

**THE RELATION OF FREEDOM AND EVIL IN KANT'S
MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATION OF FREEDOM AND EVIL IN KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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The purpose of this study is to examine concepts of freedom and evil, and to clarify their relation in terms of Kant's moral philosophy. In this study, I firstly examine Kant's understanding of freedom and the problems that this understanding leads to. I also discuss how the concept of freedom can be reconciled with the concept of evil expressed in the form of "propensity to evil". Additionally, I attempt to show the significance of the notion of evil for Kant's moral theory.

Evil is one of the most criticized concepts of Kant's philosophy and it is considered as inconsistent with his earlier thoughts by his contemporaries. Kant claims that the "propensity to evil" is universal to all of human race, but it does not mean that human beings are actually evil. They become good or evil with their free will (*Willkür*). In this study, I propose that Kant's understanding of evil is a concept that helps to conceive one's own freedom in terms of Kant's morality. I also try to show that in spite of its similarities with the Christian doctrine of "original sin", Kant's conception of evil should not be considered as a religious issue; it is a matter of freedom as the extension of his moral theory and his earlier thoughts. Kant's earlier works do not seem to be sufficient for comprehending his moral thoughts. Therefore, it can be proposed that with the introduction of the concept of evil in the *Religion within the Limits of Reason*, the missing part of Kant's moral theory is completed.

Keywords: Kant, freedom, evil, morality, categorical imperative.

ÖZ

KANT'IN AHLAK FELSEFESİNDE ÖZGÜRLÜK VE KÖTÜLÜK İLİŞKİSİ

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, özgürlük ve kötülük kavramlarını incelemek ve Kant'ın ahlak felsefesi bağlamında aralarındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymaktır. Bu çalışmada, öncelikle Kant'ın özgürlük anlayışı ve bu anlayışın yol açtığı sorunlar incelenmektedir. Ayrıca, özgürlük kavramı ile “kötülüğe eğilim” biçiminde ifade edilen kötülük kavramının nasıl uzlaştırılabileceği tartışılmaktadır. Ek olarak, kötülük kavramının Kant'ın ahlaka ilişkin düşünceleri açısından önemi ortaya konmaya çalışılmaktadır.

Kötülük, Kant felsefesinin en çok eleştirilen kavramlarından biridir ve çağdaşları tarafından Kant'ın erken dönem düşünceleri ile tutarsız olduğu

düşünölmektedir. Kant, “kötölöğe eğilim”in tüm insan soyu için evrensel olduğunu, fakat bu eğilimin insanda gerçekte var olan bir kötölük anlamına gelmediğini savunur. İnsanlar özgür istençlerini kullanarak (*Willkür*) iyi ya da kötü olurlar. Bu çalışmada, Kant’ın kötölük anlayışının, Kant ahlakı bağlamında kişinin özgürlüğünün farkına varmasına yardımcı olduğunu öne sürölmektedir. Ayrıca, Hristiyan öğretisi olan “ilk günah” ile benzerliklerine rağmen, Kant’ın kötölük anlayışının dinsel bir sorun olarak ele alınmaması gerektiği, Kant’ın ahlak kuramının ve erken dönem düşüncelerinin uzantısı olarak bir özgürlük sorunu olduğu gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Kant’ın erken dönem çalışmaları onun ahlak anlayışını kavramak için yeterli görünmemektedir. Bu nedenle, *Aklın Sınırları İçinde Din* çalışmasında kötölük kavramının açıklanması ile Kant’ın ahlak kuramının eksik parçasının tamamlanmış olduğu savunulabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kant, özgürlük, kötölük, ahlak, koşulsuz buyruk.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Kant was one of the most influential German philosophers of the eighteenth century. Kant takes his monumental place in the history of philosophy with his “critical” method, his “Copernican Revolution” and his new approach to ethics. Among his predecessors there are many who were influential on Kant’s philosophy. I will mention two of them. Kant always expresses his indebtedness to Hume and Rousseau. He says that Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumbers and that he learned from Rousseau respect to man and human dignity. While Hume’s thoughts shed light on his metaphysics and epistemology, Rousseau’s influence can be felt on his moral philosophy.

Kant has made important contributions to philosophy. He introduced a new approach suggesting a mean for philosophical problems, he set up a bridge between rationalism and empiricism. Kant makes a synthesis of rationalism and empiricism. Before Kant, rationalists argued that the source of knowledge is human mind, whereas the empiricists claimed that knowledge is given to us

from outside by sensibility. He accepts some points of both of these views but he introduces a new approach.

Until Kant it was thought that the mind conforms to objects in order to attain knowledge of the object of experience. However, with Kant's "Copernican revolution" the passive mind becomes an active participant in what it experiences and Kant claims that objects conform to our mind. According to Kant, the objects which we know are known by the mediation of sensation. The outer world, i.e., the sensational world cannot be known without our mind's contribution, whose knowableness needs the contribution of mind. This kind of reality shows us the limits of our knowledge. Indeed, this is what Kant intended to do in the *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR)*, that is, to search the limits of reason.¹

While Kant establishes a bridge between empiricism and rationalism in the *CPR*, he also opens a door to moral philosophy. Kantian morality is still a topic of interest and debate. When we look at a book on morality, we can easily notice that it mentions Kant's morality either criticizing it or supporting it but at the end mentions it. Kant's contribution to moral philosophy is so important that it cannot be overlooked.

¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan & Co., 1965. Hereafter this work will be abbreviated by *CPR*.

As the main aim of my thesis, I examine Kant's two disputatious concepts, freedom and evil, and I try to understand their relations in terms of Kant's moral philosophy. I also try to clarify why these concepts are problematic in Kant's philosophy and I examine how Kant handles these problems. In addition, within the framework of Kantian morality I discuss how freedom (of will) can be reconciled with Kant's notion of "propensity to evil", and try to clarify the significance of this notion for Kant's moral thoughts.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I mainly focus on the problem of freedom in Kant's philosophy. However, before examining Kant's understanding of freedom, I give the outline of the traditional problem of freedom and the philosophical approaches to that problem. After such an introduction to freedom, I give a preliminary overview of Kant's philosophy for a better understanding of his notion of freedom and his moral theory.

In the following sections of the second chapter, I give details of the problem of freedom in Kant's philosophy. Firstly, I examine Kant's understanding of freedom and explicate how Kant handles the problem of freedom. In the *CPR*, Kant calls freedom, God and immortality as "unavoidable problems set by pure reason".² They are problematic, because they are unknowable within theoretical employment of reason. Kant mainly examines the problem of freedom in the context of the *third antinomy*. Since both causality and freedom

² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B7.

are important concepts in his philosophy, that is, since causality is necessary for knowledge and freedom is necessary for morality, Kant tries to reconcile freedom and causality. He does this with noumena and phenomena distinction. By means of that distinction, he claims that there is causality in phenomenal realm as the law of nature and there is another kind of causality as freedom in noumenal realm. After providing the possibility of freedom, he explains his moral theory in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Groundwork)*³ and the *Critique of Practical Reason (CPrR)*⁴ and in *The Metaphysics of Morals (MM)*.⁵ I examine Kant's moral theory mainly based on his thoughts as they are given in the *CPrR* and in the *Groundwork*.

In the further sections of the second chapter, I mention the problems arising from the Kant's conception of freedom. Freedom has a central place in Kant's philosophy, and it "never ceased to be unproblematic".⁶ Freedom is used in various and perplexing meanings. Moreover, the meaning of freedom alters and expands in each of Kant's studies. For example, freedom refers to moral law, spontaneity, autonomy and practical reason in Kant's various works. I try

³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991.
Hereafter this work will be abbreviated by *Groundwork*.

⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1997.
Hereafter this work will be abbreviated by *CPrR*.

⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991.
Hereafter this work will be abbreviated by *MM*.

⁶ Sokoloff, William W., "Kant and the Paradox of Respect", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 45., No. 4, pp. 768-779, October 2001, p. 775.

to shed light on these changes in the meaning and their roles and significance in his philosophy.

In the third chapter, I try to explain Kant's moral theory. I find it necessary to mention Rousseau's influence on Kant's moral philosophy. I think Kant is inspired by some of Rousseau's concepts and principles while constructing his moral theory. For this reason, I try to clarify Rousseau's influence on the background of Kant's moral theory. Later, I give a general outline of and I examine some of the details of Kant's moral theory. By means of the major concepts of his theory like the categorical imperative, his kingdom of ends, heteronomy and autonomy, good will and the highest good. I also mention subjects like the existence of God, immortality of the soul.

In the last section of the third chapter, after examining Kant's understanding of morality, I give some objections to Kant's moral theory and discuss certain difficulties. I try to find ways of overcoming some of these difficulties within the framework of Kant's moral theory.

Let me explicate one of these problems that constitute the core of my thesis. Kant argues that freedom is compatible with natural causality in the *CPR*. Later in the *Groundwork* and in the *CPrR*, he explains the details of his comprehension of freedom within the relation of his moral thoughts. However, in his explanations, Kant uses freedom as the implication of practical reason, moral law, and autonomy of an agent. Because of such a use of freedom, the

possibility of immoral or evil actions almost disappears. But, I think later in the *Religion within the Limits of Reason (Religion)*,⁷ he explains his thoughts on evil and he clarifies the conditions of immoral and evil performance.

In the fourth chapter, I examine Kant's understanding of evil. In the first section of that chapter, I give the philosophical background of the problem of evil. Later, I discuss how the Kant's concept of evil is considered by his contemporaries and by his scholars. Then, I try to clarify Kant's understanding of evil as given in the *Religion*. This concept is regarded as scandalous because of its similarities with Christian's doctrine of "original sin".

In the *CPrR* and the *Groundwork*, Kant concentrates on morally valuable actions. He elucidates where the moral worth of an action comes from, but he does not explain where the evil nature of an action comes from. He does not engage in a discussion of what an evil action is and he does not explain the notion of immorality until the *Religion*. It is only given tacitly as the opposite of the morally valuable actions. However, such an explanation of evil or immorality is not sufficient to comprehend it.

I argue that Kant's earlier works, the *Groundwork* and the *CPrR*, are not sufficient for comprehending his moral thoughts and his understanding of freedom. Later in the *Religion*, Kant introduces the concept of evil.

⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene & Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row Publishers, USA, 1960. Hereafter this work will be abbreviated by *Religion*.

Recognizing Kant's distinction in the aspect of will as *Wille* and *Willkür*, the problem, which arises from the identifying uses of practical reason with freedom, disappears. Human beings may act in an evil way by means of use of their free *Willkür*, this explains the possibility of immoral or evil actions. I argue that in the *Religion* with his introduction concept of evil the missing part of Kant's moral theory is completed. However, as Kant attempts to disclose these incomprehensible and ambiguous points, new problems such as the inconsistency of these new concepts with his earlier thoughts arise. Further, Kant is considered as the defender of Christianity because of his thoughts in the *Religion*. Since his notion of evil reminds the Christian doctrine of "original sin", it is regarded as "scandalous" by Kant's contemporaries.

I argue that Kant's notion of evil is more complicated than it is thought. To indict Kant for advocating Christianity would be an inept claim. Because, Kant clearly states that morality does not need religion in the preface of the *Religion*. Further, he claims that God cannot be the starting point to morality. I argue that Kant's thoughts on evil are extension of his earlier thoughts and works. With a careful examination, it can easily be noticed that Kant actually implicitly mentions these thoughts in his earlier works. In other words, the seeds of those thoughts on evil can be seen in his earlier works.

In the last chapter, I mainly focus on how Kant solves the problems arising from his identifying the freedom of an agent with practical reason (moral law) and autonomy of an agent, that is, how it would be possible for someone to

commit an immoral or evil act if a free and autonomous person necessarily is subject to moral law? I also give details of Kant's perplexing notion of "evil". Since Kant entitles his notion of evil as "radical evil" in the form of "propensity (*Hang*) to evil", I also try to explain what Kant means by the term "propensity to evil". My major aim in this thesis is to understand the relation between the freedom and evil in Kant's moral theory. Therefore, in the last part of this chapter, I try to clarify the place of "evil" in Kant's morality and its relation with freedom. I want to examine the role and the significance of the propensity to evil for Kant's philosophical system for a better understanding of his morality and for notion of freedom.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

2.1. Background of the Problem of Freedom

In this chapter, before examining freedom in Kant's philosophy, I mention the philosophical background of the problem of freedom briefly in order to understand Kant's position. With such an introduction, I intend to give the general outline of how the problem of freedom is considered within the history of philosophy and further, I give some philosophers' considerations of freedom.

The question "are human beings free?" is one of the unavoidable and also unanswerable questions of humanity. Human beings always try to solve this puzzle; however, an exact answer has not been given yet. This concept also attracts philosophers' attentions. Before giving an answer to the question "whether we are free or not", they initially tried to understand the nature of freedom, i.e., tried to understand the notion itself: "What is freedom?". While saying freedom, what is intended mostly is free will. The free will can be

defined as a particular kind of capacity of rational agents to make conscious choices according to their own will without externally imposed restraints.

People have tried to understand freedom through these questions: Do human beings have a free will, and as a consequence of having a free will, are they free in their choices? Is there a relation between freedom and evil? Is men's freedom just an illusion? Is the physical world determined or not? Are men free from necessity of physical world, i.e., law of causality? Determinism can be defined as the causal determination of every event (including all human actions) by a continuous chain of antecedent events. If the physical world is determined, then what about the human beings as a part of that world? The complete determination of human beings endangers the possibility of morality. If the human being is not free in his choice, then how is someone accountable for the result of his actions? Determinism has two aspects: causal determination by law of nature and determination by God. The problem of freedom cannot be considered independent from the existence of God. If God exists, in spite of this existence, can free will of human beings still be mentioned? Were Eve and Adam really free to eat or not to eat the apple; or was it a necessary and pre-determined step for the beginning of humanity? Does God create human beings with a free will? However, saying that human beings are free in their performances seems contradictory with God's omniscience and omnipotence.

Under the light of answers given to these questions, philosophers suggest different perspectives about freedom. According to incompatibilists, all

elements of physical world act according to a pre-determined plan and therefore human beings are not free. However, some philosophers, who are called as compatibilists, think that determinism may be compatible with free will. Because they regard free will as the condition of morality. For example, Hume, one of the compatibilists⁸, believes the human has moral responsibility of his actions since he has free will. Additionally, some philosophers, who believe in the existence of God, do not want to leave the human beings as powerless in front of God. They do not think that complete determination of human nature is possible; they endeavor to save freedom from the complete determinism of human beings. They are opposed to fatalism.⁹

As I said, freedom is considered in many different approaches. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau divides it into two as physical and moral freedom, that is, freedom before contract and after contract. Actually, I think Rousseau's understanding of freedom is very important for better understanding of the background of Kant's freedom and morality. In the next chapter, I give the details of Rousseau's understanding of freedom. Now, let us look at other philosophers' approaches to freedom. Another philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, defines freedom as "simply the absence of obstacles to motion".¹⁰ According to Hobbes, if everybody has limitless freedom, i.e., right to do everything, then

⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-responsibility>

⁹ Fatalism can be defined as governance of universe by fate or destiny.

¹⁰ Hobbes, Thomas, *On the Citizen*, trans. Richard Tuck, Michael Silverthorne, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 111.

having right to do whatever someone wants to do is no other than having no right.¹¹ Sartre is also one of the philosophers, who give an important place to freedom within their philosophy. Sartre says that human beings are wholly free in their actions. His well-known and radical utterance about freedom is that “man is condemned to be free” in the *Being and Nothingness*. With this statement, he does not only provide unlimited freedom to men but also he claims that it is not possible to escape this freedom.

As I said before, some philosophers, like Rousseau, divide freedom into two concerning its positive and negative meanings. The negative cognition of freedom is considered as “free from”. In fact, “free from” does not give us more information about the nature of freedom; it is just being free from obstacles. Kant can be regarded as one of the philosophers who consider freedom in the distinction of positive and negative meaning. Additionally, Kant attempts to rescue freedom from the determination of the physical world. Concerning the reconciliation of the determinism and freedom, the well-known remark of Kant is that, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith”.¹² I argue that Kant’s understanding of freedom is under the effect of both Hume’s and Rousseau’s philosophies.

2.2. Background of the Notion of Freedom in Kant’s Philosophy

¹¹ Hobbes, Thomas, *On the Citizen*, pp. 26-27.

¹² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

Now, after giving a brief review of the problem of freedom, I continue with Kantian freedom. However, before mentioning Kant's understanding of freedom, how Kant considers it and what the difficulties of freedom within Kant's philosophy are, I want to give a general outline of Kant's philosophy for better understanding of his notion of freedom and his moral theory. Because, I think certain concepts introduced in *CPR* constitute ground of his moral theory.

I think David Hume's skepticism pushes Kant to an investigation that searches the limits of pure reason. After Hume reduced knowledge of causality to just habit, Kant starts the *CPR* with an inquiry and he investigates the limits of reason (*Vernunft*). He attempts to find out the answer of these questions: "what I can know?", "what I ought to do?", and "what I may hope?". In other words, he searches for what the necessary and universal conditions of object of possible experience are, that is how things appear to us, what the conditions of it are. The inquiry is aimed to disclose what reason can achieve when the experience is completely removed, that is, he searches the limits of "pure" reason.

