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SYMPOSIUM ARTICLE

Kant's Pessimism about Happiness

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Abstract
This essay investigates Kant's various reasons for pessimism about happiness. I argue that some of Kant's concerns about whether (or to what extent) happiness is possible for us are more pressing than others, and some can be more easily mitigated. Moreover, although he tends to emphasize the difficulties in securing personal happiness, Kant's texts offer several helpful strategies for ways of acting and living that can help us avoid some key sources of discontent, thereby increasing our chances for being happy in life.

Keywords: Kant; happiness; morality; virtue; well-being; human unhappiness

1. Introduction

Kant considers happiness to be our primary non-moral aim in life and "the highest physical good we can achieve in the world" (KU 5:450). As he sees it, all human beings have the deepest longing for happiness, a state of lasting desire-satisfaction and continuous well-being without which a good life would be incomplete. That we unavoidably wish for happiness is reflected in Kant's claim that happiness is an end which can be presupposed as actual in all finite rational beings and a purpose we have by natural necessity (GMS 4:415; TP 8:282; MS 6:386). Yet, for all our striving, Kant seems to think that our prospects for finding happiness are generally bleak.

Not infrequently, Kant emphasizes that what we want for happiness can conflict with duty, in which case we must forgo the satisfaction of desire. Apart from this familiar idea that morality sometimes costs us our happiness, both the nature of happiness as well as our human nature make happiness difficult for us. Happiness depends heavily on external circumstances beyond our control and hence on luck. As a "fluctuating idea" of which we cannot form a determinate notion, happiness remains a shifting ideal of the imagination (GMS 4:399). Reason thus gives us poor insight into determining an overall plan for happiness and the means to achieve it. To further confound the problem, our inclinations grow and change over time, complicating what it would even take to find satisfaction in life, and "our own absurd natural predispositions" render us incapable of true and lasting contentment (KU 5:430). The central challenge we face, as Kant so vividly depicts it, is that "the problem of determining surely and universally which action would promote the happiness of a rational being is completely insoluble" (GMS 4:418). In short, whereas we can be guaranteed rational (moral) satisfaction by fulfilling our duties and cultivating virtue, satisfaction in the pursuit of happiness is never guaranteed (and even looks to be generally unlikely).

My primary aim in this essay is to investigate Kant's various reasons for pessimism about happiness. I will suggest that some of his concerns about whether (or to what extent) happiness is possible for us are more pressing than others, and some can be more easily mitigated. Moreover, although he tends to emphasize the difficulties in securing personal happiness, Kant's texts offer

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several helpful strategies for ways of acting and living that can help us avoid some key sources of discontent, thereby increasing our chances for being happy in life.

2. Kant's pessimism about our prospects for happiness

Kant defines happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) in a variety of ways—as pleasure, enjoyment, contentment with one's condition, the satisfaction of inclination, well-being, even overall or complete life satisfaction. The possible differences between these terms seem not to have concerned him. Indeed, at times he treats them interchangeably, as when he writes that happiness amounts to "continuous well-being, enjoyment of life, complete satisfaction with one's condition" (MS 6:480). Despite characterizing happiness in distinct ways, leaving readers to wonder whether he has a settled notion of it, on balance, Kant thinks of happiness as the satisfaction of inclination (desire). That is, happiness, on his view, is best understood as an idea in which "all inclinations unite in one sum" (GMS 4:399) or, most simply, the "sum of all inclinations" (GMS 4:394).[1] Although more could be said about the various ways in which he defines happiness and how these terms are related, this much is evident: For Kant, happiness is a state of (sensible or empirical) contentment consisting in the maximal satisfaction of inclination along with the prospect of its indefinite continuation. Such satisfaction with one's condition brings the agent who enjoys it pleasure (agreeableness) and is identified with her well-being (*Wohl* or *Wohlbefinden*).[2]

With this basic account of Kant's desire-satisfaction view of happiness in mind, I turn to the central problems he thinks we face in pursuing such contentment in life. Here, I focus on six issues with which Kant is especially concerned.

