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Reading by the light of a burning phoenix: an inquiry into faith, deliverance, and despair within humankind's paradoxical suspension between the conditional and the unconditional in the work of Immanuel Kant and Hermann Hesse

Patrick James McCauley
University of Iowa

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READING BY THE LIGHT OF A BURNING PHOENIX:
AN INQUIRY INTO FAITH, DELIVERANCE, AND DESPAIR WITHIN
HUMANKIND'S PARADOXICAL SUSPENSION BETWEEN THE
CONDITIONAL AND THE UNCONDITIONAL IN THE WORK OF
IMMANUEL KANT AND HERMANN HESSE

by

Patrick James McCauley

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Religious Studies in
the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2006

Thesis Supervisor: Professor David Klemm

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a new interpretation of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. This interpretation is grounded on Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy and is centered on a discussion and analysis of an inescapable paradox which is fundamental to the human condition. I argue that our rational capacity exposes us to an unconditional and insuperable moral demand. However, we have only ever a finite material capacity to offer in response to this autonomous command. It is our fate, therefore, to impose conditions on our own unconditional imperative, that is, to exist as a self-evident contradiction. Since it is possible to escape neither the conditioned nor the unconditioned pole, we must eventually despair of the possibility of moral sufficiency.

I argue that *Steppenwolf* is an aesthetic articulation of and response to this radical and tragic disparity within the structure of the human being. The first of four chapters focuses on Kant's moral philosophy and offers a philosophical foundation for the discussion of this disparity. I investigate the most basic structures of freedom, autonomy and responsibility in an effort to reveal and acknowledge this inherent human contradiction. The second chapter locates my position within the tradition of *Steppenwolf* interpretation. My own interpretation of *Steppenwolf* follows. By means of Hesse's non-fictional writings, I situate some of the novel's ambiguities within the larger context of Hesse's written thought. I argue that *Steppenwolf* chronicles one man's resisted progression toward the despairing acknowledgment of his own moral inadequacy. I also argue that *Steppenwolf* offers an intimation of deliverance, but only in the form of willing and anonymous self-sacrifice in the name of the impossible ideal.

The final chapter considers a fundamental three stage moral development described by both Kant and Hesse. The progression from one stage to the next seems rationally impossible. However, stage progression can be accomplished by means of enabling aesthetic and symbolic experiences. By means of this analysis I explain why the immortal

can appear in the temporal realm only in the unconditional and self-abandoning submission of the finite to self-evident, yet impossible, practical commands.

Abstract Approved: _____
Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date

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May 2006

Thesis Supervisor: Professor David Klemm

Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Patrick James McCauley

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religious Studies at the May 2006 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

David Klemm, Thesis Supervisor

Diana Cates

Kenneth Kuntz

David Jasper

Sarah Buss

For Kathryn

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.
- CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1956.
- CJ *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987
- GBG *The Glass Bead Game*, trans. T. Ziolkowski; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York. 1969
- Gr *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. J. W. Ellington, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981
- IWG *If the War Goes On . . . :Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. R. Manheim; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York. 1971
- MB *My Belief: Essays on Life and Art*, trans. D.Lindley; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York. 1974
- MM *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. M. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- PP *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. T. Humphrey, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.
- REL *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson, New York: Harper & Row, 1960
- S *Steppenwolf*, Owl Books, Henry Holt and Co., New York. 1990

INTRODUCTION

What is the human condition? During my time in English Literature departments, I heard the expression often used with confidence and with respect. The greatest works were often considered great as a result of their ability express the human condition. Shakespeare can be seen as suggesting that the individual is usually the real source of his or her own misery. Conrad seems to suggest that our own heart of darkness resides just below our civilized persona, ever willing to emerge chaotic. To what or by what are we humans conditioned? What are the limitations to which we are submitted? Blaise Pascal addresses this issue directly.

For in fact what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything. Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hopelessly hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; He is equally incapable of seeing the nothing from which he was made and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up.

Unity joined to infinity adds nothing to it, no more than one foot to an infinite measure. The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God, so our justice before divine justice.

What will he do then, but perceive the appearances of the middle things, in an eternal despair . . . This is our true state; this is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance . . . This is our natural condition, and yet . . . we burn with desire for solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses.

Let us therefore not look for certainty and stability . . . ¹

So, Pascal finds that we are bound between the finite and the infinite. He also suggests that we are probably incapable of rescinding our pursuit of either solid ground or our construction of towers to the Infinite. Neither can we give up nor succeed which leaves us "in an eternal despair" among the mere "appearances of the middle things."

I believe that both Immanuel Kant and Hermann Hesse are centrally concerned with humankind's paradoxical and insurmountable suspension between the finite and the infinite. It is my contention that they, like Pascal, felt that it is this irresolvable

¹ pp. 27-9, 83, Pascal, B., *Harvard Classics 48, Thoughts and Minor Works*, trans. Trotter, W. F. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910

contradiction that grounds the human condition and the human experience. Humans are conditioned by a paradox, abandoned into an antinomy, and left to make meaning where the possibility of meaning seems to languish.

As my title suggests I will also be discussing the possibility of a deliverance from this condition. It is my contention that both Kant and Hesse point the way to such a deliverance from what can seem to be the inescapable. However, it is critical that I emphasize at the very outset that progress to this deliverance is asymptotic. This means this progression unavoidably includes an inescapably infinite abyss by means of which any deliverance is possible. This deliverance is not of the vicarious type.

My main concern here will be a literary interpretation of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. Hesse's main character, Harry Haller, is historically situated in Germany between the world wars. He is haunted by the realization that his greatest literary and political efforts were as nothing in the face of the First World War. This acknowledged impotence is offset against the absolute need to do something in regards to the approach of the Second World War. I will argue that Hesse's character mirrors the progression of Hesse himself during this time period. I will also argue however, that Hesse is using this specific historical setting to articulate an universal human fate, a fate as inevitable and at least as resisted as that of Œdipus. My interpretation depends on an understanding of Harry's progression as one who is without actual alternatives. It is crucial that Hesse's depiction of the human condition that is expressed in *Steppenwolf* be received by the reader as a depiction of fate. In order to achieve this, I will rely heavily on Immanuel Kant's argument for this very inevitability. In short, Kant will provide the formal description of and argument for the dynamic that is expressed poetically in Hesse's novel. Under the sway of this interpretation, we can avoid the empty temptation to hope for alternative outcomes with regard to Harry. Harry's is a fated fatal flaw and I will look to Kant to buttress this assertion. Hesse's own references to Kant help legitimate the connection between to two writers on this issue.

Therefore, I will begin this project with an extended discussion of Kant's moral theory. It will be my intention in this chapter to reveal that Kant's moral theory depicts the very contradiction highlighted by Pascal. I will argue that Kant felt that his contentions regarding reason and its commands were, for the most part, unavoidable. He also felt that these forms of thought were the rationally necessary context of all human thought and experience. I will also argue Kant was aware of the fact that the categorical imperative makes an infinite demand of a finite agent. Kant was aware of the fact that for limited human beings, the moral law was both inevitable and obviously impossible. I can neither rebel against the legitimacy of the moral law's demands nor hope to fulfill them. This is the asymptotic abyss that both Kant and Hesse felt is inherent to all moral progression in the human agent. There can be no serious development that does not eventually arrive at despair, which is the only honest homage that the finite can pay the infinite. I will argue that deliverance must include this despair.

So, while the first chapter will provide a philosophical framework for understanding Hesse's novel, the second chapter will be an extended analysis and interpretation of Hesse's work in light of that framework. In other words, the first chapter will provide a description of the general structure and the second chapter will delve into an artistic expression of one individual's specific experience of this general structure. Hesse will help us understand what it is like to live through the very challenges that Kant presents philosophically. In other words, I will treat *Steppenwolf* as Hesse's masterful artistic attempt to provide Kant's moral philosophy (as he understood it) a legitimate extended example.

This will be followed by a final chapter dedicated to offering a discussion of the possibility of a redemption from the finite/infinite paradox discussed in the previous two. Here I will focus on the progressive aspect of Kant's and Hesse's conception of development. I will describe and defend a three stage ethical development inherent in the work of both of writers. I will also discuss the aesthetic experiences of the Beautiful and

the Sublime as necessary enabling symbols that occur at the thresholds between stages. I will argue that it is by means of these symbols that progression from one stage to the next becomes possible. It will conclude with an assertion that deliverance takes the form of the Christ or the Phoenix in that one individuality must descend into the abyss never to return in order to make possible a legitimate redemption. That of me which adheres to the limited must become as zero in the company of that of me which is not limited. The particular must collapse in divine awe into the absolute even while I remain simultaneously both. I will argue that the novel *Steppenwolf* is itself the transcendence hoped for by the character Harry Haller.

CHAPTER I
THE INEVITABILITY OF DESPAIR: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE
PARADOX BETWEEN THE FINITE AND THE INFINITE INHERENT
TO KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

This first chapter amounts to an extended analysis of Kant's moral philosophy. The concern of this chapter involves an interpretation of Kant's moral work as a depiction of the necessary and unavoidable rational context inherent in all possible human thinking and experience. Although the main focus of the chapter is on the radical disparity of the finite and the infinite and the implications that has for human despair as fated, we will approach this target by means of considering the nature of Kant's work on practical reason at its most basic or fundamental level. The chapter will be divided into seven parts. We will begin with a discussion of Kant's proclivity to discuss unwitnessable structures inherent in all human experience, both theoretical and practical. This will initiate a discussion of the definition of freedom as Kant described it, which will then bring us to a discussion of the difficulties involved in proving even the possibility of such a freedom. The third section will analyze the phenomenological experience of certainty regarding the reality of my responsibility, and then drive toward a disclosure of this certainty as the originating impetus for any discussion of practical reason at all. The fourth part will connect responsibility to the category of causality and its requirement for consistency in all law giving within the context of reason. This will reveal the ground of the categorical imperative.

The fifth part will address the absolute dissimilarity of the ideal and the real regarding the apparent problem of applying of purely formal rules to material conditions. This will allow us to examine the grounds of our acceptance of experience (and our decisions within experience) as real. The sixth part will explore the connection of formal rules to the ground of significance and prioritization within experience. This will lead us to a discussion of the rationally necessary implications of the ground of my own self respect as well as the often procrastinated and progressing acceptance of these implications. The seventh and final section will consider the effects that an admittedly infinite unconditional

demand must have on any pretensions maintained by one wielding a merely and undeniably finite capacity. This will allow us a discussion of a destined despair of any legitimate moral sufficiency, which will lead us to a consideration of this profound humiliation as the rationally inevitable phoenix-formed threshold of any possible human moral maturation. This analysis is offered so as to provide the philosophical ground for the interpretation of Hesse's *Steppenwolf* that follows in the succeeding chapters.

The Unwitnessable Architecture Within Which Human Thinking and Experience Occur

When a student first encounters Kant's philosophy, it is common to find his work complex and daunting. For some Kant's material can appear completely opaque. Part of this is admittedly due to the nature of Kant's writing style. However, it is also the case that Kant's philosophy about the nature of experience flies in the face of some of our own basic presumptions. Most of us first come to Kant's writing with some deeply held (even subconscious) basic assumptions about the nature of reality and our perception of it. Since some of Kant's most fundamental assertions run counter to our own most basic assumptions, a kind of cognitive dissonance can, and often does, occur. So, when we find Kant's work difficult it may not necessarily be as a result of Kant's style. We may be finding it difficult because, while we are reading his work, we are trying to maintain the very assumptions that Kant is trying to convince us to question or abandon. In this way we may be trying to force Kant's philosophy to fit within the presumptions we bring with us to the text.

Take for example our perception of reality. As children (and perhaps as adults as well) most of us assumed that things actually existed as they appeared to us. The fundamental insight of Kant's "Copernican revolution" was that there is a difference between things as they are in themselves and things as we witness them through our senses. In fact, this insight is the insight that solves the apparently irresolvable contradictions of his antinomies of pure reason, both theoretical and practical. In order to make the case for the truth of this difference, Kant could not rely on experience alone.

Since it was experience itself that he was considering, experience itself could not supply all the information necessary to understand it. In other words, we cannot, through experience itself, come to an understanding of how experience is possible. At least that is what Kant contends. Regardless of whether or not he was right, it remains true that his intention was to go behind and beneath the structure of experience itself, to go to its necessary conditions. His "Transcendental Aesthetic" of theoretical reason goes into remarkable detail regarding the procedures that undergird experience which are themselves unwitnessable. He argues that these unwitnessable processes are necessary for any experience at all.

In other words, much of what Kant describes there amounts to what might be called architectural drawings revealing the structure behind the walls and under the floors of experience. Let me offer an example. When we walk into a building, there is much that is not seen that nonetheless remains necessary for the building's structural integrity. Most of those who use such a building never need be concerned with the details of the building's structure. Kant's discussion of experience is analogous to this. There is a structure that makes experience possible, and even so, those who experience things need not be aware of that structure to have experiences. Therefore, much of Kant's first *Critique* is made up of a discussion, description and defense of this unseeable structure which makes experience possible. It is complicated and at times very hard to grasp. One is almost forced to ask why Kant decided to go through the production of this material and why his reader should read it. The reason, Kant argues, is so as to protect us from the human tendency "to run riot in the transcendent."² In other words, he decided to try to lay out the blueprints of experience itself to make sure he and we understood the legitimate bounds of possible experience. He wanted to be able to know when he or anyone was unadvisedly stepping into a discussion of a topic that is beyond possible experience, that is, beyond possible

² CPrR p. 59

knowledge. He was trying to help us avoid the embarrassment of claiming to know that which it is impossible to know.

However, it is not the purpose of this paper to defend his argument of the rationally necessary structures and processes of experience. I highlight them only to show that it is Kant's philosophical technique to describe the necessary under girding structures of the topics he is trying to discuss. As I mentioned earlier, it is not possible to show or reveal these structures, which include what he calls the categories, to the reader in experience. We cannot go out and watch a scientific experiment which reveals them for our senses. The categories are philosophical concepts that, while actual and necessary, are also merely thinkable, not perceivable. To put it mildly, Kant's philosophy is, for this reason, hard to comprehend for the first-time reader. As I mentioned earlier, an understanding of his ideas, regardless of whether or not I will eventually find them persuasive, involves a certain amount of overthrowing of very common presumptions. To put it another way, his ideas are counter-intuitive for many at first. By this I mean that most of us have a tendency to assume that my perception of a thing is a perception of the thing as it is in itself, and yet Kant wants me to question my certainty of that judgment, that assumption. For most of us, seeing is believing, but Kant wants us to make sure if that is in fact true.

Most of us naturally assume an absolute objectivity of observation, at least when it involves simple object identification, for example. We ask Kant, why wouldn't the object that I see be the way I see it to be? He responds, because you have supplied the experience with certain subjective conditions which are necessary so as to make the experience possible for you. Time, for example, is one of these subjective conditions. While I have the tendency to naturally assume that time is objective, that is, that time is a characteristic of the reality into which I find myself thrown, Kant tries to help me see the possibility that time may actually be a subjective condition of my ability to see anything at all. Kant argues that I make things temporal in order to see them. It is from me that time comes. I do not do this intentionally or even consciously. It all happens quite without the help or

awareness of my consciousness in a manner analogous to the functioning of my liver which also performs complex maneuvers without my conscious help.

Basically, Kant asks his reader to re-understand certain basic elements of perceived reality, both subjective and objective. An understanding of Kant's ideas concerning experienced reality requires a serious overthrow of many beliefs so deeply held that, for most of us, these beliefs had been taken as self evidently certain and beyond possible doubt. His ideas are not really so difficult to grasp. (Basically, he claims that we shape pure sense data into a form that we can grasp.) However, this material is so challenging to master for many of us at least partly because these ideas fly in the face of our deeply held assumptions regarding reality. While Kant's system is admittedly complex and intricate, I contend that the certainty we have granted to our presumptions, presumptions which Kant requires us to question, largely contributes to the difficulty often encountered regarding Kant's work.

Newton's laws of physics can have a similar effect on those endeavoring to learn them for the first time. While Newton argued that bodies in motion tend to stay in motion, few of us come to his work with that idea among our naturally formed assumptions concerning the physical world. Most of us have observed that anything in motion eventually slows down and stops. It is common to assume therefore, that slowing is a natural tendency or law of things in motion. Nonetheless, Newton asks us to see that it is an irrevocable law of physics that bodies in motion tend to stay in motion. We have to break down some of our basic assumptions about motion in general to even begin to be able to grasp what he was trying to explain to us. However, it is only by doing so that we can come to understand that with every case of slowing motion, there must be a counteracting force present. If I perform this questioning, I can come to discover say, the presence of friction in a wagon wheel. It is through such questioning that I can begin to take steps to alleviate it.

So, we must see Kant as a philosopher whose technique is to inquire about the unseen yet necessary structures behind human experience and thought. These ideas are complex and often fly in the face of some of our most basic assumptions.

However, the questioning of basic assumptions rarely comes without something of a price. For example, if Kant's philosophy is convincing for you, you must come to grips with the fact that direct physical experience of an infinite God in any form is irrevocably impossible. For those persuaded by Kant, the traditional proofs for the existence of God lose their credibility. The concept of mysticism, therefore, becomes something that often must undergo a radical change in interpretation. Because we are aware on some level of the price that often comes with the serious questioning of beliefs or assumptions, we often resist embarking on such questioning without really being aware of our own significant resistance. It is often my own unrecognized reluctance to even consider such a reorganization of my world view that hampers my investigation of any work that submits my deeply held assumptions to radical questioning. This leads to my main point. It is my contention that Kant's second *Critique*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, involves as serious a revolution of thought as does his first *Critique*. Any valid understanding of it is only possible if the radical and far reaching implications of its premises are entertained in good faith by the reader.

Kant's second *Critique* requires an understanding of the human individual as counter-intuitive and assumption-challenging as the first *Critique* required of my understanding of reality. The second *Critique* is commonly considered to be one concerning morality and is included and categorized as such in philosophy and ethics anthologies. While morality is one of the central concerns in this work, the topic of morality itself does not exhaust the work's range. After all, if morality were its only concern, it would probably have been titled "Critique of Rational Morality" or "Morality Within the Bounds of Reason Alone." It is my contention here that Kant's second *Critique* is centrally concerned with a reunderstanding of the basic structure of human individuality

and the grounds upon which this understanding is based. While the first *Critique* was concerned with the necessary structure through which we experience reality, the second *Critique* is involved in the necessary structure through which significance and priority are established and experienced.

If it were possible to experience reality exclusively through the faculties of speculative reason, that is, without the effects of the faculty of practical reason, that experience would be empty with regard to meaning or significance in general. Regarding meaning, experience as it is made possible through an interaction between the understanding and sensibility, that is, experience as it is described in the majority of the first *Critique* is, in and of itself, empty. The powers that make experience in general possible are both mute and deaf regarding the establishment and the judgment of meaning. The structures that make experience possible cannot establish a hierarchy of concerns. The structures that make possible an effective interaction between the faculties of intuition and the understanding cannot of themselves establish relative or absolute significance. The faculties responsible for the presentation of experiences to consciousness cannot establish whether any particular experiences matter or not. Meaning is not in their jurisdiction. A hierarchy of concerns and questions of significance can only be the subject matter of practical, not theoretical reason.

In what follows I will try to elucidate how meaning is donated to the experiences which are made possible through the categories, and that this granting of meaning happens in a manner that is just as unavoidable and inevitable as was the manner by which experiences were said to be made possible in the first *Critique*. In other words, I intend to show that for Kant the rational structures of thinking described in the second *Critique* are not optional, but intrinsic to rational human thought itself. He holds that any belief or contention that these structures and their implications can be ignored can only be an indefensible flight of fancy. He holds that the dictates of pure practical reason are self-evident and neither rationally deniable nor escapable. He also holds that this undeniability

cannot in any way be undermined by anything experiential or cultural at all. These fundamental assertions of pure practical reason are ineluctably immune to cultural manipulation. He holds that no accusation of bias of any kind is possible regarding practical reason and its implications. Whether he is right or not is another question, but we must first find out what he meant if we are to challenge him. So we must endeavor to understand him in good faith even if eventually to question these ideas, because there is, of course, no point to questioning Kant regarding ideas he did not in fact hold.

Defining Freedom as Kant Understood It and the Problems of Proving Its Possibility

When discussing Kant's second *Critique*, it is very common to use the categorical imperative as the starting point. While it is understandable why many have chosen this for that role, it seems very dangerous to do so. If Kant's categorical imperative is to be understood at all in the way Kant intended it to be understood, its validity must be understood as self-evidently undeniable. If we start not with the ground of the categorical imperative but with the categorical imperative itself, we risk the tendency of seeing it as a choice among other possible options, and not something that is rationally unquestionable which leaves the possibility for no other options. There is also the possibility of incorrectly interpreting it as in some way a heteronomous dictation grounded on Kant's own claims of authority. Kant's actual intentions might legitimately be understood as the direct opposite of these ideas. An example would be: Kant's morality is discussed in an introductory level philosophy text book as being "so strict that it is hard for most people to accept."³ The person who holds this opinion does so on the grounds that either there are other forms of ethical decision-making to choose from, (a quick look at the table of contents in any ethics text book will offer the reader at least two others) or because they feel that the difficulty of the demand itself legitimates its rejection in favor of something more within the range of

³ See Robert C. Solomon's *Introducing Philosophy, A Text with Integrated Readings*, 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 p. 539

See also Stephen Engstrom, "Conditioned Autonomy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (1988) pp. 435-53

human performance. However, if the categorical imperative is as rationally certain as Kant seems to claim it is, neither of these positions can be defended as convincing and overturning rebuttals.

So where does the categorical imperative come from? Kant writes, "[c]onsistency is the highest obligation of a philosopher."⁴ What he seems to mean is that serious philosophers need to avoid rational contradictions in their assertions.⁵ He feels it is the responsibility of a philosopher to both avoid personal philosophical hypocrisy and be on the look-out for it in general. To put it simply, the categorical imperative will have its source here. Understood in its most formal sense, the categorical imperative demands nothing other than simple rational consistency. There is, however, a bit of a journey from here to ethical behavior in the real world, at least conceptually.

One phrase that Kant infrequently uses for the categorical imperative is "universal legislative form."⁶ He writes, "the mere form of a law can be thought only by reason."⁷ In other words, the word law, at least in this usage, refers to a purely rational concept. He acknowledges that there are natural laws, but it was one of the main points of his first *Critique* to argue that the appearance of laws in nature are due at least in part if not completely to the categories through which we experience nature. We organize our understanding of nature according to the rational concept, law.⁸ In fact, Kant refers to

⁴ CPrR p. 23

⁵ See R. J. Sullivan's *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* p. 152 "when Kant discusses application of the Categorical Imperative, he calls it the 'principle of contradiction' and 'mere formal condition' of 'thoroughgoing consistency.' (See, e.g., *Gr.* 55/422, 57/424; *M.M.* 396.) Violations of that norm result in a contradiction (*Widerspruch*) within the will . . . Kant therefore, clearly considered the Categorical Imperative to be a practical application of the logical and purely formal principle of consistency or, alternatively, the principle of noncontradiction"

⁶ CPrR p. 28

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28

⁸ See Henry E. Allison's *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p. 210 "what must be determined is a set of rules governing the pursuit of any end at all . . . such a set of rules is precisely what Kant understands by a unconditional practical law. Consequently, it must either be denied that the maxims of transcendently free agents can be justified at all (which amounts to a denial of rationality) or it must be acknowledged that conformity to such a law is the criterion governing the selection of maxims"

natural law as a "typic" of law in that it reflects the pure rational concept of law as universally valid.⁹ Now, in daily life we use the word laws to describe often very common precepts given by an actual political legislature to actual people under rule of a government. While Kant also uses the word in this way at times, (quite frequently in fact with his *Metaphysics of Morals*), he is not using it in quite this way in this instance, for human made laws can turn out to be wrong, unjust or inconsistent. The rational laws he is discussing here can by definition never be wrong. Laws can only be universally applicable in order to legitimately be laws. That is what makes them laws of reason.

Here he is referring to law as a purely formal concept of reason. When it is the case that something must occur or necessarily must be, the fact that it must do so is referred to as a law. To include the word necessary before the word law would be to misunderstand it in that the definition already includes necessity in Kant's usage. Also included in the definition is the idea that this necessity is universal. If a law is not universal, it cannot legitimately be called a law for Kant. The fact that one cannot equal two follows from the law of rational non-contradiction. That one does not equal two is a truth according to that law. The truth of that statement is therefore universal and necessary. The rational form of law always includes an assumption and an implication of universality and necessity. For a rule to be a law it must be equally true everywhere and always to every rational entity. To call something a law in this way is to claim that law's universality and necessity.

It is important not to misinterpret this idea. This is a purely formal, contentless concept. While it may be possible to debate whether the word law is a fitting word for this concept, that is not what is at issue here. I am simply presenting the fact that Kant used the word law to refer to this purely rational idea of reason. Henceforth I will be using the word in this way as well. Let me point out that the word law can often imply suggestions

⁹ CPrR p. 71

See also H. J. Paton's discussion in his *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* 5th ed. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1965. p. 160

of authorities and duties in a reader's mind. However, at this point we have not yet traveled past the basic rational form of law itself. We are only here discussing the concept of lawfulness itself, not any single instance of law giving. In other words, when someone says, "it is always the case that ...", he or she might also have said, "it is a law that ..." It is this most basic understanding of the word that I am trying to highlight here. To put it another way, there is no room here for disagreement yet. Even if there is nothing that can refer to this concept, that is, even if there are no actual laws, it remains possible to think the concept itself, which is all that is here being asserted. A law, according to Kant's usage, is something whose necessity applies universally. When the equal sign is used in mathematics, it represents a claim by the user that the values on either side of the sign are equal and that this claim is a universal and necessary claim. This use is an appeal to a law, in Kant's usage. A law, as it is understood here, cannot ever be rationally applied in arbitrary, random or even discretionary ways. Law, of itself, is a purely rational idea whose definition necessarily asserts the formal structure of universally consistent application.¹⁰

So, from Kant's point of view, the formal concept of law implies simple formal universality. The categorical imperative will never, on its own, imply more than this simple universal validity as a formal, that is, purely logical concept.¹¹ From Kant's point of view, there can be no being, no authority who sends down this demand for universal consistency for all claims of reason. It is reason as reason that demands it. We must be careful not to anthropomorphize this. There is not a voice in my head (or from on high) who is the voice of some character called reason (even though it can feel like there is). According to Kant, all thinking always already happens in a rational context. All thinking

¹⁰ See PP p. 67 for Kant the word 'law' implies "the mere form of universal lawfulness."

¹¹ See Gr. pp. 421-2/30 "the law contains no condition to restrict it, there remains nothing but the universality of a law as such with which the maxim of the action should conform. This conformity alone is properly what is represented as necessary by the imperative." See Also J. B. Schneewind, "Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy." *Cambridge Companion to Kant* p. 320 "The moral law, Kant holds, can only be the form of lawfulness itself, because nothing is left once all content has been rejected."

presupposes reason as the structure or form of thinking.¹² Therefore, all rational creatures unavoidably carry the concept of law as implying the validity of necessarily universal application. When Kant introduces this concept, he is not as yet asserting anything other than that concept. He is simply asking us to recognize and consider the idea of necessarily and universally valid application as one might for example, recognize and consider the equal sign in mathematics. As equality is a concept of reason, so is law.

It is, of course, often the case that people can behave and think irrationally. Neither I nor Kant are asserting that this is not true. I can quite easily make mathematical errors, for example, and this seems to reveal the possibility that the human mind is not always purely rational. Kant admits that there is all manner of irrationality among humans. By asserting that all thinking happens within a rational structure, he is not arguing against irrationality in its many forms and occasions. He is simply arguing that we, as rational cannot help but agree with rational statements as long as we understand them and that all of our thinking happens in a structural demand for rational consistency (I will defer the discussion of insanity). Thinking itself must follow rational patterns and structures if it is to be thinking. Please do not mistake Kant's assertion on this point as one that asserts a duty to avoid the apparent chaos or craziness of say, a party, a random whim or even an intuitive artistic insight. At this point he is talking about the most basic structures of thinking itself, not something so complex as decisions in consciousness concerning explainable behavior. Also, we should not mistake his assertion here to be one that hides bias behind a claim of rationality. While it can be argued that he may be guilty of that in a other parts of his philosophy, we must notice here that he is not asserting anything beyond that idea that our thinking is such that a discipline such as math makes sense to us and its pronouncements of truth are accepted by us as ineluctable.¹³ All thinking happens within a basic rational architecture.¹⁴

¹²See Onora O'Neill "Vindicating Reason" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1992. p. 290 "We are in no position to live without reason."

¹³ See Allison P. 117

A rational demand cannot be heteronomous. In other words, no one, real or imagined, can impose a demand of reason on me. A rational demand cannot be external to me. If you convince me through argumentation based on reason, it is reason itself within my own mind that is the actual convincer, it is reason which demands my assent. To be rational is to be subject to the demands of reason as irrefutable. Very simply, it is I who grants the legitimacy to rational claims, and I do so on the grounds of the rational self-evidence of their validity. But, as rational I cannot choose to do other wise, and I am not free to do otherwise. Claims of pure reason neither require nor can have any authority beyond their own self-evidence. If a claim does not reveal itself to be self-evident to me, it cannot, at least for me, be a rational claim, and as such cannot be rationally convincing for me. If I am inescapably rational, as Kant claims rational creatures are, then while I can verbally claim that I do not find a rationally valid claim valid, I can never actually believe or persuade myself regarding that claim, no matter what. As rational it is not among my possible choices to inwardly affirm as rational something that I am aware is not rational.

Reason cannot be coerced by means of power. No amount of power can make a rational certainty uncertain.¹⁵ Power, even infinite power, can have no effect on the validity of rational claims.¹⁶ So, once a claim reveals itself to me as rationally certain, no

¹⁴ See Sullivan, pp. 152-5 Where he cites Kant's discussion of the purely analytical aspect of the categorical imperative. He cites Kant's call for the "merely formal condition" of "thorough going consistency" in the *Groundwork* and in *Metaphysics of Morals*. Sullivan sees Kant as claiming that we are such that "[n]o self-contradicting claim can be true" for us. He goes on to say "For analytic claims, then, the principle of noncontradiction determines in a purely a priori way both what cannot be true and what must be true . . . the logical principle of noncontradiction underlies all coherent thinking . . . That this is itself an analytically true claim can be shown by the fact that denying it generates an absurdity . . . the ultimate law of *pure* practical rationality is and must be the practical application of the purely formal principle of noncontradiction."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7 "The virtuous person is one who does what he *ought*, not because it is in his interest to do so but because it is what he ought to do, his *duty*. In this tradition the emphasis is on the purity of our intentions, not the effective use of power in the world." Sullivan is making the important point that this focus on intention effectively abstracts from power as a consideration of moral worth. Reason operates in indifference to power.

¹⁶ See PP p. 127 "The divinity who protects the boundaries of morality does not yield to Jupiter (the protector of power)"

amount of political (or even divine) power nor any power of my personal will can have an effect on my acceptance of the validity of that claim. You can try to force me by threat of torture to deny the validity of the claim $1=1$. I can even seriously desire the ability not to accept it, but it is not within my power to inwardly deny validity to this claim. It will remain true for me regardless of how much I may want it not to be. Those who are rational are absolutely subject to the valid claims of reason. It is on the inevitable self-evidence of reason that the moral imperative is grounded.

If I can be identified with my own rational nature, then it is I who gives myself rational demands. A law of reason, is therefore a self-imposed law.¹⁷ So if there is a rational law, a law that is, as rational, necessarily self-imposed, and if law is by definition a claim of universally legitimate application, then the concept of law itself makes me demand of myself that all laws must by definition be universally applicable and demandable. This is not an outrageous claim. It is simply a demand I make of myself for rational consistency. I cannot help but require rational consistency. Claims of law need to be consistent for all legitimate occasions regarding the application of that law. In other words, I cannot sometimes claim that one equals one and then at other times claim that it is not and expect to believe myself. Even though I can say this, I cannot actually believe it. Reason itself, or I, myself, as rational, demands a consistent application of the law of non-contradiction if it is to be thought of as a law in the purely rational sense.¹⁸

This is where the first formulation of the categorical imperative comes from. Kant writes, "Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason: So act that the maxim of your will

¹⁷ Sullivan p. 48 "A moral agent is an agent who can act autonomously, that is, as a law unto himself or herself, on the basis of objective maxims given by his or [her] reason alone. (See, e.g., *Gr.* 98/447) and p. 157 "But it is our own reason that formulates and mandates the Law of Autonomy, and therefore, Kant argues, we cannot evade the prescriptivity of the law, no matter how inclined we may be to try to do so. The moral law is still present in our rational awareness, and it inevitably condemns us if we violate it."

¹⁸ See O'Neill p. 299 "Kant . . . view[ed] autonomy, that is the principle of not submitting to groundless authorities, as the core of reason . . . autonomy is all there is to reason. To reason is just to think in a lawlike (principled) way, without deference to any alien "law." It avoids both "lawlessness" (i.e. nonlawlikeness) and "submission" (i.e., to "alien" authorities)"

could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law."¹⁹ This formulation is already slightly less formal than his earlier "universal legislative form," in that the former assumes rational acting subjects. It is crucial to notice here that these early formulations of the categorical imperative derive directly from the rational concept of law itself. Legislative form must be universal for it to be legislative form. It is my own reason and its concept of law that introduces the concept of necessarily universal consistency. Law, like all purely rational ideas, cannot be gleaned from experience.²⁰ As mentioned earlier even the experience of law in nature is, according to Kant, a reflection of the fact that my own reason subjects all experience to a necessary lawful order. The order I see in nature is a reflection of my own need for it as a requirement for experience itself.

The point here is that the concept law, like the concept of infinity, cannot be witnessed in the world and can have its source only in reason. When we witness what seem to us to be "laws" of nature, we must acknowledge that our experience of nature itself can only offer predictions of probability, not universally certain predictability (which can only come from reason). If law is a rational idea, its validity is undeniable for me as rational creature. So, I, as rational, demand of myself that anything that takes the form of a law must be by definition universalizable if I am to claim rational consistency and defensibility. If I apply something as if it were a law and yet recognize that it is not universalizable in application, then I, myself as rational reject all possible judgment of that application as rationally consistent. I must judge such an application as self-evidently contradictory (and I cannot help but do so). This is still very formal. It is analogous to not being able to give inward assent to the claim $1=2$. Another way of putting this is that law is a rational idea that is included as part of the necessary rational context

¹⁹ CPrR p. 30

²⁰ See Sullivan p. 88 where he asserts that we can find in practical reason "what experience cannot give us."

through which all thinking itself occurs. At least as Kant sees it, the legislative form is as rationally formal as are mathematical expressions.

While Kant here goes beyond the point that we have just reached, much of what has just been said can be found in the following passage.

Since the *mere form of the a law* can be thought only through reason and is consequently not an object of the senses and therefore does not belong among appearances, the conception of this form as the determining ground of the will is distinct from all determining grounds of events in nature according to the law of causality, for these grounds themselves must be appearances. Now, as no determining ground of the will except the *universal legislative form* can serve as a law for [the rational will], such a will must be conceived as wholly independent of the natural law of appearances in their mutual relations, i.e. the law of causality . . . Therefore, a will to which *only the legislative form* of the maxim can serve as a law is free (emphasis mine).²¹

There is much here regarding will and its possible independence from natural law that I have not yet addressed. Nonetheless, this citation offers textual assurance of Kant's thinking on law as a universal and formal concept.

I have focused attention on Kant's understanding of law because there can be no doubt that he saw law as the ground of the possibility of rational freedom (something of which this citation gives evidence), and because I find that law as a purely rational concept is seldom discussed in reference to the grounding of Kant's morality.²² Kant felt that rational legislation must be a rationally necessary idea if freedom or responsibility of any

²¹ CPrR p. 28

²² See Paton p. 249. Paton relies on the discussion of the Third Antinomy and the need to seek the unconditioned for every conditioned as the ground for thinking freedom. He asserts that theoretical reason must think "the totality of conditions for every conditioned necessity, a totality which must itself be an unconditioned necessity, if there is to be any necessity at all. The conception of the moral law as unconditionally necessary is only a further example of the activity of reason . . . in conceiving . . . an unconditioned necessity." Paton seems to be asserting the requirement for an unconditioned moral law without really explaining why the moral law is the law that it is. If I understand Paton correctly, this leaves him susceptible to the possible conception of the moral law as an arbitrary absolute. This cannot be the case because the categorical imperative can only have one form. It is this that I am trying to emphasize.

See also Paton p. 211 "The concept of causality . . . implies the concept of law."

See also Allison pp. 201-49. Allison treats the discussion of the ground of freedom and the categorical imperative in much more detail. He gives serious attention the claim that Kant seems to have changed his mind or his strategy between the writing of the *Groundwork* and the writing of the second *Critique*. Allison emphasizes that it is not until the second *Critique* that Kant appeals to the "fact of reason" as the ground of his argument regarding freedom. While I am not sure that the two works cannot be coherently reconciled, it is important to acknowledge Kant's change in language and approach to the deduction of freedom.

kind are to be thinkable in the first place. Why is this so? It has to do with the category of causality.²³ Kant explains in the first *Critique* that all experienced reality is structured through rational forms he, after Aristotle, calls the categories. If Kant is right about this, existing human beings order and shape raw sense data through these forms in an unavoidable and necessary way. The fact that we order raw sense data through the categories is largely what differentiates things in themselves from things in experience, noumena from phenomena. This is because things in themselves as they are in themselves may not be subject to the forms of the categories while all objects of human experience are. We might also say that phenomenal existence is not thinkable for human beings except as structured by means of the categories.

One of the necessary structures or categories through which experience is witnessed is causality. For us, every effect must have a cause. Whether things are connected causally as they are in themselves is not knowable for us, but a causal chain of events is necessary for human experience. In other words, we cannot help but find that events are connected in an unavoidable causal chain. It may be impossible even to imagine a non-causal natural scenario. However, this very idea makes autonomous human agency very difficult to understand. In the natural order every effect necessarily has a preceding cause, and I seem to find myself as one of the things included in nature in general. As such, if I find myself subject to the natural necessity of cause and effect (regarding the laws of physics or biology, for example), how can I then imagine myself or my choices as not determined by that chain of events? If I am part of the natural chain of cause and effect, then it seems as if every one of my own actions must or at least might have a preceding natural cause. If that is true, it is hard to understand where freedom of decision comes into play. If humans are part of the natural causal chain, which experience seems to confirm,

²³ See CPrR p.57. "In the concept of will, however, the concept of causality is already contained; thus in that of a pure will [which is the same a pure practical reason] there is the concept of causality with freedom; i.e., of a causality not determinable according to natural laws and consequently not susceptible to any empirical intuition as proof. Nevertheless, it completely justifies its objective reality in the pure practical law a priori.

then how is it possible to think that I am not subject to this necessary chain. How are humans to be understood as free from the causal chain when nothing else in nature seems to be free in this way?

The simple answer is, we are not. Let me try to explain. If an individual squirrel's actions are determined by instinct, that is, if its actions are driven by predetermined biological motivations regarding the reaction to stimuli, the variety of his or her possible reactions to that stimuli cannot be regarded as freedom, at least not as Kant is using the word. Many people use the word freedom as a reference to one's ability to choose from among possible reactions to stimuli. For example, given the stimuli of natural physical hunger, I can think of myself as free to choose from an incredible variety of possible edible options as a reaction to and satisfaction of that stimuli. Kant's understanding of freedom involves not the variety of resultant final decisions from which I may choose but the possibility of a variety regarding the reasons for choosing. He is discussing not a freedom of material selection but a freedom regarding reasons for a choice.²⁴ Do I have the freedom to pick from among fundamentally different grounds or principles for action? Are there really a variety of different grounds for possible action? Kant reacts to the problem of the possibility of human freedom as it is confronted by the seeming inescapability of natural causal determinism.

For the sake of debate, Kant entertains the possibility that all of our human actions are directly determined by natural causality. At first glance such an assertion does not seem likely as a result of the fact that we often encounter a variety of people who seem to be motivated to action according to very divergent concerns and priorities. Regarding motivation, one person seems selfish while the next person seems to be empathetic. How is it possible to imagine that these two people have not in fact exercised their freedom to

²⁴ See Paton pp. 59-69 "a maxim is a particular kind of *principle*: it may be defined as a subjective principle of action. . . A subjective principle, in order to be such, must be acted upon: it is a subjective principle only if it is a principle on which we act. . . a subjective principle is a '*maxim*.' . . . it also differs from a motive in being more general than a motive; and this is why it is called a principle. . . My maxim is the principle which is in fact the determining ground of my action"

choose from among a vast variety of possible reasons for action. It is possible to imagine their motivations are similar if it turns out that both of these people were motivated to their actions by deeper more basic materialistic concerns. What may seem altruistic may actually be motivated by fears of abandonment, for example. Put simply, it is possible to imagine that hidden instinctual drives may ground much or all of human activity.²⁵

If this is possible, then the burden of proof lies with him or her who would argue that humans are not necessarily determined by these instinctual drives. It is Kant, then, who bears this burden. How do I really know that the feeling that I interpret as my love for my family is not in fact a genetically sourced and grounded feeling, established through evolutionary forces intent on increasing the odds of species survival through a clan strategy? How can I be sure that the feeling I identify as love is not, in fact, a feeling imposed upon my physical self by my own DNA for the purpose of increasing the survival success rate of that DNA? How would I be able to identify the difference between instinctually produced feelings and any other kind of feeling? What criterion could I use to be sure that my judgment regarding this distinction can be trusted? How would I be able to be sure of my own self-assessment? Is not any mere assertion of instinct-free motivation that is not accompanied by a strong defense dubious?²⁶ Even if I grant that it is unlikely that my interpretations of my feelings regarding my own family are faulty, certainty in this regard may yet be quite difficult to establish within myself. Given that which is at stake, it is certainty that I need. Mere probability cannot be sufficient. That is why the burden of

²⁵ See Allison p. 56 "the reality if practical freedom is not threatened by the possibility that reason in its legislative capacity ("in the actions through which it prescribes laws") might "itself again be determined by other influences"

²⁶ See CPR A803/B831 p. 634 "Whether reason is not, in the actions through which it prescribes laws, itself again determined by other influences, and whether that which, in relation to sensuous impulses, is entitled freedom, may not, in relation to higher and more remote operating causes be nature again, is a question which in the practical field does not concern us, since we are demanding of reason nothing but a *rule of conduct*" (CPrR p. 145)

See also Allison p. 56 "Kant is there claiming merely that it is necessary to appeal to the transcendental idea of freedom in order to conceive of our selves as rational (practically free) agents, not that we must actually be free in the transcendental sense in order to be free in the practical sense.

proof lies with he or she who would assert the possibility of non-instinctual human motivation.

To push the issue a little, can it not be seen as ignorant arrogance to simply assume the possibility of plurality regarding the motivation of my actions. Is it not fantastic conceit to assume honorable intentions in myself without being able to explain how such a thing is possible in the first place? If there is to be an alternative motivating principle to simple (though perhaps deeply hidden) material determinism, then what would that principle be? If selflessness is to be esteemed over selfishness, upon what ground would I make that assertion? Without certainty on this issue, how could claims of virtue or excellence survive accusations and suspicions of cultural bias or basic arbitrariness? Certainty regarding my own motivational integrity cannot be established by means of opinion, neither mine nor anyone else's. The mere possibility of hidden, unrecognized subconscious motivating principles seems to undermine all possibility of confidence regarding the purity of my intentions.²⁷

It is this very problem that confronted Kant as he endeavored to discuss morality. Kant did not begin with a discussion of good or bad actions, but with the subjective principles that ground actions, or what he called maxims. Kant argued that the moral status of an action can be determined, not directly through an assessment of the action or its outcome, but from the intention that gave rise to an action. Regarding moral status, Kant

²⁷ See Allison pp. 43, 59, 118, 176-7 "Kant explicitly asserts that since the intelligible character is inaccessible to us, we can never be certain whether, or to what extent, a given action is due to nature or freedom."

See also CPR A551/B579 note p. 475 "The real morality of actions, their merit or guilt, even that of our own conduct, thus remains entirely hidden from us . . . How much of this character is ascribable to the pure effect of freedom, how much to mere nature . . . can never be determined . . . no perfectly just judgments can be passed"

See "On the Proverb: That may be True in Theory, But is of No Practical Use," from *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. p. 68 "I readily concede that no man can with certainty be conscious of *having performed* his duty altogether unselfishly. For this is a matter of inner experience, and as such an awareness of one's state of mind [Seelenzustandes] would involve an absolutely clear representation of everything pertaining to those notions and considerations that imagination, habit, and inclination conjoin to the concept of duty. This is too much to ask for. Moreover, something's nonexistence (even an unconsciously intended advantage) cannot be an object of experience."

See also Sullivan p. 60 "we can never be sure that we *have* acted from the proper moral motive"

writes, "it is the intention which is precisely the question."²⁸ But this brings us back to the difficulty involved regarding the possibility of a plurality of motivational grounds. Given the distinct possibility that all human actions are in actuality grounded on possibly hidden materialistic or biological concerns, on what grounds could I argue for the possibility of non-material human motivation?

Kant arrived at the conclusion that if there were to be the possibility of an alternative motivation to action, it would have to be free from a reliance on experience of any kind (just as the concept of law is). The reason for this is that the possibility of an alternative motivational ground would have to be shown as a certainty (even if this certainty turns out only to a certainty of practical reason). In other words, if I am to posit a ground of human motivation distinct from biological drives, I must be certain that such a thing is at least possible. For without certainty of this possibility, any claims of actions motivated by non-biological drives would necessarily remain mere opinion which would be radically susceptible to suspicions of bias. Kant then calls our attention to Hume's claim that claims of necessity cannot rest on experience alone.²⁹ Experienced patterns can offer only assertions of probability at best. As the famous example explains, the experience of having seen the sun rise in the east thousands of times can only offer the probability of its rising there again tomorrow. Hume showed that it is not possible to be certain about the location of the rising of the sun tomorrow. If I am concerned about the source and character of my motivations, it is not enough to tell myself that it is probably the case that non-material motivations are possible. Worries concerning the possibility of unfounded self conceit regarding the dignity of my motivations demand something more dependable than probability. Therefore Kant is in the position of having to prove the possibility of an ideal motivating alternative to material determinism.

²⁸ CPrR p. 85

²⁹ Ibid., p. 52

There is another problem here. This problem concerns the possibility of culpability. As we have noted earlier, worries concerning the source of my motives reveals the possibility that my actions are actually driven by instinctual concerns. In other words, when I accept the likelihood that I am not certain regarding my decisions and their motivational source, I have to come to face the possibility that the reasons for my actions are indistinguishable from any instinctual creature's. While this can be in itself significantly disturbing, there is an even deeper issue at hand. The fact that I must admit that I cannot be certain about the source of my motivations reveals, on reflection, the distinct possibility that I have never been in control regarding the ground-level reasons for my actions. What seemed like freedom was only a freedom to choose among possible responses to one and the same category of initial instinctual drive. My own doubt concerning the real reasons for my actions reveals the possibility that subconscious or semi-conscious drives have always been running the show and imposing their will upon me. These instinctual drives demand things like "eat," "sleep," "procreate," or "protect young," and all that is left to me is to figure out how to prudently serve or fulfill those commands well. What is revealed as possible here is that I may have no control whatsoever over why I act. If this is correct, then I may come to see myself as a drone in irrevocable servitude to these drives. What is at stake here is the very possibility of freedom of motivation itself.

However, if it is the case that I have no control over why I act, then I cannot be held responsible for the fact that I am so motivated. If there is and can be no choice regarding the reasons and motivational grounds of my decisions and actions, then it cannot be the case that I can be held responsible for being motivated in this way. Regarding maxims, if I never had any choice, then I never had any responsibility regarding those maxims. If there is no choice and therefore no responsibility, then any discussion of morality regarding individual motivation is ludicrous. I can only hold myself responsible for things over which I have control. All of what has just been said derives from the mere

fact that I find myself incapable of certainty regarding the actual source of my motivation, and we must admit that it may be impossible to be sure about the actual grounding source of a feeling. Even Kant admits that the categorical imperative could eventually be revealed to be the mask of an instinct. Toward this idea, he writes, "[t]he real morality of actions, their merit or guilt, even that of our own conduct, thus remains entirely hidden from us How much of our character is ascribable to . . . mere nature, that is, faults of temperament [instinct] for which there is no responsibility . . . can never be determined; and upon it therefore no perfectly just judgments can be passed."³⁰

If am not in control of my motivations, I am not responsible for them. If they are nature's demands to which I can offer no legitimate resistance, then only nature can bear the responsibility. If this is the truth about the grounding of human action, then the diversity of human action would amount to the rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic given that, for Kant at least, morality and responsibility are issues of intentions. If the moral quality of human actions are determined by their motivating intentions and it turns out to be the case that all intentions are, in fact, naturally determined then from a moral standpoint there can be no qualitative difference between such actions. However, even if natural determinism does become revealed as a fact, it remains possible to judge human actions according to some other criteria. The worth of my actions could be judged according to their effectiveness regarding my survival or that of my clan. But if the ground of my motivation cannot be under my control, then I am as a marionette to them, left to choose only as to how these motivations are to be satisfied and not whether they should be satisfied. In other words, what is threatened here is "reason's very being."³¹ If I am powerless regarding the principles of my motivations, then what appears to be pure and independent reason is in actuality a mere instrumental part of an instinctual structure and therefore, not reason (at least as Kant understands it) at all.

³⁰ A551/B579 p. 475

³¹ CPrR p. 3

But if this is the case, then why are issues of merit, fault and guilt so prevalent among us?³² Why am I such that I cannot disregard my own judgment of certainty regarding what I can but see as the fact of my own responsibility for the reasons of my own actions?³³ Even though Kant admits that natural determinism must remain a possibility for experiencing humans, the fact that his entire philosophical project is in some way directed toward practical reason and morality itself bears witness to the fact that he did not relinquish pursuit of rationally defensible ideas concerning responsibility. But how can we proceed if certainty pertaining to my motivational ground must remain impossible? In order to proceed we must acknowledge an insurmountable contradiction. If morality is an issue of my intentions regarding my actions, it becomes necessary to be able to know with certainty what my intentions are. However, if it is also the case that this certainty concerning the intentions of my actions is always undermined by doubt as a result of the possibility of unconscious, unadmitted material intentions that corrupt the legitimacy of false surface intentions, then it becomes necessary to admit that the certainty I need to determine my own moral status is impossible for me or any creature in a similar circumstance. The certainty I need is impossible for me. So it seems that, regarding motivation-based morality, that which is impossible to do without is itself impossible to acquire.

Again, the existence of Kant's many works on motivation-based morality lead us to assume that he has some solution to this impasse. If he is to proceed in this direction, he will have to offer a legitimate solution to what seems to be insoluble. He writes, "[t]he critique, therefore, of practical reason as such has the obligation to prevent the empirically

³² See Schneewind. p. 325. "Kant held that the proper way to proceed in moral philosophy is to start with what we all know about morality and see what principle underlies it. The *Groundwork* accordingly begins with an examination of the commonsense opinion.

³³ See Sullivan p. 50 "Kant argues that he is only elucidating our ordinary notion of morality, clarifying the norm ordinary people use when they make ordinary moral judgments"
See also Paton p. 245 "Kant discovered . . . the principle of autonomy . . . by analyzing the implications of ordinary moral judgment"

conditioned reason from presuming to be the only ground of determination of the will."³⁴ Kant here calls attention to what he sees as his own obligation to show the possibility of a practically rational determination of the will. A solution to what seems insoluble is now obviously necessary. While he does treat the possibility of autonomy concerning the grounds of motivation (what he comes to call freedom), in the first *Critique*, theoretical reason's range reaches only so far as to insure the mere possibility of human freedom. According to Kant, theoretical reason is incapable of insuring freedom's reality, even while it also can not prove its impossibility.³⁵ In itself, theoretical reason is not enough to address the contradiction we are here facing, even while it can be seen as offering a dim hope. At least freedom is not ruled out. In order to address the possibility of autonomous freedom of motivational principle regarding choice, Kant resorts to what he names practical reason.

Reason, in its practical employment, concerns actions.³⁶ Theoretical reason's domain includes the reality that humans can know through experience. Theoretical reason therefore is concerned with what can be known. Existence is, therefore, part of theoretical reason's domain. Practical reason, even though it is part of one and the same reason, is not concerned with proof of whether experiences are real or not. Instead of being part of the mechanism by which we receive, perceive, and confirm reality, practical reason "presuppos[es] these objects as given."³⁷ In other words, practical reason assumes that perceived reality exists as it appears. It does so so as to be able to take this reality seriously, that is, so as to see this appearing reality as the place where actions actually (and

³⁴ CPrR p. 16

³⁵ See CPR A445/B473 p. 409 - A452/B480 p. 415

See also Schneewind p. 329 "In the First *Critique* Kant argued that no theoretical proof (or disproof) of free will can be given."

See also Sullivan P. 87 "we must give up any hope of understanding pure practical reason and the possibility of the Categorical Imperative; we can only "comprehend its Incomprehensibility" (Gr. 463/63)

³⁶ CPrR p. 3

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67

not just possibly) occur and therefore can be evaluated regarding moral worth. It is practical reason, therefore, that assumes or donates the gravity of actuality to perceptions.³⁸

Practical reason is the part of reason that we refer to when we offer the "reasons" for our actions. According to Kant, reasons can be either hypothetical or categorical.³⁹ Hypothetical reasons are those which are concerned with furthering material concerns of some kind or another. These are called hypothetical because they are conditioned by material concerns. Hypothetical reason for actions are "means to a further purpose."⁴⁰ Hypothetical reasons are reasons of means for actions in the real world. For example, the reason I picked up the shovel is because I intended to dig a hole with it. The critique of practical reason in its hypothetical employment would be an almost infinitely long how-to manual of practical tips for getting things accomplished. It seems likely that animals also use this form of reason and Kant admits as much.⁴¹ Kant is not downplaying the role of this use of practical reason. He is just making sure that it is understood in its distinction from pure practical reason, reason that is "practical of itself" and not "empirically conditioned."

Again, the problem we are faced with here is whether or not it is possible to rationally assert in good faith an authentic belief in the possibility of a foundation principle of motivation that will not in the end turn out to have been instinctually grounded all along. Given that I must be suspicious of any assertion (whether my own or another's) of a non-instinctual motivational ground, the burden of proof rests with him or her who would assert the possibility of such a ground. Given the apparent fact that we are creatures of physical necessity and desire, we must admit the force that such concerns can exact on us. We must admit that the impact of physical necessity and desire is such that claims of

³⁸ See PP p. 59 "reason . . . reminds . . . a reflective man . . . to give his life meaning through action"

³⁹ Gr p. 26

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26

⁴¹ REL p. 21

freedom from such concerns is one that we cannot help but meet with suspicion. We must observe what shaky ground Kant is attempting to walk into here. How do I prove the rational possibility of freedom of choice regarding the motivational grounds of my decisions, when it has already been shown that certainty on the issue is necessary and yet seemingly impossible?

In order to make his case, Kant has to reveal the possibility of some other motivational principle. Freedom, at its most basic level requires at least two distinct motivational grounds from which I have the autonomous power to choose. If I am to have a choice regarding the grounds of decision-making, then there must be at least two fundamentally different grounds from which to choose. I cannot be called free regarding motivational principles if there is but one such principle. We must again remember that we are not here discussing freedom of choice regarding actions, but a freedom of choice regarding the principles of motivation for an action. We are not discussing a freedom of what to do as much as we are discussing freedom with regard to why an action is or should be done. The path that Kant takes can come as something of a surprise. Kant argues that there must be an alternative ground for the reasons of actions simply because we feel responsible. He will address the question of whether we are actually responsible later. But his point of departure into the realm of practical reason is the simple subjective experience of personal responsibility, namely guilt.

The Felt Certainty of Responsibility as the Ground of the Assumption of Freedom

From Kant's point of view, the feeling of guilt, a feeling which can have incredible strength, is hard to explain. As we have already seen, either we, as purely instinctual, have no control over the grounds of our decisions and thus could not adopt responsibility for them, or we are free but can never be consciously certain about which of my possible motivations really drives my decisions (and thus, cannot really know whether to feel guilty at all). In other words, it seems that either the feeling of guilt is impossible or I will never be able to know if I should feel guilty or not. Even though the contention that at least one

of these two claims must be true is fairly persuasive, this is confronted by my own often undeniably certain feelings of responsibility nonetheless. Given the two possibilities presented, this feeling of certainty in regards to a personal responsibility that is self-imposed seems difficult if not impossible to explain. Nonetheless, it is upon this feeling of personal human responsibility that Kant claims to ground the significance of nearly all of his philosophy.

According to Kant, we often experience personal responsibility as an inevitably certain judgment. There are experiences of guilt about which we feel so certain that we refuse and reject any attempts at alleviation. However, if certainty of moral motivation is always impossible, then how can guilt as an experienced feeling be so apparently undeniable? The answer is that we can in fact be certain concerning a certain type of motivating ground. Very basically, while it is the case that I can never be certain whether material concerns have undermined what I may claim to be non-material principles, it remains possible to be certain when I have in fact decided to make instinctual concerns the condition of non-instinctual ones. I can be sure when my concern for the material has usurped my concern for the ideal. In other words, while I can never be sure that a decision is free of instinct, there can be decisions I make whose ground as dominantly instinctual is clear and undeniable to me. This I can know. There are occasions in regards to which I can be consciously certain that selfish material concerns determined my choice of action.⁴² This kind of certainty regarding spontaneous remorseful responsibility grounded on a self judgment of selfish motivation can be postulated as operative in even pre-lingual children on a playground.⁴³

⁴² See Sullivan p. 60 "Although we can never be sure that we *have* acted from the proper motive, we can know whether we have *tried* to do so."
See also Paton p. 135 "[Kant] bids us begin with an action done or completed and consider what is the principle actually manifested in it."

⁴³ See Sullivan p. 61 "*having* a conscience . . . is 'an inevitable fact.'"
see also MM pp. 160-1 "conscience speaks involuntarily and unavoidably."

But it has yet to be shown upon what this feeling of responsibility is grounded. Unless we can discover a proof for its possibility (that is, for the possibility of free responsibility regarding principles of motivations), the legitimacy of this feeling is susceptible to the suggestion that it may be only a fantasy, some psychological misfire of some kind. While it surely seems that the vast majority of human subjects experience this responsibility as an "inevitable fact," we have not yet determined an alternative to instinct as a motivating ground of action. Given that the experience of responsibility is certain, it appears that there simply must be an alternative ground. However, if Kant is going to allow himself such a principle, he will have to offer a rationally defensible explanation of its possibility. It will not be enough for Kant to simply posit an alternative ground regarding the reasons for decisions. He will also have to show how we can rationally understand it. This is because as always, Kant is dedicated to the project of avoiding as much unfounded opinion as he possible can. The feeling of certainty regarding responsibility (this "susceptibility on the part of free choice to be moved by pure practical reason (and its law), . . . what we call moral feeling")⁴⁴ is his initial point of departure. Can this of itself be the ground of his defense for his moral position? Isn't it true that feelings, even feelings of guilt certainty, can be misleading?⁴⁵

With the feeling of certainty regarding primarily the experience of guilt as a self-judgment, Kant felt he had the legitimate wherewithal to assume at least the possibility of an alternative source regarding the reasons for decisions. After all, why would we feel so guilty and so certain regarding that guilt if there was in fact no alternative to instinctual motivation? It at least allowed him limited justification regarding a search for such an alternative. Responsibility presumes freedom, freedom presumes choice, and choice

⁴⁴ See MM p. 160

⁴⁵ See Paton p. 65 "On Kant's view we feel reverence because we recognize that the law is binding upon our wills. The great error of the moral sense school is to suppose that the law is binding because we feel reverence. No feeling can be the basis for a binding moral law, but the moral law may be the ground of a specific moral emotion.

presumes a plurality from which to choose. The central characteristic of this feeling of responsibility is the certainty, the undeniability, that can accompany the judgment. And, as it was discussed above, certainty can only be of the province of reason, not experience. Experience can offer only probability as its upper limit. Therefore, the alternative source of reasons for actions would have to be reason itself if there is to be a possible explanation for this certainty felt in moral self evaluation. In other words, reason would have to be practical if there were to be an understandable explanation for the certainty felt in moral self-condemnation.

Kant argues that we become aware of the reality of our freedom only at the moment we find ourselves internally advised against any planned actions which are motivated by a prioritization of material concerns. In other words, so long as I feel no compunction regarding the execution of selfish or biologically driven decisions, so long as I find that I do not urge myself not to do such a thing, the very concept of freedom as Kant is describing it is perfectly unthinkable. If Kant's argument is to be persuasive for me, it is necessary that at some point in my life I have undergone the feeling of a legitimate and personally enforced ethical responsibility or restriction. I have to have felt that type of guilt whose enforcement is or at least seems to me to be interior to my personhood. Kant's moral work rests on a specific variety of experienced guilt which is such that I am simultaneously the receiver and imposer of the sentence. Without this experience, there can be no practical philosophy as Kant understood it. The centrality of self-inflicted guilt cannot be overstated regarding Kant's discussion of practical reason.

The depth of certainty regarding the feeling of guilt as deserved is central to Kant's practical work. There are those who have experienced self-imposed feelings of guilt so severe and irrevocable that they cannot help but consider the option of suicide. However, if it is I who receives that guilt even while it is also I who enforces it, then why can I not let myself off the hook?⁴⁶ This question is crucial. For the sake of exploring it, allow me to

⁴⁶ See Schneewind p. 314 "The problem Kant faced was to show how such law-making is possible. In particular he had to explain how we can impose a necessity upon ourselves. If my obligations arise

offer a real example. There is a person I know personally who was a highly trained member of the United States Army. While this story actually happened, I have changed some of the story's details for the sake of his privacy. Jonah was raised in a family that put a great deal of emphasis into the expression of gratitude for the political freedoms afforded citizens of this country. He had been raised to have great deal of respect and appreciation for the privileges that the sacrifices of others have afforded him. He was also taught that he might also consider dedicating himself toward the same endeavor.

Upon graduation from high school, Jonah entered the military and it was soon determined that he had some natural aptitude for those skills most highly prized by that body. After having been trained as an elite member of an exclusive and exacting unit, he was sent with them on an information-gathering mission into territory not yet under the control of friendly forces. While they had not expected much in the way of a threat, they were aware that their security could not be guaranteed. As Jonah told me the story, upon parachuting to the ground, they met with an ambush and were greatly outnumbered. They were confronted immediately with lethal fire and there appeared little chance of escape. Running as fast as he could, he witnessed the violent deaths of the soldiers to his immediate left and right. Continuing to run and covered with their blood, he grabbed his radio to call for an air strike.

At this point, Jonah stopped his narration and looked at me unblinkingly. He said, "now I could tell you that things were happening so fast that I didn't understand what was at stake. I could tell you that I was acting out of training or reflex. I could tell you that I was too ignorant or too immature to understand the gravity of the consequence of the actions I was then considering. I could even tell you that I acted out of a firm belief in the justifiability of self-defense. I could tell you a lot of things, but the truth is that that ambush, which went on for at most a few minutes, seemed to last a few days in my head.

through my own will, how can there be any real constraints on my actions? Can't I excuse myself from any obligations I alone impose?"

I grabbed my walkie-talkie and pressed the button and screamed that they were killing us. I heard the response, 'what is your location?' I could tell you that it was all happening too fast to have any kind of chance for real reflection, but the truth of the matter is that I knew exactly what would happen if I revealed our location. I knew exactly what the consequences would be. Regardless of whatever else I could say, that is the truth."

"So, I did it. I relayed our position as I ran with the bullets tearing at my clothes and hair. In thirty seconds I could hear the helicopters and in sixty, everyone on that field was dead except for me, or so I thought. I turned around and walked back to where the ambushers lay. When I got there, there was one man who was still alive. I think I would be okay today if I hadn't walked back. I think I would have been all right if I hadn't looked that guy in the eye. But I looked at him and he looked at me. We stayed that way until he died. If I hadn't looked at him, seen him, I think I would have been okay, but as it is I wake up every morning and fall asleep every night looking into his eyes."⁴⁷

Jonah's life has fallen, by his own definition, far short of its potential. He forever endeavors to pick himself up and find a job that he can maintain. However, even though there is nothing mechanically wrong with either his mental or physical equipment, all attempts to string together a few weeks of solid employment eventually come to ruin. He told me, "every time I start to get my life back together and try to make something of myself, some part of me declares that I am guilty of an unjustifiable decision and that I therefore deserve no personal fulfillment." In response to my suggestions to consider the possible indoctrination of his upbringing, the justifiability of his cause or his age at the time, he shrugged. "Don't you think I have tried that?" I asked if he had considered religious options concerning rituals of forgiveness. Again he shrugged and said, "I imagine God can forgive me and I actually believe that He has. But as it turns out, it seems

⁴⁷ See REL p. 64 "our life must come to be viewed , for the purposes of judgment, as a *temporal unity*, a *whole*; in which case the reproaches [of conscience] arising from the earlier portion of life (before the improvement began) might well speak as loudly as the approbation from the *latter* portion, and might considerably repress the triumphant note of 'All's well that ends well!'"

it was never His forgiveness I was after. It was my own. God can forgive me all He wants, and at some level I can even appreciate that, but its not His judgment that concerns me. Regardless of whether or not God has let me off the hook, I remain responsible for my decision that day. There is nothing God can do to make it not so. And there is nothing I can do to forget it."

I said, "but Jonah, on that day, you were sure that you believed in the moral validity of killing in self-defense. Can't you simply chalk it up as an extremely severe awakening and let yourself off the hook? I mean you didn't know any better."

He said, "How many times do you think I have tried that one? Even now, years later, I suspect it occurs to me at least once a day. I thought I believed that a military person should have the legal and moral right to defend his or her own life with lethal force. I know a lot of guys who went though the same kind of thing and it has never bothered them. I did believe it, but what I didn't know was that there was some other part of me that didn't agree. I didn't know that deeper down there was another stronger belief that I should not kill anyone. Every once in a while I try to talk to that part of myself. I say something like, 'I didn't know. Now I know.' However, the response is always the same. It says, 'you should've known. There is no excuse for not having known. You always knew.'"

I have included this somewhat lengthy example because it allows me a real world experience of responsibility to help elucidate Kant's intended meaning regarding experienced morality. While it is true that for Kant credible rational principles of moral motivation must exist in me a priori and certainly prior to any possible experience of guilt, we cannot be aware of the presence of these principles of motivation until we encounter them in an actual experience of autonomously enforced moral self-evaluation. It is extremely important to be aware of this detail in Kant's morality.⁴⁸ Kant writes, "if there

⁴⁸ See PP p. 67 "the will's receptivity to finding itself subject to it as to an unconditional constraint is called *moral sense*. Thus, this feeling is not the cause but the effect of the determination of the will, and we would have not have any perception of this feeling whatsoever if that constraint did not precede it."

were no freedom, the moral law would never have been encountered by us."⁴⁹ Notice here that he implies that the moral law, even while remaining a priori and valid, cannot be known to us unless we encounter it through a free choice. An awareness of the moral law must be preceded by an experience of choice (remembering of course, the we are not here talking about a choice regarding a variety of possible actions, but of a variety of possible grounds of motivation to actions).⁵⁰ In other words, the moral law and all of its implications and postulations can only become thinkable to me if I find myself in a situation within which I see it as indisputable that I am not necessarily determined to action by some variety of material concern.

In order to understand the possibility of freedom as Kant understood it, I have to experience this freedom as irrefutable. I have to know, in some sense anyway, that even though I am hungry, there are non-experience-based concerns that can override my desire for food as the determining ground of my actual decision. Of course there can be a tremendous variety of examples given in which one experience-based decision is given over for another. I can give up some candy now to save money for a larger dinner later. I forgo the dinner in order to be able to save money for college, which will in turn afford me a better chance at a greater salary and the many more dinners that can provide. I can even forgo my own dinner so as to provide for my children. Whether this last example is a moral or hypothetically practical choice depends, at least as Kant saw it, on whether my concern for my children is grounded on the infinite inherent value that they share with every human individual or on my instinct to protect my young, which is an instinct that I share with quite a number of other organisms. As I go through the experience of this decision, how am I to know for sure which of these motivations actually dominated the

⁴⁹ CPrR p. 4

⁵⁰ See PP p. 51 "He discovered in himself an ability to choose his own way of life and thus not to be bound like other animals to only a single one. The momentary delight that this just discovered advantage may have awakened in him must have been followed immediately by anxiety and unease as to how he should proceed with this newly discovered ability . . . He stood as on the edge of an abyss . . . there opened up to him an infinitude . . . and it was now equally impossible for him to turn back"

other so as to actually determine my choice. As I have indicated above, it may be that I cannot know.

But for some reason, we do not experience this uncertainty as something that lets us or Jonah off the hook. Instead, for many of us (if not all), the question of the real reasons for our actions concerns us quite a lot. How do we come to find that we have the power to select between at least two motivating principles? Kant's answer is the same as Jonah's. We find ourselves in an experience of self-imposed guilt. It may be the case that behind all human motivation that arrogates itself as free of instinctual impetus, instinct adheres nonetheless. However, even if we, with Kant, are ready to concede that possibility, what does that matter if I find myself inevitably and invariably imposing upon myself a certainty of my own responsibility regarding the motivation of my actions?⁵¹ Key to understanding this structure of Kant's architecture here is the self-imposition of inevitable and inescapable responsibility. You could tell Jonah all day long that deep down we are nothing but instinctually driven animals and that as such we cannot be held responsible for the fact that we are instinctually driven since it was never really in our control to be otherwise. As such, you might say to Jonah, how can you feel bad about a situation over which you never had any real control.

We must note at this point that Kant is not making any ontological or epistemic claim. Kant claims that the assumption of rational freedom is of practical concern only. He

⁵¹ See Sullivan p. 83 "Kant admits that up to now he has treated freedom as only an assumption. He states, however, that what is 'given' in our self-awareness is the absolutely fundamental conviction that we *are* free and morally responsible for what we do. It is a presupposition whose truth we all find we *must* believe whenever we deliberate about how to act and whenever we do act.

See also Bruce Aune's *Kant's Theory of Morals*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979. pp. 28; 97-8 "[Kant] seems to think that, as a result of the respect or reverence human beings feel for practical laws, they experience such laws as imperatives or commands and feel 'morally constrained,' or obligated, to conform to them. . . Since we are aware of a power of reason within us, which seems to involve a 'pure spontaneity,' and since we cannot act 'except *under the idea of freedom*,' we are justified in supposing that, as things in themselves, we are free - even if we cannot actually prove that we are. "

See also Paton p. 64 "For Kant the emotion of reverence is unique . . . In Kant's language it is a feeling 'self-produced through a concept of reason.'

See Gr. p. 14 "There might be brought against me an objection that I take refuge behind the word "respect" in an obscure feeling . . . even though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any outside influence but is, rather, one that is imposed by means of a rational concept;

is certainly not making the claim that freedom's existing reality can be grounded on the fact that I feel responsible. He is claiming only that we must exist *as if* we were free.⁵² It is my own inability to plausibly deny my own responsibility that forces me to assume its truth (as well as its far reaching implications).

Regarding the argument asserting the possibility of reason being only a mask of yet another instinctual drive, Jonah might even be able to agree with the seeming validity of this position, but he would (and in fact, does to this day) remain in a context of self-imposed condemnation. If there were in fact no such experiences, then Kant could not have produced his moral work. Kant's moral philosophy is dependent upon the acknowledgment and recognition of the possibility of a purely subjectively driven and inescapable self-condemnation grounded on the apparently irrefutable fact of my power to make choices regarding my motivation for action. Since I find myself responsible, even at times guilty, I must have been and must still be free. If I experience responsibility as ineluctable, I am forced by that perception to assume my own free status regardless of theoretical reason's impotence to provide any insight (positive or negative) on the matter.⁵³ The category of causality combined with the ineluctable experience of responsibility results in my inability to reject the logical necessity of an alternative to natural causality as a motivating principle. If there were a person who could really deny or escape his or her

⁵² See Allison p. 246-7 "Kant took seriously the epistemic possibility that our belief in our agency might be illusory . . . Kant is not claiming that our independence of the mechanism of nature is somehow introspectively accessible . . . any such "experience" . . . would violate the conditions of the possibility of experience . . . This consciousness [this recognition of freedom], then, is of a mere possibility rather than an actual capacity . . . it is . . . the possibility of . . . choosing in spite of the presence and strength of the conflicting inclination . . . Thus, virtually the entire picture of moral agency . . . may be seen as the presentation of the presuppositions and implications of this consciousness. . . What is denied is merely the possibility of considering [the consciousness of freedom] as illusory from the practical point of view, that is, from the point of view from which we regard ourselves as rational agents."

See also Paton p. 253 "Kant may be thought to justify the categorical imperative by saying that it accords with the will of my real self as a member of the intelligible world"

⁵³ See Schneewind p. 329 "In the first *Critique* Kant argued that no theoretical proof (or disproof) of free will can be given. In the *Groundwork* Kant thinks he can give at least indirect support to the claim that we are free. When we as rational beings act, he says, we must take ourselves to be free . . . whenever we deliberate or choose we are presupposing freedom, even if we are unaware of the presupposition or consciously doubtful of it."

own self-imposed judgments of guilt, then freedom could for that person be denied. Such a person (but only such a person) could be persuaded to act and evaluate himself in unfettered accordance with the argument for a single motivational principle undergirding all human action and over which we never did or ever could have any control (or responsibility).

For such a person, morality would be gleaned from among varieties of prudence.⁵⁴ My principles of honorable human behavior could be based on utilitarian concerns, concerns for happiness, selfish animal drives, or even the arbitrariness of some culturally relative tradition.⁵⁵ Kant is not arguing that such decisions are not made and he is not even arguing that they are irrelevant. In fact, he argues that much experiential wisdom regarding these principles and their implications will have to be acquired and consulted if one is actually serious about trying to manifest rational morality in the real world.⁵⁶ However, if there really is no such thing as possible choice regarding the principle of motivation of my actions, why then does Jonah feel his self-imposed condemnation is inevitable? Kant's point here is that my reason has the right to assume the possibility of its own practical application only as a result of my *having found* myself responsible for the reasons of my actions.

Let me put this another way. Kant asks this question: Is it possible to both act and also believe that it was not I who chose the reasons for that act? As a human being, is it possible to act and to simultaneously give assent to the assertion that I am not the author of choice regarding the reasons of that action? Can I convince myself in good faith that even though I perform an action, I am not responsible for having selected the motivating

⁵⁴See MM p. 149 "The study of the . . . ends the human being *does adopt* in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature . . . can be called the technical (subjective) doctrine of ends; it is really the pragmatic doctrine of ends, containing the rules of prudence in the choice of one's ends."

⁵⁵ See PP p. 34 "lawless freedom . . . we . . . disdain . . . [there are those] preferring to scuffle without end rather than to place themselves under lawful restraints that they themselves constitute, consequently preferring mad freedom to a rational one."

⁵⁶ CPrR p. 165

intentions that initiated it? Or is it impossible to assert such a statement and believe it as true within my own mind? Your answer to this question will determine whether any of what follows can be persuasive. It is Kant's position that it is impossible to imagine my own will as determined by another. Even if a man has a gun to my head, whether I decide to agree to his demands remains absolutely up to me. It cannot be otherwise. It can never be the case that I have no choice. Nothing outside of me can determine my own will. If it does, I have chosen it to be so. Let us leave aside, for the moment anyway, the discussion of the severely mentally challenged. All of Kant's discussion here assumes rationality as a given characteristic of the acting agent. (We must also be sure not to include anything like rape in this category, because I cannot include things I have not chosen within the category of things I have chosen).

So, if it is in fact impossible for me to understand my own choice regarding the ground of my motivation as not my own, then I understand freedom as Kant did. Kant felt that it was the case that humans are such that they cannot but understand themselves as the authors of their choices. He asserted that it seems to be that it is not in our power to deny this, no matter what. I find myself as such. If my status as author of my decisions (even regarding motivational principles) is for me undeniable, then I must also see myself as responsible for those decisions. Freedom and responsibility are interdependent concepts. My perception of myself as free might seem a small and inevitable concession. However, it is from this that Kant can show the inevitability of the demands of practical reason as he saw them.

