autonomous moral agency in terms of “obedience to self-legislated principles” as Carr believes; it demonstrates rather that our will is the cause of our actions and the primary source of how we constitute our actions and make ourselves autonomous creatures, and, likewise, when it comes to the question of how we can relate to the Categorical Imperative, the issue is whether we are motivated by it. More precisely, a will, and in particular a good will, not only acts in accordance with and is motivated by the hypothetical imperative, but it also unifies its agency and renders itself both efficacious and autonomous. Moreover, it is a will that acts out of duty, that is, out of respect for the moral law. Furthermore, it is the will of a person characterized by moral strength and moral courage, one who constrains his or her actions, overcomes his or her obstacles, and thinks for him- or herself from the standpoint of the other and consistently. This is a person who renders his or her character efficacious and autonomous.

\textbf{The Ultimate Aim Is the Formation of Character\textsuperscript{18}}

Such a person, one whose character is not only efficacious but also autonomous, chooses to have “the moral law determine the will immediately.”\textsuperscript{19} By this, Kant meant that the moral law functions positively as well as negatively in the formation of character: it may humble our arrogance and weaken the


\textsuperscript{18} See Immanuel Kant, \textit{On Education} [1803], e-book (Online Library of Liberty, Liberty Fund, 2005), 45. Here Kant said, “Our ultimate aim is the formation of character.” See also G. Felicitas Munzel, \textit{Kant’s Conception of Moral Character} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), for a discussion of Kant and character formation. Munzel’s book is an important contribution to the discussion of a Kantian notion of character formation and education. In addition, see James Scott Johnston, “The Education of the Categorical Imperative,” \textit{Studies in Philosophy and Education} 25, no. 5 (2006): 385–401, for a discussion of character formation in relation to the Categorical Imperative and predispositions. Finally, see Peter Fitzsimons, “The ‘End’ of Kant-in-Himself: Nietzschean Difference,” \textit{Educational Philosophy and Theory} 39, no. 5 (2007): 568, where he says, “Kant’s ideas about the pragmatic aspects of man’s social development were not merely an afterthought to his metaphysical speculations. The parallel concern with the social and the moral realm [in, for example, his \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View}] suggests Kant was not bound solely in a one-dimensional world of unattainable reason.”

possibility of self-conceit, but it may also produce in us a sense of respect for the moral law. Kant maintained that “if something represented as a determining ground of our will humiliates us in our self-consciousness, it awakens respect for itself insofar as it is positive and a determining ground. Therefore the moral law is even subjectively a ground of respect.”

The moral law does more than determine our will so that we choose to reflect upon our motives for action, the ends we want to achieve, and the means we want to use in order to achieve our ends as efficiently as possible; it also creates a feeling of self-esteem or of inner worth and instills in us a respect for others and ourselves. Moreover, it is a part of our conscience, which holds our duty before us and functions as an “internal court,” producing a feeling of displeasure in ourselves when we realize that, in our actions, we deviate from the moral law [that is, that we do not act in accordance with it, nor are we motivated by it]. Conscience, therefore, is related to our moral predisposition and demands that we know ourselves, and in particular how we constitute ourselves as moral human beings. It demands that we come to “know [scrutinize, fathom]” ourselves in relation to the reasons and maxims upon which we act, and in particular when we make mistakes or err (TMM, 6: 441). Kant explained that

For while I can indeed be mistaken at times in my objective judgment as to whether something is a duty or not, I cannot be mistaken in my subjective judgment as to whether I have submitted it to my practical reason [here in its role as judge] for such a judgment; for if I could be mistaken in that, I would have made no practical judgment at all, and in that case there would be neither truth nor error. (TMM, 6: 401)