Kant states that, "but though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience".¹³ He speaks of two kinds of knowledge; pure knowledge that is independent of all experience and sense impressions (*a priori*), and empirical knowledge that has its source in

¹³ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1.

experience (*a posteriori*). Kant ascribes necessity and universality as the criteria of *a priori* knowledge.¹⁴ In opposition to Hume, Kant claims that experience does not provide us necessity and universality;¹⁵ because they arise from pure reason itself. Thus, Kant asserts that by means of this *a priori* knowledge, we can reach beyond the limits of all possible experience. Now, I try to explain how Kant makes a difference between these two kinds of knowledge.

Judgment is a kind of synthesis that represents the relation of two concepts, e.g., the rose is red, which ties “rose” with “red”. It has two different types as analytic and synthetic judgements. An analytic judgment is a judgement such that, in the relation between the subject and predicate, its predicate is contained in its subject. The truth and falsity of an analytic judgment is based on the principle of identity.¹⁶ A synthetic judgment is a judgement such that its predicate is not contained in its subject. They extend our knowledge. As a result of the combination of the distinctions of *a priori* and *a posteriori* with the distinctions of synthetic and analytic, there are four kinds of judgements.

¹⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B4.

¹⁵ Hume attempts to derive causality from nature, but he is unsuccessful. As said by Kant, experience does not give us the causal relation. Therefore, Hume’s attempt is a failure according to Kant.

¹⁶ The principle of identity can be simply stated as $A = A$. In other words, “a being is what it is”.

These are analytic *a posteriori* judgements,¹⁷ analytic *a priori* judgements,¹⁸ synthetic *a posteriori* judgements,¹⁹ and synthetic *a priori* judgements.

Among these judgements, I want to talk about synthetic *a priori* judgements. It is the connection of an *a priori* element with an empirical element, which applies to the world. The notion of synthetic *a priori* judgement is Kant's innovation that he brings to philosophy. Before Kant, only synthetic *a posteriori* and analytic *a priori* judgements were discussed.²⁰ Synthetic *a priori* judgements are important for Kant's philosophy. According to Kant, metaphysics ought to have these *a priori* synthetic judgements. Further, he thinks that by means of these *a priori* synthetic judgements, reason can reach beyond its limits.²¹ Additionally, according to Kant, moral judgements are synthetic *a priori* judgements. Since they are universal and they cannot be derived from experience, they are *a priori*; and since they extend our knowledge, they are synthetic.

¹⁷ These kinds of judgements are not possible. Because, all *a posteriori* judgments are synthetic, since they depend on experience.

¹⁸ They are necessary and universal judgements and they are the logical truths, e.g. $a=a$.

¹⁹ These kinds of judgements are empirical and extend our knowledge, e.g. some roses are red.

²⁰ Additionally, before Kant, the mathematical judgements are considered as *a priori* analytics judgements. However, Kant regards mathematical judgments as synthetic, and since they are necessary as *a priori*. Kant's well-known example for *a priori* synthetic mathematical judgement is that " $7+5=12$ ". Some principles of natural science, namely, physics, also contain *a priori* synthetic judgments. "Everything that happens has a cause" is an example of *a priori* synthetic judgements in physics.

²¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B18.

Consequently, the question, “how are *a priori* synthetic judgements possible?” becomes the main problem of a critique of pure reason. While Kant ensures a solution to this question, he would also answer the question of whether metaphysics is possible as a science or not. Therefore, the main problem of metaphysics transforms into the problem of how *a priori* synthetic judgements are possible, and he asks, “how can we know the object?”. To find the solution to the problem, Kant tries to disclose the conditions for any possible experience with the intention of determining the limits of pure reason. The conditions for the possibility of *a priori* synthetic judgements would also ensure the possibility of metaphysics, and the possibility of bringing solution to its problems such as *a priori* knowledge of existence of God, freedom, and immortality of soul.

Kant gives two stems of knowledge as sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) through which objects are given to us, and understanding (*Verstand*) through which objects are thought.²² In the section entitled *Transcendental Aesthetic* of *CPR*, Kant begins with the exposition of space and time as pure intuition, being the form of sensibility. Kant defines sensibility as the “capacity (receptivity) for receiving representations”;²³ it takes whatever is given to it. Whatever given in experience must have a form. Therefore, whatever given through sensation is given under the form of space and time.

²² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A15/B29.

²³ *Ibid.*, A20/B34.

Additionally, whatever we perceive is perceived under the form of time and space. Space and time, as being intuitions, are not the ideas, concepts, or impressions derived from sense experience. They are provided *a priori*, so, they are pure intuitions. Kant states that “We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think of it as empty of objects”, and “we cannot, in respect of appearances in general, remove time itself, though we can quite well think time as void of appearances”.²⁴ Appearance is necessarily spatial and temporal. However, it is important to notice that this does not mean that appearance itself belongs to space and time. Rather, in an experience, everything that appears, appears only under the conditions of space and time as the *a priori* forms of sensibility, and under the conditions of the categories as the forms of understanding. He states that while knowledge is being constructed, something is given to us through sensibility under the forms of space and time, and we synthesize what we perceive with the twelve categories of understanding that exist *a priori* in human mind.

Ultimately, knowledge is constructed with the synthesis of content by means of the categories of understanding. The categories are the human mind’s contribution to the construction of knowledge. He explains the necessity and importance of both intuitions (space and time) and categories for knowledge: “without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no

²⁴ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A24/B39, B46.

object would be thought. ... The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing.”²⁵

It is important to notice that space and time are not the conditions of the existence of things, i.e., not the forms of things in themselves (*Ding an sich*); they are the forms of phenomena. What are given in space and time are only appearances, and what are perceived in space and time are only these appearances. Mind gives unity to the multitude that is derived from sense experience and synthesizes that multitude by means of categories of the understanding. Therefore, knowledge is restricted by the objects of experience, and we cannot know anything beyond this.²⁶ According to Kant, things in themselves are unknowable;²⁷ in experience, we can only get knowledge of their appearance.

Kant states that concepts are the forms of thoughts.²⁸ So, whatever is thought, is thought by means of concepts of understanding. Kant states that although the theoretical reason does not provide their assurance, it inevitably produces some questions. These questions are about immortality, God and freedom. Kant says

²⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A52/B76.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Bxxvi-Bxxxii.

²⁷ James Van Cleve, a commentator of Kant, objects to this view as “unknowability of things in themselves’ must be taken as subject to qualification. At the very least, we can know *analytic* truths about them. Perhaps we can also know certain negative facts about them, such as their nonspatiality. ... we can have knowledge of certain *relational* or *structural* features of things in themselves- that what we must ignorant of is just their *intrinsic* nature”. Cleve, James Van, *Problems from Kant*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p. 136.

²⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B151, B288.

that the knowledge of theoretical reason is limited with the objects of experience.²⁹ Since, in experience there is no object referring to them, immortality of soul, existence of God and freedom cannot be known by means of experience. Although freedom, God and immortality cannot be known, they can be thought.³⁰ Now, after giving a general overview of Kant's aim in the *CPR*, in the following section I try to explain the difficulties of freedom in Kant's philosophy.

2.3. The Problems of Freedom in Kant's Philosophy

I think in Kant's philosophy, the problem of freedom can be considered in two ways. The first aspect of the problem is Kant's approach to the traditional problem of freedom. Kant examines traditional problem of freedom by means of the *third antinomy* and examines the possibility of freedom. Later, in his moral philosophy, he gives the details of his understanding of freedom. The second aspect of the problem concerning the difficulties arising from Kant's consideration of the problem of freedom, in other words, the difficulties that arise while Kant is explicating his understanding of freedom. In the following parts of my thesis, I examine both of these aspects of freedom.

I have already noted that according to Kant human knowledge is limited with the knowledge of the objects of experience. However, Kant states that human

²⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Bxxviii.

constantly encounters questions raised from the reason itself that the theoretical reason cannot seem to answer these questions. Answers of these unavoidable questions about existence of God, immortality of soul, and freedom of will cannot be obtained in any experience.³¹ Therefore, answers of these questions must be located beyond the reach of pure reason, i.e., beyond the limits of possible experience. On the other hand, reason cannot withdraw itself from thinking of these ideas. Kant called metaphysics the “battlefield” beyond the experience where “endless controversies” occur and these ideas metaphysical illusions. While Kant says “ideas”, he means necessary concepts that are raised by reason itself, and objects of which cannot be given in a possible experience under the forms of space and time. Therefore, Kant called these as transcendental ideas of pure reason;³² they are unknowable concepts of Kant’s philosophy.

While these ideas are unknowable, they are also crucial elements of Kant’s philosophy; especially freedom (in relation to it, the free will as well) is the ground of morality. Kant speaks of freedom (and also the other two ideas) in the preface of the *CPR* and later it comes in front of us as a problem, namely *third antinomy* in the section entitled *Transcendental Dialectic* of the *CPR*. While freedom has a central place in Kant’s works, it is also the most problematic concept of Kant’s philosophy and it is also the ground of certain

³¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B7-B9.

³² *Ibid.*, B384-B387.

other problems. That is, the unavoidable ideas of God and immortality do not introduce two different problems; they are also concerned with the problem of freedom.³³

There are many difficulties with freedom. As I noted above, one of the aspects of the problem of freedom can be considered as Kant's approach to traditional problem, that is, how causality and freedom can be coincided. While Kant talks about freedom, he also claims that there is causality in the nature, that is, what is given in space and time is determined by causality. The realm of appearances is completely and necessarily determined by causality. Therefore, in nature, empirically, every event is determined by preceding conditions. Kant states that, "all the actions of man in the [field of] appearance are determined in conformity with the order of nature".³⁴ If each of my actions is the result of a prior action or of my prior actions, then my actions are determined. This means, if they are not within my power, then the possibility of freedom disappears; we cannot talk about the possibility of freedom. The important question that arises is that whether our actions are caused by nature or freedom. The relation between causality and freedom seems paradoxical. Kant explains this contradictory situation in the context of the *third antinomy*.

Let me explain the second aspect of the problem of freedom that arises from Kant's approach to freedom. The impossibility of defining freedom by

³³ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4.

³⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A550/B578.

speculative reason is one of the major difficulties regarding freedom in Kant. Since freedom is theoretically unknown, it is also problematic whether it has objective reality or not. Kant is aware of the difficulty of freedom. He says that, "...the concept of freedom was problematic but not impossible; ... speculative reason could think of freedom without contradiction, but it could not assure any objective reality to it".³⁵ In fact, according to Kant, freedom obtains its objective reality with the practical employment of reason. Kant attempts to show this in the *CPrR* and the *Groundwork*. Kant establishes morality on this concept in the *Groundwork*, and freedom acquires its objective reality by means of morality. In the third chapter of my thesis, I examine and give details of how Kant approaches to that problem.

Another difficulty with freedom is its altered usage in various meanings. Some Kant's scholars also drew attention to those changes. It is used in many different connections in Kant's works, such as transcendental and practical freedom. It is regarded as a transcendental idea in the *CPR*, and later it is used in negative and positive meanings in Kant's practical philosophy. There are various criticisms about Kant's conception of freedom concerning its meaning. In spite of agreeing on the change of the meaning of freedom, there is no consensus about what kinds of changes these are. For example, according to Henry Sidgwick, Kant uses freedom in two different meanings and does not

³⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 3.

seem to be conscious of this change in the meaning of the concept.³⁶ Sidgwick reveals these two different meanings of freedom as “(1) the freedom that is only realized in right conduct, when reason successfully resists the seductions of appetite or passion, and (2) the freedom to choose between right and wrong, which is, of course, equally realized in either choice”.³⁷ Sidgwick renames these two kinds of freedom; the first one as “good or rational freedom” and the second one as “neutral or moral freedom”.

Sidgwick explains how Kant uses these two different meanings of freedom as follows. He states that Kant means neutral freedom wherever he associates the notion of freedom with the notion of moral responsibility or moral imputation. Neutral freedom is expressed as choosing wrong as much as choosing right. Indeed, Kant is mostly concerned with freedom of the wrong-chooser and he especially wishes to prevent the wrong-chooser from transferring his responsibility onto causes beyond his control. Sidgwick explains what he calls rational freedom as follows: when what Kant has to prove the possibility of unconditional subjection to law, that is, without any intervention of sensible impulses, or, when he seeks to exhibit the independence of reason in influencing choice, then he explicitly identifies freedom with this independence of reason.

³⁶ Sidgwick, Henry, “The Kantian Conception of Free Will”, *Mind*. Vol. 13, No. 51, pp. 405-412, July 1888, p. 405.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Lewis White Beck also draws our attention to changes in the meaning of freedom.³⁸ He says that Kant mentions two types of freedom and two types of will. Like Sidgwick, Beck claims that it is not certain whether Kant himself is aware of this change in the meaning of the term. These two types of freedom are the following: one is from the *CPR* as “spontaneity” and the other is from the *Groundwork* as “autonomy”.³⁹

In addition to these two main different usages of freedom, Kant also uses freedom in different meanings. Beck categorizes these different uses of the term freedom in Kant’s works as follows: freedom as theoretical idea, practical freedom, freedom as an actor-concept (spontaneity) or transcendental freedom, and freedom as a supreme-legislation (autonomy) or moral freedom.⁴⁰ I try to explicate each of these uses of freedom in Kant’s works throughout my thesis.

As I said, these different uses of freedom also cause the difficulties within Kant's philosophy. For example in the *Groundwork*, Kant also uses the moral law, autonomy of an agent, practical reason and freedom interchangeably. These interchangeable uses constitute the main problem of my thesis. The problem is that according to Kant, to be subject to the moral law is to be free, in other words, acting morally is being free. So, acting freely and doing the

³⁸ Beck, Lewis W., *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1966, pp. 176-177.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-197.

morally right thing appear to be the same. This leads to the disappearance of possibility of meeting immoral actions in Kant's morality as it is given in the *Groundwork* and in the *CPrR*. I think that Kant recognizes this problem and later in the *Religion* and more precisely in the *MM*, and he solves this problem with *Wille-Willkür* distinction. In the next chapter, I examine and give details of the problem, that is, identifying the freedom with law, practical reason and autonomy. Particularly, I focus on that aspect of freedom and I try to disclose the place of evil within Kant's morality in that context.

2.4. Third Antinomy and Transcendental Freedom

The relationship between freedom and causality is problematized in the *third antinomy* in the "transcendental dialectic" section of the *CPR*. Kant defines antinomy as "conflict between laws". The antinomies are natural and unavoidable problems set by reason itself⁴¹ and they are "natural illusions of our common reason."⁴² While reason attempts to know the ideas of itself with the theoretical employment of it, it falls into antinomies. Because with the theoretical employment of it, reason can only know the objects of experience. Therefore, the antinomies arise from reason's desire going beyond its limits. Since it is about the freedom, I only examine the *third antinomy*, not the others.

The thesis of the *third antinomy* is given as

⁴¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A462/B490.

⁴² *Ibid.*, A500.

Causality in the accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom.⁴³

and the antithesis as:

There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature.⁴⁴

Kant claims that both of the thesis and the antithesis can be validly proven.⁴⁵

For the proof of thesis, he states that every event in nature is causally determined by a prior event. In that case, the causal chain can be regressed infinitely, that is, a complete series of causal events cannot be reached. However, there should be a first cause, which is not determined by an antecedent cause. The reason arrives at last the “transcendental freedom” by reaching a first cause, i.e., an uncaused cause, by going forward through successive chains of preceding causes. This first cause is free because it does not necessitate antecedent causes. In this connection, Kant regards that uncaused first cause as “absolute spontaneity”, in other words the unconditional first cause, has absolute spontaneity and has power to begin a chain of casual events. He names that spontaneity as “transcendental freedom”. In brief, in this context, freedom “is a pure transcendental idea, which, in the first place, contains nothing borrowed from experience”.⁴⁶ In the transcendental freedom,

⁴³ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A445/B473.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ For details of these proofs, see A445/B473- A452/B480 in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁴⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A533/B561.

it is assumed that natural necessity does not exist in the basis of human's actions.

For the proof of antithesis, Kant states that if the existence of transcendental freedom is assumed as the first cause, which does not need a prior cause, then this unconditional cause contradicts the condition of experience. Because, according to law of nature, every event is causally determined by a prior event. Therefore, assuming an uncaused transcendental freedom destroys the unity of condition of experience.

Kant states that, "all alteration takes place in conformity with the law of the connection of cause and effect".⁴⁷ Thus, if there is causality in nature (the existence of which is clear from his statements and necessary for Kant), then the freedom of man cannot be possible. Kant regards causality as one of the twelve categories of understanding that are the universal and necessary conditions of experience for constitution of knowledge. At the end, since causality is one of the categories of understanding,⁴⁸ it applies to all possible experience. Therefore, the realm of appearances is necessarily determined.

While causality is necessary for knowledge, freedom is indispensable for morality. Therefore, Kant neither wants to renounce causality nor freedom. However, he is aware of the contradiction that obtains between the assumption

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, B233.

⁴⁸ The table of other categories of understanding is given in B106 in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

of freedom and necessity in the law of nature i.e., causality (determinism as the result of that causality). Consequently, Kant tries to find a way of reconciling freedom with causality in nature.

Kant says that these ideas (God, immortality, and freedom) are unknowable but they are not unthinkable; further, there is no reason that prevents us from thinking of them, if they can be thought without contradiction.⁴⁹ He claims that morality does not necessitate the understanding of freedom; its being thought without contradiction is enough to be the ground of morality.⁵⁰ Consequently, he tries to show the possibility of freedom. It is important to notice that he just intended to reveal the possibility of freedom, that is, he attempts to show that both freedom and natural causation can exist together without contradiction.