Let us return to Jonah's story. If he is the source of his own self-criticism and censure, and it is also true that he would be willing to do anything to be free of this condemnation, then why is it not in his power as a free agent regarding his choices simply to choose to forgo further self-reproach? If the punishment is as excruciating as it seems and if it is he, himself who enforces that punishment, then why decide to remain in that condition? Why not employ his freedom and forgo the enforcement of self-censure? Why

must he beg forgiveness from his very self, and why does it seem that he must withhold that forgiveness? Jonah's case is not unique by any means. There are many for whom the horrors of war are a reference to the misery of their own negative self-interpretation. I have also known former drunk drivers and hunters who live in perpetual self-denunciation as a result of even simply negligent or accidental killings. I might note here that Jonah was awarded two different medals of honor for his actions that day. This highlights the likelihood that his self-criticism is not as a result of heteronomous criticism from the military he served. These medals have been on the bottom of the Iowa River for some time.

You might respond to such situations with the assertion that self-condemnation need not be based on reason. You might argue that guilt has long been recognized as something that can result from various forms and intensities of cultural indoctrination. I am so long exposed to certain heteronomous evaluations of human worth that I internalize these mere opinions as truths and then impose them on myself. Yes, I may feel guilty, and yes, I may be the one who imposes this self-judgment, but that does not insure that this must be a purely rational judgment. If cultural indoctrination is always a possibility, how can it be possible to assert the possibility of an autonomous rational source of self-judgment and evaluation? Given that Jonah was so easily convinced by his own family of the justifiability of military service, can it not be the case that his present guilt is also an example of his unreflective adoption of heteronomous cultural opinion as truth?

Yes, this must remain a possibility. However, this is nothing more than an example of what we have already seen regarding the possibility that practical reason is in actuality nothing more than a mask for instinctual drives. The fact that my guilt might in fact be culturally based and thus heteronomous does not prove the impossibility of autonomy.⁵⁷ Yes, it is possible that Jonah's guilt might actual be a reflection of some

⁵⁷ See Paton p. 78 "it may be observed that if the distrust of reason professes to be based on reason, it is self-contradictory; and if it is not so based, then it is admittedly irrational, and it would be waste of time to argue about it. Such a thorough-based irrationalism or skepticism must inevitably make all values rest on mere feeling and so make them arbitrary: it must deny all objective standards of value."

copied belief to which he granted authority, but that possibility does not rule out the simultaneous possibility that his guilt could be purely subjective and rational. It bears repeating that Jonah regrets not merely his act but also (and perhaps prevalently) his reasons for having made the choice. Note also that it seems almost irrefutable that it is only ever I who must grant authority (even if subconscious) to any external dictate which would have my allegiance.⁵⁸

Even though it is possible to internalize heteronomous criteria of self-worth, this does not make an autonomous criterion for self-worth impossible. Further, Kant's thought here does not rely on the feeling or experience of guilt to sustain his assertion of rational morality. All he needs is my feeling of *certainty* regarding the freedom of my choice which every experience of profound guilt presupposes. As mentioned earlier, it is my perception of myself as free that grounds Kant's discussion of practical reason. If it is indeed the case that I cannot imagine myself as not free, then I am forced to acknowledge myself as the true author of my actions. The category of causality forces me to do so.⁵⁹ If all effects are preceded by a prior cause and yet nothing outside of me determines my own choice, then I must acknowledge myself as the efficient cause of my action. I must see my free choice as itself the beginning of an endless causal chain.⁶⁰

Yet, even if this is accepted, how does the acknowledgment of freedom demand an inquiry regarding motives for this choice. How are my intentions necessarily relevant to the freedom of my choice? Can we not say with Camus and his Stranger, that there can be

⁵⁸ See Sullivan p. 45 "moral reason must be both cognitive and a conative power, entirely by itself able to determine how we should act and also able to motivate us to act on those judgments without relying on any priori desires. This is the central thesis of Kant's moral theory. Today it is virtually impossible for us to appreciate how radically Kant broke with traditional moral theorizing . . . In fact, this constitutes what may be called Kant's Copernican revolution in moral philosophy. No one before Kant had thought to suggest that human reason could be so powerful."

⁵⁹ CPrR p. 107

⁶⁰ See Paton p. 249 "Theoretical reason must conceive the totality of causes, which, because it is a totality of cause, cannot itself be caused. It is this Idea . . . which gives us the conception, however empty, of an uncaused cause or a free cause."

no intention regarding a human decision? Why must intentions be discussed? We must admit that there may in fact be individuals for whom guilt is not an issue. Camus may be right when, at the beginning of his novel, he asks us to consider the possibility of a person for whom guilt and meaning are irrelevant. However, while it is probable that this possibility must remain, we must also admit that it is clearly irrelevant to a person who does in fact encounter self-imposed guilt and feelings of responsibility regarding the reason for his or her actions. After all, what does it matter if someone else appears to have no conscience when I find mine inescapable?

In fact, if we look carefully at Kant's ethical work, we can see that he emphasizes the fact that the validity of his practical claims are an individually granted validity. While it is true that Kant asserts the universal applicability of the moral imperative, it is crucial to notice that it is I, as acting individual, who must, as an individual, sovereign completely and yet only over myself, impose what can but appear to be a universally valid demand on myself (and only myself) as a duty. When I hold myself accountable according to moral rules as Kant understood them, there can only ever be my own self as the imposer of the demand. So, despite the fact that others may in fact judge themselves according to what can seem to be far less universally valid criteria, this cannot possibly matter when the inescapability of self-imposed guilt is experienced by me as a purely internal subjective experience. Given this situation, there cannot be effective outside consultation or even relevance. Jonah was well aware of others who had been able to live with killings they defended according to the principle of the right for self-preservation. It was simply irrelevant to his own experience. If I am to hope to reevaluate the appropriateness of an imposition of guilt upon myself, it will inevitably have to be my very self who must be convinced by means of persuasive argument. Since guilt as Kant described it is an exercise of subjective and autonomous rational judgment, the hope for forgiveness must also be subjective and autonomously rational.

It may be helpful here to make note of the fact that given the experience of self-imposed, seemingly inescapable guilt, there must also be something of a splitting of identity. As I mentioned earlier, given an autonomous imposition of guilt for the violation of self-accepted rules of behavior, I find myself both as the receiver of the punishment and the imposer of it. Given as severe an experience as Jonah's, the desperation for escape almost necessarily causes something of a segregation of these two elements for the purpose of differentiating the source of censure from the target of it. In other words, as I am in the throes of excessive self-imposed guilt, it is hard to understand and identify myself as simultaneously in both roles. Given significant suffering, it is hard not to associate with the part of me which suffers. Pain seems to call attention to itself. So, as we encounter this experience, it is common to interpret a division between the sovereign and subject aspects of my personhood. In other words, I may find myself identifying with the part of myself who can but recognize the dictates of my (somehow perceived as separate) rational self as if they were "divine commands."

Kant does make the point that there is no time during which I stop identifying with the judgment-imposing element of myself,⁶¹ and he also asserts that the greater the humiliation, the more certain I become of that laudable part of myself upon which I can ground legitimate self-respect. But, we must ask, why do we submit our actions to rules so strict and so inescapable? Why does it seem to Jonah that he must remain where he is? Why does it not seem possible to overthrow these strict and compassionless criteria either by whim or by sheer force and determination of will? It is because they are implied in the very concept of freedom itself and it is rationally simultaneous with it. According to Kant, it is not possible rationally to simultaneously think freedom and not think these criteria as inescapably implied. Both freedom and the criteria of rational moral self-evaluation are views on one and the same thing, practical reason.

⁶¹ CPrR p. 77

Let us recap. The concept of freedom derives from my acknowledgment of myself as author or selector of the reasons for my actions. As I have noted earlier, if I am to be the chooser regarding the reasons for my actions, there must be, at the very least, two fundamentally distinct principles or grounds for these reasons from which to choose. If freedom regarding reasons is to be a thinkable concept, there must be a choice, a variety from among which I may exercise my freedom. If it turns out that instinct actually undergirds every intention, then freedom must therefore be a fantasy, at least as it applies to motivation. Even if it does turn out to be that this is in fact how it is, it remains the case that I find myself under the conviction that I am responsible for the reasons of my decisions. I am forced to admit that I could not do so if I actually believed that I am a puppet to my genetically based concerns. The confidence I have regarding the understanding of myself as free and responsible results in a confidence that I am not predetermined by instinct even if I cannot in fact prove this, something Kant all too readily admits and asserts.

Proof of this is not required here, because only I need be convinced. As we have noted, the experience of guilt is isolated within subjectivity. The assumption of freedom is not something I can impose directly on someone else. It is not possible to force someone to feel guilty (Jonah's type of guilty) and we have not progressed beyond a discussion of self-imposed responsibility as of yet. Since we are only discussing how self-imposed guilt is rationally explainable, none of what we are talking about can be confused with any legal or political imposition of justice. Our discussion remains within the context of a single individual and must do so, for the moment at least. Since it is only I who needs to be convinced, the status of my having found myself such that I am confident, even certain of my own status as responsible regarding the reason for my actions is all that is needed to legitimate an inquiry into the source of this self-interpretation. As we noted earlier, I find myself at least apparently free and find that I do not have the power to understand myself as not so (even while it remains possible that I am not so, because I have no proof). I find that I am such that I cannot claim innocence or inculpability regarding my actual actions and

motivations and actually believe this claim. The reverse is also true. My assumption that I am free also allows me to take some credit for my actions when I am proud of them. Guilt and the acknowledgment of personal merit are similar parts of the same structure.

If I find myself to be free, and freedom obviously requires at least one alternative to instinctual motivation, I must look to thinking itself, reason as the only alternative source. What other alternative could there be? If we consider social or cultural norms to be a possible alternative, we are forced to explain the source of my feelings of certainty in these experiences. As we admitted earlier we must look to reason as a result of freedom's claims to certainty. I am certain about my responsibility, freedom and guilt, and I must admit that experience cannot provide certainty. I must therefore look to reason as the ground of all judgments that claim certainty and disqualify any cultural rules as incapable of establishing anything stronger than probability. Further, any awareness of a plurality of cultural rules makes certainty about the authority of any one of them impossible.

The Category of Causality as the Ground of the Categorical Imperative

Just above I mentioned that the criteria with which I judge myself guilty are inherently and inevitably implied in the concept of freedom itself. How is this so? This brings us back to the concept of law itself. The very moment that I acknowledge myself as the author of my actions and as the prime mover of a new and apparently eternal chain of events, I cannot help but be confronted with the concept of law. If I am a prime mover of an eternal chain of subsequent events in the material realm, my inability to ignore the category of causality forces me to think the causing principle or law of this prime move of mine.⁶² To put it simply, I inevitably ask myself why I chose what I chose. I require a

⁶² See Sullivan p. 47 "To be a cause *means* to exercise power in a law-governed way. An agent of any kind can be an efficient cause only in a law-governed world, only by following a law or laws determining its 'character' in a broad sense, that is, how its causality is exercised (See CPR A539/B567). . . . In a lawless (i.e., completely ruleless) world, anything could follow from anything, and that would make the notions of causality in general and of free, moral agency in particular totally meaningless. (See, e.g., RWR 35/30)"

See also Paton p. 211 "The concept of causality . . . implies the concept of law; and this must hold whether causality . . . is determined by natural necessity or is free."

reason of myself. Unless I am like Camus' stranger and can act in indifference, it is not within my power to ignore my own rational requirement for a causing rule or maxim through which the impetus to act occurred.⁶³

If it is true that I am such that instinct is the one and only ground of reasons for action, then I need not be concerned with the reasons for actions except for with regard for types of prudence. So it may actually be and I must concede that. If this is true then rules of prudence can be the only possible practical rules of decision-making. However, if I am of the conviction that I am the author of these reasons for actions, that I have the choice from among a variety of grounds for behavior, then my own determination of myself as free forces me to defend my choice to myself at least. Why did I choose what I chose? If I understand myself and my choices as being necessarily indeterminable by any external force in my decision-making, then I demand of myself the reasons for my actions. Unless I am willing to accept the assertion of randomness or meaninglessness as the real answer regarding the motivational source of my actions (which for many is impossible, experientially at least), I must concede the demand for explanation regarding those actions. I imagine it is possible that like Camus's stranger, there are individuals for whom there is no reason for actions and that their actions are, regarding meaning, random. If this is true, then none of this can be convincing for that kind of reader.

If, however, I find myself as an individual for whom the demand for explanation regarding my decisions is an inevitability, then Kant's thought on this subject applies. It is so for Jonah. In other words, reasons for action can only be either random and therefore

See also Allison p. 202 "The concept of causality carries with it that of *laws* [Gesetze] in accordance with which, because of something we call a cause, something else - namely, its effect - must be posited [gesetzt]. . . Hence freedom of will . . . must . . . be a causality conforming to immutable laws though of a special kind; for otherwise a free will would be self-contradictory. . . What else then freedom of will be but autonomy - that is, the property which will has of being a law to itself?"

⁶³ See Paton p. 82 "every action has its *maxim* or subjective principle; and this is the first thing that Kant has in mind when he says that a rational being acts in accordance with principles, or in accordance with its conception of laws, and so only has it a will."

See also Aune p. 12 "The kind of behavior of crucial interest in morals is intentional or purposive behavior. When a person acts purposefully or intentionally, he acts for a reason, and his behavior is somehow based on that reason."

unattached to intention, or they are intentional. If I am not a person for whom the former is true, then I must be a person for whom the latter is true. If the latter is true, then I am a person who, as intentional, forces myself to offer reasons for my actions. Once I demand and receive reasons for my actions, I must ask why such reasons were privileged over all other possible reasons. I must ask, for example, why instinct might have been prioritized over something else (if there is something else). I must ask myself why I chose the intentions I did regarding my choices in the world. Unless I am a person who is at peace with the supposition of my own intentionlessness, a personal defense of my intentions is an inevitable self-requirement. I must explain my reasons for the reasons I chose.

It is this personal requirement for explanation that engages the concept of law. As we said before, law is a simple yet irrefutable rational concept that includes universality of application. In other words, at its base, the rational concept of law includes a requirement of fairness, a uniformity of application. If I am purely instinctual, then I can make survival the rule of my decision-making. In that the ground of choice is not reason but instinct, I need make no demand of fairness regarding the rule I used. Therefore, I will have no problem privileging my own survival needs over that of any other. If however, I find that I am such that I must explain why I have chosen instinctual demands over other possible principles, I am forced by my own reason to submit the rule of my decision-making to the concept of law and its assumption of universally unbiased employment.

To put this another way, all decisions require the individual to have selected (consciously or otherwise) a reason for acting from among the variety of possibilities (if there is a variety). To have selected one of these rules from among the variety is to have selected this rule at least temporarily as the only or supreme rule of decision-making, a maxim. A plurality of concerns cannot be the real ground of decision. Of course there is often a collection of concerns imbedded in a decision, but there can be only a single concern that is the dominant and therefore determining concern. While other concerns can contribute, it is the dominant concern that actually drives the choice. In order for a decision

to have been made, a battle for dominance between competing principles must already have occurred, and one of them must have risen triumphant. One principle must vanquish the competitors for the throne and rise as ruler. At this point alone can it be said that this principle has become the rule of an act.

To have selected a rule for decision-making is to assert that rule's supremacy. We must admit that this is true at least for the individual at that particular instant. To have made such a selection in reality is to reveal my having come to a conclusion, at least for the time being, regarding the aptness of the ground choice. To make such an assertion is simply to say that my reasons were my reasons. I can reserve my selection so long as I do not actually act. I can deliberate in the time before an action, and in this deliberative space I can withhold any assertion of the primacy of any particular rule of choice. But action requires selection and selection requires the suspension of deliberation. Only a single rule can survive this deliberation. Therefore, any action necessarily implies my having already chosen a single rule of decision-making as, at least for the time being, the reigning and sovereign rule of decision-making.⁶⁴

This choice would not be of any real concern if it did not happen in the context of reason. There can be no question that I can make decisions that make my own clan's survival the rule of my choices. However, so long as this choice is a human choice, it occurs within earshot of my own reason. Reason has not the power to consider conditions or exemptions for claims of truth. Reason, as purely formal has not the capacity to consider non-formal issues. For reason, it either is the case that $1=1$ or it is not. Mitigating circumstances cannot be brought to bear in determinations of reason. Reason has not ears to hear pleas for lenience or mercy. Reason is not capable of including extenuating circumstances of any kind regarding its determination of the validity of a

⁶⁴ See REL p. 20 "The disposition, *i.e.*, the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims, can be *one only* and applies universally to the whole use of freedom. Yet this disposition itself must have been adopted by free choice, for otherwise it could not be imputed." (my emphasis.)

mathematical statement.⁶⁵ It is not that reason somehow anthropomorphically refuses to consider requests for favoritism, it simply has not the capacity to be idiosyncratic. A claim of formal reason has not the capacity to be other than a claim of universally self-evident validity. It cannot break its rules in light of special circumstance, because as reason, it cannot break the rules of reason. If the rules of reason are broken, then it simply cannot be reason that did it.⁶⁶

Therefore, all human choices are made in the context of reason which can consider no excuse. All human choice implies at least the temporary selection of a rule of behavior as superior to all other possible choices. Reason is purely formal, and as such it cannot be conditional. Reason's assertions of mathematical truth necessarily happen in ignorance of and indifference to that to which the numbers refer. When reason considers truth, it has not the capacity to consider whether $1+1=2$ refers to oranges or steam ships.⁶⁷ Its claim that the expression is true does not include a reference to that to which the numbers refer. In fact, its claim of truth in that instance is a universal claim. It claims that in every possible occasion in which there is one and then another one, there are and must universally be two.

Therefore, since all human choice is made in the context of reason, and since human choice requires the selection of a single rule of choice determination, reason imposes the requirement that my idiosyncratic rule decision-making be evaluated as a universal law.⁶⁸ Why? Even though I am a sensuous creature subject to an immense

⁶⁵ See Allison p. 66 "moral laws . . . Kant claims, are known a priori because they are grounded in pure reason and, as such, take no account of human desires or the means to satisfy them
See also Gr. p. 405/16 "Now reason irremissibly commands its precepts, without thereby promising the inclinations anything . . . [reason does not] quibble"

⁶⁶ See Sullivan p. "In a lawless world, anything could follow from anything, and that would make the notions of causality in general and of free, moral agency in particular totally meaningless."

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 153 "Because this principle [of noncontradiction] is purely formal, without specific content, it is an objective law, holding for all rational beings

⁶⁸ See Paton p. 243 "In spite of the fact that I must recognize myself as a being belonging to the sensible world, I must also recognize myself, *qua* intelligence, as 'subject to the law of the intelligible world, that

multitude of material desires and concerns and as such am all too aware of the possibility of making decisions on fundamentally selfish or self concerned grounds, reason has not the capacity to understand much less condone such a thing. Reason is not sensuous and cannot understand non-universal pronouncements or considerations.⁶⁹ The idea of occasional, relative or cultural legitimacy is unthinkable for reason which can consider legislation only ever as universal. In fact, with regard to a human decision, only certain of the ingredients of that decision are witnessable from reason's perspective. What reason notices is that I have selected and employed a rule for making a choice. For reason, this rule must be seen as a law in that reason cannot understand something that can only occasionally be a rule. For reason, all rules of decision-making can only be seen and understood as a law. And, of course, since law is understood by reason as necessarily having universal implications, all uses of law are submitted to the demand for universalizability.⁷⁰

This is the source of Kant's rational demand for the necessity of universalizability of all maxims. If I am free, then I must have a choice of reasons for acting. Given a choice of reasons for action, I must employ a rule or maxim for deciding on a action. Since reason can only understand rules as laws and since it can only understand laws as of universally uniform applicability, then my reason can demand only universally valid reasons for decision-making. What is of central importance to notice here is that Kant's claim cannot be confused with a claim of authority. The demand of reason is a demand from within myself, not Kant. If you find it possible to reject this description of reason as

is, to the law of reason, which in the Idea of freedom contains the law of the intelligible world.' This law is identical with the principle of autonomy"

⁶⁹ See Aune p. 35 "If there really is a moral law, it must have the distinctive features of a law. For Kant, these distinctive features are universality and necessity.

See also Paton p. 143 "the will works only with the form of law or universality"

⁷⁰ See CPR A549/B577 p. 473 "For every cause presupposes a rule according to which certain appearances follow as effects; and every rule requires uniformity in the effects. This uniformity is, indeed, that upon which the concept of cause (as a faculty) is based"

an inescapable demander of objectively fair and consistent decision-making, then you can reject his entire moral project as irrelevant and indefensible. Kant's moral philosophy absolutely depends on each individual finding him or herself already under the condition of self-inflicted reason-based responsibility. If you do not find yourself in such a state, then Kant loses the possibility of being persuasive for you.

However, it is crucially important to notice that such a denial is Jonah's greatest wish even while it remains his greatest impossibility. Jonah is in a situation in which he judges that his self-condemnation is self-evidently valid and inescapably deserved. It is self-evident to him that he was free in his military decisions. It is self-evident to him that he always had access to the fact that he had always already given himself the order to unconditionally avoid the killing of another human being. It is this type of experience that Kant is trying to explain. Reason is an inalienable part of my person and it is not in my power to actually deny its judgments.

Kant is not trying to get people to give up their sinful ways and turn toward the demands of reason. Kant is not assuming a less desirable sinful state from which we need to endeavor to make ourselves see the rational light. On the contrary, Kant is asserting that this rational demand for the universalizability of the grounds of our decisions is a very necessary mental context through which all experience must pass. In other words, regardless of whether or not I am yet conscious of it, I have already conceded to reason (by means of my own access to reason) the self-evident validity of its demands that all rules for behavior be laws, that is, universally applicable without contradiction. According to Kant, my concession to the validity of rational demands is a foregone conclusion under thought's condition of reason.⁷¹ This remains true regardless of how I actually behave. I do not need to repent and accept rational validity because I already have, whether I like it or not.

Let us set this same idea under a slightly different light. When I offer reason a mathematical statement, reason has no choice but to consider the truth of the statement only

⁷¹ See Paton p. 135 "No rational agent is entitled to make arbitrary exceptions"

in the terms of a universal claim. If you offer reason the statement $1=1$, reason will determine the validity of this claim as if it were a statement of all possible occurrences of these quantities. Reason will not understand this as a single or temporary claim, but as a claim of unchanging truth for all possible applications. Reason does not have the capacity to understand a mathematical claim in any other way. When I present reason with the concept of "equal," it understands it as a assertion of the self-evidently and inevitably certain equality of the values on either side of the sign. It has no capacity to understand the concept "equal" in any other way. In precisely the same way, any rule by which I make a decision can only be grasped by reason as a law and as such universalizable.

Therefore, reason has no capacity to understand conditional rules. It can only understand "rule" under the formal concept "law" which, like the concept equal, can only be a claim of universal and uniform validity. So when we use a conditional rule to make a decision in reality, our reason struggles to understand how an idiosyncratic and conditional rule can be employed in a way that only a universal law can legitimately be used. My own exercise of reason cannot help but assume that all employments of rules are employed as universal laws. Simply, reason sees the employment of conditional rules as contradictory to its understanding of rules in general. All decisions that are grounded on conditional concerns are assertions of the legitimacy of the rule of those decisions. Reason understands such assertions as assertions of an unconditionally valid rule of behavior (regardless of whether I intended or understood it as such or not). Reason understands a decision, any decision as an assertion of the unconditional and universal validity of the rules upon which the decision was based. It cannot do otherwise. However, when reason encounters my decision to privilege selfish concerns regarding a decision in reality, it encounters that decision as the declaration of the validity of a conditional unconditional.⁷² It sees the act as a self-evidently indefensible and a rationally obvious contradiction.

⁷² See Aune p. 37 Aune disagrees saying "[f]or my part, the reduction does not seem very promising. Apart from having a general doubt about the existence of any objective moral law, I find it very doubtful that basic moral requirements can be understood as requirements of rationality itself." Aune gets lost in his investigation of the absence of purposes regarding the actions commanded by practical reason. It is only

Kant's message is not a pleading with his reader to be more moral, it is a warning to his reader that he or she already is under the judgment of his or her own reason and is always therefore risking Jonah's fate. Neither I nor Kant has any capacity to make me more rational. Reason is not an escapable condition. It cannot be made or developed into anything that it is not already. It is my ability to acknowledge a rational claim as invariably and objectively certain that insures my status as rational. It is an internal power that gives me the capacity to look at a mathematical statement and concede its self-evident validity. If I did not already have that capacity, no amount or type of teaching or education could make up for that insufficiency. Aside from the language of its expression, a math teacher does not give a student information she does not already have. A math teacher at best helps the student come to recognize, sharpen and employ a rational capacity this student already possesses. If it were not so, mathematics could not be learned. Mathematical claims have only ever been claims of rational self-evidence. It is certain that a person's concession that a claim is rationally self-evident can be nothing but uncoercable and subjectively spontaneous. It must be I individually and independently who concedes rational self-evidence and it must be so in every instance. Anything else cannot be understood as a recognition of rational self-evidence, regardless of the frequency of such claims.

If Kant is right, then I need acknowledge only that I perceive my action as my own to be inevitably subject to the demands of my reason and its universal requirements. If Kant is right, then all human experience happens under reason's demand for universally consistent rules of choice. If Kant is right, there is no other way to understand freedom itself. As human experience is inevitably filtered through the conditions of the categories (including the category of causality), so decisions are filtered through practical reason.

theoretical reason that needs to postulate a purpose of purposiveness of moral human action. Practical reason is not capable of concern over ends. It demands mere consistency in all instances of law giving regardless of outcome. Practical reason's demand for consistency is permanently deaf to any concern regarding outcomes. It can only command and is incapable of negotiation of any type. See also Kant's "The End of All Things" in PP p. 102 "lex est surda et inexorabilis." Livy "law is a given and is inexorable." The passage in the original reads: "leges rem surdam, inexorabilem." ("The law was a thing without ears, inexorable") Livy II. trans. B.O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library

Reason does not determine the decision, for if it did, it could not be considered a free decision. A will exclusively determined by reason would lack the necessary plurality of choices in the same way that a will exclusively determined by instinct would. So given the truth of the assumption that we are in fact such that we must select between reason and instinct for the rules of our decisions, reason does not determine my decision, but it does determine my own self-evaluation. As rational I, myself, concede the validity of reason's assertions. I have no ability to complain about what may seem to me to be the injustice of reason's ideas because not only do they erupt from within myself but it is also I who accepts them as valid universally.⁷³ If I give myself rational rules, it is I who gives them to me and it is I who accepts them. There is and can be no other to blame and no other from whom to beg mercy. It is as such that Jonah experiences guilt.

Kant must therefore see Plato's *Euthyphro* as Socrates' attempt to awaken Euthyphro to the possibility of future self-condemnation. It can do no good for Socrates to simply tell Euthyphro that he is in danger of something like Jonah's misery. If there is any hope for Euthyphro, Socrates needs to assist Euthyphro to see for himself that he is already under the judgment of his own reason. Socrates needs Euthyphro to eventually see that arrogant bombast can never eclipse the inevitability of reason-based self-evaluation. I am not saying whether Euthyphro's father is or is not guilty or deserving of the death penalty his son had hoped to impose. I am only saying that if Kant and Plato are thinking along similar lines, then Socrates is trying to help Euthyphro come to discover that certainty cannot be achieved by means of my confidence in any possible heteronomous authority. Trust in an authority, any authority whatsoever, cannot bring certainty as a result of the fact I am exposed to them by means of experience and because certainty is the domain of pure reason alone. A lack of certainty insures the possibility of being wrong. Socrates is therefore trying to help Euthyphro see that guessing regarding the justice of his father's

⁷³ Ibid., p. 84 "Since the universal laws are practical laws - that is, objectively valid principles of volition - they can be intrinsically acceptable to rational beings only by being principles that rational beings freely accept"

possible execution puts Euthyphro at risk of having performed an indefensible act. This guessing puts Euthyphro at risk of perhaps unrelenting self-condemnation. It can be asserted that Socrates has no interest in besting Euthyphro in debate. His interest was a compassionate one regarding the possible pain of self-condemnation.

In other words, the demand of reason that all rules be universalizable precedes (even if it does not determine) all choices. This demand is a necessary context within which human decision-making occurs. Ignorance or denial of that fact is no protection from the possibility of self-imposed condemnation. Reason's demands regarding the use of rules is part of Kant's description of the fundamental architectural structure of human experience. This does not have to be consciously recognized to be true any more than the categories, as described in the first *Critique*, need to be recognized for them to be necessary for experiences. Kant's moral theory, therefore, extends far past the discussion of possible rules for determining decisions. Since decisions are being made during every moment of consciousness, this practically rational context accompanies all possible experience. Just as the categories must accompany every experience, so must the practical criteria of reason as well.⁷⁴ Given a subject who finds himself the author of his or her decisions, there can be no experience that occurs outside of the implications of practical reason.⁷⁵ He or she who would confront this assertion, must show how there is a rational inconsistency or an unfounded assumption here. We must understand that Kant sees his theory here as rationally certain and undeniable. Everything, including the demand that all rules be universalizable, is rationally implied by myself in my mere assumption of my individual freedom as real.

⁷⁴ See Schneewind p. 315 " Does the faculty of practical reason have an inherent structure in the way that the faculty of pure reason does? If it does, and if it imposes form on the givens we feel as desires, then we have a clue to an explanation of exactly how and why we are autonomous. Taking the activity of practical reason as the source of the necessities that we impose on our willed behavior would show that these necessities are no more escapable than those that give structure to the physical world."

⁷⁵ See Paton p. 254 "The relation between the Idea [of freedom] and my sensuously affected will is compared with the relation of the categories to sensuous intuition."

The Absolute Dissimilarity of the Ideal and the Real

The rational demand for universalizability of all rules for determining behavior is only one of a number of expressions or formulations of Kant's categorical imperative. How does Kant get from the rational defensibility of the mere rational form of law to determinations about how an individual should encounter another individual?⁷⁶ How do I even know if other people exist? We should take careful note of the fact that for Kant, from the point of view of practical reason, a person is determined to be a thing-in-itself, a noumenon.⁷⁷ Now the first *Critique* was fundamentally dedicated to the undermining of any claim regarding the human ability to witness the noumenal in any way.⁷⁸ For humans, all experience is phenomenal, that is, subject to the dictates of the categories. In fact, Kant grounded all of his criticisms regarding claims of metaphysical knowledge on his assertion that no such thing could be known as they were all at some level claims of a human ability to experience the noumenal. So how can he, in the second *Critique*, suddenly reinstate as possible something that he worked so diligently to show was impossible in the first *Critique*?

From a practical point of view, the reality of other people is assumed as a combination of my experience of them and the claims of practical reason. Kant writes, "[the *Critique of Practical Reason*] requires no explanation of how objects of the faculty of desire are possible, for that, as a task of the theoretical knowledge of nature, is left to the

⁷⁶ See Sullivan p. 159 "the ultimate norm is a purely formal law, completely empty of all content, like a statement written from a logical notation. We therefore cannot know how it actually applies to us, that is, what it may substantively command"

⁷⁷ CPrR p. 98

⁷⁸ See Paton p. 29 "in our descent from a first principle we must bring in further elements not themselves contained in the first principle. . . Thus in the first two chapters of the *Groundwork* Kant proceeds analytically from common knowledge to the supreme principle of morality - the categorical imperative. In the third chapter he proceeds synthetically from the examination of this principle *and its sources* - that is, its sources in practical reason itself - to the common knowledge in which it is employed." See also Gr. p. 5/392 "The method in this work is, I believe, one that is most suitable if we proceed analytically from ordinary knowledge to a determination of the supreme principle and then back again synthetically from an examination of this principle and its sources to ordinary knowledge where its application is found."

critique of speculative reason."⁷⁹ What Kant is insinuating here is that for practical reason, it is not necessary to show that the objects of experience are real or even how they are possible in the first place. Practical reason does not really care if the reality of these objects as noumenal is provable. Practical reason assumes they are real and it must do so. Kant writes, "[practical reason]...presupposes these objects [of sense and desire] as given."⁸⁰ It is crucial to understand this.

Kant's first *Critique* dealt with the issue of how reality as an experience is possible. The second *Critique* did not have to be that concerned with these questions because the concept of freedom is impossible if there is no domain in which to exercise my power of choice. If the concept of my own freedom is thinkable, I must first presuppose the conditions which make freedom possible. As we have noticed earlier, in order for freedom to be possible, there must be a plurality of choices regarding reasons for behaving. Earlier we started by assuming material concerns (instinct) and then we drove toward a discussion of the possibility of rational concerns as a selectable alternative to instinct. Here we must do the opposite. We will assume reason, but we must then show how we can assume material concerns at all. This is important because we need some alternative to reason in order to have the plurality that is the condition of the possibility of freedom.

How does practical reason gain enough confidence in experience so as to treat our perception of people as if they were things-in-themselves? Before Kant, Descartes among others challenged us to provide the criteria by which we can distinguish dreams from reality. The recent film trilogy, *The Matrix* challenged us to provide the same criteria. If I have had a dream that I thought was real while I was dreaming it, by what means would I be able to know that my present experience is not just another such dream? Given the dubiety of the needed criteria of distinction, the burden of proof rests with anyone who would claim certainty or even likelihood regarding the perception of the objects of reality as

⁷⁹ CPrR p. 46

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 67

a presentation of things-in-themselves.⁸¹ When asked, "Why do you doubt your senses?" Dickens' Scrooge responds, "Because, a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats . . . You see this toothpick? . . . I have but to swallow it to be haunted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation."⁸² We have all had experiences such as a mirage in the roadway that force us to align ourselves with this sentiment.

In his description of theoretical reason, Kant endeavors to explain the possibility of experience. However, he does not spend time doing it regarding practical reason. He does not need to. This is because my perception of myself as inescapably responsible for the reasons of my decisions forces me to assume that the consequences of my actions happen in a real setting. If I am such that I cannot deny my freedom, then I must assume, in fact, must have already assumed, that my actions happen in a reality. Guilt assumes both freedom and an existence within which my freedom has actual, not imaginary, impact. Theoretical reason must explain and defend experience as possible. Practical reason does not have to do this. Reason-based guilt demands the assumption that my experience and my choices are real.

It is often the case that a dreamer will awaken temporarily laden with regret for an action apparently chosen in a recent dream. As the dreamer comes to understand that events she had thought were real were actually dreams, she begins to be able to escape the regret that had been included with the memory of a decision. The guilt is maintained until she is able to have confidence that these events were in fact dreamed (not real) and not lived (real). However, if there were no exit to a dream, if no alternative reality were to interpose itself between the dreamer and the dream, the guilt could not, of course, relent. Freedom, grounded on reason and its requirement of universality, does not permit me the option of

⁸¹ See O'Neill p. 282-4 "The fundamental point of the Copernican turn is that no correspondence of reason to reality be presumed. . . Human knowledge is threatened by a 'great gulf' that provides the most challenge to the possibility of a complete and systematic philosophy."
See also CPR p. A302/B359 p. 303 "reason never applies itself directly to experience or to any object"

⁸² A Christmas Carol p. 158

safely assuming that the reality I experience is not actual. Reality very well may not be as it appears. It always remains possible that a blot of underdone potato has made a cheat of my senses. However, so long as I remain convinced that I am the author of the reasons of my actions, I cannot afford to take the chance to assume that it is as such.

Actions in reality are like shooting at a scarecrow at twilight. I can take target shots at a scarecrow so long as I am confident that it is actually made up only of flannel and straw. However, should the light be dim, I always already know the gravity inherent in shooting when I am not sure whether my target is really straw or a person. Since it is always a possibility that what I think is a scarecrow could actually turn out to be a person, guessing cannot be considered an ethically safe possibility, because the tragedy made possible by that assumption has such serious possibilities regarding my own self-imposed guilt. The first *Critique* let me know that reality is always going to have a bit of the appearance of a scarecrow at twilight, it is always going to be an experience the reality of which I cannot be sure. Appearances may be in themselves as they seem to me but it is also true that they may not. However, practical reason does not allow me the luxury of guessing. When I see a person, even though I know that my senses may be cheating me in some way, I must assume that the person I think I see actually exists as a person, at least with regard to the decisions related to practical reason. I must check to make sure the scarecrow is not actually a person before I can shoot at it. If I do not have the wherewithal to check, then how could I decide to take shots anyway? To shoot at a scarecrow without checking is to risk shooting a real person for no reason.⁸³ Such is my situation when I

⁸³ See J. G. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. P. Preuss, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987 pp. 75-7 "Only through these commandments of conscience do truth and reality come into my presentations. I cannot refuse them my attention and my obedience without giving up my vocation. Nor can I refuse to believe in the reality which they bring along without likewise denying my vocation . . . everything becomes true and certain for me which is presupposed as true and certain by the possibility of such an obedience. I am aware of appearances in space to which I transfer the concept of myself; I think of them as beings like myself . . . the voice of my conscience calls to me: whatever these beings may be in and for themselves, you ought to treat them as self subsistent, free, autonomous beings completely independent of you. Presuppose as already known that they can determine their purposes quite on their own and independent of you . . . I will therefore always regard those beings as beings which exist for themselves . . . It is the voice of conscience, the commandment, 'here limit your freedom, here suppose and respect other purposes,' which is translated into thought, 'here is certainty and truly a self existent being like myself.' To see them otherwise I must first deny the voice of my conscience"

encounter the appearance of people in my experience. I cannot check and see if my experience of people is an illusion or not. I cannot check to see if I am at this moment dreaming. I cannot check to see if I am and have always been in the Matrix. Since it is not in my power to check, I must assume the reality of people that appear to me as real people.

I do not have the recourse to be sure that the reality of my experience corresponds directly and accurately to a reality of things-in-themselves. It very well may turn out to be the case that I am in the *Matrix* or in an extended dream. If that were revealed to be the case, then I could shoot all the dream people I wished to without fear of suffering crushing self-imposed condemnation. Violent video games provide just such an instance.

However, I cannot arrive at this level of certainty. Since I cannot arrive at this level of certainty, since I cannot be sure that my experience of the world and its people is really a dream or a video game, the reality I see and the people with which it is populated must be accepted as if they were certainly real even though experience can only offer certainty that they are possibly real. Please notice the appearance of certainty here and recall that we have mentioned earlier with Hume that certainty cannot be experience-based. The certainty with which I grant to experience its status as existing reality is imposed on me by practical reason in order that this setting can be accepted by me as the necessary context of freedom.

Take Jonah's case once again. I asked him if he could try imagining situations like the *Matrix*. I said, "Jonah, how can you even be sure that you actually went to that field in Central America. How can you feel so guilty if you don't even know you actually went there? If this turns out to be the Matrix, then you really never participated in killing anyone. Since you don't know for sure that we are not in the Matrix all the while, why must you feel so bad?" He said that he had actually tried that for a while in various forms of fantasy and escapism. He said that he has always been completely aware that reality may actually turn out to be a dream, but his guilt requires only the simple possibility that this is reality, not the certainty of it. Guilt does not need me to be certain that reality is as it

appears. But I would have to be certain about a dream being a dream if I were to be able to relinquish myself from reason's demands regarding guilt incurred in a dream. Even if I grant that reality may actually be a fantasy, I would have to be certain of this if I were to be able to escape the self-denunciation inherent in violations of my own dictates of practical reason. So long as I must admit that I am certain that perceived reality may actually be as it appears, I must assume its reality, for reason as an ineluctable necessity offers no room for error.

We can see in this something analogous to parts of the ontological argument associated with St. Anselm. According to logic, possible necessity implies necessity. In the ontological argument, the possibly necessary existence of a God seemed to guarantee His existence. While Kant himself revealed what he saw as the faulty reasoning involved there, the form of the argument is helpful for us here. Given the necessity of reason's demand, the mere possibility of the reality of my perceptions [granted by my possibly faulty experience of them] grounds the validity and inevitability of my assumption that it is an existing arena within which I make real choices.

However, this only answers part of the question regarding the different formulations of the moral imperative. Even if we grant that universality is undeniably included in the concept of law as understood by reason and that reason in this capacity assumes that all that take the form of law are also pronouncements of universally consistent applicability, how does that permit us to discuss the humanity "in my own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end..."⁸⁴ How do we get from the purely formal discussion of the universal implications of law to actual people? If Kant is going to continue to assert self-evidence, undeniability and inevitability regarding his moral concepts, the gap between the purely formal and everything else must be acknowledged and addressed.

⁸⁴ Gr p. 36

In response to this considerable challenge, Kant begins by discussing two distinct approaches to the establishment of individuality itself. In the first *Critique*, Kant established the unity of apperception as a single mental location where raw sensations are gathered. This unity of apperception, as he calls it, is the unity to whom sensations occur. Kant also refers to this as the "synthetic unity of the manifold of given intuitions in one consciousness."⁸⁵ In order for a series of originally random units of sense data to be unified for the purpose making it possible to submit them to the understanding so as to originally make experience possible, there must be a single spot for sense data to be originally collected. This is theoretical reason's path to the establishment of an individuality of sorts. Theoretical reason asserts that in order for experience to be possible, experience must happen to a unified individuality, a unity. This is the consciousness referred to in the above citation. However, we must not confuse this consciousness or unity of apperception with personality in its totality. This unity must not be thought of as insinuating anything more than it does. If we are to think about this unity's attitude toward the sensuous material it processes, it can only be an attitude of indifference. It cannot judge or evaluate, it only collects (gives unity to the manifold) and submits its collections to the understanding. This can hardly be considered the essence of human individuality and personality. While the unity of apperception may remain a significant, even essential ingredient to the human experience of selfhood, it cannot be confused with its totality.

Regarding practical reason's contribution to individual personality, Kant writes that the rules of practical reason "contribute . . . to the a priori subjection of the manifold of desires to the unity of consciousness of a practical reason commanding in the moral law."⁸⁶ Whereas the first *Critique* dealt with "the theoretical use of the understanding in bringing the manifold of (sensuous) intuitions under one consciousness a priori," practical reason requires a site for the unification of a multiplicity of desires. For theoretical reason

⁸⁵ CPrR p. 67

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67

the word "I" refers to him or her to whom sense data happens. I am the one who receives and collects raw sense data in this instance. However, to practical reason, the word "I" refers to him or her to whom a plurality of desires occurs. I am the one who is subject to a variety of conflicting even contradicting concerns. We can see very quickly here, that this ingredient of my personhood contrasts significantly with theoretical reason's ingredient in that the latter was blind regarding interest, while the former must be seen as at least a partial (if not the sole) source of all my interest in general.

It is very important to notice that in this unity of the manifold of desires we have the interaction of two desires with radically different sources. In this unity inherent in consciousness, we encounter material desires which necessitate our inclusion in the natural order. However, if Kant is right, we also encounter concerns grounded in reason itself which necessitate our inclusion in an intellectual order. It is here and only here, in this practical unity of consciousness that the intellectual and natural worlds come in contact. Aside from their coincidence within the unity of consciousness of practical reason, these two orders can have no interaction or even awareness of each other. (We might also consider whether the coincidence of intuition and concept in the schema of the first *Critique* might be an analogous interaction.)

This discussion of a unified consciousness grounded on practical reason brings us back to a discussion of the plurality of choices required for the possibility of freedom. This consciousness is a unity which has the capacity to hold at least two grounds for the making of decisions. In other words, this unity also amounts to my faculty for the possibility of having an awareness of this plurality. It is here, and only here, that I encounter my choice and thus my freedom. So the "I" of practical reason is not just the unity within which a plurality of desires can occur to me, it is also he or she to whom the choice between these desires must be left. For practical reason, "I" am the selfhood or unity to whom choice is offered and on whom, therefore, responsibility is therefore foisted. It is this "I" from

whom judgment is unavoidably and inescapably required. It is this chooser who must also offer explanation to reason for these judgments and the decisions that derive from them.

As I am such that I encounter both intellectual and natural concerns in one and the same consciousness, I am, on these very grounds, capable of understanding this consciousness, my consciousness as a free consciousness.⁸⁷ To put this another way, since the arena in which the concerns of the natural world come to encounter, often in hostility, the concerns of the intellectual order is the arena of my own practical consciousness of desires, "I" become the one to whom responsibility for the judgment of priority between these worlds is alone attributable. Let us use Kant's image of a court of law.⁸⁸ The natural world and the intellectual world send advocates, if you will, to represent the concerns of their corresponding grounds of choice and they present their case before an all powerful and sovereign judge, a judge who can be subject to no conditions. There can be no possibility of outside coercion for this judge. This judge reclines in solitude, so to speak, as the advocates approach. It is crucial to notice here that the maximum influence these advocates have is that of suggestion or appeal. They cannot ever be understood as driving or determining the choice. These advocates have a power only to suggest or implore. My desire for food or justice can never make me make up my mind.

Once the concerns of my material and intellectual advocates have been heard, this judge selects between them in perfect incorruptible and uncoercible freedom.⁸⁹ Even while

⁸⁷ See Allison p. 150 "Kant's claim . . . that deliberate defiance of the moral law . . . is a[n] . . . impossibility . . . is a claim about the conditions of the possibility of being accountable beings at all. More specifically, the claim is that in order to be accountable and, therefore in order to be *either* good or evil, it is necessary to recognize that the moral law (in the form of the categorical imperative) makes valid claims. . . . A being who lacked this recognition and the concomitant feeling or respect would not be morally accountable"

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 41;49

See Sullivan p. 61 "Kant describes consciousness by legalistic expressions. It is a "tribunal," "the consciousness of an inner court in man," in which we think of ourselves as prosecutor, accused, defense counsel, and judge. It leads us to a "judgment about what a person has or has not done," "a verdict of [moral] reason" - "condemnation or acquittal"

See MM p. 189

⁸⁹ See Allison p. 208 "Put simply, if self-preservation, self- interest, or happiness is the principle of my behavior, if it dictates my maxims, it is I (not nature in me) that gives it this authority."

myself as subject to material concerns can be seen as desperate, struggling for food or oxygen for example, myself as will, as chooser cannot be seen as in any way necessarily determined by physical desperation. Myself as chooser sits in imperturbable quietude⁹⁰ perfectly free to concede to the desperation of my physical requirements or to reject these demands in light of what it may decide are graver concerns. This is proven (experientially) in every instance in which someone like Medgar Evers, for example, makes rational concerns the condition of material safety. Only one person has to be willing die or suffer for a cause to prove that such thing is a legitimate possibility. In fact, even if I never witness even one such individual, it is rationally certain that I can and even must conjure the possibility on my own within my own thinking.

Given my belief in the reality of my own freedom to select from among a plurality of motivational principles of action, I have no choice but to assume the reality of this isolated locus of judgment which can but remain unfettered and spontaneous in the face of the material and intellectual appeals.⁹¹ My body and sensuous self must suffer the demands of nature, my rational self must assert the requirement of consistency and uniformity, but my will need not heed either of them as it selects a ruling principle from among the possible plurality in an actual moment of choice. It is only under these conditions that any actions can legitimately be called "mine."

For the judge in this setting, there can be no other voice. I, as judge, can only be alone. There can be no plurality of selectors of principles. In the moment of choice, one principle is elevated to the status of a rule of an act by one selector. Therefore, any choice

See Paton p. 181 "the setting of ends before oneself is the essential mark of freedom . . . I can never be compelled by others to make anything my end. If I make anything my end I do so of my own free will"

⁹⁰ See RWR pp. 26-7 "The term 'act' can apply in general to that exercise of freedom whereby the supreme maxim . . . is adopted by the will . . . [This] is intelligible action, cognizable by means of pure reason alone, apart from every temporal condition"

⁹¹ See Paton p. 254 "Kant identifies a man's intelligence and his rational will with his 'proper' self . . . 'Das eigenliche Selbst'.
See also Gr. p. 57-8/457-8

at all assures and confirms a unified singular and univocal source of decision as a necessity. As judge in this setting and context, I can claim no variety, no collaboration of decisive judgment. In this setting my unified individuality is as guaranteed and inescapable as my freedom from coercion. As my natural and intellectual advocates present their concerns before me in my consciousness, the pure spontaneity of my choice is necessarily and undeniably absolute. This judge is much of what we refer to when we utter the word "I." In other words, practical reason, in its connection and confrontation with natural concerns regarding decisions in a real world, is identity-conferring and establishing.⁹²

It is not by mistake that I have included references to what I see to be a clear inference in Kant's work regarding the coincidental attribution to humans of language usually reserved exclusively for God. Seen in the light of Kant's moral work, the human individual must be seen as both absolutely free, all-powerful (if only with regard to possible choice), sovereign judge (answerable to none except for at his or her own rational and material discretion), and as the sole and unique prime (or unmoved) mover of unendable causal chains in the natural order.⁹³ I am not suggesting that human individuals be thought of as God in Godself, but we must take note that this clear similarity to concepts that are traditionally reserved for God alone is quite intriguing. If there are serious implications in this regard, it will be very important to tease them out.

In a manner quite similar to his reaction to the antinomies in the first *Critique*, Kant argues that, as elements of the experienced world, we do belong necessarily to the natural causal chain. As a result freedom of choice is only thinkable if the human being is also thought of as a rational intellect subject to the pure rational idea of law, and as such at least possibly undetermined by the dictates of the natural causal chain. Kant writes, "we could

⁹² See Allison p. 60 "Kant seems to be claiming . . . both that the referent of the word 'I' must be a genuine subject of thought and action and that such a subject must conceive of itself as free in the transcendental sense. This makes our transcendental freedom inseparable from our selfhood . . . Kant claims that we know through intellectual intuition that the soul is free in the transcendental sense"

⁹³ See CPR A555/B583 p. 477; A552/B580 p. 475 "just as if the agent in and by himself began in this action an entirely new series of consequences . . . if reason can have causality with respect to appearances, it is a faculty *through* which the sensible condition of an empirical series of effects first begins"

defend the supposition of a freely acting cause when applied to a being in the world of sense only in so far as the being was regarded also as a noumenon."⁹⁴ So, just as he did in his first *Critique*, Kant relies on the phenomenon/noumenon distinction to make possible an understanding of an apparently insoluble contradiction. This sovereign judge which is inherent in any supposition of the possibility of responsibility or guilt regarding human choice cannot as such be phenomenally witnessed. I cannot see myself in the mirror in anyway that reveals in a physical sense myself as free chooser. The idea of a person as responsible is a pure intellectual concept. If I could not find this concept in my own intellect, it could never be discoverable in the world of experience. If I see it in another person, it cannot therefore be as a result of some physically observable attribute, but as a result of my having assumed it in reference to my experience of that person.

We must note in the above quotation that Kant does not assert that humans are noumenal, but must only be "regarded" as such. This returns us the idea that we cannot afford to assume the unreality of that which we perceive to be humans, given uncertainty in either direction. We can now combine this idea with the idea that the sovereign judge and chooser that is our will is not synonymous with the demands or concerns of my physical or intellectual self. In fact, we must remember, that the free will is the free will only if it has the capacity to say no to any physical or intellectual demand whatsoever. From the point of view of myself as absolutely free chooser, we must always admit that even desperate physical demands do not have the capacity to rise above the level of suggestions to my will. My physical demands can only plead with my will, they can never force or determine. If my physical concerns do start to appear to be undeniable demands, it can only be that I have chosen in freedom for it to be so when I did not have to do so.

So, even though my physical demands and with them my appearance as physical can be argued to be a portion of the ingredients that make up my identity, it cannot be argued that it makes up the entirety of these ingredients. Assuming that Kant has been

⁹⁴ CPrR p. 50

convincing for you so far, we must admit that at least part of what I understand as my identity must be grounded on an unwitnessable purely intellectual assumption of the reality of my position as sovereign judge regarding a plurality of grounds of behavior choices. In other words, who I am has to be understood as at least partly grounded on my assumption that I am free and responsible even if I cannot prove this.

However, given the idea that I cannot assume the unreality of those appearances which appear to be people, I have to assume that these experiences of people are experiences of sovereign choosers as well even though I cannot and can never physically witness that. So, as we noticed earlier, since practical reason cannot afford to make a mistake given the possibility of the noumenal reality of others, practical reason does not have to prove this reality to assume it as a reality. In fact, practical reason must assume the reality of the appearance of another person as an appearance of a sovereign chooser and prime mover of infinite causal chains. It must assume this as a certainty of practical reason. It is on this very assumption of certainty that the inevitability and inescapability of Jonah's guilt (assuming I understand it correctly and that it does not turn out to be grounded on unrelated pathologies or neuroses) is exclusively grounded. We must recognize that if it were possible to reject or even question this certainty, Jonah and many like him would.

Therefore, it is not possible to regard what I believe to be the appearance of another human being, that is, a sovereign judge and chooser, as anything other than an unquestionable and certain encounter with a noumenal reality (even while I readily admit without hesitation that witnessing the noumenal is clearly theoretically impossible). When I see another person, my own practical reason forces me to regard myself as an example of an appearing noumena and to regard this other person as such as well. To use language that Kant uses in reference to related material, to experience other people as something noumenal and as certainly so, is to "postulate" their existence as certainly noumenal within a phenomenal experience. Recall the scarecrow example I offered earlier as well as my reference to the ontological argument. Given the necessary and absolute value of any

possible free human chooser, reason demands that I regard this possible necessity as a necessity. Given the necessity of reason's demand for consistency regarding all possible rationally free human agents, the mere possibility of these agents [granted by my possibly faulty experience of them] grounds the validity and necessity of my assumption of their status as existing noumena. Regarding others in this way is then to grant their status as appearing noumena by means of rational faith, for it is quite beyond the bounds of theoretical reason to ever know such a thing.⁹⁵

Now this rational faith cannot be seen as a voluntary or discretionary faith. When I see you, it is not in my power not to see a free chooser. I can pretend not to see you as such, but, if Kant is correct, I can never really persuade myself as to the truth of that pretension. So, while it must remain the case that reality could turn out to be a dream or a product of the Matrix, practical reason does not need to care about that speculative possibility. Its certainties and implications cannot be destabilized by means of such suggestions. Regarding the presentations of what certainly could be the appearances of noumenal certainties, practical reason has the power, in fact, the requirement, to treat the uncertainty necessarily inherent in phenomenal experience with indifference. This certainty regarding the existence of free agents is rational in that it is a rationally necessary thought and yet it must remain a faith because this certainty must always lie beyond the scope of possible speculative knowledge.

However, when I witness you, through the dictates of practical reason, as an appearing noumenon (which theoretical reason can only receive as an obvious contradiction), it is not your physical attributes which are afforded this interpretation. For the same reason, when I witness myself as an appearing, noumenally real certainty, it is not

⁹⁵ See Paton p. 176 "If there is a categorical imperative, it must enjoin upon us objective and absolute ends. Since these ends must have absolute worth, they cannot be the relative ends we seek to produce: they must be rational agents or, for practical purposes, men. Without this there could be no absolute worth and so no categorical imperative. Hence the categorical imperative must bid us treat men as absolute ends or as ends in themselves. Worked in with this conclusion is the view that men, considered as ends in themselves, are the *ground* . . . of a possible categorical imperative"

my physical attributes or characteristics which are granted this status. These physical appearances are seen by practical reason as the mere location of a noumenal reality. It must be remembered that my role as sovereign chooser is only thinkable as such when it is thought of as absolutely free to reject and ignore any physical concern in its judgments. I can consider myself noumenal only when I can consider myself capable of being undetermined by my status as a physically concerned creature. This ability to recognize myself as an appearing noumenon has very serious implications. We saw just above that it is my status as independent chooser that grants me my identity as this individual who is exclusively responsible as an individuality. That aspect of my perceived identity that is grounded on my freedom is not dependent on my physicality. For Jonah, he is and will always be he who is at least partly responsible for the deaths of others in a field in Central America.

So, when I understand myself as he or she who is responsible, it is not myself as physical to which I am referring. In such a situation, it is merely I as free chooser (a purely ideal concept) that I understand and assume myself to be. It is only to myself as such that I can grant that my knowledge of myself is certain. My experience of myself as a physical existence must always retain the uncertainty demanded by theoretical reason. It is and must remain certain that I may at any moment wake up to find that I am actually not as now find myself physically to be. My certainty of my existence as noumenal does not extend necessarily to my physical self as such.

Let me say the same thing from a slightly different angle. If I understand myself to be a sovereign and absolutely free judge to whom alone responsibility can be attributed, and I assume that this unity is not exactly identical with the source of my physical desires and requirements, then I cannot assume that this unity is completely limited to its physical desires, at least while I understand myself as responsible. We must remember, that physical requirements can, at their very strongest, merely appeal to my sovereign will. I, as will, must always (whether I wish to admit it or not) retain my ability to say no to my

physical requests. Even if myself as physical submits to my will what is for my physical well being a unquestionable demand (a death threat for example), this demand can only ever be received by my will as a request, or an appeal. Therefore, if my self-understanding is a self-understanding that necessarily includes responsibility as an inescapable characteristic, then it is necessary that I understand a necessary segregation of my physical concerns from my status as free judge. In other words, it is not possible to understand myself simultaneously as both determined by physical concerns (identical with my physical concerns) and free with regard to them.

The only necessary connection my will has to my physical concerns is that my will must hear requests from that quarter. The connection between my physical concerns and my will can never and will never get any stronger than this. So, myself as responsible is connected to but not identical with myself as hungry, for example. However, for many including Jonah, while it is possible to reject the appeals of hunger, it is not possible to deny the assertions of self-condemnation grounded on responsibility and freedom. As Kant understands it, I can, by force of will, decide to deny ruling sovereignty to my physical concerns, but I have not the power by force of will to deny reason's demands regarding deserved self-condemnation. In other words, I can disregard physical concerns but I cannot disregard self-imposed guilt based on reason.

What I am arguing here, is that while identity has ingredients which have their source in physical concerns, it is myself as sovereign judge and as therefore responsible actor that makes up the lion's share of my own understanding of who or what I am. It was this that I was alluding to earlier when I said that responsibility is identity-conferring. In fact, Kant seems to assert that these materially grounded ingredients of personality make up only a small, perhaps relatively less significant portion of my own self understanding. The irrevocability of my status as responsible seems to indicate its central importance regarding identity. Kant writes, "the person as belonging to the world of sense is subject to his own

personality so far as he belongs to the intelligible world."⁹⁶ Here Kant is clearly indicating the central position that my status as noumenal agent has regarding the concept of personality itself.

We must also remember here that in order for a decision to occur, deliberation must end. Both intellectual and material advocates present their arguments to the will. When the will moves from deliberation between the arguments of these advocates to decision, it is the case that as a personality I must act as a unity. While I am in deliberation, it appears to be possible to understand myself as bifurcated. The cartoon image of a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other seems to represent an intuitive description of separate sources of interest and intention that are simultaneously mine. However, there is no way to make a decision and remain bifurcated. Decision requires a ruling and he or she who rules can only be understood as a unity. An antagonistic multiplicity cannot as such make a choice. Notice that when the supreme court hands down a decision, it can only send down a single determining ruling. While it is true that both my various advocates and the United States' Supreme Court can include dissenting opinions in a ruling, these must be regarded as impotent, even irrelevant with regard to the practical courtroom application and effectiveness of the ruling opinion and the decisions that come exclusively from it. If the Supreme Court were to send down a variety of rulings in regard to a single case, insurmountable confusion regarding the application of the rulings would result. Which ruling ought be used in specific cases? Dissenting opinions cannot effect action so long as they remain merely dissenting opinions. They must remain merely that which did not determine the choice. (It is true that dissenting opinions can effect future decisions, but if this happens, then what had been a dissenting opinion would then have risen, in that instance, to the position of ruling opinion) In other words, I am who I am based on my actual decisions, not on the ideas I considered. I must select one argument and one principle from among the variety to make any choice.

⁹⁶ CPrR p. 89

Further, it is impossible to avoid or deny the rational advocate of my decision-making. To do so seems to require the relinquishing of a necessary requirement for freedom itself. I can try to decide to be solely motivated by material demands and assert that there are no rationally absolute grounds for decisions. In this case the individual would have his or her identity solely in his or her material concerns and capabilities. I concede this as a possibility. However, this individual could not also assert a self-understanding that included freedom and responsibility as Kant understood those concepts. This materially driven individual would have an identity and judgment based solely on principles of prudence. But as such a person, I could not take credit nor accept guilt for the principles of my decisions, for there could only be material sources for them. While I could base my decisions on raw gluttony or culturally authoritative ideas of justice, what these would have in common is the impossibility of understanding these principles as absolute or universalizable. Rules of decision-making that come from experience must always be relative, as I have said.

However, as I have also mentioned before, the concept law has within it the concept of infinite and unconditional applicability as a requirement. The suggestion here is that so long as I understand any rational concept as rational (even mathematics), and so long as I understand that the demand for the universalizability of all instances of rule giving as a rational concept, there can be no possibility of denying the self-evidence of a demand for universalizability for all occasions of rule-giving. In other words, if I attempt to deny the validity of rational demands in favor of a claim of purely prudential, cultural or instinctual sources of motivation, my own pure rational concept of law and its demand for universal uniformity of principle application recognizes contradiction in any claim of valid yet relative principles. My self-perception as an entity in charge of the selection regarding the motivation of my actions necessarily implies an already accomplished rejection of an understanding of myself in isolation of rational demands. Simply, if I can but find myself

undeniably free, I have also made it impossible to claim immunity from reason. My identity therefore must be tied to my access to reason.

However, this leaves us with a quite significant implication. As I come to recognize most of my own self-understanding as resting in my status as absolutely free rational chooser, and therefore move away from attributing ethical significance to the accidents and idiosyncrasies of my physical capacity, my own self-understanding and interpretation of my own identity and reality moves away from a reliance on all idiosyncratic or specific characteristics. As I come to recognize the immensity of the importance that my own assessments attribute to my own power to rationally assess competing desires, I come to attribute ever less importance to the particular aspects of my own physical nature. This is not to say that I physically do not matter. However, what I most esteem in myself, according to Kant, is my role as absolutely free rational judge. As this esteem increases, my interest in the significance of my own material particularity decreases. More specifically, as I come to spontaneously attribute ever increasing priority to my role as maker of decisions, I simultaneously begin to assign less and less priority to my own individual encounters with hunger, for example. Yes, hunger must and will always press upon me with vicious persistence, but its power to persuade must diminish with my increasing refusal to confer upon it superiority relative to rational demands for the universalizability of all instances of law giving.

So, what is slipping away in this process is an ability to emphasize my own idiosyncratic elements as centrally significant. All humans are granted an incredible array of characteristics that guarantee our absolute individuality and uniqueness relative to all other possible occurrences of human individuality. We cannot help but pay significant attention to our differences. My physical, mental, spiritual even emotional talents and insufficiencies distinguish me from any other possible human being and guarantee my absolute individuality. I can only be unique. However, even if this is granted, there is no guarantee that I will care that much about those aspects of myself that ground my status as

unique. While I probably must admit that I am unique, there is no requirement that I must care about my status as such.

In fact, in the material just above, we have come to see that, for Kant, my own concern for my idiosyncratic characteristics and requirements diminishes in inverse proportion to my decision to esteem my own role as absolutely free decision maker.⁹⁷ As my esteem for my intelligible self increases, it seems my ability to prioritize instinctual concerns decreases. Even more interesting is the recognition that this aspect of myself, my power as potentially indomitable rational deliberator, is without possible idiosyncrasy. As rational, I am universally homogeneous with all other possible examples. As rational, I am the impossibility of uniqueness. Reason is in all instances perfectly uniform. I can ground my own interpretation of my own significance on either material or rational grounds. If I begin to ground the interpretation of my own significance on my status as noumenally rational in my decision-making capacity, I am grounding my interpretation of my own personal significance on purely formal concepts. Let me say this simply, as I shift my esteem from idiosyncratic physical ingredients of my personhood to my ability to be indomitable in my decision-making (at least potentially), what I am beginning to emphasize are elements that are the opposite of unique. In other words, as noumenal we are all absolutely and certainly indistinguishable.

In order to understand myself as noumenal in the manner Kant suggests, I must abstract from my idiosyncrasies to discover what might be left. If I begin to esteem those aspects of my capacity that are solely grounded on purely formal concepts, I must come to admit that these formal elements are just that, formal. A formal or rational concept can only be understood as always one and the same concept in any particular presentation or occurrence of it. As I esteem my own rational thoughts, I must admit that your rational

⁹⁷ See Sullivan p. 197 "Unlike mere things, persons have a status that, as we have seen, Kant calls 'humanity' in the sense of a moral personality, in contrast to and individual's empirical or psychological personality. . . the latter is 'merely the power to become self-conscious of our identity' through temporal changes, whereas moral personality refers to a rational agent's ability to act freely, that is, independently of the mechanisms of nature.

thoughts are formally identical to mine. Reason can but be universal and homogeneous. It cannot be privately different. It cannot be individualistic. Much of what is commonly referred to as individuality is necessarily grounded on things I do not have in common with you. By definition, reason cannot be one of these things. So if I start to increase my esteem for aspects of myself that are grounded on reason, I begin to de-emphasize the importance of the difference between myself and any other (even potentially) rational chooser. While differences must always remain, these differences can thus potentially become insignificant or even irrelevant in regards to the ground of my decision-making.

If I focus my attention on my own capacity to be an at least potentially imperturbable judge over competing incentives to action, I begin to see myself free of material demands (at least potentially). I can see myself in a light such that I am incapable of asserting any significant difference between myself and any other possible occurrence of this capacity.⁹⁸ As I focus on this aspect of my potential and on the importance that I grant to that aspect of my potential, I can begin to recognize that this part of myself is irrevocably identical (in value at least) to all other such occurrences. Formal principles of behavior and

⁹⁸ See Paton p. 135; 168 "[Kant] is assuming, as we all must, that there are, or at least may be, other rational agents besides ourselves, and he is saying that the principle of moral action must be the same for every rational agent. No rational agent is entitled to make arbitrary exceptions to the moral law . . . To say that the ultimate moral law must be universal is to say that every particular moral law must be objective and impersonal . . . that it must be impartial between one person and another. In this there is surely nothing to cavil at, even if we believe that we have a direct intuition of an unanalyzable quality of goodness (or obligation . . . the universality of moral law already implies reciprocity of obligation between person to person. . . If I claim to be treated by you in one way, I must be prepared to treat you in the same way. The importance of this for morality can hardly be exaggerated. . . there must be ends given by mere reason itself, not reason in the service of inclination. These ends must be valid for every rational being . . . I ought to respect the rational wills of all moral agents including myself"

See also Sullivan p. 47 "For Kant, the term 'autonomy' denotes our ability and responsibility to know what *morality* requires of us and our determination not to act immorally. Rather than being a norm for promoting and satisfying our desires, then, the law of autonomy functions fundamentally as 'the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends' . . . Therefore, the autonomous person is one who, by enacting objective principles of conduct, is not only self-legislating but also universally legislative. For Kant, then, the road to autonomy is through the self-imposed discipline or self-mastery necessary to adopt rules by which we transcend individuality in favor of universality." Sullivan interprets Kant well here regarding the transcendence of individuality. However, he seems to avoid a discussion of the real human pain and despair which is implied and inherent in this transcendence. My disassociation with my own individuality is a resisted and ominous process. Myself as individual must necessarily fear the collapse or destruction of my own individuality. I must perceive its approach with the foreboding inherent in the impending unknowability of death.

choice cannot be regarded as mine as opposed to another's. The role of free judge who chooses in a context of reason from a variety of incentives to action is universal and necessarily indistinguishable in all possible occurrences. While it remains important to recognize that the concerns brought before that court will always maintain a serious and significant individuality having been sourced in material individuality, the judge who hears this unique testimony is itself rationally identical and un-unique in comparison to all other possible occurrences.

In other words, If I decide to make another merely a means to my own end, I have committed a rational inconsistency.⁹⁹ Any instance of one person making another a means to some end solely is an example of one instance of free decision-making, a person, deciding to prioritize itself individually over another rationally indistinguishable occurrence of free decision-making, that is, any other person. It is a claim of distinction between indistinguishables. Since my own free decision-making requires reason to be among the grounds of the reasons for my decisions, and since I cannot possess reason any more than any other rational creature can, it is impossible to rationally defend any prioritization of my decision-making capacity over any other's without perpetuating a contradiction.

When Kant argues that people must be seen by practical reason as noumenal, he is asserting that we recognize that each rational human is itself a center of absolutely free decision-making, each one rationally indistinguishable (in priority) in this capacity from one another. If I interpret the center of my own significance as grounded on my reason-based freedom, then I have simultaneously esteemed that identical and indistinguishable freedom in any other possible instance, inside or outside of me. Kant refers to that which

⁹⁹ See Paton p. 135 "the principle of moral action must be the same for every rational agent. No rational agent is entitled to make arbitrary exceptions"

See also Sullivan p. 194 "A purely rational norm . . . holds universally for all rational agents. . . the fundamental Idea of a 'person' is purely formal, so the concept of persons 'must be conceived only negatively'; it must ignore any positive, empirical information that might distinguish one person from another and so provide the information for acting heteronomously . . . because it mandates respect for persons independently of any empirical information . . . [i]t is itself unable to discriminate between persons"

is identical in human choosers as our "humanity." Any prioritization of the relative worth of my own rational center of decision-making at all cannot itself be rationally explainable or defensible. The prioritization of one occurrence of universally identical rational principles over another is undermined by that very same reason that instantiated that rational freedom in the first place. Rational freedom and the decision to privilege one occasion of it over another cannot be simultaneously maintained without pure contradiction.¹⁰⁰

Let me make this self-evidently clear. The categorical imperative can be expressed as follows: $1=1$. Reason demands that any claim of a difference of value among rational humans upon which choices and judgments are made has to be defended to the point of certainty. If I concede that value difference cannot be rationally guaranteed (for it would have to be based on experience which can grant no certainty), then my own reason demands that I default to a presumption of equal value for all rational creatures in order to satisfy minimum categorical demands.¹⁰¹ Further, if the source of my own interpretation of my own significance is grounded on universal rational principles, then I must admit to no special or privileged status in regard to them for they are identical and indistinguishable in all their possible occurrences. If one instance of reason-reliant free choice is rationally indistinguishable in value from any other, then any occasion in which one locus of free choice has been privileged over another is an assertion that is rationally indistinguishable from the mathematical expression $1 > 1$. A superiority of identicals is impossible. Seen in this light, we can see the grounds upon which Kant claimed rational self-evidence and undeniability to his categorical imperative. No matter how many times I make decisions of the form $1 > 1$, my own reason cannot ever grant it defensibility. Now matter how many times I may witness what appear to be other people making decisions in the $1 > 1$ form, my own reason has not the capacity to understand it or to legitimate it. Decisions of this form can but remain irrational, contradictory and nonsensical.

¹⁰⁰ See PP p. 134 "The intrinsic characteristic of moral evil is that its aims are self-contradictory"

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 72 "the *equality* of each [person] with every other . . . [is a] pure rational principle"

Formal Rules as the Ground of Significance

Even so, we must ask if irrational decision-making is so serious a risk. Cannot I just decide to be irrational in this way? What is to stop me? What is to demand my own self-condemnation for mere irrationality? Nothing. I am certainly free not to choose the demand for consistency as a motivational principle of action. However, we must also recall that my own perception of myself as author of my decisions was grounded on at least two sources of incentive to action, instinct and reason. These grounding rules of choice, maxims, may be mathematically expressed as $1 > 1$ and $1 = 1$. Ignoring the rational ground of choice still leaves me the instinctual course. I can assert that there is only instinct and that claims of reason are irrelevant. However, this would undermine the possibility of a plurality of choice regarding incentives to action and this leaves me necessarily as a puppet to my instinctual drives regardless of which ones they happen to be.¹⁰² In such a setting, I could not see myself as the real author and source of my decisions. I could only see myself as a strategizer regarding predetermined and unchosen instinctual ends and drives.

However, for many of us, this status is not one that we are actually free to adopt. If I find that I am not actually able to convince myself that I am a puppet to my inclinations, if I cannot help but find that I am in fact the author of my choices, I simultaneously assert the irrevocable significance and relevancy of reason in all its demands. There may in fact be people who do not find themselves bound to interpret their own activity as issuing from their own freedom. However, that cannot matter if I am not such a person. If I find that I do and must interpret myself as absolutely free regarding the grounding of my decisions, then I can have no hope of escaping the austerity of the demand for the universalizability of the rules of my choices. Finding myself always already the sole inception and impetus of

¹⁰² See Paton p. 245 "a rational being must have direct insight into the principles of rational thought and must conceive himself to be capable of thinking in accordance with these principles. Furthermore, he must conceive these principles to be valid for all rational beings as such: whatever these principles may be in detail, they must be conceived as having universal validity. Unless we accept this, there is an end to all rational discourse and indeed to anything that can properly be called thinking."

See also Schneewind p. 326 "Respect [a purely rational principle of motivation] is unlike other motives . . . every rational agent always has available this motive, which is sufficient to move her"

unending causal chains necessarily implies my rational acceptance of reason's demand that all occasions of free choice be encountered as unquestionably and certainly equal and indistinguishable in value. In that it is reason itself that grounds both the legitimacy of 1=1 as well as my own perception of myself as free, unless I can believe with certainty that instinct actually determines my decisions, I must grant the legitimacy of the demand that one does equal one, regardless of whether or not I actually behave according to that rule.

In other words, my acceptance of the legitimacy of the categorical imperative can sneak up on me. I do not need to be conscious of my having granted legitimacy to the demand for the universalizability for all my instances of rule-giving in order for it to have actually occurred.¹⁰³ Reason does not rely on or require the engagement of my consciousness for all of its activity. This is seldom acknowledged regarding Kant's moral material, I assume partly as result of the paucity of language in Kant's time regarding the discussion of unconscious mental activity. Reason and its practical implications can be operating in my own thinking without my consciousness awareness of it. This fact is centrally important to his idea of stages of moral development, a topic on which I will concentrate considerable attention. For the time being, let me merely call attention to the fact that from Kant's point of view, I need not have consciously or intentionally conceded the legitimacy of the moral imperative as a rationally self-evident truth in order to have in fact submitted my choices to its sovereign judgment.

Along with my belief in the reality of my own autonomy of choice and evaluation comes a feeling of personal and inviolable control. An awareness of my own absolute freedom delivers a feeling of self-aggrandizement which is quite enjoyable for most human individuals.¹⁰⁴ I love coming to the awareness that even if someone else puts a gun to my head, my own next choice remains solely within my own power and discretion (even if the results do not). Even children can be heard to say "you can't make me" with an inflated

¹⁰³ See Allison p. 150

¹⁰⁴ CPrR pp. 77; 81

chest and raised chin. My own intellectual assurance of my own absolute freedom affords me the recognition of the impossibility of any necessary authoritative or heteronomous determination of my will. I never have to do what you demand regardless of what physical threat you may have the power to impose. My spirit inflates with my own esteem for my station.

In fact, this feeling is so tempting, I can enjoy its effects even without necessarily considering the severity of its implications. That same child on the playground could very well receive a fat lip for his decision to offer resistance to power. As Thoreau reminded us, civil disobedience necessarily includes the possibly terrible response of those who in fact do have material power. Yet, there is no demand initially that I be consciously aware of this possible outcome. My esteem of my own freedom is an esteem grounded on intellectual principles and one that includes me in a noumenal realm. Kant writes,

Personality, i.e., the freedom and independence from the mechanism of nature [as a result of] (pure practical laws given by its own reason) . . . [is] something which elevates man above himself as a part of the world of sense, something which connects him with an order of things which only understanding can think and which has under it the entire world of sense, including the empirically determinable existence of man in time.¹⁰⁵

Absolute freedom of decision forever unbinds me from the possibility of being externally determined necessarily. While Kant almost always instantly connects this feeling of control with the duty upon which it is inevitably grounded to respect all instances of reason grounded freedom as equally and indistinguishably important, every human does not necessarily do likewise consciously. I can really enjoy the feeling of intellectual freedom and control even while I do not recognize its call to a duty of equality in decision-making. Even if it is the case that the duty to recognize universal human equality is inherently and necessarily linked to the concept of my own radical freedom, there is no guarantee that I will be immediately aware of this. In fact, if experience can be trusted, it is rarely the case that these two elements of the same rational truth are simultaneously acknowledged. In

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 89

other words, it might be said that my own desire for the rational self-esteem that accompanies my awareness of my own freedom and control tempts me into prioritizing and centralizing that aspect of my own personhood regarding the interpretation of my own significance and identity, without my being totally aware at that time of its true price tag.

My own freedom is a purely rational and therefore universal concept that can only gain individuality of any kind when it is set off against my specific and unique material desires and needs in an existing human consciousness. As we have seen, the freedom, in itself, and as purely rational, is indistinguishable and identical to any other possible instance of it, and is so in exactly the same way as the equal sign in mathematics is always rationally and irrefutable identical in any usage. Therefore, when I ground my own self-perception and esteem on rational freedom, I have prioritized an aspect of myself that can in no way be held as idiosyncratically mine. In fact, when I ground my self-perception on rational freedom, I have (perhaps unwittingly), grounded it on an aspect of myself that has its necessarily identical corollary in every other possible rational creature. The principles upon which freedom is grounded are always one and the same exact principles in every occurrence of freedom.