This suggests that we can be mistaken when it comes to our judgments, but not when it comes to our conscience; “an erring conscience is an absurdity,” according to Kant (TMM, 6: 401). It also suggests that Kant did not identify conscience with moral judgment but that he related it to the process of moral reflection and that he held it as our duty to engage in such a mode of communication. Conscience reminds us, according to Kant, not only of our duty to engage in moral reflection but also of our responsibility to acknowledge and respond to whether we actually do engage in such a mode of communication together with others in various situations. Hence, conscience can also “be defined as the moral faculty of judgment, passing judgment upon itself.” Allen Wood stresses this point when he says that the “duty to pass judgment on oneself in conscience is for Kant our most fundamental duty. Without fulfilling it, we cannot honestly represent

20. Ibid., 5: 73.
23. Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (1793), ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6: 186. This work will be cited in the text as RWB for all subsequent references.
Kant described the role of conscience as follows:

Conscience does not pass judgment upon actions as cases that stand under the law, for this is what reason does so far as it is subjectively practical. Rather, here reason judges itself, whether it has actually undertaken, with all diligence, that examination of actions (whether they are right or wrong), and it calls upon the human being himself to witness for or against himself whether this has taken place or not. (RWB, 6: 186)

This is why we have to think for ourselves, and not out of habit, and why sincerity both to others and ourselves is important and a fundamental ethical duty for Kant. It is also why communication is not only of vital importance to those concerned, but is also the very condition for how we constitute our understanding of each other and ourselves in practice, that is, for how we come to understand our agency and for how we act in accordance with and are motivated by the principles discussed previously, especially the Categorical Imperative. For example, it is in communication, according to Kant, that we demonstrate whether we show respect for the other and ourselves — and, in particular, for the moral law — and come to acknowledge ourselves as efficacious and autonomous human beings.

The function of our practical reason, then, is not limited merely to identifying possible goals to be achieved, to determining the means and motives for attaining those goals, or to making us as efficient as possible within given circumstances. It functions, as we have seen, to make us autonomous. The latter means that we are in principle capable of communicating freely both in a negative and in a positive sense; in other words, we are capable of making our own decisions and acting without interference from others, and we are also capable of inquiring, together with others, into the moral worth of maxims for actions. However, since in practice we are not necessarily free in every single situation to do this, making ourselves efficacious and autonomous — in education and elsewhere in a society — is a kind of work. Furthermore, while people often demonstrate a capacity and willingness to act in accordance with and to be motivated by the moral law, they in some cases demonstrate an incapacity or even an unwillingness to do so. Kant described this as follows:

Here, however, we are only talking of a propensity to genuine evil, i.e. moral evil, which, since it is only possible as the determination of a free power of choice and this power for its part can be judged good or evil only on the basis of its maxims, must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law. And, if it is legitimate to assume that this propensity belongs to the human being universally (and hence to the character of the species), the propensity will be called a natural propensity of the human being to evil. — We can further add that the will’s capacity or incapacity arising from this natural propensity to adopt or not to adopt the moral law in its maxims can be called the good or the evil heart. (RWB, 6: 29)

This suggests not only that it is a kind of work to render us efficacious and autonomous in education and elsewhere and to create the conditions needed for

It is also a challenge for us to choose what we are prepared to make of ourselves and then to realize our choices in education as well as elsewhere. That is, the decision whether we should choose to act upon and be motivated by the moral law, or whether we should give in to our natural propensity for evil and act upon nonmoral maxims, is a challenge. Those who choose not to make themselves autonomous, or who are not able to do so, make themselves heteronomous: they are affected by others or by impulses within themselves. Moreover, they are not necessarily aware of the reasons they act in the way they do, or do not try to come to know themselves and their reasons for acting, nor do they necessarily reflect upon the goals to be achieved, the means used to attain the goals, or the principles that may motivate them. Furthermore, they usually and uncritically allow their beliefs, values, and behavior to be shaped by others, and they are not necessarily sincere in communication.