Kant finds the remedy in introducing the distinction between the realm of things in themselves (noumena) and the realm of appearances (phenomena). This distinction is the heart of Kant's solution to the *third antinomy*. Thus, this dualism allows him to establish the possibility of freedom (of the will). In other words, with this dualism, he brings a new approach to freedom different from his predecessors, that is, he saves the possibility of freedom by taking it from the phenomenal realm into the noumenal realm.

⁴⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxv - Bxxix.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Bxxix.

According to Kant, everything in nature is necessarily determined by law of causality but the important point is that when Kant says “everything”, he means everything that are in the realm of phenomena (appearances) but not in the realm of noumena. This “everything” does not include the things that cannot be known, it includes the things that can be known as the objects of the realm of appearances. Kant clearly states his thoughts about realm of appearances as “everything in nature is causally determined”. However, he clearly states that both freedom and law of nature involves causality, but they are different kinds of necessities that reign in the different realms. Consequently, with this distinction, the law of nature and the freedom, which are different kinds of causality, become possible at same time without a logical contradiction.

Kant says, “Hume awakened me from my dogmatic slumbers”.⁵¹ Hume’s claim that there is no causal relation in nature,⁵² that we cannot derive necessity from

⁵¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Gelecekte Bilim Olarak Ortaya Çıkabilecek Her Metafiziğe: Prolegomena*, p. 8.

⁵² According to Hume, knowledge can be obtained in two ways as “matters of fact” and “relations of ideas”. For “relations of ideas”, he gives mathematical judgements as an example. The knowledge as “matters of fact” is acquired from experience. We get this kind of knowledge from our previous experience by inferences and we make these experimental inferences by using cause and effect relations. However, experience does not provide us the causal relation and the knowledge inferred from it. Hume rejects causality. He says that, reason can never provide us the necessary association of one object with another in experience. While Hume denies causation, he would also deny the principles of science. Actually, he does not object to think events through the relation of cause and effect; on the contrary, he accepts that thinking objects through causal relation is inevitable. However, he objects to making predictions about future depending on these habitual judgements. Therefore, his skepticism rejects the possibility of the scientific knowledge, not the knowledge obtained through “relations of ideas”. With his famous example, we saw the rising of sun many times and depending on these, we say that, the sun will also rise tomorrow. However, for Hume, there is no ground to claim this. Because, while we are saying, “the sun will also rise tomorrow”, we only depend on the frequency of seeing the sun rising until now. The sun has risen every day until today. He says there is no causal relationship. All is habit; our knowledge strengthens by the frequency of seeing the rising of sun. A and B are not necessarily connected to each other, we combine them depending on the frequency of seeing A and B together. It is important to notice that, he entitled such a judgement, which is the sun will rise tomorrow, neither as true nor false. He says that, without the occurrence of the event, we cannot call this judgement

experience, is what awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumbers. This idea helps Kant to solve the *third antinomy*. Kant says that Hume is right in saying that there is no causality, but he misses the point that causality does not exist in noumenal world, but exists in phenomenal, i.e., the empirical world. According to Kant, Hume found an important point, but he does not use it correctly.⁵³ If the attributes of phenomena that are given to us in time and space are applied to attributes of things in themselves, then possibility of freedom cannot be mentioned. Causality in nature and freedom becomes contradictory. Consequently, Hume's claim that "there is no causality in nature" helps Kant to draw the phenomena and noumena distinction. This distinction is the turning point for him, a key to his philosophy.

With that distinction, Kant makes the distinction between what is thinkable and what is knowable. We cannot know things in themselves (the noumenal realm); we merely know their appearances as phenomena. Kant regards the objects of possible experience as knowable, and the ideas (God, immortality, freedom) as intelligible, because they cannot be derived from experience.

true or false. Because we cannot be sure that the future will resemble the past or not. Causality is one of the concepts that constitute the basis of physics. Therefore, with saying there is no causality, Hume endangers the possibility of scientific knowledge. (Hume, David, *On Human Nature and the Understanding*, pp. 33-72, 187-218.)

⁵³ Kant asserts that "... since the origin of metaphysics so far as we know its history, nothing has ever happened which was more decisive to its fate than the attack made upon it by David Hume. He threw no light on this species of knowledge, but he certainly struck a spark from which light might have been obtained, had it caught some inflammable substance and had its smoldering fire been carefully nursed and developed". Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena*, p. 5.

Kant says that man is both a rational and a sensible being, he is a member of two worlds: sensible and intelligible. His phenomenal side, i.e., his empirical character, is necessarily determined in time and space by physical causation that is the law of nature. He states this as follows:

All the actions of men in the [field of] appearance are determined in conformity with the order of nature, by their empirical character and by the other causes which cooperate with that character; and if we could exhaustively investigate all the appearances of men's wills, there would not be found a single human action which we could not predicate with certainty, and recognise as proceeding necessarily from its antecedent conditions. So far, then, as regards this empirical character there is no freedom.⁵⁴

However, man's noumenal side is not subject to time and space, that is, his noumenal existence is not determined by antecedent causes. Practically, he is a member of intelligible world and determined by moral law. Kant says that the "subject ... is conscious also of his own existence as a thing in itself, also views his existence so far as it does not stand under temporal conditions, and himself as determinable only by laws which he gives to himself".⁵⁵ This is Kant's solution to the problem of reconciling freedom (of will) with the universality of physical causation.⁵⁶

The distinction of the realms has a main role in his philosophy, and with this distinction, he solves the tension between causality and freedom. He states,

⁵⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A550/B578.

⁵⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 102.

⁵⁶ Sidgwick, Henry, "The Kantian Conception of Free Will", p. 409.

then, that freedom and natural causation are not incompatible with each other.⁵⁷ However, his solution causes a new problem concerning, what the relation between two realms is. That is one of the objections to Kant's distinction between noumena-phenomena. The answer to the question of what the relationship of the intelligible and the knowable realms is, is problematic. If there is an interaction between these realms, then possibility of determination of human actions arises. The causality is the concept that exists in us *a priori* and it only applies to objects of experience. It is the mind's contribution to the appearances; therefore, it does not apply to things in themselves. If the interaction does not exist, then how does the empirical object appear, i.e., how does appearance appear without an object behind it?

In spite of Kant's explanations in the context of the *third antinomy*, the notion of freedom remains theoretically problematical. Although it does not contain a logical contradiction, it cannot be proven theoretically that, the concept of freedom has an objective reality and that there is an object to response it.⁵⁸ This is one of the objections to Kant's concept of transcendental freedom. Actually, Kant ascertains the possibility of freedom by means of the *third antinomy* and later he attempts to prove its reality in the *CPrR*, which I mention in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A558/B586.

⁵⁸ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, İnkilap Kitapevi, İstanbul, 1999, p. 75.

Consequently, I argue that the *third antinomy* has more importance than the three others. Because it gives possibility of freedom, which is the heart of his works and his philosophy. The moral side of human beings is based on the *third antinomy*. By means of possibility of freedom of will, Kant can establish morality. The possibility of freedom is also the condition of the agent's autonomy. He constructs his philosophy, particularly his moral philosophy on that concept. Further, depending on freedom and morality, he can mention the possibility of God and immortality in the *CPrR*. The postulation of existence of God and immortality of soul are the practical necessitations of his moral theory. Consequently, I argue that the *third antinomy* is the starting point of Kant's moral philosophy.

2.5. Two Employments of Reason: Theoretical and Practical

As the consequences of the distinction of the phenomena and noumena, Kant divides reason into two in terms of its employment as theoretical and practical. While the theoretical employment of it gives the knowledge of what things really are, the practical employment of it gives how things ought to be.⁵⁹ With the theoretical reason, we obtain the knowledge of the object of experience. Nevertheless, the theoretical reason cannot give the knowledge of the freedom of will, immortality of soul and existence of God; it can only provide us the logical possibility of them. While conceiving freedom with theoretical reason is

⁵⁹ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 74.

impossible, freedom can be assumed and understood by means of the practical employment of the reason. Additionally, through practical use of it, reason reaches beyond its limits. Moral law can also be derived with the practical employment of reason. Consequently, with the phenomena and noumena distinction, since they are in the realm of things in themselves, these ideas (freedom, immortality and God) are not contradictory anymore, for, they are free from the conditions of experience.

Furthermore, again as the result of the distinction of realms, the human being has two sides: the phenomenal and the noumenal sides. While with his phenomenal side, man is determined in space and time, and is subject to causality in the empirical world; with his noumenal side, he is free. Kant explains this as follows:

A rational being must regard himself *as intelligence* (hence not from the side of his lower powers) as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding; hence he has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws of the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions; *first*, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); *second*, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but grounded merely on reason.⁶⁰

2.6. The Relation between Freedom and Morality

In Kant's philosophy, the relation between freedom and morality is very close: freedom is the basis of existence of moral law, and morality is the basis of

⁶⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 99.

cognition of freedom.⁶¹ In the *Groundwork*, Kant says that morality is not relevant to anything predetermined. Determination eliminates the possibility of freedom, and without freedom we cannot talk about morality. Since morality requires choosing, it becomes possible only with free will. Therefore, freedom is the necessary presupposition of morality. As stated previously, according to Kant, morality does not necessitate the understanding of freedom. If we could show its possibility, then it would be enough for morality. The primary sign of this possibility is the feeling of one's own independence from the law of nature.⁶² Actually, Kant ensures possibility of the freedom by means of the *third antinomy*. Kant claims that as we are rational, we have to act under an idea of freedom: "Now I assert that to every rational being having a will we must necessarily lend the idea of freedom also, under which alone he acts".⁶³

Although freedom is the ground of morality, by means of morality we can realize and actualize our freedom. At first glance, there seems to be circularity in the relation of freedom and morality. Kant is aware of that difficulty. In the *Groundwork*, he states that, "it must be freely admitted that a kind of circle comes to light here from which, as it seems, there is no way to escape".⁶⁴ Later, in the preface of the *CPrR*, he clears out that circularity problem is in fact not a

⁶¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4.

⁶² Sokoloff, William W., "Kant and the Paradox of Respect", p. 776.

⁶³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 95-96.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

real problem.⁶⁵ He explains the relation between freedom and morality as follows:

To avoid having anyone imagine that there is an inconsistency when I say that freedom is the condition of the moral law and later assert that the moral law is the only condition under which freedom can be known, I will only remind the reader that though freedom is certainly the *ratio essendi* of moral law, latter is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.⁶⁶

I try to explain how Kant solves this circularity problem throughout the *Groundwork*. At first, Kant introduces freedom as a postulate of practical reason for sparing a place to morality; he grounds his moral theory on freedom of the will, i.e., free will. However, this meaning of freedom is negative. According to Kant, the negative sense of freedom is the absence of obstacles, specifically being freed “*from*” causality (in nature). The negative meaning of freedom gives what freedom is not, but does not give what freedom is.⁶⁷ Freedom gains its positive meaning after its experience through the law of morality. According to Kant, the positive meaning of freedom is being free “*for*” something. In general, when people mention freedom, they mostly use the negative meaning of it. Since people focus on the negative meaning of it, that is, “being free *from* something”; mostly, the answer of this important question, that is “freedom *for* what?”, is overlooked. I argue that the positive sense of freedom constructs the vital point of Kant’s morality, and the answer of

⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this explanation is not satisfactory for all. For instance, Sokoloff says that, “freedom is the ground of all action; but this ground is unstable and perhaps even groundless”. (Sokoloff, William W., “Kant and the Paradox of Respect”, p. 769.)

⁶⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 126.

“freedom for what” is a starting point for “categorical imperative”. Kant gives positive sense of freedom as “to obey the (moral) law” which is self-imposed by a moral agent, that the free and moral person is the person who is subject to the law that is formed by himself.⁶⁸ At this point, we can easily realize Rousseau’s influence on Kant. Actually, we encounter the distinction of negative and positive meanings of freedom in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. I give the details of these similarities in the next chapter.

Now, I want to give the summary of this chapter. Kant distinguishes phenomenal realm that constitutes the sensible side of man from noumenal realm that constitutes that intelligible side of man. Concerning this distinction, Kant says that while the phenomenal (empirical) realm is knowable, the noumenal realm is thinkable. Therefore, he claims that we cannot have knowledge of the realm of noumena in which we are free. Kant cannot show the possibility of freedom of the will without assuming the existence of the realm of things in themselves; and without freedom of the will, Kant cannot establish his moral theory, details of which I give in next chapter. I have also mentioned the problems that arise from Kant’s understanding of freedom. However, I will focus on the problem that results from Kant’s seeming to identify the freedom with moral law and practical reason and I discuss this point in the next chapter within the context of its relation of Kant’s moral

⁶⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 94-95, and Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 33-34.

philosophy. Further, related with the problem of freedom, I discuss Kant's *Wille-Willkür* distinction and his understanding of evil.

CHAPTER III

KANT'S MORAL THEORY

3.1. The Basis of Kant's Moral Theory

Kant gives great importance to morality within his philosophy and he expresses this every time without hesitation. This is clear in his sentences: “I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*”.⁶⁹ His other well-known remark is: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within”.⁷⁰

I encountered some of Rousseau's principles in Kant's morality in a different guise. I argue that, the seeds of Kant's moral philosophy depend on Rousseau's philosophy. Therefore, I find it necessary to mention Rousseau. It is known that

⁶⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

⁷⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 169.

Kant interrupted his walking routine while he was reading Rousseau's *Emile*.⁷¹

Kant also expresses his admiration to Rousseau as follows:

I am myself by inclination a seeker after truth. I feel a consuming thirst for knowledge and an eager restlessness to advance in it, as well as satisfaction in every acquisition. There was a time when I believed that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I despised the rabble who know nothing. Rousseau set me right. This blind preference disappeared; I learned to respect men, and I would find myself far more useless than the common workingman if I did not believe that this consideration could confer value to all others to establish the rights of mankind.⁷²

Now, in the following pages, I try to clarify Kant's indebtedness to Rousseau, and to examine similarities between Rousseau's and Kant's philosophies. Kant regards Rousseau as the Newton of the moral system.⁷³ Rousseau's influence can be noticed on Kant's philosophy, particularly on moral philosophy. However, Kant does not find Rousseau's thoughts adequate. According to Kant, Rousseau does not formulate the principle of morality; in Rousseau's works, the definition of the moral law does not exist, what exists is merely the sense of morality.⁷⁴ Although, they are given in a different context, I find a parallelism between Rousseau's "general will" and Kant's "categorical imperative", Kant's "kingdom of ends" and what Rousseau describes as enlightened society, and lastly their ways of introducing the distinction in the meaning of freedom.

⁷¹ Cassirer, Ernst, *Kant'ın Yaşamı ve Öğretisi*, trans. Doğan Özlem, İnkılap Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1996, p. 98.

⁷² Kant, Immanuel, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John Goldthwait, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, p. 60.

⁷³ Cassirer, Ernst, *Kant'ın Yaşamı ve Öğretisi*, trans. Doğan Özlem, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 56.

As I said, I find a parallelism between Rousseau's general will and Kant's moral law, specifically categorical imperative, in terms of aiming the common-good for whole people, for humanity; not wanting a personal good.⁷⁵ Rousseau gives legislative authority to people as the sole legislator, and these people are also sovereign at the same time.⁷⁶ According to Rousseau, the free and moral person is the person who is subject to the laws, which are formed by himself. Consequently, I can say that Kant renovates Rousseau's thought of self-imposed law, which is the expression of general will resulting from human freedom, as the basic principle of his moral law.

There is also a parallelism between Rousseau and Kant in terms of rendering people both a sovereign as the legislator and a member as being subject to law.⁷⁷ About the case that seems as if contradictory, that is, at the same time

⁷⁵ Rousseau makes distinctions among the general will, individual will, and will of all. He says, while the individual wills are directed towards individual interests, the general will, namely the will of the sovereign, is directed towards the common good. In other words, while each individual has his own particular will that expresses what is best for him, the general will expresses what is best for the state as a whole. It is important to note that the will of all individuals, meaning the collective will that is simply the sum of each individual's desires, is not the same with the general will, that is, it is not the sum of all individual private interests. Different from the combined will of all individuals, the general will is concerned with the public interest. In a well-designed state, the will of all is the same with general will, because each citizen desires the common good. However, in a state where people regard their personal interests superior to the interests of the state, the will of all would be different from the general will. Rousseau argues that the general will is the will of all people, and that if a minority of individuals does not approve a law, which has been approved by the majority, then that minority must have mistakenly supposed that its own particular will is the same as the general will. (Rousseau, pp. 59-60.)

⁷⁶ Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 82. Hereafter, I use this work as the *Social Contract*.

⁷⁷ To be a moral person, man should be free. However, the social contract and the civil laws resulting from that contract may obstruct people's freedom. As a result, Rousseau suggests that people should make their own civil laws as the sole legislator, and people should conform to those civil laws that are formed by themselves. They should make their own laws without anybody's

being subject to laws and being free, Rousseau says that there is no need to ask, “how one is both free and subject to the laws, since they are merely the record of our own wills”.⁷⁸ The same approach is seen in Kant. In the *Groundwork* he claims that while a man is subject to the moral law, he still has freedom, indeed, to be free is to be subject to moral law.

What Kant called “kingdom of ends” and what Rousseau describes as enlightened society, i.e., ethical community, where laws are legislated by its people, come very close. In both of these societies, the main value is human’s rationality and dignity.⁷⁹ It seems that Kant transformed Rousseau's society

interference. He finds the solution as rendering the people sovereign, in other words, setting the people up as their own leaders.