As I come to an awareness of my own absolute freedom, this discovery is a subjective one. It is always I who happens upon this discovery, and as a result, I feel proud of my part in it. Further, there is a temptation to pat myself on the back for what appears to me to be the subtlety and reach of my powers of observation and reflection. However, while the discovery is necessarily subjective, the truth that I discover is objective. Since I am the one who "finds" my own absolute freedom, I have the tendency to desire to claim ownership or individual possession of it in some sense. The more I esteem myself in light of it, the more precious it becomes to me and the more jealously therefore I am likely to try to guard it somehow. However, in that it is an objective fact of reason, (and therefore not something that can be claimed as an individually exclusive attribute or property) it betrays and frustrates any attempt to interpret it as an individual

possession capable of conferring individually distinctive value. I cannot grasp and individually withhold possessively something that is always already universal, formal, immaterial. Therefore, I have not the capacity to exclusively claim ownership of any rational principle.

Therefore, if I understand and assert that the significant part of myself is my freedom and the reason upon which it is based, I am identifying with a part of myself that is not just similar to like aspects of other people, but exactly identical with this very same aspect in all other possible rational creatures. I am identifying a part of myself that is radically and perfectly indistinguishable in both value and content from any other appearance of freedom. Whether I realize it or not, when I esteem my own freedom, I am simultaneously esteeming something that cannot be something that in any way differentiates me from others. I am identifying myself with something that guarantees my absolute identity and equality in value with all other possible rational creatures.

You may counter with the assertion that it remains possible that there are those who are more and those who are less aware of this certainty of the absolute equality of all possible rational choosers that has been expressed within this essay in the mathematical formula $1=1$. Can I not esteem those who are more aware of the morality based on this certainty more than those who are less aware? Perhaps, but even if I grant some kind of privileged esteem to myself or someone else for being so aware as to recognize the inevitable certainty of the categorical imperative, this individualistic esteem is necessarily limited by that same imperative which calls for all rational creatures to be esteemed and regarded on the grounds of the equal inherent value of their rational capacity for free choice, not their manifestation of it. My human dignity is based on my potential, not my actuality. I share this identical potential with every instance of human freedom. So, I have not the rational capability to assent to any personal claim of superiority on rationally moral grounds, for those very same moral grounds do not ask the question of whether the freedom of another has been encountered by that person. It only asks if it is inherent in an

individual. My awareness of my freedom and thus of my duty is not a condition of my inherent value as capable of free rationally moral choice. I need only be capable of freedom to be significant in the eyes of someone else who is also always only equally capable of rational freedom regarding grounds of choice. The manifestation or actualization of my ability to make rational concerns the grounds of my behavior is not a condition of my value as free.

So, if I ground the judgment of my own significance on my rational capacity, that is, on my freedom, autonomy and therefore, control, I then identify myself simply under the purely formal concept "one who is free." It is therefore rationally impossible to understand my relative significance as anything other than purely equal to any other "one who is free." In this case, I conclude that what matters about me is something that is indistinguishable from that same aspect of every other possible free chooser. That which grounds my own understanding of my own worth is something that is not exclusively possessable as a result of its pure status as formal. I can come to see that what matters about me is exactly what matters about anyone else and that we matter to the exact same degree.¹⁰⁶ Still, there is no guarantee that I will accept this necessary implication as truth at the same point in time as I accept the esteem that is grounded on this freedom. In fact, it is entirely possible in my decisions to continue to privilege my own concerns over those of others and in doing so make others the mere means to my own ends, and yet feel somehow morally confident in my right to do so. This may in fact be the most common rule of decision-making in the history of human beings.

¹⁰⁶ While Kant makes this point, it is informative to also see Augustine's expression of it in *On the Free Choice of the Will*. "Can anyone call truth his own, when it is present unchangingly, for to meditate upon who have the power to meditate . . . the true and immutable laws of wisdom are as true and immutable as the rules of number . . . the immutable truth, comprising everything that is immutably true, exists; and you cannot say that immutable truth is yours or mine, or anyone else's. It is present and shows itself as a kind of miraculous secret, yet public, light for all who see what is immutably true. . . No part of the truth is ever made the private property of anyone; rather it is entirely common to all at the same time." pp. 87-91 in *Philosophic Classics; Volume II; Medieval Philosophy; Fourth Edition*. ed. F. E. Baird, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. 2000

However, practical reason can be seen as insidious to such a person. It must always remain a "fact of reason," to use Kant's expression, that the grounds and principles that make the perception of my own freedom possible always simultaneously ensure and assert the universal and self-evident equality of all other such rationally-grounded occasions of freedom, regardless of whether I am aware of it or not. In other words, the esteem with which I interpret my own worth as grounded on rational freedom, immediately institutes a duty to esteem all other such instances equally which, if violated, undermines my own ability to esteem myself on grounds of rational freedom. The call to esteem myself on the grounds of freedom is the same exact call to esteem all other instances of freedom. It is one and the same call. They are formally simultaneous and rationally inseparable. Any claim that I impose on any instance of rational freedom is immediately and simultaneously imposed on all other possible instances of the same instance as a result of my own rational insistence on consistency. If I grant esteem to my own occasion of rational freedom, my reason has not the capacity to distinguish it from any other possible occasion of freedom. If I decide to interpret your worth as diminished, then that same reason cannot help but simultaneously submit my own rational freedom to the same interpretation. Reason has not the capacity to differentiate between formal identicals regarding value.

My reason, as pure reason, does and must always know this. However, it is not immediately necessary that I recognize it consciously. And yet, the writing is on the wall. Some part of my own thinking is always aware when a rational contradiction has been introduced as if it were not a rational contradiction. Regardless of my own level of awareness, as rational, I always yearn (perhaps merely subconsciously) to reconcile with reason. When I find that I have been treated as though I matter less than another instance of pure freedom, I can feel my own reason balk. Part of me rises up in protest for what appears to me to be an obvious violation of the 1=1 rule. However, this very same reason must of course, rise up in the very same protest when it is I who violates this same 1=1 rule. The degree to which I esteem my own rational capacity (particularly in regards to my

own freedom and autonomy), is the very degree to which I negatively regard those of my own decisions which maintain the 1>1 form.

Could it not then be argued that the person who esteems his or her own rational capacity not at all would therefore be immune to the negative self-assessment that accompanies rationally indefensible decisions? Yes. In this instance, reason must, as always, necessarily balk at a rational inconsistency, but if I can disregard the concerns of reason (or if I have no access to reason at all), it cannot possibly matter to me what reason asserts. However, this is much easier said than done. Such a person would not be able to rationally care about 1>1 type injustices enforced upon him or her. Of course, if survival or instinct is my ruling principle, then I can hate someone who hinders my success in that regard, but that is where my protest must stop. Even though I can resent you on purely instinctual grounds if you take what I desire, I cannot internally or externally appeal to requirements of justice or fairness in my protest without immediately invoking universalizable claims. And without these purely rational and universalizable appeals of uniform fairness, rightful possession becomes a function of brute power or fairly arbitrary social contracts. If I am to be unconcerned about those judgments that reason foists upon my own rule of decision-making, I cannot then turn around and claim rational injustice when I am the victim of it. Further, it is hard (if not impossible) to imagine someone who does not esteem his or her own access to reason. If I make claims of injustices done to me, these claims require my own reciprocated concern when I am not the victim.¹⁰⁷

Please do not interpret this as a moral entreaty. I am not suggesting here that one should not do this, but that one cannot. Once I invite the feelings of reason-based moral outrage in among the rules I use to make judgments of significance, I have not the power to limit or to isolate the directional gaze of reason's judgments, no matter how much I may

¹⁰⁷ Consider the person from whom free agency has been forcibly taken. Such a person will often revolt with righteous certainty and indignation concerning the injustice of human enslavement. See PP p. 133 "[people] need only to become conscious that they are not free in order to become in their eyes the most wretched of all the earth's creatures."

want or need to do this. Kant argues that the effects of this invitation, regardless of the initial instance, must amount to an incessant appeal for the universalizability for all instances of law-giving. It is my very own reason, my very own personality or "humanity," therefore, who requires this of me. There can be no escape and no appeal, for there can be no escape from myself.¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, it can still be the case that my awareness of this can remain partial or indistinct. It remains possible that I can live in something of a condition of partial ignorance or denial of my own negative self-assessments. It is a curious characteristic of human beings that we seem capable of being only partly conscious of ideas we have. Just because my reason thinks something, that is no guarantee that I will consciously acknowledge it. How we do this and by what mechanism is not the central concern here.¹⁰⁹ We need only accept that it appears to be that we can do this. The main point here is that as rational, we cannot escape reason's judgments, not in the long term in any case. Reason does not rely on consciousness to be effective. If I violate the rule of $1=1$, this decision is isolated and labeled by reason somewhere in my memory as such. Since reason is not subject to the conditions of time, it does not care about this decision's temporal distance from the present. From reason's perspective, all decisions are temporally simultaneous and eternally relevant.¹¹⁰ From reason's perspective, the age of a decision cannot even be thought let alone considered regarding the evaluation of that decision. Time

¹⁰⁸ See PP p. 71 the violation "of duty . . . even without consideration of its resultant disadvantages, affects the mind directly and makes man in his own eyes reprehensible and subject to punishment."

¹⁰⁹ See RWR p. 52 footnote "Now reason's ability to master all opposing motivating forces through the bare idea of a law it utterly inexplicable; it is also inconceivable, therefore, how the motivating forces of the sensuous nature should be able to gain the ascendancy over a reason which commands with such authority."

¹¹⁰ CPpR p. 101

See also PP pp. 93; 98-9 "in the moral order . . . the end [*of all things*] is at the same time the beginning of the supersensuous survival of these same temporal beings, consequently the beginning of their existence as beings that do not stand under the conditions of time, and thus their beginning as beings whose state is such as to allow nothing other than a moral evaluation of their nature. . . Reason[']s . . . *character* (which is not, like the world's beings, a phenomenon, but something supersensuous, consequently not changeable in time) remains permanently the same. . . our character (the homo noumenon, whose behavior occurs in heaven) would not be subject to any temporal change whatsoever."

will not heal any guilt I rationally imposed on myself for any violation of rules the validity of which I have myself spontaneously conceded.

If this is the case, then reason functions so as to simply determine whether or not my maxims are universalizable, that is, whether they are simply rationally consistent, fair. If not, then any esteem that I have built on the grounds of my own rationally-grounded autonomy is confronted by my own assessments of my own rational inconsistency. In other words, my own reliance on reason for personal esteem forces me to confront the demands of my reason for consistency regarding the maxims of my actions. From an experiential standpoint, it can feel like my own guilt is ever so gradually sneaking up on me, building slowly and proportionally with my own developing pride in my autonomy from the dictates of the natural order. If I endeavor not to acknowledge my own rational inconsistencies, it can seem as if Hugo's Javert endlessly pursues me. It is, however, my own esteem for reason and the self-respect it affords that fuels this Javert, regardless of whether I am conscious of this or not.

To put it simply, reason's demands for consistency must haunt my consciousness as well as the credibility of any optimism regarding my own positive self-assessments. If my own reason convicts me of inconsistency, this judgment must vitiate all pretensions of legitimate reason-based self-respect, regardless of whether this has happened consciously or not. As a result, these pretensions must over time become ever emptier and insupportable. Therefore, in order to prop them up, they require ever more non-reason based legitimations.¹¹¹ What we must notice here is that this is merely a game in which I try to hide things from myself which is an endeavor that must eventually fail. When I try to hide or deny the memory of acts of the $1>1$ or $1<1$ form along with my own rational

¹¹¹See PP p. 41 "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self imposed when its cause lies . . . in a lack of resolve and courage . . . Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance, nonetheless, gladly remains in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is easy to be immature [that is, heteronomous] . . . I need not exert myself at all, I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome task for me."

judgment of them, I always know who hid these memories and where they are hidden, even while my own consciousness of this fact may not be as clear cut.

However, it is Kant's contention that reason's success is guaranteed in the long run. As rational I am doomed to or abandoned into reason (to use Sartre's phrase). There is no human thinking that is free from thinking, and all thinking of course is rationally structured and determined. Denials and escapism of any kind can only be temporal, and reason, as atemporal, is content to wait forever. What is more, as rational, we always already know about the inevitability of the failure of any attempt to outrun rational self-judgments. However, in the short run, we seem to have the capacity to temporarily suspend these judgments, at least in consciousness, even if perhaps only to a limited degree. Since I always know when I have committed a rational inconsistency regarding the reasons for my decisions (over which I seem to have inviolable control), my own perhaps semi-conscious yet nonetheless potent acknowledgments of commission of a rational inconsistency must haunt whatever positive self-assessments are professed in and by my consciousness.

So, while it remains possible to assert a positive self-assessment despite rational requirements of consistency, the rational structure of much of my own thinking promises the eventual crumbling of any such positive self-judgment. My own interpretation of my own importance and identity as grounded on my autonomy of choice (itself grounded on reason) speeds this crumbling along. My reason based self-esteem fuels the eventual disquieting and defeat of that same self-esteem.¹¹² The self-evidence of the moral

¹¹² See Paton p. 64 "For Kant the emotion of reverence is unique . . . In Kant's language it is a feeling 'self-produced through a concept of reason.' Its similarity to religious emotion is shown, I think, by the fact that in it I feel at once humbled and also uplifted or exalted. On the one hand the moral law is a check to my inclinations and a blow to my self-conceit, so that being humbled my feeling of reverence is akin to pain. On the other hand . . . I am also uplifted by consciousness that the constraint imposed on my inclinations comes from my own free will. On this side my feeling is akin to pleasure."

See also CJ p. 114-5/257 "Hence the feeling . . . of displeasure that arises from . . . inadequacy . . . is at the same time also a pleasure, aroused by the fact that this very judgment, namely, that even the greatest power . . . is inadequate, is itself in harmony with rational ideas, insofar as striving toward them is still a law for us."

See also Gr. p. 14 "Respect is properly the representation of a worth that thwarts my self-love."

imperative forces every other moral formulation to adhere to it or face indictments of arbitrary bias and rational indefensibility. Remember, the moral imperative claims nothing save the indistinguishability of all instances of reason-based freedom, and therefore the self-evidence of the necessary assumption of universal equality of every human individual with regard his or her significance in his or her decision-making.

So, at base it is I who freely accepts the validity of the rational demand to treat all instances of human freedom as equal in value regarding the reasons for my own decisions. I am not externally or in any other way forced to accept this rule of judgment.¹¹³ As rational I spontaneously and under no duress grant this rule legitimacy and I cannot be forced to do this. It might even be said that in a certain way it is I as rational who creates, so to speak, or authors this rule for myself in the first place. (All I mean to emphasize here is the source of the rule is autonomous and therefore, in no way heteronomous). I originate this rule out of reason and then I accept it as a rule of legitimate judgment in the pure absence of any possible determining coercion.

In other words, in terms of the source of the moral law and in terms of my own submission to its determinations, I have only myself to blame or merit. Since I am free to accept or reject any rule of judgment and decision-making, responsibility for any such choice can but lie with myself alone. If I find the law insufferable, I cannot shake my fist at heaven, for it is only I who accepts or rejects (and therefore enforces) any law under which I find myself autonomously submitted. Since it is I as rational who bares the credit

¹¹³ See Paton p. 180-1 "[Freedom] is based in the principle that a rational will makes, or gives itself, the laws which it obeys - the principle of autonomy . . . the setting of ends before oneself is the essential mark of freedom . . . I can never be compelled by others to make anything my end. If I make anything my end, I do so of my own free will . . . the compulsion or necessitation always present in duty must spring from my own free and rational will. I must be the source and author of the law to which I am subjected."

For an alternative view see also Aune p. 92 "Why could rational beings not be born (or created) with a built-in respect for practical laws . . . in the way that Newton's laws are the laws governing the motions of the bodies?" Of course this could occur but this idea can be of not significance to human agents irrevocably assured of their own free will. Freedom requires the real possibility that I need not act from the rational respect for consistency. To an agent who has not the power to deny his or her responsibility regarding motivating principles, the concept of a "built-in respect" is irrelevant if not actually absurd.

or responsibility for both the authorship and the imposition of this rule, it is not possible to beg mercy from any external source, regardless of whether this source is human or divine.

Can it not be argued that reason forces me to make these concessions? Cannot I shake my fist at reason? Yes. But it is my own reason, or myself as rational who forces. Reason is integral to any possible human self-understanding or interpretation. Very simply, reason can neither be seen as nor be heteronomous. It is not and cannot by definition be external. Rational law giving is and can only be a subjective autonomous act. Reason and I are not separate identities within a body (even if it can feel like they are). Reason's determinations are always my own. Therefore, when I shake my fist at reason and what can seem to be its merciless demands, ironically I shake my fist at merely myself.

It is not hard to notice in this that this fist-shaking is actually an awakening to guilt, a righteous anger directed at oneself on the grounds of insupportable injustice. Since it is I who authors and then freely accepts as valid reason's rules of judgment, and since it is also always I and I alone who then selects from a plurality of grounds of decision-making, we must acknowledge that moral choosing is pure in its internal subjective integrity. While it can be said that decisions can be influenced (but only merely influenced) by outside events, these decisions happen in pure subjectivity, free from any external determination. It is I who validates reason's requirements and simultaneously I (the very same I) who can choose to subordinate reason's requirements to material concerns. There can be no one else involved. While it is difficult to understand why (and perhaps even how) the selfsame subjective intelligence would simultaneously accept and reject reason's claims of legitimacy, we must concede that for any rational human being this inconsistency is necessary for and self-evident in any decision made in the $1 > 1$ (My concerns are more important than yours and I will act as such) or $1 < 1$ (My concerns are less important than yours and I will act as such) form.

**In the Face of Infinity, All That is Finite is As If
It Were Nothing**

So why not simply relinquish my resistance to my own rational demands? If self-imposed and sustained rational guilt is terrible and I am seriously intimidated by the possibility that I am at risk of Jonah's fate, why not simply decide to make reason's demands the condition of my material concerns? Why not simply repent and adopt a rationally consistent principle of choice? Assuming that I am consciously aware of this question and consciously dread Jonah's fate, the simple response is that I must encounter the fact that reason's demands are infinite and my material power to adhere to these demands are finite. Reason accepts no excuses.¹¹⁴ Reason does not even have ears to hear or grasp excuses. It is ideal and pure. It merely announces. It understands no conditions. It can grant no audience for appeal. For reason, one just equals one and it has not the capacity to understand any conditions under which it could be not so. In fact, reason knows that there can be no such conditions. So if I am persuaded by the inescapability of my own reason's demand to recognize all instances of reason-based freedom as indistinguishable in value, I am then doomed to cast my eyes about the world only to find billions of individuals each of whom equally deserves my attention and concern in equal measure to the attention and concern I show myself.

My own reason asserts its own validity in regard to actions in the world regardless of "whether [my] physical power is sufficient to this or not."¹¹⁵ Kant writes "[f]or the

¹¹⁴ See Paton p. 249 "theoretical reason must conceive the totality of conditions for every conditioned necessity, a totality which must itself be an unconditioned necessity, if there is to be any necessity at all. The conception of the moral law as unconditionally necessary is only a further example of the activity of reason (here of practical reason) in conceiving - and seeking to realize - an unconditioned necessity." We must be careful here. Paton's point about the need for an uncaused cause is persuasive and clearly in line with Kant's own thought. However, it is important to notice that Paton does not endeavor to explain why the categorical imperative is the specific imperative that it is. Here he is only emphasizing its status as an unconditional necessity. He leaves the categorical imperative vulnerable to indictments of arbitrariness by not explaining why the imperative has to be the one imperative that it is.

See Gr. trans. H. J. Paton, New York: Harper & Row, 1964 p. 73 "reason, without promising anything to inclination, enjoins its commands relentlessly, and therefore, so to speak, with disregard and neglect of those turbulent and seemingly equitable claims (which refuse to be suppressed by any command). From this there arises a . . . propensity to quibble . . . a result which in the end even ordinary human reason is unable to approve."

¹¹⁵ CPrR p. 15

will be only in accord with the law of pure reason, the will's power in execution may be what it may."¹¹⁶ He also writes, "in all precepts of the pure will it is only a question of the determination of the will and not of the natural conditions (of practical ability) for achieving its purpose."¹¹⁷ When I find myself on a vast planet filled to overflowing with individuals who have rational claim to my attention and concern, by what means do I decide how to fulfill my own demands for justice?

As we have said before, reason does not have the capacity to recognize relevant distinctions amid occasions of rational freedom. Up until now, this requirement of reason was used primarily to denounce any instance in which I make myself superior (or inferior) in importance to another in my choices. Here however, we are confronted by another problem. Even if I decide to treat others and myself with equal degrees of concern in good faith, reason has not the capacity to privilege one person over any other. All rational creatures are indistinguishably important in reason's eyes and yet there is far more of these individuals than I can ever meet in a life time, let alone privilege in my decision-making. If I am to concentrate on one, I must necessarily ignore and neglect the rest. How am I to reconcile the conditionlessness of reason's moral demands with the limit (the condition) of my own physical ability to adhere to it?¹¹⁸

We could spend more time on this, but it is very easy to see that an infinite demand must make disappearingly small any finite attempt to live up to it.¹¹⁹ In the face of infinity,

See Also REL p. 40 "what *we* are able to do is in itself inadequate"

¹¹⁶ CPrR p. 47

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 68

¹¹⁸ See PP p. 93 "in considering the "utter incomparab[ility] of the limited and the unlimited, Kant observed that "[t]his thought contains something a bit horrifying, for it leads to an abyss, from which there is no possible return for whoever falls into it. ('With strong arms Eternity/ holds fast in that stern place/ him who leaves nothing behind.' Albrecht von Haller (1708 - 1777))

¹¹⁹ See Allison p. 155-6 "[Kant's] concept of . . . morality . . . reflects an ideal of moral perfection that is unobtainable by finite . . . agents such as ourselves"

any finitude is as zero.¹²⁰ In other words, given that our self-appearance as limited in power, knowledge, and duration is truth, the categorical imperative can only be seen as self-evidently impossible for us.¹²¹ This is a very important aspect of Kant's moral philosophy because some refer to its impossibility as the grounds of its legitimate rejection. However, it is crucial to remember, that it is not Kant or God or anyone else who imposes reason's demands on me.¹²² These demands are and can only be my own. Reason or myself as rational has not the capacity to accept my own limit as a condition of my own rational demands. I impose the judgments of reason upon myself. As unconditional, reason can therefore only judge my finite attempts and intentions of consistency in the motivations of my actions as miserable failures.¹²³ This failure is an inevitability of the radical difference between finity and infinity.

However, my own limit can never make reason's assertion of the equal value of all rational human deciders invalid.¹²⁴ As rational I can but maintain my concession that $1=1$

¹²⁰ See PP p. 93 where Kant compares a finite quantity to an infinite one and remarks that they are "utterly incomparable . . . and we surely cannot have any (but a merely negative) concept of [the unlimited]."

See also Kant's discussion of the our contradictory make up in PP p. 68 "I readily concede that no man can with certainty be conscious of *having performed* his duty . . . This is too much to ask for . . . But that a man ought to perform his duty . . . is something of which he is most clearly conscious. . . the pretense that human nature does not permit such purity . . . is the death of all morality."

¹²¹ See MM p. 167 "Virtue [that is, moral sufficiency] . . . is an ideal and unattainable, while yet constant approximation to it is a duty . . . virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet."

See also Allison p. 171; 173 "it turns out that we are morally required to pursue an unattainable goal . . . Kant both insists that we have a duty to realize it and acknowledges the impossibility of full compliance" See also Sullivan p. 271-2 "no matter how hard we try, we know full well that we cannot make adequate reparation . . . it is all too easy to despair and give up any effort to strive for the goal. . . . As finite creatures, we never can be wholly adequate to [the] command [to be 'reconciled with God']."

¹²² However, Kant does quiet often refer to the idea that we accept the legitimacy of reason's demands so completely and absolutely that we receive them as if they were "divine commands." CPrR p.134 Even if we do receive them as such, this never gives these demands an heteronomous status.

¹²³ See Allison p. 127 "the direct effect of the law on sensibility [is] the feeling of pain arising from humiliation . . . to the 'delusion of self-conceit'"

¹²⁴ See Allison p. 236 "But this imperative addresses us in our capacity as rational agents and with a claim to universality and necessity that makes no concessions to our sensuous nature and no reference to empirical conditions. In its commands we find reason dictating on its own behalf."

See also Schneewind p. 333 "reason showed the perfect good to be a required but unattainable goal"

See also Paton p. 34 "goodness is not conditioned by its relation to a context . . . it is . . . unconditional"

remains indisputable. Nothing can be done or discovered that can undermine its self-evidence. It can never become untrue. And yet my status as limited seems almost as inevitable. We appear to be at a rationally certain impasse. What does it mean to be such that I irrevocably demand of myself an irrevocable impossibility?¹²⁵ Further, what are the implications of this on any self-assessment that is grounded on my status as rationally consistent?

This is complicated by the fact that, even closer to home, short-term attempts to treat others with equal esteem often must also fail. Attempts at stopping, say, what appears to be an unjust war can meet with the reality of my own impotence in the face of the demand from my reason to stop it. This aspect of the finite/infinite contradiction of the human condition is the central concern of Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and of Hesse's own life. We will investigate this in detail in the following chapter. In such a situation, I am forced to witness the unquestionable validity of my own demand contrasted against the fact that I have very little actual recourse. However, reason must remain simply reason, and so, my impotence in the face of a clear duty can never soften or temper reason's demand.¹²⁶ I can unendingly admit the inadequacy of my power to halt an injustice and yet this can never adjust to any degree the rational self-evident insistence of $1=1$. The part of my mind that asserts that I must do something significantly effective has not ears to hear that I cannot.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ See Allison p. 155 "The key . . . is the impossibility of attributing a propensity to good to finite . . . agents such as ourselves (either to the race as a whole or to particular individuals). This propensity, together with rigorism, entails the necessity of attributing a universal propensity to evil to agents relevantly like ourselves"

See also PP p. 29 "Whatever concept one may form of *freedom of the will* in a metaphysical context, its *appearance*, human actions, like all other natural events, are certainly determined in conformity with universal natural laws." One characteristic of natural law is that appearances of natural power are limited.

Ibid., p. 54 "Thus, from morals arises a breach with nature's ends, and from nature's ends arises a breach with morals."

Ibid., p. 87 "If we now inquire as to the means by which this eternal progress towards betterment can be maintained . . . one soon sees that this . . . result . . . [is] immeasurably distant"

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 98 Anything limited is a "wholly inadequate measure" of the unconditional. "[I]ndeed, in this we have only admitted that in regard to its (practical) objective, reason can never have done enough to attain its ultimate purpose by following the path of perpetual changes . . . not advanced the length of a single step."

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 56 "It appears, therefore, that the human species' pathway to the complete fulfillment of its vocation is to be endlessly interrupted"

So, Kant's moral philosophy includes the assertion that we expose ourselves inevitably to occasions in which what is rationally necessary is also physically impossible. Can I reject it on these grounds? What is the point of adhering to a philosophy in which arrival at a demand for an impossibility is shown as predictable and inevitable? What could be the benefit for adhering to such a system? Let me grant that there may be none. But what does my request for a productive outcome have to do with the inevitability of reason in my own thinking? Even if we concede that the moral imperative is radically irreconcilable to limited human power, this can have no bearing on the continued validity of the demand, at least within my own self-assessment.¹²⁸

Kant is not trying to convert people to a practical or pragmatic system. He is not trying to sway people to his recipe for human justice or fulfillment. He is certainly not setting his system as one among a variety of possible systems from which I can select. He is trying to sketch out the structure of what appears to him to be the way things actually are. If we are each individually in fact subject to the inevitable despair of rationality and thus unendingly demand of ourselves things we can never be capable of, what point could there be to wishing or pretending that we do not so subject ourselves.¹²⁹ I can never in good

Ibid., p. 86 "Taken objectively, morality is in itself practical, for it is the totality of unconditional binding laws according to which we *ought* to act, and once one has acknowledged the authority of its concept of duty, it would be utterly absurd to continue wanting to say that one *cannot* do his duty."

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 134 "the evil principle in ourselves . . . is the more dangerously devious and treacherous because it excuses all our transgression with an appeal to human nature's frailty."

¹²⁹ See Sullivan for alternative view p. 273 "Despite human moral frailty and frequent moral failures, as long as we try to do all that we can, we may view our own eventual destiny and that of the human species optimistically." This interpretation seems to be supported by Kant's own thoughts on grace. On this topic Kant writes "[m]an, as we know him, is corrupt and of himself not in the least suited to that holy law. And yet, if the goodness of God has called him, as it were, into being, *i.e.*, to exist in a particular manner (as a member of the kingdom of heaven), He must also have a means of supplementing, out of the fullness of His holiness, man's lack of requisite qualifications therefor." Kant also refers to an eternal span of time by means of which we can progress to an eventual sufficiency. This is grounded on his assertion that "ought implies can" or that necessity of the moral demand logically implies its possibility. But these are merely postulations that theoretical reason must think in the face of immutable practical demands and they can offer no guarantee of their actual existence. In the sentence that follows the above citation, Kant writes "But this [supplementing grace] contradicts spontaneity (which is assumed in all the moral good or evil which a man can have within himself), according to which such a good cannot come from another but must arise from man himself, if it is to be imputable to him. Therefore, so far as reason can see, no one [not even Christ] can, by virtue of the superabundance of his own good conduct and through his own merit, take another's place; or, if such vicarious atonement is accepted, we would have *to assume it* only from a moral

faith deny the validity of the mathematical equation $1=1$. Kant holds that the moral imperative exerts the same rational power over me as a result of being formally identical to this mathematical equation. If the moral imperative to treat all occasions of rational freedom as identical in importance is self-evidently valid, then denial of its legitimacy cannot be among my possible choices.¹³⁰ Given rational certainty, what protest can I offer? What threat could any criticism of any kind pose to a rational certainty? No matter where I go, what I think, what I wish or even need, I must always admit that one can never not equal one. All assaults on the validity of the statement as irrational or invalid must fail.

But could not we argue that treating all occasions of rational freedom as identical in value is actually possible even given the limitations of human power, knowledge and time? Kant felt that this was how the Stoics regarded achievable human moral potential. Regardless of whether this assessment is accurate, Kant felt that the Stoics did not take the implications of human limit seriously enough. He wrote of them,

The Stoics . . . had chosen their supreme practical principle, virtue, quite correctly as the condition of the highest good. But as they imagined the degree of virtue which is required for its pure laws as completely attainable in this life, they . . . exaggerated the moral capacity of [people], under the name "sage," beyond all the limits of his nature, making it into something which is contradicted by all our

point of view, since for ratiocination it is an unfathomable mystery." REL p. 134 Sullivan's optimism tempts him to miss the abysmal despair inherent in inevitable asymmetry between finite capacity and infinite demand.

See G. Felicitas Munzel's *Kant's Conception of Moral Character, The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 for a related alternative on p. 340 "the full moral consequence of Kant's inquiry into the possible cooperation of the laws of nature and of freedom, first in the third antinomy and again in terms of the notion of purposiveness, comes to the fore. Without a basis for presuming the world to be essentially suited for realizing reason's interests, the work of procuring a character as a grafted entity would be doomed." Of course it remains possible that this work is 'doomed.' Munzel seems to be calling for a presumption of the 'suited'ness of the finite for the infinite. Given the absolute insufficiency of any finite value in the face of the infinite, such a presumption seems insupportably optimistic. Much of Kant's work involves the seriously paradoxical interaction of the ideal and the real. If we fail to acknowledge the true nature and implications of these paradoxes, much of the wealth in Kant's work can be lost. I will argue in the last chapter that this despair is also a threshold. Failure to recognize Kant's rigorism as inevitable and impossible bars entrance to the threshold, which is and must be a descent into the maelstrom.

¹³⁰ See Paton p. 250 "the unconditioned necessity of moral law . . . is a necessary ideal of reason."

See REL p. 31 "Man (even the most wicked) does not, under any maxim whatsoever, repudiate the moral law in the manner of a rebel (renouncing obedience to it). The law, rather, forces itself upon him irresistibly by virtue of his moral disposition."

knowledge of [people]. . . they made their sage like a god in the consciousness of the excellence of his person, wholly independent of nature.¹³¹

In other words, Kant felt the Stoics were guilty of a form of insupportable arrogance. Human power, knowledge and time are, according to all accounts we receive from experience, clearly bounded and conditional.¹³² It is not now nor will it ever be in my power to hold back the rising tide no matter how grave the implications of not being able to do so. It is a delusion or a lie to assert that I can have enough power or insight to meet in reality all of the demands of virtue. Perhaps Kant misrepresents the Stoics, and I grant that possibility, however, what is important to recognize here is that the force of this argument remains intact for anyone who arrogantly over-esteems human physical capacity in the face of an unconditional requirement.

If I claim material sufficiency regarding the moral law, the burden of proof of this sufficiency rests with me.¹³³ Does not the starving child in Ethiopia presented to us in a "Save the Children" campaign deserve my attention? The moral imperative demands that no instance of free rational choice can defensibly be ignored by my own instance of free rational choice. Let us say that I have made a decision that is grounded solely on my respect for the rational legitimacy of the demands of practical reason, and as a result I decide to treat some other instance of free choice as indistinguishable in value from my own instance. The very fact that I have so grounded my choice instantly implicates me as guilty regarding all other possible instances of rational freedom I may have treated. This is

¹³¹ CPrR pp. 131-2

¹³² See REL p. 51 "it is not only futile to want to extirpate [natural inclinations and limitations] but to do so would also be harmful and blameworthy."

See also Allison p. 183 "[Kant warns against] forgetting our ontological status as finite . . . [this status's] characteristic feature of constraint cannot be eliminated or overcome . . . [we must note] this emphasis on human finitude . . . holiness is a purely regulative idea to be approached asymptotically but never attained by a finite rational agent."

¹³³ See Allison p. 178 "In short, no matter how hard we try, there is always room for improvement. Thus to be satisfied with a certain level of virtue (or holiness) is to violate one's duty. . . the duty to seek holiness is . . . an infinite task.

See PP p. 87 "When man attains a higher stage of morality, one can see further still and can make more rigorous judgments regarding what man is in comparison with what he ought to be . . . our self-censure will always be the more rigorous the more stages of morality have been ascended."

because the assertion that $1=1$ applies equally to all possible instances of freedom. My decision to focus on one instance of free choice requires an arbitrary and rationally culpable distinction of this instance from all other possible instances.

In fact, such an arbitrariness of focus is formally indistinguishable from selfishness. Let me explain. Imagine three people, each of whom are supposed instances of rational free choice. If I privilege my instance over the others, I am selfish in a way that cannot be defended with regard to the rational demands of practical reason for I have arbitrarily selected my instance of freedom as the condition of the other two which cannot be consistently universalized. However, if I decide to focus on one of the other two people, the condition of doing so is to ignore the remaining person. To do so is to arbitrarily privilege one instance of freedom over another without possible rational defense. This is exactly what is deficient about self-centered behavior of the first example. To privilege a single instance of humanity, whether in myself or another, over any other possible instance or instances is to necessarily violate any principle grounded on the fundamental equality of value of free rational creatures.

Let us put this in a slightly different light. If I use the moral imperative as the rule of my decision-making, the fact that I do not have infinite power, knowledge, and time forces me to admit that I must necessarily violate what I demand of myself. You might say, but is serving one person with respect and dignity not better than none at all? Perhaps, but the very principle I use to initiate such an act will itself inevitably condemn my neglect of all other people who also deserve the equivalent respect. Any non-omnipotent attempt to adhere to the moral imperative to treat all instances of rational freedom as equal in value must simultaneously instantiate my own indefensible and yet inevitably guaranteed incapacity in the face of this demand. Any human attempt at rationally free morality must necessarily and instantly prove the impossibility of my own moral sufficiency.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ See PP p. 99 "if we assume there to be a constant progress toward and approach to the supreme good (that is set out as his goal), mankind still . . . cannot connect *contentedness* with the prospect of his state . . . contentedness he can think of only by finally attaining the ultimate end."

Therefore, legitimate moral sufficiency is a formal impossibility, a rational contradiction given limited human power.

So, all feelings of arrogance or even adequacy regarding the rules of behavior I give to myself can be but illusions or aggrandizements.¹³⁵ Any attempt to adhere to these rules must, under rational reflection, inevitably and self-evidently prove this. Consciousness of this self-evidence is in no way a condition of its truth. In other words, it is not necessary that I be immediately aware of the irreconcilability of a finite capacity and an infinite demand in order for this irreconcilability to be legitimate. In fact, I can spend a long time living in various levels of resisted or denied acknowledgment. If Kant's claims are correct that practical rules of behavior and thus of self-judgment are inherent for every rational creature, then the radical insufficiency of any finite attempt to satisfy my own infinite demand must remain true regardless of any resistance to that acknowledgment. Attempts to avoid acceptance of a self-asserted truth can only result in frustration or worse.

However, if this is all true, it assures the unconditional humiliation of all possible self-esteem grounded either on my own moral status or my own power in the physical world. The unconditionality of the moral demand that is grounded and accepted in my own reason must reveal as infinitesimally insufficient any finite power. We must remember that there is no room for appeal or recourse here in that I am the author both of my actions and the law. To whom would I appeal if the law is revealed as impossible? I would have to be able to admit in good faith that the law is not legitimate. However, it is my own reason that

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 240 "it would not follow that we possess the capacity to do what the law requires of us"

See also O'Neill p. 287-8 "The prefaces [of the first *Critique*] depict human reason as a repeatedly frustrated striving for completion and unity, in a being whose capacities seem inadequate for what it yearns to do"

See CPR A509/B537 p. 450 "The principle of reason is thus properly only a *rule*, prescribing a regress in the series of conditions of given appearances, and forbidding it to bring the regress to a close by treating anything at which it may arrive as absolutely unconditioned. It is not a principle of the possibility of experience and of empirical knowledge of objects of the senses, and therefore not a principle of the understanding; for every experience, in conformity with the given [forms of] intuition, is enclosed within limits."

For alternative view see Schneewind p. 324 "[Kant] does not require us to bring about as much happiness (or as much of our own perfection) as we possibly can. He allows that we will have permissible ends that will compete for time and resources with the morally required ends." What is morally required remains required regardless of conditions.

refuses this possibility. Kant admits that most of us shrink in horror from this inevitable humiliation.¹³⁶ However, what use is there in shrinking from the inevitable? Where can I hide from my very own judgment?

It is crucial to notice here, that this humiliation is a certainty. It is nothing less than an archetypal human destiny. If I do not or cannot accept the implications of this awakening, I must inevitably remain at its feet, banished from any possible further progress. My own reason forced me to progress by degrees to this acknowledgment (consciousness acknowledgment not necessarily required) and it is my own reason that holds me to it. While my own reason prevents me from retreating, my refusal to assent to the humiliation prevents progress. If I decide to try to deny the validity of reason's mortification of my physical incapacity, I must remain wandering within the shadow of its actual validity.¹³⁷ There can be no actual relief nor progression. If there is to be personal progression or redemption from this terrifying impasse of finite and infinite, it can only come by means of a conscious acknowledgment of the inevitability of this impasse and of its severe implications. I cannot move around or elude the demands of reason. I must move through them. More precisely, they must move through me. We must also remember, that inability to progress or retreat is a rational confinement. My physical limitations and the reality of other rational choosers are the only elements of experience required to bring about this moral self-detainment.

The acknowledgment of the inevitable humiliation of all physical power in the face of the categorical imperative reduces to ash any self-assessment based on those powers. My identity must be reconstituted if there is any serious aspect of it that is grounded on respect for those powers. There can be no "good enough" for a human being of finite

¹³⁶ REL p. 139

¹³⁷ See PP p. 67 "But only the virtuous man, or one who is on the way to it, is capable of suffering this pure moral dissatisfaction (which does not arise from any disadvantageous result of his actions, but from their very contrariness to law).

power who is subject to his or her own unconditional demand.¹³⁸ Positive self-assessment (an alleviation of guilt) cannot therefore be grounded on the hope of my approval of even heroic physical attempts to satisfy unconditionally demands. It is likely that as we approach a radical acknowledgment of the finite-infinite impasse, many if not all of us do in fact ground our positive self-evaluations on what we have come to mistakenly assume to be the effective and adequate potency of our physical capacity. I like to understand myself as capable and as sufficient for challenges presented to my physical power. It can be assumed that as members of the natural order, much of our own positive self-assessment is based on this pride of power. It is this very pride in my own skill and strength that must die at the feet of the unsatisfiability of the rational moral demand. Along with it must die any personal identity with that illusory pride.¹³⁹

In other words, I must individually come to the acknowledgment of the impossibility of my own material sufficiency to an infinite demand, and I must perceive this insufficiency as a kind of death.¹⁴⁰ If I interpret my worth as grounded on any form of material power (as almost all naturally do¹⁴¹) and then come to discover that my power is absolutely insufficient according to my own rationally certain criteria, I cannot help but rationally refuse any possible assertion of self-worth. We have seen this rational incompatibility before. This incompatibility is the rational form of guilt. Jonah experiences

¹³⁸See REL p. 60 "the distance separating the good we ought to effect in ourselves from the evil whence we advance is infinite, and the act itself, of conforming our course of life to the holiness of the law, is impossible of execution in any given [,that is, finite] time."

Ibid., p. 66 "moral evil (transgression of the moral law, called SIN when the law is regarded as a divine command) brings with it endless violations of the law and so *infinite* guilt."

¹³⁹ See PP p. 62 where Kant calls attention to "the arrogant desire to use experience to reform reason in that very area in which reason finds its highest honor. And this benighted wisdom believes it can penetrate further and more clearly with its mole-like eyes fixed on experience than with eyes belonging to a being created to stand erect and gaze at the heavens."

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 99 "such a life, if it can be called another life, must appear the same as [this] life's annihilation"

See Ibid., p.128 the "model presented by an idea of reason . . . ought to be done even at the cost of self-sacrifice."

¹⁴¹ See Fichte p. 16 "From the . . . limitation, you can calculate . . . the limiting . . . I am immediately conscious of my limitation because it is mine and I only exist because of it"

structural inconsistency consciously. However, the rational structure does not rely on my consciousness of it for it to be operative within the entirety of my thinking. While Kant does not use the language of subconsciousness, he does often refer to the idea that there can be elements of my motivation that are hidden from me.¹⁴² So, as I approach the understanding that my own material power must be exposed as fantastically inadequate in the face of my own infinite demand, it is likely that I may have a semi-conscious awareness of the threatening and impending implications of this realization. On the grounds of this threat, I may subconsciously resist conscious acknowledgment of my own inadequacy.

I will dedicate more time to the psychological aspect of Kant's ethics by means of an interpretation of Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. For now, suffice it to say, that I need not be lucidly aware of my own physical inadequacy regarding my own rational demands to be afraid of the implications this truth can have for me. Therefore, I can live in a situation in which the ground of my own positive self interpretation can be destabilized as a result of interior semi-conscious self assertions antithetical to self approval of any kind. This tension between conscious self-approval and semi-conscious self-rejection can be maintained for many years. It can be so persistent that it can become accepted as the general baseline mood of human existence and as such it can be tolerated.

In other words, even if Kant is right that denial of these rational necessities is impossible, it may be the case that conscious acknowledgment can be put off for a while, but for a price. This mood that results from the tensions between simultaneous self-assertions of approval and rejection is itself something of a purgatory, a price. Guilt suppressed is still guilt. The maintenance of this condition can itself be a draw on my limited physical powers making adherence to my own moral demands even more unlikely.

Nonetheless, as I approach the acknowledgment of my own insufficiency, an acknowledgment that can feel like a death (language that Kant actually uses in *Reason*

¹⁴² See Allison p. 59. "the possibility always remains open that there may be *unconscious* stimuli at work." [emphasis mine]

Within the Bounds of Reason Alone),¹⁴³ I can be tempted to try to retreat from the acknowledgment. However, if I decide to do so, I doom myself to a kind of lost wandering in the shadow of my own semi-accepted belief in the inevitability of that acknowledgment. Kant refers to a moral progression which is something that I will treat in greater detail in an upcoming chapter. For now, let me offer the suggestion that any progression that has led to the acknowledgment of this impasse must halt if I decide to retreat from that very acknowledgment. My moral development must stagnate as I procrastinate in this shadow. If my own development has led to this impasse, where else can I go? The price of progression at this point must include submitting to the far reaching implications of revealing to myself the utter insufficiency of the totality of my material powers.

What are the implications of my acknowledgment of the categorical difference between the limited and the unlimited? If Kant is right then it is rationally certain that the moral imperative is an unconditional demand and yet the inevitable limit of my own physical power and skill must always be granted as an inherent condition on any personally generated rational moral demand. Given the fact that I am irrefutably subject to the concerns of both my reason (which are unconditional) and my physicality (which is conditional), I am inevitably subject to a contradiction in the very makeup of my being. In the first *Critique*, Kant relies on what appear to be antinomies of pure reason as the impetus for his Copernican revolution. In that work, Kant presents a debate in which each side seems to be rationally provable. He solves these antinomies at least in part by suggesting that experience is not a presentation of things as they are. Our own perception probably shapes reality to make it perceivable. Mistaking appearance, phenomena, for things in themselves, noumena, gives way to all manner of metaphysical flights of fancy.

¹⁴³ REL p. 68 "The coming forth of the corrupted into the good disposition is, in itself (as "the death of the old man," "the crucifying of the flesh"), a sacrifice" Cf Romans VI, 2, 6, and Galatians V, 24

See also PP p. 99 "the consciousness derived from annihilating his personality, of feeling oneself flowing into and being swallowed up in the divinity

Here in the second Critique, we can say that we have arrived at yet another antinomy. The demand to act on an assumption of equality of value for all free choosers seems to be rationally certain and securely undeniable. I cannot deny the rationality of any assertion that adheres to the form $1=1$. So the thesis here must be that creatures who are free to choose regarding the ground of their actions as a result of their status as rational must always demand of themselves to act in a rationally consistent manner. However, it seems that in order for a demand to be necessary, it must first be possible. Therefore, since reason insinuates necessity, its demands must at least be possible even if unconditional. However, the antithesis here must hold that it is impossible for a creature of finite power to be sufficient to an infinite requirement. If both the thesis and antithesis are true, then the categorical imperative is both necessary and impossible for an existing human. This is a contradiction. How can it be rationally necessary to assert a rational inconsistency? We appear to have an antinomy.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ See CPR Bxxvii-Bxxviii p. 28 "But if our Critique is not in error in teaching that the object is to be taken *in a twofold sense*, namely as appearance and as a thing in itself; if the deduction of the concepts of understanding is valid, and the principle of causality therefore, applies only to things taken in the former sense, namely in so far as the are objects of experience - these same objects, taken in the other sense, not being subject to the principle - then there is no contradiction in supposing that one and the same will is, in the appearance, that is, in its visible acts, necessarily subject to the law of nature, and so far *not free*, while yet, as belonging to a thing in itself, it is not subject to that law, and is therefore *free*. My soul, viewed from the latter stand point, cannot indeed be known by means of speculative reason (and still less through empirical observation); and freedom as a property of a being to which I attribute [an endless causal chain of] effects in the sensible world, is therefore also not knowable in any such fashion. For I would then have to know such a being as determined in its existence, and yet as not determined in time - which is impossible, since I cannot support my concept by any intuition. But though I cannot *know*, I can yet *think* freedom; that is to say, the representation of it is at least not self-contradictory, provided due account be taken of our critical distinction between the two modes of representation, the sensible and the intellectual, and of the resulting limitation of the pure concepts of understanding and of the principles which flow from them." I include this to highlight the distinction that Kant draws between sensible and intellectual powers. I am also highlighting the inescapability of either of these radically asymmetric modes. Just as my sensible powers will fruitlessly struggle to represent the atemporal in time (the unconditioned for every given conditioned which reason demands), my own physical powers of agency will fruitlessly yet necessarily struggle to bring an unconditional demand to fruition under the conditions of time. Whereas metaphysical and speculative questions in this form can be entertained with small levels of any serious risk in clean, well lit drawing rooms and lecture halls, practical reason forces me as the identity I understand myself to be to encounter the abyss in a very real and practical sense. It is I as simultaneously material and ideal, conditional and unconditional, who is torn asunder. I do not watch from a distance nor discuss it dispassionately or disinterestedly. As simultaneously limited and unlimited, our very form is such that we are an unstabilizable incompatibility. In practical reason, the unhealable rift (the absolute dissimilarity) identified in speculative reason between the ideal and the real, becomes a destiny to be individually experienced. My indivisible subjectivity must and will be torn. And I will be drawn through this with the very utmost of foreboding, resistance and horror. There can be no vicarious reprieve.

However, if we pay attention to the role that the antinomies played in the first *Critique*, we can see that instead of being a problem, these apparent contradictions were in fact the necessary catalyst.¹⁴⁵ The antinomies marked the passage way through which Kant's eventual ground-breaking philosophy had to pass. As a colleague once said to me, "with Kant, the contradictions are where all the fun is." So, let us proceed under the assumption that this apparent contradiction between unconditional demand and necessarily conditioning capacity might not mark a dead end.

We must also notice here that this antinomy is much more intimate than were those of the first *Critique*. The antinomies of pure theoretical reason concerned my ideas only. While this is in no way insignificant, we must notice that practical reason, on the other hand, has jurisdiction over my own self-assessment, in fact over my own determination of meaning and significance in general. To some degree at least, I can chose or not chose to dabble in discussions of metaphysics. Its something of a discretionary activity even if it has potentially serious implications regarding my understanding of divinity. However, if Kant is even partly right about practical reason, then I, myself, am inevitably subject to the judgments and dictates of my own practical reason. These dictates are neither discretionary nor negligible.

Further, the contradictions of theoretical reason were contradictions of thought. The contradiction of practical reason is different. It is myself who asserts the legitimacy and necessity of practically rational demands and it is also myself who cannot live up to them as author of my real actions. In this antinomy, then, it is I, myself, who is the contradiction. My very status as both intellectual and physical, and subject therefore to both natural and intellectual causality, makes me an inherent contradiction.¹⁴⁶ If Kant is

¹⁴⁵ See Paton p. 202 "it is in freedom that [Kant] finds the unique worth and sublimity of finite human beings"

¹⁴⁶ See PP p. 96 "reason tells them . . . the world has a worth only insofar as the ultimate ends of the existence of rational beings can be met with; but if these should not be attainable, creation itself would appear to those who believe in an end of the world to be as purposeless as a play that has no upshot whatsoever and has no rational design."

right, then exiting humans are a doomed confluence of the irreconcilable. This is not simply a contradiction on a math exam or in a theological argument presented at a conference. It is not that distant. I must *be* this contradiction, not just think it.¹⁴⁷

To see this from another angle, let us recall Kant's ideas concerning the schemata. The schemata are often regarded as perhaps the point at which his argument in the first *Critique* is weakest, if it is actually weak at all. To give it a very simple treatment, the schemata, being both ideal and real, conceptual and experienced, can connect that which is categorically different. In other words, the trick of the first *Critique* is the explanation concerning how the purely intellectual can be applied to the purely sensory. How can the purely physical be determined under purely conceptual categories? The absolute difference between the sensory and the conceptual seems to suggest the impossibility of their interaction. To solve this problem Kant introduced the schema which, being made of both, could make it possible for us to connect them. Time, being both purely conceptual and yet also seemingly experienced is that which does this connecting.¹⁴⁸

See Ibid., p. 121 "we take flight on Icarus's wings in order more closely to approach the secrets of some unfathomable intention."

See Ibid., p. 34 "The supreme guarantor should be just *in himself* and still be a *man*. This is therefore the hardest task of all; indeed, its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned."

¹⁴⁷ See Sullivan p. 272 "as finite creatures, we can never be wholly adequate to that command."

See also Allison p. 190. Here Allison cites Wood who sees Kant's rigorism as "simply the product of the moralist's unhealthy imagination." Even if we grant that this process is unhealthy, this concession offers no rebuttal to the validity of the argument. Kant may very well be describing what could be called an 'unhealthy' process. However, if the process is inevitable, whether or not it is a healthy process is of little concern.

See also Wood, Allen W. "The Emptiness of the Moral Will." *Monist* 73 (1989), p. 473.

See also Allison p. 192-3. Here Allison cites Williams who argues that "practical deliberation is 'first-personal, radically so, and involves an I that must be more intimately the I of my desires' . . . By this line of reasoning . . . Williams reinforces his original contention that Kantian morality is alienating, since it requires us to negate what is most truly ourselves . . . In short, [Williams] maintains that the requirements of an impersonal morality alienate us from others as well as from ourselves . . . [these requirements] intrude in an unhealthy way upon our deepest personal attachments." Again, even if we concede that reason's demands are alienating and unhealthy, these amount to mere appeals for leniency to which reason can be but deaf. I agree that this process is precisely alienating and this must be perceived as unhealthy. But this does not matter much if the process is a fated and without an alternative.

See also Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985. p. 67

¹⁴⁸ See CPR B177-8/A138-9 p. 181 "This mediating representation must be pure, that is, void of all empirical content, and yet at the same time, while it must in one respect be *intellectual*, it must in another be *sensible*. Such a representation is the *transcendental schema*. . . .

So where is that which forces the categorically different, that which is absolutely other, to interact in practical reason? What is that entity that brings finity face to face with the unconditional and unlimited? The venue for this annihilating interaction is the rational freedom of the individual human being. When I recognize the fact that I am free to make either physical concerns the condition of intellectual concerns or intellectual concerns the condition of physical ones, I instantiate the impossible interaction of that which is rationally irreconcilable. Existing human rational freedom, therefore, is the schema of practical reason.¹⁴⁹ When I find myself forced to choose between natural or intellectual causality, I must bring the finite into antagonistic mutual recognition with the infinite.

It must be understood that the finite and the infinite are not two among a number of fairly different items susceptible to comparison. The finite and the infinite are more than just different. They are radically different. In the terms of each, the other is beyond grasp. Finitude cannot be grasped in the language or conceptuality of infinity, and infinity cannot be grasped in the language of finitude. In the context of each, the other can only be expressed negatively. There can be no positive description of infinity in finite terms. This absolute difference makes any interaction seemingly impossible, for they cannot be brought into meaningful relation as a result of the absolute nature of their difference. There can be no mutual recognition between these two beyond simple negation, *via negativa*.

time is . . . homogeneous with the category . . . But, on the other hand . . . it is . . . homogeneous with appearance . . . Thus an application of the category to appearances becomes both possible by means of the transcendental determination of time, which as the schema of the concepts of understanding, mediates the subsumption of the appearances under the category"

¹⁴⁹ See Paton p. 140; 143 "The Idea of our pure rational will stands to our will as affected by sensuous desires in roughly the same relation as the categories stand to our sensuous intuitions. . . Thus in knowledge the mind must function in accordance with its own principles just as the will must function in accordance with its own principles in moral action."

See also Gr. p. 55 "This categorical *ought* presents a synthetic a priori proposition, whereby in addition to my will as affected by sensuous desires there is added further the idea of the same will, but as belonging to the intelligible world, pure and practical in itself, and as containing the supreme condition of the former will insofar, as reason is concerned. All this is similar to the way in which concepts [categories] of the understanding which of themselves signify nothing but the form of law in general, are added intuitions of the world of sense and thus make possible synthetic a priori propositions, upon which all knowledge of nature rests."

And yet, this impossible interaction is precisely inescapable for the rationally free human being in existence. As a being capable of evaluating the rules of my choices according to rational criteria, I am forced to reconcile my finite capacity with the unlimitedness and unconditionality of rational demands regarding law-giving. And the problem is that neither side can ever give in, neither has the capacity to relent. Rational certainty can never admit to adjustment and physical limit can never become unlimited. In this situation we have not the luxury of merely intellectually considering or perusing this impasse. As human I am both he or she that is the source of the rational demand and also he or she who has what must always only be a finite physical capacity. As such I am the unity of finity and infinity.

In short, if Kant is right and the implications of reason and physicality are irreconcilable, then it cannot suffice to offer a speculative theory such as is done in the first *Critique*. A practical solution is required. If such a solution is impossible, perpetual self-condemnation becomes obviously inevitable.¹⁵⁰ I can accept or reject Kant's theoretical criticism of metaphysics and nothing serious must necessarily happen to me. It can remain for me like a game of chess with no necessary real-world implications. However, if Kant is right about practical reason, then the irreconcilability that is inherent in my very nature dooms me and us all inevitably to a confrontation with the finite/infinite impasse. Therefore, I am destined to consider the relation between my infinite and finite concerns regardless of whether I have ever read Kant's philosophy or not.

So, if Kant is right, then my own demand for consistency regarding rules I choose for decision-making exposes itself as an unconditional demand that I make of myself. As unconditional, the source of this demand in me has not the capacity to understand let alone consider issues of possible or even legitimate excuse. Commands of reason must be and

¹⁵⁰ See CPrR p. 156 "with all our efforts we cannot completely free ourselves from reason in judging, we would inevitably appear in our own eyes as worthless and depraved . . . even if we sought to compensate ourselves for this mortification before the inner tribunal by indulging in all the enjoyments which a supposed natural or divine law might be thought, in our delusion, to have connected with legality"

must stay what they are, universal and eternal, and have not the capacity for alteration, adjustment, or manipulation. Put simply, if I cannot consistently defend any privileging of one instance of human free decision-making over any other, then any decision that requires or includes such a prioritizing is instantly and certainly assured of my own judgment of the act as rationally indefensible. The interpretation of humans as free in regards to the ground of the reasons for their decisions is itself an interpretation of humans as noumenal beings. Therefore, to accept the categorization of human beings as free is to understand that freedom as ideal or purely conceptual. Therefore, since my own freedom and yours are both ideal, there can be no legitimate means by which these instances of ideal freedom can ever be distinguished. Any determination of difference must always and certainly be arbitrary and indefensible.

That which is rationally identical can submit to no consistent differentiation. Therefore, there is part of my own brain that can understand no serious difference in moral importance between human beings capable of rational thought. However, this part of my brain is also subject to its unification with a totally finite physical capacity. This limit of my powers makes the prioritization of some individual necessary, inescapable. My own infinite demand is necessarily confronted by my own finite capacity in the unity of my particular individuality. For a power limited being to assert that this demand is somehow performable is to intend to rob it of its true majesty as unconditional and infinite. Further, it is crucial to see that the impossibility of the demand in no way hinders its legitimacy as rationally certain. If both sides of the antinomy of the human condition are inescapable, then despair is guaranteed.¹⁵¹ Despair must therefore be the inevitable destiny of the any rational physically limited creature.¹⁵² This is the central point of the current chapter.

¹⁵¹ See Sullivan p. 47 For Kant, then, the road to autonomy is through that self-imposed discipline or self-mastery necessary to adopt rules by which we *transcend individuality in favor of the universal*. "[my emphasis] Sullivan does not dwell on the fear and pain that is implied in this. In fact, he argues away from acknowledgment of the abyss here alluded to. If I am the individual who is transcended even while I am also that which transcends individuality, a viscous tearing of my individuality is clearly inevitable.

See also Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 250-51. "The outlook of moral faith is not in any sense a solution to the dialectic of man's situation, but is only a rational means of facing the inescapable tension and perplexity which belong essentially to us as finite rational beings. We know already that the

The unconditionality and unlimitable character of a rational demand must infinitely humiliate any limited physical power. With this must go any physical power based positive self-assessment. Doomed, therefore, is any self-assessment or interpretation based on either power or ethical status. Kant's practical philosophy cannot be consistently understood without the inclusion of inevitability of this destiny. The necessary sign of rational maturity must therefore include submission to an unblinking conscious acknowledgment of not simply the moral imperative, but also of this destiny and this despair. If there is to be even a possibility of a sublimation from this condition, one must proceed to a conscious acknowledgment or recognition of this despair as inevitable, perpetual and inescapable.¹⁵³ There can be no alternative. All roads lead here. Resistance is illusory. If the inevitable perpetuality of this despair is to be seen as a death, it is a death that must be suffered for it is rationally inherent, that is, systematically assured for the rational creature. I have not nor can I ever conceivably possess the power either to increase my physical power to infinity nor to tame the eternal tenacity of my own infinite demands.

If Kant is persuasive, then the moment that I come to bow my head in defeat is only a matter of time. Humility, therefore, is not a earned attribute or a mark of achieved character, but a having been forced to arrive at a resisted (and destined) acknowledgment of what has always been the truth regarding my own hubris. Like Œdipus, I am destined to witness my own undeniable and perpetual inadequacy in regard to what I can but deem of unconditional importance. Just as Œdipus is doomed to bemoan his impotence to change

road we travel is a dark and a difficult one; we should not expect philosophy to tell us otherwise. In Kant's view, philosophy has succeeded if it has given clarity and rationality to the difficult wisdom and hard-won virtue whose validity we recognize already."

¹⁵² See PP p. 39 "the great theatre of supreme wisdom that contains the purpose of all the rest . . . should remain an endless reproach . . . [of] the history of the human race . . . [S]ince we despair of ever finding a perfectly rational objective in [human history] . . . the sight [of this history] compels us against our wills to turn our eyes away"

¹⁵³ See PP p. 70 where Kant observes that humankind's rational morality reveals "deep tendencies toward the divine that allow [human beings] to feel sacred awe regarding the greatness and sublimity of his true vocation."

events of the past, I am destined to acknowledge in bitter despair the immutability of my inherent structure as intimately and absolutely ironic. It can only be folly for either of us to pretend or even wish for it not to be so. Pretensions of legitimate positive interpretations of my own esteem are predetermined as fallacy as a result of irreconcilability of my very form. While I cannot hold myself responsible for my having been so structured, this does not lessen the legitimacy of my responsibility to perform the impossible one iota. I find myself abandoned in impotency and yet nonetheless assuredly responsible, culpable in this irresolvable contradiction.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERARY CRITICISM ON HERMANN HESSE'S
STEPPENWOLF

In this dissertation, I engage in an extended and philosophically informed interpretation of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. In doing so, I enter into a nearly eighty year old tradition of scholarly debate, insight, and analysis on this work. It is my intention to add a new interpretive strategy to this tradition. In particular, I intend to employ Kant's discussion of certain rational and moral inevitabilities as a means for gaining insight into the experiences and decisions of Hesse's character Harry Haller during his journey toward the Magic Theater. However, there is much within my analysis that has been observed and discussed previously. In what follows I intend to reveal those aspects of my work that I share with or have derived from previous scholarly work on *Steppenwolf*. In this discussion of the tradition of scholarly interpretation of *Steppenwolf*, I take my lead from David G. Richards and his *Exploring the Divided Self: Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf and its Critics*, a masterful and comprehensive analysis of the history of *Steppenwolf* interpretation.¹⁵⁴

I have divided this survey of interpretations into three categories. This division is for organizational purposes. This division provides me the opportunity to draw connections between the insights of different critics and to cite trends. It also allows me to compare and contrast my work to that of these critics in an efficient manner. The divisions are as follows: Issues surrounding stage based development in *Steppenwolf*; Issues related to the Immortals and Hesse's Third Kingdom; The importance of Responsibility in *Steppenwolf*.

¹⁵⁴ Richards, David G., *Exploring the Divided Self: Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf and its Critics*, Camden House, Columbia SC, 1996

**Issues Surrounding Stage-Based Development in
*Steppenwolf***

At the core of my analysis is a discussion and articulation of what I see as an inevitable three stage development process that is inherent to the human condition. Far from being unique, this is one of the most common observations that scholars make concerning *Steppenwolf*. The popularity of this take on the novel derives both from Hesse's own discussion of a three stage developmental process in his essay, "A Bit of Theology," but also from the psychology of C. G. Jung. Hesse had been introduced to Jung's thought while he was under the care of Jungian psychologist, Dr. J. B. Lang.¹⁵⁵ Among those who see Jungian influences in the three stage developmental process within *Steppenwolf* are Eugene Webb, and Reso Karalashvili.¹⁵⁶ However, Anni Carlsson was the first to call attention to these stages in 1933. She bases her interpretation on Hesse's own development as seen in changes in his fiction and Hesse's own words in the essay mentioned above. Max Schmid sees something of a three stage development but bases his interpretation on the work of L. Klages which deals with the movement from innocent soul through experience and eventually into the realm of pure spirit.¹⁵⁷

Siegfried Unseld also takes his cue from "A Bit of Theology" in his recognition of three stages. Unseld notes that each of the three stages are represented by the three distinct narrative voices, the landlady's nephew, Harry and the author of the *Treatise*.¹⁵⁸ Middleton notices developmental stages but bases them on the Stations of the Cross.¹⁵⁹ Peter Gontrum recognizes the three stages that Unseld and Carlsson does but divides the last stage into two, distinguishing the unity of inner and outer from the unity of temporal

¹⁵⁵ Richards p. 112

¹⁵⁶Ibid pp. 115; 132

¹⁵⁷ Ibid p. 19 Klages ideas on this seem to echo Hegel's.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid pp. 25-6

¹⁵⁹ Ibid pp. 34-5

and eternal.¹⁶⁰ Edward Farrer connects his interpretation of stage development in *Steppenwolf* to that described by Joseph Campbell in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell contends that the Hero passes through four stages in his or her approach to and return from direct experience of being.¹⁶¹ Oscar Seidlin connects Heidegger's three stages to that which he sees in *Steppenwolf*.¹⁶² Lynn Dhority returns to a tripartite linear progression and thus segregates her interpretation from Ziolkowski's circular sonata interpretation. Dhority follows Unseld's recognition that the different narrators represent different stages, observing that the nephew's attitude is simplistic, Harry's is complex and conflicted, and the Treatise author's perspective offers some hope of an escape from conflict.¹⁶³ Joseph Mileck joins Dhority and Unseld in his connection of three narrative perspectives to three stages of development.¹⁶⁴

Peter Jansen offers a new perspective when he connects stage development in *Steppenwolf* to the progressive developmental stages described by Kierkegaard. Jansen adds an additional layer of complexity and depth to his analysis by including a discussion of the boundaries between stages. My own focus on these thresholds or boundaries between stages connects my work to Jansen's.¹⁶⁵ Reso Karalashwili sees a connection between the stage development of both Kierkegaard and Jung and that expressed in Hesse's novel.¹⁶⁶ While my reliance on this three stage development in my interpretation reflects much of this previous work, I find a very important connection to Theodore

¹⁶⁰ Ibid pp. 37-8

¹⁶¹ Ibid p. 71

¹⁶² Ibid p. 29

¹⁶³ Ibid pp. 84-5

¹⁶⁴ Ibid p. 94

¹⁶⁵ Ibid pp. 99-101

¹⁶⁶ Ibid pp.131-4

Ziolkowski's 1961 essay "Hermann Hesse's Ciliastic Vision." There Ziolkowski discusses the third stage as

an eternal realm of spiritual values that exists independently of the everyday world, a realm that occupies modally the same position as the Christian millennium. But instead of being a third stage in the future, it exists simultaneously with the second stage on a totally different level of being. In that realm Goethe and Novalis and Mozart still live.¹⁶⁷

My own discussion of a third stage that takes the form of the phoenix bears a serious resemblance to Ziolkowski's interpretation in this essay.

While it is clear that there is much in my interpretation of stage development in *Steppenwolf* that has been previously observed, I offer a new perspective by connecting Hesse's fictional work to the philosophical and ethical work of Immanuel Kant. Kant's moral philosophy provides the grounds for an interpretation of stage based progression that is inevitable and universal. Regarding the issue of an inevitable drive, in 1951 Franz Baumer also observes an aspect of inevitability or fate in Harry's progress. Baumer contends that Harry is guided by his *daimon*, his fate which speaks through the "poet's own soul."¹⁶⁸ Marga Lange and Mileck also take note of an internal guide or instigator. Lange's interpretation of an unconscious internal drive within Harry comes in the form of guilt over having neglected his authentic "subjective self."¹⁶⁹ My analysis regarding subjective guilt is similar to Lange's, but she bases hers on references to Heidegger and Buber, whereas my guilt references are rationally ethical in a Kantian sense rather than ontological. Mileck offers something similar regarding an internal *daimon* in his suggestion that Harry's "immortal self" is the Treatise's author. Mileck finds that "the mortal self is helped by and must become the immortal self."¹⁷⁰ This bears some

¹⁶⁷ Ibid p. 59

¹⁶⁸ Ibid pp. 22-24

¹⁶⁹ Ibid p. 71

¹⁷⁰ Ibid p. 96

similarity to my own reference to Kant's absolutely free center of rational evaluation and judgment.

One of the main pillars of my investigation into Hesse's fiction is a suggestion that Hesse is referring to a problem that is an inherent part of the human condition. This is an insight that has been addressed by a number of Hesse scholars. Oscar Seidlin sees a Heideggerian inauthenticity as the fundamentally human existential malaise encountered by Harry.¹⁷¹ Edmund Gnefkow focuses on what he calls "the curse of individuation. Gnefkow contends that Hesse relies at least as much on Eastern thought as he did on Western psychological insights. Gnefkow sees *Steppenwolf* as a description of a man wrestling with an identity, an "I," that is in polar opposition to a "not-I," and Gnefkow sees this is a universal human polarity. Harry must achieve a state above opposition and beyond polarity.¹⁷² Hans Jürg Lüthi cites the fundamental dissimilarity between nature and intellect. This contradiction always threatens to tear us apart. Lüthi suggests that the conflict inherent to our condition is incurable.¹⁷³ Susanne Meinicke offers something similar to an inherent or structural problem in the human condition by suggesting that there is something sick in the entire collective consciousness. Harry's sickness is a reflection of the sickness of the culture. From Meinicke's perspective, there is a glimmer of hope in that it is possible to imagine a new culture emerging out of the overthrow of the old.¹⁷⁴

My own analysis follows more in the traditions of those who see an antinomy within the very structure of the human being who is both rational and natural. In this I follow Kurt Weibel who felt that "romantic humor . . . means recollection of the infinite in the objectifying perception of the risible contradiction of the world . . . Humor makes a

¹⁷¹ Ibid p. 29

¹⁷² Ibid pp. 32-3

¹⁷³ Ibid p. 89

¹⁷⁴ Ibid pp. 117-9

whole out of the finite world, in order to rescind it as such."¹⁷⁵ While Weibel's observation of a humor which is based on the difference between idea and appearance differs from my own emphasis on the contrast between ethical ideal and physical capability, the relation remains. Further, if we can recognize unconditional, ethical ideals and physically-limited capacity as polar extremes, then my work bears a reference to that of Ziolkowski, Knüfermann, Pavlyshyn and Golden as well.

Ziolkowski makes reference to polar extremes as the engine that drives Harry's progress.¹⁷⁶ Volker Knüfermann sees Harry as stuck between a hope for a breakthrough to some grasp of the immortal realm and a belief in the hopelessness of all human striving. Marko Pavlyshyn refers to Ziolkowski's suggestion that the structure of *Steppenwolf* bears resemblance to that of a sonata. Pavlyshyn finds that the form is well suited to the polar characteristics of Harry's predicament. Pavlyshyn describes the sonata as

a musical form which conceptually unites two seemingly contradictory aspirations of Haller's ego: on the one hand the striving toward (and even temporary achievement of) the level of the Immortals, and on the other hand, the return to the starting point, which for him is individual personality.¹⁷⁷

Kenneth Golden also recognizes a polar tension challenging Harry. Following Farrer, Golden employs Joseph Campbell but chooses to focus on Campbell's emphasis on the polarity of experience. Golden sees Harry as strung between the Nietzschean Apollian principle of individuation and the Dionysian principle which is opposed to all ego consciousness.¹⁷⁸ My own work bears a similarity to these scholars regarding a discussion of a polar suspension, however, my work emphasizes the specific suspension between conditional and unconditional ethical concerns.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid p. 31

¹⁷⁶ Ibid p. 59

¹⁷⁷ Ibid p. 89 (43)

¹⁷⁸ Ibid pp. 128-9

Golden is not the only critic to observe the need of a Dionysian dissolution of the ego in Harry. Seidlin suggests that Harry's problems could be solved by means of an escape of the self. As mentioned previously, Seidlin's interpretation employs Heideggerian ideas of existential authenticity and the problem of individuation as a "separation from the All-ness."¹⁷⁹ Gnefkow continues with the assertion that individuation itself is problematic. As mentioned earlier, Gnefkow contends that Hesse rejected the individuating tendencies and intentions of Western psychoanalysis for the Eastern suggestion to strive for escape of polar individuality. According to Gnefkow, Hesse felt that intensified individuation leads to suicide.¹⁸⁰ Ralph Freeman discusses Hesse's call for the questioning and dissection of individuality and personality as well. Freeman interprets *Steppenwolf* as an allegorical reference to psychological events, "disintegrations and resolutions occurring beneath the ordinary level of conscious and even unconscious experience."¹⁸¹

Pavlyshyn continues the criticism of identity. As mentioned earlier, he discusses contradicting principles within the individual. He calls these contradictions the "Dionysian spirit of the dissolution of individuality."¹⁸² This dissolution, claims Pavlyshyn, can lead to a higher unity which grounds the immortal laughter in *Steppenwolf*. Lüthi Also mentions the Dionysian as instrumental to this higher unity.¹⁸³ David Artiss is another in this tradition that emphasizes the dissolution of the identity and its functional role regarding the participation in a higher, and for Artiss, a Jungian, unity.¹⁸⁴ Another interpreter in the Jungian style is Dieter Hensing who felt that Hesse's Third Kingdom can be achieved not

¹⁷⁹ Ibid p. 29

¹⁸⁰ Ibid pp. 32-3

¹⁸¹ Ibid pp. 53-59

¹⁸² Ibid p. 89

¹⁸³ Ibid p. 89

¹⁸⁴ Ibid pp. 119-121

by means of individuality but by the "delimitation and dissolution of the ego in the unity of eternity."¹⁸⁵ Günther Baumann follows both the Jungian interpretation as well as in his assertion that the path of the Immortals includes the transcendence of the ego.¹⁸⁶

I concur with these scholars in two ways. In what follows, I will contend that identities built upon heteronomous interpretive principles are unstable and subject to internal criticism. Also, this internal criticism can often occur subconsciously in a manner related to that described by Freeman. A key difference between my interpretation and these is that I emphasize an identity that is simultaneously overcome and maintained in the final stage of development.

Another key theme within the tradition of interpretation is that of rebirth. Eike Middleton sees water as a symbol of rebirth.¹⁸⁷ Henry Hatfield suggests that Harry can undergo a reverse development to be reborn.¹⁸⁸ Christian Immo Schneider sees *Steppenwolf* as a description of a return to formless chaos and death on the way to a rebirth.¹⁸⁹ Emanuel Maier, who corresponded directly with both Hesse and Jung, felt that Hermine's death represented a death and rebirth for Harry.¹⁹⁰ My interpretation shares this focus on resurrection, but differs from most of these interpretations in that I suggest that the individual who enters the death is not the same one who rises.

Regarding the transition from stage one to stage two, my interpretation highlights the importance of escaping heteronomy or cultural determinism. This has also been noted by Lange, Hertz and Edward Abood. Lange's interpretation according to Heideggerian

¹⁸⁵ Ibid p. 128 trans. Richards

¹⁸⁶ Ibid p. 135

¹⁸⁷ Ibid p. 34

¹⁸⁸ Ibid p. 63

¹⁸⁹ Ibid p. 73

¹⁹⁰ Ibid p. 112

principles while those of Hertz and Abood occur in a Jungian style.¹⁹¹ Abood emphasizes the connection between Harry and Dostoevsky's underground man. I agree with this and yet I also contend that this is only a part of a larger dynamic.

Regarding the transition from the second stage to the third, I emphasize the role that despair plays. Schwarz, Ted Spivey, Artiss and Baumann also remark on the role of despair as a possible threshold. Schwarz feels that Harry is granted the "grace of regeneration" while on the "brink of despair."¹⁹² This grace comes in the form of Hermine and is a call to reintegrate his "sensual self." Spivey sees despair as instrumental to a fragmentation of the ego which can offer the opportunity for visions of hope.¹⁹³ Artiss sees despair or neurosis as a painful but perhaps necessary passage to integration in a Jungian sense. Baumann sees despair and suicide as indications that the individual is prepared for transition.¹⁹⁴ It is only when the individual is in this condition that the Jungian psychopomps can emerge and lead the individual through transitions, according to Baumann. While I agree with the emphasis and role of despair, my interpretation differs regarding my use of Kantian principles to suggest the eventuality of despair and in my inclusion of this transition as one in a series of transitions.