The communication between heteronomous people is, according to Kant, not directly characterized by inquiries into the moral worth of maxims or by deliberations over the possibility for those concerned to participate in such inquiries. Instead, heteronomous people, on his view, generally more concerned with satisfying their sensuous inclinations and with systematically subordinating the moral law to the principle of self-love, which means that they choose to act upon their impulses or desires as reasons for their action without further reflection (RWB, 6: 32–39), and by using anything — including other people — to achieve their desired ends. Such people distort and pervert the possibilities for others and themselves to engage in self-reflective activities and to think for themselves; they also distort the possibilities for others and themselves to think from the standpoint of the other and to do so consistently. They instead foster greed and envy, encourage or at least do not discourage human beings’ natural inclination to vice, and stimulate a radically individualistic approach to social relations that is based on the idea of merely using each other for the sake of achieving certain desired ends.

It seems, then, that heteronomous people also encourage the cultivation of specific practical identities and stress the value of their functions within what some of us would call economic and administrative systems, which means that those concerned are used merely as means to some further end within such systems. If this is correct, they do not foster respect for the moral law, nor do they further the education of character in moral terms. Moreover, it seems that they do not necessarily promote reflective and critical inquiries into the legitimacy of judgments, but that they do, for example, emphasize the value and importance of having those concerned develop the technical and social skills needed through education and elsewhere so that they become usable for the sake of attaining the desired ends. If this is correct, then heteronomous people let others affect them so

25. For a discussion of the hard work involved in making oneself moral in a society, see, for example, Paul Guyer, “The Crooked Timber of Mankind,” in Kant’s Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 129–149.
that they act in accordance with and are motivated by the hypothetical imperative and the principle of self-love, and not by the moral law.

Now the formation of an autonomous, as opposed to a heteronomous, character requires a steadfast commitment to virtue and a mature conduct of thought (Denkungsart)\textsuperscript{26} and, further, that we as autonomous persons act from the Categorical Imperative. To form such a character, we must educate ourselves as rational beings, raise ourselves above our predisposition to animality, and strive in practice to unify our agency in moral terms. Such steadfastness and resolute conduct is, according to Kant, a duty we have to raise ourselves above our crude state of nature, to shift our predisposition to animality toward personality (\textit{RWB}, 6: 26–28). Such a duty entails exercising self-control and governing ourselves by the moral law; we cannot fulfill this duty by acting in accordance with and being motivated by mere instinct or inclination, nor by merely developing certain skills for the sake of achieving specific goals within particular administrative or economic systems or by simply coming to embrace the beliefs, values, and practices within a particular society. It requires instead the exercise of moral judgment, that is, the exercise of deliberating ends, means, and actions, as well as the moral worth of maxims, and considering whether all concerned are free and able to participate in such deliberations. Such practice of moral reflection shapes our moral attentiveness and responsiveness to each other and determines whether we make ourselves autonomous. It makes us aware of how we behave in communication: whether we invite each other to participate in moral reflection and whether we are respectful of each other as rational beings in such communication. It is, to use the words of G. Felicitas Munzel, "the concrete manifestation of reason in the world" and requires that people take responsibility for collectively acting in such a way that they strive to achieve the aim of educating themselves to be efficacious and autonomous in practice.\textsuperscript{27} Such a character is, Kant asserted, the "distinguishing mark of the human being as a rational being endowed with freedom," and the individual's efforts to achieve it "indicates what he is prepared to make of himself."\textsuperscript{28} This achievement requires that we as human beings develop our predispositions in and through education and elsewhere in a society, and it may be properly called a form of art. It is to this that we will now turn.