First, living a morally good life governed by duty will inevitably require a conscientious person to abandon the concerns of happiness, at least on certain occasions (problem #1). This has to do with the fact that happiness, as Kant conceives of it, is an inherently non-moral end consisting in the sum satisfaction of (empirical) desire. That is, happiness involves getting what one wants in life by fulfilling the objects or ends of inclination in a way that brings pleasure and contentment with one's state or condition (GMS 4:393). Accordingly, happiness itself (its content, what it means to be happy) has nothing directly to do with our highest priority, namely, morality or virtue.[3]

[1]On Kant's desire-satisfaction view, happiness consists in getting what one wants or what one wills. At times, however, Kant suggests that happiness also involves the satisfaction of the various things for which one wishes (GMS 4:418; KpV 5:124). If happiness is understood to involve not merely satisfying one's desires and getting the things one strives to bring about or wills (e.g., good health, a successful career, a rewarding relationship), but also fulfilling one's wishes (e.g., beauty, fame, winning the lottery), it is no wonder Kant thinks happiness is especially difficult to achieve. For Kant's account of the distinction between will and mere wish in the *Groundwork*, see GMS 4:394.

[2]For other passages in which Kant defines happiness as the sum satisfaction of inclination (or the ends of inclination), see: KV A800/B828, A806/B834; GMS 4:394; KpV 5:61, 73; KU 5:434n; RGV 6:58. For passages in which he identifies happiness with pleasure, see: KpV 5:22, 23, 25, 60, 111; MS 6:215; KU 5:208, 209, 210. Elsewhere, Kant portrays happiness as well-being, (sensible) contentment, or satisfaction with one's condition (or one's state) (GMS 4:393, 395, 401, 416, 418; KpV 5:84; RGV 6:67). Occasionally, he glosses happiness as a person's "preservation and welfare (*Wohlergehen*)" (GMS 4:395). Finally, Kant describes happiness most simply as enjoyment, as when he writes that happiness constitutes "lasting enjoyment of the true joys of life" (MS 6:215; cf. RGV 6:67). This list is not exhaustive, but it provides a snapshot of the main notions of happiness with which Kant operates in his ethical theory—pleasure, satisfaction of inclination, satisfaction with one's condition (or one's state), well-being, sensible contentment, enjoyment, and sometimes welfare or preservation. It is not my aim here to establish that there is no tension between the various definitions of happiness found in Kant's texts. In this paper, I remain agnostic on this point. For purposes of this paper, I presume that Kant treats happiness as an umbrella term to encompass several related ideas about its content, while centrally holding that to be happy is to have the sum or maximum of one's inclinations satisfied, and for this overall sense of satisfaction to be at least somewhat stable.

[3]This simple statement needs qualifying. The main point here is that our natural end of happiness is a non-moral end or purpose consisting in the overall satisfaction of empirical desire. This is compatible with the thought that morality nevertheless bears an important connection to happiness (in this life) in that we are morally required to take the happiness of others as our own end. On Kant's view, our broadest ethical duty to others is to promote their welfare, by using permissible means within our

Kant emphasizes that our two fundamental human aims of seeking personal happiness, on the one hand, and cultivating a good will or virtue, on the other hand, are wholly independent goals by insisting that morality teaches us how to become worthy of happiness, but not how to be happy (GMS 4:393, 442, 450; TP 8:278, 284, 288; KpV 5:111-112, 130). It is not merely that the supreme principle of morality and the principle of self-love and concern for one's own happiness are heterogenous principles, representing distinct evaluative standpoints about what is good (morally versus naturally or prudentially valuable) (KpV 5:59-60, 112). Kant insists on the further thought that what we want for happiness can always *conflict* with what we are morally commanded to do. To register this further point that the means for happiness and duty can always clash, he warns that maxims of virtue and maxims of happiness are "so far from coinciding that they greatly restrict and infringe upon each other in the same subject" (KpV 5:112; cf. TP 8:282).