My own interpretation relies on the suggestion that identities are grounded on one of a number of possible cardinal interpretive principles. As a result, I hold that we are susceptible to a number of different identities. The idea of a multiplicity within an identity is also maintained in the interpretations of Eugene Stelzig, Maier, Meinicke and Artiss. Stelzig takes a post-modern approach to the biographical interpretation. He emphasizes aspects of the novel such as the chess game and the shrunken Hermine as a chess piece to interpret *Steppenwolf* as an expression of Hesse's own "personal identity as a complex

¹⁹¹ Ibid pp. 70; 117; 122

¹⁹² Ibid p. 51

¹⁹³ Ibid p. 119

¹⁹⁴ Ibid p. 135

unity-in-multhood." He felt that Hesse wanted to "explode the fiction of the identity simplex."¹⁹⁵ Maier finds that the Magic Theater is a "temenos" or holy area "in which the various aspects of the personality are gathered for the purpose of unification" in a Jungian sense.¹⁹⁶ Meinicke also sees what appear to be contrasting aspects of Harry's identity that need to be combined in a Jungian unity. Meinicke sees laughter as part of the process.¹⁹⁷ Artiss echoes the Jungian approach as well, calling for a unification of contrasting aspects of the soul through humor.¹⁹⁸ While I share the concentration on often hidden unconscious aspects of a grander unity of identity expressed in the work of these writers, I do not base my interpretation on Jungian concepts. My interpretation goes in a direction that is similar to Stelzig's but uses philosophical structures as a means for explaining multiple aspects of identity.

Webb also takes a Jungian approach but gives focused attention to the idea of stage development. I agree with Webb in his observation that Harry remains stuck in the second stage, and interpretation he shares with Ziolkowski.¹⁹⁹

Issues Related to the Immortals and Hesse's Third Kingdom

One of the fundamental challenges faced by Hesse was that of artistically expressing the timeless within the conditions of narrative time. Freedman noticed this and holds that Hesse intended to

represent unity within the flow of time . . . [T]he ideal above time can be portrayed simultaneously with a movement through time (the quest) . . . Hesse . . . chose

¹⁹⁵ Ibid p. 103

¹⁹⁶ Ibid p. 113

¹⁹⁷ Ibid p. 117

¹⁹⁸ Ibid p. 119

¹⁹⁹ Ibid pp. 115; 59

aesthetic symbols . . . to represent unification of dissonances frozen in time through sensibly or intuitively accessible representations.²⁰⁰

In other words, Freedman saw poetic symbol as a means by which Hesse could create the "magic" of presenting the unrepresentable. While I concur with Freedman and share his concern for the difficulty of the task, there is room in his work for explaining how the process works. It is my intention in what follows to delve into a discussion of the possibility of an occasion in which the timeless can appear within time.

Schwarz goes in a different direction. Schwarz refers to the Magic Theater as something beyond reason and human understanding.²⁰¹ Rather than suggesting that the timeless can be presented, Schwarz seems to be warning us of the impossibility of presenting it. Abood stakes out a position between these two, suggesting that Hesse is concerned with a "single, timeless essence (Brahma, the Buddha-nature), of which the visible world, including human life, is only a passing manifestation."²⁰² In other words, the immortal within time is possible but only in passing. My own position comes close to Abood's on this point. Hensing brings us back to doubt by suggesting that "the unity of the world is ultimately not a harmonizing and synthesizing of opposites in reality and in this life but an otherworldly *unio mystica*."²⁰³

The issue is taken deeper by Lüthi, A. Hollis, and Karalashwili, who all suggest that the realm of the Immortals is either impossible or only possible in the afterlife. Lüthi, who we have seen maintaining a belief in the fundamental and potentially destructive dissimilarity between nature and intellect, also holds that this polarity can be overcome only by the Immortals which Lüthi equates with death.²⁰⁴ Lüthi does not believe that

²⁰⁰ Freedman, Ralph. *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, André Gide, and Virginia Woolf*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. 1963 pp. 51-2

²⁰¹ Richards p. 52

²⁰² Ibid p. 124 (59-61)

²⁰³ Ibid p. 128 (809)

²⁰⁴ Ibid p. 89

Harry has achieved this. Hollis sees things similarly. According to Hollis, the transcendent realm of the Immortals is outside the conditions of space and time and therefore beyond life and unobtainable. Hollis notes that humor "suggested as a means of solving Harry Haller's existential problems, is criticized implicitly in the novel."²⁰⁵ Karalaszewski, connecting Hesse's *Third Kingdom* to Jung's Self and state of harmony and balance beyond polarity, also does not think that such a state is achievable in this life.

Peter Gontrum and Mark Boulby take the discussion deeper still with their references to martyrdom and self sacrifice. Gontrum tracks Hesse's use of symbols in relation to the stages discussed above. As we saw there, Gontrum includes a fourth stage and corresponding set of symbols in his interpretation of *Steppenwolf*. Regarding this fourth set of symbols in which the eternal and the singular are united, Gontrum felt that

[t]he symbols which give the believing person the feeling of taking part in the eternal are infrequent with Hesse, but they are the crowning of his creation of symbols . . . They constitute a threshold to another world beyond nature, in which the dying person gives his bodily existence to the destructive but also comforting secret of nature.²⁰⁶

Gontrum seems to emphasize the importance of voluntary self-sacrifice regarding the interaction between the bodily and the eternal. To this end, Gontrum also emphasizes the importance of what he sees as Harry's escape from hubris accomplished by means of the Magic Theater.²⁰⁷ Gontrum sees this escape from Hubris as a preparation for self sacrifice. Boulby suggests something similar.

The world of the Immortals, therefore, lies at the very end of the Way, of 'The Steep Road,' . . . Yet even the Tractate has its reservations -- perhaps after all the only Way *is* that of martyrdom, leading 'to still greater sufferings, to proscription, to the last renunciation, perhaps the scaffold' (S p. 62) . . . Harry knows, at all events, that he is still far from being one of them . . . *unio mystica* he may have briefly experienced, but *unio mystica substantialis* is reserved for the saint . . . The ultimate 'leap into the universe' (S p. 55) will be still to come . . . inevitable.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Ibid p. 94 (27)

²⁰⁶ Ibid p. 38 (116)

²⁰⁷ Ibid p. 39

²⁰⁸ Boulby, Mark, *Hermann Hesse: His Mind and Art*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca. 1967 p. 205

Both Boulby and Gontrum interpret Hesse as offering clear warnings of possibly drastic requirements for transcendence. I share this interpretation with them and it is one of the cornerstone aspects of my argument. Both Boulby and Baumann contend that humor cannot really be seen as Hesse's or Immortal's answer to Harry's problem. Baumann finds humor something of a compromise.²⁰⁹

While we have been looking at the issue of the Immortal Realm from the point of view of mortals, it bears mentioning that *Steppenwolf* includes references from the point of view of the Immortals themselves. Both Franz Baumer and Freedman take note of this. Baumer notes a Hesse quote from *Trip to Nuremberg* in which Hesse felt that "the eternal self in us observes the mortal I and appraises its leaps and grimaces, full of pity, full of scorn, full of neutrality."²¹⁰ This point of view from the eternal bears a serious resemblance to my own discussion of Kant's removed and judging reason.

While my own work owes much to all of the interpreters referenced here, I align most closely with Boulby and Gontrum in their discussion of a call to martyrdom in *Steppenwolf*. Theirs along with Ziolkowski's simultaneous second and third stages offer my own ideas considerable support and precedence.

The Importance of Responsibility in *Steppenwolf*

Harry has a tendency to stay cloistered in his room. This, along with Harry's prioritization of art, call into question the issue of practical real world responsibility, as it is explored in *Steppenwolf*. Stelzig seems to corroborate this concern by suggesting that *Steppenwolf* is a confessional autobiography, produced because for Hesse, "the process of writing himself is his most satisfying and complete mode of being."²¹¹ This would seem to suggest that the artistic endeavor is itself its own legitimation. Sammons sees something similar but cites Hesse's call for inwardness and reflection as reason for criticism.

²⁰⁹ Ibid p. 135

²¹⁰ Ibid p. 25; 53

²¹¹ Ibid p. 103 (34)

Sammons felt this subjective and interior focus combined with a desire for the otherworldly pulls people away from political and social activity and dedication.

Fritz Böttger and Middell wrote under the influence of their socialist convictions. Böttger felt that symbols such as Mozart's radio called the reader "to make concessions to the [bourgeois] status quo . . . [the Immortals] see no way out of the commercialization of all art; in their view, one must accept it."²¹² Böttger felt that the intellectual should not try to escape the bourgeoisie. Middell criticizes Hesse for being content to criticize the bourgeoisie without having a viable alternative to replace it.²¹³ In a similar vein, Hans Mayer sees *Steppenwolf* as a warning against a "social danger . . . of the Bürgers' frivolous play at being anti-bourgeois."²¹⁴ All three warn the reader to consider whether Hesse has expressed enough concern for social responsibility.

However, Gnefkow held that "for Hesse as a Western man the drive to be active in the world is a necessary complement to the *via contemplativa*."²¹⁵ In my interpretation, I avail myself of the opportunity to situate *Steppenwolf* within Hesse's own non-fiction writing and within his biographical context. Along these lines I make a case for the suggestion that *Steppenwolf* is a response to Hesse's own emerging conviction regarding the importance of serious ethical action in the real world. I share with the socialist critics a concern for legitimate political and social involvement. However, I split with them in their insistence that *Steppenwolf* indicates an abandonment of social responsibilities. As I will make clear, I find that *Steppenwolf* is Hesse's confession of and penance for what Hesse saw as his inadequate reaction to the First World War, as well as proof of his determined commitment to no longer shirk his real world responsibilities.

²¹² Ibid p. 91 (338-9)

²¹³ Ibid p. 92

²¹⁴ Ibid p. 93 (529)

²¹⁵ Ibid p. 33 (85)

In an effort to make these points, I take somewhat of a biographical approach to the interpretation of the novel. In this I follow most of the early critics and interpreters of the novel. Among these are Hugo Ball, Anni Carlsson, Hans Schmid, and Richard Matzig.²¹⁶ Later participants in this approach include Mileck and the post-modernist Stelzig.²¹⁷ Those who follow this path often find that they felt invited to do so by Hesse's own contentions that his work had always been intentionally confessional and autobiographical.²¹⁸

I include Hesse's role as author within my interpretation and discussion of *Steppenwolf*. Along these lines I follow Dhurity and Lüthi in their suggestion that the healing referred to in the author's note (added in 1941) was a healing experienced by Hesse himself and not Harry.²¹⁹ Pavlyshyn also suggests that Harry failed to find the healing mentioned.²²⁰ Dehorn goes so far as to suggest that there is no deliverance at all within the novel.²²¹ I agree with Lange and Abood in their contention that Hesse is an existential optimist, at least in comparison to Kafka and other existentialists.²²² However, I hold that even while Hesse remained optimistic in his hope for transcendent meaning, I also feel he warned against redemptions, resolution, and resurrections that were too convenient or easy. I feel that Seidlin, Jansen, Maier, Artiss, and Breugelmans all risk an interpretation in which the resolution of Harry's despair is too complete and too easily procured.²²³

²¹⁶ Ibid pp. 12-19

²¹⁷ Ibid pp. 94; 102

²¹⁸ MB p. 111-112

²¹⁹ Richards pp. 87; 90

²²⁰ Ibid pp. 87-9

²²¹ Ibid p. 15

²²² Ibid pp. 71; 123

²²³ Ibid pp. 29; 100; 113; 122; 131

Along similar lines I write critically of Harry's apparent desire to escape from his despair to an existing realm of the Immortals. I share this with Abood.²²⁴ I also criticize Harry for his cultural or aesthetic elitism. This was also observed by Dhority and Weiner.²²⁵ Taking it further, Dhority, Knüfermann and Egon Schwarz compare Harry's elitism to the Society of the Tower in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. Alternatively, I find that Abood relies too heavily on an experience or vision of the transcendent as the goal and solution for Harry's despair.²²⁶ I will argue that enlightenment of the Immortals comes in and by means of action and choice, and not so much as a result of awareness, visions, or insight.

Steppenwolf also inspires a discussion of the relevance of absolutes. Knüfermann and Abood question whether Hesse actually believed in absolutes.²²⁷ I will disagree with them on this point. In fact, much of what I argue here is grounded on the acceptance of Kant's categorical imperative as a rational absolute. Hesse's reference to the phrase "Tat Twam Asi" supports my position on this.²²⁸ In his *Kurgast* or *Guest at a Spa*, written just before *Steppenwolf*, Hesse translates this expression as "Love your neighbor, for he is you yourself."²²⁹

It is my intention that the interpretation that follows participates in the serious and insightful tradition surrounding the interpretation of *Steppenwolf*. I have shown significant connections to previous work on the subject. However, it is also important to note that my reliance on Kant's philosophy clearly distinguishes my interpretation from what has come before. Further, it is my contention that I include and bring into relation many of these

²²⁴ Ibid p. 123

²²⁵ Ibid pp. 74; 75; 106

²²⁶ Ibid p. 124

²²⁷ Ibid p. 75; 123

²²⁸ S p. 183

²²⁹ Richards p. 25

divergent insights and observations in a detailed articulation of stage-based progression that I see as fundamental to the structure and meaning of the novel.

CHAPTER III
DESPAIR AND DELIVERANCE: AN INVESTIGATION OF HERMANN
HESSE'S *STEPPENWOLF* ELUCIDATED BY MEANS OF THE
AUTHOR'S
NON-FICTIONAL WRITINGS

One of the central questions in the work of Hermann Hesse concerns the interaction between art and history. Hesse went to his grave at least partly the deep and passionate disciple of the German artistic spirit he had been as a young man. His confidence, faith, and trust regarding the importance of art for a culture would ultimately prove indefatigable, though not without having sustained threats of serious attacks, suspicions, and internal revolutions. Both the public historical realities of the twentieth century and Hesse's own experiences forced him to ask penetrating and potentially undermining questions about the purpose and value of art and its relation to the events and implications of the First World War and the Second World War. Early in his career, Hesse was content to allow himself to be overwhelmed and transfixed by the grandeur and otherworldliness of the great aesthetic tradition that included Goethe and Mozart, but guilt and responsibility regarding his feelings of complicity forced him to admit the need to subject this art to a serious reevaluation in order to see if it really was ethically defensible.

In this chapter, I will show that Hesse does maintain the faith in aesthetics that he mentions in his author's note. I will show that *Steppenwolf* itself is proof of Hesse's faith. However, the faith that produces *Steppenwolf* is not the faith that the character Harry espouses at the novel's outset, nor the faith of Hesse's own aesthetically enthusiastic youth. *Steppenwolf* is a novel about the transition from the first youthful faith to the second more mature faith. It is the purpose of this chapter to reveal Hesse's understanding of this deliverance. *Steppenwolf*, as a work, leaves the answer to many of its questions to the reader's discretion. In response to these moments of intentional and artful ambiguity, I will take advantage of Hesse's direct communications, his essays, political writings, and letters, looking for his discussions of related issues so as to offer biographical context and conceptual insight into his intended meanings within his novel. Hesse's ready admission

that his fictional works were highly autobiographical encourages the serious reader to delve into the intellectual atmosphere that surrounded the creation of this work.

This chapter is divided into thirty-four sections. The first four are dedicated to a biographical treatment of Hermann Hesse himself. I will begin with a discussion of Hesse's own early feelings and assertions regarding the role and importance of art and artists. I will then offer an investigation into Hesse's personal crisis brought about by both the First World War and family tragedies. This will allow me to argue for Hesse's awakening to his direct responsibility to common people, a development that comes at the cost of his convenient presumptions about the relevance of art.

From the discussion of Hesse himself, I will move to a discussion of *Steppenwolf* and of Harry Haller as a thinly veiled autobiographical depiction of Hesse himself. In this fifth section, I will call attention to the theme of suicide and I will argue that this theme is a central and organizing one throughout the novel. In section six I will explore Hesse's technique of employing multiple and sometimes dubious narrators in *Steppenwolf*. Section seven provides an opportunity to identify aesthetic elitism as a trait shared by both Hesse and Harry Haller. In section eight, we will look into Harry's malaise and his desire for release. I will highlight the fact that despite his conviction regarding the importance of art, it has been some time since he has felt the enthusiasm of his youth. We will also look into his disquieting attraction to the bourgeois in this section.

Section ten will take us deeper into his yearning for communion with the bourgeois and for what he sees as overdue recognition for his aesthetic commitment and for his suffering in the name of the ideal. Section eleven focuses on the often resisted self-assessment that can arise from the perception that death is impending. Here I will argue that Harry desires a literal deliverance from his despair in part because of semi-conscious doubts about his own aesthetic faith. Section twelve will take us up to the threshold of despair. Here we will compare the despondent Harry to Hesse's own interpretation of Christ in Gethsemane, and this will introduce us to the possibility that the despairing

individual can consider possibilities previously beyond his or her grasp. Section thirteen will delve into the *Treatise of the Steppenwolf* and into the idea of conscience as unacknowledged author and guide. Here we will begin to criticize the assumption that the experience of the transcendent can be voyeuristic.

Section fourteen will explore Harry's reticence to acknowledge common folks as worthy of his commitment. At this stage we find that Harry is not prepared to suffer the scaffold, aesthetic or otherwise, in the name of the bourgeois. In section fifteen, we will see that Harry's nausea is one bred not of repentance but of contempt for the bourgeois. We will call attention to the contradiction that Harry is, as yet, incapable of self-sacrifice in the name of the very ideals championed in his art. Section sixteen will highlight Harry's similarity to the poet Jean Paul, in that they both can be accused of using art as a means of escape from the unconditional demands of the ideal. Section seventeen focuses on Hesse's concept of the moral sovereign as a subjective creator *ex nihilo* of universally valid and transcendent principles. As Harry glimpses the immense scope of these internally discovered rules, we find that he flees for the comfort of heteronomy by means of a negative reflection of bourgeois conventions.

Section eighteen will take us deeper into Hesse's ideas concerning interior transcendence. Hesse postulates an authentic and abysmal yet hidden selfhood, which is ruthlessly hobbled by our own compromising and intimidated fiction of a surface identity. Following this, in section nineteen, we will consider the pain that the authentic expression of the transcendent must bring to the artistic individual who must nonetheless live in society. This will allow us a discussion of the idea that an occupied identity cannot be the agent of its own abandonment. For such an identity, outside help will be required. Section twenty will include an exploration of the form of grace and its connection to a will broken by despair. Hermine will enter our discussion as the vehicle or source of grace. Section twenty-one will introduce Harry's fundamental hubristic flaw. Here we will address the contradiction of assumed sufficiency of the limited in the face of the unlimited. Section

twenty two considers Harry's dream conversations with Goethe. Both Goethe and Hermine pose questions designed to undermine Harry's hubris. These questions will allow us to further consider the impediments involved in abandoning an occupied identity.

Section twenty-three will allow us to accuse Harry of grounding his indignation on an unfounded assumption. We will consider the possibility that there may in fact be no alternative to the fate of the impossible task, and the destiny of failure. Section twenty-four will focus on the existential quality of despair. I will argue with Hesse that this experience cannot be perused or dispassionately considered from a non-despairing posture. I will also suggest that despair is in part a result of the fact that my own critiquing persona is itself destined to suffer the withering critique of the ideal. I will argue that the wisdom born of experienced despair cannot be commodified. Section twenty-five allows us an opportunity to take a look at Harry's mistaken conflation of art and reality. Both Harry and the earlier Hesse assumed that aesthetic and intellectual bravery excused them from the firing squad. For both of them, World War I will disabuse them of this illusion.

From this we will move on to a consideration of our motivations for aesthetic admiration in section twenty-six. Do we yearn for the ideal or for the social approval that can be granted those who are reputed to be torch bearers of the ideal? Both Hermine and Goethe will chastise Harry for sporting the mere costume of the torch bearer. Section twenty-seven will explore the rationally destined journey to despair. I will argue that the only humility sufficient to the ideal is a resisted and imposed humility. I will also argue that futility is no excuse from action. Section twenty-eight then asks what we should actually do in the face of this futility. This section will delve deeper into Hesse's ideas of the autonomous and inward creative discovery of ideals. Here we will also discuss Pablo's request of a "trifling suicide" or identity annihilation as the requirement of this pursuit of the ideal.

Section twenty-nine takes us deeper into the antagonistic relationship between ego and conscience. Even though the abysmal interiority of my conscience is absolutely

intimate to me, my illusory surface identity can but see it as an other. As such it can be seen by that identity also as the source of inconceivable grace. Section thirty focuses on the ego's transition from end or purpose of my actions to mere means. We will see here that this transition alone makes possible any authentic incarnation of the absolute. Section thirty-one brings us to a discussion of the pious anonymity which precedes any faithful presentation of the ideal. Here we will observe that the finite cannot hope to survive the attempt to embody the ideal. Section thirty-two will provide the opportunity to assert that all expressions of the ideal within the bounds of reality must occur in the form of the Christ or the phoenix.

In section thirty-three we will listen as the immortals try to explain this idea to Harry. We will consider the possibility that *Steppenwolf* itself is a treatise from the immortals. In this section I will emphasize the immortal call to duty in the name of the magnificent transcendent that lies ever within each of the war-lumbering bourgeoisie. In the concluding section, I will argue that the deliverance that Harry and Hesse have been seeking comes only ever as an intimation and only ever in the form of the willing and conscious personal acceptance of the phoenix's role. I will argue that *Steppenwolf* itself is evidence of Hesse's commitment to his faith in the impossible instantiation of the transcendent within reality.

The Early Hesse and Ennobling Aesthetics

His 1927 novel *Steppenwolf* is centrally concerned with what were to Hesse horrifying suspicions that art may be irrelevant in the face of historical atrocities, or worse, that the artist may actually be complicit in them. Hesse's self-reflexive fictional character, the despondent and suicidal poet, Harry Haller, wanders through his days apparently no longer capable of hope or faith in the persuasive, awakening, and reformative power of art. Younger Harry, like the early Hesse, seems to have felt that art and authentic religion were our only real options for salvation from meaninglessness.²³⁰ Without this hope, this faith

²³⁰ IWG p. 19

in the ability of art to establish or reveal meaning in human life, he seems to believe he has been left with no remaining alternative.

Therefore, he is desperate. He is absolutely at a loss as to how to respond to questions of the meaning of life, if art is no longer potent enough or trustworthy enough to counter the annihilation of meaning he felt had been left in the wake of the atrocities of historic reality. Lacking any alternative, he does not know what to do and he does not know how to even begin in a new direction. He is awakening to the reality that due to both this disillusionment regarding his past and his lack of viable alternatives for the future, he himself will be incapable of being the means or agent of his own salvation. He has no idea of how to save himself and can imagine no alleviation of his terror, guilt, and suffering in the face of meaninglessness. It is in this condition that we meet Harry.

However, in order to understand this disillusionment, we must first understand the substance and the source of that original illusion or belief. In order to understand Harry's lost faith, we must delve into the very faith that was lost. What is the architecture of Hesse's early belief system? How did he understand art's place in the larger scheme of human meaning and life? Hesse's personal history becomes relevant here. Hesse's maternal father and grandfather were Swabian Pietist missionaries in India. We might suspect that from this and his own excursions to the East at least in part come his fascinations with Eastern thought. Along with this fascination with the East, he also maintained a faith in the spirit of the German Romantic and Christian tradition mentioned above. His early works such as *Peter Camenzind* and *Gertud* stand as testament to his deep loyalty to this artistic tradition in which he desired to participate. He continued to refer to the centrality of these two sources, Eastern philosophy and Western religion and art, throughout his career.²³¹

However, even while we can point to the influence of the strict religious tradition of his family, his deep passion for what he saw as the spirit within the tradition of art, music,

²³¹ IWG p. 7

literature, and philosophy ingredient to his own Germany, and the awakening and revolutionary spirit he saw in Eastern thought, it will serve us well to investigate Hesse's own interpretation of the varying sources concerning the content, structure, and importance of his resulting belief system. His own articulation of what might be called his metaphysics is perhaps understandably (if inconveniently) vague. He admits the presence of the inscrutable within his understanding of divinity and art. He announces quite a number of times that he is not a philosopher, but an artist, and as such allows himself a certain indeterminacy regarding the details of his theology and aesthetics.²³²

Hesse believes that art and authentic religion are centrally important regarding the fundamental meaning of human life. As early as 1905 Hesse wrote "Great masses of people . . . live out their lives in a dull and loveless stupor."²³³ Especially in his earlier writings, Hesse felt a serious contempt for those who live an unreflective and unspiritual human life. He seems to have thought a human being can lose much of his or her implicit value through submission to and collaboration with the social herd. He felt that each of us must endeavor to search for and discover a deeper aspect of ourselves beyond the concerns of instinct or else risk inauthenticity, or worse, the all but insignificant status of a mere redundant member of the crowd. He writes "[h]uman culture comes into being through the conversion of animal drives into more spiritual impulses."²³⁴ Hesse was convinced that we can participate in this spiritual realm in the reception and creation of substantial works of art. Without this participation he felt we are doomed to remain indistinguishable from schooling fish.

We must notice that for Hesse there is a serious judgment of value and worth hanging in the balance here. He refers to the role of the poet as "a somewhat higher stage of humanity than is possible for the masses." This early Hesse has a thinly veiled disdain

²³² MB pp. 241- 253

²³³ Ibid., p. 7

²³⁴ IWG p.14

and resentment for "the bourgeois . . . the normal, healthy, hard-working, average people."²³⁵ He espoused something of an aesthetic classicism. He gives us the suggestion that these average, non-aesthetic people are empty, and perhaps irrelevant, if not down right shameful. Aside from their inalienable potential to eventually be awakened individuals in pursuit of the authenticity of their own individual soul through art or authentic religion, the youthful Hesse felt that these unreflective people were redundant.

His esteem for art matches in inverse proportion to his disdain for the bourgeois. In reference to a Beethoven sonata, he writes "[w]ith its angelic voices the music recalled me from the bustle and worry to the *real* world, to the one reality which we possess, which gives us joy and torment, the reality in which and *for which* we live."²³⁶ We must notice his assertion that there are two worlds. We must also notice here his suggestion both that the real world is the world of aesthetics and that this aesthetic world provides the reason for living. Hesse writes that we are "[o]n the road from fish, bird, and ape to the war-waging animal of our time, on the road by which we hope in time to become men and gods."²³⁷ The suggestion here seems to be something along the lines that people are made up of elements that are both divine and animalistic. Hesse does not condemn the animal in us, not exactly. He will eventually permit it a certain innocence and interior integrity free from hypocrisy.²³⁸ We can see elements of this already in *Steppenwolf*. However, it is clear here and elsewhere that this early Hesse believes that it is our spiritual, divine, or aesthetic potential that gives us our true value. Hesse seems to believe that humans are involved in a progressive evolution not just of natural complexity but of spiritual quality and purpose as well. However, the problem seems to be located for Hesse in the contradictory maddening

²³⁵ MB p. 14

²³⁶ IWG p. 15, my emphasis

²³⁷ MB p. 61

²³⁸ GBG, p. 513

mix. Hesse seems to have felt that we must come to understand the human being both "in his bestiality *and* as the image of God."²³⁹

In the above citations we can also notice that Hesse uses language that implies the reality of another realm, "a suprapersonal mythical realm,"²⁴⁰ or reality accessible through art. However, he seems to risk or flirt with the thought that this realm is actually a literal reality. At one spot he writes that "poetry [can be] a gate into a realm of magic, yes, almost the gift of a new dimension,"²⁴¹ and at another that a "door [can be] opened of a sudden to the other world. I sped through heaven and saw God at work."²⁴² Hesse's Castalia, a realm dedicated to intellect and aesthetics, which is the setting of much of his work *The Glass Bead Game*, gives a possible literary articulation to this concept of an existing aesthetic reality. It can be suggested that this perhaps partially unrecognized belief tempts the early Hesse to disregard aspects of the material world and his possible responsibility to it. Regarding the First World War, he writes

It is easier for one of us [artists] because [we] are under no obligation to feel personally responsible for the deep gloom that comes over a nation when it sees . . . that many thousands of human lives and billions in wealth may well have been sacrificed in vain.²⁴³

Elsewhere he writes

Soul is love, is the future; all else [that is, material reality] is only stuff, only matter, only a hindrance on which our divine power can exercise itself, shaping and destroying . . . do not search backwards through world history! Your soul will not blame you for having cared too little about politics.²⁴⁴

Both of these citations come from articles written in 1917.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 188 emphasis mine

²⁴⁰ MB p. 126

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 132

²⁴² S p. 30

²⁴³ IWG p. 17

²⁴⁴ MB p. 44

We see in them something of a belief that serious concerns of politics and militarism can be evaporated by demeaning them in comparison to higher concerns and import of the aesthetic world. He gives us the impression that the material world is itself some kind of illusion, dismissable for the insightful seer who sees into the true world of the soul accessible through authentic religion and art. He writes

Ever since I was a boy I have been in the habit of disappearing now and then, to restore myself by immersion in other worlds . . . So now, once again, I vanished for a time. The present had lost its charm for me after two or three years of war and I slipped away to breathe different air. I left the plane on which we live and went to live on another plane . . . I inwardly recited the short astral spell, turned off my heartbeat, and made my body vanish under a clump of bushes. I pursued my cosmic wanderings and abandoned the idea of going home.²⁴⁵

While it is clear that the article in which this passage appears is intended as a fantasy, there remains the sense that he is only half joking. He saw himself and all serious artists as *Phantasiemenschen*, creative dreamers or prophetic seers, as opposed to *Bürgers*, solid citizens.²⁴⁶ He saw the artistic calling as one requiring total commitment and focus, which in turn required therefore a disregard for worldly temptations, responsibilities, and concerns.

The poet . . . must dedicate himself totally if his poetic vocation is not to be a masquerade . . . [The poet must have] that awe in the face of nature, that acceptance of unusual self-sacrifice, that responsibility which is never satisfied with itself and gladly pays the price of sleepless nights for a successful sentence, a well turned phrase . . . these are the hallmarks of the true human being per se, of the unenslaved, unmechanized man, the reverent, and responsible human being. Now if you have this ideal of a human being, if you are not inspired by a desire for notoriety and fame, money and power, but rather desire a life centered in itself and unshakable by worldly influences, then . . . you belong to the [poet's] species.²⁴⁷

We can see here emerging the idea that the artist has an aesthetic responsibility for and to an aesthetic world, whereas the worldly man has his own different (and lesser) worldly responsibilities. As noted, the early Hesse seems to have felt that artists were a "somewhat

²⁴⁵ IWG pp. 20, 28

²⁴⁶ Joseph Mileck, *Steppenwolf* Introduction, p. ix

²⁴⁷ MB p. 13

higher stage of humanity than is possible for the masses."²⁴⁸ So, not only was the artist in some way not responsible for responding to the occurrences of history in the material world, the artist's vocation was somehow more important than were the vocations of people who did find themselves called by the concerns of the material world to service and sacrifice. Hesse reminds us in his last novel that the glass bead game and all of Castalia is paid for by these very people.

This early Hesse had a fundamental conviction in the irrevocably crucial purpose of the artist and poet. And yet, there is not a lot from this younger Hesse regarding exactly what this purpose is.²⁴⁹ What purpose does the artist serve? Why should we as readers believe him when he asserts the artist's role as invaluable? Often he is content to simply imply and assume the artist's importance. In a style reminiscent of a class-conscious snob, he often simply takes it for granted that the uncultured masses could not possibly matter as much as the connoisseurs and creators of great art and music. Note the assumptive pretense in the following citation:

. . . the citizen, the law, the market place . . . so called reality! My God, it was just this dreary reality that was their world and refuge; . . . the[se] war waging animal[s] of our time . . . practical men who through election reforms and the like think they are achieving progress, whereas, limping along centuries behind the thoughts of visionaries, they are simply trying to put *to work* on a small scale one or the other of the details of the [artist's, visionary's] intuitions and ideas. Thus the politician who strives for permanent peace is just one among a thousand ants.²⁵⁰

We can see here that Hesse fails to take seriously his own ignored observation that these "practical" people are the ones who actual put ideas "to work," a reference to action in the material world. The actual hands-on work of artists is restricted inside the bounds of an artistic context, such as within a canvas, novel, or symphony. We will be returning to this idea and the border between the realms of the artistic and the real in greater depth later.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 14

²⁴⁹ We can recall that for Kant the experience of the "beautiful" is only a felt indefinite reception of what seems like unquestionable universal significance. See Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Pluhar, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1987, p. 53-5.

²⁵⁰ MB pp. 60-2, emphasis mine.

As we have seen, Hesse's lack of esteem for the "normals" as he calls them is inversely proportional to his elevated regard for the artist's role. As much as he disdains the average person's aesthetic incompetence, he always tries to remind us that these same individuals have the potential to be awakened from their "stupor" by means of the transformative power of art. He feels that "Europe [and humankind in general] resembles a sleeper in a nightmare, striking out and injuring himself."²⁵¹ Hesse believes art can awaken us. In fact, he seems to believe that this power to awaken people is one of art's most crucial capabilities and purposes. In a letter to a cabinet minister, Hesse wrote

Or perhaps you will say that you as a private citizen feel very close to Beethoven and to all that is noble and beautiful. And maybe you do. But my heartfelt wish is that one of these days, chancing to hear a piece of sublime music, you should suddenly recapture an awareness of those voices that well from a sacred spring . . . read a parable of Jesus, a line of Goethe, or a saying of Lao-tzu.

That moment might be infinitely important to the world. You might find inner liberation. Your eyes and ears might suddenly open . . . the eternal voice of humanity that speaks clearly to us from art would give you the power of true sight and hearing . . . you would see . . . [n]othing more about the labor shortage and the price of coal . . . and all the rest of what you have hitherto regarded as the sole reality. You would see soldiers lying for days in no-man's-land, unable with their mutilated hands to shoo flies from the mortal wounds. You would hear . . . the screams of the mad, the accusing plaits of mothers . . .

[This art could open you to] reexamine your aims, your ideals and theories, with a new mind and attempt to weigh the true worth of [these ideals] against the misery of a . . . single day of war.

Oh, if this hour of music, this return to true reality, could somehow come your way! You would shut yourself up in your room and weep. . . And next day you would go out . . . and be the first among your governing statesmen to condemn this wretched war.²⁵²

This 1918 Hesse has an almost unquestioned faith in the power of art and authentic religion to awaken people to what he saw as our deeper and more authentic perspective and insight. We might even suspect that for Hesse, art represented the only true hope for the realization of our destiny as an utopian society of awakened people dedicated to what he called soul or the spirit. What exactly such a world would look like or what exactly this spirit is is unclear and deeply mysterious even to Hesse himself. However, it is clear that he feels that

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 45

²⁵² IWG p. 19

the politicians pursue illusory ideals, which cause unspeakable catastrophes of human suffering and loss. He feels that these horrific losses result solely from the ignorance and stupor inherent to their status as aesthetically unawakened. For Hesse, the majority of people wander the earth driven by fear, confusion, and an often barely recognized lust for power, and as such ironically undermine and destroy their own possibility for realizing the very purpose and meaning for which they are authentically and inherently called and destined.

The severity of Hesse's criticism of the unawakened is matched by his admiration for the giants of the German artistic tradition. Consider this 1913 homage to Bach written when Hesse is 36 years old. He writes

mighty tones rise up in deep and splendid passion, swelling stormily, crying aloud in resignation their lamentations before God . . . [with] outcr[ies] of abysmal suffering . . . [and] sublime awe . . . this daring and forgotten master raises his strong voice to God, challenges and accuses . . . and then he rests, enveloping himself and praising God in a chorale of reverence and dignity . . . he erects a cathedral of his worship . . . How miserable, how paltry, how bad are the lives we lead! Which of us would dare to stand forth like this composer before God and fate, with cries of accusation and of gratitude, with such aspiring grandeur from so profoundly reverent a mind? [We should] be closer to the beautiful and great mysteries. . . the world is beautiful and filled with divine order and harmony . . . He lifts . . . his edifice of notes . . . into a starry space full of nobly perfect systems . . . and leaves the world full of glory and soul.²⁵³

Hesse's heroes are aesthetic heroes and the acts that he holds as great and courageous are aesthetic acts. This early Hesse is like a Castalian, that is, he is like one of the glass bead devotees from his final novel, who live removed from political and manufactory life, immersed in a purely intellectual enclave. For the younger Hesse, at least, there can be no doubt that the purpose of human life is to manifest one's true potential of authentic self-realization through art. He writes, "nature is nothing but the changing manifestation of eternally creative immortal life, so man's special role and duty is to represent soul" . . . "to discover what is immense and eternal in every trivial thing."²⁵⁴ For the early Hesse, this

²⁵³ MB p. 17-9

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 38, 98

"representation" and "discovery" happens in poetry and music, and therefore, the only ennobling quest is an aesthetic one.

However, this belief and faith in the importance and meaning of the depth element in art in part tempts Hesse away from prioritizing relationships with real people. He writes about his own earlier assumptions:

In my youth I had closer and more intimate relationships with landscapes and works of art than with human beings; indeed, I dreamed for years of a poem in which only air, earth, water, trees, mountains, and animals would appear, no human beings. I saw man as so far astray from the path of the soul, so enslaved by desire, so crude and wild in his pursuit of animal, ape-like, prehistoric goals, so intent upon rubbish and gimcracks . . . perhaps man . . . was already in the process of retrogression.²⁵⁵

This desired withdrawal from human beings is further articulated in an essay from 1917 titled "The Refuge":

For many years a favorite wish has accompanied me . . . a refuge. . . a small house on Lake Lucerne . . . [or] a woodsman's hut in the Alps . . . four hours from the nearest neighbors. . . [or] a hole in the ground in a cemetery. [Quoting a Swabian pastor and eccentric] "Leave, O world, leave me in peace!" . . . Thereby, it seemed, all was to be achieved if somewhere I had a hideaway and a refuge.²⁵⁶

We can get the impression that the younger, slightly immature Hesse desired to actually move forever from the material world to the rarefied air of the world of soul through art. He wanted to live in the starry space created within or accessed through Bach's music or Goethe's poetry, perhaps literally.

However, there is something else only slightly hidden in this desire. There is a feeling here that Hesse believes responsibility regarding his role in the material world is somewhat optional. Either I may choose to immerse myself in the beauties and catastrophes of the material world, or I may count myself among the aesthetically elite and leave the masses to their immature bumbling and sometimes truly horrific masquerade. The aesthetes and intellectuals of Castalia in *The Glass Bead Game* disregarded both current politics and history to such a point that they were for all their magnificent training and

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 39

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-3

education almost completely ignorant regarding these subjects. They felt completely legitimated in their immersion in purely intellectual pursuits as well as in their disregard for the worldly. They did not ask about the purpose or relevance of their activity for the rest of their country or the world. The inherent and self sustaining value of art and intellectual pursuits were simply and confidently presupposed. About an average Castalian, Hesse wrote

He [does not] care very much about the meaning of our special position, He [does not] have a real conception of the purpose of our Order and life. The average Castalian may regard the man of the outside world, the man who is not a scholar, without contempt, envy, or malice, but he does not regard him as a brother . . . does not in the least feel he shares responsibility for what is going on in the outside world. The purpose of life for him seems to be the cultivation of the scholarly disciplines for their own sake. . . this Castalian culture . . . is not directed toward goals, not consciously serving something greater or profounder than itself.²⁵⁷

Hesse seems to be drawing something of an analogy between religious monasteries and his own idea of a removed community of devoted, gifted, and austere intellectuals. As societies have tolerated isolated communities of monks whose material social contribution is at least questionable, so too did the early Hesse assume the artist's self-legitimizing purpose as the bearer of the noble. Yes, art could help a society escape world wars, but Hesse also felt that the real reason we should avoid these wars in the first place was to facilitate the production and awakening appreciation of more great art. He felt that art was the purpose of peace, not merely the means to it.

In other words, for this early Hesse, it is the artist who is the true hero and self-sacrificer for the culture at large. The artist is the visionary without which the "normals" could never have happened upon transcendent and revolutionary ideas like "thou shall not kill" in the first place.²⁵⁸ The artist is an altruistic and unselfish knight, braving the terrors of the abyss and the isolation of polite society for the purpose of lifting the entire species to a more evolved state and eventually to its ultimate destiny and purpose. He writes

²⁵⁷ GBG p. 349

²⁵⁸ IWG p. 123

The normal ones were conservative, they clung to what was healthy and traditional. A normal lizard never hit upon the idea of trying to fly. . . The one who first did . . . was a visionary and eccentric. . . The visionaries were there in order to venture their leaps, to dream of the undreamed-of . . . [to perform] the human duty of prophetic dreaming and his service to the ideal.²⁵⁹

The Hesse of this period is clearly taken with a Hegelian/Darwinian evolutionary concept in which humankind is destined for gradual development from the instinctual to something of the divine. He seems to feel that humans have been created for the purpose of gradual linear improvement and progress. He feels that the great artists and visionaries who lead this progress are champions to whom we are indebted for whatever dignity we may possess as a species. For this earlier Hesse, there is no or very little real dignity or honor in war or any other historic action in general, for such things are only the mistaken and pathetic wanderings of ignorantly arrogant, blind, and unawakened people in a realm that does not matter as much as the aesthetic and symbolic realm.

In other words, for Hesse of this period, artists cannot be criticized or held responsible for their lack of action or material self-sacrifice regarding this or any war. At this point in his history, he feels that there can be no guilt for these visionaries, because it is through them alone that the only hope for and meaning of the human race can be realized. It would be the height of folly to squander the vanguards of transcendent aesthetics as mere front-line cannon fodder in a material war or even in resistance to that war. "[I]f the poet became political, he was turning away from his human duty of prophetic dreaming."²⁶⁰ The artists were already sacrificing themselves on the only front lines that really mattered and represented the only hope for alleviation from historical carnage. The role of the artist was beyond possible reproach regarding its indifference to and removal from world events and concerns. Even though all people are perhaps capable of transcendent awakening, it remains those who are actually responsible for the aesthetic realization of the truly majestic who alone secure and manifest the only significant meaning of human beings in general. It

²⁵⁹ MB p. 61-2

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 62

is through Mozart that we stride like gods toward our potential and intended purpose, not Napoleon. It is through "Descartes, Pascal, Froberger, not . . . Cromwell or Louis XIV."²⁶¹

World War I, Crisis and Disillusionment

As we have noted, these beliefs and assumptions are more characteristic of the pre-First World War Hesse than they are of his later periods. The period of the First World War was for Hesse, as it was for so many others, a ferocious and indomitable annihilator of many deeply held convictions and founding (even if often substantially unrecognized) assumptions. It has often been noted that the immensity of the carnage and suffering brought forth by this new type of mechanized and technological war brought an end to the kind of art that had preceded it. A brief comparison of the painting or poetry that preceded and that which followed the First World War reveals an unmistakable and even radical shift in focus and feeling. Monet's pastoral and bright landscapes and breakfast scenes give way to expressions of nearly ungraspable horror and meaninglessness, such as that present in Picasso's *Guernica*. For many, the war brought new and deep questions and desperate challenges concerning the nature of human meaning in general. Artists responded to the cataclysm with expressions of overwhelming dread and pessimistic insanity. Some artists began to feel that they could no longer afford the luxury of assumed and habitual ascriptions of significance and meaning.

The awesome and perhaps previously unthinkable horror of the war forced Hesse and many others to much more seriously consider accusations of frivolity regarding an artist's dedication to his or her art. Did art still matter in the face of that which it had not helped to prevent or even hinder? Might an artist's dedication have been more legitimately expended on more direct and practical concerns of fighting or resistance? The Hesse we have been discussing to this point was seriously disturbed by these questions. Further, as someone whose life had been so dedicated and enlivened by art and its spirit, Hesse was

²⁶¹ GBG p. 351

forced to wrestle with serious questions concerning the meaning of his own life, as well as his plans for the rest of his life. What had his art meant in the face of the war? What could he offer in resistance to what he saw as the approaching war?

To add to this, tectonic shifts were occurring in his private life as well. In the Bern years between 1912 and 1919, Hesse's father died, his son became seriously, even deathly ill, and his wife descended into dementia and became bound to an asylum. Hesse became exhausted and distraught.²⁶² It would take Hesse until the last moments of his entire fictional canon to directly address the issues of his attachment to wife and son.²⁶³ His apparent long-term reticence to directly address these issues gives us a glimpse into the depth of the effect these events must have had on him.

So, as we have encountered him to this point, Hesse was the driven and dedicated, yet elitist, disciple of the spirit and power of German art, music, and literature, unshakably optimistic and incapable of doubt concerning this art's ennobling and almost salvific capacity. However, he finds himself forced to ask what he is to do after having begun to question the honesty and integrity of this very faith. It is not hard to imagine Hesse like Harry Haller walking the dark German streets despondent and hopeless. With his wife in an asylum, his children left with close friends, and the relevance of his art under radical, perhaps lethal suspicion, it is not easy to see just what helped this Hesse to continue. He writes

when I was almost forty, [I had been] jolted awake by the gruesome reality of the war and profoundly horrified by the ease with which my colleagues and friends had enlisted in the service of Moloch . . .²⁶⁴

²⁶² Joseph Milek, *Steppenwolf* Introduction, p. x
See also Richards, D. G. *Exploring the Divided Self: Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf and its Critics*, Camden House, Columbia, SC. 1996

²⁶³ GBG pp. 520 - 558

²⁶⁴ Moloch is a Canaanite idol, to whom children were sacrificed as burnt offerings (OED; Lev. xviii. 21)
See also IWG p. 4

From the vantage point of 1946, Hesse refers to the First World War as the point of his life during which he experienced his "first awakening."²⁶⁵ Therefore, Hesse must have turned what might have been inescapable despair into something else. What could have led to inescapable despair and suicide seems to have led to a new starting point. Hesse survives this "crisis" period to produce the most recognized literature of his career. Between this moment of hopelessness and the publication of *Steppenwolf*, Hesse seems to have been able to martial a tenacious reaction to the threats of his new epoch. So how did he come back from the edge? The answer to this will provide critical insight into the personal and historical context of *Steppenwolf*.

As Hesse is confronted with the realities of his personal life and with the approach and progression of the First World War, he is forced to admit certain realities concerning art in itself, his own art, and art's relation to historical and ethical events. The pre-war Hesse detailed above has an almost zealot's passion, conviction, and faith regarding the importance and evolving, transfiguring effect of art on culture. He can imagine no more valuable occupation than to deeply experience real and profound aesthetics, and he can imagine no endeavor more honorable and estimable than to become a producer of profound, enlivening, and transcending literature. His certainty in this faith had become so unassailable that it would take the immensity of the private and public events in his life at this time to rattle its broadly buttressed foundations.

So what emotional effect did these events have on Hesse? We get perhaps a glimpse into Hesse's own feelings regarding his love for his son, whose death Hesse had been threatened with during this time. This glimpse comes in a short story which he included at the end of *The Glass Bead Game*. In this story, "The Indian Life," the main character, Dasa, becomes married and is given a son.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 6

Even dearer to him . . . was his son Ravana, the fulfillment of his love and his life, the object of his tenderness and solicitude. . . Dasa realized fully how intensely he loved him the first time he had to leave the boy for an indefinite period.²⁶⁶

As ruler, Dasa is confronted with the threat of attack from a neighboring ruler. Dasa considers his motivations to respond with a counterattack.

So that was the reason he was riding off so zealously and was so dutiful a sovereign. Not from concern for his loss of cattle and land, not from kindness to his subjects, not from ambition to match his father's noble name. but out of intense, painful, irrational love for this child, and out of intense, irrational fear of the pain he would feel at the loss of this child.²⁶⁷

Later Dasa is forced to witness his murdered son in the arms of his deranged wife.

"Ravana, my child, my flower!" He knelt. His face fell forward upon the dead boy's head. As if in prayer he knelt before the mute woman and the child, mourning both, paying homage to both. . . He longed for death as his parched throat longed for water. Only death would still the torture in his heart. Only then would the picture of the mother with their dead son be erased.²⁶⁸

As mentioned earlier, we note that it seems to have taken Hesse quite a while to summon the wherewithal to directly address the pain of this subject matter. This scene appears literally four pages from the last line of his literary career. As Odysseus returns to Telemachus, so Hesse returns in the end to address the true gravity of his feeling for his own son. *The Glass Bead Game* itself ends with a self-sacrificing return to a son figure. Hesse also writes in his diary of a kind of dream in which "I felt that my most precious thing had been taken away from me, my children had died or were at the moment dying before my eyes."²⁶⁹ So, it seems we cannot overestimate the impact the threat of his son's death might have had on Hesse. Combine his feelings for his son with their separation from each other, and we get a good feel for the contribution this relationship and these experiences might have had regarding Hesse's crisis. Also note that the desperate Harry Haller has no son and only an estranged romantic interest (and a divorced wife in the past)

²⁶⁶ GBG p. 543

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 545

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 554

²⁶⁹ MB p. 57

as the story begins. The Hesse of 1926 is apparently not ready to include a missing son among the ingredients of Harry's despair.

Along with his family concerns, Hesse is also facing the stark reality that art did not save the world from the war, nor did his political writings, which is an issue directly alluded to in the early portion of *Steppenwolf*. Art's impotence in the face of the war's unimaginable scale of frantic brutality shook Hesse's zealot's faith. Hesse's convenient assumption of a legitimate segregation of the noble world of aesthetics from the material world began to lose its credibility in the face of these absurd brutalities. The astounding impact and obscenity of the war has the capacity to force individuals to justify their reactions to these events.

We men of letters, insofar as we were not corrupted or simply intoxicated by war, found ourselves compelled to examine minutely the foundations of our lives and to become clear, little by little, about our own responsibilities. My own spiritual concerns were at white heat.²⁷⁰

The war, "that violent eruption into our lives,"²⁷¹ had been simply too much to ignore. Even "[o]ld maids who had been feeding poodles were caring for the wounded."²⁷² Given so unprecedentedly shattering a war, perhaps even the artistic bystander and neutral observer was implicated in guilt. After all, how could the artist explain him or herself? What contribution or resistance had been offered? Had political articles, literary offerings, and published protests been proven laughingly and pathetically insignificant in the face of the threat? Given the unimagined immensity of the shame due humankind in the shadow of the war, by what means would Hesse argue even within himself for the ennobling qualities of art?

Hesse's faith in the unquestionable nobility and significance of the artist's role did not dissolve instantaneously. Earlier I mentioned that the early Hesse's long-time desire

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 185

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 186

²⁷² IWG p. 64

for an isolating hermitage in the mountains. It is not hard to see the congruence of Hesse's desires for both physical and aesthetic seclusion. Noble art was produced in reaction to, isolation from, and even renunciation of material concerns. He had felt that the real poet withdrew. However, as Hesse heads into his crisis, he begins to doubt his own forthrightness on this matter. Hesse was forced to ask how great a service the withdrawing poet provides. From what duties can the productions of a serious and sacrificing poetry unequivocally excuse him? The artist's status of having significance and cultural value beyond possible questioning, the status that Hesse had spontaneously attributed to the likes of Bach and Goethe, and partly to himself as artist, began to lose its appearance of self-evident validity.

Awakening to Worldly Responsibility

In a 1917 essay Hesse describes his dream of the withdrawing poet.

During many hours over many years I elaborated the dream . . . I constructed it with care, painted and adorned it . . . made it ever more beautiful . . . more delicate, more noble. . . [I] poured love into it.

But oftener and oftener I entertained perceptions that could not be reconciled with the dream. Some word in a conversation . . . a verse from the Bible, a line from Goethe took me powerfully; lonesomeness, loss of friends, sacrifice of pleasures spoke their own rough language . . . all opposed my dream. Shakespeare derided it, Kant attacked, Buddha denounced. . .

All this went on slowly in many narrow spirals, and a hundred times the wishful dream returned . . . [However] on one occasion a new realization knocked at my forehead [which] said: "Your wishful dream has been not simply false, not simply an error, not simply a pretty bit of childishness like a soap bubble. It has been . . . much more dangerous. It has fed upon you . . . robbed you of life. Have you ever bestowed on your friend, your wife, your child so much as half the love you have given it, half the care and warmth, half the days, nights, creative hours?²⁷³

In this 1917 essay we can see Hesse's awakening to the ethical price to be paid for the privileging of art over existing people. His previously customary segregation of the art and material worlds is not as easy for him here. We can see the assumed precedence of aesthetic concerns weakening. Hesse began to think that these aesthetic people "mythologize the world and in so doing often do not take it seriously enough. [This kind

²⁷³ MB p. 35

of person] always inclines a little toward playfulness . . . [This type of person] has done nothing to make . . . death penalties, prisons, wars, [or] guns . . . impossible."²⁷⁴ Hesse is beginning to seriously acknowledge his own recognition and acceptance of an imposition of responsibilities on him by existing people. He considers the following: if it is in fact true that my art actually does serve a splendid purpose, I can then in good conscience risk things like the neglect of my family, given that all this is done in the service of that greater cause. However, if it does in fact turn out to be the case that my conviction regarding art had always been at least partly illusory, "a soap bubble," then it might turn out to be that I had been guilty of irresponsibility regarding my family all along.

If I believe that no one has a claim on me, or that my responsibility to art outranks any other possible material world responsibility, it is easy to espouse an "art for art's sake" ideal. Along these lines it is fairly easy to defend to oneself a singled-minded pursuit of art during peace time. But, of course, during such times, a person of means can also amuse him or herself in idle entertainments, if he or she so wishes. However, this convenient defense of artist pursuits becomes much more difficult within the context of something like the First World War. What happens to a man like Hesse if it begins to appear that his art had as little serious impact on the approach of the war as had the pursuits of libertines?

Why did poets exist? What did nature require of them? Why were they valued? . . . [For] his human duty of prophetic dreaming and his service to the ideal . . . [However] I was suddenly disturbed, I saw the train of notions I had just entertained fluttering away insubstantially behind me and I could no longer touch them. Instead I was confronted by a disagreeable idea. . . that went something like this: Why have you thought all of this? These aren't thoughts, they are simply masks and disguises behind which a motive is in hiding! I felt that as a result of that conversation the evening before with my wife, a barb had stayed imbedded in me, and I needed to justify myself in my own eyes as a poet, for yesterday we had been speaking about . . . how strange it is that almost all artists are able to realize in their own lives little or nothing of the noble, splendid, ideal values that they set down in their works. So that is where the arrow hit.

I dreamed of an ideal man . . . he would be in absolute harmony with himself, with the ideal, with fate; he would change easily, he would die easily. . . I myself did not change willingly, I myself would not die easily. . . A mass of fibers

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 198

within me rebelled against it, a part of me believed in death, a part was weakness and fear.²⁷⁵

It is not hard to notice the beginnings of Hesse's internally revolutionizing criticism of both art and his own motivations. His confidence regarding his earlier beliefs is "fluttering away," while his concern regarding the non-artistic actions and responsibilities of his life is growing. Hesse's wife noticed that artists rarely live real lives that resemble the excellence of their artistic visions. The earlier Hesse would have been unconcerned with the material productions of an artist's life. The earlier Hesse would have been concerned only with the quality of the art, the heroism within the work itself. However, here, this Hesse who is in question and perhaps crisis, is starting to evaluate his own behavior outside the bounds of the aesthetic realm and its internal criteria. For Hesse, a new criterion of judgment is emerging. He can no longer afford the indulgent assumption that art is self-legitimizing or that it is the superior human endeavor. For Hesse, art can no longer legitimate itself. Art and artists will have to be justified in the world.

it is part of our intellectual arrogance that we confront world history, especially in modern times, in much the same spirit that the hermits and ascetics of early Christianity confronted the *theatrum mundi*, the great theater of the world. History seems to us as arena of instincts and fashions, of appetite, avarice, and craving for power, of blood lust, violence, destruction, and wars, of ambitious ministers, venal generals, bombarded cities, and we too easily forget that this is only one of its many aspects. Above all we forget that we ourselves are part of history . . . and share the responsibility for world history and our position in it. But we gravely lack awareness of this responsibility.²⁷⁶

The actions of the artist, which happen in the world, will also have to be justified and seriously evaluated there as well.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 61 - 64

²⁷⁶ GBG p. 352

²⁷⁷ See also Tolstoy's masterful discussion of this aesthetic hubris in his *Confessions* Distributed by the Tolstoy Library On Line. We know that Hesse included Tolstoy in his library and I feel certain that this work served Hesse well in the writing of his novel. I include a significant citation of it here and below as evidence of the pattern I am asserting. "In my youth I had a desire to be better not in my own eyes or those of God but in the eyes of other people. And very soon this effort again changed into a desire to be stronger than others: to be more famous, more important and richer than others . . . I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache . . . During that time I began to write from vanity, covetousness, and pride. In my writings I did the same as in my life. To get fame and money, for the sake of which I wrote, it was necessary to hide the good and to display the evil. and I did so. How often in my writings I

Therefore, without the convenient belief in the unquestionably superior importance of art over material existence and its concerns, Hesse was forced to reevaluate his life and work according to this new criterion. To his dismay what he found is that some if not all of his art had been a sham, a mask behind which a fear of death, among other concerns, was hiding. He suggests that he had "raised repression into the spiritual realm . . . [and had had] a compulsion to compensate for weakness through works of art."²⁷⁸ How was Hesse to proceed? Could he remain a poet and novelist given that his own motives were suspect and the power and gravity of art itself had seemed to disappear before his eyes?

So by December 1917, Hesse is writing in a very direct and political manner, calling for the manifestation of action for peace and the overthrow of the leaders. This new man of action and resolve in the real world of history writes about the First World War and the certain impending doom inherent in

the bitterest, bloodiest, most ruthless and appalling war of all time . . . In view of this situation it is our duty, the one sacred duty of every man of good will on earth

contrived to hide under the guise of indifference, or even of banter, those strivings of mine towards goodness which gave meaning to my life! And I succeeded in this and was praised . . . I returned to Petersburg after the war, and met the writers. They received me as one of themselves and flattered me. And before I had time to look round I had adopted the views on life of the set of authors I had come among, and these views completely obliterated all my former strivings to improve - they furnished a theory which justified the dissoluteness of my life.

The view of life of these people, my comrades in authorship, consisted in this: that life in general goes on developing, and in this development we - men of thought - have the chief part; and among men of thought it is we - artists and poets - who have the greatest influence. Our vocation is to teach mankind. And lest the simple question should suggest itself: What do I know, and what can I teach? it was explained in this theory that this need not be known, and that the artist and poet teach unconsciously. I was considered an admirable artist and poet, and therefore it was very natural for me to adopt this theory. I, artist and poet, wrote and taught without myself knowing what. For this I was paid money; I had excellent food, lodging, women, and society; and I had fame, which showed that what I taught was very good.

This faith in the meaning of poetry and in the development of life was a religion, and I was one of its priests. To be its priest was very pleasant and profitable. And I lived a considerable time in this faith without doubting its validity. But in the second and still more in the third year of this life I began to doubt the infallibility of this religion and to examine it. My first cause of doubt was that I began to notice that the priests of this religion were not all in accord among themselves . . . this obliged me to doubt the validity of our creed.

Moreover, having begun to doubt the truth of the authors' creed itself, I also began to observe its priests more attentively, and I became convinced that almost all the priests of that religion, the writers, were immoral, and for the most part men of bad, worthless character, much inferior to those whom I had met in my former dissipated and military life; but they were self-confident and self-satisfied as only those can be who are quite holy or who do not know what holiness is. These people revolted me, I became revolting to myself, and I realized that that faith was a fraud."

not to sheathe ourselves in indifference and let things take their course, but to do our utmost to prevent this final catastrophe.

Yes, you say, but what can we do? . . . We have no power! This is the easy reaction to all responsibility . . . To blame are the inertia and cowardice of each one of us, our obstinacy and reluctance to think. . . [it is] only because we are all too lazy, too easygoing, too cowardly. . . What can we do? We can bestir ourselves!²⁷⁹

This Hesse is no longer calling for the leaders to listen to Mozart as he had earlier. This Hesse is no longer content to yearn for his refuge in the mountains away from the concerns of history and politics. This Hesse feels "befouled . . . thoroughly with blood" and called to action. It is articles of this kind, what he refers to as his "timely" articles, that Hesse is surely referring to in *Steppenwolf*. There, Harry is accused of being a traitor for just such articles and stances. During the evening spent with the "respectable" bourgeois professor and his wife, Hesse reveals the impact and cost of risking the appearance of having unpatriotic views. The professor points to his copy of a "militarist and jingoistic" rag in which a writer named Haller

had been making fun of the Kaiser and expressing the view that his own country was no less responsible for the outbreak of the war than the enemy nations. There was a man for you! . . . put him in the pillory . . . [that] bad fellow and rotten patriot.²⁸⁰

This reaction from Harry's former colleague gives us an indication that publishing criticisms of the government came with considerable consequences. Hesse's decision to take these risks indicates his own movement into the realm of political action. He does this on the grounds of his own new grasp of the gravity of impending current events and his own feelings of responsibility in regard to them.

To a certain extent his own attempts at marriage and parenthood also reveal a certain conscious decision to intend away from total immersion in the realm of the spirit and toward some participation in the historical world. However, as we have noted before, neither his political nor personal forays into the material world turned out so well.

²⁷⁹ IWG pp. 34 - 7

²⁸⁰ S p. 80

Nonetheless, the overwhelming implications of a world war combined with the responsibilities involved in a marriage and in parenthood forced Hesse to leave his "refuge" where he had been immersed in art's assumed precedence so as to join the fray in the material world.

The Paradox of a Comparison with the Ideal

However, he is unsuccessful in his roles as husband, parent, and political inspirer of peace action. By 1925, with his understanding of the inevitable approach of the next world war, Hesse has abandoned all three positions. He writes

A man sits in an attic room engaged in a subtle work of scholarship. Suddenly he becomes aware that the fire has broken out in the house below. He will not consider whether it is his function to see to it, or whether he had not better finish his tabulations. He will run downstairs and attempt to save the house. . . instincts tell me, my nose tells me, that down below something is burning . . . my business is not to analyze music . . . but to rush to where the smoke is.

[I]f today I remind my colleagues and the honorable board . . . to turn their eyes for once to the dangers that threaten us . . . I assume for a moment the unenviable and . . . ludicrous role of the prophet, warner, and sermonizer, [and] I do so fully prepared to accept mocking laughter.²⁸¹

This Hesse continues to recognize the unquestionable importance of action in the face of the "unendurable horror" of historical events, and yet he is grudgingly resigning himself to the fact that the role of prophet and warner is a ludicrous one. He is starting to see that his own call for the people to "bestir" themselves will go unheeded, or worse, will be met with "mocking laughter."

Not only has Hesse come to realize that art will not awaken the leaders and turn them from the decision to enter into war, he is starting to realize that his own published calls to the populous for resistance and reason will fall impotent at the feat of "the nightmarish state of mind which gives rise to wars, racial persecution, and fratricidal strife among men."²⁸² With new eyes he is seeing the true threat and power of that part of the human being that "fear[s] demons and fear[s] one another . . . fear[s] the mighty and

²⁸¹ GBG pp. 346-7

²⁸² IWG p. 146

fear[s] punishment,"²⁸³ that part of us that invites and persuades us to "resign ourselves to the crowd and submit to inertia."²⁸⁴ He writes "I no more believe that world peace can be brought about in rational ways, by preaching, organizing, and propaganda than that the philosopher's stone can be invented by a congress of chemists."²⁸⁵

Hesse is coming to feel the agony inherent in the acknowledgment of the depth and degree of his own powerlessness in the face of things that must nevertheless be fought. Even while he admits that it is "the one sacred duty of every [person] . . . not to sheathe ourselves in indifference . . . but to do our utmost to prevent this final catastrophe,"²⁸⁶ he is also coming to admit that his own best efforts may be fruitless and impotent with regard to that catastrophe.

If I consider the sum of efforts, renunciations, sufferings, and sacrifices that I have expended in the course of many years in the production of these printed books and compare that with the results I see today, then I could consider my life as a failure and a waste. It may well be that on close examination few human lives come out otherwise: no life and no oeuvre can stand comparison with the demands of the ideal.²⁸⁷

It is not difficult to recognize the formal similarity of Hesse's predicament and the one described in my first chapter in the language of Kant. As Kant predicted, Hesse has arrived at an inescapable paradox. While the 1925 Hesse knows he must offer resistance to horrors like the imminent war and the calamities in his family life, he is becoming all too aware that he may not possess the power to offer serious resistance. Yet, he has criticized claims of powerlessness as an insufficient excuse, chastising those who would say "we would do our bit, but, as it is, we have no power!" by saying "[t]his is an easy reaction to all responsibility . . . we cannot sit back."²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 130

²⁸⁴ MB p. 44

²⁸⁵ IWG p. 59

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 35

²⁸⁷ MB p. 112

²⁸⁸ IWG p. 35

What is a person like Hesse to do with himself when he is forced to acknowledge the insufficiency of his art, his essays, and all the rest of his actions in the face of a past and also approaching carnage, not to mention the sorrows, tragedies, and failings of his personal life? Should one simply fiddle as Rome burns? Should one continue to call the alarm even if all are deaf? If one desists in this call, what should one do then? If I can do nothing of real consequence about anything that matters, by what means do I react and exist within self-reflexive consciousness itself? What do I do to occupy my time? Do I intoxicate myself in escapist amusements in order to distance myself from my own acknowledgment of the undeniable responsibility regarding the First World War and the approach of the Second, or is suicide the only rational response to this situation? Can I just stand straitjacketed and watch as the unstoppable conflagration descends? If I do, will this experience simply drive me mad? These are the questions that haunt Harry Haller as we meet him at the outset of *Steppenwolf*.

Forced to wrestle with an irreconcilable and yet inescapable paradox, it seems quite understandable that in this situation, both Hesse and Harry might feel threatened with insanity. We must see here that Hesse finds himself being drawn between both desperate urgency and profound despondency. There is and can be no recourse and yet there can be no submission either. Hesse is beginning to feel that "the world [can be] completely odious to you, and you [can have] an inclination to smash streetlights and set fire to temples."²⁸⁹ Hesse writes that with

the outbreak of the world war . . . one can without exaggeration announce the death and destruction of that culture in which we older people were educated as children and which seemed to us at the time to be eternal and immutable.²⁹⁰

For Hesse the basic assumptions of reality and meaning are disintegrating.

the great war . . . devastated the world. Today we stand among its ruins, still deafened by its noise, embittered by its absurdity, and sickened by the streams of

²⁸⁹ MB p. 68

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 136

blood that haunt all our dreams. . . [We] cannot return to childhood. No one can do that. [We cannot] go back to writing poems and playing sonatas in peaceful little cities.²⁹¹

Hesse is being forced to abandon the very cultural creations and traditions that had for him been the cornerstones of the purpose of his own life and the meaning of human significance in general. He writes

books that might be expected to make for a better world and more smiling future there are none . . . Ideas which yesterday were held sacred . . . may tomorrow be utterly discredited and forgotten.²⁹²

Hesse, caught in a trap, is forced to sit and concede the frantic absurdity of his predicament. Regarding his lost faith in the cultural grandeur of Germany, he is coming to "believe nothing except the insane uncertainty of every belief"²⁹³ and feels himself and Europe "on the road to chaos; intoxicated with a divine madness [as he] makes [his] way along the edge of the abyss and sings, sings drunken hymns the way Dmitri Karamazov sang."²⁹⁴

So, this Hesse cannot return to his beloved Bach for salvation nor can he imagine any escape from his self-made yet fated predicament between responsibility and limited power. We can easily picture Hesse aimlessly wandering the streets at night, with "a chaos within himself" just as we find Harry at the beginning of *Steppenwolf*. As early as 1917, Hesse is becoming aware of the implications of this impasse, saying "I have an enormous desire to die. . . How can life go on under these conditions?"²⁹⁵ And yet the later Hesse refers to this period of crisis as his awakening. We can look, therefore, to the *Steppenwolf* to see if it is the story of transition through this crisis. Hesse himself warns the reader in the postscript he wrote in 1941 that

²⁹¹ IWG pp. 71-2

²⁹² Ibid., p. 132

²⁹³ MB p. 79

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 85

²⁹⁵ IWG pp. 25-6

[t]he book, to be sure describes sorrows and suffering, but it is by no means the book of a man in despair but rather of a man of faith . . . the story of *Steppenwolf*, though it describes an illness and a crisis, does not describe one that leads to death or decline but rather the opposite - to recovery, healing.²⁹⁶

This is our question. What kind of healing is Hesse talking about here? This question becomes all the more pressing when we connect it to Kant's rationally necessary, or what one might call fated, despair. Hesse himself arrived at this point, a point so desperate that no escape seemed possible, and yet this same yet older Hesse indicates that *Steppenwolf* is a work which offers a rescue from the seemingly inescapable. In other words, *Steppenwolf* seems to be Hesse's answer to a question inherent in humankind itself. If Kant is right in his assertion that we are fated for practically rational despair, only a fool would risk missing the possibility of a release from that fate, should one be possible. It seems just such a release that Hesse hints at in his novel. This chapter is dedicated to an understanding of just such a release.

Harry Haller

My reader may wonder about the legitimacy of my heavy reliance on elements and ideas from Hesse's actual life as reliable and direct context to the admittedly fictional Harry Haller. While I acknowledge a significant distinction between the historical and the fictional figures, we must also admit that Hesse, at least, saw Haller and most of his fictional characters as primarily autobiographical. Hesse writes

For me a novel begins to take shape at the moment I see a figure forming, one that can for a while be the symbol and bearer of my experiences, my thoughts, my problems. The appearance of this mythical person (Peter Camenzind, Knulp, Demian, Siddhartha, Harry Haller, etc.) is the creative instant out of which everything else emerges. Almost all the prose works of fiction I have written are biographies of souls . . . verbal incarnation of my own being.²⁹⁷

It seems clear that Hesse, as author, is himself assuming and intending a certain inherent connection and relation to his own experiences and those of his characters. Hesse gives us

²⁹⁶ MB p. 216

²⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 142, 144

permission, therefore, to venture more deeply into this connection for the purpose of piecing elements together for a broader understanding of Hesse's work as a whole.

Regarding Harry Haller, let us begin with his own description of his status and mood. By means of an analysis of Hesse's own essays, we have gained insight into one of the fundamental dilemmas facing Hesse and presumably Haller. If one finds oneself pathetically incapable of offering resistance to that which must be resisted nonetheless, what does one do as one is forced to watch the impending cataclysm bear down? Harry tells us that another war to end all wars is approaching. He thinks about those who "see nothing of the preparations for the next war that are going on all round."²⁹⁸ Harry finds the signs so obvious and undeniable that a person who fails to notice them can be nothing but an "unthinking, happy child."²⁹⁹ The Hesse of 1925 has no doubts about the coming of the Second World War and neither does Harry. Both of them can be seen as men who have gone through the upending crisis, the ethical revolution we discussed above concerning the impact of the First World War. That is, regarding personal responsibility, both men are aware that there can be no legitimate disregard of or exemption from reaction to so great a horror. If I have come to admit that I believe I simply must do something regarding the coming war and yet also feel that I have nothing with which to offer capable and effective resistance, what do I do with myself when I wake up in the morning?

We meet Harry as he is assessing a day just "gone by," a day that he had "killed."³⁰⁰ He describes it as one of those "lukewarm days . . . without special cares . . . without despair; days when I calmly wonder, objective and fearless, whether it isn't time to . . . have an accident while shaving."³⁰¹ So on the very first page of his own records, Harry describes no serious passions, no desperate sufferings, no violent self-

²⁹⁸ S p. 78

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 78

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 25

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 26

determinations. Rather, we see a somehow resigned or resigning Harry "lying in a warm bath," immersing himself in a life without emotion and presumably without meaning. We get the impression that he moves through his days under the force of simple habit and inertia, pushed by diminishing energy left over from a time when he had had serious purpose. Underneath all of this feelinglessness, is a simmering desire for suicide. It is this quick non-desperate desire for suicide that can catch the first-time reader of *Steppenwolf* off guard. There is nothing in the first few sentences that precede Harry's confession that gives an intimation of suicide. The reader cannot help but ask what there is about contentment and a lukewarm mood that inspires a somewhat disinterested desire for suicide? I suspect that Hesse intends the reader to ask this question.

The text of *Steppenwolf* does not answer all of its own questions. Like many great works of literature, this novel leaves spaces for the reader within which a reader can wonder and creatively ruminate. Hesse demands some active participatory interpretation on the part of the reader of his work. He forces the reader to try and fill in gaps and spaces within his text. The first of these spaces involves Harry's dispassionate consideration of suicide during the first paragraph of the novel. During his or her first encounter with the text, the reader can have no serious understanding or expectation about the reasons that this character would be considering this option. Therefore, the reader proceeds through the novel at least in part looking for the answer. Why does Harry want to commit suicide? For many readers, this is an orienting and organizing question, which can effect the reader's interpretation of the ensuing plot.

The Dubious Narrator

However, as we proceed through the novel, we are forced to address another literary structure within the work. Hesse's work enlists the services of a variety of narrators. By 1963, *Steppenwolf* is published with an author's preface, a direct communication from Hesse himself which was originally written in 1941 and to which I have already alluded. After this we are provided with a fictional preface narrated by the

nephew of Harry Haller's landlady. It is this man who reveals to us that he has found a manuscript left behind in the rented room abandoned by Harry Haller. This manuscript makes up the majority of Hesse's novel. It is narrated by Harry Haller himself. Within this manuscript is a copy of another work called "The Treatise on *Steppenwolf*," which is narrated by what is could very well be an Immortal. So the work presents us with at least four different voices or narrating perspectives.

This technique does not originate with Hesse. For example, we find Emily Brontë and Joseph Conrad using the interesting and potentially powerful technique of multifarious and sometimes unreliable narration. We cannot fail to notice Søren Kierkegaard's related use of pseudonyms as well. One of the main questions inherently posed by the use of multiple narrators is the question of how we are to take the word of these various voices. For example, how are we to take the ideas presented by the landlady's nephew? He describes himself as "a middle-class man, living a regular life, fond of work and punctuality."³⁰² He seems to be a clear example of the bourgeoisie so criticized by Harry and by Hesse himself. Are we to assume on these grounds that we ought not trust his interpretation of Harry? Are we to look at his perspective and insight as distinctly ironic communication on Hesse's part? Is Hesse using a figure of the bourgeoisie in order to criticize, even lampoon that very bourgeoisie, a tongue-in-cheek portrayal for the point of social commentary in the style of a political cartoon? In other words, are we supposed to refuse to accept this narrator at his word, but instead accept him as an ironic portrayal of an unreflective, indoctrinated mouthpiece of the herd? Perhaps, but it is dangerous to make so quick an assumption given so subtle a writer as Hesse.

However, if we do entertain such interpretations of this narrator, if we allow ourselves the luxury of not taking the nephew completely at his word, it forces us to consider questioning the veracity and reliability of Harry's narration as well. Is Harry to be trusted as a narrator, the honest and perceptive presenter of facts and interpretations? Will

³⁰² Ibid., p. 13

he tell us the truth, or must we be suspicious of his presentation of events as well? Before Freud, Kant warned us about the fact that no person can ever be completely confident regarding the true palette of his or her own motivations. Hesse's own experience with psychoanalysis through and following his crisis period bolsters our suspicions that Hesse was all too aware of subconscious desires and concerns, and their ability to undermine the credibility and integrity of conscious intentions. Further, by 1925, many if not most European and American artists and writers had accepted at least some basic Freudian ideas concerning subconscious drives and desires, which effectively threw every person's claim of honest self-assessment into question. Also before Freud, Nietzsche had persuasively argued for a subconscious or semi-conscious "will to power" inherent in each individual member of our species. Nietzsche's influence on Hesse can hardly be overestimated.

All this leads us to assume that Hesse is asking us to be suspicious of the integrity of Harry's insinuation of objectivity in his narration. Twentieth-century writers were forced to reckon with the problem of hidden psychological agendas and motivational uncertainty. James Joyce attempts to address the issue by means of the "stream of consciousness" through which every desire, conscious or otherwise, is presented to the reader regardless of whether the character him or herself would actually have been conscious of the thought.³⁰³ *Steppenwolf* employs this technique as well, allowing the reader access to Harry's private thought processes and interior dialogues, but Hesse also relies quite heavily on the device of the dubious narrator to address the issue of subconscious psychological bias and repression. In other words, whereas Joyce reveals much of what is hidden about the character's subconscious, Hesse forces the reader to actively search for and uncover the very desires and concerns that the narrator himself is trying to hide, deny, and repress.

The credibility of this line of thinking is strengthened by Hesse's use of the split personality device which sits at the very center of this novel. The work's title,

³⁰³ See Joyce's *Ulysses*, Vintage Books, New York. 1986.