The Development of Predispositions in Education

The education of character is not an easy task. In this section and the next, I aim to show that Carr's characterization of Kant's practical philosophy as "top-down" in nature is misleading and, further, that Kant's practical philosophy is more nuanced in relation to various different kinds of predispositions than Carr

\textsuperscript{26} For a discussion of the value and importance of \textit{Denkungsart} in terms of what one is prepared to make of oneself, see Munzel, \textit{Kant's Conception of Moral Character}, especially chap. 1.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{28} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View} (1798), ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1798/2006), 285. This work will be cited in the text as \textit{APP} for all subsequent references.
seems to believe. Moreover, I argue that it is incorrect to claim, as Jean Rumsey
has, that the Kantian “agent is isolated; that is, the agent is conceived of as
naturally asocial, atomistic, individualistic,” and that Kant’s theory of human
nature fails “to account for the social dimension of human beings.”29 Instead,
I follow Pauline Kleingeld in showing that a Kantian notion of agency means that
human beings have to develop their “predispositions for the use of reason” in
the context of a society, and that they have to take the social, cultural, and political
dimensions of their lives into account in order to develop their predispositions.30

In brief, the argument runs as follows: Since we as human beings have a
predisposition to animality — a technical, pragmatic, and a moral predisposition,
Kant maintained [APP, 321–333] — we cannot merely preserve ourselves or our
species (the predisposition to animality). Furthermore, we cannot simply cultivate
the skills needed for “manipulating things . . . , consequently suited for the use
of reason” [APP, 323] (the technical predisposition). Finally, we cannot “become
civilized through culture, particularly through the cultivation of social qualities,
and the natural tendency of [our] species in social relations to come out of the
crudity of mere personal force and to become well-mannered” [APP, 323] (the
pragmatic predisposition). According to Kant, we also have to make ourselves
moral, that is, develop our moral capacity (the moral predisposition). In other
words, we as human beings should not merely cultivate the skills necessary to
preserve our interests and ourselves and use others as means for such aims, nor
should we simply pass on specific values, norms of action, or certain kinds of
knowledge through education. We also have to take responsibility for educating
ourselves as moral beings, that is, strive for moral perfection. However, we
must do more than strive to perfect ourselves in moral terms; we must also
strive for perfection in terms of social and technical skills. Specifically, we must
make ourselves both efficacious and autonomous. However, as Kant said, such
“achievement is difficult because one cannot expect to reach the goal by the free
agreement of individuals, but only by a progressive organization of citizens of the
earth into and toward the species as a system that is cosmopolitically united”
[APP, 333].

It is difficult and a challenge for us to preserve ourselves as individuals and
as a species because, on the one hand, we have to develop the necessary skills
and pass on the perfected capacities from one generation to another through
education, and, on the other hand, we have to determine the form of social
interactions (legal and moral) that will make it possible for us to strive for self-
perfection. It is a challenge for us not only because we as human beings have
to develop our skills and social abilities [namely, our technical and pragmatic
predispositions] continuously, through education and by other means, but also
because we have to struggle against our innate propensity for evil and strive

to develop our moral capacity (that is, our predisposition to morality) through education and by other means. An education that accepts such a challenge, setting as its aim the achievement of self-perfection through continuously developing the technical and pragmatic predisposition and the moral predisposition, renders us efficacious and autonomous. It strives to develop more than just specific skills and our ability to pass on or communicate certain habits, traditions, practices, values, norms of action, and knowledge from one generation to another; it aims also to cultivate our own moral predisposition. Education is therefore one of the greatest and most difficult problems to which we can devote ourselves, according to Kant.\footnote{Kant, \textit{On Education}, 15.}

Such an education cannot be individualistic or atomistic or asocial, nor can it be understood as having a "top-down" character. It has to focus on developing human beings’ predispositions in a society; it is a learning process, which means that all those concerned must both "appropriate the skills and knowledge acquired by previous generations\footnote{Kleingeld, "Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development," 66.} and also develop their moral capacity as human beings. Kate Moran explains this as follows:

At all stages of education, then, Kant is concerned that we shape in children certain dispositional traits and ways of thinking that will make moral choice and moral motivation more likely as these children mature into fully developed rational agents. With this observation, we can begin to see just how incomplete any purely individualistic and "formalised" account of Kantian ethics is. Developing a moral disposition is, for Kant, both a crucial component of working toward a kind of ethical community, and it is a project that requires a great deal of social cooperation.\footnote{Kate A. Moran, "Can Kant Have an Account of Moral Education?" \textit{Journal of Philosophy of Education} 43, no. 4 (2009): 483.}