⁷⁸ Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Rousseau believes that society and civil laws are necessary. The civil laws are needed for the existence of society. He thinks that the natural condition of man is not enough for having a rational and moral life. He describes the moment of transition from the state of nature to civil society as a happy moment and says that, “the happy moment which took him from it forever, and, instead of a stupid and unimaginative animal, made him an intelligent being and a man”. (Rousseau, p. 41) Therefore, the “social contract” and civil law as the result of it are inevitable. He defines civil laws as the expression of the “general will”. (Rousseau, p. 66-72)

Rousseau says that while human being is giving up natural freedom by the “social contract”, actually they have not lost their freedom. He says that by entering into civil society, men lost their natural freedom but they gain civil freedom. He claims that the civil society is the condition of being human to be fully human, which means being a rational and moral. Rousseau describes the people who have natural freedom as slaves of instincts and impulses, like animals. Civil freedom, which is limited by the “general will”, teaches to think and behave rationally. He claims that civil freedom saves the man “out of a stupid and bounded animal made an intelligent being and a man”. (Rousseau, p. 53) The civil freedom leads human to be moral and rational beings. Rousseau states that with the transition from natural state to civil society, human beings gain morality they did not have before. He states that one of the benefits of the civil state is “moral freedom, which alone makes man truly master of himself; for the impulsion of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom”. (Rousseau, p. 54) Rousseau links freedom with morality by saying that our actions can only be moral if those actions were done freely. In giving up our freedom, we give up our morality and our humanity. He says the following:

To renounce one’s freedom is to renounce one’s quality as man, the rights of humanity and even its duties. There can be no possible compensation for someone who renounces everything. Such a renunciation is incompatible with nature of the

after social contract into “kingdom of ends”. Consequently, Kant was inspired by some of Rousseau’s concepts and he expands the points that Rousseau leaves implicit. It would be not wrong to say that Kant’s moral philosophy is grounded on inspirations that he got from Rousseau.

Rousseau makes a physical and civil freedom distinction in his political philosophy, which is similar to Kant's distinction of negative and positive freedom in his moral philosophy.⁸⁰ While natural freedom is negative freedom (*being free from*⁸¹), with the civil society it gains its positive meaning (*being free for*⁸²). According to Rousseau, civil laws are the general guidelines under which a person chooses to live. He claims that since a civil law is an expression

man, and to deprive one’s will of all freedom is to deprive one’s actions of all morality.(Rousseau, p. 5)

Consequently, subjects do not lose anything by entering the society; they gain morality and they are freed from their instincts, as well. (Rousseau, pp. 53-54)

⁸⁰ Rousseau begins the *Social Contract* with the sentence “man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains”. (Rousseau, p.41) From this it is understood that man was born free, but later he lost his freedom in society after the contract. Rousseau believes in the necessity and the unavoidability of the social contract for transition from the state of nature to civil society. Until Rousseau, the social contract theories require transfer of rights to someone else and therefore after the contract, people would lose their freedom.

At this point, Rousseau’s important problem arises which is to reconcile individual freedom with civil society. During this transition, Rousseau was trying to find a way to provide freedom to people and also to preserve order, stability and accord in society. Briefly, he seeks the way of living in a civil society without losing freedom. Consequently, Rousseau makes “freedom” the center of his political thoughts.

Rousseau solves the problem by presenting two kinds of concept of freedom: “natural freedom”, i.e. “physical freedom” and “civil freedom”. Natural freedom is the freedom that people have in the state of nature, and the civil freedom is the individual’s freedom within civil society. Natural freedom is characterized by the unbounded freedom to do whatever we like, and has no limit, meaning that their actions are not restrained in any way. (Rousseau, pp. 53-54)

⁸¹ That means, being freed from everything, the unbounded freedom to do whatever we like, freedom with no limits.

⁸² It means being free for subjection to the laws legislated by ourselves.

of the general will, people should be compelled to conform the general will: “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body; which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free”.⁸³ The same approach is seen in Kant. He states that the free and autonomous beings necessarily conform to moral law because of their rationality; they prefer living under such a law. For, the law is legislated by themselves. Additionally, free and autonomous beings consider themselves as a part of the “kingdom of ends”. According to Rousseau, all laws should be for the sake of freedom and equality.⁸⁴ He defines general will as being truly concerned with the common good.

Up to this point, I have tried to explain similar points in Rousseau’s and Kant’s philosophies. I hope that in the following sections, as I explain the details of Kant’s understanding of morality, Rousseau’s influence on the background of Kant’s moral philosophy can be seen more clearly.

There are various views on how Kant introduces morality. One view is that Kant’s moral system is modern scholastic and his works are nothing else than giving rational form to the dogmas of Christian morality. Another view is that Kant takes human psychology as the basis to his studies so that his moral

⁸³ Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, p. 53.

⁸⁴ Equality does not mean that everyone should have the same degrees of power and wealth. Every state has different needs and there is not a same way that all states must follow, since they have different natural conditions, that is, states’ laws must be in harmony with their natural conditions. (Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, p. 78.)

system is also considered as simple psychological analysis.⁸⁵ Actually, Kant's starting point is the universal moral sense⁸⁶ that is seen in our daily lives and in our daily judgements. Because, he believes that even the simplest human being has the knowledge of moral responsibility and sense of duty; everybody intuitionally has a notion of a moral law and duty.⁸⁷ Sense of morality exists within everyone, that is, we all have the common sense of morality.

In contrast to the first view attributed to Kant, he suggests something different from Christian morality. Christian morality proposes the divine perfection as its model; it is grounded on God as both means and end. On the contrary, Kant does not ground morality on God,⁸⁸ or the existence of other world and the fear of punishment. He thinks that morality should not be something imposed from outside, it is something we impose on ourselves. The motive behind the moral act should not be constraints from outside such as the fear of punishment, existence of another world or love of God. People should act morally as the inevitable result of being rational. Moral action should be free. Moral law should be something self-imposed. It is not a command that someone has to follow, because God commands it. According to Kant, God cannot be known;

⁸⁵ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 63.

⁸⁶ The moral sense that Kant meets in Rousseau's thoughts which, does not expressed in systematic, ordered way as moral law according to Kant.

⁸⁷ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 63.

⁸⁸ While Kant does not ground morality on existence of God, he claims that the existence of God is the practical necessitation of morality. I try to explain this relation between morality and existence of God in the section entitled as "Highest Good, Postulation of God, and Immortality" of this study (pp. 73-74).

therefore, God cannot be the starting point to morality. Furthermore, he claims that, “for its own sake morality does not need religion at all by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient”.⁸⁹ Furthermore, such statements of Kant can help to understand the ineptness of indictment to Kant for his thoughts on evil and religion on being a supporter of Christianity.

Kant’s morality is known as duty ethics, which is introduced firstly by him. The duty ethics depends on obligation that lays the ground of moral action and moral value of it. While in the virtue ethics, the moral value depends on the agent and the agent’s character, in both of Kant’s ethics and utilitarianism the moral value grounds on action, but in a different way. In the utilitarianism, the moral value depends on the result of action. However, in Kant’s morality, the value of action depends neither on an agent’s character nor on the result of action. In Kant’s morality i.e., duty ethics, the moral value of an action is independent from its results; the worth of action comes from its being performed with the consciousness of duty, acting only for sake of duty. Kant claims that seeking the worth of an action within its result is not just wrong but also vain. The worth of an action is in the contemplation behind that action, not in its results. Value of an action is in the agent’s good will and agent’s performing it with being conscious of duty. Kant does not ground morality on religion; instead, he introduces a morality that finds its ground on pure practical reason. Kant is in favor of the rationality of religion. He explains his thoughts

⁸⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 3.

on morality mainly in the *Groundwork*, and also in the *CPrR* and the *MM*. However, in my thesis, I discuss his moral theory based on his thoughts as given in the *Groundwork* and the *CPrR*.

While Kant searches for the principles of morality, he does not seek them within or outside the nature, he attempts to derive them directly from the pure reason itself, i.e., seeks them within the limits of reason.⁹⁰ According to Kant, in daily life, people accept a case as good or evil, however; they cannot give the explanation of what is good or evil, so, they cannot give the principles of good or evil. According to Kant, if the criteria for the evaluation of these concepts are clarified, then the fundamental moral principle will also be clarified.⁹¹ Kant's aim as stated in the *Groundwork* is to search and find, and also to examine the highest principle of morality.⁹²

Kant says that if philosophy delivers its doctrines from *a priori* principles alone, we may call it pure philosophy and without pure philosophy, we cannot speak of moral philosophy. Therefore, he establishes morality on pure reason.⁹³ Kant asserts that moral principles should not be empirical, which means that they should not depend on sense experience or feelings, because the sense

⁹⁰ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'in Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 65.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹² Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-47.

experience cannot give moral principles.⁹⁴ Those moral principles cannot be obtained through experience, i.e., from actual situations. Because, experience gives how things really are but does not give how things ought to be. That means, we cannot derive “ought” from “is”. If moral principles could be obtained from experience, then one cannot talk about their universality and their necessity. Moral principles are not simply given to us in experience, their moral necessity and universality lay outside of sensibility. To perform according to moral laws, the content of which is previously determined, is nothing but to obey someone else’s principles. Indeed, according to Kant this is not acting morally. Because, you burden the responsibility to someone else and you escape from the responsibility resulting from acting according to those principles and you just act like a puppet. That is choosing the easiest way. You do not choose or decide; you merely act according to the rules of predetermined content.

Additionally, Kant states that it is the biggest harm to morality to try to derive its principle from examples.⁹⁵ Because, every example, which is proposed as model, should firstly be evaluated for whether it is appropriate to be a moral model or not, however none of these examples can provide a ground for

⁹⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 43-47.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

morality.⁹⁶ Consequently, according to Kant, there is no place to imitations in morality; they only help to encourage being a moral person.

Kant claims that the moral principles should be *a priori*, universal, and should be derived from pure reason.⁹⁷ He says that the moral laws are not for just human being, they are also for all rational beings.⁹⁸ To talk about their universality, they should be valid for all rational beings; they should bind all rational beings.⁹⁹ Further, in order to mention morality, one should have free will (*Willkür*).¹⁰⁰ The genuine choosing act is only possible with a free will. Therefore, postulation of freedom is a necessary condition of Kant's morality. He says that, "If there were no freedom, the moral law would never have been encountered in us".¹⁰¹ I as have explained in the second chapter of my thesis, Kant ascertains the possibility of the freedom of the will with the distinction of realm of things in themselves and the realm of appearances.

Finally, one of the important points with Kant's morality, is that, while he tries to derive the categorical imperative as the moral law in the *Groundwork*, he notices the difficulty, more precisely, the impossibility of such a derivation.

⁹⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 63.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

¹⁰⁰ After his distinction of *Wille* and *Willkür*, we notice that, when Kant says free will, he intends to say *Willkür*, especially throughout the *Groundwork*.

¹⁰¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4.

Therefore, later in the *CPrR*, he gives up the derivation of moral law and accepts the moral law as the “fact of reason”.¹⁰²

3.2. Kant’s Morality

3.2.1. Good Will and Duty

Two important concepts of Kant’s morality are “good will” and “duty”. Kant describes duty as “necessity of an action from respect for law”.¹⁰³ He seeks for a concept to apply while judging the value of moral action and, he presents “good will” as a remedy.¹⁰⁴ In the *Groundwork*, Kant’s starting point is the “good will”, that is the only thing to which we attribute unconditional moral value. Kant’s thought about good will is: “it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will.”¹⁰⁵ If will is motivated by appropriate maxims, then it is a good will and other goods (courage, honor, judgement, etc.) may become extremely evil without the principle of the good will.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, a moral act requires the good will as the precondition of goodness. Another implication of Kant’s statements of good will is that the worth of good will is independent of anything external to it; it does not depend on the

¹⁰² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 31.

¹⁰³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'in Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

consequences of any action whether that action turns out to be successful or unsuccessful. A good will is not good for what it produces; it is good in itself, it is intrinsically good. The good will is not only a wish; it is being ready to act with a genuine decision concerning good.¹⁰⁷ The good will can be taken as the precondition of goodness in all moral acts.

The other important concept of Kant's morality is "duty". Duty also includes good will. Kant classifies human actions in four groups considering the good will and duty relation. (1) Actions contrary to duty. (2) Actions conforming to duty (3) Actions for sake of duty (4) Actions done from inclinations. In fact, Kant does not clearly state but the division is important for Kant's understanding of evil, that is, it also constitutes the ground of Kant's understanding of good and evil. That is recognized after Kant has articulated his thoughts on immorality and evil in the *Religion*.

Kant is not interested in the first category of duty introduced above. I think the reason is clear enough, since they are contrary to duty; they are not morally valuable even if they resulted in a good way. Related with the second and the third classes; Kant states that we need to distinguish "actions done in

¹⁰⁷ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 88.

accordance with duty” from those “done for the sake of duty”. Because Kant defines duty as “necessity of an action from respect for law”.¹⁰⁸

Kant’s argument “acting from respect for the law” is regarded as problematic. Some Kant scholars focus on the mysterious status of respect. It is found contradictory, because it is thought that Kant grounds law on an incentive, namely respect, while he tries to build morality on an *a priori* ground.¹⁰⁹ For example, William W. Sokoloff says that, “Kant wants to purify morality from a certain mode of sensible contamination but one feeling remains (respect), and it is the unstable nexus between the human and the law”.¹¹⁰ However, Kant does not consider respect as a merely ordinary feeling like others. He ascribes a new meaning to it, and he says that it is different from other feelings in that “the cause that determines this feeling [respect] lies in pure practical reason; because of its origin, therefore, this particular feeling cannot be called pathologically effected; rather, it is practically effected”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Sokoloff, William W., “Kant and the Paradox of Respect”, p. 771.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 771.

¹¹¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 69.

Additionally, Sokoloff explains Kant’s approach to this confusion as “whereas in the *Groundwork* Kant claims that basing morality on incentives destroys its sublimity, in the *CPrR* this is no longer the case”. For the details of the discussion see; Sokoloff, William W., “Kant and the Paradox of Respect”, p. 772.

According to Kant, an action may be performed by one of the three different kinds of motives¹¹² behind it.¹¹³ It may be done from duty or done from immediate inclination or done from instrumental inclination. Regarding the first one, you perform an action because you think it is the right thing to do. The second kind of motivation is acting from immediate inclination, that is, you enjoy performing that action. The third one is the action from instrumental inclination (self-interest); an agent performs the action because of some independent end, to which it serves.¹¹⁴ Actually, Kant does not dwell on the differences between these motives. However, they are important for comprehending Kant's immoral or evil act. Additionally, he does not precisely state but after he introduces the notion of evil, we understand that if an action is done from duty, then it is morally good; in all other cases, it is morally evil.

3.2.2. Moral Value of an Action

According to Kant, in order for an action to be morally good, that it conforms to the duty is not enough, but it must also be done for the sake of the duty. He claims that only actions performed for the sake of duty have moral worth. If one performs an action only because of inclination, then that action has no

¹¹² Kant defines motive as "the objective ground of volition". (Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 78.)

¹¹³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 52-53.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

moral worth.¹¹⁵ The value of an action is not within its consequence, it is in the mentality behind the action, that is, it is in the principle of volition. The moral value of an action derives from its maxim. Kant defines the maxim as “subjective principle of volition”, and it differs from the objective law, namely the moral law that is “the objective principle of volition”.¹¹⁶ The maxim “contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations)”.¹¹⁷ In other words, maxim is the principle that an agent himself makes his rule. Every agent acts according to his maxims. It is possible that, two agents have quite different maxims regarding the same law.¹¹⁸ The moral law, as the objective principle of volition is valid for all rational beings and they ought to act according to this principle. Briefly, since the will is free, the subjective principle of volition, namely maxim, can be determined either by the moral law, or by inclinations, desires, etc. If the will is determined by the objective principle of the volition; that is, if an action is done from respect for law, then it is moral, otherwise it is immoral.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 54-55.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *The Doctrine of Virtue*. Gregor, Mary J., University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1971, pp. 24-25.

¹¹⁹ As I said before Kant does not concern immoral or evil action while he explains his moral thoughts in the *Groundwork*. He focuses on to explain what the morally good action is. However, later in the *Religion*, we recognize precisely that all actions whose motive is other than duty, which are not from done respect for law are evil.