Steppenwolf, refers to the idea that Harry has an alternative personality, a wolf, and this personality vies for dominance and control within Harry's total individuality. Harry purports to understand himself as having both wolf and human aspects. He feels that they fight each other for the privilege of making real choices and judgments. Sometimes the wolf's desires determine decisions, and sometimes the man's desires do. The suggestion is that within this single human being there are two centers of judgment with two distinctly different ruling principles. This internal division forces the reader to take Harry's statements with a grain of salt. In other words, Hesse confronts us with a narrator who does not himself really know when he is telling or even feeling the truth. We may desire to trust Harry, but Hesse does not permit us that convenience. Earlier novelists usually employed a narrator for the purpose of objectively presenting a world, at least to some degree, within which there were characters presented for our investigation and interpretation. In *Steppenwolf*, the narrator is no longer merely a means of presenting interesting, artful, and dissectable characters, but is himself one of those characters. Hesse allows the narrator to unwittingly and unintentionally reveal, even betray, himself to a much greater degree than Hesse does for other characters in the text.

The Ground Principles of Meaning and Disillusionment

Further, Harry's is a story of man in crisis. Harry is a man who is in mourning over a belief system lost to disillusionment. As we noted before, we should not be surprised that Harry's situation is remarkably similar to Hesse's at the time of the novel's creation. Both are confronting the passing away of their own confidence in what had once been cornerstone principles and presumptions. However, a crisis is often also a transition. And yet, one of the key characteristics of an honest portrayal of such a transition is the fact that the end result is unknowable to the transitioner while he or she is in the process of transitioning. As we are exiled from a belief system or as we abandon one from our own past, we are forced to travel through a period of radical indeterminacy. As we reject our

formerly unquestioned ordering principles, the destination with its new ordering principles cannot be predetermined or even pre-imagined with any detail or certainty. I will spend more time defending this claim in the following chapter on stages. Harry is living through a crisis similar to Hesse's, during which he can no longer be sure what rules interpretations in general or what determines truth and hierarchical precedence in the first place.

These transitions do not happen instantaneously. I must remain an interpreter and an actor in the real world even while I lack any kind of conviction regarding a ground of judgment or meaning. When we meet Harry in his disinterestedly suicidal state, he is in just such a condition. While we cannot know this during a first encounter with Hesse's work, elements of the novel support this as does Hesse's own history leading up to the writing of this work. Harry had been a writer of political articles criticizing the leaders who had opted for war. He was also aware of the fact that they would have no serious power to persuade even educated individuals such as his former colleague with whom he had shared dinner.

So, why is Harry suicidal? Rousseau writes "[d]oubt concerning the things most important for us to know is a stress too great for the human mind to endure for very long. We cannot help putting an end to our doubt in one way or the other."³⁰⁴ Earlier I made a point of the early Hesse's zealous certitude in the importance and power of literature, art, and music. However, as we have seen, the time period that included the First World War put an end, for Hesse, to pretensions he may have had regarding art's ability to prevent such cataclysms, as well as his own role as an artist presumably endowed with such a power. In fact, he is one of the earliest to admit the "blasé indifference" and even complicity among those who had been considered the intellectuals and artists in Germany during this period. However, a reader of Hesse's letters and articles reveals something that is true for many and perhaps even most people.³⁰⁵ Hesse does not admit the true depth

³⁰⁴ Rousseau, J. J. *The Essential Rousseau*, trans. L. Blair, Meridian, New York, NY, 1975. p. 235

³⁰⁵ IWG p. 65

and impact of his own self-determined guilt quickly. Like most of us, he admits such things grudgingly and in little more manageable batches. In fact, some of his feelings regarding his acknowledgment of responsibility regarding the World Wars and his own complicit guilt will not emerge until 1948.³⁰⁶

In other words, *Steppenwolf* is the story of a man in transition. As such, it is the story of a man who is not himself well aware of exactly what it is that he is going through and we receive this story from that very person's point of view. For Hesse, the only honest portrayal of such a process is to explain it from the point of view of the person going through it.³⁰⁷ However, guilt and slowly disintegrating prejudices, principles, and assumptions (among other contributing concerns) significantly color such an individual's perceptions and thought processes. Hesse has therefore given Harry the anxious task of explaining something by means of expressing the degree of Harry's own inability to understand it. Hesse gives us a Harry who narrates his life even while he has an only dawning grasp of what is happening to him. He has, therefore, very little in common with the omniscient narrator.

To sum up, Harry Haller is Hesse's intentional yet artful presentation of his own transition through a crisis brought about by an overthrow of once deeply held convictions concerning art. This overthrow comes as a result of his having been confronted with chaotic and destabilizing episodes from within his own family and from the First World War. He is awakening but not awakened, and as a result is forced to exist without really understanding how to make sense of his own existence and interpretations. He has to make decisions on a daily basis such as where to live and what to do with himself, but he

³⁰⁶ MB p. 254-257

³⁰⁷ This technique employed by Hesse may echo Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms. See Richards, D. G. *Exploring the Divided Self: Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf and its Critics*, Camden House, Columbia SC, 1996. p. 145 "the development pattern based on Hesse's concept of three kingdoms, . . . some critics have compared to the three stage progression described by the existentialist philosopher . . . Kierkegaard"

has very little to go on regarding a criterion for decision-making. He is in "doubt concerning the things most important." In regard to just such a crisis, Rousseau writes that

Each day I lost another of the opinions I had accepted. Those that remained were not enough to form a body of ideas that could stand alone. I felt the self-evidence of my principles gradually obscured in my mind . . . I was in the state of uncertainty and doubt that Descartes considers essential to the search for truth . . . it is disquieting and painful. Only a lazy mind or an interest in vice can keep us in it.

I meditated on the sad fate of mortals adrift in that sea of human opinions, without rudder or compass, at the mercy of their stormy passions, with no other guide than an inexperienced pilot who knows neither from where he has come nor where he is going.³⁰⁸

This passage from Rousseau's *The Creed of a Savoyard Priest* is a description of what must happen as a person abandons known interpretive and evaluative principles in lieu of as yet unknown ones. Even the landlord's nephew notices that

Haller belongs to those who are caught between two ages . . . two modes of life, with the consequence that [he] loses all power to understand [him]self and has no standard, no security . . . He belongs to those whose fate it is to live the whole riddle of human destiny [in] a personal torture, a personal hell.³⁰⁹

The voyage between the known and the unknown is perilous, to say the least. Harry's desire for suicide is a good example of the peril that can loom over such a journey.

Harry's Illusory Aesthetic Elitism

So, given a narrator so lost and adrift, how are we to assess and regard his narration? At the very least we must assume that Harry thinks he is telling or trying to tell the truth as he sees it. One of the interesting aspects of "Harry Haller's Records," that is, Harry's own narration of his life during this period, is that it seems to have no intended audience. Harry left the manuscript to his landlady's nephew and to his discretion.³¹⁰ It is not clear at all who Harry believes will read this. It is quite possible that Haller believed that no one would read it. Given this, we can consider the possibility that these records were written with something of the tentative honesty of a diary. Therefore, Hesse seems to

³⁰⁸ Rousseau p. 234

³⁰⁹ S p. 22

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 19

ask his reader to consider Haller's records as having been written in good faith and hence honestly, even if we also admit Harry's own perhaps considerable psychological hindrances to even internal subjective honesty. In other words, this Harry, who is in transitioning crisis, can be seen as believing that he is telling us the truth in his manuscript even if it may be the case that he is only marginally capable of even understanding or providing the truth he is trying to relate.

This Harry of the first few pages is very angry under a surface of seemingly mediocre contentment. This Harry wishes to "smash something, a warehouse, perhaps, or a cathedral, or myself, to commit outrages, to pull the wings off a few revered idols." He refers to these days as "soul destroying, evil days of inward vacancy and despair." He is angry at his "gout," "his headaches," "the vampires of finance," "so-called culture," "representatives of the established order," "contentment," and "this carefully reserved optimism of the middle classes, this fat and prosperous brood of mediocrity."³¹¹ This Harry is quick to criticize with righteous anger of a number of different targets. We have little trouble recognizing some of Hesse's own favorite targets of criticism, derision, and blame. This Harry has no shortage of others to blame for his mood and his hell.

This might surprise the reader familiar with the above-described impasse in which Hesse found himself during the writing of *Steppenwolf*. The post-First World War Hesse is struggling with his own complicity and negligence regarding the war. Even while it is all too true that Hesse was ready to assign significant blame to these same representatives of the established order, it is surprising that Harry avoids locating much of the blame for his own despair within himself and his own determinations of his responsibility and guilt. We must wonder, therefore, what Harry is doing regarding his recognition of his own guilt. If we are right in guessing that Hesse is artistically expressing the transition he himself had been going through, then we cannot fail to notice that at the story's outset, Harry is foisting responsibilities and culpability onto almost everyone but himself.

³¹¹ Ibid., pp. 26-7

And yet Harry is aware that he needs "a new orientation."³¹² Harry wistfully remembers his youth "full of poetry which I later wrote down by candlelight sitting on the edge on my bed! All that was past now. The cup was emptied and would never be filled again."³¹³ This gives us the impression that Harry, like Hesse, has come to some disillusionment about poetry or its power. We get here a clear sense that Harry is convinced that this type of life was irrevocably lost, that an irreversible threshold had been crossed. The boy and young man who had been a dedicated and passionate poet had now become an exile from that life. Now Harry lives in a life of mediocrity and lukewarm contentment, "countless hours and days that I lost in mere passivity."³¹⁴

We know from Hesse's direct writings about his own life that this threshold is not instantaneous and that it involves therefore a progress in itself.³¹⁵ So the question is, just where, within the process of awakening, is Harry? Hesse gives us the clue. After Harry describes his hated contentment, his disdain for the bourgeoisie, his guilty homesick love of the araucaria shrine to bourgeois order and attention to duty, and his exile from his life as the poet he had once been, he describes an exception. He describes "hours that brought the welcome shock, pulled down the walls and brought me back again from my wanderings to the living heart of the world."³¹⁶ It is a "concert of lovely old music" that provides this effect for Harry. This music opens the same door to "another world" we are familiar with from Hesse's own life.³¹⁷

This indicates that unlike Hesse himself at this time, Harry had yet to fully escape or question his old familiar worship of the spirit in art. This Harry is still yearning for an

³¹² Ibid., p. 28

³¹³ Ibid., p. 29

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 29

³¹⁵ MB p. 189-201

³¹⁶ S p. 29

³¹⁷ See p. 124 of this chapter

escape from the earthly into the aesthetically ethereal. He is still under the impression that he is "wandering" in the material world and that the "heart of the world" is aesthetic. He further, though inadvertently, confesses this status when he discusses this other world.

I caught a glimpse of it now and then. Sometimes for a minute or two I saw it clearly, threading my life like a divine and golden track . . . it gleamed out in golden sparks as though never to be lost again . . . Once it happened, as I lay awake at night, that I suddenly spoke in verses, in verses so beautiful and strange . . . again it shone out and drove its gold track far into the sky while I was in the presence of my beloved. Ah, but it is hard to find this track of the divine in the midst of this life we lead, in this besotted humdrum age of spiritual blindness, with its architecture, its business, its politics, its men!³¹⁸

This passage provides us with much. We see here a clear articulation of Hesse's own pre-First World War self-assured prioritization and esteem of art and its spirit. At this point in the novel, Harry shares almost exactly the feelings of the 1917 Hesse and his elitist's adulation of the German intellectual and artistic tradition. Harry speaks about his "beloved" like a mystic in communion with the divine. He speaks with a Gnostic's air of conclusive confidence and self-assured certainty.

Harry is quite close to the pre-First World War Hesse and his tendency to assume an almost literal existence of this aesthetic realm and its superiority and ethical priority to the material one. We also see the fact that Harry is mirroring this earlier Hesse's tendency to see existing people as a tedious hindrance and as relatively insignificant when art is being considered. We see Harry here as Hesse's literary embodiment of his own former desire or perhaps even expectation to escape the material world of "spiritual blindness . . . a world that is strange and incomprehensible" into an other worldly "refuge."³¹⁹ Harry even refers to his attic apartment as such.³²⁰ We also see a rehearsal of the early Hesse's assumptions regarding the artist's exemption from responsibility regarding both politics and individual people. Harry does not see these "men!" as brothers or equals to whom he is seriously

³¹⁸ S p. 30

³¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 30, 31

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 28

obligated and connected. We can hear his connoisseur's assumptions of only a half admitted superiority as he remarks, " [h]ow could I fail to be a lone wolf, and an uncouth hermit, as I did not share . . . these mass enjoyments [of] these Americanized men who are pleased with so little."³²¹ We can sense here that he dismisses not just the tacky entertainments, but the importance of the people themselves, though perhaps only semi-consciously.

These identifying marks locate for us just where Harry is within the transition that Hesse is articulating. At the outset of this novel, Hesse is providing us with a character who has yet to consciously acknowledge some of the questionable and even troubling aspects of his aesthetic faith. He has yet to have the deep implications of his action and perhaps inaction during the war impose their full and overwhelming impact. He is still at the point where he can convince himself that the war had been exclusively the responsibility of bad politicians and the scared herd humans who mindlessly followed along after them. At this point he stills feels confident in his artist's and abstainer's exemption from responsibility and guilt. Given an insight into Hesse's own keen awareness of the precariousness of this stance, the reader cannot help but anxiously sense the looming threat of the impending crisis that Harry cannot yet see for himself. The Harry at the beginning of *Steppenwolf* is a person who has yet to consciously enter into the current that will result eventually in what Hesse called his World War One awakening.³²²

This gives us confidence in the interpretation that the novel could therefore be an expression or presentation of the awakening Hesse describes in his more direct communications. It could very well be a description of Hesse's own progression from artistic elitist to that which he would eventually become (a result we have not yet delved into in any serious detail). If Hesse is attempting an expression of this progression, then *Steppenwolf* must remain a description of that process primarily from the fairly myopic

³²¹ Ibid., pp. 30, 31

³²² IWG p. 6

point of view of the person who is going through it, as we have said. Harry's self-expression will not then be primarily an objective philosophical analysis of the transition (which may be the perspective adopted in the Treatise) as much as it will be something of a subjective, personal, even intimate and somewhat mistaken description. As we emerge from Plato's cave, there must always be a period of awe and overwhelming disorientation at the heretofore unimaginably brightness of light. This must be followed by a period during which we allow our eyes to adjust their focus and adapt to the light. This adjustment period cannot be considered a time of keen observation and astute analysis. Rather, it is more likely to be a period of awkward and clumsy acclimation and dubious ranting. For all of his intellectual's self-assuredness on certain topics, we can and probably must expect the same for Harry as he moves from one stage to another.

So, we have acknowledged that Harry is still holding onto assumptions that he will soon abandon or from which he will be exiled. We must get a more detailed portrait of his internal atmosphere and mood. We know that Harry is something of a former poet and aesthetic connoisseur, an intellectual of some repute who has an only partially recognized disdain for the common folk, but we have not yet fully explored where he appears to be headed. What is Harry's trajectory? As we have noted just above, this Harry, like the early Hesse he mirrors, flirts with a presumption of this aesthetic and spiritual "world far above" as a literally existing world.³²³ Harry tries to assure himself by asking

[c]ould I be altogether lost when that heavenly little melody had been secretly rooted within me . . . I might be a beast astray, with no sense of its environment, yet there was some meaning in my foolish life, something in me gave an answer and was the receiver of those distant calls from worlds above.³²⁴

This Harry adorns himself with a gnostic's authority and attitude of election, distinguished for distinctive and perhaps infused insight and elevated understanding even while he seems

³²³ See REL p. 47 where Kant asserts that he or she who is "by nature averse to the labor of moral reconstruction, now summons . . . all sorts of ignoble religious ideas. [In] religions . . . which are endeavors to win favor (mere worship) . . . man flatters himself by believing . . . that God can make him eternally happy"

³²⁴ S p. 35

to feign self-deprecation as an outcast and a beast astray.³²⁵ He seems to retain the belief that regardless of his lamentable social position, he remains one of the select, the anointed, "a favorite of God."³²⁶ In fact, he seems to wear his outcast's status as something of a mark of honor and attestation of his election. Also, noteworthy is the conversational form in which he describes his connection and communication with the divine. Something speaks to him and something in him was a "receiver" of "distant calls." Here Harry falls victim to the hubristic mistake made by Hesse and uncountable millions of others who decide to adopt the pretense of an elevated status and with it indisputably authoritative judgment as a result of their own claim of exclusive (or rare) and distinguishing mystically direct contact with an omniscient.

While it is possibly true that Harry may be thinking of this connection to another world in a metaphorical manner, Hesse's decision to allow us access to Harry's stream of consciousness permits us the ability to see that Harry is making no clear distinctions between figurative and literal. Within his own mind, he leaves this crucial distinction adumbrated. There is a reason for this. On the one hand, his own critical and questioning twentieth century intellectual's reason has already brutally undermined any safely assumed certainty of any traditional religious leader's claim of revealed vicariously guaranteed authority. One of the main reasons he despairs for the bourgeoisie is as a result of the ease with which they accept traditional and culturally arbitrary claims of authority, an act in which he refuses to intellectually participate. On the other hand, given his status as outcast and hermit, among other issues, he had not much left of value in his life besides his posture as an aesthetic knight. It is as member of what he assumes to be a select order that he finds "meaning in [his] foolish life."³²⁷ He indicates here that without this, his life may very well have no meaning at all.

³²⁵ REL pp. 60-1 "to trust . . . feelings, supposedly of supersensible origin, is rather a perilous undertaking; man is never more easily deceived than in what promotes his good opinion of himself . . . rather it is advantageous . . . to 'work out our own salvation *with fear and trembling*'"

³²⁶ MB p. 67

³²⁷ S p. 35

So Harry cannot afford to look too closely at his own understanding of his metaphysics here. If he asserts a literal world of spirit, he would have to face the withering questions with which he himself would attack the convenient, comfortable and unreflective certainty of Euthyphro and the rest of the religiously arrogant. If he asserts that this golden track and the world to which it leads are figurative ideas, his own self perception as elected and superior would become merely figurative as well. It would suggest a much less drastic and less ethically relevant distinction between these two worlds. The guilt of the First World War among other things (his participation in the failure of his marriage, for example), stands waiting for him should his elected artist's ethical exemption from the material world (itself grounded on the assumed ontological existence, distinction and superiority of the an aesthetic realm) turn out to be something of a self serving cognitively dissonant concoction. The reader, aware of Hesse's own abandonment of the Gnostic's posture, must tremble for Harry.

However, for the time being, Harry affords himself the luxury of convenient vagueness which is often characteristic of our interior monologues and reflections, and which is necessary for the perpetuation of his established self understanding. It is on the grounds of the danger inherent in this unfortunate and yet ubiquitous human tendency for unaddressed interior vagueness that Socrates and Plato proscribed the central importance of dialogue itself. The attentive reader may note Hesse's ironic use of the phrase "soap bubble" to describe a transporting melody in Harry's head.³²⁸ Hesse uses this same phrase to portray the flimsiness of the dishonorable and abandoned belief systems of his own past.³²⁹ Therefore, given that Harry's stagnation is at least partly girded up by means of his own almost intentional resistance to rigorous reflective integrity, we can be fairly

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 35

³²⁹ MB p. 35

confident that as the work continues Hesse will lead Harry to a grudging recognition of this very aspect of his thinking along with its fierce implications.

Desire for Release

Harry reveals that it was he himself . . .

It was *Steppenwolf*. . . who over the ruins of his life pursued its fleeting, fluttering significance, while he suffered its seeming meaninglessness and lived its seeming madness, and who hoped in secret at the last turn of the labyrinth of Chaos for revelation and God's presence³³⁰

Here we get a clear indication of at least part of the problem with Harry's plan. His aesthetic gnosticism (which is again affirmed here in his secret desire for a revelatory and literal audience with a "present" and existing God) affords him some benefits, yet he is also being increasingly confronted by threats of what he perceives to be meaninglessness and madness. The first few pages of the novel reveal that Harry works only a few hours a day. He feels tortured by contentment and is sometimes brutalized by "soul destroying days."³³¹ He has moments of joy so fleeting and precious that he has carefully marked each individual instance. To say the least, Harry is not looking to perpetuate this general state and condition. As much as he is resisting a serious analysis or criticism of his belief system, he is also quite interested in some form of release from his present circumstance. This interest in release pushes him on.

During one of these joyous though fleeting moments of happiness, Harry felt that the "golden trail was blazed and I was reminded of the eternal and of Mozart, and the stars . . . [f]or an hour I could breathe once more and live and face existence, without the need to suffer torment, fear, or shame."³³² It is still unclear to the reader why Harry feels so tortured. However, from this last passage we get the indication that his torture and shame is alleviated while he can see the "golden trail," this path through the aesthetic to another

³³⁰ S p. 36

³³¹ Ibid., p. 26

³³² Ibid., p. 36

higher world of spirit. This also indicates that he feels shame when he cannot see this trail. It seems to be the case that during moments of artistic inspiration, Harry can summon up a sustaining faith in his other world and, as a result, in his privileged and anointed position. However, there also seem to be times during which he cannot summon this faith. During these later times, it seems to be the case that he starts to doubt the very existence of this other world. It is important for us to note here that with this doubt comes "shame." Given Hesse's own experiences, the reader must pay keen attention to confessions of shame and responsibility. Nonetheless, Harry, himself, has not yet acknowledged why he feels shame.

We get additional confirmation of Harry's dissatisfaction with his condition as he remarks about how he had once had friendships but that these had been "taken away" and that there were "[w]ithered years . . . between those days and now."³³³ Harry continues to narrate his thoughts as if to an initiated informed friend or private diary in which the informing context is known. Narrating in this manner, Harry leaves out most of the details that would explain why friendships are now impossible for him. The only thing we do know is that Harry feels as if this possibility had been not lost or bungled, but "taken away." He implies that the responsibility lies with someone or something other than himself. He has been the subject, perhaps endurer, even victim, of his isolation, not its cause. Further, Harry has not yet provided anything in the way of an explanation or confession as to why he is threatened by suicide, meaninglessness, insanity and isolation.

And yet as much as he seems to lament his loneliness and exile, Harry also tries to defend his condition, arguing to himself that he had asked for solitude and had achieved it. We cannot help but recall Hesse's own article on his desire for refuge and solitude and how he eventually came to understand it as the life-draining, self-perpetuated lie of a self-

³³³ Ibid., p. 36

deceiver and a self-server.³³⁴ However, we can see in Harry's continuing defense of his status that he has not yet arrived at Hesse's 1917 conclusion. Harry has not the immediate intention nor the will to do whatever hard work might be required to escape his condition. This is because Harry has not yet come to the point at which his despair is insufferable. Therefore, there is not enough pain to motivate a confrontation with his weakening though still engaged and operating belief system. Harry is still defending ground principles of truth and value that, while often miserable, retain the comfort of familiarity for him.

However, the cracks are starting to appear. Harry is confronted by the visceral vitality of Jazz music and the reader is allowed to follow Harry's consciousness as he cascades through a series of thoughts about the decline of art and culture in Europe. He rehashes familiar assertions about the superiority and gravity of older art. He conjures up the image of a group of "old connoisseurs, the reverers of Europe as it used to be, of genuine music and poetry . . . [of] spirit, soul, all that we had called beautiful and sacred."³³⁵ However, this tired rehash of well-worn sentiment is followed by Harry's first instance during which he considers the possibility that this art had not actually been as important as he had always presumed. "Had [this art and culture] never been true and living? Had all that we poor fools bothered our heads about never been anything but a phantom?"³³⁶ Harry does not or cannot allow himself to continue down this line of questioning just yet. At this point in the text, he changes the subject.

³³⁴ MB pp. 32-3 "Behold, here the dream [for refuge] was caught red-handed! Caught with all its pretty falsity. To be specific, it took fright just when it was to be fulfilled. It did not want to be fulfilled, it was cowardly, it searched for objections, it found excuses, it advised against, it drew back shuddering.

Oh, well, there was nothing left it could do. It had been lying for so long, it had been making promises for so long, and promising too much. Always it had taken and taken, and now for a change when it was time to give, there was nothing it had to offer. It drew back cringing like a swindler who had named a false address and now is being taken there where no one will know him, where he will have to be silent, where he will have to be unmasked.

³³⁵ S p. 38

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 38

His thoughts return to his encounter with the apparently magical other worldly doorway to a "Magic Theater" that had occurred earlier that same evening. This is not an accident. His experience with the appearance of an actually existing neon sign calling him to another presumably existing yet alternative realm that is "not for everyone" is an image that is in perfect synchronization with Harry's yearned for faith in a literal higher world that is exclusively reserved for the elect, that is, for those who would be considered "mad" by the "normals." In other words, as soon as his thoughts meander within the vicinity of questioning his assumptions regarding the central importance and dignity of what he considers "real" art and music and his role as a "reverer" of them, Harry quickly retreats to memories that prop up his Gnostic self assurance of election and distinction. As soon as he finds himself considering the possibility of questioning art's importance, that is, questioning his own sincerity, loyalty and commitment to his faith, he runs away in the opposite direction.

It is just as he is considering these ideas that another harbinger from this reality appears. An exhausted huckster appears bearing a sign that refers to the Magic Theater. He disinterestedly hands Harry a cheaply printed book which turns out to be "The Treatise on the Steppenwolf," a work which Harry will concede is a portrait of himself. What is important to take note of here is that Harry cannot face the shame that Hesse knows Harry is destined for, at least not directly. Hesse knows that Harry has not the courage yet to face the full force of his impending shame and guilt. Hesse knows that Harry will have to be drawn to it by means of what Harry currently finds attractive according to the presumptions and habits of his present state of mind and belief system. In other words, in order to be confronted eventually by what he fears, Harry will have to be presented with the invitation in a form that he actually desires presently. Therefore, the huckster, this emissary from Harry's yearned for other world, speaks only one line. He speaks the only line Harry

desires, the only line he needs to bolster his elitist's self-aggrandizement, "not for everybody."³³⁷ Harry cannot resist the bait.

Harry is miserable, but as we have noted, he is not miserable enough yet to risk serious change or questioning. Harry is perfectly willing to admit that things are not working out as he had expected as a young and inspired disciple and committed apprentice of the arts. Given his usually "luke-warm" discontent with contentment, Harry, like the rest of us, has to explain and interpret his reality within his own mind at least. We are all required to come to an interpretive conclusion as to the purpose of our actions and experiences. We are such that we must answer the question why. This was addressed in more detail in the first chapter of this paper. So how is Harry explaining his situation? What is the point and purpose of his misery, his isolation?

As we encounter Harry at the outset of this novel, he still sees himself at least partly as a noble and important self-sacrificing knight sworn in the service of transcendent aesthetics. We are familiar with this mind-set from Hesse's own early writings and articles. The uncorrupted keen-eyed pilgrim and champion of the authentic truth must suffer the pains that come from dismissing and disdaining the unthinkingly accepted traditional principles and habits of the herd. Acquiescence to the demands of the herd is easy and comes with considerable comforts and pleasures. It can be very alluring, very tempting. Yet it is the duty, thinks Harry, of the aesthetically elect to resist these temptations and fight in the name of the higher reality.

Nowhere is the allure of the bourgeois more apparent than in Harry's encounter with the araucaria, what Harry thinks of as "this little vestibule [of] superhuman housewifery . . . a little temple of order . . . of sound respectability -- early rising, attention to duty, restrained but cheerful family gatherings, Sunday church going, early to bed."³³⁸ Hesse wrote "behind it all lay envy . . . I had known plenty of hours and days when I

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 39

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 29

would only too gladly have been 'normal' too."³³⁹ Harry reveals "I don't know how this comes about, but I, the homeless Steppenwolf, the solitary, the hater of life's petty conveniences, always takes up quarters in just such houses as this. It is a weakness of mine. . . I have a yearning for something homelike."³⁴⁰ He tries to explain that his embarrassing desire for these bourgeois homes "comes, no doubt, from the days of my childhood," that is, from the accidental similarity this kind of house has with an upbringing for which he cannot be held responsible.³⁴¹ However, the suspicious reader cannot help but notice Harry's "no doubt," which smacks of a telling overstatement of things. In other words, he may, in fact, be trying to mask or deny other unadmitted yet contributing reasons for his yearning after what he claims to deride in the bourgeois. This early Harry may not yet be able to face the implications of actually desiring much of the bourgeois life.

One of these implications would be that he is not as immersed in and as intellectually overcome with the spiritual as he would like to think he is. Harry may be thinking that a true disciple of and martyr to the faith of aesthetic spirituality, the person who is in authentic communion with the "Inscrutable,"³⁴² would not find himself yearning after the life of the herd, "the same old stupid road" like an uninitiated and pliable schoolboy.³⁴³ The committed disciple of the true arts who nonetheless finds him or herself subject to such temptations might actually have to admit him or herself a fraud. To admit such a thing would also be to admit that he had never earned any kind of ethical exemption regarding politics, history, or even family life. To recognize such a thing would be to force oneself to instantly admit among other things that a significant portion of the responsibility for the colossal brutality of the First World War also fell to him. Lurking, impending and

³³⁹ MB p. 60

³⁴⁰ S p. 28

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28

³⁴² IWG p. 77

³⁴³ S p. 28

yet unadmitted guilt is perhaps the most powerful ground for resisting the acknowledgment of evident truths.

As a result of this lurking wolf, Harry immediately counters with a reassertion of his elected status. Directly following his limping attempt at legitimation regarding the guilty pleasure he takes in the bourgeois, Harry remarks

I like the contrast between my lonely, loveless, hunted, and thoroughly disorderly existence and this middle-class family life. I like to breathe in on the stairs this odor of quiet and order, of cleanliness and respectable domesticity. There is something in it that touches me in spite of my hatred for all it stands for. I like to step across the threshold of my room where all this suddenly stops . . . where everything . . . is marked and saturated with the plight of the lonely man, with the problem of existence and with the yearning after a new orientation for an age that has lost its bearings.³⁴⁴

Harry needs to emphasize and assert the difference between these worlds. Both his intellectual/aesthetic and ethical superiority rely on it. His assertion of this distinction to himself permits him to temporarily forestall the obliterating awakening that is nevertheless advancing toward its fruition. He emphasizes his suffering for the cause also as a means for bolstering his martyr's self-perception. He thinks, How could such a terrible condition ever seriously be confused with the easy path of least resistance characteristic of frauds or cowards? He tells himself that a road so rough and lonely could not possibly be the shirker's road. The more suffering he recognizes and expresses, the easier it becomes to convince himself that, far from being any kind of deserter, he actually is and has long been a commendable warrior of the spirit. Quoting Novalis, Harry echoes "A man should be proud of suffering. All suffering is a reminder of our high estate."³⁴⁵ Suffering is the proud and rare mark of the defenders of the cause.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 28

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16

Yearning for the Bourgeoisie and for Earned Rewards

However, suffering is also the mark of a person who is beginning to be unable to reconcile with his or her own self-judgments, something we saw in the first chapter. Notice in the above citation how quickly Harry switches without so much as a transitioning word from confessing that he "like[s]" the araucaria shrine to his assertion that he "like[s]" his intellectual monk's cell. This Harry quickly leaps away from certain topics that are headed in dangerous or threatening directions.

It is also important for us to notice that Harry announces the cause for which he claims to be fighting here. Young Hesse believed in the artist's and seer's role as the adventurer and irreplaceable trailblazer in the human race's potentially glorious spiritually evolutionary development. As we have noticed before, both early Hesse and Harry believe that the normals owe a debt to these self-sacrificing artists. However, this debt is such that these same normals cannot even imagine, let alone understand or acknowledge it. A debt is owed to these creative and brave dreamers for their abilities, sacrifices, and labors by which the whole race is raised to ever higher and more illustrious states of development. Harry here has taken on what he sees as the valorous task of trying to find "a new orientation" for a lost post-First World War generation of Europe. He is the gallant, and deliberate yet regrettably unrecognized intellectual hero. It may also be true, however, that Harry has lost his own bearings as well.

Among the aspects of Harry's customary orientation that are changing under his very feet is his ability to confidently deride the bourgeois. "I contemplate this little garden of order and let the touching air it has and its somewhat ridiculous loneliness move me to the depths of my soul. I imagine behind this vestibule, in the sacred shadow of the araucaria, a home . . . a life."³⁴⁶ Part of the structure of Harry's beliefs is the fact that he is fighting for the bourgeois even as he "hates all [the bourgeois] stands for." There is an

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 29

unmistakable conceptual dissonance here. He believes that it is the whole of the human race that is destined for spiritual evolution, and he also believes that each person is capable of the aesthete's awakening, and yet he seems to have concluded long ago that many of these weak repetitive members of the middle class are really beyond hope and are the main source of the social problem. To some degree, Harry sees himself as fighting for and in the name of the true destiny of these bourgeoisie even as he sees these same individuals as the very enemy he is fighting. Inherent in his self-perception as an elite is an accompanying derisive disregard for the following unreflective masses, for the "spotless mediocrity, of ordered ways, a touching and anxious devotion to life's little habits and tasks,"³⁴⁷ for "the irresponsible man who chews and munches another's words in his mouth, and gives them out again undigested."³⁴⁸

We can also see here that Harry is becoming increasingly uncomfortable in his isolation. Harry's self-approval for having yearned for and achieved solitude even at the considerable cost of loneliness reminds us of Hesse's own desire to escape humanity mentioned earlier. With a combination of pride and self-pity, Harry thinks of his apartment, "my little pretense of a home, where . . . Novalis and Dostoyevsky awaited me just as do the mother, or the wife, the children . . . in the case of more sensible people."³⁴⁹ It might very well be the case that his use of the word "sensible," meant on the surface as an ironic joke, is being used a little more seriously than he himself is willing to fully acknowledge. "How foolish to wear oneself out in vain longing for warmth!"³⁵⁰ Harry's

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 15

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 34

See also RWR p. 22 "The predisposition to humanity can be brought under the general title of a self-love which . . . *compares* . . . That is to say, we judge ourselves happy or unhappy only by making comparisons with others. Out of this self-love springs the inclination *to acquire worth in the opinion of others*. This is originally a desire merely for *equality*, to allow no one superiority above oneself . . . but from this arises gradually the unjustifiable craving to win it [superiority] for oneself over others. . . secret and open animosity against all whom we look upon as not belonging to us."

³⁴⁹ S p. 40

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 37

internal confessions of "vain longing" for closer human contact intimidates him with suspicions that he may be guilty of a heretofore unadmitted weakening commitment with regard to that "wonderful still and vast . . . cold stillness in which the stars revolve" and to which Bach's music leads the wrapped and dedicated apostle of the ideal.³⁵¹ As we have noted, he or she who claims to wish to live in that other ethereal world cannot also find him or herself desiring a life in the material one without undermining his or her own claims of fidelity and unequivocal commitment that he or she feels is the substantiating mark of the genuine elected devotee. In the eyes of the person who has been "touched by one of the magical truths," the bourgeois reality should be "no more than a shadow."³⁵² However, Harry cannot honestly say this.

This pull in two directions is exerting pressure on Harry. He is beginning to resent it and to become weary. At base, Harry wants to be awarded credit for his sacrifices, "for having suffered so long and deeply," for having built and maintained his "boundless and frightful capacity for pain."³⁵³ The longer he abstains from that which he desires, the longer he stalwartly suffers his exile's dreadful desolation, the more he begins to find himself demanding assurance of some reward, acknowledgment or prospect of positive outcome in exchange for and in recognition of his efforts. If he is going to be requisitioned to the role of the socially misunderstood, even cursed Steppenwolf in this world, he would like in return a literal doorway, a "pretty doorway with a Gothic arch . . . [with] writing [that would] invite me, the madman . . . give me admittance . . . greetings from another world . . . there perhaps would my music be played . . . [there would I be in] God's presence."³⁵⁴ The novelist Hesse grants his fictional persona what he most (though as we will see mistakenly) desires, a literal door in a familiar wall of the real world that promises

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 37

³⁵² MB pp. 86, 89

³⁵³ S p. 10

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-3, 36

to lead to a literal alternative reality more properly suited to members of his elected and extremely exceptional class. "But once he is over there, in the land of the soul, then, magically . . . stars sing out . . . and the world is perfect, and it is the language of God in which . . . everything can be said . . . where everything is resolved."³⁵⁵ There he would be recognized for his "creative piety" and there he would be received rightfully as one of the persevering aesthetic orthodoxy, and no longer as the outcast, the apostate and the madman.³⁵⁶ "[T]he poet is brought into the world [for] the performance of a sacred duty toward that world which is more than real, which is eternal."³⁵⁷ However, for many people, the greater the suffering, the greater the desire or need for assurance that the suffering will matter, that it will not be in vain, that it will make a legitimate difference.

And yet, as we have noted before, we can see that Harry is already consciously considering what is to him the almost unthinkable prospect, that all of his sacrifices and commitments might actually have been in vain. Harry considers that he and those like him might in fact be guilty of belonging to a "pig-headed minority suffering from a complex neurosis."³⁵⁸ This Harry, like the young Hesse, has until now afforded himself an initiate's certainty of faith in the transcendent significance of universal and eternal truths accessible only through the keen and perhaps extremely rare and precious talent and training needed for aesthetic appreciation and production. This faith, like any faith, is easy to maintain when nothing seriously tests it and its costs are relatively low. In fact, it is an undisputed characteristic of human beings that we can decide to believe and assert anything we wish. Children "make believe" all the time with incredible ease and complexity. But the veracity of any such belief is, of course, just as easy to doubt as it is to claim.

³⁵⁵ MB p. 31

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 132

³⁵⁷ MB p. 61

³⁵⁸ S p. 38

Doubt, Death and the Desire for Deliverance

As soon as something must be sacrificed or suffered in order to maintain a belief, new issues come into play. Harry has sacrificed much in his life to this point in the name of his art and spirit, as had Hesse himself. It would be a mistake to think of the efforts of either Harry or Hesse as somewhat half-hearted. It should not be inferred that the commitment and discipline involved in Harry's considerable education and in his championing of art are somehow insignificant or dismissable endeavors. However, Harry is faced not with the demands for meaning and certainty by which merely rigorous activity is legitimated. He is faced instead with the demands for meaning and relevance that arise from an assessment of his life as a completed and bounded whole.

Hesse makes a distinct point to mention that *Steppenwolf* is the story of a man in his fifties.³⁵⁹ Up until now, Harry has forgone the comforts of home and family which now seem to have gained obvious and substantial appeal for him. He understands himself as one who has had "pains . . . gout . . . as elderly people do."³⁶⁰ As the boundedness of his lifetime becomes more undeniable, as he is forced to "bend the knee before the majesty of death," Harry begins to force himself to assess the content and outcomes of his life.³⁶¹ Harry encounters the funeral of a man "who did not appear to be indispensable . . . Nobody wept . . . And where is the man to whom my death would mean anything?"³⁶² He is forced by the image and closing inevitability of death to ask what his purposes had

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. v

See also Tolstoy "My question - that which at the age of *fifty* brought me to the verge of suicide - was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without an answer to which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was: 'What will come of what I am doing today or shall do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?'" (my emphasis)

³⁶⁰ S pp. 25-6

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 73

³⁶² Ibid., pp. 72 - 3

been and whether these aims had been achieved. What he finds is "the ruins of his life . . . [and that it was] seemingly meaningless."³⁶³

[T]omorrow or the day after, myself as well, [will be] buried in the soil with a hypocritical show of sorrow -- no, there and so ended everything; all our striving, all our culture, all our beliefs, all our joys and pleasure in life -- already sick and soon to be buried there too. Our whole civilization was a cemetery where Jesus Christ and Socrates, Mozart and Haydn, Dante and Goethe were but indecipherable names on moldering stones.³⁶⁴

His life and what it had stood for was beginning to appear possibly, perhaps probably, pointless. Harry is threatened with the mind numbing possibility of having sacrificed everything for a phantom, an illusion, a "neuroses." Forced to offer justification for his time and life to this point, Harry is finding it harder to maintain confidence in the faith to which he had dedicated his life. Certainty and conviction that had once come easily under the influence of youthful bravado, "the sacred flame of my youth" and amid comrades at arms, now suffers under the weight of honest and brutal self reflection often afforded those with a wealth of solitude.³⁶⁵ Such reflection, conscious or otherwise, is uniquely and insidiously effective at excavating doubts long ignored.

So, Harry yearns for the bourgeois life. He now resents his hermit's quarantine. He is confronted with the gravity and ethical questions of the First World War. He even doubts some of the cornerstone ideas which found that to which he has dedicated the majority of his life's energy, emotion, fidelity and time. Harry does not like admitting any of these for they each seriously threaten his own self-perception up to and including the very meaning of his life. He endeavors to deny or ignore them. This resistance to acknowledgment consumes its own cash of energy and will. However, every day each of these threats strengthen, demanding ever greater stores of energy to resist. At an almost conscious level, Harry knows that despite his considerable discipline to stand firm, his

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 36

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 77

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 84

ability to maintain his ground is coming to an end. He is being forced to recognize that soon now, he will not be able to hold back an inevitable and indomitable tide. All people who recognize their own inability to stop the approach of what they believe they cannot face are desperate.

Life tasted bitterly horrible. I felt that the long-standing disgust was coming to a crisis . . . How had I, with the wings of youth and poetry, come to this? Art and travel and the glow of ideals -- and now this! . . . How had this paralysis crept over me so slowly and furtively, this hatred against myself and everybody, this deep-seated anger and obstruction of all feelings, this filthy hell of emptiness and despair.³⁶⁶

Even as he admits the approaching crisis, he is still flabbergasted at the idea that so promising a figure has arrived at so desperate and regrettable a condition.

Desperate to avoid acknowledgment of his half-recognized desires, guilts, and insufficiencies, Harry urgently desires to be called home. He wishes to receive deserved deliverance into the hands of the very God of aesthetic awakening he has faithfully served all these years. He desires to "enter into it like a banished king returning to his palace out of the grayness of a foreign land."³⁶⁷ If the doorway to a realm where his music would be played could just actually exist, all of these encroaching relentless threats which seemed to have been "lay[ing] in wait for me . . . stalk[ing] me from behind," could be forgotten, eluded.³⁶⁸ Safe harbor in the transcendent has been wished for by many more than lonely Harry.

At this point in the novel, that is, the period just preceding his suicide attempt, Harry has yet to completely abandon his belief in a legitimate and literal, aesthetically accessed divinity/ideal, even as he senses the impending demise of his ability to believe in it. He is still on the believer's side of doubt, even though he is also frighteningly suspicious of the decaying orbit of this faith and all that is founded on it. A deadline is

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 74

³⁶⁷ MB p. 132

³⁶⁸ S p. 80

starting to loom. Soon perhaps, he will no longer be able to sustain a belief in the literal reality of this other realm. Soon perhaps, he will not be able to even hope for deliverance to this haven. So, in the semi-rational state often occupied by the desperate, Harry desires to be spirited away to what he believes in, before his ability to believe in it runs out. Such rational dissonance is only possible in the mental shadows were the lights of criticism and dialogue are dim and the force of anxiety is great.

Threshold

Harry will be going through a threshold and a transition, just not the one he hopes for. This crisis, this desperation, can be an active part of the awakening to which the older Hesse often refers. But this awakening is probably not one that is predictable or imaginable for the one going through it. A truly annihilating transition cannot be pre-grasped or anticipated. Such transitions must necessarily be beyond the transitioner's comprehension. I cannot by means of an established and currently operative determining fundamental interpretive principle, overthrow that same principle and ground of overall interpretation. This is the problem described in Kant's discussion of radical evil.³⁶⁹ Life under another comprehensive interpretive principle or ground is opaque and perfectly ungraspable from the perspective of a person still under the determination of a currently operating and ruling comprehensive interpretive principle. Therefore, the move into what must be the fundamentally unknown is almost always unspeakably terrifying and therefore passionately resisted, both consciously and unconsciously.

Harry's dinner with his former colleague and his wife is a critical moment in *Steppenwolf*. It is after this dinner that Harry moves from his lukewarm, maintainable misery to a passionate intentionally suicidal hysteria.

³⁶⁹ See RWR p. 20; 108 "Neither can a man be morally good in some ways and at the same time morally evil in others . . . the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims, can be *one* only . . . how can a man himself believe that by himself, try as he will, he cannot make himself a new man well-pleasing to God, when -- conscious if the transgressions of which up to the present he has been guilty -- he still stands in the power of the evil principle and finds in himself no capacity adequate for future improvement? (my emphasis)

For it was at once clear to me that this disagreeable evening had much more significance for me than for the indignant professor. . . For me it was a final failure and flight. It was my leave-taking from the respectable, moral and learned world . . . I was sent flying and beaten from the field, bankrupt in my own eyes . . . sick unto death. . . . For what? And why? This very night I would make an end of the comedy, go home and cut my throat. No more tarrying.³⁷⁰

Notice Harry's return to questions of meaning and purpose. The questions he had dabbled with during his encounter with the funeral procession, his questions regarding the meaning of his life and its purpose into the future, here reemerge with terrifying urgency.

I could not bear my loneliness any longer . . . since I struggled for a breath in a vacuum and suffocated in hell, what way out was left me? There was none. I thought of . . . the thousand joys and labors and aims of my life. Nothing of them was left me . . . but agony and nausea.³⁷¹

In what amounts to less than a page, almost all of Harry's resistance falters and the weight of a full cognizance of his fears manifests. Here Harry admits how dreadful is his hermit's solitude to him; he admits that he has come to believe that there really is no way out, not even through a Magic Theater, and he admits that the labors and aims of his life had turned to nothing. Harry is on the teeth of the crisis, unblinkingly confident of his own hopelessness and helplessness.

But why? Why did Harry's dinner with a former academic colleague and his wife turn out to be the precipitating event? It was because, during this encounter, Harry lost his last shred of hope. If an at least somewhat talented intellectual who was familiar with some of the divine inspirations of Eastern philosophy could so easily be recruited into support of jingoistic idiocy, then what hope was there for the power of art, poetry or political articles to reach and convert the war-lusting masses? We recall that Hesse wrote, "when I was almost forty, [I had been] jolted awake by the gruesome reality of the war and profoundly horrified by the ease with which my colleagues and friends had enlisted in the service of Moloch."³⁷² Up until his crisis, Harry, like Hesse, faithfully imagined not just the

³⁷⁰ S p. 83

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 84

³⁷² IWG p. 4

enlightened individual, but an enlightened human race. Harry's significance as a poet (to this point in the novel, at least) rests on the possibility of this outcome as a rationally legitimate hope. The First World War dealt such hope a toppling blow, and the approach the Second World War threatened it with eternal annihilation.

Harry reflects Hesse's own thoughts from 1919, during which he wrote:

You can compare to Jesus anyone who has been touched by one of the magical truths, who no longer separates thinking from living and thereby isolates himself in the midst of his surroundings and becomes the opponent of all. [My image of] Jesus [is when he is] in the garden of Gethsemane, tasting the last cup of loneliness, his soul torn [between] an impending death and a higher rebirth. . . with a childlike need of comfort, seeking a little warmth and human closeness, a fleeting comforting illusion in the midst of his hopeless loneliness. . . Jesus . . . intentionally and lovingly deceived himself [about] the disciples . . . with whom he shared his thoughts . . . as though they could understand him, as though it were possible in actual fact to communicate his ideas to these people, to awaken some related vibration in them. And now in the moment of unbearable agony he turns toward these companions . . . he is now so openly and wholly human, so much the sufferer that he might come closer to them than ever before. . . but, no . . . they are snoring. . . it is a moment of incredible, total isolation, tragic loneliness.³⁷³

There is an important clue here regarding Hesse's and Harry's relationship with the "disciples," the "normals." Hesse's Gethsemane Jesus wants human closeness, a "related vibration," at least as much as he desires to "communicate his ideas" to them. This vulnerable Jesus is driven not solely by a sense of noblesse oblige or mercy, but by a human yearning for communion. A significant part of this Jesus's tragedy is his separatedness from these snorers. The tragedy is not just their isolation from him, their inability or unwillingness to grasp his "magical truths," but also his isolation from and loneliness for them.

But Hesse's suicidal Harry exemplifies the cost of having "intentionally and lovingly deceived himself [about] these disciples."³⁷⁴ Notice how angry the 1919 Hesse has become. He has become sarcastically despondent regarding the possibility of communicating magic truths to the masses. He seems to have given up completely his

³⁷³ MB p. 86-7

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 87

hope in this possibility. However, if one has come to the conclusion that awakening the masses to the transcendent is a fool's hopeless and tragic errand, then it marks the end of a road for one who had formerly not so concluded. As we have asserted, the First World War raised the stakes. Its ferocity of scope rendered seemingly insignificant any revolution that did not encompass the entire society. What is the point of a few enlightened individuals living in some isolated commune when the Third Reich is on its way? For whom am I writing this poetry? Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* is largely dedicated to asking and responding to this question. And yet, what is the artist to do who grounds his purpose on the necessity or even just the possibility of such a revolution, if the purpose is revealed as ludicrous, even hubristic? Upon leaving the house of his former colleague and his wife, Harry is forced to finally concede the terrible and insurmountable strength of the herd mentality for stubborn, fear and the habit-driven redundancy of clichéd thought and action, as well as the boundless suffering and injustice to which this mentality inevitably gives rise.

the next war draws nearer and nearer, and it will be a good deal more terrible than the last. All that is perfectly clear and simple. Anyone could comprehend it and reach the same conclusion after a moment's reflection. But nobody wants to. Nobody wants to avoid the next war . . . if this be the cost. To reflect for one moment, to examine himself . . . nobody wants to do that . . . And so . . . the next war is being pushed on with enthusiasm by thousands upon thousands day by day.³⁷⁵

Harry seems to believe "that perhaps man had already been discarded as the pathway to the soul and was in the process of retrogression, that this fountain [of the eternal ideal truth] must make its way out of nature by some other course."³⁷⁶ Perhaps humankind will not be the eternal's vehicle for instantiating the transcendent.

But what then to do? Like Hesse, Harry is forced to ask: What one can do? This question arises just as that which must be stopped is also recognized as unstoppable.

Ought Harry just sit in his favorite bar, The Steel Helmet, and drink as the Second World

³⁷⁵ S p. 117

³⁷⁶ MB p. 39

War approaches from every side? The true brilliance of Hermann Hesse and of *Steppenwolf* lies in the answer Hesse offers to the question. It is an answer of desperation, courage, forgiveness of the unforgivable, faith beyond hope, and perhaps a little "schizomania."³⁷⁷

So, as he leaves his ill-fated dinner, Harry decides on suicide. Upon resolving to answer the question of meaninglessness with suicide, Harry, however, is confronted by the simple terror of death. He is afraid to face his own razor. This fear at least affords him the moment's pause necessary to consider his circumstances. What Harry does not yet know at this point, is that the ears of the suicidal are capable of hearing new things and in new ways.³⁷⁸

The Treatise, Conscience and Voyeur's Transcendence

This new perceptive ability is first discussed in the *Treatise of the Steppenwolf*. In order to address Harry's self-perception and descent into a desire for suicide, we must address the *Treatise*. The *Treatise* occurs within the bounds of Harry's diary-like narrative, and represents yet another narrative perspective. Hesse himself identifies this essay as one of "those passages in the book that have to do with the spirit, with art, and with the "Immortals." "There rises over *Steppenwolf* and his problematical life a second

³⁷⁷ S p. 193

³⁷⁸ Again in his *Confession*, Tolstoy echoes Harry's and Hesse's ideas and circumstance saying "something very strange began to happen to me. At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life, and though I did not know what to do or how to live; and I felt lost and became dejected. But this passed and I went on living as before. Then these moments of perplexity began to recur oftener and oftener, and always in the same form. They were always expressed by the questions: What is it for? What does it lead to? . . . I understood that it was no casual indisposition but something very important, and that if these questions constantly repeated themselves they would have to be answered. And I tried to answer them. The questions seemed such stupid, simple, childish ones; but as soon as I touched them and tried to solve them I at once became convinced, first, that they are not childish and stupid but the most important and profound of life's questions . . . The questions would not wait, they had to be answered at once, and if I did not answer them it was impossible to live. But there was no answer.

I felt that what I had been standing on had collapsed and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived on no longer existed, and there was nothing left . . . My life came to a standstill . . . I had come to a precipice and saw clearly that there was nothing ahead of me but destruction. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death - complete annihilation . . . at the age of fifty [I had been] brought . . . to the verge of suicide

higher, immortal world."³⁷⁹ We must recognize the somewhat mysterious authorship of the *Treatise*. The landlady's nephew informs the reader that Harry had left a single manuscript to his discretion. This nephew does not mention the *Treatise* or any additional pamphlet left with Harry's manuscript. Further, the *Treatise* occurs within the text itself and as part of the text. In other words, we must assume that the *Treatise* occurs in the manuscript discovered by the fictional nephew just as it does to us in Hesse's novel, as an integrated part of an aesthetic whole, even as we continue to ponder the significance of its alternate narrative perspective.

While within the context of the novel's drama, Harry receives the *Treatise* from a tired salesman, we might also consider the possibility that the *Treatise* is Hesse's or perhaps even Harry's attempt to give voice to as yet unacknowledged aspects of Harry's own selfhood, conscience or deep soul. Given that much of the *Treatise* itself (as well as Hesse's work in general) is dedicated to the questioning of a unified identity, it is not hard to imagine that Hesse is signaling to the reader that the *Treatise*, which was apparently penned by an Immortal, rises to actuality through Harry himself, though perhaps somewhat unconsciously. This remains possible even though Harry himself refers to the *Treatise* as having been "painted with the lofty air of impartiality by one who stood outside . . . by an unknown hand."³⁸⁰

If in fact the *Treatise* was a work of an unacknowledged aspect of Harry himself, it coheres with Hesse's own thought on authorship. Hesse fundamentally believed that the artist was to pursue the transcendent within oneself. Hesse's Inscrutable, his eternal, is an immanent one.³⁸¹ Two years before the publication of *Steppenwolf*, Hesse writes about Dostoyevsky and conscience:

³⁷⁹ MB p. 215

³⁸⁰ S p. 67

³⁸¹ MB p. 190

the truly heavenly . . . voice of this writer . . . shows us a different essence: the conscience of man. . . . There is no doubt that conscience leads us through suffering and fear of death to misery and guilt, but it also guides us out of unbearable lonely meaninglessness and into relationship with significance, with essence, with the eternal. . . it is incredibly strong, it is stronger than inertia, stronger than self-interest, stronger than vanity.³⁸²

Hesse is referring here to what he believed to be a voice within us which "leads" and "guides." Hesse feels that this voice is seldom recognized as in some sense one's own.

We resist the acknowledgment as a result of the difficult truths it often requires us to admit.

To one in the deepest misery, in the last degree of confusion, [conscience] can always show a narrow path open, not back into this world dedicated to death but over and away from it to God. Hard is the road that leads man to his conscience. Almost all people all the time live counter to this conscience, they resist it, they are weighed down more and more heavily until they are destroyed by a suffocating conscience.³⁸³

Who is leading Harry to his despair? It is his own conscience. We have mentioned that Harry still carries a desire to foist the blame for his predicament onto some outside force of fate, the bourgeoisie or the war guilty government.³⁸⁴

The Harry who receives the *Treatise* is still under the influence of his particular stage of development, its cardinal interpretive principle, and the assumptions and interpretations inherent to it. Among other things, he is still under the impression that he can be literally assumed into the magical realm of the Immortals. As we have said, he half consciously desires to be permitted exit from this world, through a literal gate, into another world more suited to a man of his temperament, insight and accomplishments. In other words, this early Harry desires the world around him to change so as to afford himself the luxury not to. Harry does not want to go through another "reorganization" of his personality and ego. This is why his motivation to believe in a literal escape through a door to another world is so strong as to effectively rival his own reason's scrutiny and doubt.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 134

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 134-5

³⁸⁴ S p. 68-9

His desire to avoid internal revolution is so strong that even after having received and read the *Treatise*, he remains committed to his refusal and resistance. He still desires a transcendence that occurs from without rather than from within, one that happens for him and not to him. He would like to be the consumer, the audience, and perhaps even privileged voyeur of transcendence, not its location, subject, and target. The *Treatise* alerts Harry to the fact that he will have to go through a fundamental internal transition.

In reality . . . every ego . . . is . . . a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages. . . . Man is not a fixed and enduring form . . . He is much more an experiment and a transition . . . man is not yet a finished creation . . . As for the way to true manhood, the way to the immortals, he has, it is true, and inkling of it and starts upon it now and then for a few hesitating steps . . . But as for striving with assurance, in response to that supreme demand . . . and going the one narrow way to immortality, he is deeply afraid of it.

The way to the uncreated and to God leads on, not back . . . ever further into sin, ever deeper into human life. You will have to absorb more and more of the world . . . in your painfully expanded soul. This is the road that Buddha and every great man has gone . . . A man who can understand Buddha and has an intuition of the heaven and hell of humanity ought not live in a world ruled by . . . bourgeois standards.³⁸⁵

Harry acknowledges a certain truth to the *Treatise*'s assessment saying that it "gave the unvarnished truth about my shiftless existence."³⁸⁶ Yet within his own interior monologue, we have seen that he resists and denies his connection to and yearning for a bourgeois life. So, the *Treatise* comes out and directly accuses him of it.

Steppenwolf . . . deliberately . . . looked down upon the ordinary man and was proud that he was not one. Nevertheless, his life in many aspects was thoroughly ordinary . . . He had money in the bank . . . was glad to live on good terms with the police and the tax collectors and other such powers. . . He was secretly and persistently attracted to the little bourgeois world . . . he took up his abode always among the middle class . . . [to whom] he stood in constant relation. . . Our Steppenwolf, Harry . . . is . . . captive to the bourgeois and cannot escape it.³⁸⁷

I have already noted that Harry liked to emphasize his differentiation from the bourgeois, if not his superiority to them. I have mentioned that this was made possible in part by an undisciplined cloudiness of self-analysis within his unchallenged stream of consciousness.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 59, 62-3

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 67

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 50 - 53

However, the *Treatise* is an alternative and perhaps "impartial" voice, and as such, in its presence he is no longer permitted the luxury of vagueness which had been afforded him by his lack of rigorous self-examination. This apparently external critique begins to waken him from his self-pitying haze and forces him to admit his tendencies and his realities.

By the end of his reading of the *Treatise*, Harry seems convinced of the accuracy of its description of his condition and agrees with its conclusion that his situation was "unbearable and untenable."³⁸⁸ He decides therefore that

Death was decreed for this Steppenwolf. He must by his own hand make an end of his detested existence -- unless, molten in the fire of a renewed self-knowledge, he underwent a change and passed over to a self, new and undisguised.³⁸⁹

Harry admits that there are two possibilities here and yet he almost immediately rejects the possibility of personal change. He claims to have already gone through such changes

Alas! this transition was not unknown to me. I had already experienced it several times, and always in periods of utmost despair. On each occasion of this terribly uprooting experience, myself, as it then was, was shattered to fragments. Each time deep-seated powers had shaken and destroyed it.³⁹⁰

We must notice two things here. First, Harry is assuming that the approaching change will resemble changes he has experienced in the past. Second, Harry is assuming he has a choice in the matter. The *Treatise* seems to assert that both assumptions are incorrect.

Harry assumes that suicide is a legitimate choice, and yet the *Treatise* asserts

Nor will suicide really solve your problem, unhappy Steppenwolf. You will, instead, embark on a longer and wearier and harder road of life. . . the pangs of being born ever anew.³⁹¹

This *Treatise* of the Immortals seems to suggest that suicide will lengthen, not shorten, his suffering. Harry seems to be ignoring the implications of fate, that is, the insinuations of inevitability within the *Treatise*'s assertions. The transition that the *Treatise* warns Harry

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 76

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 67

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 67

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 64

of is presented there as something of a destiny. However, Harry confronts this declaration of fate with *Œdipus'* hubris.

No, in all conscience, there was no power in the world that could prevail with me to go through the mortal terror of another . . . new incarnation, when at the end of the road there was no peace or quiet -- but forever destroying the self, in order to renew the self. Let suicide be as stupid, cowardly, shabby as you please, call it an infamous and ignominious escape; still, any escape . . . from this treadmill of suffering was the only thing to wish for. No stage was left for the noble and heroic heart . . . I had played Don Quixote often enough . . . There was an end of it!³⁹²

Harry seems to ignore the *Treatise's* warning about suicide. The *Treatise* does not argue that suicide is a coward's option. It argues that suicide will only make the inevitable harder and more painful. Harry has conveniently ignored the *Treatise's* decree of his journey as a destined one and instead he has chosen to understand it as a noble but nonetheless relinquishable choice. Of course the desperate Harry has to shift the assessment here. He cannot afford to read the *Treatise* in good faith. He has to adjust his interpretation. He is too terrified of the destined transition laying in wait for him to entertain the possibility that it is inevitable. His fear will not permit it.

Further, Harry also thinks he already grasps this impending change. He assumes that it will resemble the identity-fragmenting changes of his past. He also assumes that these transitions, this cycle of destruction and rebuilding, will never end. However, the *Treatise* warns against this as well. It assures Harry that this transition must be a "leap into the unknown."³⁹³ So, upon reading the *Treatise*, Harry employs two fictions to avoid the terror of its implications. He assumes that he knows what he is trying to avoid, and he assumes that it is possible to avoid it. Fear forces these reinterpretations. The *Treatise* asserts that

Only the strongest . . . force their way through the atmosphere of the bourgeois earth and attain to the cosmic . . . the few who break free seek their reward in the unconditioned and go down in splendor. They wear the thorn crown and their

³⁹² Ibid., p. 69

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 55

number is small . . . [they have the] urge for tragedy . . . and can . . . break through the starry space.³⁹⁴

Harry has an "inkling" for this, for the "way to the immortals,"

[b]ut as for striving with assurance, in response to that supreme demand, towards the genuine manhood of the spirit, and going the one narrow way to immortality, he is deeply afraid of it. He knows too well that it leads to still greater sufferings, to proscription, to the last renunciation, perhaps to the scaffold, and even though the enticement of immortality lies at the journey's end, he is still unwilling to suffer all these sufferings and to die all these deaths. . . he shuts his eyes. He is resolved to forget that the desperate clinging to the self and the desperate clinging to life are the surest ways to eternal death, while the power to die, to strip one's self naked, and the eternal surrender of the self brings immortality with them.³⁹⁵

The author of the *Treatise* confirms that Harry has "resolved to forget." Harry does not want to face the implications of the "supreme demand" of "the unconditioned." He does not want to wear the "thorn crown" or face "the scaffold." He is happy to stay on the good side of "the police and the tax collectors" by whom and through whom the wars he so seemed to detest were fought and funded. With Hesse, Harry could very well say

I dreamed of an ideal man . . . he would be in absolute harmony with himself, with the ideal, with fate; he would change easily, he would die easily. . . I myself did not change willingly, I myself would not die easily.³⁹⁶

And yet as soon as he surrenders to the desire for suicide, we find that he is afraid of that as well. We must admit that, in large part, Harry is a selfish coward.

The Bourgeois and The Scaffold

Now we can concede that Harry has studied hard and suffered seriously for his art. We can concede that he has indeed sacrificed the comforts of hearth and home, of family and social acceptance. We can admit that he was willing to sacrifice much in order to publish articles in opposition to the world wars. We can even admit that he might have tried as hard as he could to offer resistance to the wars by means of articles and poetry.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 54

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 62

³⁹⁶ MB p. 63-4

However, Harry is quicker to consider suicide than he is to face "the last renunciation, perhaps the scaffold, and . . . the loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane."³⁹⁷

And we must consider for whom Harry would be facing the scaffold. For what purpose and for whom would he be wearing the thorn crown if he had had the courage to do so? Who else is there other than people like his landlady and her nephew? However, at base, Harry does not really esteem the members of the bourgeoisie very much. The *Treatise* reveals "In theory [Harry] had nothing whatever against the servant class, yet in practice it would have been beyond him to take a servant quite seriously as his equal."³⁹⁸ The landlady's nephew also feels that Harry's "whole life was an example that love of one's neighbor is not possible without love of oneself, and that self-hate is really the same thing as sheer egoism."³⁹⁹ Harry is perfectly willing to undergo solitude and risk aesthetic penetration into the unknown, but he is not prepared for practical self-sacrifice of any kind, especially for the common folk.

Harry is still driven by his pride in his assumed distinction over "the ordinary man." He still sees himself "a person removed from the common run of men by the prerogative of talents that had something of the genius in them."⁴⁰⁰ He is not yet capable of seeing these "creature[s] of weak impulses, anxious, fearful . . . and easy to rule" as people who are important enough to deserve his personal sacrifice.⁴⁰¹ Even though in his youth he had been "poor and had [had] difficulty in earning his bread," he does not seem to permit that experience to extend to actual real world empathetic action for the poor).⁴⁰²

Harry knows that

³⁹⁷ S p. 62-3

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 51

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 11

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 50

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 52

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 52

all through the mass of the real bourgeoisie are interposed numerous layers of humanity, many thousands of lives and minds, every one of whom, it is true, [could] have obeyed the call to the unconditional.⁴⁰³

In other words, Harry knows, as did Hesse, that each of these common bourgeoisie are just as inherently capable of being "possessed by God" as the elect and artistic are.

However, since "he never tore part of his soul loose from [middle class] conventionalities" and since he "fought against and denied" this aspect of himself, he finds it hard to respect those whose lives and actions remind him of this.⁴⁰⁴ In other words, Harry has gone down the very well-worn path of disregard for each individual person's true and inalienable transcendent potential. Instead, he limits his view to their current status in order to disregard and then disdain the multitudes as hopeless, and worse, culpable.

But this inability to "perceive the divine, the necessary, the fated even in what is most wicked and ugly, and also pay it reverence and worship in this guise," is in fact the very source of his chaos and the root of his despair.⁴⁰⁵ Harry cannot worship the divine in the guise of the bourgeois, because his current identity requires disdaining them, and because Harry is just as reticent of personality annihilation as the *Treatise's* author says he is. The author of the *Treatise* writes

It is open to a man to give himself up wholly to spiritual views, to seeking after God, to the ideal of saintliness. . . [but] the bourgeois . . . will never surrender himself . . . his ideal is . . . to maintain his identity . . . A man cannot live intensely except at the cost of the self. Now the bourgeois treasures nothing more highly than the self. . . he achieves preservation and security. . . Like all men Harry . . . is nothing else than the narrow and perilous bridge between nature and spirit. His innermost destiny drives him on to the spirit and to God. His innermost instinct draws him back to nature . . . [he] is never anything more than a temporary bourgeois compromise . . . A timid and artlessly sly experiment.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 53

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 51

⁴⁰⁵ MB p. 72

⁴⁰⁶ S pp. 51-2, 61-62

Harry finds himself always in middle class houses and always yearning so terribly after company because he has not really left the middle way compromise by which he maintains his precious identity. Like the bourgeoisie, Harry values his identity above all else and sacrifices his destiny in the transcendent to maintain it. This is Harry's shame. He is a compromise, and his compromise is a sell-out in exactly the same form (even if not necessarily the same content) as that of the bourgeoisie.

As we have seen Hesse is aware that "no life . . . can stand comparison to the demands of the ideal."⁴⁰⁷ The author of the *Treatise* makes it clear that there are very few who have the wherewithal to allow themselves to be really "possessed by God," who "seek their reward in the unconditioned," or can stand the "dissolution of painful individuation."⁴⁰⁸ Any power-limited creature who tries to compare him or herself to an unconditioned ideal must necessarily find his or her own endeavors painfully inadequate. There is and can be no pride, no self-aggrandizement of the finite in the face of the Ideal. The first chapter of this paper was in part dedicated to this point. Therefore, if Harry maintains a belief in his superiority over the "easily ruled" common person, it cannot be by means of Harry's honest assessment of his achievements under the light of the ideal. Under this light, no person's belief can. Under the light of the ideal, all human endeavors are equal in their insufficiency. Therefore, Harry's superiority can only be sustained as a result of a continued merely relative comparison with other similarly limited people.

For all his talk about the importance of the transcendent, Harry cannot afford to evaluate his own endeavors by means of a transcendent criterion. He needs and requires the bourgeoisie in order to maintain his own assertion regarding his belonging to an elected sect. He needs and requires to see them as lesser in comparison to himself. His own self-interpretation, his own identity, and the ground of the meaning of his life depend on it. To relinquish his constant comparative association with the bourgeois, Harry would have to

⁴⁰⁷ MB p. 112

⁴⁰⁸ S p. 64

allow himself to be abandoned to the unconditional. He must maintain a position of relative superiority. Therefore, true empathy with them as equals and sacrifice for them would presuppose a nullification of his presumed superiority and result in an undermining of this strictly relative identity. Empathy for equals requires respect, while relative superiority requires something of a lack of respect. "Deliberately he looked down upon the ordinary man and was proud."⁴⁰⁹

So, just as the author of the *Treatise* had made the point that the bourgeoisie sacrifices everything for his or her placid and compromising identity, so *Steppenwolf* sacrifices everything for his identity as "Prometheus."⁴¹⁰ The *Steppenwolf* fears the "possession of God," and does not "respon[d] to the supreme demand," precisely because it requires "the dissolution of painful individuation." As we have seen, Harry does not want to change. He wishes to be the witness of transcendence, but only while remaining Harry. He does not want Harry transcended. Harry has an "intimation"⁴¹¹ and "inkling"⁴¹² of the transcendent in and of itself and of its inherent meaning, but as he is, it is not the transcendent in itself that Harry values but his own ability to perceive it. Harry is completely resistant to "the eternal surrender of the self"⁴¹³ and so must remain subject to "the confinement within limitation."⁴¹⁴

The mind of man is beneficent and noble only when it obeys the truth. As soon as it betrays truth, as soon as it ceases to revere truth, as soon as it sells out, it becomes intensely diabolical.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 50

⁴¹⁰ MB p. 120

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 135

⁴¹² S p. 62

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 62

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 64

⁴¹⁵ GBG p. 360

He does not desire nor intend the "expansion of the soul" that would enable what the *Treatise* calls "reunion into the All . . . reunion with God."⁴¹⁶

So, the message given to Harry from the *Treatise* is one that says that there is a transition bearing down on Harry. It says that Harry already feels called and destined for this change. This transition is a deliverance. However, it is not the deliverance Harry desires. Harry desires a transition through which his identity and ego are maintained. He wants a transition *for* his ego, not a transition *of* his ego. He wants to be regarded as a "supreme and special gift." He does not want to acquire "immense powers of surrender and suffering, [or an] indifference to the ideals of the bourgeois."⁴¹⁷ Harry wants to stabilize a self-esteem and an identity that is grounded on a merely keener understanding of the unconditioned Ideal, not on a submission to it, an evaluation by it, or a dissolution within it.

**Suicide, Salvation by Works, and the
Contradiction of the Artist Incapable of Self-
Sacrifice**

We might imagine that this condition would lead Harry to some form of admitted shame, and that his desire for suicide might be grounded on it. However, Harry's desire for suicide is not driven by repentance. He himself reveals as much, saying "[n]othing . . . was left me, not even repentance, nothing but agony and nausea."⁴¹⁸ He does not wish to kill himself out of a feeling of deserved guilt. Instead, he wishes to escape the suffering bred of his recognition of the futility of his endeavors, the humiliation of his powers. Harry's desire for suicide shakes its fist angrily at the herd mentality and at God for having created so weak a creature as this common human. He does not admit his own shortcomings to their true depth. This is because to do so would threaten the annihilation of his identity.

⁴¹⁶ S p. 64

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. 63

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 84

He wishes suicide because he can no longer imagine anything in the way of an escape under his own power. As we have seen, Harry's crisis comes from a grudging and resisted admittance of the stubborn and perpetually renewing power of the herd to resist independent rational critique and thus perpetually march onto war, spouting platitudes with delirious confidence. During the First World War, Harry is forced to witness as the best of his own efforts and talents were exposed as woefully inadequate, even laughingly pathetic before the sheer immensity of this power. His more recent visit with his former colleague served to guarantee that his efforts would always prove insufficient. Harry says "for me it ended, once and for all, any confidence, any friendship, any feeling of affinity I could have with these people."⁴¹⁹ Thus, if his own powers were all that he had to rely on, he would be forced to watch on as the even more cataclysmic carnage of the next world war approached. In other words, Harry is being confronted by the apparent fact that a salvation by works is doomed. Harry's crisis is grounded on his heretofore resisted acknowledgment that he will not be the source and master of his own (or anyone else's) rescue. Since he can imagine no other rescuer than himself, he assumes with an air of confidence that there will be and can be no rescue, only suffering and "continual torture," all without purpose.⁴²⁰

However, this state of affairs requires a fairly complex construction and maintenance. As we have seen, it is fundamentally hubristic. If I am in a situation like Harry's, my despair is grounded on a faulty and inflated assumption concerning the effective scope of my own power. Also, it assumes that my dedication and unconditional commitment to the rest of humankind is actually conditioned by my unquestioned requirement of self-preservation, preservation of both body and personal identity.

Therefore, Harry is pleased to remain in the realm of the aesthetic. He is proud of his capacity to risk profound threats in his mind and in his poetry. As I have noted, Harry

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 90

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 55

and the earlier Hesse are like "almost all artists [who] are able to realize in their own lives little or nothing of the noble, splendid, ideal values that they set down in their poetry."⁴²¹ Harry's poetry, if we can presume to compare it to Hesse's, is dedicated and committed to a presentation of the unconditioned supreme Ideal. The real poet knows that serious artistic endeavors must come at the cost of his responsibilities to real people, but the resulting poetry permits a glimpse into what is of unspeakable importance for all humankind. However, without doubt, much of the poetry is either directly or indirectly dedicated to emphasizing the importance of what the author of the *Treatise* calls the "supreme demand," of "the unconditional," or what the landlady's nephew refers to as "love of one's neighbor."⁴²² Here is a contradiction. Given our human limit of time and power, the artist seems to need to violate the very principles he or she is championing in his or her art as a condition of producing the art that champions these principles as unconditionally important.

Jean Paul and Art as an Escape from Truth

In 1921 Hesse writes about the German Romantic author Jean Paul, a writer respected by Hesse and largely forgotten by everyone else. Of Jean Paul, Hesse wrote "indeed disillusionment was the constant fate of this demanding and insatiable soul who sought the ideal everywhere, and was fated everywhere to encounter the deathly smell of so-called reality."⁴²³ While Hesse had great respect for this writer, he did not hide the fact that Jean Paul might have regarded the actual people in his life with more respect. Regarding his relationships with women, "he was by no means a reliable love . . . He was much too fickle for that, and much too addicted to things of the mind."⁴²⁴ This is despite the fact that he had written a "*Devotional Handbook* in which . . . the critic has become a

⁴²¹ MB p. 63

⁴²² S p. 11

⁴²³ MB p. 116

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 115

self-critic, the cynic a moralist." Regarding Jean Paul's unhappy marriage, Hesse felt that he "should have known how love and marriage go for people whose heads are in the clouds."⁴²⁵ We see here an artist's split between the ideal and the real.

According to Hesse, Jean Paul

has often been reproached for his failure to adapt to the world, as though this were a sin and a weakness. It might be worth remembering that for someone disenchanted with life, for a poet and idealist at odds with reality, it constituted a very considerable achievement to maintain his poor hungry person alone in the face of the world and to remain defiantly true to his manners or lack of them, let the chips fall where they might.⁴²⁶

We cannot fail to notice the similarity that Hesse's description of Jean Paul bears to his own *Steppenwolf*. We might also notice the tone of sarcasm and irony that runs through this description. It seems that Hesse might in fact see Jean Paul's lack of "manners," his inability to adapt to the world, as in fact a sin and a weakness. He continues his description:

with his writing materials and a keg of beer [he would] try to forget in the ecstasy of thought and creativity what was out of joint with the world. And a great deal was out of joint . . . [for him] this life had no reality.⁴²⁷

Here Hesse allows himself a fairly brutal criticism. He is asserting that Jean Paul was guilty of using his literary and intellectual talent as an inebriating tool of escapism on par with a keg of beer. According to Hesse, Jean Paul was not trying to reveal the truth by means of art, he was trying to ignore and escape it by that very means.