It is a challenge for us to develop and sustain such an education for several reasons. First, it has to relate continuously to human beings’ different predispositions and make sure that there is a balance in the development of them. If education concentrated only on the predisposition to animality, for example, it would perhaps focus on disciplining those concerned, but not necessarily on making them efficient in achieving their goals in the environment or on encouraging the use of each other for the sake of attaining certain goals. Moreover, it would most likely not focus on developing their moral predisposition either — that is, on making them autonomous. If, on the other hand, education focused on developing the technical predisposition to a greater degree than the predisposition to animality or the pragmatic and moral predisposition, it would most likely make those concerned not only socially and morally incompetent but perhaps even pervert them and lead them to "the bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness (in relation to other human beings)" \textit{(RWB, 6: 27)}. Alternatively, if education focused on developing the pragmatic predisposition over the predisposition to animality or the technical and moral predispositions, it would most likely make those concerned less efficient in manipulating their environment and using it for their own interests; it would also almost certainly make them less

\textbf{31.} Kant, \textit{On Education}, 15.
autonomous. Finally, an education focused on developing the moral predisposition over the predisposition to animality or the technical and pragmatic predisposition would most likely prevent those concerned from making themselves skilled in manipulating things in their environment or developing their social skills; hence they would be unable to use each other skillfully for their own interests. By the same token, education cannot focus on developing a combination of only the predisposition to animality and the technical and pragmatic predisposition because to do so would make individuals less autonomous and more vulnerable to being used for some desired ends, even if it were simultaneously to make those concerned disciplined, technically and socially skillful, and perhaps efficient in achieving some desired ends. It seems, then, that education has to concern itself with developing the predispositions of human beings; specifically, education has to concern itself with disciplining those concerned, with developing their social and technical skills, and with creating the conditions that will enable those being educated to make themselves autonomous.

Second, such an education also has to concern itself with developing and acquiring new skills continuously [because, for example, the character of work constantly changes], and with developing the social skills and forms of government that make it possible for human beings to liberate their “will from the despotism of desires”34 and to set and achieve their ends entirely in accordance with the moral law together with each other. This is the highest end, which requires that the predisposition to morality be developed in education as well as elsewhere in society.

Third, such an education makes it possible for those concerned to strive for self-perfection, not only of the technical and pragmatic predisposition, but also of the predisposition to morality. It creates the conditions for making others and ourselves efficacious and autonomous; it serves not only to discipline our natural inclinations and to limit the use of skills or people merely for the sake of achieving certain desired ends within, among other things, specific administrative or economic systems, but also to educate those concerned not merely “for the present, but for a possibly improved condition of man in the future; that is in a manner which is adapted to the idea of humanity and the whole destiny of man.”35

Fourth, such an education increases the freedom of human beings and makes it possible for those concerned to act not merely upon evil maxims, but upon maxims that have moral worth. It does not subordinate the moral law to the inclinations, fears, or desires of any individual or group of individuals, nor does it freely subvert the moral law in the interest of specific groups of people, whether ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, or religious. Moreover, it does not necessarily foster or stimulate human beings’ vices, such as the desire to “win


preference over others and subject their wills to our own”; nor does it necessarily stimulate “the illusion of self-conceit, the deceptive belief that we deserve these privileges.” Instead, an education that has the perfection of human beings as its final end renders individuals efficacious and autonomous and strives to educate them not only to develop their technical and social skills but also as moral subjects. According to Wood, “the vocation of morality is to transform humanity into a harmonious community of free rational beings, a realm of ends whose members live together freely according to a consciously self-devised plan.”