Kant claims that we judge the moral worth of an action independent of the agent's inclinations, desires or the consequences of the action. Value of an action is in the agent's good will and agent's performing it with being conscious of duty. Although, Kant does not give much examples in his works, since the "for sake of duty" is the backbone of his moral theory, he gives certain examples concerning this concept. He gives the following example to make it clear that the moral value is independent of the agent's inclinations:

... to preserve one's life is a duty; and besides everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. But on this account the often anxious care that most people take of it still has no inner worth and their maxim has no moral content. They look after their lives *in conformity with duty*, but not *from duty*. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless grief have quite taken away the taste for life; if an unfortunate man, strong of soul and more indignant about his fate than despondent or dejected, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral content.¹²⁰

Another example that Kant gives to explicate that only actions performed for the sake of duty have moral worth and an action in accordance with duty but not done for the sake of duty has not moral worth is as follows:

There are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth, but is on the same footing with other inclinations.¹²¹

Some of human actions may seem in accordance with duty, however this does not show their maxim is for the sake of duty. Kant states that if they are

¹²⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 53.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

analyzed deeply, we mostly face with dear self.¹²² Kant claims that it is impossible to find an example of an action, which is conformed to duty and at the same time whose maxim depends on moral grounds, through the mediation of experience.¹²³ Even with most careful and deep examination, it is impossible to reach the motive behind the action. For, the moral value of action is not within the action that is viewed empirically, it is in the internal principle of it.¹²⁴

3.2.3. The Moral Law and the Categorical Imperative

Let us summarize our discussion in the previous section. An action is morally valuable if it is performed for the sake of duty. While mentioning duty, Kant means “necessity of acting to show respect to law”, so if an action is willed in accordance with law, then it is performed as a duty. In other words, a moral action is the action that is performed with respect to law. As a consequence of these explanations, it can be asked that what the law that determines the will to be good will, which is the precondition of a moral action, should be.¹²⁵ The concept of law as the requirement of its meaning involves necessity. However, necessity in moral law is different from necessity in the law of nature. If it were the same kind of necessity, like when a stone is thrown into sky, it necessarily

¹²² Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 62.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

¹²⁵ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 94.

falls down, then it could not be talked about freedom of the will (free will), which is the ground of morality. Therefore, the moral law involves an obligation; determination of a will by objective laws can only be an obligation. Kant says that, “since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing than practical reason”.¹²⁶

There are two different kinds of will. The first one is holy will, i.e. will of God; while the will is determined by reason objectively, it is also determined subjectively. The holy will spontaneously accords with the law.¹²⁷ The second one is the human will that is objectively determined by reason but subjectively, it is contingent; it may not accord with reason.¹²⁸ Consequently, moral laws can only be an imperative. That means, the rational awareness of an objective principle insofar as it is obligatory for human will is called a command of reason and the formula of his command is called an imperative.¹²⁹ Finally, moral law can only be an imperative, because, the free will has the capacity to reject or accept it.

Kant says that moral law should be an imperative that tells us what we ought to do independent from the coincidental wills or interests. The imperatives are the objective principles. He presents two kinds of imperatives: hypothetical and

¹²⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 66.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

categorical. The difference between them is that while the hypothetical imperative is conditional, the categorical imperative, which is the supreme principle of morality, is unconditional. That is, although hypothetical imperative commands us what we ought to do to attain an intended end, categorical imperative commands us unconditionally what to do. It commands an action directly without putting any other means as conditions and without reference to any other ends.¹³⁰

In the *Groundwork*, Kant states his aim as to find out the supreme principle of morality. He wants to introduce a moral law that is independent from any empirical content. He says that since it would be non-empirical, i.e., pure and *a priori*, the law should not have any content. Because if it had such content, then an agent's action would be determined from outside and he would not be responsible for his actions and their results. Therefore, moral law can only have the form of a law, not the content. This is the most interesting side of Kantian morality, because it is grounded on pure rationality and free from empirical content.

According to Kant, a principle is called a principle of moral action only if it maintains its validity when it becomes a universal law for all rational beings.¹³¹

Two criteria of moral law are universality and necessity. He introduces the categorical imperative as the fundamental moral law: "act only in accordance

¹³⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 67.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law”.¹³² The categorical imperative has no content; it is merely a form, it is the moral law itself and it is unique.¹³³ The categorical imperative is followed by what is called the *universal law of nature* formulation of categorical imperative: “Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.”¹³⁴ There are also three other formulations of the categorical imperative derived from it. These are the following: the *principle of humanity*, that is, “so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means”,¹³⁵ the *principle of autonomy*, that is, “act only so that the will could regard itself as the same time giving universal law through its maxim”,¹³⁶ the *principle of kingdom of ends*, that is, “every rational being must act as if he were by his maxims at all times a lawgiving member of the universal kingdom of ends”.¹³⁷

The categorical imperative gives a test to identify which actions are morally permissible. Kant states that to check whether my will is morally good or not,

¹³² Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 73.

¹³³ According to Akarsu, Kant indebts the highest formal principle related with the most perfect to Wolff and he takes the answer of what is the most perfect one from the empiricists (from the English). For details see, Akarsu Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 54.

¹³⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 73.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

to determine whether the maxim of an action is morally right or wrong, it is enough to ask yourself that, can I also will that my maxim should become a universal law?"¹³⁸ Hence, according to Kant, one can reach the principle of morality of an ordinary human's reason, and the human being can use this principle as criteria for his judgements about good or bad.¹³⁹

Kant makes use of examples concerning how to use the categorical imperative. He investigates whether these examples are morally permissible or not; that is, whether they can be a universal law of nature or not. Additionally, he categorizes the actions in these examples into two groups as perfect duty and imperfect duty.¹⁴⁰ In perfect duties, the principle of an action could not be represented as universal law of nature. In the imperfect duties, an action could be represented as a law of nature, i.e., it is possible to be a law of nature but universalization of it as a law of nature could not be willed, i.e. to will universalization of such a maxim as a law of nature is not possible for rational beings.¹⁴¹ The first example is on suicide, second example is on false promise, third example is on improving talents and fourth example is about helping other(s). Kant examines these examples with the intention of whether they are morally permissible or not.

¹³⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 58.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77.

In the first example, it is scrutinized whether suicide is morally allowable. Someone, who is disappointed, unhappy, bored, and does not find a reason to live, asks himself whether he could will universalization of his maxim as a law of nature. His maxim is that “I make it my principle that to shorten my life because of self-love when it seems to be a painful and a troubled life”. Kant says that the nature, which urges destroying life because of self-love, contradicts the same nature that urges preservation of life because of self-love. Such a maxim could not be a universal law of nature.¹⁴²

In the second example, a man needs money and he should borrow it. Although he knows, he cannot pay it back while borrowing it; he is aware of that without giving a strong promise to repay it, he could not borrow it. In that case, his maxim is that: when I need money, even I know I could not repay it; in order to borrow it, I promise to repay it. The question is that, can I will universalization of such a maxim, whether it is contrary to duty or not? Let us assume this maxim is universalized as a law of nature. In that case, the word “promise” becomes meaningless; giving false promise contradicts the meaning of promise. In such a nature, that, if everybody gives promise but does not keep it, then the meaning of giving promise is lost, and the concept becomes contradictory with itself. Therefore, the maxim, when I need money, even I know I could not pay it back; in order to borrow it I can promise to pay it back,

¹⁴² Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 73-74.

could not be universalized as law of nature. With this explanation, Kant says that it is shown that giving a false promise is morally impermissible.¹⁴³

In the third example, a person finds a talent in himself but rejects promoting this talent. Instead of improving it, he prefers idleness, amusement. Now, the question is that, can the maxim, which is neglecting natural gifts, be for the sake of duty? Kant states that such a maxim can be represented as a law of nature. However, to will the universalization of such a maxim is not possible. As long as the agent is a rational being, he necessarily wills to improve his talents, since they are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes.¹⁴⁴

In the fourth example, while an agent can help someone else who is in big trouble, he does not help thinking that “what is it to me? I think he should struggle and overcome his problems. I shall request nothing from others, and I do nothing for contributing to others’ welfare and I do not help them when they need”. Again, Kant claims that this kind of maxim can be thought as a law of nature but willing such a nature is impossible. For, the will, which decides the universalization of that maxim, conflicts with itself. When the agent needs help in the future, because of the universalization of his maxim, he would also renounce help of other people.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

After examining these examples, Kant states that the actions in these examples are morally impermissible. Because, while attempting to universalize their maxims as law of nature, contradictions arise. However, the contradiction that arises from the first two examples is different from last two. The first and second ones are examples of perfect duties and the third and fourth ones are examples for imperfect duties. While representing the first and the second examples as a law of nature is contradictory, in the third and fourth examples, they can be represented as law of nature but universalization of these maxims cannot be willed. Kant states that in the perfect duties a contradiction directly arises; however, in the imperfect duties, contradiction ensues later, during willing the universalization of that maxim as a law of nature. Additionally, in the first and the third examples, we are responsible for ourselves, in the second and the fourth examples we are responsible for others.

3.2.4. Distinction of Means-Ends and Things-Persons

After ascertaining the categorical imperative as moral law, Kant shows that if duty will be a real legislative authority for one's actions, then it can be articulated only as categorical imperative not as the hypothetical imperative.¹⁴⁶ He also states that how moral laws bind rational beings has not been shown. He expresses the situation as that "we have not yet advanced so far as to prove *a priori* that there really is such an imperative, that there is a practical law, which

¹⁴⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 76.

commands absolutely of itself and without any incentives,¹⁴⁷ and that the observance of this law is duty”.¹⁴⁸ He puts the question, which should be answered, as “is it a necessary law for all rational beings always to appraise their actions in accordance with such maxims as they themselves could will to serve as universal laws?”¹⁴⁹ If it is necessary, then it is connected *a priori* with the concept of rational being. Will is a capacity, which is only peculiar to rational beings, to act self-determiningly in accordance with the representation of certain law.¹⁵⁰ He states that if something serves as self-determination of objective ground of it, then it is called an “end”. If something is the only ground of possibility of the action and its effect can be an end, then it is “means”.¹⁵¹ With these, Kant explicates the ground of moral law as follows:

Suppose there were something the *existence of which* in itself has an absolute worth, something which as *an end in itself* could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it, and in it alone, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, that is, of a practical law.¹⁵²

Additionally, Kant says that “in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion;

¹⁴⁷ Kant states that “the subjective ground of desire is an *incentive*; the objective ground of volition is a *motive*”. (Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 78.)

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end”¹⁵³.

Kant states that since their object becomes worthless if their inclinations were not, all things, that are objects of inclination, have only conditional worth. Therefore, insofar as it is acquired by our action, the worth of any object is always conditional.¹⁵⁴ Kant makes a distinction between persons and things. He says that by their nature, rational beings are ends in themselves that have a capacity that may not be used merely as a means. Therefore, rational beings are called *persons*. A person is an object of respect. On the other hand, if the existence of the beings rests on nature not on one’s will and if these beings have no reason, but still have only a relative worth as a means, then beings are called *things*.¹⁵⁵ Further, Kant claims that since it sets itself an end the rational nature distinguishes itself from the rest of nature.¹⁵⁶

3.2.5. Dignity of Rational Beings and Kingdom of Ends

According to the *principle of humanity*, every rational existence, being as a person, who lives under the universal and objective law of morality, must treat others as ends in themselves, not only as means. So, Kant calls that union of

¹⁵³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

moral and autonomous rational beings the “kingdom of ends”.¹⁵⁷ The categorical imperative allows one to see whether one can will that the maxim of his action should become a universal law in a world, namely, “kingdom of ends”, in which he is going to be a part. It is important to notice that the kingdom is not real; it is merely an ideal community, i.e., an intelligible world.

Kant claims that in the kingdom of ends, “everything has either a price or a dignity”.¹⁵⁸ He states that what has a price can be replaced by another thing, that is, with its equivalent. However, if it has no equivalence, then it has a dignity.¹⁵⁹ What he means with dignity is an unconditional and incomparable worth, i.e., an intrinsic worth.

Kant claims that every rational being is both a member and a sovereign of the kingdom of ends. So far as he is subject to the moral law, every rational being is a member of that “intelligible world”, and so far as he is the legislator of the law, every being is the sovereign of that kingdom.¹⁶⁰ In general, the notion of law calls to mind the subjection in the negative sense. However, an agent has dignity so far as he is a lawgiving member in the kingdom of ends and he is capable of acting morally. This is possible through being subject to moral law

¹⁵⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ As I already speak of, Kant’s “kingdom of ends” and Rousseau’s society after contract are like each other, now their resemblance can be seen more clearly.

which is legislated by agent himself. By means of morality, rational beings can be an end in itself.

Consequently, Kant states that since they have capacity to be autonomous, all rational human beings have dignity. Moreover, human beings should be behaved in such ways to become aware of these capacities. Further, he says that, “autonomy is the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature”.¹⁶¹

After introducing the categorical imperative, Kant claims since that the human beings are autonomous and rational, the moral law given by the categorical imperative ties them. What renders a human being rational is his subjection to a law that is legislated by himself. Since the moral law is the law, which is legislated by ourselves, it would be meaningless, even contradictory if we do not obey that law. Actually to obey the law that is self-imposed, and not to obey other things externally caused is the real meaning of being free; it is by means of this, we can actualize our freedom.¹⁶² Being conscious of that “we are free from any external cause, because I can put and obey my own laws” is the feeling that constitutes the ground of our respect to the moral law.

¹⁶¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 85.

¹⁶² Actually, we encounter such an approach in Rousseau, details of which I gave in the beginning of this chapter.

3.2.6. The Relation among Autonomy, Freedom and Morality

Autonomy is one of the important and also most difficult notions of Kant's morality. Kant uses freedom interchangeably both with the autonomy of human being and being a moral person in many places. He claims that freedom does not mean lawlessness.¹⁶³ Kant postulates freedom in the noumenal realm but this does not mean that our actions are not covered by the causality at all. On the contrary, he says that there is also causality in the noumenal world but different from causality in nature. So, he speaks of two kinds of causality, which are causality in phenomenal world as law of nature and causality in noumenal world as freedom. Freedom is a kind of causality, because, a rational being with free will is the cause of his actions. That is, since the will is determined by reason, it also involves necessity.¹⁶⁴ Kant defines freedom as follows:

Will is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes.¹⁶⁵

What Kant means with alien causes are desires and inclinations. Kant speaks of two different uses of will: autonomy of will and heteronomy of will. By the heteronomy of will, he means performing an action for the sake of some other

¹⁶³ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁴ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 80.

¹⁶⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 94.

ends instead of reverence for the law. By the autonomy of will, he means performing an action just for its own sake, i.e., for the sake of duty. The autonomous will is the unconditional will. In another words, if the human will is under the influence of alien causes, then it is heteronomous, if it is independent from alien causes, then it is autonomous. When the agent takes his inclinations, desires, impulses under control, then he would have acted autonomously and therefore freely. Moreover, to be free is to follow our own rational principles instead of our desires, impulses. Autonomy of the agent depends also on “third antinomy”, by means of which freedom can be considered in noumenal realm, so that, one can mention the autonomy of an agent, that is, his being free from phenomenal causality.

Consequently, Kant considers freedom or autonomy to be obeying a law that one legislates for himself.¹⁶⁶ Kant says that the free, autonomous and moral person is the person who is subject to the laws, which are formed by himself.¹⁶⁷ Only an autonomous and rational being can obey the moral law. Actually being free is also being subject to a moral law. For Kant, “a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same”.¹⁶⁸ If the agent can obey the moral law, which he legislated, without an intervention, then he should be free. Kant talks about the determination of the will by the law of reason, that is, the real

¹⁶⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶⁷ Again, in that understanding, a powerful Rousseau effect can be felt, the details of which were given at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁶⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 95.

freedom is the determination of will by law. He says that to will a freedom that is not determined by law (moral law) is to will being unreasonable animals.¹⁶⁹ Sidgwick says that, “a man realizes the aim of his true self when he obeys the moral law”, and this is the fascinating side of Kantian morality.

However, the critical concern for Kant is that whether we are really free. Kant attempts to

show that if we are free and rational beings, then the categorical imperative, as moral law, puts us under an obligation. The moral law requires the free will, so we must suppose ourselves free. The rejection of moral law is possible but in the *CPrR*, he states that if someone rejects the law, he loses his freedom and his personality. The moral law is the necessary condition of freedom. Kant states that the law is “the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which he *ought to act*, i.e., an imperative”.¹⁷⁰ He also claims that because of their rationality, human beings have to act under an idea of freedom as follows: “Now I assert that to every rational being having a will we must necessarily lend the idea of freedom also, under which alone he acts”.¹⁷¹ Consequently, freedom implies rationality.

¹⁶⁹ Akarsu, Bedia, *Ahlak Öğretileri: Immanuel Kant'ın Ahlak Felsefesi*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 73.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

Now, it is clear that how Kant identifies freedom with the morality, and autonomy of agent. This interchangeable usage of notion of freedom causes difficulties. In the following sections, I give some of the difficulties of Kant's morality and I also mention the problem that arises from identifying the freedom with practical reason and law.

Consequently, in spite of all these explanations, Kant says that we cannot explain free will; we can only assume it. It is not possible to explain how freedom is possible; freedom is inscrutable to us.¹⁷² As being rational and autonomous existences, we only assume that we are free and we can experience our freedom by being conscious of that; we are subject to a law, which is legislated by ourselves and also being conscious of that we have moral duties.

3.2.7. Highest Good, Postulation of God, and Immortality

After presenting the general outline of his moral theory, Kant explains his thoughts about the existence of "God" and "immortality" of soul, which are two other problematic ideas of his philosophy. Actually, Kant does not mention these ideas in the *Groundwork* but later in the *CPrR*, he postulates these two ideas as necessary for his moral theory.

While his starting point is "good will" in the *Groundwork*, he starts with the notion of the "highest good" to the *CPrR*. Kant puts the "highest good"

¹⁷² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1987, p. 135.

(*summum bonum*) as the object, the concept and also the motive of the pure will.¹⁷³ He also considers highest good as the highest end of morally determined will.¹⁷⁴ According to Kant, the highest good has two elements: the virtue (moral perfection) and happiness. Only one is not sufficient for highest good;¹⁷⁵ the highest good requires both highest level of virtue and happiness. To reach the former, Kant postulates the immortality of soul and to achieve the latter, he postulates the existence of God.¹⁷⁶

Kant states that rational beings aim to achieve to the highest good. He also states that to achieve the highest good in the world is the necessary object of will, which is determinable by moral law. However, complete determination of will by moral law is holiness. This is not possible for any rational being during his existence in this phenomenal world, i.e., the world of sense.¹⁷⁷ In other words, it seems that in the foreseeable future it is not possible to achieve highest good. This complete fitness of will with the law is only possible during an infinite progress. Moreover, according to the principle of pure practical reason, it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will.¹⁷⁸ After stating these, Kant claims that such an endless progress is

¹⁷³ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 115.