Hesse seems to actually retain something of a deep regard for this poet, referring to his "dexterity in the play of inspiration. . . a lonely Prometheus, aware of the impossibility of true understanding between human beings."⁴²⁸ Hesse remarks that Jean Paul was a genius "whose ideal is the free play of all the powers of the soul, who liked to say yes to

⁴²⁵ S p. 116

⁴²⁶ MB p. 116

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 117

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 120

everything . . . a quite uncommonly free spirit dancing lightly amid all the opposites."⁴²⁹

However, Hesse does not absolve Jean Paul on the grounds of his genius. Hesse asserts strongly and directly that there is a

contradiction between poetry and life. Had Jean Paul been the person in life that he was as a poet, had he been able to master and apply in life the profound insights and deep knowledge of the innermost secret of living that he possessed as a poet, he would have been a model man, an exemplary person, an eminently happy individual, a son of the gods.⁴³⁰

The implication here is, of course, that Jean Paul did not do this. Hesse is describing a man unwilling or unable to master and apply his insights to his life. Hesse continues:

What Jean Paul could not do in life -- acknowledge the opposites, say yes to everything, to dreams and also to the commonplace -- this he attempted in his writing.⁴³¹

Hesse gives us the impression that it is possible for a timid person to hide from life in art. Jean Paul either will not apply his own insights to life, or he cannot do it. Either way, his attempt to do this in art is described by Hesse as something of a paltry compensation, a rather pathetic and severely inadequate substitution. We must also note that Harry cannot say yes to the "commonplace" either.

Hesse goes on to discuss Jean Paul as a writer who had

Knowledge of himself . . . a tacit recognition of the poet's own weakness, who is a lord god in the study, in daily life, however, a poor, nervous, distracted human being.⁴³²

We see in this short essay that the 1921 Hesse is himself aware of what Jean Paul was only tacitly able to admit. Hesse is emphasizing and focusing on the fact that poetry is no fair compensation for a shabby "daily life." Hesse felt that the poet must arduously intend to avoid the temptation to "compensate for weakness through works of art."⁴³³ At this point

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 119-121

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 121

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 121

⁴³² Ibid., p. 121

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 63

in the process of his maturation, Hesse is directly asserting his conviction of the priority of individually determined moral action in the real world over any claim of art whatsoever. Art and poetry should inspire us to reach for the ideal regardless of its impossibility, it should not be the grounds of our excuse not to.

Hesse asserts that we must avoid the temptation of easy acquiescence to the dictates of arbitrary cultural determinations of moral behavior, the mark of the bourgeois. But the freedom to critique one's cultural moral dictations, a freedom that is indeed a necessary attribute of any serious artist or poet, is not also a license to become a profligate. All human beings have the ability and perhaps the duty to criticize and evaluate the culture of his or her upbringing. I must responsibly accept my role as my own culture's judge. To do so, I must throw off my own often tenacious desire to submit to the personal determinations of arbitrary social dictates. I must refuse submission and instead submit these social determinations to my own autonomous assessment. If I intend to serve the ideal, I must refuse to serve the patterns of social power I may once have accepted as infallible and may still regard as comforting and seductively familiar.

It is not difficult to see that this awakening can come with a certain feeling of emancipation. It can also come with a certain feeling of self-aggrandizement as I assume the role of an appropriate judge (and no longer subject) of culture. However, there is a tendency to halt my progress here and fall victim to the temptation of assuming myself a member of the awakened elite who knowingly shake our heads in disdain at the fumbling lunacy of those unawakened ones, who unthinkingly labor under the yoke of traditionally maintained merely relative arbitrations. What can often be initially missed is the fact that I cannot restrict the gaze of my own judgments to the external. If I am going to submit my society to the demand for a rational defense for its judgments, I cannot be excused from the same demand myself. It can sometimes be a while before I am ready to admit this.

**Autonomy as a Creation out of Nothing
and Harry's Resisted Duty to the Bourgeois**

Once I have awakened to the fact that I am responsible for my own independently determined defense of my own decisions and actions in the real world, I can no longer confidently rely on tradition for these determinations. I must descend within myself in good faith to determine anew and independently the difference between right and wrong. Any other means of moral rule-determination would most likely be another mere bourgeois compromise. Regarding the former, Hesse felt there was no other legitimate path. He included his discussion of the importance of independent moral responsibility just after his chastisement of Jean Paul:

every individual . . . finds a chaos within himself, a world unregulated by any table of the laws, in which good and evil, beautiful and ugly, bright and dark are no longer separate. To separate them afresh, to divide them again, is the business of each individual.⁴³⁴

Notice here that Hesse is asserting that regardless of my desire to believe that there are predetermined rules of behavior that I inherit from my family and society, "a table of laws," it remains to me to admit that this is not and cannot be the case. There is a chaos within me, a chaos of intentions, principles, instincts and untamed desires, and it is my destiny and responsibility to address and organize them. Regarding this pantheon of viciously competing concerns, I must assume the role of establisher of an hierarchy. This chaos, this task can appear so daunting that I will inevitably yearn for an easier path and I will find myself wishing to opt for (or return to) any alternative and predetermined hierarchy of concerns presented by my society. Under the sway of this temptation, most will allow others to determine right and wrong for them. Hesse believed both that any real morality had to be honestly autonomous, and that no one, not even artists, were immune from this responsibility.

Hesse's glimpse into a moral ideal and its practice is beautiful. He suggests that each existing moral agent must discover in him or herself the soul of a unique and

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 122

invaluable artist who creates out of nothing and within stark individuality. For Hesse, both real art and morality are the opposites of any adopted convention or custom. A true moral agent frets over, loves, and pours care into his or her decisions, carefully assessing details and intently building arguments on defensible principles. This actor in reality should do this in the spirit of a painter or sculptor who broods over his or her work, assessing and establishing his or her own worth on this practice.

Hesse's 1921 essay on Jean Paul seems a clear precursor to his *Steppenwolf*. Harry is also someone who has discovered the joys of liberation born of serious social criticism. Harry likewise is talented regarding his "dexterity in the play of inspiration." Like Hesse's Jean Paul, Harry has suffered serious disillusionments and was also prone to attempt to forget a world "out of joint" in "ecstac[ies] of thought and creativity."⁴³⁵ Hesse quotes Jean Paul himself, who wrote that "the poet hovers *howling above* this confusion."⁴³⁶ Both Harry and Jean Paul seem to have treated themselves to an artist's distance from a "life [that they claimed to have felt] had no reality."⁴³⁷ We see here the image of the distracted and permissive artist negligent of responsibilities in reality. Hesse clearly warns us that Jean Paul "should not be a 'leader' for us."⁴³⁸ Hesse is making the point that despite the fact that Jean Paul and Harry are among those from whom "arise all those works of art," works that are

like a precious, fleeting foam over the sea of suffering . . . in which a single individual lifts himself for an hour so high above his personal destiny [such] that his happiness shines like a star and appears to all who see it as something eternal.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 117

⁴³⁶ MB p. 118, emphasis mine

⁴³⁷ S p. 117

⁴³⁸ MB p. 122

⁴³⁹ S p. 44

Despite their contributions of indescribable beauty and profundity, Hesse felt that neither Jean Paul nor Harry can be considered anything like "model" men, or "exemplary" persons. Harry himself will eventually come to think of himself and artists like him as "superfluous, irresponsible lot of talented chatterboxes."⁴⁴⁰

Just as Jean Paul sees the artist as one who "howls above" the confusion and of daily life, Hesse gives us a Harry who lives literally upstairs, above the fray. He makes sure to indicate that Harry must descend from his refuge even to engage himself in his adoring abandonment to the araucaria shrine. There in his isolated Olympic pantheon among the gods Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Pascal, and Novalis, Harry rarely descends from his attic into the hubbub of daily work-a-day life. All this serves to emphasize that Harry does not, perhaps refuses, to identify or empathize with these commoners who are lunkheadedly lumbering on to another fantastically maniacal war, a war whose radical evils they will all bear responsibility for, with voices high, assured in their ignorant arrogant assumptions of righteousness and justification. Harry thinks to himself "[h]ow could I fail to be a lone wolf, an uncouth hermit . . . who finds neither home nor joy nor nourishment in a world that is strange and incomprehensible to him."⁴⁴¹

However, even if the world is "out of joint" and "incomprehensible," this does not permit him excuse from participation and responsibility. In correspondence with an old friend, Hesse wrote that

we've been spared, we haven't suffered, we haven't lost anything or made any sacrifices. . . we little neutrals have been blessed with undeserved good fortune: nothing has happened to us, we had and still have a roof over our heads and our daily bowl of soup. . . If anything can cure the world and make mankind pure again, it is the actions and the sufferings of those who refuse to be bent or bought, who were more willing to lose their lives than their humanity.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 136

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 30-1

⁴⁴² IWG pp. 149, 157

We must note Hesse's use of the verb form "had and still have" in the first sentence of this citation. We cannot fail to take note of the confession in this. Unlike Harry who claims that he "did not regret the past," Hesse does regret it and acknowledges that he does.⁴⁴³

Harry has not yet come to complete an admission of this type. Part of the reason for this is Harry's insistence on his identity as a Steppenwolf. As we have seen, Harry's self-understanding as a divided Steppenwolf is called into question in the *Treatise*. Harry has awakened to transcendent ideals and supreme unconditioned commands. He has seen in art and religion what the common bourgeoisie have yet to see. He cherishes and relies on this distinction he maintains for himself from the unreflective herd. However, the author of the *Treatise* does not sit still for Harry's convenient self-aggrandizement. We have noted that this author confronts and challenges the veracity and integrity of Harry's assumed superiority. He then goes on to show that Harry's self-interpretation as a *Steppenwolf* is really just a mask intended to camouflage his continued membership in the bourgeois. Yes, Harry may have exceptional access to and an intuition of the awesome ideals that are presented and are accessible in art, but he refuses to engage these discoveries as standards of his actual behavior. Therefore, the author of the *Treatise* is probably right when he or she pins Harry to the wall as a "temporary bourgeois compromise . . . Despising the bourgeoisie, and yet belonging to it."⁴⁴⁴ The author alerts Harry that this "bondage" rightly "cause[s] him the continual torture of shame."⁴⁴⁵

The author of the *Treatise* also continues to dismantle Harry's structure of excuse and denial as that author delves into a description of moral action in the real world that closely resembles that which Hesse produced in his article on Jean Paul. This author writes

⁴⁴³ S p. 29

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 61, 54

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 55

Harry has . . . genius enough to attempt the quest of true manhood instead of discoursing pitifully about his stupid Steppenwolf at every difficulty encountered. . . . A man who can understand Buddha and has an intuition of the heaven and hell of humanity ought not live in a world ruled by . . . bourgeois standards. It is only out of cowardice that he lives in it . . .⁴⁴⁶

Harry cannot afford to honestly face off against the evaluative demands of the Ideal. Harry is clever and sensitive enough to have gleaned from philosophy, religion, and poetry that reason's demands are unbounded and incapable of negotiation. These demands are referred to by the *Treatise* author in familiar terms such as "supreme commands," and the "unconditioned." This author also alludes to them in his discussion of the enlightened person's "profound consciousness of the sin" of suicide.⁴⁴⁷ We cannot help but notice the direct references to Kant's moral philosophy in the use of this language. Hesse also refers to Kant as an enduring presence in his own library.⁴⁴⁸

A large portion of Harry's problem is that at some level he knows that he is incapable of living up to his own concession to the legitimacy of reason's demands. As we noticed in the first chapter, reason's demands for consistency are without any possible boundary and are incapable of considering any limitation as a condition of validity. Hesse writes about the difficulty of the individual person's encounter with the boundless.

for the first time one stands face to face with the true eternal . . . whose characteristic is . . . grandeur . . . I often stand [there] . . . hat in hand and wind in my hair, swept by the sounds and scents of my youth, challenged and examined by a world that sharply reminds me of what is past . . . The enduring always seems to look down upon the transient with superiority . . . I . . . find myself examined and appraised by the spirit of this cool . . . expanse . . . for our sort, us artists . . . our heart comes to the elemental and the apparently eternal, warm and full of love . . . yet [our heart] never receives in return from the eternal . . . any further response than just that indifferent, half-mocking glance of the great for the small . . . the enduring for the transitory.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 64-5

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 48

⁴⁴⁸ MB p. 93

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 237

The unboundedness of the "supreme demand," the infinity that is necessarily implied in the "unconditioned" dissipates to oblivion the credibility of any merely finite, that is, conditioned claim of sufficiency or adequacy.

Harry's acceptance of this fact lies somewhere between admittance and denial. Harry is terrified of the negative evaluation the supreme demand would exact on him were he to honestly submit himself to it. As we have noted, Harry has derived a great deal of self-esteem from his sharpness of insight. He has so long lived within the luxury of his assumedly elevated status, that it is hard for him to easily relinquish it. At some level, Harry has glimpsed the implications of the unconditioned, and the immensity of its threatened censure forces him to desperately grasp in self-defense for the extra credit he needs to believe he has amassed over his years as a purported martyr to the truth through aesthetics. How could he, thinks Harry, a man so obviously in advance of these pathetically obtuse war-guilty sheep, not receive a dispensation of some kind for his years of sacrifice and fidelity?

In other words, if I cannot afford evaluation according to unconditioned criteria, I will try to grasp, like a drowning person, at whatever else is available. However, Harry is also all too aware of "the elasticity of [bourgeois] ideals" and of the inherent descent into the flailing delirium of world wars that comes with them. Therefore, he can afford neither the ideal nor the conventional. Between the two he is left with the mere sham of asserting his relative superiority to the bourgeois. Harry might be found to say, "Okay, I'm not the ideal man, but at least I am not a goose-stepping participant in the daily progress to the next war." He is caught in between the two and he is therefore left to understand himself merely as a negative reflection of the bourgeois.

However, a negative reflection remains a reflection nonetheless. Harry must maintain this relative comparison to the bourgeois or risk being submitted to the unconditioned ideal for judgment. Since he is not one of those with the courage to wear the thorn crown, he is doomed to remain bound to the herd and its relative ideals. I am

constrained to any association that I require, regardless of whether it is a negative or positive association. Since the unconditioned ideal offers a principle that has no capacity to consider conditions, Harry is forced to slink back to an orbit around bourgeois principles, which are all too ready to entertain considerations of limitation and compromise. Further, this binding is one that must remain antagonistic. Therefore, he is doomed to remain in constant yet hostile proximity. His only connection to the bourgeois is in the role of the disassociating and perpetually castigating critic. He is bound to both adore and detest the araucaria shrine.

**Deceiver Deceived: The Contradiction of the
Steppenwolf and the Garden of Authentic
Subjectivity**

But who would live in such a condition consciously? Harry creates a mythology by which he defers admitting his true condition. Instead of shouldering the responsibility for his condition, and admitting his fear of the scaffold and thorn crown, he foists the responsibility onto the idea that it was not his fault that he has been born a contradiction. He was born a Steppenwolf and this has always been something out of his control and therefore not his fault. He feels that the Gods or the fates are to be blamed for his contradictory make up and he is to be pitied for the insoluble suffering it causes.

However, the *Treatise* author warns that, instead of alleviating suffering, it is Harry's perpetuation of his Steppenwolf fiction that results in the continuation of his suffering and desperation.

even though he thinks himself an artist and possessed of delicate perception . . . he cannot see that this whole world, this Eden . . . is crushed and imprisoned by the wolf legend just as the real man in him is crushed and imprisoned by the sham existence, the bourgeois.⁴⁵⁰

The author of the *Treatise* unmasks the steppenwolf persona with its characteristic of divided and fated suffering and reveals it as actually grounded on cowardice veiled in self-

⁴⁵⁰ S p. 65

pity. This author presents his or her image of authentic human behavior in contrast to this steppenwolf fiction. This author sees the human being as a creature who

designs for himself a garden with a hundred kinds of trees . . . flowers, . . . fruits and vegetables. [*Steppenwolf*] would pull down the most enchanting flowers and hew down the noblest trees and even regard them with a loathing and envious eye. This is what *Steppenwolf* does with a thousand flowers of his soul. What does not stand classified as either man or wolf he does not see at all.⁴⁵¹

What the author of the *Treatise* is getting at here is just how costly Harry's fictional mental self-manipulation is. This author warns Harry that "nine-tenths of this garden" is being annihilated under the weight of this deception.⁴⁵² In other words, Harry's self-perception as a divided soul, which hates and loves the bourgeois, is a contrivance made necessary by his inability to face "the scaffold . . . the tragic" implied in the demands of "the unconditioned." So much goes into the maintenance of the contrivance that not much is left for artistic production or anything else save suffering and increasing exhaustion.

It is important to note the similarity in Hesse's two references to an internal subjective world. In his essay on Jean Paul, we have noted Hesse's discussion of an internal "[c]haos, a world unregulated by any table of laws." There the individual was to "separate . . . good and evil, beautiful and ugly . . . afresh."⁴⁵³ The individual is meant to discover and author the principles of division between good and bad, beautiful and ugly within him or herself independently, like an artist. The author of the *Treatise* also refers to an internal "garden." Again, nine-tenths of this garden are annihilated by Harry's unfortunate yet intentional self conscription to the bourgeois. Here again Hesse provides us with an internal expanse. The author indicates to Harry that there is much more to him than he is presently capable of acknowledging. It is the introduction of external laws, Harry's requirement of the limitedness inherent in bourgeois principles, that prohibits even his awareness of this wealth.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 65

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 65

⁴⁵³ MB p. 122

Whether we are pleased to admit it or not, in our essential selves we are subject to an internal, immensely diverse and complex subjective world within which we are not permitted the luxury of predetermined culturally inherited laws or rules of interpretation or evaluation. I can choose to ignore this reality and import pre-packaged non-subjective criteria in order to accomplish an artificial order, but such attempts must always be revealed as synthetic fabrications, and in the end, a kind of plagiarism. This is because according to Hesse, it seems that the very essence of authentic human life is an independent subjective separating. The author of the *Treatise* follows Hesse's suggestion that the model of ethical decision-making is artistic creativity. The author of the *Treatise* asserts that "Man designs for himself a garden" with "enchanted flowers" and "noble trees." However, these are invisible to the gardener who imports and imposes a prefigured self-understanding and set of criteria.

Note the dissonance between the designer and the gardener. The anxious and insistent gardener plows under what the designer designs often without even knowing that he or she has done so. In fact, the gardener described here can be seen as a fictional self-identity that obscures the true and much more diverse and encompassing persona of the garden designer. The author of the *Treatise* might refer to this fictional identity as having contributed to "the illusion of the personality."⁴⁵⁴ Hesse is working very directly on the problem of inauthentic personalities born out of a coward's adherence to arbitrary social dictates. Hesse emphasizes this structure later in the Magic Theater where a cross-legged figure (analogous to the garden designer) plays with the chess pieces of various possible personalities (analogous to hewing gardener).⁴⁵⁵ I must slough off my dependence on this artificial personality and the principles upon which it is grounded if I am ever to achieve access to the true "flowers of my soul." If not, I will be left to live out my days in the irony of a self that is a falsehood and likely a valueless redundancy. I cannot rely on

⁴⁵⁴ S p. 60

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 191

another to divide chaos into right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. I must accept my fated role as the sovereignty by which alone an authentic division could occur. "To separate them *afresh*, to divide them *again*, is the business of each individual."⁴⁵⁶

Hesse gives a poet's image to the starkness of Kant's ideas. While it is true as noted in the first chapter that for Kant true moral decision-making must be fundamentally subjective and autonomous, it takes an artist like Hesse to illuminate this idea in poetic imagery. With Hesse we get the image of the moral agent as a fundamentally autarchic, purely internal garden designer who independently and creatively gives form to chaos. Hesse provides the image that clarifies Kant's idea of subjectively-determined yet objectively-certain rules of decision-making. For Kant and for Hesse, I must myself shoulder the role of artist and originate from scratch a life that is an authentically subjective reflection of internally intuited and discovered transcendent ideals. Hesse sees Kantian morality as the work of an avant-garde artist. In doing so he emphasizes what often gets ignored, that my own subjection to the unconditional imperative absolutely must occur on the grounds of my having discovered its authentic validity both within myself and independently, like an inspired author.

Hesse felt strongly that the authentic artist delves deep within him or herself to arrive at profound truths. Fidelity to one's internal access to a transcendent spirit was paramount for him. The artist who looks for the approval of the culture or who mimics the work of another was worthless to him. Hesse felt that as an artist, it was one's prime duty to give "an expression of my own essential being."⁴⁵⁷ In his own work he resented deeply "truth and expression [that had] been sacrificed to imitation and falsity of form."⁴⁵⁸ Hesse discussed this in regard to his own novels:

⁴⁵⁶ MB p. 122

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 108

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 111

And so I too without really knowing it had played the role of storyteller as the deceiver deceived . . . None of all [my] narratives . . . came under consideration . . . There was nothing to select. Writings in which I had once (unconsciously, of course) been most stylized, most disingenuous and deceitful, precisely these -- ugly and unsuccessful though I found them today -- were the ones that proclaimed the truth most loudly, revealed me most pathetically . . . precisely in those writings in those works which I had written long ago with the bitterest desire for pure confession I now found . . . evasions, concealments, and extenuations. No, among these works there was not one . . . in which the confession was complete and clean, not one that in which the expression had found its way to deliverance.⁴⁵⁹

We can see Hesse's own confession to having been the ignorant gardener who has diligently "hewn down . . . the thousand flowers of his soul," mindless of his own more authentic original design. As the 1921 Hesse considers "the sum of efforts, sufferings, and sacrifices that I have expended in the course of many years in the production of these printed books," the books that precede *Steppenwolf*, he starts to see that, having been the "deceiver deceived," the works really amount to "a failure and a waste. . . Pack up, my boy, and go home! . . . my writings had been judged and condemned."⁴⁶⁰ What was the fundamental flaw in all these works? "Mimicry"⁴⁶¹ and "rotten plagiarizings ill-gotten."⁴⁶²

The depth-intending artist is therefore sworn to attempt an honest and psychologically courageous expression of his or her own essential being, of the truth as one encounters it in subjective integrity. The polar opposite of this intention is to mimic, consciously or unconsciously, the work of another, or to heed the dictates of the populous or of convention. "It is common knowledge that no one writes worse than these defenders of decrepit ideas. No one plies his trade with less of decency and conscientious care."⁴⁶³ According to Hesse, the artist must not turn away from his or her "duty of prophetic dreaming and his [or her] service to the ideal."⁴⁶⁴ Hesse writes

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 111-2

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 111-2

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 110

⁴⁶² S p. 207

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 116

⁴⁶⁴ MB p. 62

The average citizen likes to compare the dreamer to a madman. The average citizen is right in feeling that he would immediately go mad if, like the artist, the man of religion, the philosopher, he allowed himself to become acquainted with the abyss within him. We may call the abyss the soul or the unconscious or whatever; out of it comes every impulse of our lives. The average citizen has a watchman between himself and his soul, a consciousness, a morality, a security police, and he recognizes nothing that comes directly from the abyss of the soul before it has been given that watchman's stamp of approval. The artist's distrust, [therefore], is not directed against the region of the soul but precisely against the border watchman's authority.⁴⁶⁵

We see here a clear similarity to the *Treatise* author's garden. Here the soul produces something and then the watchmen severely edits it. In the *Treatise's* garden, the designer produces only to have the gardener edit, destroying ninety percent of the garden in the process. In both cases the editor is a fiction masquerading as the true self.

Hesse is trying to make clear a terrible irony. My authentic self is being mowed under by a self I merely believe is authentic. However, this mower is the "deceiver deceived." It is a fiction produced out of my upbringing and my fear of exile. Harry expresses well what it can feel like to be exiled from the herd. Most of us recognize at an early age just how profound the insistence to conform is, and just how grave can be the punishments reserved for those who risk novelty of thought and action. What Hesse is getting at here is that these threats are so intimidating, presented to us so consistently and during such formative years, that we go beyond the mere adherence to the dictates of tradition and convention. We actually go so far as to develop and then inhabit an identity in relenting response to these conventions. I force upon myself a faith in this fiction of identity. The landlady's nephew suggests that Harry had been

brought up by devoted but severe and very pious parents and teachers in accordance with the doctrine that makes the breaking of the will the corner-stone of education and upbringing. But in this case the attempt to destroy the personality and to break the will did not succeed. He was much too strong and hardy, too proud and spirited. Instead of destroying his personality they succeeded only in teaching him to hate himself.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 30-1

⁴⁶⁶ S p. 11

The *Treatise* author refers to Harry as someone who

in his childhood . . . was a little wild and disobedient and disorderly, and those who brought him up had declared a war of extinction against the beast in him; and precisely this had given him the idea and the belief that he was in fact actually a beast with only a thin covering of the human.⁴⁶⁷

We can see here that it is out of this dynamic of fear and his personal history that Harry develops his Steppenwolf persona.

The Pain of the Thorn Crown and the Abandonment of an Occupied Identity

Hesse deeply believes that it is the artist's duty to risk the considerable dangers involved in serious reflection within the abyss and solitude of one's own authentic unfathomable soul. Anyone who engages such risk must be identified as mad by those who define sanity as the desired adherence to cultural conventions. The artist who refuses to risk this quest disqualifies him or herself from the role of artist. It is Hesse's more profound assertion that each human agent must disband his or her fear of exile and, like the true artist, must venture the boundless perils of his or her own inner abyss in a vanguard's quest for the invaluable principles of an authentic life. The truth looks like a harlequin when draped in the garb of humorless convention. Real art

is tired of always talking in the language of yesterday and the day before . . . it wants to cock its hat and walk zigzag. And our fellow citizens are furious at this; they feel they are being mocked and that their values are being attacked at the very root.⁴⁶⁸

This is why the "the bourgeois parlor [is] too confining" for Harry.⁴⁶⁹ That which the artist serves does not pause to consider the rules and sensitivities of polite society.

However, neither does it consider the threats that society has to offer, nor the cost for the artist. Further, what is true for the artist is an order of magnitude more so for the moral

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 41

⁴⁶⁸ MB p. 28

⁴⁶⁹ S p. 65

agent who serves the unconditioned. For this person waits the thorn crown, the scaffold, and the eternal.

What is crucial to see here is that it is the fictional personality that has to waken to its own status as fictional. If I am to realize my true authentic potential as the garden designer, I have to abandon my self-perception as myopic mower. But I must also be this mower while this abandonment occurs. As such I must witness the approaching disillusion of the personality from this personality's own point of view. This personality is therefore placed in the unenviable position of having to wish for its own demise. This may very well be beyond its capabilities. Kant's discussion of radical evil addresses this impasse. How am I to wish for my own overthrow? While I inhabit the steppenwolf identity, it is very difficult to imagine that it is a fiction, because it is by means of that personality that I am accomplishing that very thought. It is the steppenwolf who thinks, so how could the "I" of the steppenwolf not exist? This is how things must appear to that identity. This is only a slight manipulation of Descartes.

How can I overthrow my identity even while I remain this identity? The answer is, I cannot. If my identity is what I need to be rescued from, then I cannot be the agent of my own rescue. I cannot as steppenwolf rescue myself from the steppenwolf without remaining steppenwolf. This coheres with Harry's own dawning awareness of his inability to acquire deliverance through works mentioned earlier. Harry's identity will have to be abandoned even while he resists this abandonment with all his might, as if it were the death that it is. It is difficult to rationally imagine how such a thing could occur.

Hermine and Despair as a Breaker of the Will

If there is a rescue for Harry within the pages of *Steppenwolf*, at least part of the credit must go to Hermine. Harry meets Hermine at a very specific point in his own awakening. He enters the Black Eagle at exactly the point during which he has come to the realization that he can neither continue living nor commit suicide. He is strung between the poles of bottomless humiliation and mortal terror such that "each succeeding day [he]

would again face despair heightened by self-contempt."⁴⁷⁰ Let us recall that Harry has in part been led to this position as a result of having recognized the truly humiliating and terrible inadequacy of his powers, poetic and otherwise, to offer any serious resistance to the bourgeois-borne approach of the next war.

However, despair can be a great opportunity even though it is seldom recognized as such while one is suffering it. Hesse believes that despair has the capacity to, among other things, open one's eyes to the subtleties in the works of Dostoyevsky, about whom Hesse writes

The time to read Dostoyevsky is when we are miserable, when we have suffered to the limits of our capacity for suffering and feel the entirety of life as a single searing wound, when we breathe despair and died the death of the hopeless. Staring from afar into life, bereft and crippled by misery and no longer able to understand life in its wild, beautiful cruelty, wishing to have no more to do with it, then we are open to the music of this terrifying and magnificent writer. Then we are no longer onlookers, no longer epicures and judges; . . . then we can first experience the marvelous meaning in his terrifying and so often hellish world.⁴⁷¹

Hesse is asserting that desperation can open a person to hear, see, and read things in fundamentally different ways. Before I am submitted to the pressures of despair, "inertia . . . self interest . . . vanity" are likely still to have a great influence on me, even if I wish to believe I have long ago thrown off those dependencies.⁴⁷² Despair is stronger than self-interest and vanity, two of the things that strongly contribute to the maintenance of the Harry's steppenwolf fiction. Despair can afford me the ability to consider things that would have been disregarded under the rule and watch of self interest and vanity. Hesse writes

despair, the suffering of evil, submission and nonresistance to the cruel, bloody harshness and ambiguity of all human existence . . . The candor and bluntness of the admission that our existence and humanity are a miserable, doubtful, and perhaps hopeless affair . . . We must give ourselves up to suffering, surrender to

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 84

⁴⁷¹ MB p. 133

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 134

See also Tolstoy "At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life . . . But this passed and I went on living as before."

death, our eyeballs must congeal at the unconcealed, hellish grin of naked reality . . . [Dostoyevsky's work] affirms death, denies hope, forgoes all the intellectual and poetic forbearance and reassurance with which we are accustomed to allow agreeable poets to soothe and deceive us about the danger and the horror of human existence.⁴⁷³

Hesse is arguing that despair is the only thing strong enough to destabilize an established identity. Anything soothing and compassionate cannot offer this strength. The identity I carry with me as I approach despair is headed to its death. I, as this identity, have an intimation of this. Therefore I, as I remain this identity, instinctively avoid and resist this progress while I anxiously look for hope of alternatives. Therefore, this identity needs that which "affirms death [and] denies hope."⁴⁷⁴

As we follow Harry through this transition we must concede that conceptually it is very delicate. For example, according to what has just been asserted, if Harry is to have any hope at all, it must be that he is denied even the possibility of hope. Hope requires "submission and nonresistance" to the destiny of hopelessness. This is only an apparent contradiction. It only appears as a contradiction from the point of view of the fictional and illusory yet operational personality.

Harry is definitely facing a despair of some sort, but it is not yet strong enough to drive him through the transition that awaits him. He cannot even find the courage to perform his own wish for bodily suicide. However, his despair is strong enough to give him ears to hear input from Hermine. It is important to notice that Hermine is most likely a prostitute. We are informed that she makes her own living and does so sometimes as a typist. As we have noted earlier, Harry is a bit of a classist snob whether or not he likes to acknowledge this. As the *Treatise* author observed, he is not accustomed to imagining members of the servant class as on his own level. Therefore, how is it that Harry now decides to enter into a conversation with her? It is his fear driven by his despair. He is so afraid of the "razor" that he opened himself to literally any other alternative.

⁴⁷³ MB p. 134

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 134

Notice that the first thing Harry does regarding Hermine is ask her permission. He asks "May I? . . . I'll stay here with you if you'll let me. No, I can't go back home."⁴⁷⁵ We can see in this already someone who is relinquishing his warrant for social criticism and judgment, his role as elite and elect authority. Instead of distributing criticism from the removed and indubitable judge's perch, here Harry is now regarding another as in charge. Hermine recognizes this immediately, commenting "I wouldn't mind betting that it's a long while since you had to obey any one."⁴⁷⁶ Harry has fully played out a set of assumptions and has arrived at a dead end. Despair is unlike any other self-criticism in that it refuses to allow for reconsiderations or reassessments. Despair, the giving up of hope, is proof to me that my previous thought patterns are and have been bankrupt. Previous reconsiderations have proven fruitless because it was by means of them that I have been led back to this despair, this hopelessness and meaninglessness. A necessary ingredient in serious despair is my eventual, originally resisted, acquiescence to the acknowledgment of the failure of all my numerous best efforts to resist despair. Such a submission is a fundamental, terrifying and profound humiliation. The best of my own efforts have failed to stave off what I would most like to resist. This despair is marked and identified by its capacity to convince my current identity, by means of multitudinous failed attempts at escape, that there is and can be no possible escape.

The will is broken in its compelled recognition of its own incapacity for self-sufficiency. Harry's willingness, even desire, to listen to and to be led by Hermine could happen under no other circumstance. Up until this point Harry had languished long under his presumption of his rightful authority as cultural evaluator. He had been confident in the appropriateness of his having assumed the role of final arbiter. Such a person finds it a duty (and perhaps a perverse pleasure) to frequently voice his or her evaluations and

⁴⁷⁵ S p. 85

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 86

conclusions.⁴⁷⁷ As Harry himself asserted, "Unfortunately it is a habit, a vice of mine, always to speak my mind as much as possible, as indeed Goethe did, too, in his better moments."⁴⁷⁸ As such, people like this have much less of a tendency to seriously consider other opinions, especially those that contradict their own. However, despair-born distrust of my own conclusions opens me by destabilizing my confidence in my own claim to authority or clear sightedness.

Hermine recognizes right away that Harry has suffered too long under the assumed responsibilities of authoritative critic. She also recognizes in his requests for permission that he desires the role of follower, submitter, the very characteristic he criticized so incessantly in the bourgeoisie. Hermine knows that his relinquishing of his certainty and his desire to be ordered is a sign and a promise of recovery. In response to his assertion that "life is harder" than suicide, she says "You'll see it's child's play. We've made a start already."⁴⁷⁹ To this point in the novel we have watched as Harry descended ever further into a torturous isolation and misery. In this initial moment of Harry's recovery, we are seeing the first hints of Hesse's counteraction to the seeming inevitability of post-world war meaninglessness, hopelessness, and blind absurdity.

Harry understood that

it was the unendurable tension between the inability to live and the inability to die that made the unknown girl . . . so important to me. She was the one window . . . she was my release and my way to freedom. . . I could not imagine whence she derived these powers, what the source of her magic was, in what secret soil this deep meaning she had for me had grown up; nor did it matter. I did not care to know. There was no longer the least importance for me in any knowledge or perception I might have. . . The miracle had happened. I had found a human being once more and a new interest in life. All that mattered was that this magic should go on, that I surrender myself to this magnetic power and follow this star.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ MB pp. 20-25

⁴⁷⁸ S p. 82

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 87

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-5

We have noted that Harry's despair was in part as a result of his own resisted admission of the insufficiency of his powers, his works. Here we see that Harry is regarding Hermine as a form of grace, an external and magical procurer and provider of the inconceivable. Hesse is clearly offering a twentieth-century retooling of Luther's salvation which is also preceded by a required despair.⁴⁸¹ Hesse even tips his hat to Luther on page 182.⁴⁸²

Harry, Jonah and the Hubristic Flaw

However, Harry's "rescue" from the spider's "web" of his own conceptions will not be in the form of a pure and unearned gift.⁴⁸³ There are more steps for him to take. Harry's despair, like that of Ivan Karamazov, is of the variety that shakes its fist indignantly at heaven. Harry believes that he has been dealt an unjust hand and is suffering unfairly for it. We have already noted that the author of the *Treatise* alerts Harry to this

⁴⁸¹Luther, Martin, *Christian Liberty*, trans. Lambert, W. A., Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1957 pp. 11-12 "Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability . . . for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it. Therefore, in order not to covet and to fulfill the commandment, a man is compelled to despair of himself, to seek help which he does not find in himself elsewhere
See also Romans 7: 7 - 8: 26 "Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin Apart from the law sin lays dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing that I hate So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from me from this body of death? . . . So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. . . . To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. . . . So then, Brethren, we are debtors We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have been groaning inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

⁴⁸² Both Hesse and Kant were brought up within the German Protestant tradition. The impact on their work of their participation in that tradition cannot be overstated. The influence of both Paul and Luther is indisputable.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 105

characterization. As a steppenwolf, Harry believes he was created as a contradiction, that is, as if it was therefore his destiny to suffer for no apparent reason. Harry reminds is of the biblical Jonah in that both of them are renters of rooms amid others who work for their lodging. Like Jonah, Harry tries to escape or relinquish the responsibilities of the prophet, even if it may be that this role is an inalienable aspect of his character. Both Jonah and Harry seem to have lost the ability to hold out hope for the legitimate viability of the prophet's task given so unreceptively stubborn and renewingly obtuse an audience. Both Harry and Jonah try to run from a seemingly ludicrous mission, that is, a mission that seems hopeless due to the inevitable deafness of those to whom the truth is to be spoken. No matter how loudly or deftly either of them espouses the gravity of this truth, they have come to concede that the common folk will ever only feign submission to the absolute. Due to this hopelessness bred of the pertinaciousness of the crowd, both Harry and Jonah desire release from a task the failure (and even impossibility) of which is predestined.

Just as YHWH asks Jonah "Do you do well to be angry?"⁴⁸⁴, Hermine says "don't make a song of your sufferings."⁴⁸⁵ Both men seem to feel deeply justified in their anger. It could just as easily have been Harry when Jonah shakes his fist and says "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."⁴⁸⁶ Harry's is a desire to commit suicide out of anger, not shame. Why present human beings with an ideal upon which all meaning is grounded only to have these poor creatures come to discover the impossibility of living up to this ideal? Why cruelly taunt the limited with the mocking glance of the unbounded? Why inspire musicians to an expression of the transcendent only to have the music squandered before obdurate ignorance? However, the declaration of righteous anger always assumes the possibility that things could have been otherwise. In order for me to be angry about how things have gone, I have to assume that things did not have to go the way that they did. I

⁴⁸⁴ Jonah 4: iv

⁴⁸⁵ S p. 89

⁴⁸⁶ Jonah 4: ix

always have to assume that I know better. Those who are righteously angry lean deeply into their confidence that things are not as they should be. In other words, this type of anger can only come from someone who has assumed the role of appropriate and justified critical authority. Lastly, unlike those who rebel against, for example, governmental injustice, both Jonah and Harry shake their self assured fists directly at the "Inscrutable."⁴⁸⁷

However, in order to legitimately possess this kind of authority, it would seem that one would need to have access to the whole of the cosmos, temporally, causally and spatially. Harry is stuck trying to square the human being's access to transcendent truths such as the supreme and unconditional demand mentioned in the *Treatise* with the human being's limited power and knowledge.⁴⁸⁸ Like Kant, Harry feels that practical reason cannot believe that the supreme command could be an impossible demand. Reason cannot accept an impossible necessity. It is a rational contradiction. Kant seems to rely on the idea of infinite progress in an eternal afterlife to rectify this seeming inconsistency, for Kant is all too prepared to assert that the categorical imperative is an impossibility for existing human beings.⁴⁸⁹ Harry does not have access to the whole of existence nor does he claim to. What he has is an awareness of transcendent truths which include the "supreme demand," a principle upon which human meaning is based. He is aware that this demand is imposed as an unquestionable necessity, and that it is rationally impossible to consider the impossibility of a necessity. In other words, "ought" assumes "can." He therefore assumes adequate human agency in regard to the ideal. This, of course, is his tragic and hubristic flaw.

⁴⁸⁷ IWG p. 77

⁴⁸⁸ Tolstoy corroborates this idea "we - men of thought . . . artists and poets . . . have the greatest influence. Our vocation is to teach mankind. And lest the simple question should suggest itself: What do I know, and what can I teach? it was explained in this theory that this need not be known, and that the artist and poet teach unconsciously . . . From my intimacy with these men I acquired a new vice: abnormally developed pride and an insane assurance that it was my vocation to teach men, without knowing what."

⁴⁸⁹ CPrR, p. 133

If I assume that the supreme demand is possible, I must then assume its ideal performance as the legitimate and authoritative criterion of human behavior, my own and everyone else's. Such a person is then destined to witness the world in its stark and maddening contrast to this criterion. Neither I nor anyone I regard can withstand comparison to the ideal. Since reason will not permit me to imagine the supreme demand as impossible, experience of world causes me to necessarily assume instead the culpable corruption of all human individuals including myself. This is the form by which Harry proceeds toward despair.

every person, would do better . . . to ask himself how far his own faults and negligences and evil tendencies are guilty of the war and all other wrongs in the world, and therein lies the only possible means of avoiding the next war. . . Nobody wants to . . . It has . . . brought me to despair.⁴⁹⁰ . . . [I] was given over bit by bit to self-criticism and at every point was found wanting.⁴⁹¹

Reason's demand for the performability of the ideal forces me to initially assume the sufficiency of my powers in regard to the ideal. It forces me to presuppose my own ability to actualize the ideal, and upon this hopeful prospect I build my own self-assessment. Since the ideal as unbounded is in reality impossible for any limited power, including myself, I am destined to choke on my own assumption of sufficient agency. Harry's despair is a fundamental human destiny. The brutal humiliation of my inevitable attempt to sufficiently perform the ideal is a rationally certain human fate for anyone who takes the ideal at all seriously. However, as Harry himself clearly demonstrates, functional denial is the traditional response to this fate.

It is the angry Harry that bears his teeth and upsets the wives of former colleagues. It is with angry certainty that he condemns the world and suffers it in resented impotency. In response to this certainty Hermine says, "You're a baby and you need someone to look after you . . . I never knew such a baby."⁴⁹² Hermine, like the *Treatise* author, confronts

⁴⁹⁰ S p. 117

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 89 - 91

Harry in a challenging dialogue. She does not let Harry off with sympathy and compassion as he has done for himself in his own interior monologue. She goes on to assert "You are no madman, Professor. You're not half mad enough to please me."⁴⁹³ We sense in this statement her awareness of Harry's ignoble compromise and the overestimation of his distance from the normal and the sane. Harry's desperate self wants her to be "like a mother . . . [a] mummy there to comfort the silly baby," but she will initiate and instigate identity-destroying questioning instead.⁴⁹⁴

Goethe, Death, and the Deliverance from an Occupied Identity

Harry is in a particular stage that is by no means unique to him, no matter how much he wishes to believe that it is. Hesse found that people like this, people in this stage are

striving for deliverance through works. [This kind of person] is regarded with awe and overvalued by the populous. The naive person always inclines to see a penitent as a holy man and one who has attained deliverance. [This striving], however, is only a stage and ends in despair.⁴⁹⁵

Hesse felt that only when this striving for deliverance through works "yields to grace, [and] is recognized as ambition, as busyness, as eagerness and hunger," can the necessary despair be overcome.⁴⁹⁶ This person retains some of his assumptions from his own naive stage and is likely to regard himself as something of a holy man. Harry is clearly such a person. A younger Harry would look on this current penitent, sacrificing Harry with "awe." In that some of this belief remains, the current Harry "overvalues" himself. Since he requires this assumption, he remains tied to the assumptions of the populous, as we have noted earlier.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 89

⁴⁹⁴ S p. 91

⁴⁹⁵ MB p. 190

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 190

Here, Hesse claims that the person who strives for deliverance though works is doomed and destined for despair. What I must learn to accept is that I will not earn deliverance. Since the ideal cannot be satisfied by any finite attempt, I will never find myself sufficient in the face of this ideal. I cannot achieve a perfect performance of the ideal, and so can never deserve deliverance. As a result, the striving ambitious "I" is not he or she who is granted deliverance. It is in spite of this "I," not on the grounds of it, that any deliverance could be possible. However, our Harry is still striving, still looking for deserved elevation, still yearning for acknowledgment of his efforts as far beyond the capabilities and contributions of the masses.

Harry is suffering from a contradiction. As we have noted, he wishes deliverance *for* his present identity even while the deliverance he needs and is destined for is one that is a deliverance *from* his identity. How can you rescue me when it is me from whom I need to be rescued? Who is the one on the other side of the deliverance if it is my identity that has been abandoned? This will be least clear and most terrifying to the identity that is to be overthrown. As we have said, this identity cannot look at this in any other way than as a progress toward an execution.

In order to do this, fundamental reinterpretations will have to occur. It is not hard to see that the arrogance inherent in the postulation of sufficient works must meet with annihilating humiliation. For this arrogance, annihilating humiliation is a destiny, a fate. However, in order to initially exist, this arrogance cannot be permitted to foresee this destiny. This arrogance must even regard this assertion of inevitability as impossible. An assumption of the impossibility of the inevitability of failure is a necessary condition of works-based arrogance. Therefore, the recognition of the inevitability of this failure makes works-based arrogance impossible to maintain. Harry's steppenwolf identity, the champion of transcendent poetry for which much has been braved, suffered, and sacrificed, has a works-based arrogance as a necessary ingredient.

However, Harry has refused to accept personal responsibility for his insufficiency in the face of life's demands. He blames the leaders, the mindless masses, and his own creator. He likes to believe that he did his best to distribute poetic intimations of the ideal, and that it is not his fault if the dullness of the populous dissipated his efforts. He likes to believe that he has been put into a terrible situation not of his own creation, and therefore he is to be pitied, thanked, and commended. He should be recognized and lauded for his majestic efforts in the face of such terrible odds for success. Harry likes to see himself as having raged mightily against the absurdity of his time and prefers to assume that he has acquired respect in the eyes of the transcendent because of it. He prefers to see himself as the mauled Christ rightfully deserving the mournful and loving care of his mother in Michelangelo's *Pietà*. Who could have asked for more, he asks, from such a dedicated son and servant of the spirit?

To this Hermine says "You make me laugh."⁴⁹⁷ Right away, Hermine refuses to take any of his grandiose pomposity seriously. She immediately scolds him and ridicules his postured austerity. Harry admits that "[s]he admonished me with the look of a governess of sixty."⁴⁹⁸ Everywhere there are images of Harry as a child, as immature. What does Harry have to understand or concede in order to progress to maturity? From what point of view does Harry still appear a child? The answer comes in a dream during which Harry is confronted by Goethe. This dream gives Harry the opportunity to criticize a certain issue within Goethe's poetry and life that directly bears upon Harry's current dilemma. Harry accuses Goethe of being

too vain and pompous, and not outright enough . . . Like all great spirits, Herr von Goethe, you have clearly recognized and felt the riddle and the hopelessness of life, with its moments of transcendence that sink again to wretchedness . . . the ardent longing for the realm of the spirit in eternal and deadly war with the equally ardent and holy love of the lost innocence of nature . . . this condemnation to the transient that can never be valid, that is ever experimental and dilettantish; in short, the utter

⁴⁹⁷ S p. 91

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 91

lack of purpose to which the human state is condemned -- to its consuming despair.⁴⁹⁹

In Goethe, Harry perceives a fellow sufferer in the meaninglessness of the human condition. Harry accuses Goethe of having acknowledged the impossibility of realizing the ideal, and of having been waylaid in the limitedness and createdness of the human body. Harry charges Goethe with the knowledge that humans are strung between two irreconcilable realities, between awareness of the transcendent and the exile from it in human limitedness, "the whole frightful suspense in vacancy and uncertainty."⁵⁰⁰ Harry then goes on to express what he really finds objectionable.

You have known all this, yes, and said as much over and over again; yet you gave your life to preaching the opposite; given utterance to faith and optimism and spreading before yourself and others the illusion that our spiritual strivings mean something and endure. You have lent a deaf ear to those who have plumbed the depths and suppressed the voices that told the truth of despair. . . [You acted] as though in your old age you had found the real way to discover the eternal in the momentary, though you could only mummify it . . . hide it with a pretty mask. This is why we reproach you with insincerity.⁵⁰¹

Harry wants Goethe to admit the inevitability of despair, just as Harry has or is about to.

We must acknowledge that Harry himself has made a slight advance here. He has come to admit the inevitable irreconcilability of the finite and the infinite. He has also come to admit that despair is fated for those doomed to adhere consciously both to the finite and the infinite as humans are. Harry is admitting, at some level, that limited works can never satisfy the requirements of the unlimited. No producer of merely limited works can ever earn satisfaction in the eyes of unconditional commands.

Goethe counters Harry's accusation. He first confesses that indeed he had too highly prized his own bodily survival, admitting his "struggle against death, the unconditional, and self-willed determination to live."⁵⁰² However, he said that he died

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 94-5

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 95

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 95

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 96

nonetheless, "as if I had died as a school boy." He also admitted that his "nature had much of the child in it . . . its love for idleness and play. . . so it went on and on, till I saw that sooner or later there must be enough of play." This last point is directed squarely at Harry, who is also guilty of having remained too long the child, just as Hermine has asserted.

So, Harry accuses Goethe for his lack of sincerity regarding the fate of despair, and Goethe counters by accusing Harry of being a child. In what way is Harry a child? We must return to his adoption of the Jonah-like righteous anger in the face of the Inscrutable. There we concluded that this kind of anger presupposes a legitimate alternative, another possible course of action that might have been chosen but had not been. Harry shakes his fist at God arguing that it was a bad and unforgivable idea to force humans to struggle with an impossibility and then eventually with meaninglessness. Don't taunt me, demands Harry, with "moments of transcendence" only to forever withhold it. Why is this childish? Only a childish fool bangs his or her head against a wall and then blames the wall for his or her misery. Harry's mistake lies in the fact that he has assumed the possibility of an alternative.

Death of the Assumed Alternative, and Art as the Light Cast from a Burning Phoenix

If it is the fate of humankind to find ourselves strung precariously between irreconcilable conditions; it will serve no purpose to cry about it. Goethe charges Harry to be done with his moaning and have "enough of play." Hesse writes in 1919,

don't look down on those men . . . [who] are prepared, [and] have an intimation of destiny, they are ready to face doom. Respect the spirit that lives in resolute men! Desperation is not heroism -- you discovered that yourselves in the war.⁵⁰³

Unlike the Hesse of 1919, Harry wears his desperation like a medal of honor. He has not yet come to recognize that it is not heroism. In fact his superior status relative to the bourgeois requires as much. However, Hesse writes,

Fate comes from God, and unless we learn to recognize it as holy and wise, unless we learn to live and fulfill it, we shall have been truly defeated. . . Love is self-

⁵⁰³ IWG p. 105

mastery, the power to understand, the ability to smile in sorrow. Love ourselves and our fate, fervent acceptance of what the Inscrutable has in store for us, even when we cannot fathom and understand it -- that is our goal.⁵⁰⁴

Hesse goes on:

Our mission, it seems to me, is . . . not to bawl like babies, but to recognize our destiny, to embrace our suffering, to transform its bitterness into sweetness, to mature through our suffering.⁵⁰⁵

What Harry has yet to accept is the possibility that there may be no alternative to the human trajectory to launch an ill-fated attempt at realization of the impossible. If there is no alternative, then only the ignorant innocent bemoans it. The only legitimate postures possible in the face of the truly inevitable, are either stalwart (even if doomed) confrontation or ignominious surrender/desertion. However, here what is asked is not the brave confrontation of world wars or the death of children, but the impossibility of ever living up to one's own ideals and the threat of meaninglessness that this imposes.

Hesse believes the journey out of the meaninglessness of the twentieth century takes this route. Given that a certain destiny is in fact inevitable, it is, in the end, immature and pointless to whine about it or be angry about it. In regard to this point Hesse discussed the German poet Hölderlin. As a result of this destined impasse, Hesse described Hölderlin as "the prototype of the poet chosen by God and stricken by God, blazing up in super-human purity, full of nobility and agonizing beauty, but . . . destined to suffer shipwreck."⁵⁰⁶ Hesse sees in Hölderlin one of "Humanity's honorable and hazardous attempts to ennoble itself, [those whose] fate is shrouded in a heroic, tragic atmosphere."⁵⁰⁷ Hesse goes on in reference to both Hölderlin and Novalis that

in [genius] human existence recognizes itself as a frightful mishap, a great and daring but not wholly successful cast of nature. Genius . . . enters the world for

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 77

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 107

⁵⁰⁶ MB p. 126

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 129

which it becomes the guiding star and goal of desire, while at the same time it must suffer suffocation from that life.⁵⁰⁸

Hesse is reinforcing the incompatibility of certain aspects within human beings. Regarding Goethe, Hesse goes even deeper:

with Goethe I have constantly been forced to hold imaginary conversations and engage in conflicts of ideas (one of them is recorded in *Steppenwolf*, one among hundreds). . . I felt [that Goethe's had been] the grandest and . . . most successful attempt . . . to reconcile the man of the world with the stormer of heaven. . . the irresponsible musical-Dionysiac enthusiast with the apostle of responsibility and moral duty. . . Obviously this attempt was not wholly successful. Indeed, it could not succeed! Nevertheless, it had to be repeated again and again, for to strive for the highest and the impossible -- just this seemed to me to be the hallmark of the spirit. . . he did not content himself with little goals . . . he sought the greatest . . . he erected ideals that could not be attained.⁵⁰⁹

For Hesse, the hero is not the person who embarks on a difficult journey and succeeds.

For Hesse the hero is the one who knowingly embarks magnificently on a noble quest that is guaranteed to fail from the beginning.

We might be tempted here to consider Hesse a fool or a romantic sentimentalist.

Isn't it meaningless to pursue the impossible? Isn't it something of an insult to the ideal itself to besmirch it with laughingly paltry and radically insufficient attempts to incarnate it? Isn't this attempt something akin to the "detested" gramophone that Harry resents in his "sanctum where he took refuge with Novalis and Jean Paul"?⁵¹⁰ Isn't Hermine right when she asserts "whoever wants . . . the heroic and the beautiful, and the reverence for the great poets and for the saints -- is a fool and a Don Quixote"?⁵¹¹ Isn't the acceptance of such shortcomings as permissible reactions to the ideal in reality a pathetic and inglorious compromise? Mustn't limited presentations of the unlimited necessarily resemble a "devilish tin trumpet [which spits] out . . . a mixture of bronchial slime and chewed

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 131

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 183

⁵¹⁰ S p. 115

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 150

rubber" as if it were the "noble . . . divine music" of Handel?⁵¹² Mustn't the mocking eye of eternity look on at all limited aspirations to the ideal as "distorted . . . murdered and murdering . . . ooze"?⁵¹³ Is not Harry right and must not the poet who recognizes this despair and slink off into anonymity?

The Awakened Posture and the Illusion of Intellectual Distance

Yes. This poet must despair. It is crucial for us to note that the despair cannot be glossed over or performed in half measures. The answer Hesse offers to the riddle of meaninglessness inherent to the human condition necessarily includes the individual journey through despair and hopelessness. There is and can be no other way. This is an asymptote to whose infinity one must submit.⁵¹⁴ Therefore, Hesse's answer is not strictly conceptual. In that it requires the subjective, individual, and real world experience of despair, it cannot be understood even slightly by a person who has not been down that whirlpool personally. Referring back to his thoughts on Goethe, Hesse writes

This wisdom of Goethe's, which he himself kept hidden . . . is hardly even Goethean, but instead breathes the same air as the wisdom of India, China, Greece, is no longer intellect but piety, awe, the willingness to serve . . . It is nothing but reverence, nothing but awe at life, it wants simply to serve and knows no pretensions, no demands, no rights. It is that wisdom of which the sages of all noble peoples speak.⁵¹⁵

Hesse is here making the point that this wisdom, the wisdom spoken of in *Steppenwolf* as the wisdom of the Immortals, is not intellectual at all. This wisdom is perfectly invisible to

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 212

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 212

⁵¹⁴ See Poe, E. A., *Edgar Allen Poe: Poetry and Tales*, The Library of America, New York. 1984. pp. 432-48 Hesse's asymptote takes the form of Edgar Allen Poe's *A Descent into the Maelström*, as opposed to the form of the clever passage between scilla and charybdis. In Poe's story, the narrator's brother is borne "headlong, once and forever, into the chaos of foam below." Even though the narrator only descends halfway to the depths, his comrades do not recognize him upon his return. A full descent without return is required, not just a clever or skillful evasion of threats.

See also REL p. 59 note "between the relation of a schema to its concept and the relation of a concept to the objective fact itself there is no analogy, but rather a mighty chasm, the overleaping of which . . . leads to anthropomorphism."

⁵¹⁵ MB p. 187

those who wish to sample or peruse it disinterestedly. A person cannot simply regard this wisdom as if he or she were objectively or dispassionately reviewing a painting or a poem. This wisdom is not conceptual in form. Rather this wisdom amounts to a posture, an orientation of the subject him or herself. It is a situatedness, a manner of existing and an awakened point of view. It is not what is viewed from this awakened posture, but the awakened posture itself.

The intellectual who criticizes society takes pride in standing removed from the crowd and from the objects and issues he or she submits to his or her judgment. As we have mentioned, the critic of the bourgeois judges from an assumed height or distance. This critic is a connoisseur invested in his or her status as educated and legitimate arbiter of taste and justice. However, this arbiter always stands safe, in his or her own eyes at least, beyond the range of criticism. All are subject to evaluation save the evaluator, a vaulted position earned through his or her talents, education, sensibilities and sacrifices. When Goethe or Hesse presents instead a person who has the non-intellectual wisdom mentioned above, this critic must necessarily misunderstand this wisdom and then misjudge it.

This critic submits all else to judgment from a position that is itself safe from judgment. Such a critic takes his or her work seriously, perhaps very seriously as we have seen in Harry, and yet regards his or her work in something of the form of the wine critic. I taste the different wines, confident that I myself will never be submitted to such a test. As critic I must assume myself sovereign authority. Hesse's description of Goethe's non-intellectual wisdom reverses this pattern. Instead of remaining the enforcer of evaluations, I become the very subject of evaluation. I find myself submitted in awe to the identity-exploding conditions of the ideal. Instead of submitting the noumena to the conditions imposed by my patterns of experiencing (such as those described by Kant), I become the site, or object of a similar (but reversed) submission.

Man is not capable of thought in any high degree, and even the most spiritual and highly cultivated of men habitually sees the world and himself through lenses of delusive formulas and artless simplifications -- and most of all himself.⁵¹⁶

Instead of being the source of imposed conditions, I become the target of them. This is, therefore, an existential wisdom. It is not thought, but experienced. Hesse argues that this cannot be understood second-hand or disinterestedly.

In other words, this wisdom includes my having been personally and individually submitted. I cannot read about this in a novel or poem, I can entertain the thought from the safety of an intellectual distance. This is not one of those admittedly marvelous intellectual ideas that I can master for a test and then deposit like a great book on a shelf in my mind as if it were a possession or commodity. Such a commodity requires a consumer, an owner of an object. This wisdom cannot be commodified, it cannot be possessed. This is because this wisdom exposes the identity that is marked by even intellectual covetousness as always having been illusory. This idea cannot be shelved among other acquired ideas, because it is the idea of or the awakening to the impossibility of such a thing. The ideal is not to be possessed. The ideal perfectly resists any attempt to possess it. Hesse reminds us of this when Harry goes to see a movie during which the golden calf of Exodus, the icon of idolatry, is recalled.

I must come to discover myself irrevocably (perhaps even resistantly) invested, no longer the acquirer but the acquired. In fact, this wisdom is not a thought among other thoughts at all. It is the awakening to an awareness that intellectual distance is an illusion. As I approach this awakening, I am an identity that assumes itself to be a sovereign source of judgment. However, as more and more is submitted to this judgment, my own identity is eventually so submitted. I am horrified by this assault as a result of my illusory assumption of security as an elite and legitimate sovereignty. When this assumption of security regarding personal identity is unmasked, destroyed by the incompatibility of the

⁵¹⁶ S p. 58

finite and the infinite, there remains very little left of the identity which had originally approached the awakening.

The Difference between Art and Reality

The illusion of identity haunts every section of *Steppenwolf*. The author of the *Treatise* warns Harry of his illusory self-perception as do Hermine, Goethe, Mozart, and Pablo. The main stumbling block for Harry is that he thinks he has already questioned his identity. Harry preaches that others should "like me, [become] the critics of their own lives . . . [and they should] star[e] into the void as I do."⁵¹⁷ Harry has yet to really do this even though he is quite confident that he has. It is hard to address something I am convinced I have already solved. His mistake is having "insulted the majesty of art in that he confounded our beautiful picture gallery with so-called reality."⁵¹⁸ Harry has conveniently forgotten the difference between art and reality. Just because I am willing to face the abyss in poetry, that says nothing of my capacity to do so in reality. This is what poor despairing Harry resists admitting. Somehow early on he convinced himself that aesthetic bravery was a suitable alternative to real world bravery. For Harry, the impotence of art in the face of the world wars finally started to destabilize this assumption (as it had for Hesse himself).

Later in his life Hesse refers to Germany as that "which up to a few years ago . . . gave me moral justification for my work."⁵¹⁹ In this we can easily see that this justification is no longer applicable. The wars had been too much to sustain his belief in the power of art in the real world. As a result he is forced to admit that he is a

man who lives in an unbombed house and eats everyday, who has had his share of troubles and worry in the last ten years but has never even been threatened with violence, [and not] been through every kind of suffering."⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 78

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 215

⁵¹⁹ IWG p. 159

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 140

Hesse also asserted about others and himself "I am obliged to reply that the only anti-Nazis I can take seriously are those who had both feet in a camp, not one."⁵²¹ Harry echoes this very idea, saying,

I began to perceive that this ignoble horror in the face of death was a part of my old conventional and lying existence. The late Herr Haller, gifted writer, student of Mozart and Goethe . . . was given over bit by bit to self criticism . . . and found wanting. The gifted and interesting Herr Haller had, to be sure, preached reason and humanity and protested against the barbarity of the war; but he had not let himself be stood up against a wall and shot, as would have been the proper consequence of his way of thinking. He had found some way of accommodating himself; . . . Harry Haller had, to be sure, rigged himself out finely as an idealist and contemner of the world, as a melancholy hermit and growling prophet. At bottom, however, he was a bourgeois who took exception to a life like Hermine's . . . He longed . . . to get back to those happy times when his intellectual trifling had been his diversion . . . Oh, the devil, he made one sick this Harry Haller! And yet I clung to him all the same, or the mask of him that was already falling away.⁵²²

We can see that Harry is himself beginning to recognize his personality as a fiction, an accommodation. We can also see that what brings about the dissolution of this personality is a recognition of real-world ethical responsibilities that derive directly and originally from his own thinking. Harry himself is starting to see that he afforded himself the illusory belief that his art excused him from the firing squad as the "proper consequence" of his thinking.

Just as Hesse had accused Jean Paul of relinquishing his responsibilities by means of an "ecstasy of thought and creativity," Harry had

been a bourgeois idealization of Goethe, a spiritual champion whose all-too-noble gaze shone with the unction of elevated thought and humanity, until he was almost overcome by his own nobleness of mind!⁵²³

So by means of great poetry, his own and that of others, all of which to some degree lauded the primacy of the ideal, Harry was able to cobble together an excuse for himself from the demands of this very same ideal. However, reading or thinking about the ideal cannot be considered just exchange for the performance of it.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 162

⁵²² S pp. 129-130

⁵²³ Ibid., p. 130

**The Problem of Moral Exemplars and Fantastic
Romancers - Enough of Play**

In a dream, Goethe admonishes Harry for taking "old Goethe much too seriously . . . you shouldn't take old people who are already dead seriously. It does them an injustice."⁵²⁴ Hermine also charges Harry to be careful of "human picture[s that] fall short of the original."⁵²⁵ The young Harry, like the young Hesse himself, took much too seriously his own image and adoration of figures from the German aesthetic past. He claimed to worship the transcendent that had been expressed in these works, but it is likely that he had also been the impressionable schoolboy all too ready to grant heteronomous authority to traditional heroes. Hesse admits this in an essay during which he denounced all of his writing preceding *Steppenwolf* on the grounds of its "mimicry."⁵²⁶ If Harry was, in fact, guilty of something like this, then he would have considered Goethe noble due to the poet's reputation for nobility, not for the actual self-evident nobility of his poetry. Kant as well acknowledges the danger of making heroes of ethical exemplars, warning that many will mistakenly worship the figure and not the ideal.⁵²⁷ If this happens, all hope for independent and autonomous ethical action is likely lost.

If Harry had, in fact, succumbed to the worship of the figure of Goethe and not the spirit that resided in that man's poetry, then his fidelity to art was merely a cohesion with and an assimilation to cultural tradition.⁵²⁸ The true disciple of the ideal requires the actual

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p. 97

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 100

⁵²⁶ MB p. 108

⁵²⁷ See CPrR p. 160-1 "the admired action . . . [ought not be done from] any pretensions to inner greatness of mind or noble and meritorious sentiment . . . One defeats his purpose by setting actions called noble, magnanimous, and meritorious as models for children with the notion of captivating them by infusing an enthusiasm for these actions. For as they are considerably backward in the observance of the commonest duty and even in the correct estimation of it, this amounts to speedily making them fantastic romancers . . . this supposed incentive has . . . no moral . . . effect on the heart"

⁵²⁸ S pp. 152-3 were Hermine asserts "it has always been the same and always will be, and what is called history at school, and all we learn by heart there about heroes and geniuses and great deeds and fine emotions, is all nothing but a swindle invented by the schoolmasters for educational reasons to keep children occupied for a given number of years. It has always been so and always will be. Time and the world, money and power belong to the small people and the shallow people. To the rest, to the real men

aesthetic appearance of the ideal in order to praise a poem. Most merely learn to parrot the opinions of school masters and then learn to practice patterns of traditional interpretations and analyses of art. The idealized portrait of Goethe which so disturbed Harry stands as a representation of this mimicry. In such a situation, my esteem for a poet like Goethe is actually grounded on my embeddedness in the assumptions of my upbringing, and not in the ability of his poetry to awaken me to the transcendent. Like Euthyphro I grant authority to the tradition to determine genius and ironically dismiss possible appearances of the ideal in the art. It is also quite common for such a student of the arts to aspire to and even covet eventual election by culture to this genius status. This is because it is not the artful presentation of the transcendent that is lauded but the mere status of election. Harry admits to desiring acknowledgment and fame for its own sake.⁵²⁹

In the same dream in which Goethe admonishes Harry, Goethe gives him advice from his own experience in life. Goethe says

I was in continual fear of death and continually struggling with it. I believe that the struggle against death, the unconditional and self-willed determination to live, is the motive power behind the lives and activities of all outstanding men. My eighty-two years showed just as conclusively that we must all die in the end as if I had died as a school-boy. . . my nature had much of the child in it, its curiosity and love for idleness and play. Well, and so it went on and on, till I saw that sooner or later there must be enough of play."⁵³⁰

Kant warns that in the end, either the instinctual will to survive must be chosen as the condition of ethical principles, or ethical principles must be chosen as the condition of the will to survive. There can be no compromise. The author of the *Treatise* emphasizes this and predicts and promises the thorn crown for those who select absolute ethical principles over survival. Only one of the two concerns can emerge as my "unconditional" concern,

belongs nothing. Nothing but death. . . . [and] eternity . . . The pious call it the Kingdom of God . . . In eternity there is no posterity . . . It is the kingdom on the other side of time and appearances."

⁵²⁹ S p. 130

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 96

and all else will immediately become conditional concerns as a result. To this Goethe tells Harry, our self pitying child, that "there must be enough of play."

Even if Harry had originally been drawn to Goethe and the rest of the figures of the tradition through respect for the tradition and the allure of fame, he had come, perhaps by mistake, to actually recognize the ideal and the transcendent in these works of art and music. Even if he had long labored under the desire for recognition within that same tradition through whose authority he had so admired the greats of the German tradition, he was now becoming obliged to recognize and acquiesce to the "proper consequence" of these ideals he had been exposed to and that he, at some level, had already accepted. Since he had conceded the primacy of the ideal in art, it was high time to concede the primacy of the ideal in real world actions or suffer the pains of conceded hypocrisy. The ideal promises neither survival nor the positive recognition of the populous. Hesse remarks frequently that the prophets of the ideal are often hung in popular disgrace only to be popularly worshipped by succeeding generations.⁵³¹

So, as Harry comes to confess his attachment to the bourgeois and his resistance to and pitiful denial of the implications of his own beliefs, he is beginning to recognize in shame that what he has long regarded as dignified selfless suffering has actually been nothing more than "coquetting with the spiritual."⁵³² Hermine chastises him and his desire for "heroic parts to play" and accolades that would come along with them. She claims that anyone who "wants more . . . the heroic and the beautiful, and the reverence for the great poets or for the saints -- is a fool and a Don Quixote."⁵³³ Hermine sees Harry here as a mere misguided masquerader wearing what amounts to only a costume of dignity, a figure whose targets of gallantry are illusions, and whose endeavors, therefore, are likely meaningless. Even Harry himself mentioned having played Don Quixote.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 62; IWG p. 81

⁵³² Ibid., p. 130

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 150

The Ideal Accepts No Excuse

This returns us to the question of Hesse's call to attempt the impossible. What is the worth in embarking on a quest whose failure is predetermined? Is Harry right when he says, "I had played Don Quixote often enough in my difficult, crazed life, had put honor before comfort, and heroism before reason. There was an end to it."⁵³⁴ Isn't there a kind of honest even if resigning honor in admitting the finite's disappearingly small capacity to address the infinite?

Goethe's answer to Harry is that even if this impasse is recognized and admitted to the depth of its implications, we are bound nonetheless to act and we are nonetheless responsible. The ideal accepts no excuses, not even the guaranteed failure of the agent. Destined failure is not an excuse from endeavoring to recognize the unconditional in action anyway, even though Harry has thought that it is. The person who has granted credence to merely relative cultural determinations of justice and honor, the person who has assumed the possibility of achievement of personal sufficiency according to absolute criteria, must come to submit to despair as a deserved judgment. When we are introduced to Harry, he is a man still embedded in cultural assumptions, which he is reticent to acknowledge as such, and he is heavily invested in taking stock in what he believes to be the considerable relative worth of his own sacrifices and efforts in the name of the ideal and transcendent. His desire for a door to another world betrays the sincerity of his belief in his deserved, works-based, initiate's status.

As we have noted, by 1919, Hesse is writing about an ideal man who "would change easily, he would die easily."⁵³⁵ He is writing about poets who would "realize in their own lives . . . the noble, splendid, ideal values that they set down in their works."⁵³⁶ However, this appears to be a call for a return to works. This is where we can finally come

⁵³⁴ Ibid., p. 69

⁵³⁵ MB p. 64

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 63

to understand why despair is a necessary step in the process. Regarding despair, Hesse feels "through this we must pass, this is our destiny!" As we have noticed, we are forced by reason to assume that any unconditional command must be performable. We assume that impossible demands could not be commanded by reason. An impossible but necessary command is at least an apparent rational contradiction. Therefore, the rational demand to accomplish the commands of the ideal inspires the rational assumption of personal sufficiency for that command. So, on the grounds of this rationally necessary aggrandizement of our own capacity, we assume the possible sufficiency of personal works. Along with this comes determinations and predictions of personal merit and guilt. Since this is a rationally necessary assumption (and therefore not a cultural one), it dies very very hard. This formal assumption is the very arrogance of the ego, which, because this assumption is a rational necessity, cannot willingly relent. This ego, born, in part, from this rational assumption, will always try to reassert its honor deserving sufficiency and will covetously yearn for the self-sufficiency and the independence of deserved individual merit. My ego forever re-initiates the desire to be recognized as having the capacity to infinitely satisfy the demands of the ideal on its own. My ego has no capacity but to desire to stand beside the ideal, having proven itself equal to the tasks of the ideal. This ego which emerges out of a rationally necessary assumption of feasibility for all rational imperatives, can never, as such, kneel in perfect humility before the ideal. This humility is not among this ego's possible choices or characteristics.

This ego cannot be trained to accept humility. Rationally bred of the ideal, this ego can only be subdued by that same ideal. An ego bred under the rational assumption of the possibility of its own deserved commendation cannot be the source of its own mortification. Its very form is to resist such an admission. It is driven by both the self-evident primacy of the ideal and its own rationally-driven confidence in the sufficiency of its intention to realize this ideal. As a result of this ego's concession to the unconditional ideal as the ground of all human meaning, it is characterized by what can appear to be an

unflappable tenacity. The self-evident authority and transcendent importance of the ideal instills a refusal to submit to failure. These are rationally ordered sequential steps and through them "we must pass, this is our destiny."

So, I cannot go directly to the recognition of my humility in the face of the ideal. To assume that I can is a mistake and a corruption. Only by way of the depths of the abyss can I reach the farther shore. A death must be died. I cannot simply choose to concede insufficiency. Further, I must be forced to do this despite my greatest effort to avoid it. The only sufficient concession to and expression of the unbounded ideal from the point of view of any limited creature is perpetually resisted and bitterly resented unflagging failure. The ideal which I find within myself has not ears to hear the confessions and prostrations of sycophants. The only failure sufficient to an unbounded demand is an unflagging intending-not-to-fail failure. This failure must be of the type that never relinquishes in its ardent intention not to fail. To try to avoid the suffering inherent in perpetual and yet insufficient endeavor by means of verbal, artistic or intellectual admission or concession of my own insufficiency is a failure to truly esteem the ideal as unconditional. If I come to see the ideal as surpassing all in meaning and value, how can an admission of finite insufficiency release me from a nonetheless continuous effort to attempt it?

'What ought we do?' you ask me. . . 'what action ought we perform?' -- this question of an anxious child, shows me how little you know of action. . . . An action is a light that shines from a good sun . . . A true action is not the same as "doing something," a true action cannot be cogitated and contrived . . . What you call action is running-away from pain, a not-wanting-to-be-born, a flight from suffering!⁵³⁷

Despair is not an excuse. Harry, and Hesse with him, were forced to choke on the weakness of their efforts literally and artistically regarding both aspects of their own lives and the broader context of world wars. It seems like a common-sense decision to relent when an effort has been exposed as hopeless. An effort that is maintained even after it has been revealed as impossible can even be regarded as disrespectful to the honor of the

⁵³⁷ IWG pp. 97-9

original intention. It can also be seen as the actions of an insane person. But what is one to do in the recognition of insurmountable impotence? What ought we do? Harry decides to retreat to his attic and wallow in self-pity amid the deceased flag bearers of the ideal. To this Goethe says "enough of play."

What Then Must We Do? A New Ideal

So what then do we do? How should play and idle self pity be ended? What action would be suitable to the worshipped ideal? The Goethe of Harry's dream answers by asking what then of "the *Magic Flute* of Mozart? . . . The Magic Flute presents life to us as a wondrous song. It honors our feelings, transient, as they are, as something eternal and divine. . . It preaches optimism and faith."⁵³⁸ In a late essay Hesse wrote

our heart comes to the eternal . . . and . . . receives in return from the eternal . . . that indifferent, half-mocking glance of the great for the small . . . the enduring for the transitory. Until we, be it in defiance or submission, in pride or despair, oppose speech to muteness, the temporal and the mortal to the eternal, and the feeling of smallness and transitoriness becomes the both proud and desperate consciousness of man . . . and behold, our impotence is broken . . . we . . . oppose . . . to her apparent eternity . . . our knowledge of death . . . our hearts capable of suffering.⁵³⁹

Hesse seems to be preaching a reengagement with the demands of the unbounded ideal even after the impossibility of my sufficiency to it has been guaranteed. With this it becomes more apparent why the magic theater can only be for the mad.

But this cannot be done indiscriminately without risking absurdity. How does limit legitimately "oppose" the limitless? For this we must return to Hesse's beautiful formulation of autonomous ethical decision-making as the artistic and creative endeavor of a subconscious garden designer. Harry's persona as the steppenwolf is based on many of the assumptions we have been addressing, and includes his required attachment to the bourgeois, his culturally based deification of heroes of the German artistic tradition, and his assumption of the commendability of works as sufficient. If Harry is going to stop

⁵³⁸ S p. 96

⁵³⁹ MB pp. 236-7

unknowingly destroying aspects of his own authentic personhood by means of a fictional persona grounded on these assumptions (even while he remains this persona, at least at the outset), he will have to be forced to start considering a "new ideal."⁵⁴⁰

Hesse acknowledges that every person, even the despairing one, "has a primal need to recognize some meaning in his life, and when he no longer finds any, morality disappears and private life is characterized by widely heightened egotism and profound fear of death."⁵⁴¹ The wildly egotistical and death-fearing Harry is indeed undertaking a search for meaning with the urgency of a primal need. What has led Harry to this meaninglessness is a personality or identity still grounded on or seriously reliant on his maintaining allegiance to the relative principles of his upbringing. Hesse asserts that from this allegiance must be made a fundamental break with tradition, "a turning away from every fixed morality and ethic in favor of a universal understanding, a universal validation, a new dangerous, terrifying sanctity."⁵⁴² But this man is seen as a criminal by the "convinced supporters of tradition, the loyal admirers of a noble, sacrosanct form of culture, the knights of established morality."⁵⁴³ Harry is all too ready to agree that the normals see him as this dangerous iconoclast. What he is not immediately prepared for is that he himself is among these knights of the sacrosanct. In fact, as we have said, his identity depends on this inclusion among the elite. To really submit it to questioning and revolt would be to run his own identity through. Afraid to fall on his sword, we have seen that Harry chooses instead to settle for a compromise rather than face the scaffold.