Achieving this end is something that we have to make our duty; that is, it is something we should respect and strive to attain. As already noted, however, this is not an easy or unproblematic task; it is a constant challenge and struggle for us. The extent to which we are able to achieve this end demonstrates what we are prepared to make of ourselves. As Kant explained,

> When it is said that it is in itself a duty for a human being to make his end the perfection belonging to a human being as such (properly speaking, to humanity), this perfection must be put in what can result from his deeds, not in mere gifts for which he must be indebted to nature; for otherwise it would not be a duty. This duty can therefore consist only in cultivating one’s faculties (or natural predispositions), the highest of which is understanding, the faculty of concepts and so too of those concepts that have to do with duty. At the same time this duty includes the cultivation of one’s will (moral cast of mind), so as to satisfy all the requirements of duty. [TMM, 6: 387]

He continued, “A human being has a duty to carry the cultivation of his will up to the purest virtuous disposition, in which the law becomes also the incentive to his actions that conform with duty and he obeys the law from duty. This disposition is inner morally practical perfection” [TMM, 6: 387].

As we have seen, such duty demands that we human beings raise ourselves from the crude state of our nature and move toward not only the cultivation of our technical and pragmatic predispositions but also the education of our predisposition to morality. However, since the moral law only can prescribe “the maxim of actions, not actions themselves . . . it leaves a playroom [latitudo] for free choice in following [complying with] the law, that is, that the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action” [TMM, 6: 390]. This is one of the reasons why the art of thinking [Denkungsart] has to be developed: it is not merely because reason and the art of thinking allow us to identify reasons for our actions and their role in principles, but also because they enable us to distinguish different principles and to specify the ones with which we act in accordance and by which we are motivated. Apart from this, we can identify actions, evaluate whether they comply with the maxims for our actions, and assess whether maxims have moral worth. And since the moral law does not

37. Ibid., 339.
38. Ibid., 344.
prescribe actions, it leaves it to individuals to determine how they should act in order to comply with the maxims that have moral worth.

There is, for example, no single way in which we can fulfill the duty to ourselves — that is, strive for self-perfection and maintain our self-respect and the conditions for it — when it comes to our predisposition to animality, the technical or pragmatic predisposition, or the predisposition to morality. There is not even a single way in which we can be dutiful to others: we cannot identify just one single act that would demonstrate our love of others, or show how we can benefit or be helpful to others. Nor can we identify just one single act that would express our respect for the other, an act that would help the other to maintain his or her self-respect.

We see, then, that the art of thinking, which includes the idea of thinking for oneself, from the viewpoint of the other and consistently, is not only a challenge for those concerned but is also a very difficult art to achieve, develop, and maintain. We also see, to use the words of Allen Wood, that “there is nothing ahistorical about Kantian ethics. It has a historically situated understanding of itself, and is addressed to the specific cultural needs of its own age.”\textsuperscript{39} Kantian ethics requires, among other things, an openness of mind, that we restrict ourselves and our inclination to act on nonmoral incentives, that we respect the moral law not only within ourselves but also in others, and that we continuously strive to develop our ability to form judgments and refine our sensibility to our various different kinds of predispositions; it also requires that we be receptive to alternative interpretations of acts and the extent to which they are, or can be seen to be, in agreement with a suggested maxim. However, excellence in the art of thinking (or wisdom, as Kant put it), that is, “the idea of a practical use of reason that conforms perfectly with the law, is no doubt too much to demand of human beings. But also, not even the slightest degree of wisdom can be poured into a man by others; rather he must bring it forth from himself”\textsuperscript{40} (\textit{APP}, 200). Even though it may be a demanding quest for people and is something that has to be accomplished together, the idea of a practical use of reason is not, or so it seems, an impossibility.