¹⁷⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 121.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

only possible with the possibility of immortality of rational beings. Practically, the highest good is only possible with the supposition of the immortality of soul. Therefore, Kant regards immortality as the postulation of practical reason.¹⁷⁹ With the postulation of immortality, he also brings our attention to the noumenal side of rational beings.

Kant states that during this endless progress rational beings attempt to achieve the highest good. As the outcome of the highest good, rational beings acquire happiness in proportion to their virtue. However, human beings do not have such a perfection to judge their moral perfection. Since, it cannot be left to happen accidentally, there must be someone who guarantees it. At this point, Kant postulates the existence of God. He says that human beings need to postulate an omniscient existence that endows us happiness in proportion to their moral goodness.¹⁸⁰ Kant explains the necessity of God as follows:

Now it was our duty to promote the highest good; and it not merely our privilege but a necessity connected with duty as a requisite to presuppose the possibility of this highest good. This presupposition is made only under the condition of the existence of God, and this condition inseparably connects this supposition with duty. Therefore, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 129

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-133.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Furthermore, Kant states that, “certain knowledge of God’s existence would destroy man’s freedom and reduce human experience to a show of puppets frantically currying the favor of the Almighty”.¹⁸²

However it is important to notice that while Kant claims the necessity of the existence of God, he also states that “this moral necessity is subjective, i.e., a need, and not objective, i.e., duty itself. For there cannot be any duty to assume the existence of a thing”.¹⁸³ Additionally, in the preface of the *Religion* he clearly states his thoughts on the relation between morality and existence of God as follows:

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty. At least it is man’s own fault if he is subject to such a need; and if he is, this need can be relieved through nothing outside himself: for whatever does not originate in himself and his own freedom in no way compensates for the deficiency of his morality. Hence, for its own sake morality does not need religion at all.¹⁸⁴

As I said in the beginning of this chapter, Kant does not derive morality from the idea of existence of God; on the contrary, the idea of existence of God is derived from morality. Because postulation of God is necessary for the advance of his moral theory.

¹⁸² Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. lxxx.

¹⁸³ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 132.

¹⁸⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 3.

Kant thinks that he would provide the objective reality of his three problematic ideas, by means of postulating the free will and existence of God and immortality of soul as the necessitation of morality. On the other hand, there are many objections to Kant's morality. Although, some of these objections lose their importance, that is, according to some of Kant's reviewers they are not real problems, but, some of these objections continue to be discussed. In the following pages, I give some of these objections. Meanwhile, I also discuss the objection, which arises from the appearance to identify the freedom with practical reason and law, which is the central theme of my thesis.

3.3. Critique of Kant's Moral Theory

In this section, I want to mention some problems concerning Kant's moral theory, how these problems can be handled within Kant's morality or how Kant himself handles these problems. The categorical imperative is the most criticized element of Kant's morality. Kant is often blamed for that general principle of his morality on the ground that no particular rules of conduct can be inferred from it. It is regarded as "empty", "sterile", "merely formal".¹⁸⁵ I argue that these kinds of objections arise from a misunderstanding of Kant's aim. Indeed, these kinds of objections are completely opposed to what Kant intended to do. At the beginning of this chapter, I gave the reasons why Kant wills such a formal moral law and considers it necessary. On the other hand,

¹⁸⁵ Broad, C. D., *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1962, p. 122.

some of Kant's interpreters express the fascinating side of Kantian morality as being grounded on pure rationality and, the categorical imperative's being merely a form, without empirical content.¹⁸⁶

There is a difficulty in the deduction of moral law, namely, the categorical imperative. Kant is aware of it, that is, it is also problematic for him. It is said that Kant does not actually overcome this difficulty.¹⁸⁷ While in the *Groundwork*, Kant attempts to derive moral law; in the *CPrR*, he renounces deduction of moral law; he puts it as a "fact of reason". He attempts to derive freedom from that morality, in another words; he proposes the moral law as ground for a deduction of freedom. Kant claims that the existence of moral laws entails freedom. Because without freedom or free will, the agent's choosing action cannot be mentioned.¹⁸⁸

Moreover, Kant is criticized for suggesting a "rigorist" moral theory.¹⁸⁹ The categorical imperative is blamed for not accepting any exception. However, according to Kant, that rigorism is the necessity of universality of the moral law. Kant explains this through "telling lie" example in his answer to Benjamin Constant as follows:

¹⁸⁶ Sidgwick, Henry, "The Kantian Conception of Free Will", p. 412.

¹⁸⁷ Allison, Henry E., "Morality and Freedom: Kant's Reciprocity Theory", p. 394.

¹⁸⁸ Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Kant's rigorism is also seen in his understanding of evil. In the *Religion*, he claims that, an agent can be good or evil, not both them, i.e., there is no middle ground between good and evil. (for details of discussion see Allison, Henry E., *Idealism and Freedom*, p. 130.)

The man ... who asks permission to think first about possible exceptions [to the rule] is already a liar (*in potentia*). This is because he shows that he does not acknowledge truthfulness as in itself a duty but reserves for himself exceptions from a rule which by its very nature does not admit of any exceptions, inasmuch as to admit of such would be self-contradictory. [T]his is because such exceptions would destroy the universality on account of which alone they bear the name of principles.¹⁹⁰

The well-known criticism of Kant's morality is that "to tell murderer the location of victim" which was proposed by the French philosopher Benjamin Constant. He proposed this criticism in Kant's lifetime and Kant answered Constant's criticism in his essay *On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent*. Constant claims that according to Kant's moral theory, even when a murderer, who has intends to kill, asks us the place of our friend, who is hiding in our house, it would be a crime to lie to murderer.¹⁹¹ Contrary to expectations, Kant's response is that one's moral duty is to be truthful in every case, even toward to a murderer. About the lie, what Kant claims is clear that one must not lie. Kant, in his answer to Constant, slightly changes Constant's example. Kant's example is that while I am lying the murderer saying that my friend is not in my house, my friend may escape from the window. The murderer and my friend may come across outside and the murderer may kill him.¹⁹² According to Kant, there is no necessary connection with my answer

¹⁹⁰ Zupančič, Alenka, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, Verso, London, 2000, p. 50.

¹⁹¹ Zupančič, Alenka, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

and the murderer's action. Further, he may not believe me. Therefore, because of telling the truth, I cannot be responsible for the death of my friend.¹⁹³

Since moral value of action is independent from its consequences as Kant says, even when a murderer asks, you should tell the truth. Because while you are misleading or lying to the murderer, you treat him as a means, not as an end, you do not respect his rationality. Furthermore, one cannot be sure about whether the murderer will kill his prey or not without the occurrence of the event. One cannot envisage the outcomes of his decisions.

As mentioned previously, Kant distinguishes between perfect and imperfect duties. It is said that Kant's moral theory is insufficient to provide a remedy to the conflict between two perfect duties. Resolution of the conflict between a perfect duty and an imperfect duty is also a problem. In the case of conflict, does categorical imperative say something about prioritization of duties to solve the conflict? In relation to the previous example, the conflict between two perfect duties, always telling the truth and saving one's life, how would such a conflict be resolved? How would someone resolve the conflict between the perfect duty and imperfect duty? Is there *a priority* over the other? For example, in the following case, which one has priority over the other: the duty as keeping a promise to pick your friend up with your car at a certain time or

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

the other duty that is, stopping on the way to make heart massage to a stranger for saving his life?¹⁹⁴

Kant objects to use of examples as yardstick to morality.¹⁹⁵ He uses examples while introducing the moral theory in the *Groundwork*, especially while he is explaining the categorical imperative. Therefore, he is also criticized for doing that. Nevertheless, I think this is an inept objection. Because, Kant does not propose them as moral models, he just gives them to explicate the moral law as the categorical imperative. Explaining the categorical imperative through these examples, Kant tries to make his morality more comprehensible.

Kant's morality as it is given in the *Groundwork* does not conform to some readers' expectations. For example, Sokoloff expresses his disappointment as follows:

Despite monumental goal, the groundwork has an astonishing conclusion. For the ultimate foundation for morality remains a question and is fundamentally inaccessible to cognition. A massive gap separates the body of the text from the character of the inquiry promised by the title. Although the word *Groundwork* suggests that this text will provide a groundlaying, groundwork, grounding, or foundation for morals, such a foundation is precisely what the text fails to supply.¹⁹⁶

Here, I want to give another important objection to Kant's morality, which also constitutes the core of my thesis. I think that the resolution of this problem is

¹⁹⁴ Stephen O Sullivan and Philip A. Pecorino
http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/pecorip/SCCCWEB/ETEXTS/ETHICS/Chapter_8_Kantian_Theory/Problems.htm

¹⁹⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁶ Sokoloff, William W., "Kant and the Paradox of Respect", pp. 773-774.

the point that Kant combines notion of evil with freedom. As I said before, Kant describes the free will as a kind of causality and he says that the will is governed by (moral) law. This claim implies that the actions of the will are necessary. That means, the will could not act different from what the moral law commands, so, the will is not really free. In other words, Kant seems to identify practical reason [moral law] with freedom of will.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, if the will is completely determined by practical reason [moral law] then how could one still talk about the freedom of will? That is, would it be possible for someone to act immorally or in an evil way? Another interpretation of the same problem is that, if the will rejects to conform to (moral) law, then Kant entitles such a will heteronomous. It is heteronomous, because it is slave of its inclinations. Since, according to Kant, the heteronomous will is not free will, it cannot be held responsible for its unlawful actions. Then, again, the same question arises; how would it be possible for someone to perform an immoral or evil act?

¹⁹⁷ Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 13

CHAPTER IV

EVIL IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

4.1. Background of the Problem of Evil

In this chapter, I discuss how Kant solves the problem arising from identifying the practical reason (moral law) with autonomy and freedom of man, that is, how would it be possible for someone to commit an immoral or evil act if a free and autonomous person is necessarily subject to the moral law? I examine Kant's perplexing notion of "evil". Since Kant entitles his notion of evil as "radical evil" in the form of "propensity (*Hang*) to evil", I try to explain what Kant means by the term "propensity to evil". Finally, I try to clarify the place of "evil" in Kantian morality and its relation with freedom.

Now, before examining Kant's understanding of evil and its difficulties within Kant's philosophy, I want to mention the philosophical background of the problem of evil briefly. With such an introduction, I want to give a general outline of how the problem of evil is considered and in which perspectives it is regarded as a problem.

Like the problem of freedom, evil is one of the oldest problems of philosophy. It appears in different guises (September 11th, terrorism, Auschwitz, plague, earthquake, genocide, etc), sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing in intensity. “What is evil?” is an old question. Where does it come from? From human beings? Can evil perish with humanity? What about evil which is caused by nature? Do we generate it, or does God give it to us? Is there a fundamental evil as the source of other evils that cause temptation of human beings? Can evil be prevented? Is the evil under our control? Is there any reason of evil deeds or does it happen accidentally? The number of these questions can be increased. In spite of not completely explaining the evil, we all agree on the existence of it. There is no consensus concerning evil, and no universal definition of it. Each philosopher introduced his understanding of evil. However, it seems that at the end the problem of evil is condemned to remain unsolvable.

The problem of evil has many aspects. One of these aspects is that; evil is taken into consideration within its relation to the existence of God. It is thought that the existence of God and evil are incompatible. If God exists, then as the necessity of God’s perfect nature, he should be omniscient and omnipotent. On the other hand, if evil exists in the world, then omniscient God should know all those evils, however, in that case, how does morally perfect God allow the existence of evil? If God cannot prevent the evil, then it contradicts the omnipotence of God.

To overcome this problem, some philosophers divide evil into two as moral and natural. If the evil that results from powers out of human control like earthquakes, epidemic diseases, etc., then it is classified as natural evil. If it results from human activity, then it is called moral evil.¹⁹⁸ Kant can be regarded as having consider evil a moral issue.

4.2. Difficulties with Kant's Understanding of Evil

Now after drawing a general outline of the problem of evil, in the following pages, I give main objections to Kant's understanding of evil and how Kant's concept of evil is considered by his contemporaries and by his commentators. Kant's notion of evil and his way of posing the notion of evil is confusing. Kant claims that there is a "propensity to evil" in human nature, and he regards this propensity as innate and inextirpable, and also as capable of being overcome. Since Kant states that morality is only possible with free will, and rational beings are responsible for actions that are chosen by themselves; his claim that "man is evil by nature",¹⁹⁹ is puzzling. Because his statement seems contradictory with freedom, particularly the free will of man, and also autonomy of rational beings. Additionally, how can it be possible to hold someone accountable for the evil character of his nature, if evil is something that comes from human nature? Moreover, how can evil actions be both freely

¹⁹⁸ Peterson, Michael L., *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, Westview Press, USA. 1998, p. 11

¹⁹⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 27.

chosen and innate in human race and also how does Kant bring free choice and “innate propensity to evil” together?

For example, Henry E. Allison, a Kant scholar, thinks that the notion of evil is incompatible with the basic principles of his moral philosophy. He states that while the earlier problem of Kant’s morality was “identification of free action with action motivated by respect for the law”, now the problem is “how can we be both autonomous agents capable of acting from respect for the law and radically evil? And if we are evil “by nature”, how can this evil be imputed to us at all?”²⁰⁰ The problem of Kant’s notion of evil is the compatibility of human nature that has propensity to evil with the human nature that is presupposed to have freedom of choice.²⁰¹ Consequently, depending on what Kant proposes in his previous works, this new conception of evil seems problematic and contradictory with his earlier ideas and thoughts.

Kant’s doctrine of radical evil has long been viewed as a scandal by his contemporaries and by his admirers who consider Kant as the “apostle of reason and progress”.²⁰² The idea of “propensity to evil in human nature” shocked Kant’s contemporaries. Kant’s understanding of evil is mainly

²⁰⁰ Allison, Henry E., *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990, p.146.

²⁰¹ Allison, Henry E., “On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil”, *The Journal of Value Inquiry*. 36: 337-348, 2002, pp. 343-344.

²⁰² Grimm, Stephen R., “Kant’s Argument for Radical Evil”, *European Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 10, Issue 2, pp. 160-177, August 2002, p. 160.
Copjec, Joan, *Radical Evil*, Verso, New York, 1996, p. viii.

understood by his contemporaries as a rejection of Kant's previous thoughts about the powers of reason in his old age; Kant was thought to turn to the traditional religious approach, to the doctrine of "original sin", to a Christianity that is opposed to the doctrines of the Enlightenment.²⁰³ Consequently, Kant's concept of evil is found inconsistent with his earlier philosophy.²⁰⁴

The doctrine of original sin can be explained shortly as follows: According to the Christian tradition, the "original sin" is regarded as the condition of universal sin of the human race into which human beings are born, the heritage of Adam and Eve to his descendants. The story is that although it is forbidden by God to eat it, with temptation of the serpent, Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the apple. The original sin refers to the first sin that is committed by Adam and Eve before they are exiled from the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience to the command of God. Therefore, it is believed that man is born sinful, an inheritance of Adam and Eve. It is thought that the effects of the original sin will be seen in the seed of all evil actions of human race.

It seems that both Kant and the doctrine of original sin mention an inborn evil. By means of the concept of propensity to evil, Kant discloses the imperfect

²⁰³ Allison, H. E., "On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil", p. 337. Copjec, Joan, *Radical Evil*, Verso, New York, 1996, p. viii.

²⁰⁴ Some of Kant's contemporaries, Goethe for example, criticized Kant harshly for his thoughts in the *Religion*: "Kant required a lifetime to purify his philosophical mantle of many impurities and prejudices. And now he has wantonly tainted it with the shameful stain of radical evil, in order that Christians too might be attracted to kiss its hem". Schiller called Kant's essay on radical evil as "scandalous". (Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 238.)

nature of the human race. Therefore, Kant's concept of evil is blamed for suggesting an understanding of evil based on the original sin. Kant's explanations he gave in the *Religion* strengthens that blame. The following quotation from the *Religion* will show the similarity between the doctrine of original sin and Kant's thoughts:

Thus the is the first beginning of all evil represented as conceivable by us; but man is represented as having fallen in to evil only through seduction, and hence as being not basically corrupt (even as regards his original predisposition to good) but rather as still capable of an improvement, in contrast to a seducing spirit, that is, a being for whom temptation of the flesh cannot be accounted as an alleviation of guilt. For man, therefore, who despite a corrupted heart yet possesses a good will, there remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed.²⁰⁵

Kant's commentators suggest different approaches to understand the Kant's conception of evil, which is based on "propensity to evil" and its place in Kant's philosophy. While evil is mostly considered as a religious problem, some Kant scholars find it anthropological. Commentators such as Allen Wood and Stephen R. Grimm claim that the true understanding of Kant's concept of evil is possible only with an anthropological approach. Grimm draws our attention to a passage from the *Religion* to support his claim:

The man of whom we say, "He is by nature good or evil," is to be understood not as the single individual ...but as the entire race; that we are entitled so to do can only be proved when anthropological research shows that the evidence, which justifies us in attributing to a man one of these characters as innate, is such as to give no ground for excepting anyone, and that the attribution therefore holds for the race.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 39.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Although Grimm and Wood consider Kant's evil as an anthropological issue, their approaches are different. Wood claims that even though Kant's and Rousseau's understanding of evil seems diametrically opposite, they mention one and the same thing.²⁰⁷ He states that Kantian evil is the restatement of Rousseau's concept of *amour propre* (feelings of excessive pride, conceit, self-love). That is, human beings are born with a good nature but when they get into relation with others, they become evil; their nature begins to become corrupt.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, Grimm does not accept Wood's argument that the source of evil is social interaction. He says that human beings have a "composite nature" that includes an animal appetite and also a capacity to derive moral law from reason. This "composite nature" of man is the source of evil.²⁰⁹

However, not all commentators think Kantian evil needs an anthropological or a religious approach. Pablo Muchnik is one of the scholars who find "propensity to evil" consistent with Kant's moral philosophy. He states that Kantian evil is no more a religious problem; it is a problem of morality and Kant's main concern is moral evil.²¹⁰ I agree with Muchnik and try to show the necessity of concept of evil for Kant's moral theory. I argue that this concept

²⁰⁷ Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 291.