However, it is a "trifling suicide" that is required, just as Pablo calmly informs Harry upon entrance to the magic theater.⁵⁴⁴ Kant discusses at length the autonomy of

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 72

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 138

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 71

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 76

⁵⁴⁴ S p. 177

ethical decision-making grounded on the rational ideal, but he does not really elaborate on the psychological cost of such an endeavor. This is Hesse's job. Autonomy requires the abandonment of heteronomy and everything upon which it is grounded. If I myself am to be responsible not only for my actions but also for the reasons and therefore principles of my actions, I must independently assume the responsibility of original discovery of these principles.

Hesse asserts that behind our perhaps illusory personalities is a larger self, a self referred to in the *Treatise* as the garden designer. The true expressions of this gardener are viciously and ignorantly pruned by a personality who acts as the watch guard and enforces heteronomous principles and traditions out of habit, upbringing, momentum or fear of the unknown. Since Harry has had an "inkling" of the garden designer, it is primarily the last of these that binds him. This larger garden-designing self (alternatively referred to by Hesse as conscience) is not afraid of the treats of cultural censures. It is only concerned with the integrity of its design. This is Hesse's artful expression of Kant's pure practical reason. My fictional surface identity gives conditions to my deeper rational self. However, my deeper rational self refuses submission to conditions and rebels, though perhaps unconsciously. Thus the battle is met. This is the source Harry's self-perception as antagonistic wolf and man. We might even suggest that Hermine, Goethe, Pablo, Mozart and the immortals are all interior personifications of this deeper broader ego-transcending self. They are the voice of a yet-to-be occupied identity.

However, as the author of the *Treatise* warns, it is not as simple as Harry believes it to be. The surface identity, being a fiction, must suffer eventual dissolution or remain a farce. Should Harry marshal the courage to be one of those "who break free [and] seek their reward in the unconditioned and go down in splendor," he will have to overthrow the watch guard and brave the unknown.⁵⁴⁵ The challenge of autonomy is and always must be the abyss. As I leave the security of known principles, I must move in the direction of as-

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 54

yet-unfathomable ones. To so embark is to know that my own self-perceived identity will be annihilated, not to mention the known cultural penalties that are involved in the questioning of traditional precepts. But this embarkation is the ticket for admission. The autonomous person

demand[s] a completely new reality . . . he has much closer and more direct relations with the unconscious . . . He has not studied and accepted magic and mystical wisdom, not read and admired them, but . . . actually experienced them. He has not only had strange and magnificent thoughts and inspirations but more than once he has stood at the magic threshold where everything is affirmed . . . for [this person] the highest reality . . . is the magical experience of the reversibility of all fixed rules.⁵⁴⁶

If you wish and aspire to autonomous rule, all inherited rules must be seen as relative and therefore relinquishable. All of them. This is in part the reason why Pablo invites Harry to a magic theater where all rules can be reversed and then reversed again. This is why Harry had to go through the magical theater experience of indiscriminate killing, for example, such that he could know "that no tamer of beasts, no general, no insane person could hatch a thought or a picture that I could not match myself with one every bit as frightful, every bit as savage and wicked, as crude and stupid."⁵⁴⁷ Many of us base our self-understandings on perpetuated fictions of character. We like to believe that we could never become a Nazi or a slave owner. Ironically, it is just such an assumption and just such arrogance that most often gives rise to just such irredeemable atrocities.

The one who aspires to autonomy must submit to the unknown and to the possibility of every possibility.

The future is uncertain, but the road here is unambiguous. It means spiritual revaluation. It . . . calls for "magical" thinking, the acceptance of chaos. Return to the incoherent, to the unconscious, to the formless . . . so that we can reorient ourselves, hunt out, at the root of our being, forgotten instincts and possibilities of development to be able to undertake a new creation.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ MB pp. 89-91

⁵⁴⁷ S p. 196

⁵⁴⁸ MB p. 92

I must be like Abraham and leave the comfort of the accepted traditions of my fathers and brave the chaos and the wilderness, if I am to originate autonomous and still self-evidently valid principles from within myself. And I must walk away alone.

No program can teach us to find this road, no revolution can thrust open the gates to it. Each one walks this way alone, each by himself. Each of us must once for an instant in his life experience within himself the same sort of thing . . . as Dostoevsky himself experienced in those moments when he stood face to face with execution and from which he emerged with the prophet's gaze.⁵⁴⁹

So, Hesse fleshes out Kant's journey into the implications of practical reason, arguing that the quest for autonomy of thought and action is fraught with challenges and terrors. Few decide to brave it. In order to see the universal principles of practical reason for oneself, one has to allow for the possible exile from the traditions of one's upbringing, both internally and externally. I must be prepared to really relinquish deeply held traditional beliefs. However, if I can accomplish this, I can encounter the "universal." The legitimacy of the categorical imperative has to be personally experienced and determined. My submission to it has to have occurred in the rarefied air of freedom, away from the determining influence of culture and tradition. I must myself intend to shoulder the imperative's duties on the grounds of my own realizations. If this principle is accepted on the grounds of any authority, if in some way I take someone's or something's word for it, this then bears no resemblance whatsoever to Kant's idea.

Conscience, Grace, and Homecoming

What is this prophet's gaze? What has the executioner to do with it? As we have said, Harry is already aware that "he had not let himself be stood up against a wall and shot, as would have been the proper consequence of his way of thinking."⁵⁵⁰ Harry had probably encountered the moral imperative himself even before we had met him. The author of the *Treatise* says as much. But he is not ready to submit himself to the "proper consequences" of his thoughts. This is in part due to his ego's resistance to annihilation.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 92

⁵⁵⁰ S p. 129

We have discussed how the ego must so resist as part of the process Hesse is describing. The ego, which for Harry is his steppenwolf identity, also named Harry in the novel, cannot long for or intend its own destruction. It must be forced to its destination from an outside source (or what must at least appear to be an outside source). To this end we have discussed the form of grace. We have also discussed the power of despair to awaken a person to see and consider things in heretofore impossibly new ways.

With this we are prepared to turn to Hesse's concept of conscience. We have already noted that there are clues to suggest that Harry may have been the author of the *Treatise*. That author is the one who introduced us to the antagonistic interaction between the garden designer and the doltishly mowing gardener. Later Harry himself considers

Was it not perhaps I who made him talk, spoke, indeed, with his voice? Was it not, too, my own soul that contemplated me out of his black eyes like a lost and frightened bird, just as it had out of Hermine's gray ones?⁵⁵¹

At this point of the novel, it becomes very difficult for the reader to discriminate between what the author intends for us to think of as fantasy and what is to be thought of as reality. As readers we also have the tendency to begin to "confound [this] beautiful picture gallery with so-called reality."⁵⁵² Hesse is permitting us on some level at least to consider the possibility that this whole drama took place within Harry's own interior thoughtscape. Hermine's name even suggests this in its obvious relation to Hesse's own first name. Given the idea that the garden designer and the garden mower are in such different stages of awakening and awareness, it only stands to reason to portray this interior process in the form of a number of different, seemingly independent though interrelated characters.

If all these characters are actually aspects of Harry's own abysmal interiority, then the grace-like changes, that which appeared to Harry's identity as outwardly instigated

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 174 See also S p. "But on my way . . . I thought if what Hermine had said. It seemed to me that it was not, perhaps, her own thoughts but mine. She had read them like a clairvoyant, breathed them in and given them back, so that they had a form of their own and came back to me as something new."

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 215

aspects or agents of change, would only appear (or have to appear) external from that identity's point of view. Hesse asserts that in Dostoyevsky's work

two forces grip us. Out of alternation and opposition of two elements and antipoles there grow the mythic depths and vast spaciousness of [Dostoyevsky's] music.

The one is despair, the suffering of evil, submission and nonresistance to the cruel, bloody harshness and ambiguity of all human existence. This death must be died, this hell must be traversed before the other, the heavenly voice of the master, can really reach us. . . We must give ourselves up to suffering, surrender to death . . .

This first voice affirms death, denies hope . . . but the second voice . . . shows us on its other heavenly side a different reality, a different essence: the conscience of man. Let human life be all war and suffering, baseness and horror -- in addition there is something else: man's conscience, his ability to put himself in opposition to God. There is no doubt that conscience leads us through suffering and fear of death and misery and guilt, but it also guides us out of unbearable lonely meaninglessness and into relationship with significance, with essence, with the eternal . . . Hard is the road that leads man to his conscience.⁵⁵³

Harry as indwelling and abysmal garden designer is taking the much more limited identity of Harry, the steppenwolf, through a series of experiences and awakenings. As I have said, these are not steps that can be skipped. These awakenings are not thoughts or concepts, but amount to a wisdom based on experience. In order to open to this wisdom, it is not enough to understand guilt and despair, I must be in guilt and despair. It is the thinking arrogant ego that must be practically subdued for the entire subject to open to wisdom. The gatekeeper must be gagged, in order for the unspeakable to be spoken. Harry recalls Hermine's thoughts as he speaks of this indwelling mystic voice as "like remembrance, like homesickness, or like remorse."⁵⁵⁴ Hermine had said, "we have to stumble through so much dirt and humbug before we reach home. And we have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness."⁵⁵⁵ Hermine is suggesting that the wanderer's return to the personal authenticity of conscience can feel like a homecoming.

Hesse is claiming that we have and are subject to an autonomous conscience (certainly not to be confused with conscience understood as habitual and internalized

⁵⁵³ MB pp. 133-4

⁵⁵⁴ S p. 177

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 153

adherence to heteronomous dictation), which is the wellspring of the meaning of our life, even if we remain unconscious of its operation and presence. This mythic garden designer tries to waken the arrogant ego to its misconceptions for the purpose of allowing for the possibility of the unified individual's authentic incarnation and expression. But this can come only when the ego identity is forced to express its own insufficiency to an unconditional command by means of its perpetual and unrelenting failed and failing attempts to satisfy this demand. Surrender will not suffice. The only way the ego can be subdued is by means of its own ongoing experience of its own ongoing best and passionate efforts as they predictably fail in the face of an inconceivably boundless ideal. The ego is insidious and will reassert its arrogant claims and aspirations to its own rightful commendation, reward and merit should it be released from this impasse. If Hesse is right, the ego can only covet.

So, as coveter, this ego does not have my unified best interests at heart regardless of how sure it may be that it does. In arrogant and tragic ignorance, it mows down "the thousand flowers of my soul."⁵⁵⁶ So, in response, the conscience sends the ego the esteem that is based on universal principles. The ego swallows this esteem-sweetened time bomb only to eventually be muzzled in its own diminishing self-aggrandizement in the presence of what it must (but seethingly hates to) concede as an absolute incommensurate with its finity. This ego is forced to admit through its own insufficiency that these conditions of esteem are actually "forever unfulfillable demands."⁵⁵⁷ Hesse writes

Only when ego yields to grace, when it is recognized as ambition . . . as hunger, when he who is awakening from the dream of pseudo-life recognizes himself as eternal and incorruptible, as spirit of spirit, as Atman . . . without his ego being in any way involved. His ego has become entirely Self.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 65

⁵⁵⁷ MB p. 191

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 190

So this ego cannot be caged by means of will, for the will that would lead to such a caging would itself belong to this very ego. It will and can submit only under protest and continued resistance. Humiliation of its own powers is what can accomplish this. It must be forced to acknowledge ongoing and shameful proof of its own impotence to satisfy the unconditional. In the end it must swallow the fact that its only possible response to the unconditional is to present it with conditions.

Self Beyond Ego

As painful as this breaking of this will is, it is the necessary price of admission to the Self, and a blessing. Hesse writes

If the world of scholars, or orators and lecturers, of rostrums and essays was right, then Socrates was a completely ignorant man, a man who in the first place knew nothing and believed in no knowledge or the ability to gain knowledge, and in the second place out of just this non-knowledge and disbelief in knowledge had made his strength, his instrument for questioning reality.

There stood I, an old wise man, in front of the old unwise Socrates and had to defend myself or be shamed. . . man's surest possession [is] his poverty.⁵⁵⁹

Hesse here argues that it was his ability to admit his limit that gave Socrates access to his questioning. It is my limitations that offer me the chance of rescue from my arrogance.

Hesse believed that this ability to concede the truth of my own boundedness permits me access to an

experience in which language ceased and became nothing because for a terrifying beautiful instant, perhaps ecstatic, perhaps deadly, the ineffable, the unthinkable that can be experienced only as a mystery and hurt, the inner side of the world, looks at us.⁵⁶⁰

This awesome experience is also a "hurt." It can come only by means of a "trifling suicide," the death of the ego.⁵⁶¹

Referring to Dostoyevsky yet again, Hesse writes

I have said that Dostoyevsky is really not a writer, or is one only incidentally. I have called him a prophet. Hard to say what a prophet really means -- a prophet! . .

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 246

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 247

⁵⁶¹ S p. 177

. A prophet is a sick man . . . an invalid of the sort who has lost his healthy, sound, beneficent instinct of self-preservation, which is the essence of all middle-class virtues . . . This sort of sick man . . . is a manic, he is a seer.⁵⁶²

It is the ego that is the bull-in-the-china-shop gatekeeper. Of all egos, it is the one which has lost its instinct of self-preservation whose gate swings open, and thus becomes an audience for the ineffable and ecstatic. By means of poems and world wars, dances and dithyrambs,⁵⁶³ drugs, and magic mirrors, Harry comes to tire of his identity until he desires to be rid of it. Pablo remarks,

You have no doubt guessed long since that the conquest of time and the escape of reality, or however else may be that you choose to describe your longing, means simply the wish to be relieved of your so-called personality. That is the prison where you lie. And if you were to enter the theater as you are, you would see everything through the eyes of Harry and the old spectacles of the steppenwolf. You are therefore requested to lay these spectacles aside and to be so kind as to leave your highly esteemed personality here in the cloakroom.⁵⁶⁴

It is from this point of view that Harry is first able to begin to hear "laughter . . . beyond all suffering."⁵⁶⁵ Once my ego is safely locked in its unrelinquishable and eternal engagement with the unconditional demand, my selfhood is then for the first time permitted to identify with the garden designer, who had been nothing but perhaps a fleeting intuition or homesickness heretofore. It is the ego, not the Self, who, sensing the call for perfection (as yet unrecognized as impossible for the limited) through reason, who self-righteously and snobbishly demands fidelity and therefore detests the croaking gramophone or radio. The Self beyond ego has no need for merit nor can imagine greed in that it is of the universal, not the particular. It is this Self that listens merely for the ideal despite the accidents of the finite. It is this Self that looks with mocking and perhaps compassionate

⁵⁶² MB p. 84

⁵⁶³ See Nietzsche, F. *Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. W. Kaufmann, Random House, Toronto 1967 pp. 4,5,7,8,17,19

⁵⁶⁴ S p. 176

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 204

"amazement . . . at all this coming and going, all this indecision and wild zig-zag trail. . . [of] this Steppenwolf."⁵⁶⁶

Hesse admired "the fact that Goethe . . . rose by degrees to this highest point, to the peace above the maelstroms, it is this that has drawn me back to him again and again."⁵⁶⁷ When the Self becomes the seat of my identity, when I have risen above the chaos, and no longer identify with my ego-self even while I remain him or her, that suffering, striving, covetous identity stops being the purpose of my endeavors and becomes for the first time their means. Instead of doing things for myself I begin to do them by means of myself. In this state I can learn to "suffer with eagerness"⁵⁶⁸ and gain the courage to attain to the ideals in my life that I may imagine in my poetry. It is fear in the name of the ego that prevents it in an ironic attempt to realize a happiness that is made impossible by means of the attempt to acquire it.

So what then does one do? One returns to the attempt of the impossible, passionate, deliberate, but free from arrogance, covetousness, or desire for credit. This poet keeps his or her eyes on the ideal and not on his or her product. This poet aspires to aggrandize the ideal and not him or herself. This poet creates poetry now in authentic and awe-driven humble reverence for the absolute and the Inscrutable with no hidden and corrupting agenda. Hesse writes that he had been

the poet returning degraded and overwhelmed by the war . . . I saw no road for myself except back to poetry, no matter whether the world still needed poetry or not. If I was able to rouse myself from my confessions and losses of the war years, which had almost wholly shattered my life, and give my existence a meaning, this was possible only through radical contemplation and reversal, from a departure from everything that had gone before, and an attempt to submit to my angel.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 66

⁵⁶⁷ MB p. 188

⁵⁶⁸ S p. 148

⁵⁶⁹ MB p. 213

Such a poet returns to poetry, no longer under the corrupting influence of its reputed ability to save Europe from war. Hesse wrote, "The hour in which we raise questions is not a pleasant one. We see that we are weak, small, and corrupt; we are humbled, but not crushed."⁵⁷⁰ The humiliation of all works does not forbid the performance of more works. Humans are limited in power and time and so will make a mess of any attempt to express the unconditional in art or act. However, only hubris cares all that much about this. Even if we are humbled, this does not guarantee that we are crushed. Even under the weight of a radical confession of the limits of my powers, action remains a possibility, even a command.

The Passing Form of the Ideal

Harry refers to great music being played through a 1927 radio, saying "Do you really mean to inflict this mess on me and yourself, this . . . last victorious weapon in the war of extermination against art?"⁵⁷¹ To this Mozart replies.

Please, no pathos, my friend! Anyway, did you observe the ritardando? An inspiration, eh? Yes, and now you tolerant man, let the sense of the ritardando touch you. Do you hear the bases? They stride like Gods . . . listen . . . while far away behind the veil of this hopeless idiotic and ridiculous apparatus the form of this divine music passes by . . . after all it cannot destroy the original spirit of the music; it can only demonstrate its own senseless mechanism, its inane meddling and marring. . . When you listen to the radio you are witness of the everlasting war between idea and appearance, between time and eternity, between the human and the divine . . . Everywhere it obtrudes its mechanism, its activity, its dreary exigencies and vanity between the ideal and the real, between the orchestra and the ear . . . Better learn and listen first! Learn what is to be taken seriously and laugh at the rest.⁵⁷²

Harry as ego is mere mechanism that obtrudes his activity and nothing more than the mere vanity between the ideal unconditional demand and his own performance of it in the world and in action. It is the vane covetous Harry who needs to be laughed at so as to make a space for listening to what is really to be taken seriously. The incarnation of the absolute

⁵⁷⁰ IWG p. 121

⁵⁷¹ S p. 212

⁵⁷² Ibid., pp. 212-3

into reality must always suffer the pain and indignity of becoming limited (and perhaps even absurd paradoxicality), which is absolutely other than the unlimited. It does no good (and offers no homage) to whine about it, much less commit suicide over it.

So *Steppenwolf* is in the end exactly what Hesse claimed it to be, a book of "faith and believing." The poet and the acting human being must tame hubris through exposing it to the unbounded, and then go on writing poetry with the faith or optimism that the spirit, the divine music that exists in these poems only despite my own strivings and meddling and which expresses only my own senseless mechanism, can "pass by." Hesse wrote

I saw Knulp, Siddhartha, Steppenwolf, and Goldmund in front of me, my very brothers, my close kin . . . all of them questioners, and for me nevertheless, the best that life has brought. I saluted them and accepted them and I knew once more that the ambiguity of my behavior would never deter me from going on with it. . . I would go on playing my games and creating my figures even though all reason, all morality, and all wisdom spoke against them.⁵⁷³

The poet must submit in awe before that to which he is pathetically trying to do justice. The poet must in reverence, do all that is possible to lift the curse of vanity and cultural temporality off the spirit of the poem, or as Hesse's Mozart said, "[u]ntil they have paid the debt of their time it cannot be known whether anything personal to themselves is left over to stand to their credit."⁵⁷⁴ The ego must perish in the process of this reverence. This is "creative piety which allow[s the poet] to hold death of small account."⁵⁷⁵ Hesse is describing a fated tragic aspect to both real poetry and human moral action. He writes

Of course, real music-making . . . had nothing to do with virtuosity . . . it demanded anonymity and piety to blossom.⁵⁷⁶

Prior to the awakening that is the acceptance of anonymous piety, the ego culpably wishes self-aggrandizement by means of the transcendent. The Harry of the novel's outset would not openly admit it, but it is true nonetheless that he wishes and even acts as if he has

⁵⁷³ MB pp. 145-6

⁵⁷⁴ S p. 206

⁵⁷⁵ MB p. 132

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 147

gained elevated status as a result of his voluntary and considerable service to the ideal. He expresses and displays the ideal in his poetry, not for the sake of the ideal, but for his own distinction. He emphasizes not the ideal, but his acuity and skill in regards to the presentation of it. This is why he is so offended by Mozart's radio. If the music on Mozart's radio is an analogy to a transmitted ideal, then it is the radio, not the music, that is a metaphor for someone like Harry. Harry emphasizes the importance of fidelity of transmission because he knows all too well that he cannot take credit for that which is transmitted.

However, in transmission into reality the ideal can only be diminished, the infinite made finite. Skill of transmission cannot add to an ideal that is sufficient in itself. Therefore, any ostentation grounded on artistic presentation can only be a relative assessment. It cannot have its eyes on the absolute ideal. Art completed under a conscious comparison to the ideal to which it is dedicated can only ever bemoan its own "mixture of bronchial slime and chewed rubber" that had been hopelessly intended as an expression of the ideal.⁵⁷⁷ So, the artist aware of the absolute otherness of the finite and infinite will forgo even unconscious attempts at self-aggrandizement by means of the ideal. Such an artist (or ethical chooser) will instead aggrandize the ideal at the perhaps mortal expense of the ego. This mixture of awe, reverence, and unquestioned submission is the "creative piety" and "anonymity" that Hesse is describing. The ego, like a radio, can only stand "between the orchestra and the ear." It must in awe and piety (not in greed for credit), stand aside to the utmost of its capacity. Harry must come to admit that his only contribution in the attempted presentation the ideal within the real is the squeaking and scratching that hinders its reception. His Harry identity is nothing but the squeaking and scratching. He must be forced to concede in awe and humility to let the immortal in Handel come through.

⁵⁷⁷ S p. 212

However, we must recall that willing submission is never enough. The only sufficient presentation of the infinite by the finite is the obliteration of the finite in hopeless and doomed yet passionate and unrelenting aspiration. As we have noted, this pious anonymity through which alone the ideal can be heard is not one that is courageously volunteered, but one that is achieved only by means of the resisted and annihilating humiliation of the ego's best efforts. In this sense it is tragic. Hesse writes

In my light morning half sleep I encountered a holy man. Half the time it seemed as if I were the holy man, thought his thoughts, had his feelings; and half the time I saw him as another person, separate from me, but penetrated by my understanding and intimately known. . . the holy man suffered a great sorrow . . . He closed his eyes and smiled, and in this mild smile there was all the suffering that can in any way be conceived, there was the admission of every weakness, every love, every vulnerability.

But it was beautiful and tranquil, this faint smile of pain, it was sorrow, deepest sorrow -- but there was no resistance, no denial. It was agreement, resignation, obedience, it was knowledge and acquiescence. The holy man sacrificed and praised the sacrifice. He suffered and smiled. He did not harden his heart and yet he survived, for he was immortal. . . everything is a symbol and at some time perishes in pain in order that, as a new symbol, it may wear a different dress.⁵⁷⁸

Wrestling with the same topic, Hesse writes of this holy man that

he is man in the process of disintegrating and withdrawing beyond the veil; beyond the principle of individuation . . . he is once more primal stuff, the unformed material of souls. He cannot live in this form, he can only perish, he can only flash by.⁵⁷⁹

The finite must perish in the attempt to express the infinite in finite terms.⁵⁸⁰ The poet of the ideal, therefore, cannot hope to survive the attempt. It is in this spirit that Hesse himself becomes willing to "submit to my angel." It is in such a spirit that *Steppenwolf* is produced.

⁵⁷⁸ MB p. 58

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 74

⁵⁸⁰ S p. 153 "We are with [the saints and the immortals] all our lives long in every good deed, in every brave thought, in every love . . . It is the kingdom on the other side of time and appearances. It is there we belong. There is our home. It is that which our heart strives for. And for that reason, *Steppenwolf*, we long for death . . . Ah, Harry, we have to stumble through so much dirt and humbug before we reach home

Who is Immortal?

Throughout this chapter we have been looking at Hesse's ideas concerning illusory identities whose demise is the price required for a homesick and prodigal return to one's authentic spirit. We have looked at the arduous and painful journey that is required to reach this destination. To this end the author of the *Treatise* asserts "the power to die, to strip one's self naked, and the eternal surrender of the self brings immortality with them."⁵⁸¹ However, at this point we are forced to ask, to whom is this immortality brought? If my identity as particular is what is necessarily abandoned in this process, who is left to receive immortality? Who "flash[es] by?"

Earlier we observed that the author of the *Treatise* esteemed Mozart for his "immense powers of surrender and suffering."⁵⁸² This author described a "loneliness . . . around those who suffer to become men . . . which rarefies the atmosphere of the bourgeois world to an ice-cold ether."⁵⁸³ This author refers to this loneliness as that of "the Garden of Gethsemane." Earlier we saw that Hesse thinks of Gethsemane as the central scene of Christianity. In his discussion of this, he made the point that Jesus "intentionally and lovingly deceived himself" regarding the capacity of his disciples to understand him. For Hesse this Jesus is a brutally tragic figure, for he fools himself into attempting what he knows will fail and will result in his torturous death. How can someone willingly suffer torture and death for knowingly attempting something that is predestined for failure? According to Hesse, it is a "piety" that allows us "to hold death of small account."⁵⁸⁴ Simply, my awe and reverence for the ideal, my acquiescence to it as my own authentic truth, overrides my awareness of my limits (and the limits of my potential audience) as a condition. All that is finite, both within and without my person,

⁵⁸¹S p. 62

⁵⁸² S pp. 62-3

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p. 63

⁵⁸⁴ MB p. 132

becomes legitimate fuel for the fire. I throw myself into the fire of the finite/infinite contradiction that is the fundamental human characteristic. I perish only to rise resplendent, flashing by, a finite collapsing reflection of the infinite. It is the light of the burning phoenix that reveals and instantiates the transcendent within the bounds of experience.⁵⁸⁵

We must not misunderstand the drive toward this collapsing reflection to include a requirement of a spectacular death. While this sacrifice can happen instantaneously in the style of those who had allowed themselves to be submitted to the firing squad, this sacrifice could also require an entire lifetime to play out. The sacrifice that Hesse is trying to explain is one in which safety of any kind is abandoned for the higher goal of giving expression to the ideal. It is the sacrifice during which the "supreme command" is made the condition of the conditions of survival and safety for a material creature. Hesse felt that these are "humanity's honorable and hazardous attempts to ennoble itself, and their fate is shrouded in a heroic, tragic atmosphere even if the hero does not chance to meet a terrifying end."⁵⁸⁶ I attain the gaze of the prophet as I encounter the executioner because to do so in defense of the ideal is to have found myself (through the resisted process described above) identifying with that aspect of myself that esteems the ideal above all other concerns, that is, to have refused priority to material concerns for the sake of prioritizing ideal concerns. I find myself identifying with that aspect of my abysmal being that is infinite and universal, demoting henceforth all finite and particular aspects of my being to the status of means. The ideal is expressed as unconditional only when its unconditionality is demonstrated in the prostration of the particular. The cross demonstrates one man's ability to make ideal

⁵⁸⁵ S p. 35 "a refreshing laughter rose in me, and suddenly the forgotten melody of those notes of the piano came back to me again. It soared aloft like *a soap bubble, reflecting the whole world in miniature on its rainbow surface, and then softly burst*. Could I be altogether lost when that heavenly little melody had been secretly rooted in me . . . Something in me gave an answer and was the receiver of those distant calls" [emphasis mine]

⁵⁸⁶ MB p. 129

demands the condition of survival.⁵⁸⁷ This is why individuals who are in such a state, individuals with the "prophet's gaze" can only "flash by."

Return of the Prodigal

Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game* ends with the main character, Knecht, a name that means servant, resigning a most prestigious post on principle. Rather than continue in what he had come to see as ethically indefensible, he decided to become the teacher of a single student. During his first day with this boy, he dies in trying to perform what he had determined the situation to require. The narrator tells us

that he was engaging in the swimming race, was fighting for the boy's respect and comradeship, for his soul -- when he was already fighting with Death, who had thrown him and was now holding him in a wrestler's grip. Fighting with all his strength, Knecht held him off as long as his heart continued to beat.⁵⁸⁸

Hesse gives us an image here of ideas that Harry is only beginning to grasp at the end of his novel. Knecht fights off death with all of his might, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the soul of his pupil. He also risks the swim originally in the same spirit. Hesse

⁵⁸⁷ See Tusken, L. W. *Understanding Hermann Hesse: The Man, His Myth, His Metaphor*, U. of S. Carolina Press, Columbia. 1998. pp. 125; 127 Tusken sees Harry's awakening as one based solely on a change in attitude regarding how seriously we take life. Tusken asserts that by the end of the novel "Harry grasps everything -- He understands Pablo, Mozart; hears their mocking laughter; knows that all 100 thousand figures of the game of life are in his pocket; is ready to begin again to taste life's torments . . . As fitting conclusion to the novel, he might have added: "The Steppenwolf is dead! Long live the Steppenwolf!" . . . according to Hesse . . . life demands that we laugh not only at the distorted music, itself, but also how seriously we listen to it." Tusken's interpretation does not recognize the asymptotic abyss of despair nor the need to abandon the farce identity of the Steppenwolf that I have emphasized. Further, see p. 224 where Tusken quotes Hesse himself who remarked "It is something else if you call Knecht [Joseph Knecht of the *Glass Bead Game*] a Steppenwolf. He is the opposite. The Steppenwolf flees from a death of desperation by his razor into the naive, sensual life. Knecht, however, the mature one, leaves serenely and bravely a world that offers him no further opportunities for development". Tusken responds "At the time he wrote these remarks in a letter; however, Hesse was seventy-eight, and it can easily be seen that he is comparing only the as-yet unenlightened Harry Haller to Knecht." Perhaps, but it is certainly not clear that Harry has become enlightened by the novel's end. In fact, it may be suggested that it is Hesse himself, and his completion of *Steppenwolf* that the represents proof of faith and optimism, not Harry, who at the novel's end is only beginning to consider things from an immortal's standpoint. It is Knecht who dies easily.

See also Stelzig, E. L. *Hermann Hesse's Fictions of the Self: Autobiography and the Confessional Imagination*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1988. pp. 223-4 "On the verge of the legendary age of fifty, Harry Haller and Hermann Hesse keep the road open to continuing growth and creativity, despite all the shortcomings and multiple disappointments of the recent past . . . No, Hesse has not achieved the elusive goal of a harmonious self, but at least the "Steppenwolf" crisis is over, it has been lived through and written out, and therefore this spectacular 'incarnation' is no longer necessary or functional." Stelzig also does not find the asymptotic abyss within the pages of *Steppenwolf*.

⁵⁸⁸ GBG p. 424

believed that the true nature of the human being was as servant to the ideal. He felt that we must each throw off the shackles of our time and society (not to mention our limitedness of power, intelligence, and duration) in order to discover ourselves the prodigal and return, by means of our homesick conscience to our own universal and authentic priorities. Our own material selves and personalities must be made to relinquish their status as conditions and become instead conditioned by the ideal to which we are privy. As we have noticed earlier, Hesse felt "[i]f anything can cure the world and make mankind pure again, it is the actions and the sufferings of those who refuse to be bent or bought, who were more willing to lose their lives than their humanity."⁵⁸⁹

Hesse's Mozart and Goethe both try to get Harry to see that it is not the particularities of the immortals that grant them immortality. It is their willingness to serve the universal and the unconditioned "with immense powers of surrender."⁵⁹⁰ It is a sad irony that Harry worships the personalities of figures like Handel and Goethe rather than the glimpse of the ideal made possible by means of the very surrender of those personalities. We must notice that within the novel Mozart turns into Pablo. When the individual personality becomes, through awed reverence, the condition of the unconditional, who the personality is that receives immortality is of very little concern, because the entire act is performed in the service of and in reverence to the immortal and at the expense of and merely despite the personality.

For Hesse the majestic manifestation of the ideal in the real by means of the resisted annihilation of the particular in a flashing engulfing homage can happen either aesthetically or ethically. However, there can be no doubt that Hesse came to see the ability to privilege unconditional ethical demands as superior to and even the reason for aesthetic expressions. On these grounds, Harry will have to come to admit shame regarding his inability to esteem the individual members of the bourgeois. He will have to come to see that within the very

⁵⁸⁹ IWG p. 157

⁵⁹⁰ S p. 62-3

bourgeois individuals who fly headlong into another world war resides an immortal and transcendent potential, an absolute worth, which alone is worthy of worship and to which the categorical imperative speaks. His relationship with Hermine, if we can assume for a moment it was not fantasy, suggests hope for him on these lines. Hesse felt that this process can invite us to see ourselves as

no longer onlookers, no longer epicures and judges; we are fellow creatures among all the poor devils of Dostoyevsky's creation, then we suffer their woes, and we stare fascinated and breathless with them into the hurly-burly of life, into the eternally grinding mill of death.⁵⁹¹

The main point I want to note in this is that Hesse is emphasizing the central importance of empathy with "the poor devils." Hesse's *Steppenwolf* can itself be seen as a treatise from the immortals. It asks us to glimpse things from the vantage point of immortality, that is, from the point of view beyond concern for morality, suffering or personality. From this vantage point it becomes easier to recognize that the aesthetic virtuoso's only advantage is perhaps a facilitated access to (that is, a talent for glimpsing) the ideal and its commands even if it is at first an only semi-conscious access. Far from providing excuse from ethical action toward others, it might even suggest some additional shame for those who seek illusory exemption. The universal command requires all human beings to be regarded as equally important. By the novel's end, Harry has not yet come to this awareness. Neither his art nor his actions will ever live up to the demands of the universal, but it is the universal that is of utmost concern, not his squeaking attempts. Hesse's Immortals are trying to get Harry to see that Harry's own authentic conscience desires that his unified person should flash by in mortal magnificence performing resolute even if limping homage to an impossible ideal, and to do so in the style of Bach, Mozart, Goethe, and Jesus. They wish him to see for himself that only an attempt that consumes an entire human life could express and instantiate the eternal in the temporal. To see in this way is to see with the eyes of Hermine's martyred saints. To come to be able to authentically wish for this is to desire

⁵⁹¹ MB p. 133

in the spirit of the immortals, for it can only occur at the subjugation of once primary mortal concerns.

Intimations of Salvation

This is Hesse's promise of deliverance beyond suffering. It is the point of view of the eternal, a point of view from "a world unknown to men, a world beyond all suffering" from which comes "clear and icy-cold laughter."⁵⁹² The path through suffering, despair, and meaninglessness to an autonomous awakening and acquiescence to the fundamental and irresolvable contradiction of human existence, this path can provide us with new ears to hear the eternal as it impossibly resounds within the temporal. Hesse writes,

Hard is the road that leads man to his conscience. Almost all people all the time live counter to this conscience, they resist it, they are weighed down more and more heavily until they are destroyed by a suffocating conscience. But for everyone, at every moment, beyond suffering and despair lies an open calm road that makes life meaningful and death easy. Some people have to rage and sin against conscience until they have experienced all the hells and soiled themselves with all the horrors in order to finally, sighing with relief, to recognize their error and experience the hour of transformation . . . One does not grasp [aesthetic presentations of this] smilingly but only with tears and in exhaustion and sorrow. . . out of pure misery and lostness, something infinitely touching, childlike, and tender blazes up, an intimation of meaning and knowledge about salvation.⁵⁹³

There is no magic door to the realm of the immortals. There are only the hints and "intimations" left us by those able to offer the sacrifices necessary to allow us to glimpse eternal and universal meaning. Hesse acknowledges that in the past he had not been prepared to offer art born of such sacrifices and had therefore produced art that would have to be "paid for in endless purgatory."⁵⁹⁴ Hesse admits that he still, like Harry, occasionally slips back to the role of pedant. He writes that sometimes within himself that

the experienced music lover [would] protest against the pieces played and [then] the boy in me was thereupon impelled to remind me that I myself once in an earlier time had written a novel in which a saxophone player gave some pertinent answers to an irritated critic.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² S p. 204

⁵⁹³ MB pp. 134-5

⁵⁹⁴ S p. 207

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 152

Hesse is willing to admit and not forgive himself for his shortcomings, saying,

Among my books [prior to *Steppenwolf*] there was not one . . . in which the confession was complete and clean, not one in which the expression had found its way to deliverance.⁵⁹⁶

However, when he concedes that he is willing to "submit to [his] angel" and continue writing after his crisis and awakening, this is an indication of his willingness to finally offer a "confession complete and clean" as well as the suffering, humiliation, and pain it will cost. *Steppenwolf* itself is proof of his commitment to produce such art. It is itself proof of the faith he mentions in the author's note. With *Steppenwolf*, Hesse produces the art that remains only a hope for Harry. *Steppenwolf* proves that Hesse had come to empathize with us "poor devils" and did so to the full extent of his aesthetic power. We know that he knew that his works would be widely and absurdly misinterpreted. We know that he knew that art could not successfully overwhelm or confront the awesome power of the herd mentality. However, *Steppenwolf* proves that he is willing nonetheless to "suffer constantly from his lack of naïveté,"⁵⁹⁷ just as his Gethsemane Jesus had "intentionally and lovingly deceived himself . . . as though it were in actual fact possible to communicate his ideas to these people . . . these companions, the only ones he has."⁵⁹⁸ This Hesse rises out of the ashes of his crisis, out of the absurdity and misery of personal and public horrors, no longer invested in personal triumph or recognition, no longer the aspirer to aesthetic heights and glory, and no longer desirous of exemption or safety. This Hesse rises fully cognizant that continued pursuit of aesthetics will "consum[e] him from within" as the price of "an enormously fruitful death."⁵⁹⁹ This Hesse rises instead in the name of what very well might turn out to be the "fleeting comforting illusion . . . of something like

⁵⁹⁶ MB p. 112

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 128

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 87

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 130

comprehension" from among those of the herd.⁶⁰⁰ Hesse, drowning in the reality of a coming world war whose atrocities will unimaginably and obscenely surpass the stultifying horrors of the first, writes anyway. Hesse rouses himself, puts a message in a bottle and heaves it with all his might, care, talent, and skill into an ocean of absurdity. Hesse, no longer the aspirant, writes for "these good people about whom [he, like] Jesus[,] had again and again . . . shared his thoughts . . . as though they could understand him."⁶⁰¹ Hesse counters chaos and meaninglessness with faith and hope, for he had come to see through personal annihilation that even a doomed attempt to privilege and perform an unaccomplishable ideal reflects the ideal even as it crashes miserably in failure. Hesse explains that after "atrocities . . . had been brought home to me . . . I wrote . . . in defiance of the horror, to profess my faith."⁶⁰² Abandoned within finity, we are homesick for the eternal. Our homesick (and often unconscious and unadmitted) souls cry for deliverance. The splendor of the ideal can shine within the absurdity of hopelessness in the human commitment to launch one's finity in confrontation with impossibility, to be entirely consumed in a hopeless aspiration to significance, itself our only possible expression of the primacy of the absolute. Only a Christ, only a Phoenix, can give voice to the immortal in the temporal. *Steppenwolf* is Hesse's Gethsemane profession of faith in the possibility of an incarnation of the ideal and of deliverance despite all evidence to the contrary, and Harry is Hesse confession as to just how close he came to squandering this calling.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 130

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., p. 87

⁶⁰² IWG p. 147

CHAPTER IV
STAGES: THE CONCEPT OF FATED MORAL PROGRESS
IN THE WORK OF BOTH HESSE AND KANT

During the last chapter we explored Harry Haller's descent into despair as a required element in Hesse's understanding of deliverance. In this chapter I will delve further into this issue of a deliverance that is preceded by a required despair. Both Hesse and Kant focus on the issue. I will employ discussions of the ideas of both Hesse and Kant concerning deliverance and stage based moral development in an effort to explain in greater depth why despair is a required aspect of this process. We will see how both writers find that humans are driven by deep and unconscious subjective incentives to painfully progress through stages of moral development toward an eventual awakening. At the center of the discussion will again be the confrontation between the finite and the infinite that has been the fueling antagonism of the progressions described in both of the previous chapters. Our central goal is to come to an understanding regarding why the stages and transitions are portrayed as fated or necessary, and more specifically to understand in greater systematic detail why the ongoing and painfully resisted recognition of the inevitable and irresolvable failure of material powers is required for deliverance.

Fundamental to this final chapter and its conclusion will be a discussion of necessary stages of ethical progress. Neither Kant nor Hesse believe in a single unbordered ethical continuum through which individual human agents progressed. They both espouse discrete ethical dispositions or stages from within which arise fundamentally different judgments of good and evil, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable. Each of these stages are distinguished and defined by an unquestioned cardinal interpretive principle by means of which a human agent determines all judgments. Progression from one stage to the next amounts to nothing other than a revolution of this fundamental principle of all judgment. While an agent remains within the confines of a particular stage, the cardinal principle, the principle by which all judgments (in that stage) are made, is itself outside the realm of possible critique. Since this cardinal principle of a particular stage determines all

judgments, it will be impossible for an agent in a stage to imagine any other valid ethical stage.

Therefore, from the point of view of someone within one of the stages, the thresholds between stages will be necessarily opaque. Further, the individual still submitted to the sovereignty of the principle of his or her stage will not be individually capable of independent progress across stages. Such an individual will not be able to independently desire, choose, or accomplish this transition. However, if this progress is indeed fated, the question of how such progress is possible becomes the central and organizing question for this last chapter.

I will begin by defending the claim that there are in fact three distinct stages of judgment and desire, and that both Kant and Hesse defended this claim. Toward this end I will explore important aspects of the nature of making judgments according to a principle in general, as well as the nature and source of those principles which alone are capable of the role of cardinal interpretive principle. We will see that the most basic and unquestioned interpretations concerning happiness, divinity, and identity, are all stage-relative and dependent.

After this section on stages in general, we will move to a discussion of aesthetics and the capacity of aesthetic experiences to function as empowering symbols. We will consider the possibility that these empowering aesthetic experiences can function as the means by which the unthinkable from a future stage can be presented to and considered by an individual within the confines of his or her present stage (confines which would appear to make any such presentation impossible). In order to do this, we will have to delve into the nature of aesthetics as Kant and Hesse understood it. This immersion into Kant's work on aesthetics will include an in-depth discussion of *the beautiful* and *the sublime*. A discussion of Kant's aesthetics will allow us to recognize the beautiful as the threshold aesthetic experience between the first and second stage and the sublime as the threshold aesthetic experience between the second and third stage.

Finally, we will escape the orbit of the aesthetic and move into a discussion of the difference between stage two and three directly. I will highlight the similarity between the ethical impasse and that of the sublime. This will allow me to use the form of the sublime as a template to make claims about the nature of the final ethical transition and the final ethical stage. In this final section, we will see that submission to the universal must come only in (not merely by means of) the sacrifice of the particular and individual. The redemption from the fated despair of the ethical impasse will come at the cost of and not for the individual identity who entered that despair. My conclusion will be one that agrees neither with Hegel nor Kierkegaard's Climacus on the matter of fated ethical despair and the finite infinite impasse. I will conclude that the resolution of the finite-infinite impasse does not result in absurd faith and the annihilation of thinking, but in the annihilation of an existing human life into the impossible real world demands of the moral imperative. It is the light of the descending material phoenix, the phoenix which is being consumed in the impossible boundless demands of the immortals, that alone offers the light of the transcendent within the confines of experience and finity. The individual who is consumed by this fire cannot be present to experience it.

Cardinal Principles

One of Kant's most basic assertions concerns the idea of principles of action. Each of us, he contends, make decisions. All of our actions are reflections or presentations of decisions regarding our subjective priorities. I go through my day making decisions about, among other things, where I will go, what I will do, and how I might spend my money. Each of these specific decisions reflect a more basic decision about the set of concerns which matter most to me. I budget my money, for example, according to the priorities I have selected. According to Kant, this more basic decision about general priority is itself determined by an even more basic decision regarding a single general concern which alone matters most. My judgment as to my single highest priority determines or shapes much (if not all) of the rest of my personal decision-making. Kant refers to that which I have

chosen as my highest priority as my "practical principle." He defines these principles that individuals adopt as "propositions which contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules."⁶⁰³

Every act requires having already adopted a supreme maxim. Kant writes

The term 'act' can apply in general to that exercise of freedom whereby the supreme maxim (in harmony with the law or contrary to it) . . . is adopted by the will, but also to the exercise of freedom whereby the actions themselves (considered materially, *i.e.*, with reference to objects of volition) are performed in accordance with that maxim.⁶⁰⁴

Kant also refers to this "supreme maxim" as the "supreme consideration,"⁶⁰⁵ the "supreme condition,"⁶⁰⁶ and the "universal maxim of the will."⁶⁰⁷ Every human agent selects a supreme maxim and it is to this one principle that all the rest of his or her considerations are subordinated. As was mentioned in the first chapter, if there were but one possible supreme condition, there could be no discussion of freedom or responsibility. If there is in fact a plurality of principles that are sufficient for employment as supreme maxims, the individual agent must be seen as responsible for his or her selection. The investigation into this single decision is crucial, for it is on this one selection that all subsequent ethical choices are grounded (that is, unless a revolution regarding this supreme condition is possible).⁶⁰⁸ In other words, all the various decisions we make reflect this one most basic decision.⁶⁰⁹ As a result, it is this one decision to which freedom can be directly ascribed.

⁶⁰³ CPrR p. 17

⁶⁰⁴ REL p. 26

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 33

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 32

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 32

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 64 "For the subjective moral principle of the *disposition* . . . can only be thought of as an absolute unity."

⁶⁰⁹ See CPrR pp. 101-2

So what are the possible choices? Kant writes that "every propensity is either physical, i.e., pertaining to the will of a man as a natural being, or moral, i.e., pertaining to the will as a moral being."⁶¹⁰ We can see here that Kant finds that there are but two possible incentives that can serve as the ground of our choice, our supreme maxim.

Man (even the most wicked) does not, under any maxim whatsoever, repudiate the moral law in the manner of a rebel (renouncing obedience to it). The law, rather, forces itself upon him irresistibly by virtue of his moral predisposition . . . But by virtue of an equally innocent natural predisposition he depends upon the incentives of his sensuous nature and adopts them also (in accordance with the subjective principle of self-love) into his maxim . . . the distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the difference between the incentives which they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of the maxim), but rather must depend upon subordination (the form of the maxim), i.e., which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other . . . one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition.⁶¹¹

We as humans are subject to both rational and natural incentives. Kant contends that these incentives are neither evil nor good. The fact that we are subject to both of these incentives is not something over which we have any control. As such, we cannot be held responsible for being subject to them. On the same grounds these incentives cannot be considered good or evil in themselves, for it is not the incentive but the choice regarding subordination of incentives which alone can earn the judgment good or evil.

Any material human act betrays an already accomplished subordination of incentives. In other words, as we saw in the first chapter, all judgment, and as a result all acts, require a rule or criterion. As Kant asserts "man must be subject to some rule or another."⁶¹² Therefore, when I make any choice or perform any act (even when I merely have reactive feelings regarding significance), I reveal that I have come to a general conclusion regarding priority. This conclusion need not have occurred consciously or deliberately. However, what becomes clear in this discussion of the conditions of any

⁶¹⁰ REL p. 26

⁶¹¹ Ibid., pp. 31-2

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 77

action is that as I go through a day full of choices, it must be the case that I have either made these choices under the condition that material concerns have been made the condition of rational ones, or that these natural incentives have been subordinated by me to rational ones. In other words, I can have only either natural incentives or rational incentives as my highest motivating priority.

Stages

An awareness of these often competing practical incentives to action allows us the opportunity to begin discussion of the stages of moral development. Given that there are two candidates for the role of supreme maxim, it would seem to suggest that there are only two distinct stages, one ruled by the natural propensity and the other ruled by the moral. However, there are in fact three. The first is the stage in which the natural propensity is adhered to in conscious ignorance of freedom and the moral law, "that period wherein the use of reason had not yet developed."⁶¹³ The second stage is still ruled by the natural propensity but in conscious awareness of the moral law and its legitimacy. This is the stage of the fall.⁶¹⁴ Only in the third stage are decisions (as well as merely reactive feelings of significance) actually determined by the ideal of practical reason.

Let us look at this in more detail. Since all judgment happens within the gravitational pull, so to speak, of a selected and operating supreme ruling condition, our basic judgments and our experience of reality will happen under and according to its determination. Since each supreme condition is fundamentally different, each will give rise to a corresponding worldview. Each of these discrete world views I will refer to as a stage. As Kant makes clear in his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, each stage is characterized by a different determining or cardinal rule or principle of interpretation and

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 38
See also REL p. 21-2

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-9

judgment in general.⁶¹⁵ Since each stage has a different fundamental rule of judgment, truth and pertinence will be fundamentally different among the stages.⁶¹⁶ Therefore, for Kant, truth with regard to the judgment of worth and justice is inescapably perspectival.

Further, from within each stage, that stage's rule is experienced as the ground of common sense, and as a result, all other cardinal rules of interpretation and judgment are perceived from within that stage as impossible, and any suggestion that there are alternative cardinal principles is necessarily regarded as ridiculous and nonsensical. Since the cardinal rule of interpretation in a given stage determines all interpretation and judgment, understanding the next stage is, as a result, not possible, because the current rule of interpretation will necessarily disqualify as incorrect any other cardinal rule of interpretation. Within each stage, the cardinal, determining, evaluative principle of that stage is necessarily accepted as valid universally (regardless of whether it is actually acceptable as such or not). In fact, the condition of its application as a cardinal rule of interpretation is that it be subjectively enthroned and spontaneously applied as universally valid for all judgment (even though my power to apply this principle extends no further than the borders of my own subjective judgment).

Since the universal validity of the cardinal rule of interpretation in a given stage is assumed in a manner that is virtually beyond subjective assault or perhaps even reflection, the person in that stage can do nothing but presuppose that everyone else is interpreting according to that same rule. It must also be understood that such a principle is the

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 31-2 "Hence the distinction between a good man and one who is evil . . . must depend on *subordination* (the form of the maxim), *i.e.*, *which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other*. Consequently man (even the best) . . . adopts, indeed, the moral law along with the law of self-love; yet when he becomes aware that they cannot remain on par with each other but that one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law . . . This evil is *radical* because it corrupts the ground of all maxims"

⁶¹⁶ See Plato's *Republic* tr. G. M. A. Grube Hackett Publishing Co. Indianapolis. 1974 pp. 99-100. There Plato discusses the inevitability of different classes of humans as determined by that which they spontaneously desire. Plato mentions these classes because disregarding them will bring injustice to any political arena. We must notice the similarity between Plato's classes and the moral stages of Hesse and Kant.

condition of any experience of meaning and as such is, in a manner analogous to the categories of the first *Critique*, quite beyond direct and literal personal recognition. It is so fundamental to the judgment and the felt experience of significance that it cannot itself be experienced directly. Its reign is revealed in the shadow it casts over my entire reception of the objects of experience as always already within a hierarchy of importance. The assumption of the validity of this principle is so foundational that it is psychologically protected by assumptions that cannot at the time be recognized as assumptions. The word faith might be delicately introduced here as a description of the level of unconscious allegiance we must all pay to whatever cardinal principle determines importance within our experience and judgment. This selection is a condition of any experience of meaning. Therefore all experiences of meaning betray an accepted faith in a principle as universally valid.

The Borders Between Stages are Opaque

What we must see in this discussion of the impact of cardinal principles is that each of the three stages are discrete and self-contained interpretive contexts segregated from each other by fundamentally different cardinal rules for the interpretation of significance and justice. To restate, it is essential to grasp that it is the nature of these foundational interpretive principles to be totally or almost totally hidden from the realm of conscious reflection within the depths of our most general experience-organizing assumptions.

For example, a disagreement between two people can never be attributed by them to an assumption of a plurality of these foundational interpretive rules. Rather, for the person in a particular stage, he or she assumes the irrevocable validity, solitary unity, and universality applicability of his or her cardinal rule. Cardinal principles can only operate as such under the (largely subconscious) assumption of their legitimacy. If you and I disagree (particularly regarding issues of justice, public policy, or significance), I must necessarily attribute this to a faulty application (either yours or mine) of my presupposed cardinal rule. In other words, since I necessarily interpret basic common sense and judgment according

to the rule of my stage, it will be impossible for me to imagine that our disagreement could be as a result of an alternative ground of basic common sense. Within a stage, it is impossible for me to consider the possible reality of alternative unconditional principles. If a principle is unconditional (which I must assume my principle to be if it is to function as the ground of my judgment), there can be no alternative. Since I assume that we all share the same ultimate ground of interpretation, I must therefore interpret disagreements between us as attributable only to differences in our skill in the application of my cardinal rule. Basically, since I cannot assume a different ground of interpretation, I will usually interpret disagreement as a matter of either confusion or stupidity.

Desire

Further, basic spontaneous desire is determined according to a person's cardinal principle. It is important to notice the relation of spontaneous desire to cardinal principles because Kant felt that ethics was not a matter of mere will power or self-control. It is about "disposition."⁶¹⁷ According to Kant, one cannot will personal, enabling respect for the moral law.⁶¹⁸ In that morality requires a certain orientation or reorientation of my desire,⁶¹⁹ disciplined will power plays much less of a role than is often attributed to Kant's moral theory. It is Kant's position that as a result of practical reason, some form of respect for the moral law is inevitable for all rational creatures. But respect for the moral law makes us only potentially moral. For Kant, true moral behavior requires us to spontaneously prefer having found one's self motivated to action through respect for the

⁶¹⁷ REL p. 20 "The disposition [is] the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims . . . the subjective ground or cause of this adoption cannot be further known"

See also REL p. 79 "the heart's disposition to fulfill all human duties as divine commands"

See also REL p. 25-6 "He obeys the law according to the *spirit* (the spirit of the moral law consisting in this, that the law is sufficient in itself as an incentive). *Whatever is not of this faith is sin* (as regards cast of mind). For when incentives other than the law itself (such as ambition, self-love in general, yes, even a kindly instinct such as sympathy) are necessary to determine the will to conduct *conformable to the law*, it is merely accidental that these causes coincide with the law, for they could equally well incite its violation.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p.130 "The idea of the highest good, inseparably bound up with the purely moral disposition, cannot be realized by man himself"

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42 "the moral cast of mind consists in the disposition to harbor no wish except [that which can . . . square with legislative reason . . . [a] morally a good man (pleasing to God) [is] . . . one who, knowing something to be his duty, requires no incentive other than this representation of duty itself.

moral law. Morality requires that I find my desire already oriented in accord with moral demands. According to Kant, it is simply not enough to will oneself to find the motivation to action in respect. Rather, authentic moral behavior requires that we come to find ourselves already yearning for or already persuaded into this type of motivation. True moral action requires that we come to find ourselves spontaneously yearning by means of our respect for the moral imperative to perform actions that conform to that imperative. In other words, it is not enough just to do the right thing, and it is not even enough to do the right thing out of stalwart, perhaps grudging sense of discipline or duty, as that word, duty, is commonly understood. We must actually come to find ourselves desiring to perform moral actions. True morality requires a motivational state such that the ground of spontaneous desire has changed. For Kant, truly moral behavior requires a state of mind in which I already find myself motivated by a desire for the moral.

This requirement of spontaneous moral motivation makes it difficult to understand how I can be the cause of a moral change, in that I cannot enact a change in my spontaneous desiring by force of will. I find that much, if not all, of my spontaneous desiring seems to occur in a temporality prior to possible willed manipulation of it. I find myself subjected to my desires, at least initially. For Kant, true morality cannot be a matter simply of will power and discipline. The ground of my desire itself must change. In other words, the reasons why I prioritize what I prioritize must change. Therefore, if change is possible, change regarding the principle by which priority is determined for me must be possible. Morality is at least as much about what I find myself desiring and why I desire it, as it is about how I decide to act. My choice regarding my unconditional principle of judgment is reflected equally by both my spontaneous desire and my chosen actions in the material world. Ethical development is as much, if not more, dependent upon apparently unwilled changes in what is desired than it is on intentionally willed changes in behavior.

The second *Critique* is after all a critique of the power of desire and not a critique of the power of action, morality, or decision.⁶²⁰

Hesse's Articulation of Stages

Let us look more closely at the three stages initially by means of Hesse's articulation of them. Here I will focus primarily on a single essay, "A Bit of Theology," which was written in 1932. This essay is dedicated to espousing a theory of stage-based moral and spiritual progression that is inherent to human beings. He describes this idea of "the three stages of human development," one of his "favorite concepts" and one that is "to me, holy, in fact; I consider it the simple truth."⁶²¹ Hesse feels that humans pass through stages fundamentally related to moral concerns and levels of awakening to and acceptance of responsibility. He describes these stages as follows.

The path of human development begins with innocence (paradise, childhood, the irresponsible first stage). From there it leads to guilt, to the knowledge of good and evil, to the demand for culture, for morality, for religions, for human ideals. For everyone who passes through this stage seriously and as a differentiated individual it ends unfailingly in disillusionment, that is, with the insight that no perfect virtue, no complete obedience, no adequate service exists, that righteousness is unreachable, that consistent goodness is unattainable. Now this despair leads either to defeat or to a third realm of the spirit, to the experience of a condition beyond morality and law, an advance into grace and release to a new, higher kind of irresponsibility, or to put it briefly: to faith.⁶²²

Hesse is convinced that there is a hard boundary between the first and second stage.

Regarding the second stage, he is assuming someone who takes moral demands seriously. He feels that few have grasped this aspect of his books. Further, he feels that the people who actually take morality seriously are few. Hesse's understanding of the word moral is very specific. He has great criticism for any merely herd instinct-driven behavior included under the title of morality. Like Kant, Hesse did not believe that an unquestioning and

⁶²⁰ See Sullivan p. 45 "moral reason must be . . . entirely by itself able to determine how we should act and also able to motivate us to act on these judgments without any prior desires . . . This is *the* central thesis in Kant's moral theory . . . No one before Kant had thought to suggest that human reason could be so powerful."

⁶²¹ MB p. 189

⁶²² *Ibid.*, p. 189

loyal follower of heteronomous authority could be considered moral. As we saw in the last chapter, Hesse felt that a moral agent had to spontaneously, individually, and creatively discover moral principles within him or herself if he or she were to be considered authentically moral.

As a result of Hesse's requirement of moral autonomy, any form of heteronomy could not be considered truly moral from Hesse's perspective. He felt that those persuaded by the claims of authority, regardless of whether these authorities were cultural, governmental, religious, or traditional, were by definition still within the first stage of innocence. Those who define good and evil according to adopted principles had yet to bite Eve's apple, and had yet to acquire the "knowledge of good and evil." About this he said

There are not a great many people who have spiritual experiences. The majority never become fully human, they remain in their primeval condition, childish below such conflicts and developments; the majority perhaps never come to know even the "second stage," but remain in the irresponsible animal world of their instincts, and infant dreams, and the saga of a condition beyond their twilight, of good and evil, of doubt concerning good and evil . . . sounds ludicrous to them.⁶²³

For Hesse the hallmark of the first stage is heteronomy itself. We can see here that he felt that the inclination to adhere to cultural determinations and dictations of right and wrong is grounded fundamentally on instinctual drives. Hesse felt with Nietzsche that the drive to form herds is driven by a lust for power born of mortal fear. As such I follow rules because, according to purely material concerns, it is safer to stick the herd and its heteronomous rules of allegiance and loyalty than it is to set off on a quest to discover my own defensible rules and to live by them. The passion with which I may hold these dictates dear and valid has no bearing on the fact that originally I acceded to these demands out of an intention to maximize some form of my own material or psychological safety. Further, I do not have to recognize this aspect of my morality for it to be true nonetheless.

In fact, Hesse seems to indicate that few do realize that their adherence to traditional norms is based on fear. We must notice that he refers to this stage as the age of innocence.

⁶²³ Ibid., p. 193

It is very important to note that he does not mean that such people are not capable of horrors. On the contrary, it is these very people to whom he attributes a very large share of the responsibility of the world wars. He considers them innocent because they have not yet awakened to the responsibility to arrive at their moral norms independently. Those who remain in the belief that loyalty to traditional or pragmatic norms is the highest virtue have yet to consider alternatives. They are driven by their instincts for survival and security to adhere to the demands of the herd, and so are often passionately loyal. In this stage, fear grounds the ready acceptance of these norms and questions of arbitrariness or universalizability are considered irrelevant, even dangerous.

For Hesse, therefore, the knowledge of good and evil is a knowledge of the legitimate possibility of questioning merely traditional or pragmatic norms by means of viable alternative moral principles discovered internally and autonomously. For Hesse, the knowledge of good and evil is only possible when one finds oneself aware of objective or universal principles by means of which any mere relative of traditional principle becomes criticizable. Before this awareness, the grandest guilt I can acquire is mere illegality, in the Kantian sense, that is, disobedience. Before this awareness, my greatest possible transgression is to do what I was told not to do by someone else or to do something that inhibits security. After this awareness, I become responsible not merely for acts, but for the principle upon which the motivation for these acts is based.

Like Kant, Hesse therefore considers the question of good and evil one that hinges primarily on one's reasons for actions. If I have yet to question the sovereignty of the social norms of my upbringing, then I have yet to realize that I am responsible not just for actions but also for the principles of my actions. If I am in the first stage, I unconsciously defer responsibility for the determination of good principles as good to the tradition and to security concerns. Take for example a traditional demand for chastity. I can easily break this rule and feel guilty for having transgressed an accepted rule. However, such a first-stage person is not yet in the position to acknowledge responsibility for the rightness or

wrongness of the rule itself. This person may feel quite guilty for his or her transgression. Therefore, while the guilt this person feels is real and quite often considerable, for Hesse (as it is for Kant), it is the guilt of person still in the condition of innocence, still not capable of accepting responsibility for the determining of rules of behavior and judgment.

The person who has yet to question the sovereignty of his or her traditional precepts often considers such questions as ludicrous. This certainty regarding the perceived irrelevance (or even malignance) of questioning cultural norms is the cause of the hard boundary between stages mentioned earlier. The person who is driven by an unconscious and instinctual imperative to cohere with the herd accepts chastity as good with a reinforced certainty. Hesse makes the point that for these people, who happen to make up the majority, justice is a heteronomous determination; and it has always and can only have been as such. The fundamental standards of good and evil are tradition and consensus themselves. Therefore, for this person, questioning fundamental cultural precepts will be impossible because all determinations of right and wrong will be determined by means of and according to those very precepts. A precept cannot, by means of itself, determine itself invalid. While a principle is functioning as the determining criterion of right and wrong, that principle cannot be subject to questions of its own status as right or wrong. These principles cannot be questioned because such questions could only occur with that very same criterion as the criterion by which all questions of validity are posed and determined. While a principle is being used to determine good and bad, it cannot be determined as bad. So from such a person's point of view, we would be questioning what is by the definition of that stage unquestionable and would therefore be postulating an absurdity.⁶²⁴ We can see in this one of the fundamental impediments to the possibility of stage abandonment.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 192 " the earlier and indeed steps [stage] on the path of the soul are comprehensible and communicable only for one who has experienced them in his own person. Anyone still living in the first innocence will never understand confessions from the realms of guilt, despair deliverance, they will sound just as nonsensical to him as the mythologies of the foreign peoples do to an untraveled reader."

Kant's Stages: First Stage

Hesse's conception of stages is mirrored by Kant's detailed description of the developmental stages of moral progress in his "Methodology of Pure Practical Reason," which appears (among other places) at the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason* and in his "Doctrine of the Methods of Ethics" in his *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant uses the term methodology to suggest "the way in which we can secure to the laws of pure practical reason access to the human mind and an influence on its maxims."⁶²⁵ In other words, this methodology will be a suggestion about how to teach or inspire autonomous moral development within morally resistant and ignorant people. Here Kant claims that "in order to bring either an as yet uneducated or a degraded mind into the path of the morally good, some preparatory guidance is needed to attract it *by a view to its own advantage*..."⁶²⁶ (emphasis mine). So even at the earliest stages of education "the pure moral motive must be brought to mind." It is crucial to try to inspire this subjective motivation to morality both because morality is impossible if an action is grounded on any other motive, and also because it teaches a pupil to feel his/her own moral worth which "gives his mind a power, unexpected even by himself, to pull himself loose from all sensuous attachments (so far as they would fain dominate him)."⁶²⁷ It is this element of awakening to a call that I want to emphasize here. Since morality must be autonomous, the key to educating someone with regard to morality must hinge upon awakening the pupil to the fact that he or she, him or herself, somehow always wanted to so awaken, and upon helping the student to realize that

⁶²⁵ CPrR p.155

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p. 156

See MM p. 226 "the pupil is drawn without noticing it to an *interest* in morality"

⁶²⁷ CPrR p. 156

See MM p. 226 "and when . . . his attention is drawn to the fact that none of the pains, hardships, and sufferings of life - not even the threat of death - which my befall him because he faithfully attends to his duty can rob him of consciousness of being their master and superior to them all, then the question is very close to him: what is it in you that can be trusted to enter into combat with all the forces of nature within you and around you and to conquer them . . . the solution to this question lies completely beyond the capability of speculative reason . . . [and yet] the very incomprehensibility in this cognition of himself must produce an exaltation in his soul which only inspires it the more to hold its duty sacred the more it is assailed.

he or she already has the power, desire and motivation to do so. We can see a clear relation to Hesse's concept of conscience.⁶²⁸ Moral development can be forced neither by someone other than the student nor by the student him or herself.⁶²⁹ Moral development will have to do significantly with a discussion of the nature and structure of desire across stages. As we have seen, spontaneous desire is one of the stumbling blocks regarding our understanding of how the progression out of a stage is possible. So these "leading strings"⁶³⁰ of moral education must draw out the student's own self-motivated and spontaneously desired re-discovery or resurrection of his or her own moral identity and ground.

For Kant, one inherent danger in moral education is the potential for a pupil to mistake legal action for moral behavior. Legal action is that which merely appears to adhere to the moral law but is in fact motivated by some unacknowledged natural incentive. If a student is exposed to stories of moral behavior, "[a]ll admiration and even the endeavor to be like [a moral] character [must] rest solely on the purity of the moral principle, which can be clearly shown only by removing from the incentive of action everything which men might count as part of [material] happiness."⁶³¹ When used as an educational tool, stories of moral people will always be problematic, because the use of such stories risks the possibility of having the student interpret the story so as to emphasize the honor attributed the story's moral hero, which thus may whet the student's own appetite for social praise and renown.⁶³² Regarding his aesthetic heroes and his own aesthetic ambition, Harry

⁶²⁸ MB p. 134

⁶²⁹ See Plato's Republic pp. 168-9 "if one were to drag him thence by force up the rough and steep path . . . would he not be in physical pain and angry as he was dragged along? When h came into the light . . . h would not be able to see a single one of the things which are now said to be true . . . I think he would need time to get adjusted.

⁶³⁰ CPrR p. 156

⁶³¹ Ibid., p.160

⁶³² MM p. 223 "a maxim of virtue consists precisely in the subjective autonomy of each human being's practical reason and so implies that the law itself, not the conduct of other human beings, must serve as our incentive . . . So it is not in comparison with any other human being whatsoever (as he is), but with the

Haller seems to have fallen victim to this tendency. Such a student would be likely to aspire to mere legal action and would, therefore, miss any chance at any real moral development. So the moral instructor must be wary of relying on moral parables exclusively. However, the question of a viable alternative rises.

Kant writes that "the consciousness of moral disposition and character, the highest good in man, cannot arise" without some awareness of and desire for our own self-confidence and moral worth. As I mentioned earlier, Kant holds that our moral capacity is the ground of all of our true self-esteem. However, there are few who become conscious of this easily. Kant describes the first fully intentional moral transgression as one involving self deception.⁶³³ There he describes

a certain insidiousness of the human heart, which deceives itself in regard to its own good and evil dispositions, and, if only its conduct has not evil consequences. . . does not trouble itself about its disposition but rather considers itself justified before the law. . . Thence arises the peace of conscience of so many men (conscientious in their own esteem) when . . . they merely elude evil consequences by good fortune. They may even picture themselves as meritorious . . . This dishonesty . . . thwarts the establishing of a true moral disposition in us . . . and deserves the name worthlessness . . . So long as we do not eradicate it, it prevents the seed of goodness from developing as it otherwise would.⁶³⁴

The self-deception described here is so complete that a reflective questioning of it seems impossible. The main problem here is that given this state of affairs, it does not seem possible that one so arrogant can, regarding the ignorance of his or her self-deception, on his or her own begin to eradicate this same self-deception.

Kant asserts that this person must be awakened to his or her own moral worth. Kant holds that even in the most hardened of hearts there resides "a burden which has secretly pressed upon it," that is, an inherent and inevitable respect for the moral law.⁶³⁵

idea (of humanity), as we ought to be, and so comparison with the law, that must serve as the constant standard of a teacher's instruction.

⁶³³ REL p. 33

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 33

⁶³⁵ Ibid., p.165

No person is beyond the possibility of moral awakening. However, before a person can consciously endeavor to accept moral instruction, his or her own spontaneous desire to do so must be reached and activated if he or she is to have any hope of being authentically and autonomously moral.

At the end of the "Methodology," Kant describes in detail two steps or stages of moral development. In the first stage, he requires that the student be involved in a directed discussion of possible and actual human decisions, so as to bring the student into the habit of judging according to moral laws. The instructor must not impose these laws upon the student. If the exercise is to have any actual potential with regard to the student's moral development, the student must spontaneously find the moral criterion within his or her own reason. Kant holds that there is reason for some optimism that this can actually happen, because

we ultimately take a liking to that the observation of which makes us feel that our powers of knowledge are extended, and this is especially furthered by that wherein we find moral correctness, since reason . . . can find satisfaction only in such an order of things.⁶³⁶

Note here that the liking comes from the feeling of having had one's powers of knowledge extended, not from any conscious desire to progress toward the moral as a result of the "press" of our inherent respect for the moral law. Nonetheless, because it is possible that the student can find an unexpected liking in the process, this liking offers the possibility of subjective and spontaneous, desire-driven moral progress. The key here is that the process works on the grounds that at each stage the individual is progressing as a result of his or her own candid desires as these desires are encountered and/or determined within each stage. While these shifts regarding the targets of my spontaneous desire may actually be part of a moral progression, I will not be able to recognize it or understand it as such until much later in the process. Even though there can occur a general moral development as seen from some external vantage point, the developing individual cannot experience it as

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p.164

such. As someone within the process, I can only experience desire according to the interpretive cardinal rule of my current stage. So it is the feeling of an extension of my powers, and not a conscious recognition of a respect for the moral law, that drives my internal desire to decide to take this particular step in the process.

Kant marks the boundary of this stage when he maintains that

this occupation of the faculty of judgment, which make us feel our own powers of knowledge, is not yet interested in actions and their morality itself. It only enables one to entertain himself with such judging and gives virtue or a turn of mind based on moral laws a form of beauty which is admired but not yet sought.⁶³⁷

In this stage, the student is involved in a sort of moral play that is characterized by the fact that he or she is not yet interested in actual moral activity. But even in such play and in the development of a "liking" for our moral knowledge, the instructor may hope that "this exercise and the consciousness of cultivation of our reason which judges concerning the practical must gradually produce a certain interest even in its own law and thus in morally good actions."⁶³⁸ Even though moral action is not included in this stage, we do find in the gradually developed interest in moral activity the seeds that may eventually inspire a progression into the next stage. But the first stage should be seen as nothing more than that which can lead up to and include "the occasion for our becoming aware of the store of talents which are elevated above the mere animal level."⁶³⁹ We should not fail to notice that Kant feels that people in this stage can be distinguished from animals by nothing beyond their mere access to as yet unrealized moral potential.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p. 164

⁶³⁸ Ibid., p. 164

⁶³⁹ Ibid., p. 164

REL p. 21 "The predisposition to *animality* in mankind may be brought under the title of physical and purely *mechanical* self-love, wherein no reason is demanded. It is threefold: first, for self-preservation; second, for the propagation of the species, through the sexual impulse, and for care of offspring so begotten; and third, for community with other men, *i.e.*, the social impulse."

Kant's Second Stage

In contrast, it is in the second stage that the pupil can become consciously aware of his or her rational freedom as such. The instructor of a student in the second stage presents the student with a "vivid exhibition of the moral disposition in examples" which emphasize "that no incentives or inclinations are [to be] the determining grounds influencing an action done as a duty."⁶⁴⁰ In this stage, the student can go beyond the mere awareness of his or her moral potential to the realization that his or her own actions are and have always been subject to the judgment of his or her own pure practical reason and its moral law. The student is initially repelled by these examples of negative perfection, for they require the dawning of an awareness (perhaps merely subconscious) that true moral behavior requires that neither the dearest of sensuous inclinations nor even the preservation of life be considered the condition for obedience to moral inclinations. It might appear that the student will withdraw at this point but we must remember that the student has been driven to this point by his or her *own* interest in the moral and in the resulting self-esteem that was initiated in the previous stage. We gain "the positive worth which obedience to [the law of duty] makes us feel" and a greater "respect for ourselves in the consciousness of our freedom," and rationally grounded self-respect is not easily relinquished.⁶⁴¹ The student recoils at what, from within this stage, appears to him or her to be the serious threat of the moral law, yet nonetheless he or she must suspect that it will be difficult if not impossible to return to and enjoy those sensuous satisfactions of his or her past without eventually coming to despise him or herself.

The fundamental characteristic of the second stage is that it includes two antagonistic aspirants for the throne of cardinal principle. The second stage is distinguished from the first in that the individual in this stage has a somewhat conscious

⁶⁴⁰ CPrR p.165

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., p.165

See also CPrR p. 165 "man fears nothing more than to find himself contemptible in his own eyes"

awareness of his or her autonomy, as well as a conscious awareness of the self-respect that can be grounded on that awareness. The individual in this stage has grasped something of the universal validity of the ideal of universal human equality and has done so through internal autonomous development or maturation. This individual feels emboldened by what he or she perceives to be the newly discovered legitimacy of his or her role as critic and iconoclast of traditionally or culturally enthroned authorities. The self-evidence of the ideals that this agent has subjectively encountered shifts this person's own definition of good and evil from a heteronomous determination to one that is autonomous. From this usually grows a building self-regard as the individual adopts the posture of an independent and valid authority-figure, whose reign is legitimated by the unassailable ideal itself. This individual feels him or herself released from the jurisdiction of cultural or traditional judgmental criteria with regard to self-evaluation. This individual may also perceive this escape as something that is to be attributed to his or her own bravery and intricate commendable insight (as Harry does) which may thus inspire this individual to harbor a desire for some form of credit and recognition.

Even as this person throws off the yoke of heteronomous guilt, this same individual of the second stage will also begin to look with some confident disdain on those whom he or she sees as still within the first stage. The second-stage individual will condemn those of the first stage with self-assured even haughty indignance. Having indeed glimpsed something of the immortal, the second stage individual will regard in disbelief and derision those still held exclusively under the sway of finite, material, and temporal concerns. This second-stage individual will regard his or her own past membership in the first stage with similar distaste. He or she will usually hold him or herself responsible and ashamed for this earlier posture and would hang his or her head accordingly except for the fact that he or she perceives this personal improvement to be so remarkable and laudable that this individual feels his or her improvement (by means of the self-evident ideal) overshadows the debt. This individual will often deride his or her own previous membership in the first

stage as if this were some other individual and will criticize this straw man as a vehicle for deriding those who still remain in the first stage. By this means he or she will bolster his or her own self-image and status. In general, this individual holds the discovered immortal ideal in such awe that it allows him or her to disregard or gloss over certain of his or her own inconsistencies and hypocrisies. We can see in this tendency to ignore inconsistencies in my own judgment another reference to the insidious self-deception mentioned by Kant just above.

The problem here is that "mere worship"⁶⁴² of the ideal bears no resemblance to subjecting one's maxim to it.⁶⁴³ It is one thing to esteem the unconditional ideal, and it is quite another to make it the functioning supreme and unconditional principle of all my judging, desiring, and acting. We saw earlier that, according to Kant, there are but two incentives, the natural and the rational. The fundamental posture of the second stage is that it gazes back to the first by means of the rational ideal. In this stage I mistakenly aggrandize myself and my stage in comparison to the stage ruled exclusively by the natural incentive. I use my mere awareness (and occasional or even frequent employment) of a rational ideal to postulate an unbridgable gulf of qualitative difference between myself and those of the first stage. The unspoken and corrupt secret of the second stage is that for all the homage that those in it offer the ideal, the ideal remains subjected to some of the dictations of natural incentives. We can see in this incomplete renunciation of material concerns something of Harry Haller's unseverable connection to the bourgeoisie. While in this stage, I cannot afford to acknowledge that my esteem is based almost exclusively on a merely relative comparison with those who remain in stage one.