\textbf{The Challenge of Establishing and Maintaining Character Through Education}

Now establishing and maintaining character through education (within the context of a society) reflects more than the procurement of human moral character; it also reflects the idea of making ourselves efficacious beings, or human beings capable of bringing about the intended results. Moreover, it mirrors the indispensability of exercising our reason and deliberative capacities as well as the “courage to use [our] own understanding” in actual communication with others.\textsuperscript{40} Such courage manifests itself in critique, that is, as a fully fledged use of

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 336. For a discussion concerning a Kantian notion of moral development and the idea that it can take place only within a society, see also Chris W. Surprenant, “Cultivating Virtue: Moral Progress and the Kantian State,” Kantian Review 12 (2006): 90–112.

reason in actual communication or, put differently, as an inclusive and mutually shared reflective and critical mode of communication among those concerned. This suggests that rendering ourselves autonomous means more than simply acting from principles and demonstrating resolute conduct; even people with an evil character can do this — in other words, even people with an evil character can demonstrate strength of will in the performance of acts that are in accordance with, and perhaps even motivated, by evil maxims. Rendering ourselves autonomous requires having a character that demonstrates good will, namely, a will that acts in accordance with and is motivated by the moral law and that does not neglect predispositions. Such a notion of character reflects the notion of autonomy as the governance of conduct through reason as well as the critical use of reason. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant said that

> Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings, and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. Now there is nothing so important because of its utility, nothing so holy, that it may be exempted from this searching review and inspection, which knows no respect for persons. The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his *veto*, without holding back.41

Such a critique and use of reason manifests itself, according to Kant, as the public and not the private use of reason.42 He continued that without the critique of reason as the true court of justice,

> reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through *war*. The critique, on the contrary, which derives all decisions from the ground-rules of its own constitution, whose authority no one can doubt, grants us the peace of a state of law, in which we should not conduct our controversy except by *due process*. What brings the quarrel in the state of nature to an end is a *victory*, of which both sides boast, although for the most part there follows only an uncertain peace, arranged by an authority in the middle; but in the state of law it is the *verdict*, which, since it goes to the origin of the controversies themselves, must secure a perpetual peace.43

The public use of reason calls for freedom from institutional constraints, which hinder autonomous rational activities, and challenges ecclesiastical authorities, which replace respect for the moral law with the acquisition of dogmas and superstitions. It reinforces for Kant the value and importance of reasoned freedom as well as the radical task of thinking not only for yourself but also from the standpoint of the other and consistently as seen from a distance; it encourages the human will to transcend borders of different kinds, in particular those that hinder rational inquiry into the moral worth of maxims such as those that are or may be associated with our different kinds of local, regional, or national identities. Such use of reason cannot be private; it can only be public. The reason for this is

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42. Kant, “An Answer to the Question,” 37.
that, according to Kant, the private use of reason is directed at a limited group of people with the aim of bringing about the intended result, while the public use of reason addresses the making of autonomous people, of releasing them from their self-imposed immaturity. This self-imposed immaturity is, then, not something for “any single individual, to work himself out of,” but is something that has to be achieved by people together through the public use of reason in the making of themselves as efficacious and autonomous. This reinforces my contention that Kant did not, as Rumsey claims, take “the isolated self-seeker as his model.”

The rendering of ourselves as efficacious and autonomous is, therefore, a call for “attentiveness to human dispositions, which often show themselves under many shapes,” for learning not only from direct observations of people around us but also from “world history, biographies, even plays and novels” (APP, 121). It is also a call for a reform in our thinking, for the courage to use our own reason publicly, and for respecting the moral law and being motivated by it so that we do not give in to heteronomous ways of living in a society. Stated differently, making ourselves efficacious and autonomous is a call for cultivating, civilizing, and moralizing ourselves as human beings, and this is, according to Kant, a duty we have to ourselves:

Now here we have a duty sui generis, not of human beings toward human beings but of the human race toward itself. For every species of rational beings is objectively — in the idea of reason — destined to a common end, namely the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all. But, since this highest moral good will not be brought about solely through the striving of one individual person for his own moral perfection but requires rather a union of such persons into a whole toward that very end, [that is] toward a system of well-disposed human beings in which, and through the unity of which alone, the highest moral good can come to pass, yet the idea of such a whole, as a universal republic based on the laws of virtue, differs entirely from all moral laws [which concern what we know to reside within our power], for it is the idea of working toward a whole, of which we cannot know whether as a whole it is also in our power. (RWB, 6: 97–98)