²⁰⁸ Grimm, Stephen R., "The Kant's Argument for Radical Evil", p. 161.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Muchnik, Pablo, "The Fragmented Will-Kant on Evil", to be published in a volume on Value Theory edited by James Sasso, *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science*, Anu Books, 2004, p. 3.

does not contradict Kant's philosophy. Furthermore, Kantian morality seems to require a concept of "evil". The concept of the "propensity to evil" has an important role for Kant's understanding of virtue. It clears out some tacit, incomprehensible and even problematic points of Kant's morality as it is given in the *Groundwork* and the *CPrR*.

4.3. The Distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür* and its Significance

In the previous section, I gave an outline of the Kantian conception of evil and the main problems of it. Now, I will try to explain how Kant solves the problem that comes from the *Groundwork*, which is, if free will is identified with the moral law, how can an agent be free and how is an intentionally evil action be possible? In other words, in spite of seeming to identify the moral law and practical reason with human freedom, how does Kant see the commitment of evil actions possible?

Kant gives two aspects of will as *Wille* and *Willkür*. Actually, Kant does not make any clear distinction on these two aspects of will; the distinction is given as tacitly in Kant's earlier writings. Both of these German words, *Willkür* and *Wille* are translated to English as "will" in Kant's earlier works. Kant makes a precise distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür* in the *MM*. In fact, before making this distinction in the *MM*, Kant also uses them in different contexts as *Wille* and *Willkür* in the *CPrR* and the *Religion*.

Kant defines *Wille* as the legislative and *Willkür* as the executive aspect of the will. In other words, *Wille* is the practical reason that derives law and *Willkür* is the faculty of choice.²¹¹ Since *Wille* cannot act, it merely supplies an imperative of duty to *Willkür*. Then, *Willkür* is subject to the motives provided by *Wille*. Therefore, while *Willkür* is free, *Wille* is unfree. However, this “unfree” is not in the strict meaning. The *Wille* is unfree because it is practical reason itself. On the other hand, it is free, because *Wille* “is law-giving and not law following”. Consequently, while *Willkür* is free, the *Wille* is neither free nor unfree.²¹²

By means of the distinction of *Wille* and *Willkür*, some of the ambiguities that arise from the use of freedom in various meanings also dissipate. That is, as I mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, Kant uses freedom in the sense of spontaneity in the *CPR*; later in the *Groundwork*, he uses it in the meaning of autonomy. With *Wille* and *Willkür* distinction, we note that while Kant uses freedom in the meaning of spontaneity, he intends *Willkür*. On the other hand, when he uses will in the sense of autonomy as in the *Groundwork*, he intends *Wille* as practical reason or moral law.²¹³

In the discussion concerning the *third antinomy* in the *CPR*, Kant introduces the concept of transcendental freedom, that is being free from necessity of law

²¹¹ Kant, Immanuel, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, p. 10.

²¹² Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 132.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

of nature, i.e., free from causality. He states that transcendental freedom is an absolute spontaneity. So, as he uses freedom in the sense of spontaneity, he means *Willkür*. It is important to recognize that by *Willkür*, Kant means freedom in negative sense, that is, freed from obstacles, particularly from natural causality.

However, considering *Willkür* in negative sense as merely the absence of external causes would be a mistake. Because, *Willkür* has also a positive side. Beck's explanation is important to comprehend the relation of *Wille* with *Willkür*:

Hence a free, i.e., spontaneous, *Willkür*, when it is good, is determined by a free, i.e., autonomous, *Wille*, or pure practical reason, which gives it a law. It can obey only this law without jeopardy to its freedom. Indeed, it gains in freedom, by now being an autonomous as well as a spontaneous will. Thus is added to the negative concept of freedom (spontaneous independence of foreign laws) the positive concept of freedom (autonomous self-legislation).²¹⁴

Wille is peculiar to human beings, whereas both humans and animals have *Willkür*. However, their *Willkür* has different features: while animals' *Willkür* is determined by impulses, humans' *Willkür* is only affected by impulses, but not determined by sensible impulses.²¹⁵

This distinction also solves the major problem that comes from the *Groundwork*, which is, if the moral law and freedom of man or his free will are identical, then how would it be possible for someone to commit an immoral or

²¹⁴ Beck, Lewis W., *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 198-188.

²¹⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, p. 10.

evil act? *Wille-Willkür* distinction explains the possibility of immoral action. That is, evil is not an act of the entirely rational *Wille* which is the source of our respect for the moral law; evil is possible only as an act of the *Willkür*.²¹⁶ By means of the use of his *Willkür*, an agent can choose to act in an evil way or in a good way. Finally, Kant states that *Willkür* cannot be explained and that it is not comprehensible; because supersensible things cannot be explained by appearances.²¹⁷

4.4. Kant's Understanding of Evil

According to Kant, the human being is naturally neither morally good, nor morally evil, nor both good and evil.²¹⁸ However, while Kant says that human beings are not naturally good or evil, he claims that there is a “predisposition to good”, and also he claims that there is a “propensity to evil” in human nature. Kant's explanations on predisposition (*Anlage*), propensity (*Hang*) and disposition (*Gesinnung*) are confusing;²¹⁹ they complicate the understanding of his moral theory and particularly his thoughts on evil. Most of Kant scholars' complain that what Kant means with these terms is not clear, that Kant does not explain them in a systematic way. On the other hand, understanding these concepts is important for comprehending Kant's conception of evil and

²¹⁶ Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, pp. 13-14.

²¹⁷ Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 133.

²¹⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 17.

²¹⁹ Hereafter, I use English translations of these concepts as disposition, predisposition and propensity.

morality. Now, I will try to clarify what Kant means with “disposition”, “predisposition good” and “propensity to evil”.

According to Kant, disposition is the “ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims”.²²⁰ In other words, disposition is the inner principle of maxims.²²¹ Disposition is the enduring character of the agent.²²² Human disposition can be good or evil but not both of them, that is, there is no middle ground between good or evil disposition.²²³ Kant says that disposition “can be only one and applies universally to the whole use of freedom”.²²⁴ He claims that disposition is not acquired in time.²²⁵ To say something happens in time implies that it is causally determined and consequently it is not free. When Kant states that a disposition is not acquired in time, he means that it is not causally determined but rather issues from one’s freedom.²²⁶ However, while saying the disposition not acquired in time, Kant is not saying that it is not acquired by the agent. On the contrary, its author is the agent himself, he

²²⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 20.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

²²² Silber, John R., “Ethical Significance of Kant’s Religion”, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. cxxvii.

²²³ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 18.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 26.

acquires it by free choice of the agent.²²⁷ To be morally good, an agent should be building up intentionally a virtuous disposition by means of his *Willkür*.

Another complicated concept is predisposition (*Anlage*). Kant claims that human nature has a “predisposition to good”. The difference between disposition and predisposition is that, while disposition is adopted by free choice (*Willkür*), the predisposition is not chosen, that is, it is bounded up “with the possibility of human nature”.²²⁸ The human beings have “predisposition to good”, means, that they have predisposition to engage in good behavior. Kant divides that “predisposition to good” into three in terms of their functions. These predispositions as three different capacities of human beings are predisposition to animality, predisposition to humanity, and predisposition to personality.

Concerning the predisposition to animality in man, Kant says that since man is regarded as a living being, he can be considered in that category. This element of predisposition does not require reason. Kant puts it under the general title of physical and purely mechanical self-love. Three aspects of that predisposition to animality are self-preservation, propagating of species, and social impulse, that is, communication with other people.

²²⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 20.

²²⁸ Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 24.

As for the predisposition to humanity in man, Kant puts this category under the title of a physical self-love. Kant considers man in that category while he regards man as a living and rational being. This is different from animality, since predisposition to humanity in man concerns comparison, hence it requires reason. That is to say, we judge ourselves as happy or unhappy only by making comparisons with others. Desire of being equal lies on the ground of that comparison. However, the desire of being equal does not include wanting equality of others with us or wanting their being higher than us. The predisposition of animality too involves reason but reason may serve to other incentives.²²⁹

While Kant takes man a rational and at the same time an accountable being, he considers man under the category of predisposition to personality. The predisposition to animality grounded on reason. That is, reason unconditionally dictates the law. Predisposition to personality in man is the capacity for respect for moral law. This also involves reason, but the existence of reason does not imply man's usage of it or following rationality.²³⁰

In summary, the three varieties in human beings' tendency to do good things are preserving the species, seeking the approval of others, and respecting moral law. Kant states that these three predispositions are limited with the

²²⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, pp. 21-23.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

possibilities of human nature.²³¹ They are compatible with moral law. Actually, Kant does not clearly state what he means with that statement, but it can mean that existence of these predispositions in human does not contradict the moral law; further, even in the predisposition to animality,²³² human beings are accountable for the moral law.²³³

Before explaining what Kant means with the “propensity to evil”, I want to explain what it means to call a man evil according to Kant. He says that a man is not called evil because of his actions that are evil (contrary to law). Kant calls a man evil because “his actions are of such a nature that we may infer from them the presence in him of evil maxims”.²³⁴ Evil actions can be observed in experience; however, evilness of a maxim cannot be observed in experience, and even one cannot be sure about the evilness of his own maxim. Therefore, evilness of a man cannot be known through experience, that is, experience cannot give certain knowledge about evilness or goodness of a man. While Kant says the nature (of man), he only means “the subjective ground of the exercise (under objective moral law) of man’s freedom”.²³⁵ Kant states that if

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³² Since predisposition to animality does not necessitate the reason and it is self-love centered, it can be thought that predisposition to animality contradicts moral law.

²³³ Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990, p.149.

²³⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 16.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

that subjective ground were other than the expression of freedom, then we cannot talk about the power of choice (*Willkür*) of human beings.²³⁶

Now, I will focus on the status of Kant's concept of "propensity to evil". For Kant, propensity is the "subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination so far as mankind in general is liable to it"²³⁷ and he states that propensity must consist in the "subjective ground of the possibility of the movement away from the maxims of the moral law".²³⁸ Propensity to evil precedes all of man's actions but propensity itself is not an act.²³⁹ It is important to note that Kant imputes "propensity to evil" to men in general, "even best of them", and says that, "the propensity to evil in mankind is universal".²⁴⁰ So, when Kant says "propensity to evil", he ascribes it not to this or that individual man, but to whole human race.

This propensity is not something acquired in time, it is innate, i.e., it is from human biological nature and it is not possible to eradicate it., Kant calls this "propensity to evil" in the human race as "radical" evil. He explains this as follows: "because it [propensity to evil] corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is, moreover, as a natural propensity, inextirpable by human powers, since

²³⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 17.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁴⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 25.

extirpation could occur only through good maxims”.²⁴¹ According to Kant, propensity differs from predisposition in that, while both can be thought as innate, the former ought to be regarded as acquired whereas the latter belongs to the human nature.²⁴²

However, Kant does not only claim that there is propensity to evil in human nature but also, that “man is evil by nature”. As I mentioned previously, such a statement by Kant shocked his readers, who knew the importance of freedom for Kant, that is, according to Kant. After such a perplexing introduction, Kant explains what he means with “man is evil by nature” as “man is evil, can mean only, he is conscious of moral law but has nevertheless adopted into his maxims the (occasional) deviation therefrom”.²⁴³ With “man is evil by nature”, Kant does not intend to say the actual evilness of human nature; he intends only to explain that propensity to evil is common for all human beings, i.e., to show the universality of such a propensity to evil in human race.²⁴⁴

The important point is that the propensity to evil is innate²⁴⁵ but the evil maxims of man are not. Being moral agents, one chooses his maxims with his

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴⁴ Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 225.

²⁴⁵ Kant regards propensity to evil as innate because, it antecedent to all act of agent. Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 24.

free will under the effect of moral law or incentives. However, evil actions do not come from the content of one's maxim. Kant explains this as follows:

Hence 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.²⁴⁶

While talking about incentives, Kant does not only consider the sensuous things, but he also regards the moral law as an incentive.²⁴⁷ Human beings need incentives to determine their *Willkür*.²⁴⁸ Kant claims that there are two kinds of incentives peculiar to the human will. The incentives of inclination those refer to human's natural desires, and the incentives of reason those refer to dignity of human as self-governing rational agents. The latter incentives always have rational priority over the former.²⁴⁹ However, this "innate propensity" in human beings may inverse the order of these incentives, that is, one may prefer incentives of inclination to those of reason. What makes a man good or evil is that, "which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other". Kant says that "man is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into maxim".²⁵⁰ Therefore, according to Kant, in spite of the goodness of his maxim, which are determined by good

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

²⁴⁷ Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 151.

²⁴⁸ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 21.

²⁴⁹ Wood, Allen W., "Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil", *Faith and Philosophy* 17, 4, October 2000, p. 8.

²⁵⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 31.

incentives, if man reverses the order of incentives, he is evil. He explains this as follows:

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 (*Willkür*) 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. The maxim, then, in terms of whose goodness all moral worth of the individual must be appraised, is thus contrary to the law, and the man, despite all his good deeds, is nevertheless evil.²⁵¹

Consequently, in spite of its being a perplexing notion, Kant clearly states that the source of evil is neither human inclinations nor natural impulses, nor human phenomenal sensuous nature. For if natural desires, inclinations were the source of evil, then freedom of the agent would be determined by natural cause, and that is contrary to the meaning of being free. Further, the agent's inclinations comes from his predisposition to good, therefore they cannot be evil. They arise from human nature, not from his uses of his freedom.²⁵² Moreover, if they were the source of evil, then an agent could not be accountable for his evilness.²⁵³ Therefore, human's desires and inclinations cannot be the source of evil.

Kant says that a maxim can be good or evil, not both of them at the same time. Actually, it is possible that a maxim is integrated by both of moral law, inclinations, and desires. In other words, an agent's maxim can be a mixture of

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁵² Wood, Allen W., *Kant's Moral Religion*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1970, p. 212.

²⁵³ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 17.

moral law and inclinations, and desires. However, in that case, one cannot be called good.²⁵⁴ Because if an action is not done only for sake of duty, i.e., out of respect for the law, then it is not morally worthy. In that case, an agent and his action are called evil. A maxim or an action cannot be disinterested, that is, it cannot be both not good or not evil at the same time.

As a result of these explanations, it is obvious that Kant locates the source of evil in the human's free will, namely *Willkür*. He introduces the concept of evil as a choice: evil is a kind of free doing. Otherwise, one should not be responsible for his good or evil actions. Depending on all these explanations, it is important to notice that Kant does not say that the human being is actually evil; he just talks about a "propensity" to evil.

4.4.1. Three Degrees of Evil

Kant introduces three degrees of propensity to evil: "frailty", "impurity", and "wickedness". These are three successive stages in the development of this propensity.²⁵⁵ Now, I will try to explain how Kant defines these degrees of evil.

Frailty: Kant explains frailty as the weakness of human heart during the following out the adopted maxims. In other words, *Willkür* chooses a good maxim, namely moral law, but it fails while following out that good maxim.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24.

²⁵⁵ Allison, Henry E., "On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil", p. 343.

Impurity: It is the failure of distinguishing the incentives, that is, the moral law from other incentives.²⁵⁷ In other words, although the maxim is good, it is not purely moral. I think Kant mentions this kind of evil tacitly in the *Groundwork*. He says only actions done for the sake of duty has moral worth; an action's conformity with moral law is not enough for it to be moral. That is, sometimes the maxim of an action conforms to moral law, but the action itself is not done for the sake of moral law. In that case, Kant calls both the man, whose maxim is not purely determined by the law, and his action as evil.