At times, Kant stresses that individual actions opposed to duty might advance one's happiness while abiding by duty can detract from one's enjoyment of life (GMS 4:402, 421-423; KpV 5:35-36, 53, 88; TP 8:286-288). Other times, he takes up the perspective of a person's overall or complete life, lamenting that a morally good person might end up unhappy while a vicious person might prosper and be content in life (GMS 4:442, 493; V-Mo/Mron II 29:623). The first point here about why happiness is not always possible for us is that, as Kant sees it, there will inevitably be times in a moral life when we are required to sacrifice the immediate concerns of happiness for the sake of duty. As finite rational agents bound by categorical moral demands that always outweigh or override competing non-moral concerns of happiness, we cannot always (permissibly) get what we want.[4]

A second feature of happiness that makes it elusive is that getting what one wants in life depends in no small part on luck (problem #2). Although Kant's German term *Glückseligkeit* is standardly translated as "happiness" in English translations of his works, it is worth bearing in mind that *Glückseligkeit* is an antiquated term connoting something akin to "blessedness" or "felicity." The association between being happy and being blessed is often reflected in Kant's discussions of happiness and how it is achieved. Happiness is not (fully) within our power, for it involves "satisfaction with what nature bestows, and so with what one *enjoys* as a gift from without" (MS 6:387; cf. TP 8:285n). In response to his teacher's question about whether a person can be assured of getting the happiness he deserves based on the goodness of his will, the imaginary student in Kant's fragment on moral catechism in the *Doctrine of Virtue* reports:

> No, not on this alone. For it is not always within our power to provide ourselves with happiness, and the course of nature does not of itself conform with merit. Our good fortune (*Glück*) in life (our welfare in general) depends, rather, on circumstances that are far from all being in our control. So our happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) always remains a wish that cannot become a hope, unless some other power is added. (MS 6:482).

Here, Kant stresses that success in achieving the satisfaction of one's desires depends on the cooperation of external circumstances. Indeed, what we would need for complete happiness is for nature to harmonize with our material ends taken as a whole (KpV 5:124–125). Yet, as the student in Kant's catechism understands, nature is at best indifferent to the realization of our human ends (cf. GMS 4:438-439). Of course, we can and should aim to cultivate prudence, a pragmatic skill that

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power to relieve their suffering and to further their happiness. Moreover, Kant contends that morality indirectly requires us to care about our own happiness because feeling discontented with respect to our own needs and inclinations can naturally tempt us to violate or neglect our moral duties (GMS 4:399; KpV 5:93; MS 6:388). Yet, while morality demands that we adopt the happiness of others as our own end and safeguard against personal unhappiness, Kant maintains that happiness itself as a distinctly non-moral end that falls under the principle of self-love or self-regard, as opposed to the fundamental principle of morality (autonomy).

[4]For an insightful discussion of Kant's view that moral agents are sometimes required to sacrifice happiness when circumstances call for it, see Pinheiro Walla (2015, 731–743). For additional discussions that likewise emphasize the idea that Kant thinks there can always be conflict between morality and happiness, see Friedman (1981), Watson (1983), White (2006).

helps us to harmonize our inclinations, by uniting our inclinations into a tolerable system, and to identify the means to achieve the various ends of our inclinations.[5] Nevertheless, Kant is adamant that no amount of human effort or skill can ensure that any of us will ever find the happiness we seek (and might even deserve) because happiness is ultimately tied to circumstances outside our control (conditions not fully under the direction of the will).[6] For Kant, then, finding contentment in life depends at least in part on fortune—when we fare poorly or things go badly for us, we will not be happy.

A third obstacle we face in striving for happiness (problem #3) is that happiness is entirely indeterminate, or a notion that Kant likens to a wavering ideal of the imagination, as opposed to a determinate ideal of reason (GMS 4:399, 417-418). In the *Groundwork*, Kant proclaims that happiness is so indefinite that it would be *impossible* for even one person to say "determinately and consistently" what would make her happy (GMS 4:418). The reason it would be impossible for any human being to identify a definite idea of what would make her happy is that none of us can know with any degree of certainty all the various things we truly want out of life (GMS 4:418). Given that happiness is supposed to be inclusive, encompassing "an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in [one's] present condition and in every future condition," the task of formulating a settled conception of happiness would surpass a human being's epistemic limitations, requiring her to know too much (GMS 4:418). Kant thus notes that even the most insightful and powerful finite being cannot frame for herself a determinate idea of what would genuinely make her happy, for such a task requires omniscience, which we humans obviously do not possess (GMS 4:418).