⁶⁴²REL p. 47

⁶⁴³Ibid., p. 37 "All homage paid to the moral law is an act of hypocrisy, if, in one's maxim, ascendancy is not at the same time granted to the law as an incentive sufficient in itself and higher than all other determining grounds of the will."

As we saw earlier, awareness of the moral imperative as a self-evident certainty of practical reason immediately implies the path to Gethsemane as an irrevocable destiny.⁶⁴⁴ This reality will usually cause those who encounter it to recoil, even while any attempt retreat to the first stage would necessarily require acceptance of serious negative self-assessment. In other words, while I am in the second stage, I cannot afford to stare too directly into the blinding implications of the ideal, for I have a vague intimation of the cost that the unconditional must have on the conditional, the material, and limited. As result I must instead limit my attention to the difference between my awareness and esteem of the ideal and the ignorance of it suffered by those in the first stage.

As we have seen, one of the original appeals of the second stage is that it offers me the self-elevation to something of the role of authority figure. The idea of fancying myself the legitimate and authoritative critic of the very authorities to which I had previously been subject appeals to me. Kant felt that we have

originally a desire merely for equality, to allow no one superiority above oneself, bound up with constant care lest others strive to attain such superiority; but from this arises gradually the unjustifiable craving to win it for ourselves over others . . . [This can lead to] the very great vices of secret and open animosity against all whom we look upon as not belonging to us."⁶⁴⁵

One of the original subjective draws of the moral imperative is its condemnation of any use of humanity in my own person as a mere means.⁶⁴⁶ I condemn any such use with self-assured indignation and swell with the esteemed authority of my newfound estate. But it is rarely the case that I immediately subject my own behavior completely to this same critique. I discover the self-evident ideal within my own thinking, and with it I will usually crown myself insuperable sovereign. I confuse its legitimacy with my own wielding of it in judgments. I conveniently disregard my will to power, my carnal desire for superiority

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 68 "The coming forth . . . into the good disposition is, in itself (as 'the death of the old man.' 'the crucifying of the flesh'), a sacrifice and an entrance upon a long train of life's ills."

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 22

⁶⁴⁶ GMM p. 36/429

over others, as one of my possible motivators and convince myself that the relish with which I subject others to my judgment is ever only in the name of the self-evident ideal itself.⁶⁴⁷ We must not miss Hesse's presentation of our susceptibility to manipulate the use of principles for self-aggrandizement in the person of Harry Haller.

So, the second stage remains one ultimately ruled by natural incentives. When I first encounter the appeal of the moral imperative as a principle by which my own self-worth and status are lifted and expanded, it is unlikely that I will also simultaneously consider that I myself might have to suffer self-sacrifice in the service of it. The moral ideal asserts the unconditional importance of the humanity in my person, and it is by means of this assertion that I first feel my own unconditional worth. It is not surprising, therefore, that we retain some semi-conscious assumption that it will always serve my ego-identity so well. But this is not so. We must remember that Kant intended no conflation of the humanity in my own person and my particular and material individuality. Hesse's poetic articulation of the difference between the ego and the Self, the garden designer versus the gardener,⁶⁴⁸ or the "Self in the I . . . the supratemporal in the temporal I,"⁶⁴⁹ provides us with a discussion of this split that is significantly more detailed and subtle than is that of Kant's. My material self, nor even my experiencing unified self, cannot be equated to the merely intelligible self to whom alone responsibility and freedom can be attributed and from whom alone our glimpse of the unconditioned can be gleaned.⁶⁵⁰ This

⁶⁴⁷ REL pp. 33-4 "A certain insidiousness of the human heart, which deceives itself . . . This dishonesty, by which we humbug ourselves and which thwarts the establishing of a true moral disposition in us, extends outwardly to falsehood and deception of others . . . puts out of tune the moral capacity to judge . . . and . . . constitutes the foul taint of our race."

⁶⁴⁸ S pp. 60-5

⁶⁴⁹ MB p. 121

⁶⁵⁰ CPrR p. 44

See also CPrR pp. 89-90 The human being belongs both to a sensible and intelligible world and as such "belongs to two worlds." The importance of this division and the importance of our continued acknowledgment of the implications it has for our interpretation of our own identity cannot be overstated.

indulgent conflation of what are actually segregated elements of the self makes up a significant portion of what Kant refers to as our insidious self-deception.

In the second stage, I allow myself a convenient indefiniteness regarding that which is deemed of unconditional worth. It is, however, only that part of me which has the capacity to acknowledge and ascribe supremacy to purely rational demands whose worth can be judged unconditional. It is my capacity to be free of the requirement to hold natural incentives as unconditional priorities to which this esteem can be attributed. It is my ability to subject all natural imperatives to the condition of rational imperatives that alone dons upon me the attribute of universal worth, in the Kantian sense. However, I often interpret or assume that the initial inflation of self-esteem granted to me by my acknowledgment of the rational ideal is granted to me individually and specifically. I make the mistake of assuming that the part of my personhood that is susceptible to natural desires is included in this "humanity" or "personality"⁶⁵¹ to which unconditional worth is granted. Since I lump that aspect of my identity that is driven by natural incentives in with that which is rationally esteemed (a conflation that is not legitimated by practical reason), it is next to impossible psychologically for me to initially imagine that something deserving of such esteem could be left unprotected from the unconditional demands of the ideal. I therefore make the fundamental error of the second stage. I assume that the ideal could never require the sacrifice of what I perceive to be my unconditionally important individuality.⁶⁵²

This conflation is not all that surprising, nor should we be too quick to dismiss it. Both Kant and Hesse emphasize that the path to autonomy is a limping one. No one arrives at mature and subjectively discovered autonomy as one fully grown out of the head of Zeus. We wander nearly blind and stumbling into an awareness of rational practical truth. We must keep in mind Hesse's characterization of this process as the quest of an artist. No artist arrives at his or her mature and unique voice and genius without years of

⁶⁵¹ REL p. 22

⁶⁵² S pp. 129-130

practice, study, and often embarrassing experimentation. The requirement of drop clothes and training wheels cannot be too easily disregarded. Venturing on a journey for which there can be no inherited map will always include retraced steps.⁶⁵³

However, the unavoidability of these missteps makes us no less responsible for them. Let us consider one of the most common of them. It is a common characteristic of individuals who remain in this stage to assume in some vague and insinuated way, that their allegiance to the ideal, an allegiance that they feel is so obviously superior to anything that those lumbering animalistic first-stage people could offer, should afford them some form of favor from and protection by an often anthropomorphized version of the ideal.⁶⁵⁴ Harry yearns for a deliverance that is earned protection and rest. Ironically, perhaps, the ideal instead requires the subjugation of material concerns, not protection for or by means of them. Kant refers to this stage as "the predisposition to *humanity* in man, taken as a living and at the same time a rational being."⁶⁵⁵ Kant writes

The predisposition to humanity can be brought under the general title of a self-love which is physical and yet compares (for which reason is required); that is we judge ourselves . . . by making comparison with others. Out of this self-love springs the inclination to acquire worth in the opinion of others . . . [This predisposition] is based on practical reason, but a reason thereby subservient to other incentives"⁶⁵⁶

So, the second stage of moral development is one that, like the first stage, retains the enthronement of material concerns as the supreme condition of decision-making. It is differentiated from the first stage in that the subject of this stage includes the use of subjectively discovered and esteemed rational ideals of freedom within decision-making. While the first stage individual has only natural incentives determining his or her hierarchy of concerns, the person in the second stage uses both natural and rational incentives to

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p. 153 "Ah, Harry, we have to stumble through so much dirt and humbug before we reach home. And we have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness."

⁶⁵⁴ REL pp. 170-1

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 21

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 22-3

determined this hierarchy. However, a mistaken assumption of a right to self-preservation (not to mention an unreflective, often haughty confidence regarding the sufficiency and commendability of their own service to the ideal) keeps this person of the second stage from establishing rational rules as unconditional motivating principles.

Kant openly admits that it is hard to understand how a person who has acknowledged the legitimacy of the practical ideal can nonetheless subject it to material demands of survival and safety.⁶⁵⁷ If I acknowledge the moral imperative as self-evident and of universal applicability, how do I end up conditioning it to the demand for my own particular survival? In other words, how do I come to be so irrational as to regard the particular as if it were universally important? I imagine we can trace this to the inherent hubris of the second stage. As we have noticed, the moment I throw off the legitimacy of heteronomous judgment criteria by adopting the role of authoritative critic by means of my subjective access to the ideal, I may adopt something of the air of a sovereign. As such, I may withhold some unadmitted personal discretion regarding exceptions, and I may do so on the grounds of some unadmitted self-assertion of my own legitimate personal authority. Under the presumption of my suitability for governance in such matters (which itself is grounded on the convenient conflation of aspects of my identity), I may semi-consciously grant myself the authority to be selective regarding the administration of this unconditional ideal. Among these line item vetoes often reside the condition of personal survival and the condition my own material limitations of time, power, and knowledge. There can, of course, be no rational legitimation of this clear rational inconsistency of submitting the universal to the conditions of the particular.

However, the reasons why we engage in these permissive self-deceptions are less important than is the fact that we do. The second stage is characterized by its contradictory and often unstable juxtaposition of divergent judgmental criteria. Despite the emergence

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38 "But the rational origin of this perversion of our will whereby it makes lower incentives supreme among its maxims, that is, of the propensity to evil, remains inscrutable to us. . . there is . . . for us no conceivable ground from which the moral evil in us could have originally come."

and ethereal impact of the rational ideal of universal human equality for the person in this stage, the fundamentally egotistical concerns both for material safety and for acknowledged individual moral credit retain unconditionality in their right of refusal regarding rational demands. So, for the person in the second stage, the moral imperative determines many and perhaps even most specific decisions, but it is eventually conditioned by concerns of survival and material limitation. As was the case with the first stage, it seems impossible to see how a person who maintains this assumption could on the ground of that very assumption, even while it is being used as the cardinal rule of judgment, decide to overthrow it as a cardinal rule.

The Role of Aesthetic Experiences as Enabling Symbols for Stage Transition

The stage process to this point can be summarized as follows: before Kant's instructional process begins, we find the student in an initial stage of almost complete moral ignorance, apathy or indifference and driven by natural incentives. This person is morally apathetic as a result of a profound self-deception about his or her own good or evil disposition. (We should remember however, that this person may be heavily invested in heteronomous cultural dictations which he or she interprets as true morality. For Kant and Hesse, however, heteronomy and morality are mutually exclusive). The depth of the deception is such that this person has almost no consciousness of it as deception. To progress from this state, the student must learn or be assisted in learning to develop an "admiration and esteem in relation to mankind in general," which is grounded morally and therefore rationally. From there it is hoped that the student will gradually shift his or her attention with regard to the implications of the moral law from his or her esteem concerning his or her rank as a member of humankind in general to his or her responsibility as an individual moral agent. Kant asserts that this process requires a lot of gradual development through the fostering of edifying habits. However, even while most of the development is gradual, there are within this process two transitions which require something of a leap.

The progression from the initial stage to the second stage requires a significant shift, as does the progression from the second moral stage to the third.

I will refer to these two points as borders or thresholds. They are borders between the significant stages of moral development. The stages I have described above can be reduced to the following: (1) the prioritization of natural incentives without regard to rational morality, (2) individual moral commitment destabilized by the prioritization of unacknowledged self-aggrandizement as well as an assumption of self-preservation (3) self-transcending moral, material self-annihilation. As I mentioned earlier, these stages can be distinguished from each other with regard to the judgmental criteria that are assumed and employed within them. Again, it is difficult to progress from one stage to the next, because each stage assumes the legitimacy of different judgmental criteria. The decisions of a person in stage three or two will appear ludicrous to a person in stage one. Since the criterion for all decision-making changes from one stage the next, it will be the very decision to move from one stage to the next that will prove the main hindrance to any attempt at moral development.

It is at this point that a discussion of Kant's aesthetics can begin, since it can now be introduced in its proper relation to Kant's larger system. Kant's thought on aesthetics is often cited as the origin of the "art for art's sake" school,⁶⁵⁸ but I find that Kant could not have agreed with such an assertion. For Kant, the experiences of the beautiful and the sublime are important only insofar as anything is important, which is to say that they are important to the degree that they are involved with and instrumental for moral development and behavior. I assert that the aesthetic experiences of the beautiful and the sublime can function as symbols which have the potential to enable or to empower a person to cross the borders of developmental stages. These symbols function in a manner analogous to the schemata in that they unite the fundamentally different entities by means of having been made up of elements characteristic to both. The beautiful has the capacity to function as a

⁶⁵⁸ See Dictionary of the History of Ideas @ etext.lib.virginia.edu for an example

symbol for the presentation of the unthinkable of the second stage for the person still in the first stage, and the sublime has the capacity to function as a symbol for the presentation of the unthinkable of the third stage for the person in the second. In each situation the symbol has the capacity to speak to or entice a person in a manner suited to that person's stage, while at the same time having something in its structure that can inspire a spontaneous yearning to interpret or to desire in the manner characteristic of the next stage.

The Aesthetic Experience of the Beautiful

Let us begin with a closer look at aesthetics in general. Kant felt that the human mind possessed three mental powers. The first is the cognitive power by means of which nature is experienced by means of the a priori concepts of the understanding. The second is the power of desire which allows for the possibility of freedom by means of a pure practical reason. The third is the power of pleasure and displeasure which by means of judgment allows for the receptions of purposiveness. Aesthetics is tied most directly to the last of these three. In particular we will at first be focusing on the judgment of taste (aesthetic judgment) as distinguished from judgments of either practical reason or cognition.

The central concern of aesthetic judgment is the experience of pleasure of displeasure. While such experiences happen in relation to objects of sense, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure

designates nothing whatsoever in the object . . . here the subject feels himself, [namely] how he is effected by the presentation.

To apprehend a regular, purposive building with one's cognitive power . . . is very different from being conscious of this presentation with a sensation of liking. Here the presentation is referred only to the subject, namely to his feeling of life, under the name of pleasure and displeasure . . . This power does not contribute anything to cognition, but merely compares the given presentation in the subject with the entire presentational power, of which the mind becomes conscious when it feels its own state . . . [judgments are] aesthetic if, and to the extent that, the subject referred them . . . solely to himself (to his feeling)."⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁹ CJ pp. 44-5

It is important to notice here that Kant is asserting the experience of aesthetic liking, *i.e.*, beauty, is something that happens within and only within the experiencing subject. Even though we have a tendency to ascribe beauty to an object as a characteristic of that object, Kant is asserting very early on that this experience is a characteristic of the subject and his or her powers of experience in general. The feeling of pleasure that accompanies the experience of something beautiful is a feeling of the interaction of my own cognitive powers on the occasion of witnessing some natural object. Even though I have a tendency to experience the feeling of aesthetic pleasure as if it were an attribute of an external object, the sources of the feeling are really my own presentational powers.

This pleasurable aesthetic feeling in the subject results from the free interplay of the presentational powers. For Kant, all experience results from raw sense data being submitted to the laws of the mental faculty of the understanding by the mental faculty he called the imagination. If the understanding were not amenable to the presentations of the imagination, if they were somehow incommensurate, then no experience could occur. As Kant sees it, the fact that they are commensurate gives rise both to the possibility of experience and to the experience of the aesthetic pleasure of the beautiful. According to Kant, what is felt as pleasurable in the aesthetic moment is nothing other than the mere fact that the presentational powers of the mind are capable of interplay.

When pleasure is connected with mere apprehension . . . of the form of an object of intuition, and we do not refer the apprehension to a concept so as to give rise to determinate cognition, then we refer the presentation not to the object but solely to the subject; and the pleasure cannot express anything other than the object's being commensurate with the cognitive power that are, and insofar as they are, brought into play when we judge reflectively . . . Now if in this comparison a given presentation unintentionally brings the imagination (the power of a priori intuitions) into harmony with the understanding (the power of concepts), and this harmony arouses a feeling of pleasure, then the object must thereupon be regarded as purposive for the reflective power of judgment . . . A judgment of this sort is an aesthetic judgment . . . [and] it is not based on any concept we have of the object . . . When the form of an object . . . is judged in mere reflection on it . . . to be the basis of pleasure . . . [t]he object is then called beautiful.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 29-30

In other words, the experience of any object of sense always brings the understanding into interplay with the imagination. However, some objects seem to be particularly suited to bringing these two powers into an easy harmony. In other words, the experience of some objects seem to highlight the commensurability of these remarkably different powers. When the experience of a particular object inspires a felt recognition of this commensurability, we experience the object as beautiful. We experience it as such even though the feeling is actually a reflection of the pleasure we feel when our disparate presentational powers are revealed as functionally compatible and productive.

It is the nature of the understanding to force, so to speak, the imagination to present sense data in just such a manner as to make them amenable to its laws. But Kant is suggesting that there may exist certain objects whose presentations require very little adjustment on the part of the imagination to make them suitable for the understanding. It is as if these objects come to the imagination already in the shape, so to speak, required for submission to the understanding's laws. Whereas the imagination usually has to labor, to speak analogically, to prepare the manifold for presentation to the understanding, these particular objects stress the imagination so little, that from the imagination's point of view, it can seem as if the understanding has exchanged roles with the imagination and has begun to adapt itself to the imagination's desires.⁶⁶¹ In other words, some objects are so suited to the function of the imagination that the imagination can present them to the hard rules of the understanding with such ease that it is as if the imagination had no duty to the laws of the understanding at all. These objects offer the imagination the occasion to feel, so to speak, as if it were free from the dictates of the understanding.

it is . . . conceivable that the object may offer [the imagination] just the sort of form in the combination of its manifold as the imagination, if it were left to itself [and] free, would design in harmony with the understanding's lawfulness in general . . . it seems . . . that only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., p. 93 "we call the beautiful . . . free and indeterminately purposive entertainment of the mental powers . . . where the understanding serves the imagination rather than vice versa."

imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony . . . is compatible with the free lawfulness of the understanding.⁶⁶²

The imagination's plight is to be fettered such that it must present sense data to the understanding in a manner that accords with the understanding's demands. However, occasionally there are objects so suited to the imagination's function that they allow the imagination to feel as if its own preferences and predilections were the dominating concern. In short, these objects allow the imagination to feel at free play. When we recall that the understanding is always free in this way, we can begin to grasp the harmonious structure of the aesthetic experience of the beautiful.

There is an implication for morality in all this. Kant writes that "this harmony promotes the mind's receptivity to moral feeling."⁶⁶³ When we recall the indispensability of autonomy regarding Kant's and Hesse's ideas of moral progress, we can begin to glimpse the importance of the aesthetic experience. Let us look at the aesthetic experience in a little more detail. Kant describes the liking associated with the beautiful as a "liking . . . devoid of all interest."⁶⁶⁴ When I like an object because of its ability to be agreeable or enjoyable regarding "pathological stimuli," I rely on its actual existence. For example, when I find myself liking a bar of chocolate as a result of its ability to provide physical enjoyment upon my consumption of it, I need this object to actually exist for me to eat it and thereby make it able to provide this enjoyment. In Kant's language, interest implies my requirement of an object's existence as a condition of my liking of it.

The experience of the beautiful is different.

A judgment of taste, on the other hand, is merely *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object: it considers the character of the object only by holding it up to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure . . . only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and *free*, since we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of

⁶⁶² Ibid., pp. 91-2

⁶⁶³ Ibid., p. 38

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 53

reason⁶⁶⁵. . . what matters is what I do with this presentation within myself, and not the [respect] in which I depend on an object's existence.⁶⁶⁶

Because the aesthetic experience of the beautiful is really just the feeling of the mutual free play of my presentational powers, and refers merely to the form of a presented object prior even to comprehension, the question of whether it actually exists is of no real concern to me. It is the effect of the object's form alone that inspires this free play of my cognitive powers.

Not only does the experience of the beautiful provide me with the opportunity to experience disinterested liking, it also offers the occasion to experience the feeling of a universal judgment. "For a judgment of taste carries with it an aesthetic quantity of universality, i.e., of validity for everyone."⁶⁶⁷

if a judgment has *subjective* - i.e., aesthetic - *universal validity*, which does not rest on a concept, we cannot infer that it has logical universal validity, because such judgments do not deal with the object [itself] at all. That is precisely why the aesthetic universality we attribute to a judgment must be of a special kind; for although it does not connect the predicate of beauty with the concept of the *object*, considered in its entire logical sphere, yet it extends that predicate over the entire sphere of *judging persons*.⁶⁶⁸

Since it is possible to communicate with other subjects about experienced objects, we assume that all experiencing humans must share the same basic mental structure of presentational powers. And, since the experience of the beautiful is an experience of the mutual free play of these same shared presentational powers, I must assume that my purely subjective experience of disinterested liking will be just as readily experienced by all other subjects with these same powers.

hence this subjective universal communicability can be nothing but [that of] the mental state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play (insofar as they harmonize with each other as required for *cognition in general*).⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 51-2

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 46

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 59

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 58-9

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 62

However, we should note that this is not a postulation of actual rational universality. I only feel as if everyone will agree with my subjective judgment.

So, for Kant, the aesthetic experience of the beautiful includes the feelings of disinterestedness and universality. For reasons closely related to disinterestedness and universality, the experiences will also be experienced as necessary and as purposive. These characteristics already signal some reference to the laws and implications of practical reason.

This prepares us to ask how the beautiful functions as an empowering symbol of the second stage of moral development for a person who remains marooned in the first? As we have seen, the experience of the beautiful occurs when we see an object that is formed in a manner such that it allows "the imagination *in its freedom* [to] harmonize with the understanding *in its lawfulness*."⁶⁷⁰ According to Kant, we like the beautiful directly, we like it without a preceding interest, and this liking, because it is disinterested, inevitably seems universally valid to us while we are experiencing something as beautiful. We can already see in disinterested liking and the appearance of universality within the aesthetic experience of the beautiful the potential analogy the beautiful could have to the morally good. Kant writes

beautiful objects of nature or of art are often called by names that seem to presuppose that we are judging these objects morally. We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or landscapes cheerful and gay; even colors are called innocent, humble, or tender, because they arouse sensations in us that are somehow analogous to the consciousness we have in a mental state produced by moral judgments. Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest *without making too violent a leap*; for taste presents the imagination as admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding and it teaches us to like even objects of sense freely, even apart from sensible charm (emphasis mine).⁶⁷¹

Through the experience of the beautiful, a hint of what the second stage will be like is presented in such a way that it has the capacity to catch the interest of a person in the stage

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., §35

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., §59

of self-deceived moral indifference. The beautiful has the capacity to interest such a person partly because it is not in fact itself moral. It is only analogous to morality, that is, its form is similar to that of the moral interest that characterizes the second stage. Further, it attracts the interest of the first-stage person because

every experience has its aesthetic aspect. In order to judge the beautiful, we use the imagination to refer the presentation to the subject and to his feeling of pleasure and displeasure, which is his feeling of life. Here the subject feels himself, namely how he is affected by the presentation."⁶⁷²

The experience of the beautiful requires only that the person have the faculties required for any experience and an interest in how experiences affect him or her. An inherent moral capacity is required, but the person need not have any consciousness of the psychological structure needed for that experience. The only initial interest that is required to have an experience of the beautiful is an interest in pleasure. It is this aspect of the beautiful that makes the symbol initially palatable to the person in the first stage. We recognize the importance of the symbol's palatability within the confines of the present stage for moral progress, once we remember that the individual must be driven by his or her own spontaneous desire, rather than by discipline or external threat.

However, once accepted, this symbol functions rather like a Trojan horse, for within this pleasurable experience lie the seeds that have the capacity to awaken this person to an interest in his or her moral capacity and thereby potentially undermine his or her self-deception. It is this type of awakening which may eventually allow him or her to leave his or her present stage. Kant writes, "The beautiful teaches us to be mindful of purposiveness in the feeling of pleasure which prepares us for loving something . . . *without interest*" (my emphasis).⁶⁷³ The experience of the beautiful has the capacity to give us our first taste of loving anything without any materially personal, that is, ego prioritized, interest. All ego-driven interest (greed) is connected to the acquisition of some sort of an existing thing. As

⁶⁷² Ibid., §1

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p.127

we have noted, it is not the idea of an ice cream sundae that interests me, as much as it is the actual existence of the sundae that inspires desire for it. In order to eat it, I must have it, and in order to have it, it must exist. Conversely, the desire inspired by the beautiful relies in no way on a desire to possess or acquire the actual beautiful thing. Whether or not I possess a painting has nothing to do with whether or not I find it beautiful in the way that Kant is discussing it here. That I like the painting relies in no way on a belief that it actually exists. Even if I find that I want to possess the painting, that desire is different and separate from the aesthetic liking that Kant is highlighting. It is the manner in which I experience the form of the thing and not the determination that it is real that matters. For the person who is still in the first stage, liking something in a manner that disregards greed or material security is entirely new.

This is a form of judgment which has been previously absent, and it is just this form of judgment that will be fundamental in the second stage. Furthermore and more importantly, the experience of the beautiful brings with it a wisp of that self-esteem and gravitas which is grounded in moral potential.⁶⁷⁴ So, the beautiful has the capacity to undermine the individual's inability to choose to leave his or her present stage (which I previously referred to as radically evil) by attracting him or her in a manner that is alluring from the point of view of his or her present stage while simultaneously introducing him or her, partially through analogy, to a completely new form of judging. The beautiful can function as a symbol because it allows a previously unthinkable idea to be presented.

How does it work? Well, a fundamental characteristic of the second stage is a consciously felt self-esteem, which is grounded on one's own human moral potential. Since the structure of the experience of the beautiful mirrors or mimics that of a purely moral decision, it has the capacity to initiate an awareness of latent respect for morality

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 144 "[Therefore,] since a judgment of taste is in fact [a claim of universal validity], its universal validity is not to be established by gathering votes and asking other people what kind of sensation they are having; but it must rest, as it were, on an *autonomy* of the subject who is making a judgment about the feeling of pleasure" (emphasis mine)

through what might be thought of as a sympathetic vibration. For example, if one strikes a tuning fork that is situated near another identically tuned tuning fork, the vibration of the first one alone will initiate the sympathetic vibration of the second one. The second will ring without having been struck. Without any other action, the second fork will resonate with the specific frequency of its sister fork because they have both been tuned to the same pitch. Similarly, while the initial draw to a beautiful object may have been the fundamental aesthetic pleasure associated with it, the structure of this liking, a liking without any personal material gain, has the capacity to strike a chord, so to speak. The person who is drawn by pure aesthetic pleasure to a painting, for example, may begin to receive a dim yet irrevocable awareness that there is a strange profundity in the experience that can seem qualitatively different from and somehow superior to all his or her experiences of pleasure to that point in time. This qualitatively different pleasure gets its intriguing twist from having been grounded upon this individual's own fundamental human "dignity."⁶⁷⁵

We must remember, however, that the person having this experience has no conscious awareness of this connection. For this individual, the experience is always merely an aesthetic one and it cannot therefore produce, at least at this point, a new self-understanding. For him or her, it is just a slightly curious and perhaps somehow fascinating feeling. The important thing to notice here is that the experience of the beautiful can inspire a self-perpetuating desire for more of this kind of pleasure. Since authentic morality requires not just legal behavior but behavior that is motivated exclusively out of my own authentically desired respect for the moral law, a change in desire itself will have to occur. It is important to see at this point that, for Kant, the experience of the beautiful does not have to do so much with a change in thinking as it does with a temporary change in feeling. As a first-stage person experiencing the beautiful as a symbol of the moral, I find myself wanting something for new reasons even though I have only the dimmest awareness of the change or of its significance.

⁶⁷⁵ MM p. 209

The End of the Second Stage

Let us move now to a discussion of the second stage individual. This person has progressed beyond the stage in which significance is determined according to the dictates of inclination. This person is no longer "[t]he naïve first stage person controlled by fear and greed (who) longs for deliverance,"⁶⁷⁶ and does not "remain in the irresponsible animal world of their instincts and infant dreams."⁶⁷⁷ Hesse felt that the second stage is "a striving for deliverance through works."⁶⁷⁸ In a manner quite similar to Kant, Hesse thought that the "second stage"⁶⁷⁹

ends in despair . . . only when [the second stage] yields to grace, when it is recognized as ambition, as busyness, as eagerness and hunger, when he who is awakening from the dream of pseudo-life recognizes himself as eternal and incorruptible, as spirit of spirit, as Atman, does he become the uninvolved observer of life.⁶⁸⁰

As we have seen in the first two chapters of the present work, it is not enough to recognize the universal self-evident validity of the moral imperative. It is not enough to recognize its fated relevance for my own decision-making and self-evaluation. I must also come to unblinkingly admit my own inability to accomplish that which must be accomplished. We have mentioned that the second stage functions by leaving its demand for personal safety unacknowledged.

Further, while I am functioning under the principles of the second stage, I recognize the moral imperative as a rule for my ego self. However, I also retain the assumption that any acts performed by my ego according to the demands of the moral imperative are to be attributed to that ego. Even though I am convinced that my actions, as determined by the demands of the moral imperative, pay that imperative unambiguous and

⁶⁷⁶ MB p. 190

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 193

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 190

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 193

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 190

legitimate homage, it is also true that I am using that same moral imperative as a mere means to acquire earned congratulation for my ego. I leave unquestioned and presumed my indulgent desire to have those of my acts done in the service of the practical ideal chalked up on my record. The second stage individual has yet to consider the possibility that this entire process might not be one that is in the end *for* him or her. A concern for personal credit or even for merely private reflective satisfaction regarding moral action is a concern that has its back to the ideal. Over interest in act attribution and personal moral rank may not cohere with a disposition that authentically regards the moral law unwaveringly as a divine command. The second stage individual has yet to consider this possibility. He or she has yet to consider that morality might actually be *for* the ideal, the unconditional and immortal.

As we saw in the last chapter, as we pass through the second stage, an increasing recognition of and respect for the transcendent importance of the practical ideal must be accompanied by a haunting intimation that my own skill and power may not actually suffice. Toward this idea Hesse writes,

For everyone who passes through this stage seriously and as a differentiated individual it ends unfailingly in disillusionment, that is with the insight that no perfect virtue, no complete obedience, no adequate service exists, that righteousness is unreachable, that consistent goodness is unattainable. Now this despair leads either to defeat or to a third realm of the spirit.⁶⁸¹

As we saw in the first and second chapters, any thought of retreat from this insight must be accompanied by a threat of a proportional loss of self-respect. We saw that for Harry the price of admittance to the Magic Theater was a "trifling suicide." How do I decide to abandon my ego even as I am that same ego? Further, how could the "I" who is to be abandoned accomplish the abandonment? Hesse writes,

Thus far I recognize the stages in the evolution of a human soul. I know them from my own experience and from the evidence of many other souls. Always, at every point in history and in all religions and life-styles, these typical experiences occur in the same stages and sequence: Loss of innocence, concern about righteousness under the law, followed by despair in a fruitless struggle to overcome guilt through

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p. 189

works, or by knowledge and final emergence from hell . . . the way leads from innocence into guilt, out of guilt into despair, out of despair either to failure or to deliverance: that is, not back again behind morality and culture into a child's paradise but over and beyond these into *the ability to live by the strength of one's faith* ⁶⁸² (emphasis mine).

As we saw in the second chapter, the fundamental blasphemy of the second stage is hubris. A works-based assumption of justification betrays a unabashedly idolatrous misinterpretation of the finite (my own power) as infinite, that is, sufficient for an unconditional demand. An overriding yearning for my own recognized ascension to membership among those on an aesthetic or ethical Olympus is to treat my own finite agency as if it were of absolute and universal adequacy. Only the ideal which I find within my own thinking can validly wear such a crown. Escape from this eventually torturous stage must come by means of the "thorn crown."

The Aesthetic Experience of the Sublime as and Enabling Symbol

The aesthetic experience of the beautiful can function as an empowering symbol for the person in the first stage by presenting the feeling of a universal and indifferent liking and thereby present a felt and productive analogy for moral respect. Similarly the aesthetic experience of the sublime can offer a felt and enabling analogy for the deliverance from the second stage's despair. How does the experience of the sublime function as an aesthetic symbol for the person in the second stage? The person positioned to progress from the stage of moral hubris to that of moral self-transcendence is necessarily in a desperate situation. As he or she develops through the second stage, and he or she comes closer to applying the full and absolute force of his or her own rational judgment to his or her own actions and principles, the moral progressor is faced with the challenge of being able to (for the first time) subject his or her own survival instinct to the moral imperative. This individual is stuck between having to willingly accept the negativities of natural life as a condition of adhering to the dictates of the moral law or having to suffer the self-loathing

⁶⁸² Ibid., pp. 191-2

that must necessarily come from slinking away from that undeniable rational demand. It is important to understand that as the moral initiate progresses, he or she gradually and perhaps resistantly becomes increasingly aware of just how inevitable is our growing acknowledgment of the fact that all of our self-respect is and has always been grounded on the dignity inherent in our moral capacity.

As the process continues, we begin to identify more and more with the rational aspect of our nature, even though material concerns have always to this point dominated our determination of an hierarchy of concern. Given the continuation of this progress, that person inevitably drives him or herself toward a bitter confrontation for dominance between his or her moral concerns and his or her physical concerns. Willing acceptance of death as a possible condition of the moral imperative seems a terrifying abyss to the person at the late edge of the second stage. Since physical self-preservation remains included in the cardinal interpretive and evaluative principle of the second stage, the willing acceptance of this condition is from that particular point of view seemingly outside the set of possible realistic choices. How is possible to become a person such that I can both choose and desire death as preferable (and obviously so) to moral self-condemnation, even while the condition of self-preservation still rules my evaluations?

Again we find the individual belonging to a stage within which certain judgmental criteria are assumed. This person always feels reassured of the commendability of his or her level of moral commitment by means of a relative ego-inflating comparison to others he or she sees as so obviously inferior. As long as this person never seriously questions the seriousness of his or her own moral commitment by means of an honest comparison to the unconditional, he or she need never actually risks any serious personal bodily harm or personal material loss. The unspoken rule within this stage is that morality is fine as long as it does not interfere with my fundamental material demands of survival and attachment (or even luxury). Just as the aesthetic experience of the beautiful, by which the progressing individual is ushered into the second stage, is grounded on a kind of play

between the presentational powers, the individual in the second stage retains something of an unacknowledged attitude of play regarding the moral imperative.⁶⁸³ Throughout this stage, basic material incentives remain the unacknowledged and even denied condition of moral incentives. Therefore, seriousness with which I clothe my moral commitment remains a mere costume, a form of play.⁶⁸⁴

We can see in this another example of Kant's radical evil. We also recognize Harry's unacknowledged adherence to the bourgeoisie. In that the person in this stage may also, like Harry, buoy him or herself up on an assumption of moral superiority over those of the first stage, there may also be certain ironic allowances the subject grants to him or herself on the ground of his or her exceptional moral rigor and resolve. This arrogance of relative superiority will also pose a considerable obstacle to stage transcendence. The finite can honestly assert no legitimate arrogance in the face of an infinite requirement. Humility is the only forthright face that finity can turn toward the infinite. Here again it will be seemingly impossible to choose to pass beyond this stage due to the fact that the individual him or herself holds judgmental criteria which cannot allow choosing to forsake these selfsame criteria. From this person's point of view, there appears to be no rational possibility of escape from the impending approach of unconditional.

However, like the symbol of the beautiful, the symbol of the sublime has the capacity to symbolically assist the individual in escaping this predicament. In the experience of the sublime, our physical capacities are revealed to us as nothing with regard to demands reason makes of them, among other things. In fact, the fundamental form of the sublime experience is that of the absolute difference between finity and infinity. Kant describes the sublime as follows: "nature is sublime in those of its appearances whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity which can occur *only* through the

⁶⁸³ CJ p. 98 "the . . . liking . . . [for] the beautiful . . . is compatible with charms and with an imagination at play. . . The sublime . . . is an emotion . . . [of] seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination's activity."

⁶⁸⁴ We cannot fail to notice the Hesse's use of a costume ball near the end of Harry's progress.

inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination to estimate an object's magnitude"⁶⁸⁵(emphasis mine).

Regarding the aesthetic experience of the beautiful, we saw that the harmonious interplay between the presentational powers of the imagination and the understanding resulted in a pleasurable feeling for the subject. In the experience of the beautiful, the subject feels an aesthetic demonstration of the compatibility of these presentational powers as uncovetously pleasurable. The aesthetic experience of the sublime on the other hand is grounded on a fundamental incompatibility between reason and the imagination. While the functioning sufficiency of the imagination to the demands of the understanding is the condition of the delight felt during the beautiful experience, it is the felt insufficiency of this same power of imagination to present that which is rationally unconditional that grounds the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

As aesthetic experiences, both the sublime and the beautiful depend on the interaction between the fundamental powers that make any experience of nature possible. Regarding the fundamental bases for experience in general, Kant writes,

All our knowledge is . . . subject to time, the formal condition of inner sense. In it [our representations] must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relation.

Every intuition contains within itself a manifold which can be represented as a manifold only in so far as the mind distinguishes the time in the sequence of one impression upon another; for each representation, *in so far as it is contained in a single moment*, can never be anything but an absolute unity. In order that unity of intuition may arise out of this manifold (as is required in the representation of space) it must first be run through and held together. This act I name the *synthesis of apprehension*, because it is directed immediately upon intuition, which does indeed offer a manifold, but a manifold which can never be represented as a manifold, and as contained *in a single representation*, save in virtue of such a synthesis.⁶⁸⁶

Kant is here describing some of the basic structure of all experience of reality. Kant is asserting that in the moment, so to speak, before consciousness of the existence of any outer object, our mind takes in raw unorganized sense data. We take in this raw data in

⁶⁸⁵ CJ §26

⁶⁸⁶ CPR pp. 131-2 A 99.

little bits, so to speak. Since we do not yet know how to properly organize this data, we give it an original, merely subjective order. This original, subjective organization amounts to nothing more than a sequential numbering, as it were, of these bits by means of the temporal order in which they were received.

Once this initial organization is accomplished, all of them must be presented or reproduced simultaneously. In other words, we take in raw bits of sense data and as we do we connect them together in a temporal sequence, like pearls strung together on a necklace (with time being represented here as the string). These merely sequentially organized bits are then presented simultaneously by the "pure transcendental synthesis of imagination."⁶⁸⁷ In other words, the string separating and ordering the raw data bits is cut and taken away such that the entire sequence of bits can be bundled into a single simultaneous and unified image (which is why the faculty that performs this procedure is called the *imagination*).

When I seek to draw a line in thought . . . obviously the various manifold representations that are involved must be apprehended by me in thought one after the other. But if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations (the first part of the line . . .), and did not reproduce them while advancing to those that follow, a comprehensive representation could never be obtained . . . not even the purest and most elementary representations of space and time, could arise.

The synthesis of apprehension is thus inseparably bound up with the synthesis of reproduction.⁶⁸⁸

So, we are able to witness reality partially by means of a faculty that first takes in sense data and then delivers a unified bundle in the form of an image⁶⁸⁹ to the concepts of the understanding. It is this two step characteristic of this faculty that is of interest to us regarding the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 133 A 101.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 133 A 102.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 144 A 121. "Now, since every appearance contains a manifold, and since difference perceptions therefore occur in the mind separately and singly, a combination of them, such as they cannot have in sense itself, is demanded. There must therefore exist in us an active faculty for the synthesis of this manifold. To this faculty I give the title, imagination. Its action, when immediately directed upon perceptions, I entitle apprehension. Since imagination has to bring the manifold of intuition into the form of an image, it must previously have taken the impressions up into its activity, that is, have apprehended them.

Kant waits until the third *Critique* to discuss in detail the limitations of this reproductive capacity.

In order for the imagination to take in a quantum intuitively, so that we can then use it as a measure or unity in estimating magnitude by numbers, the imagination must perform two acts: apprehension (*apprehensio*), and comprehension (*comprehensio aesthetica*). Apprehension involves no problem, for it may progress to infinity, but comprehension becomes more and more difficult the farther apprehension progresses, and it soon reaches its maximum, namely, the aesthetically largest basic measure for an estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has reached the point where the partial presentations of sensible intuition that were first apprehended are already beginning to be extinguished in the imagination, as it proceeds to apprehend further ones, the imagination then loses as much on the one side as it gains on the other; and so there is a maximum in comprehension that it cannot exceed.⁶⁹⁰

As the sensibility and the imagination go through the process of taking in sense data and packaging it for the understanding, it will not run into a problem unless the imagination's maximum bundling capacity is exceeded.

As we go through the day, the majority of our experiences are of objects of limited size. We recognize objects such as desks and pencils, and we recognize them as within graspable spatial bounds. We can see the edges of these objects and we can see space around the objects that is not occupied by them. Regarding such objects, the apprehension submits a manageable number of sense bits to the imagination, because the objects do not require the submission of too many of these bits. The vast majority of our experiences are of this type. However, if a very large object is presented, it is possible that the apprehensive power might deliver too many sequential bits of raw sense information for the imagination to bundle into a single simultaneous image.

If a [thing] is excessive for the imagination (and the imagination is driven to [such excess] as it apprehends [the thing] in intuition), then [the thing] is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself . . . comprehending a multiplicity in a unity (of intuition rather than thought), and hence comprehending in one instant what is apprehended successively, is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination's progression and makes *simultaneity* intuitable. Hence, (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does

⁶⁹⁰ CJ p. 108.

violence to the inner sense, and this violence must be the more significant the larger the quantum is that the imagination comprehends in one intuition.⁶⁹¹

When we find ourselves in the presence of an excessively large object, it is the second step, comprehension, that proves difficult. The more numerous are the individual bits submitted to the imagination to be comprehended, that is, bundled into a single presentable image, the more the limits of this comprehensive capacity are strained and tested.

We cannot fail to notice in this a clear indication of a hard boundary regarding the human being's ability to witness reality. One of the most significant and undeniable aspects of human finity and inescapable limitation is the imagination's upper limit for presenting sense data in a single image. According to Kant, in the presence of the absolutely large,

our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea.⁶⁹²

Reason forces the imagination never to retreat from its duty to present as a unity that which it received as a sequence. The imagination does not have the power to quit in its endeavor. This point is crucial to an understanding of the aesthetic experience of the sublime as well as to the main position of my argument. When Kant asserts that reason demands a presentation of "totality," he is indicating that in the workings of the human mind as a whole, reason's demand rescinds from the imagination the freedom to yield.⁶⁹³ Relenting, even in the face of an impossible demand, is not among the imagination's choices.

The imagination cannot present an image of the excessively large thing, nor can it refuse to present. Therefore, in the presence of the excessively large and in its attempt not to fail, it grudgingly presents its own inability. This fundamental faculty by means of which all experience becomes possible, is itself doomed or fated unrelinquishingly to

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 115-6

⁶⁹² Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., p. 115 reason, by means of its demand to present the excessive thing, "gives rise to such a striving by the imagination. . . . the imagination is driven to [such excess]"

attempt to satisfy the demands of the mind's own reason regardless of whether the accomplishment of these demands is possible. When it cannot present the bundled image of the excessive, it presents nothing. This presentation of nothing is a negative and unintended (from the imagination's point of view) presentation of its own incapacity.

[O]ur imagination, *even in its greatest effort* to do what is demanded of it and comprehend a given object in a whole of intuition (and hence to exhibit the idea of reason), proves its own limits and inadequacy⁶⁹⁴ (emphasis mine).

To risk personification of a faculty, the imagination resents and resists this proof. As we have seen, the imagination regards the excessive thing as "an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself." Kant calls this thing "repulsive to mere sensibility,"⁶⁹⁵ and says that this aesthetic feeling is "possible only by means of a displeasure."⁶⁹⁶ Further, Kant holds that "(the feeling of the sublime) is a pleasure that arise only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces."⁶⁹⁷ No matter what else we will add to the feeling and structure of the sublime experience, we must remember that the imagination never stops regarding the excessive thing (and reason's demand with regard to that thing) as a repulsive and terrifying abyss in which the power of the imagination is utterly consumed.⁶⁹⁸

However, for those susceptible to the sublime experience, this mortally terrifying submission can give rise to the feeling of supersensible purpose.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 115

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 117

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 98

⁶⁹⁸ MB p. 242 "each of us lives completely content and assured in his pseudo-world and on his map, just so long as he does not feel, through some breach in the dam or some frightful flash of lightning, reality, the monster, the terrifying beauty, the appalling horror falling upon him, inescapably embracing him and lethally taking him prisoner. This state, this illumination or awakening, this life in naked reality never lasts long, it bears death in it, each time a person is seized by it and thrust into its frightful whirlpool it last exactly as long as that person can endure it, and then it ends either with death or with breathless flight into unreality, back to the bearable, the orderly, the comprehensible. In this bearable, tepid, orderly zone of concepts, systems, dogmas, allegories, we live nine-tenths of our lives.

In order for the mind to be attuned to the feeling of the sublime, it must be receptive to ideas. For it is precisely nature's inadequacy to the ideas - and this presupposes both that the mind is receptive to ideas and that the imagination strains to treat nature as a schema for them - that constitutes what both repels our sensibility and yet attracts us at the same time, because it is a dominance that reason exerts over sensibility only for the sake of expanding it commensurately with reason's own domain . . . and letting it look toward the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss.⁶⁹⁹

For Kant, therefore, the imagination must be subjected to this horrifying and doomed endeavor as the means by which the mind as a whole can be made "receptive" to reason's supersensible ideas. In other words, receptivity to reason's ideas is not something that happens automatically or easily to the human mind. It can be felt, aesthetically at least, only by means of a "trifling suicide."⁷⁰⁰

For it is a law (of reason) for us, and part of our vocation, to estimate any sense object in nature that is large for us as being small when compared with ideas of reason . . . Now the greatest effort of the imagination in exhibiting the unity [it needs] to estimate magnitude as [itself] a reference to something *absolutely large* . . . Hence our inner perception that every standard of sensibility is inadequate for an estimation of magnitude by reason is [itself] a harmony with the laws of reason . . . imagination and *reason* here give rise to . . . a purposiveness by their *conflict*, namely, to a feeling that we have a pure and independent reason . . . whose superiority cannot be made intuitable by anything other than the inadequacy of that power which in exhibiting magnitudes (of sensible objects) is itself unbounded.⁷⁰¹

Through the pain of involuntarily and unceasingly presenting its own inadequacy, the imagination makes possible a negative exhibition of reason's ideas to the mind.

if the imagination is to provide an exhibition adequate to . . . the ideas of reason . . . our imagination, in all its boundlessness, and along with it nature [must be presented to us] as vanishing[ly small] in contrast to th[ese] ideas."⁷⁰²

So, there is only one means by which the pure unconditional ideas of reason can be made intuitable to the human mind. Infinity cannot be witnessed in nature, for that would require the bounding (in the imagination) of the unbounded and unboundable. Experience is only

⁶⁹⁹ CJ p. 124

⁷⁰⁰ S p. 177

⁷⁰¹ CJ pp. 115-6

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4 See also MB p. 240 "My response to this spectacle was a kind of horror, a feeling of terror and cold mixed with ecstasy; like being struck by a jet of very cold water, it gave pain and pleasure, it exalted and oppressed at once."

possible by means of the comprehensive bundling activity of the imagination, and the infinite is not susceptible to this bundling. Therefore, our ideas concerning infinity could not have been gleaned from experience. Our possession of these ideas could only be by means of our subjective access to reason, our faculty of the unconditional. When our sensible powers strain to their maximum and yet fail to present an idea, our supersensible access to these unrepresentable ideas is proven to us.⁷⁰³

All of this is important because this sublime experience has the power to bring about a certain arousal.

when in intuiting nature we expand our empirical power of presentation . . . , then reason . . . never fails to step in and arouse the mind to an effort, although a futile one, to make the presentation of the senses adequate to [the idea] of totality. This effort, as well as the feeling that the imagination . . . is unable to attain to that idea, is itself an exhibition of subjective purposiveness of our mind, in the use of our imagination, for the mind's supersensible vocation. . . as we judge an object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination to its limit . . . because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling), and it is with regard to this feeling that we judge the presentation of the object subjectively purposive.⁷⁰⁴ . . . the unpurposiveness of our imagination's ability . . . is still presented as purposive for the rational ideas and their arousal.⁷⁰⁵

As we have seen, the imagination does not have the power to present the infinite, but it can present its own inability in the attempt to do so. Kant refers to this inability as the imagination's "separation from the sensible." Kant saw this separation as an "exhibition of the infinite, and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul."⁷⁰⁶ Kant's discussion of the sublime includes the profound insight that the human mind can be attuned to unrepresentably infinite ideas by means of an unrelenting humiliation of the presentational powers.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p. 106

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 128

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 117

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 135

However, this attunement to the supersensible must be recognized as nothing less than an abandonment of sensibility. This arousal and attunement is a feeling that can occur only as the imagination is locked in a unsubiding determination to present what it will never be able to present. This sublime feeling sits, as it were, on top of a continuing fray.⁷⁰⁷ The condition of the attunement is the maintenance of the imagination's futile exertions. Up until the point of the abandonment, the whole mind, as Kant understood it, is occupied and engrossed with the sensible and therefore with its powers of sensibility. It could not have been otherwise, because to that point there could have been no means by which the supersensible could have been presented to the mind for its consideration. As we have seen, the supersensible is aesthetically presentable only negatively by means of demonstration of the imagination's inadequacy. However, by means of just such a demonstration "the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness."⁷⁰⁸ In the devastating humiliation, perhaps even annihilation, of my sensible powers, I can, for the first time, shift my identity from these powers to my ability to consider the unconditional. Kant names this shift "RESPECT."⁷⁰⁹

The feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea *that is a law for us* is RESPECT . . . the imagination . . . proves its own limits and inadequacy, and yet at the same time proves its vocation to [obey] a law, namely to make itself adequate to that idea. Hence the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation. But by a certain subreption (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves, as] subject[s]) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive power over the greatest power of sensibility.⁷¹⁰

Aesthetically at least, I shift my esteem for my powers of sense to my powers of reason and law. We must notice here that this shift is made possible by the feeling that it is beyond our ability to be adequate to a law. It is only by means of my recognition of my

⁷⁰⁷ MB p. 188 "the peace above the maelstroms"

⁷⁰⁸ CJ p. 99

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 114

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., p. 114

inadequacy that the superiority of reason can be made aesthetically intuitable for me. In other words, this required and yet involuntary concession of inadequacy to a law is the means of an important shift. Kant labels this feeling of inadequacy to a law respect. We must notice in this a remarkably similarity to the involuntary concession of inadequacy to a law that we saw regarding moral despair.

At this point we can begin to recognize the use this experience could have regarding the moral progression out of the second stage of guilt.

Though the irresistibility of nature's might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us . . . [The sublime] calls forth our strength . . . to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we . . . [do not] have to bow to [nature's might] if our highest principles were at stake . . . the mind can . . . feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature.⁷¹¹

If we recall that one of the main impediments to progress out of the second stage was an assumption of self-preservation, we can begin to see that the aesthetic experience of the sublime can allow an individual a temporary opportunity to begin to consider what it might feel like to finally recognize the moral imperative as actually unconditional within his or her own decision-making.

It is in fact difficult to think of a feeling for the sublime in nature without connecting it with a mental attunement similar to that for moral feeling . . . [in respect to both] reason must assert its dominance over sensibility . . . [T]he sublime . . . is a feeling that the imagination by its own action is depriving itself of its freedom, in being determined purposively according to a law different from that of its empirical use . . . [T]he imagination feels the sacrifice or deprivation and at the same time the cause to which it is being subjugated.⁷¹²

Kant here emphasizes the formal similarity this aesthetic experience bears to actual moral decision-making. By itself this permits us some hope regarding the sublime's role as an empowering symbol for stage transition. However, we must keep in mind that the experience of the sublime never becomes on its own anything other than an aesthetic

⁷¹¹ Ibid., pp. 120-1

⁷¹² Ibid., pp. 128-9

experience. In other words, it is only a feeling. We must not give the sublime experience any power it does not actually have. It has no power to magically deliver the moral pilgrim to the third stage of moral self transcendence. However, it does offer a temporary analogy. By painfully submitting the imagination (in all its limitation) to the unfulfillable and unlimited demands of reason, the sublime experience allows the subject to experience what it might feel like to exalt rational demands to the thrown of cardinal and unconditional principle.

However, this painful submission come with a surprise. The sublime experience couples its initially terrifying feeling with a subsequent feeling of profundity beyond what is possible in nature or in natural concerns. This second feeling associated with the sublime is a feeling of personal indominability regarding the threats of natural life. It is nothing less than a glimpse into what it might feel like to grant oneself freedom from the conditions of natural survival regarding the performance of moral acts. We cannot fail to notice a similarity with the threshold between the first and second stage where the individual felt freed from the demands of heteronomous determinations of justice. Just as the beautiful offers a felt glimpse into autonomy regarding criteria of guilt, the sublime offers a felt glimpse into autonomy with regard to practical moral action.

In other words, the second and awesome feeling associated with the sublime experience is an aesthetic taste of the feeling of release, control, and freedom that can come when we refuse to perceive mortal threats as any deterrent or condition whatsoever to moral decision-making. Let me make clear that it is not the feeling of suddenly gaining the power to perform all acts demanded by reason. It is the feeling of what might be called calm abandon as my determination to prioritize the moral demand overwhelms and undermines my previous preoccupation with safety and security. It is the feeling (but merely a feeling) of a finally unfettered allegiance to the moral by means of a relinquishment of mortal and prioritized fear. The feeling of the sublime is something like a "sacred thrill,"⁷¹³ or "an

⁷¹³ Ibid., p. 129

expression of the mind that feels able to cross the barriers of sensibility with a . . . practical aim."⁷¹⁴

We can see how the experience of the sublime provides the individual stuck in the second stage with an image of a moral rectification, but it is not yet clear how the experience can assist this individual in undergoing an actual self-motivated moral reorientation.

Self-Annihilating Transcendence

Like the symbol of the beautiful, the sublime functions as a symbol by having elements of both stages present simultaneously. As we have noticed, the sublime is made up of a dynamic analogous to despair, yet offers insight into release from within that despair. As it was with the symbol of the beautiful, a symbol of the sublime will have to be attractive to the individual from his or her present point of view, that is, it will have to offer something this person already wants according to the rules of the current stage. The individual stuck in the impasse of torturous moral/material prioritization, as described above, is a desperate person. What he or she wants is a believable escape from what he or she believes to be an inescapable predicament. What the sublime offers the individual is an aesthetic feeling of escape from an apparently inescapable situation. The individual in the second stage is permitted through the experience of the sublime to feel at once bound in a way analogous to his or her own situation, while simultaneously being able to experience the feeling of discovering the ability to release him or herself through a supersensible power.

Perhaps more importantly, this experience offers the individual the chance to feel something analogous to what a moral conversion would feel like. What the individual remaining in the second stage needs is something strong enough to overwhelm his or her

⁷¹⁴ CJ p. 112

own mortal terror and material attachment.⁷¹⁵ The experience of the sublime offers this person a peek over the fence. This experience offers an admittedly fleeting yet potentially sufficient taste of what it would feel like to actually subject all material concerns to the condition of his or her obedience to moral demands. We must keep in mind that it is the very principle of judgment that is in flux here. This peek over the fence is an aesthetic or symbolic peek into what it would feel like to find oneself with a different hierarchy of concerns in his or her actual choices and acts.

As I progress through stage two, and as my esteem for moral concerns begins to approach that which I had held for the sensuous, an inner battle for dominance between the two concerns seems to be inevitable. It is important to note here that our natural attachment to the principle of material concern is apparently such that only someone who is utterly upon the fangs of a desperation that is driven by this battle for dominance is such as to have the potential to receive this symbol's enabling insight.⁷¹⁶ This is because only someone whose respect for the moral law has risen to this degree is actually in the position to consider relinquishing his or her dominating esteem for the material, that is, the materially secure. Kant writes,

[t]he sublime consists merely in a relation between the sensible elements in the presentation of nature and a possible supersensible use which prepares us, for esteeming something even against our interest (of sense).⁷¹⁷

Again, neither I nor Kant suggest that the experience of the sublime has any magical redemptive or transporting capacity in itself to accomplish a moral justification in the individual. It is a symbol, not grace. We must notice here that the experience only offers me the opportunity to muster my own courage or determination to endeavor the impossible.

⁷¹⁵ S. p. 84. We should recall that while Harry believes he desires suicide, when presented with the reality of it, he recoils. Part of what has kept Harry where he is is a thoroughly unadmitted commitment to personal safety.

⁷¹⁶ CJ p. 124 "what is called sublime by us . . . comes across as merely repellent to a person who is . . . lacking in the development of moral ideas."

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127

And as mentioned above, none but those whose esteem for moral incentives have risen to all but equal footing with that esteem with which they regard material incentives are prepared to receive this experience as an empowering symbol. And lastly, we must notice here that in both the dynamic of the sublime as well as in this person's moral progress, at the moment the material element is released from its battle with reason, the whole process stops. Just as the imagination must remain embroiled in its futile servitude to reason's demands, so must the moral progressor remain forever enmeshed in the futile attempt to satisfy unconditional demands in a conditional context. Kant writes that this individual can "maintain himself only with effort and with unceasing apprehension of falling back into the former [stage]."718

We must keep in mind the serious difference between the aesthetic and the moral. The aesthetic experience never extends to anything beyond feeling. A feeling cannot be confused with an act, which is a decision for which I bear responsibility. The material threats that stand guard at the threshold of the third stage are so terrifying that there is a considerable temptation to scuttle the sincerity of my own self-assessment by means self-deception and subtly dishonorable compromise. Under the influence of this temptation, inspired by these threats, I may have the tendency to confuse aesthetic feeling with moral action. Harry Haller avails himself of this temptation. The experience of the sublime can be so overwhelming that one can easily confuse it with some form of spiritual or religious inspiration, infusion, or transfiguration. Hesse writes of Dostoevsky and Beethoven that they

possess the same knowledge of happiness, wisdom, and harmony, which are not, however, to be found along smooth roads, but rise resplendent only along paths *close* to the abyss. One does not grasp them smilingly but only in tears and in exhaustion and sorrow. . . out of pure misery and lostness something infinitely touching blazes up, an *intimation* of meaning and knowledge about salvation⁷¹⁹ (emphasis mine).

⁷¹⁸ CPrR p. 162

⁷¹⁹ MB p. 135

We can detect in this passage that Hesse is walking only "close to the abyss" and that he hears only "intimations of salvation." These are marks of the sublime aesthetic. We must however not confuse the aesthetic invitation to the third stage with the achievement of or the deliverance into the stage itself. Unlike the marks of the threshold to the stage, the mark of the stage itself is ready submission of all material concerns to unquenchable rational demands. The individual in the third stage is not the onlooker, but the one who descends into the maelstrom in practical reality. The submission to the infinite does not occur aesthetically (in feeling or emotional spirituality), nor does it occur intellectually (in a Kierkegaardian submission of reason to ungraspable hope born of guilt-fueled despair). The submission the unconditional implied in the work of both Hesse and Kant is nothing short of the submission of my entire materiality, all my power, knowledge skill, determination, sorrow and love, to the impossible rational demand of universal human equality. It is only by means of just such a donation, just such "sacrifice and deprivation," that we can instantiate "the cause to which we have been subjected."⁷²⁰

The cardinal interpretive and determining principle of the third stage of moral development is, for the first time, the universal rational self-evidence of human equality of significance. "No longer onlookers, no longer epicures and judges,"⁷²¹ those in the third stage do not reserve a life boat for their own ego self. The mark of the third stage is the ability to feed one's actual life and ability into the fire of an unsatisfiable demand. Harry Haller always turns his eye toward the bourgeoisie. He must, for the only other comparison available is to the ideal. Under this comparison, all finity is as nothing. While Harry hides terrified by the implications inherent in so withering a gaze, the one of the third stage acknowledges these implications as inevitable, fated, and irresistible.

Movement into the third stage is not like reaching a safe destination, whereupon one can relax and wipe one's brow. It is not like reaching second base in baseball. The

⁷²⁰ CJ p. 129

⁷²¹ MB p. 133

sublime and the third stage are fundamentally dependent upon the ongoing and frenetic maintenance of the struggle. Take the sublime for example. Once my sensible powers disengage from their attempt to present the unbounded, the possibility of experiencing the sublime disappears. The humiliation of the greatest capacity of my sensible powers *as an ongoing event* is a necessary condition of this aesthetic experience. The maximized struggle is the necessary foundation upon which the experience of the sublime alone can occur. The structure of the sublime experience is analogous to the fact that an unrelenting recognition and acceptance of one's own responsibilities, along with a recognition of their impossibility,⁷²² is the condition of practically rational self-forgiveness. It is only with this kind of unceasing and unrelinquished apprehension that the individual can gain a real self-respect based upon the consciousness of his or her prioritization of the implications of his or her rationally grounded freedom beyond the demands of survival.

We should also notice that assumptions and conceptions of identity change from stage to stage. Who and what I am are tied to the ground assumptions of my stage. It is no surprise, then, that movement into the final stage requires another such shift of identity. However, unlike the comparatively isolated and personal, that is, finite boundary-dependent identities of the first two stages, the final stage involves a destabilization of the legitimacy of finity-dependent individual identity itself. With my exposure to the undeniable priority of the universal and the unbounded that characterizes this stage, the finite aspects of my identity become exposed as disappearingly small and stingingly insignificant and insufficient, much to the dismay of my second stage credit-greedy

⁷²² See Plato's *Republic* pp. 132-3 "[Concerning] my natural hesitation and fear to state, and attempt to thoroughly examine, such a paradox . . . we must first remember that we have come to this point while we were searching for the nature of justice . . . Shall we require that the just man be in no way different from justice itself, and be like justice in every respect? . . . Do you think our discussion less worthwhile if we cannot prove that it is possible. . . Then do not compel me to show that the things we have described in theory can exist precisely in practice

See also PP pp. 64-5n "The need to assume a highest good in the world, which is the ultimate end of all things brought about with our cooperation, is . . . a need driving from . . . a deficiency in those external conditions in which alone an object as an end in itself (as a morally ultimate end) . . . can be produced. . . the moral end must be an unselfish one. . . there is a further duty to strive with all one's abilities to ensure that . . . a world conforming to the highest moral ends exists. In this way, an thinks himself on an analogy with the deity

identity. In the process of this exposure, I eventually lose the ability to identify with my finite aspects even while I remain simultaneously and inescapable materially anchored. In other words, I stay in my body even while I lose my ability to prioritize it or establish significant aspects of my identity on it. With this loss it begins to become apparent that my interpretation or establishment of my own identity is necessarily a corollary of my hierarchy of care, something over which I may not have total control. My identity in this final stage becomes wrapped up in the odd and paradoxical tension involved in the inescapable and inevitably perpetual juxtaposition of finity and infinity. We must remember that the condition of this stage is a continuation of the passionate and tragic struggle between the infinite ethical demands of my reason and my own merely finite capacity to realize these demands.

The third stage nature rests on a continuing storm of suffering (in a manner analogous to the sublime experience itself). In other words, I do not lose my attachment to the material concerns fundamental to human existence, I just lose the ability to make them my top priority. Just because I may sacrifice my material concerns to practically rational ones does not mean that I get to avoid the passion and wrenching remorse of the Garden of Gethsemane. The God of this stage will appear as a paradox to theoretical reason and it will involve a kind of release from profound personal guilt (as well a freedom from natural incentives as dictations) and/or a heretofore ungraspable awareness of my own more authentic identity with or unification or reunification with the self-grounding ground of freedom. This stage has a highly ironic character to it in that this ground, with which I find myself unified, remains fundamentally and irrevocably ungraspable to me beyond its practical demand.⁷²³

So, while my ego is kept busy, forever destined to suffer humiliation for its unrelinquishable yet futile attempts to satisfy infinite demands with an finite agency, I am afforded a release from this ego and his or her suffering. This release is inconceivable to

⁷²³ We might notice in this that Moses only ever really gets to see YHWH's commandments.

anyone who has not individually experienced it, for it is a release from individuation or particularity.⁷²⁴ It is a release from suffering by means of continued unrelenting suffering. So long as I understand my identity as inherently connected to specific aspects of my finite personhood, it is a safe bet that I am not released into the third stage. Harry Haller is such a person. He retains a dominating concern for his specific temporal existence.⁷²⁵ It is for this concern for the temporal that the author of the *Treatise* chastises Harry. As such he remains a person ruled by concerns for the limited, only feigning allegiance to the unconditional. Those whose allegiance resides with the particular must always suffer the mocking and annihilating gaze of the infinite. However, both Hesse and Kant seem to suggest the possibility of a release from particularity by means of a leap. This leap must occur in personal decisions and commitments that take the form and structure of the sublime. As such, my particularity must be instigated to aspire arrogantly to express infinity. However, it can attempt this arrogant aspiration only negatively by means of its ongoing and infinite diminishment in both relation to and bewildered and paradoxical awareness of the infinite.

Once this occurs, the continued suffering and humiliation of my ego affords me the capacity to relinquish identification with the particular. Instead of focusing on fear driven concerns of the first stage, or the honor driven concerns of the works stage, the "I" of the third stage is released. It is released from its previous allegiance to the particular, and as

⁷²⁴ MB P. 192 "But whether this ideal is anything but noble dream, whether it ever was translated into experience and reality, whether human beings ever actually become God, about this I know nothing. About those principle stages in the soul's history, however, I do know; I know about them, and everyone who has experienced them knows that they are realities. Now whether those dreamed-of even higher stages of human development exist or not, it is nevertheless a welcome thing for us that they are present as dreams, as ideals, as poetry, as longed-for goals. If they were ever really experienced by human beings, then these persons have remained silent about them and by their very essence they are incomprehensible and incommunicable to one who has not been touched by them.

⁷²⁵ S p. 212 We must notice that Harry always associates with those personalities by means of which the immortal came into being rather than the immortal directly. Mozart tries to get Harry to hear the immortal in the striding basses, but Harry wishes to talk Goethe and Mozart instead. Harry has yet to pay homage to that which these individuals sacrificed their individuality to incarnate. It is when the individual named Mozart submits and disappears into the immortal that the immortal appears. Yet Harry looks always for mere Mozart. This is another of Hesse's indications that Harry retains a desire for a personal promotion to Olympus. This condemns him, at least for the time being, to the second stage.

such can align itself with the absolute and universal ideals that have "pressed upon" it from the start.⁷²⁶ We must remember in even in this release, the ego remains nonetheless. It is the ego which other people see and to whom they talk. It is by means of and as this ego-self that I relate to them as well. The "I" which is not ego, the "I" who aligns with the universal, is nothing other than the unconditional yet free submission of the material to the ideal. The particular aspects of such a person must remain in the world, suffering its considerable threats. It is these particular aspects, including my ego-self, that are submitted to the universal.⁷²⁷ Thus it is that the particularity of Jesus must hang on a cross to reveal or instantiate the unconditional, the Christ, within the world of conditions.⁷²⁸ This revelatory submission is faith.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁶ MB pp. 56-7 "In my light morning half sleep I encountered a holy man. Half the time it seemed as if I myself were the holy man . . . and half the time I saw him as another person, separate from me, but penetrated by my understanding and most intimately known . . . the holy man suffered a great sorrow. But I cannot write about this as though it had happened to anyone but myself, I experienced it and felt it. I felt that my most precious thing had been taken away from me, my children had died or were at the moment of dying before my eyes . . . More than this could not be taken from me . . . I . . . or the holy man . . . closed his eyes and smiled, and in his mild smile there was all the suffering that can in any way be conceived, there was the admission of every weakness, every love, every vulnerability . . . It as pain, it was sorrow, deepest sorrow -- but there was no resistance, no denial. It was agreement, resignation, obedience, it was knowledge and acquiescence. The holy man sacrificed and praised the sacrifice . . . He did not harden his heart and yet he survived for he was immortal . . .

⁷²⁷ MB pp. 57-8 [continued from last footnote "[the holy man] accepted joy and love . . . and gave them back . . . to the fate that was his own . . . the holy man's children and all the possession of his love subsided, faded away in pain . . . They had disappeared, not been killed. They were transformed, not destroyed . . . They had been life and had become symbols, in the way everything is a symbol and at some time perishes in pain in order that, as a new symbol, it may wear a different dress.

⁷²⁸ As was mentioned in the conclusion of the last chapter, Harry does not represent the individual who has undergone this self-sacrifice. At the conclusion of *Steppenwolf* Harry will have to learn to

do better next time . . . [Harry] understood it all . . . I understood Mozart, and somewhere behind me I heard his ghastly laughter. I knew That all the hundred thousand pieces of life's game were in my pocket. A glimpse of its meaning had stirred my reason and I was determined to begin the game afresh. (S p. 217)

Harry is only at the threshold of the transition to the third stage. He has yet to go through that gate by means of the sublime as an empowering symbol. He is not yet Knecht who sacrifices easily. It is Hesse himself, extrapolated as the resilient author of this work between the wars, that instantiates the possibility to which the novel points.

Hesse corresponded with Thomas Mann over many years. Despite some seemingly serious surface level differences between these writers, they shared a deep similarity regarding the seriousness with which they regarded their writing. Hesse wrote in a letter to Mann that "[y]es, the "Steppenwolf" is a homage to you . . . a pointer from my work to yours" (HM p. 37 [Hesse apparently lifted the steppenwolf image from Mann's *Der junge Joseph*, p. 28 where "the harlot tamed the Steppenwolf" tr. R. Manheim] It also turned

out that they shared a similar theme in the late novels of their careers. Regarding Mann's reading of Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*, Mann finds a "disturbing similarity" between that work and his own *Doctor Faustus*. At least part of this shared theme is the issue of authorial self-sacrifice. Mann describes *Doctor Faustus* as a book of "radically serious, menacing subject, around which the lightning of grave sacrifice seemed to flash." (SN p. 24) Regarding this work that he compared so closely with the work of Hesse, Mann felt himself "greatly under the spell of a work that was confession and sacrifice through and through . . . a work that took the form of the most disciplined art and at the same time stepped out of art and became reality . . . palpable reality was forever indistinguishably merging into painted perspectives and illusions. This montage . . . gave me cause to worry" (SN pp. 87; 32). In a letter to Hesse, Mann revealed that "[t]hat book [*Doctor Faustus*] cost me a good deal; it took more out of me than any before it" (MH p. 122). Mann wrote

For indeed, like no other of my books, this one consumed and took a heavy toll of my inner-most forces. . . There is a noble saying: that he who gives his life shall save it --- a saying as applicable to the realm of art and literature as to religion. It is never from a lack of vitality that such an offering of one's life is made. (SN p. 6)

Mann is clearly suggesting that a work of this kind requires something of a willing self-sacrifice on the part of its creator. *Steppenwolf* is Hesse's description of what it is like and how it feels to approach this choice. Hesse provides the reader with a discussion and explanation of some of the reasons why such a sacrifice is required. The power of literature and of art in general will never, it seems, rise to a level capable of wakening those of the first and second stage out of their overarching concerns with fear, instinct and reputation. Art does not seem to be capable of offering serious resistance to the bourgeois momentum toward war and institutional oppression. However, at the threshold of the third stage and under the influence of the sublime, the individual can marshal his or her courage to intend the impossible in sincere homage to the ideal. This homage of the last stage must be marshaled without recourse to even the motivating hope for effectiveness. It is at least in part due to this loss of motivating hope for art's effectiveness against fear based instincts of the vast populous that the continued commitment to art and literature becomes an act of self-sacrifice on the part of the author.

As we have noticed, the unconditional can be expressed within the bounds of finity by means of the utter exhaustion of any finite attempt to satisfy the unconditional. The mark of both the first and second stages of ethical development is a raising of conditional concerns to the thrown of the unconditional concern. The mark of the third stage is the overthrow of this rule by universal concerns. Finally, in the third stage, a human individual selects and employs a rationally unconditional principle as his or her subjectively unconditional principle. However, as we have seen, this requires the often painful, and sorrowful subjugation of even the most dire survival concerns. It is the actual existence of an actual human that must be committed to the unconditional, and not a fictional shadow character. Joseph Knecht, a literary character, cannot be Hesse's sacrifice. While it is true that Knecht dies in a manner completely in line with the structure we have been investigating, Hesse had already come to acknowledge that fictional sacrifice is a mere slight of hand. Only the actual submission of Hesse's actual life to a universally relevant cause could bring the laughter of the immortals. It is Hesse himself, in the moment he rouses himself in order to abandon himself into the unconditional demand by means of his authorship of *Steppenwolf*, that offers the glimpse of the immortals to the reader of his works. In order to write *Steppenwolf*, Hesse must have lived through what he recounts poetically in regard to Knecht at the very end of that later novel.

But now, in the beautiful sunlight, stirred by the scene he had just witnessed, and with his pupil [only a single one] urging him into the water in the comradely fashion, he found the venture less deterring. Above all he feared that the promise born this morning hour would be blasted if he disappointed the boy by opposing cool, adult rationality to this invitation to a test of strength. It was true that his feeling of weakness and uncertainty, incurred by the rapid ascent into the mountains, warned him to be careful; but perhaps this indisposition could be soonest routed by forcing matters and meeting it head-on. The summons was stronger than the warning, his will stronger than his instinct. He quickly shed the light dressing gown, took a deep breath, and threw himself into the water at the same spot where his pupil had dived.

The lake, fed by glacial waters so that even in the warmest days of summer one had to be inured to it, received him with an icy cold, slashing in its enmity. He had

Kant's removed intimately subjective judge who sits in imperturbable quietude receives the appeals of the various incentives. For the one in the third stage, this inner unfathomable ground of rational freedom sends forth (perhaps one could say condemns) the human being into the world of material conditions with an unconditional demand. The world is absolutely incommensurate with the demand and so the finite human being will be burned and consumed by this demand. However, in the moment before there is nothing left, in the moment during which the ego-self is wracked with suffering, determination,

steeled himself for a thorough chilling, but not for this fierce cold which seemed to surround him with leaping flames and after a moment of fiery burning began to penetrate rapidly into him. After the dive he had risen quickly to the surface, caught sight of Tito [his pupil] swimming far ahead of him, felt bitterly assailed by this icy, wild hostile element, but still believed he could lessen the distance, that he was engaging in the swimming race, was fighting for the boy's respect and comradeship, for his soul -- when he was already fighting Death, who had thrown him and was now holding him in a wrestler's grip. Fighting with all his strength, Knecht held him off as long as his heart continued to beat.

The young swimmer . . . looked back . . . and . . . no longer saw him. . . Oh! he thought in grief and horror . . . there came over him a premonitory shudder of awe, a sense that this guilt would utterly change him and his life, and would demand much greater things of him than he had even before demanded of himself. (GBG pp. 424-5)

We must notice here the clear references to the cold and the self-abandonment associated with the immortals in *Steppenwolf*. We must also notice the pattern of the sublime as well as something of a signal of hope regarding the effectiveness of the sacrifice as a revelatory event. We must also note Hesse's refusal to surround the event with the pomp of a concert hall, cathedral or their like. The entire majestic event happens under the guise of the mundane and unextraordinary.

MB p. 73 "The Russian man, the Karamozov . . . is equally the complete egoist and a hero self-sacrifice.

Ibid., p. 172 "There may be much truth . . . in the assumption that every triumph of a poet's work is paid for by sacrifices in his private life. No work is accomplished otherwise."

Richards p. 118 "I believe that, despite its apparent absurdity, life nevertheless, has, meaning; I accept not being able to comprehend with reason this ultimate meaning, but I am prepared to serve it, even if I have to sacrifice myself in the process."

MB p. 188 "readiness to serve the spirit by every sacrifice"

729 CPrR pp. 89-90 "Duty! Thou sublime and mighty name that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating but requirest submission and yet seekest not to move the will by threatening aught that would arouse natural aversion or terror, but holdest forth a law which of itself finds entrance into the mind and yet gins reluctant reverence . . . a law before which all inclinations are dumb even though they secretly work against it: what origin is there worthy of thee, and where is to be found the root of thy noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations and from which to be descended is the indispensable condition of the only worth which men can give themselves?"

It cannot be less than something which elevates man above himself as a part of the world of sense, something which connects him with an order of things which only the understanding can think and which has under it the entire world of sense, including the empirically determinable existence of man in time . . . It is nothing else than personality, i.e., the freedom and independence from the mechanism of nature regarded as a capacity of a being which is subject to special laws (pure practical laws given by his own reason), so that the person as belonging to the world of sense is subject to his own personality so far as he belongs to the intelligible world. For it is then not to be wondered at that man, as belonging to two worlds, must regard his own being in relation to his second and higher vocation with reverence and the laws of this vocation with the deepest respect

resolution, guilt, despair, exhaustion, bafflement, betrayal and loss, in that moment and by means of that moment, a reflection of the inconceivable and paradoxical light of the unconditional and immortal will blaze impossibly within the confines of finity and mortality.

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