This end — the end of an ethical commonwealth or the kingdom of ends as an ideal — and in particular our actions aimed at attaining it reflect the necessity of transforming both the legal-political order and education in a society; it also reflects the necessity of transforming human beings — an ongoing process — which includes the reshaping of social, political, and cultural conditions so that these

44. Kant, “An Answer to the Question,” 35.
46. See Barbara Herman, “A Cosmopolitan Kingdom of Ends,” in Moral Literacy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 51–78. Herman provides a valuable discussion on different notions of the “Kingdom of Ends”; particularly illuminating is her argument for the idea that the “kingdom of ends is an ideal because it is [perhaps improbably] hard even to imagine the full import of the requirement to regard ourselves and one another as co-legislating members of a moral order: potential members, as I would put it, of a community of moral judgment. If the homogeneity of values is not a human goal, then the idea of a kingdom of ends marks a permanent practical vocation” [Herman, “A Cosmopolitan Kingdom of Ends,” 78]. See also Andrews Reath, “Legislating for a Realm of Ends: The Social Dimension of Autonomy,” in Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006): 173–195. Here Reath discusses the notion of “Realm [Kingdom] of Ends,” and the social dimension of autonomy.
conditions do not prevent people from increasing their freedom, sustaining the development of their skills (both technical and social), and engaging in the public use of reason (that is, participating in moral reflection in the public sphere among those concerned). It makes a claim upon us as moral human beings, is a call for our attentiveness to our moral predisposition, and is also the acknowledgment of and responsiveness to our moral predisposition. It is an idea of moral perfectionism with no fixed or predetermined ends, which functions as an ethical injunction for those concerned to strive to transform not only the society and the culture within it, but also themselves and others. It includes the idea of the use of public reason as a call for freedom from anything that prevents the rendering of ourselves as both efficacious and autonomous human beings; it also includes the idea of acknowledging and being responsive to each other as moral creatures, with a capacity not only to be aware of what works as an incentive but also to reflect upon it as a possible reason for our actions and to inquire into how we render ourselves and our agency in practice (that is, whether we constitute ourselves as efficacious and autonomous or not).

My analysis here demonstrates that the characterization of Kant’s practical philosophy as “top-down” in character does not capture the complexity and significance of his mature practical philosophy and, further, that Kant’s account of the relation between predispositions and principles is more nuanced and developed than Carr’s account suggests. In addition, my account shows that in Kant’s formulation the development of character is not merely “a matter of conformity to the requirements of [the] categorical imperative”; moreover, Kant did not define autonomy narrowly in terms of obedience to the Categorical Imperative, but rather in terms of the will (in particular, good will), respect for the moral law, its motivational force, and moral strength.

Additionally, my examination in this essay emphasizes the fact that since self-consciousness and the reflective structure of our mind differentiates us from other animal beings, and since we are ourselves the source of our dignity and responsible for how we make ourselves — that is, constitute ourselves as human beings in the world — we are challenged to educate ourselves and the younger generations, and in particular to establish and maintain education so that the full development of the human predispositions culminates in moral agency. It also makes clear that there is no single way in which this can be achieved in practice: there is not only one kind of act that makes it possible for us to develop the technical or the pragmatic predispositions, nor is there just one way in which we could act so that we develop our moral predisposition. There are many. Furthermore, this account shows that individuals cannot achieve the end described previously alone or in isolation; nor can groups of individuals — whether ethnic, religious, social, cultural, political, or linguistic — achieve this end on their own. It can only be achieved by the human race in their ongoing struggle over time and through education within a society, which means that succeeding generations of individuals and groups of individuals have to educate themselves over and over again, not only as efficacious but also as autonomous human beings, in order for them to achieve their final end.