Wickedness: this kind of evil arises from *Willkür*'s adoption of other incentives to his maxim instead of moral law itself. That is, free *Willkür* reverses the order of incentives; so, other incentives become the condition of law. For example, an action may be done for sake of self-love, self-interests, etc. Sometimes these maxims accidentally may coincide with the moral law; but, they are still evil.²⁵⁸

The important point with Kant's understanding of evil is that, he rejects the evil for sake of evil. In Kant's point of view, "even the morally worst person still possesses moral reason. Accordingly, vice cannot cause invincible ignorance

²⁵⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 25.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

that might excuse such a person from moral responsibility for his evil actions”.²⁵⁹ Rojer Sullivan explains this as follows:

...Kant holds, although human beings can give themselves up to “diabolical vices”, they can never actually have a diabolical (i.e., *a totally evil*) character. (See *Rel.* p. 22.) That would require the *complete* rejection of the moral law because it is the moral law and the deliberate and defiant choice of the evil principle for its own sake, simply because it is evil. (See *Rel.* pp. 30, 32.) Since the moral law is ineluctably present in the human will, Kant holds that it is not possible for anyone totally to reject it. When individuals do choose to do evil, they choose to subordinate the moral law to the principle of self-love. (See *Rel.* pp. 22-23.)²⁶⁰

4.5. The Relation between Evil and Freedom

Now, I will summarize our discussion that I have already explained in the previous sections of this chapter. The Kantian concept of evil is grounded on “frailty”, “impurity”, or “wickedness” of the human heart. Kant states that all human beings have propensity to evil naturally i.e., universally. However, this does not mean that they are actually evil, human beings become evil with their own free choice. Kant clearly states this as follows:

Evil is possible only as a determination of free will [*Willkür*], and since the will [*Willkür*] can be appraised as good or evil only by means of its maxims, this propensity to evil must consist in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law.²⁶¹

It is important to notice that the source of evil is neither human nature nor inclinations. The (practical) reason (*Wille*) is also not the source of it; the

²⁵⁹ Sullivan, Roger J., *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989, p. 337.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

²⁶¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 24.

source of evil is *Willkür*.²⁶² Nevertheless, at the end, evil is a matter of free choice. Therefore, human beings are morally responsible for what they do as free agents whether they perform their actions for the sake of duty or just accord with duty or act contrary to duty. So, with their free choices by means of their *Willkür*, people make themselves morally good or evil. Again, it is important to notice that with the term evil, Kant does not mean natural disasters, but the misuse of an agent's freedom by himself.²⁶³

I argued that the concept of "propensity to evil" plays a crucial role in Kant's moral philosophy and his understanding of virtue. I noted in the third chapter, Kant states that morality is only possible with a free will; without a free and autonomous will, one cannot talk about even the possibility of morality. Kant states that freedom provides the ground for morality, and at the same time, one can experience freedom insofar as one acts morally. Now, depending on all these explanations on Kant's moral theory, I restate my claim, that the concept of evil does not contradict Kant's moral theory. On the contrary, Kantian morality seems to require that concept of evil. By means of introducing that concept of evil, Kant explicates some incomprehensible and even problematic points of Kant's moral theory as it is given in the *Groundwork* and in the *CPrR*. With the "incomprehensible and even problematic points", I particularly infer

²⁶² Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 151.

²⁶³ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. lxxx.

to the problem that arises from Kant's identifying the freedom with the moral law and practical reason.

Let me clarify what I mean by saying that Kantian morality seems to require the concept of evil. Especially in the *Groundwork*, as Kant seems to identify freedom with subjection to the moral law (a necessary subjection that results from one's rationality), the possibility of immorality almost disappears. Now, with Kant's explanation of the notion of evil and with his *Wille-Willkür* distinction, the possibility of one's committing evil deeds becomes clear. Kant he still explains evil in connection with free will. Now, if someone can choose between alternatives, then he must be free. Therefore, freedom becomes conceivable through the possibility of acting in an evil way; in other words, through the possibility of someone's choosing evil as well as good.

Depending on what I said above, let me examine the case as it is proposed by Kant. I think "propensity to evil", which constitutes the ground of Kant's understanding of evil, reveals the moral worth of one's actions. If one had a "propensity to good", it could be expected that his maxim would conform to moral law; then, there would be no moral value of an action according to Kant's thoughts on morality as he claimed with "sympathetic person" example, which is as follows:

There are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with

duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth, but is on the same footing with other inclinations.²⁶⁴

Here Kant clearly states that only the actions performed for the sake of duty have moral worth; an action in accordance with duty but not for the sake of duty is morally worthless. So, if one had a “propensity to good”, then it would not be certain whether one chooses law as maxim from that propensity to good or not. Let us turn to Kant’s actual view that human beings have a propensity to evil. Despite this “propensity to evil”, one can choose adopting law into his maxim, and act morally. In that case, we would be talking about a genuine choice, a preference. The real virtuous act is to struggle and overcome the “propensity to evil”. This is clear in Kant’s “preserving one’s own life in spite of wishing for death” example:

To preserve one’s life is a duty, and besides everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. But on this account the often anxious care that most people take of it still has no inner worth and their maxim has no moral content. They look after their lives *in conformity with duty* but not *from duty*. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless grief have quite taken away the taste for life; if an unfortunate man, strong of soul and more indignant about his fate than despondent or dejected, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral content.²⁶⁵

Despite the “propensity to evil”, one can choose moral law as maxim, then it is the true, genuine act of moral worth and the person is called morally good. So, freedom can be understood as the capacity to act morally by choosing good maxims for the sake of duty in the face of the propensity to evil or strongest contrary incentives. Besides, in spite of that propensity to evil, if a man chooses

²⁶⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 53.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

good (moral law), then he is morally good, and as he chooses to act as he does, by his preference he makes himself clear that he is really free. Therefore, it would not be wrong to state that the propensity to evil makes one conceive his freedom. From the perspective of Kantian morality, I think this is the authentic meaning of being a free and an autonomous agent; that is, one is aware of evil but with his free and autonomous will he can adopt (moral) law into his maxim. Thus, one can experience one's freedom as long as it is possible for him to act in an evil as well as in a good way.

Human beings have a "predisposition to good" and a "propensity to evil". However, the "propensity to evil" or the "predisposition to good" do not imply an actual goodness or evilness of human nature. It is important to notice that according to Kant, the "predisposition to good" is not enough to make one a person good. In other words, it is not enough to have the seeds of good which lies in our nature. That man has a predisposition to good does not mean that he is actually good.²⁶⁶ On the other hand, that "propensity to evil" is not the cause of one's being evil. It does not mean an actual evil nature. Human beings become good or evil with their free will (*Willkür*). To be good one has to combat that propensity to evil, in other words, has to struggle to overcome the evil. We may have a predisposition to good, but to become morally good is only possible with the exercise of *Willkür*.

²⁶⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 48.

The Kantian notion of evil is not simply the lack of goodness or ignorance like in Platonic or the Enlightenment understanding of evil.²⁶⁷ The Kantian notion refers to an action that is consciously and autonomously chosen. It implies the preference and choosing of other incentives to the moral law. An agent becomes good or evil with his choices with his *Willkür*.

Therefore, it can be said that Kant's understanding of evil is a matter of choice and it can be regarded as the condition of conceiving one's freedom. As Kant said, evil is revealed in one's choice, which is due to *Willkür*. True morality arises from one's confrontation with his own evil, to become genuinely moral, an agent should firstly grasp his own radical evil.²⁶⁸

However, at the end, the question why some people choose good and some people choose evil maxims remains unanswered. Kant cannot say what the origin of evil is, that is, there seems to be no conceivable ground of evil. Kant claims that the ground and origin of radical evil in human beings remain inscrutable²⁶⁹ by saying that "the ultimate subjective ground of the adaptation

²⁶⁷ Allison, Henry E., "On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil", p. 338.

²⁶⁸ Lawrence, Joseph P., "Radical Evil and Kant's Turn to Religion", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*. Springer Science+Business Media B. V., Formerly Kluwer Academic Publishers B. V., Vol. 36, Numbers 2-3, pp. 319-335. pp. 331-332.

²⁶⁹ Following explanation of Bernstein may be helpful to understand the inscrutability of Kant's evil. "If we press further and ask why one person develops a disposition or character that leads him to adopt good maxims and someone else adopts evil maxims, there is much that we can say about their background, social circumstances, and education; but we cannot give an ultimate answer to this question: it is inscrutable. For such an answer would require us to be able to give a theoretical account of human freedom. And this is precisely what the Critical Philosophy shows us to be impossible. To claim that a free choice is inscrutable is not to say that it is mysterious – as if, in principle, we should be able to give necessary and sufficient reasons for why someone makes the

of moral maxims is inscrutable”.²⁷⁰ I think it should be inscrutable for the necessity of Kant’s moral thoughts, because the meaning of being a free person requires this inscrutability as in his explanation for the existence of God and immortality.²⁷¹ Kantian evil as in the form of propensity to evil corrupts the ground of all maxims, but it is not the corruption at the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims.²⁷² However, in spite of arguing that evil is inscrutable and inextirpable by human powers, Kant also claims that overcoming this innate “propensity to evil” is possible, because it is found in the nature of human beings who are free in their actions. Kant offers an approach to overcome evil with good maxims.²⁷³

choices he does make; it is only to insist that the choice is free.” (Bernstein, Richard J., *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 29.)

²⁷⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 17.

²⁷¹ Kant says that if we had known the existence of God or immortality evidently, then we could not talk about the true moral value of an action. Because the certain knowledge of the existence of God would harm agent’s free will and his free choices. In other words, being conscious of that fact everybody would prefer to obey the moral law. (Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 158-160.)

²⁷² Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 32.

²⁷³ Stapleton, Matthew, “Is Kantian Ethics Left Defenseless in the Face of Evil?”, *Ethic: An International Journal for Moral Philosophy*. Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 175-182, 2002, p. 181.
Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 32.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The concept of freedom is the bridge that connects Kant's views in his various works. This concept connects his theoretical philosophy with his practical philosophy. Kant sets up his philosophy on this key concept. The thoughts that are explicated in the *CPrR* and the *Groundwork* are constructed upon the notion of freedom. Freedom is the concept at the heart of Kant's philosophy. However, it has been continuously problematic.

On the other hand, evil is the most criticized concept of Kant's philosophy. Since Kant's explanation of evil reminds one of the Christian doctrines of "original sin", it is regarded as scandalous by his contemporaries. However, Kant scholars have different views for reconciling it with Kant's philosophy. My major aim in this thesis was to explain the relation between freedom and evil in terms of Kant's moral theory and to understand the significance of evil for his philosophy. I examined Kant's notions of freedom and evil, and related problems within the framework of his morality. For this reason, I tried to

explain Kant's understanding of morality and also mentioned some problems in relation to freedom and evil.

In the *CPR*, Kant's aim is solely to show the possibility of freedom that is thinking of freedom without a logical contradiction. In the *CPR*, Kant argues that he has solved the problem within the context of the *third antinomy*; here he claims to have shown the possibility of freedom. In the *Groundwork* and the *CPrR*, that possibility appears as the possibility of some other things, namely morality, existence of God and immortality of soul. While freedom gains its objective reality by means of morality, the other two problematic ideas of Kant's philosophy, God and immortality gain their objective realities.

In the *CPR*, Kant firstly articulates the nature of causality then he tries to show the compatibility of freedom with it. Instead of stating on "what knowledge is" which is one of the important problems of the period until his time, Kant preferred to focus on "what we can know" and "how we can know". He begins his philosophy with a search of limits of pure reason. He says that concepts (twelve categories) and intuitions (space and time) are conditions of knowledge. Kant considers causality as an *a priori* concept of the human mind, which is the necessary condition for the constitution of knowledge.

However, while Kant acknowledges the existence of causality in nature, the problem whether the will is free or not in that causally determined nature arises. If the world depends on cause and effect relation, how can freedom of

man be possible? As I said before, the free will is the condition of morality for Kant. So, causality in nature endangers the possibility of free will. If the agent is not free, then he cannot be accountable for his performances. Kant attempts to reconcile freedom the causality in nature, that is, the former becomes the precondition of morality and the latter the condition of knowledge. Kant tries to reconcile causality and freedom with his noumena and phenomena distinction in the context of the *third antinomy*. By means of that distinction, he argues that freedom and causality can exist together without a logical contradiction.

Kant introduces the distinction of sensible and intelligible character of human beings as the consequence of phenomena-noumena division. With his phenomenal, i.e., sensible, side the human being is subject to causality in nature, but with his noumenal side, he is free from the laws of nature. As having argued for the possibility of freedom in the *CPR*, Kant explains his understanding of freedom in the *Groundwork* and in the *CPrR* within the framework of his moral theory. Kant cannot show the possibility of freedom of the will without assuming the existence of the realm of things in themselves; and without the freedom of will, he cannot derive the categorical imperative, which is the central principle of his morality.

According to Kant, the place and the source of all concepts of morality is *a priori* reason. The constraints from outside such as God or a moral law with predetermined content cannot be motives of a moral action. Therefore, morality should be grounded on *a priori* and pure reason.

Kant introduces his moral law as categorical imperative. This is merely a form, it does not have any content. The important point is that freedom is not lawlessness. Kant claims that if one can conform to a moral law that is constituted by himself without any interference from outside, then he should be free. Freedom is being subject to a law that an autonomous agent imposed on himself. Thus, reason should consider itself as the author of its principles independent of all alien causes.

Kant considers freedom as a kind of causality but different from physical causality as the law of nature. He entitles freedom as the causality of reason. A rational being with his free will is the cause of his actions. Therefore, freedom also includes necessity.

Consequently, morality shows the objective reality of freedom. Morality is only possible with a free will (*Willkür*); without a free and autonomous will, morality cannot be possible. Freedom is the end of the rational beings and morality is the means to realize it.

However, certain problems arise from Kant's understanding of freedom and morality. He claims that the autonomous person is subject to his own law. At first glance, there is no problem. However, performing evil acts intentionally is not possible with the Kantian understanding of freedom and morality. Because, Kant identifies the free will of the rational being with the moral law. He even says that the practical reason is no other than the moral law. Further, the free

and the autonomous person is the person who is subject to and who conforms to moral law. Kant also states that a free agent is necessarily subject to moral law as result of his rationality. As consequence of these explanations, an important problem arises, that is, if the agent necessarily conforms to moral law, or if the will necessarily is subject to moral law or if it is practical reason, then how can there be a real freedom?

I have argued that Kant solves the problem with the distinction of *Wille* and *Willkür*. In fact, this distinct use of will is seen in his earlier works but tacitly. Kant scholars dispute the point whether Kant uses the concept consciously, and whether each of these usages is consistent with the rest. But, it seems that by means of that distinction Kant solves the problem that arises from identifying the practical reason (moral law) with autonomy and freedom of rational beings.

Wille is the aspect of will, which is the same as the practical reason and moral law. On the other hand, *Willkür* concerns the free aspect of will. By means of it the possibility of evil actions becomes conceivable. In other words, *Wille* is the legislative aspect of will and *Willkür* is the executive aspect of will. For this reason, *Wille* is the aspect of the will which is the same as the practical reason (moral law); it is used identically with freedom and autonomy of agent as it is mentioned in the *Groundwork*. In other words, *Wille* is the unfree aspect of will, which is unavoidably subject to the moral law. On the other hand, *Willkür* is the aspect of the will that is free in his choices. Therefore, an agent may act in an evil or in a good way by means of use of his free *Willkür*.

New difficulties arise with Kant's comprehension of evil. As he claims that there is a propensity to evil in human nature. Further, he says that "man is evil by nature". So, if human nature is evil, how can an agent be accountable for his evil nature? How can choosing actions freely in spite of evil nature possible? How does Kant bring the propensity to evil and freedom together? What does Kant, who believes in freedom of man and puts freedom to the center of his philosophy, mean with the propensity to evil?

Kant states that this propensity to evil is universal to all of human race. However, this does not indicate an actual evilness of human beings. By propensity, Kant means the "subjective ground of possibility of an inclination that all human races are liable to it". Propensity to evil is not a corruption in the subjective ground of the maxim. Since evil is not more than a possibility, human beings are not actually evil; they become evil or good with their choice either by preferring moral law or other incentives. In other words, evil depends on either of the two incentives, moral law or other incentives (desires, inclinations, etc), which an agent makes the condition of the other. Therefore, a man is not called evil because his actions are evil but he is called evil or good according to his maxim. Since observance one's maxims is not possible, in experience, one cannot be called good or evil upon experience.

In addition to these, according to Kant, overcoming this innate "propensity to evil" is possible, because it is found in the nature of human beings who are free. Kant says that rational beings are unavoidably conscious of the moral

law²⁷⁴ as a fact of reason. Therefore, an agent can overcome evil with his good maxims. For this reason, I think that Kant's understanding of evil is a concept that helps us to conceive his notion of freedom. In spite of that propensity to evil, if an agent struggles to overcome it and chooses law as maxim, then he is good and virtuous. While Kant speaks of evil, he refers to an autonomous choice that an agent makes with his free will (*Willkür*). In other words, by means of using his *Willkür*, an agent may adopt the moral law as his maxim or other incentives. Therefore, depending on his choice an agent is called as good or evil, and by means of his choices an agent can have a good or an evil disposition.

The most criticized point of Kant's understanding of evil is its similarities with the Christian doctrine of "original sin". I think this is no more than an apparent similarity. Kant clearly states his thoughts about the relation between morality and religion. Kant does not regard God as the creator or as the starting point for morality. He postulates the existence of God as the practical necessity of his morality. However, according to Kant, this necessity is not objective; it is only subjective. Kant does not establish morality on religion; on the contrary, he suggests that religion has its source reason, he believes in the rationality of religion. Kant claims that "for its own sake morality does not need religion at all". Therefore, in spite of its similarities with the doctrine of "original sin", Kant's understanding of evil should not be considered as a religious issue.

²⁷⁴ Guyer, Paul, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 424.

Although it is a most criticized concept, if Kant had not introduced the concept of evil, then it would be unclear how an immoral or evil action within Kant's moral theory would be conceivable given his views in the *Groundwork* or in the *CPrR*. With the apparent distinction of *Wille* and *Willkür* introduced in the *Religion*, and differentiated in the *MM*, some incomprehensible points of Kant's morality, due to his identifying the (free) will and freedom with other concepts of his philosophy, become clear.

As a final point, according to Kant, both freedom and evil are incomprehensible and inscrutable to us. He claims that freedom always exceeds our faculties. There seems to be no conceivable ground of evil, that is, there is an ultimate subjective ground of choosing good or evil that is inscrutable to us. Human beings have a power to choose good or evil by means of their free will, namely, *Willkür*. According to Kant, that inscrutability is the necessity of being free. For, if there were a conceivable ground for freedom, then it would be contrary to the meaning of being free.

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