In the same *Groundwork* passage, Kant explains that the reason we can never form a precise notion of what it would take to be happy is that happiness is a wholly empirical concept, all the elements of which are based on experience (GMS 4:418-419; KpV 5:35-36; TP 8:286-287). In other words, there are no fixed or certain (universal) principles of reason that we can rely on to tell us definitively what happiness (as a whole) would involve or the specific means to achieve it. On the contrary, we can only discover what would make us happy through the trial and error of experience. Kant cites as an example a person who wishes for wealth, superior cognition and insight, and a long life, only to find that wealth makes her the subject of envy, insight makes her aware of the evils of the world, and a long life turns out to be full of misery (GMS 4:418; cf. TP 8:286-287). On Kant's perspective, happiness (the satisfaction of the sum-total of all of one's desires) always remains an opaque goal, one that cannot be defined with any precision or pursued systematically, for "what brings true lasting advantage, if this is to extend to the whole of one's existence, is always veiled in impenetrable obscurity" (KpV 5:36).

The indeterminate nature of happiness points to a fourth, closely related complication (problem #4), which is that reason gives us poor insight in our quest for happiness (GMS 4:395–396). Although all finite rational beings universally desire their own happiness by nature, happiness is not the natural purpose of a rational will in general. On the contrary, Kant insists that reason was given to us for the purpose of cultivating a good will. In his *Groundwork* discussion of the function of reason, Kant conjectures that if, *counterfactually*, reason *had* been given to us to make us happy, nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement, for happiness is attained much more surely by

[5]For some of Kant's representative discussions of prudence, see GMS 4:416-419; TP 8:286-288; KpV 5:36-37. For an illuminating extended treatment of Kant's account of prudence, see Kohl (2017).

[6]Kant makes the comparative point that acting as duty demands is always in our power while success in achieving the satisfaction of desire is not: "To satisfy the categorical command of morality is within everyone's power at all times; to satisfy the empirically conditioned precept of happiness is but seldom possible and is far from being possible for everyone even with respect to only a single purpose. The reason is that in the first case it is a question only of the maxim, which must be genuine and pure, whereas in the latter case it is also a question of one's powers and one's physical ability to make a desired object real" (KpV 5:36-37). The difference here concerning what is within our control is reflected in Kant's remark that virtue concerns what we give to ourselves and what cannot be taken away by anyone else, whereas happiness "contains all (and also not more than) that which nature provides us" (TP 8:283n).

instinct (GMS 4:395). In other words, reason, which gives us clear directives about what we are morally obligated to do, provides comparatively weak guidance about what we ought to do to secure our natural end of happiness (TP 8:283, 286-287). Indeed, Kant suggests that reason more likely leads to frustration than satisfaction in the pursuit of happiness (GMS 4:395-396). Reason is ill-suited as a means for happiness because we do not know what we really want, what we want changes over time, it is always uncertain which actions lead to happiness, and, often enough, success in realizing the objects of our desires does not ultimately leave us satisfied.

Moreover, Kant sometimes expresses the further thought that the *cultivation* of reason can, and often does, inhibit happiness. In a notable passage reflecting Rousseau's influence about the corrosive effects of reason on human beings, he writes:

> [W]e find that the more a cultivated reason purposely occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and with happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction…for, after calculating all the advantages they draw—I do not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences (which seem to them to be, at bottom, only a luxury of the understanding)—they find that they have in fact only brought more trouble upon themselves instead of gaining happiness; and because of this they finally envy rather than despise the more common run of people, who are closer to the guidance of mere natural instinct and do not allow their reason much influence on their behavior. (GMS 4:395-396).

Here, Kant suggests that that the more we rely on reason to make us happy, the worse off we are with respect to achieving the satisfaction of the sum of our inclinations. Reason creates new problems in the way it transforms and proliferates our desires. This is a theme Kant touches on in the *Groundwork* and explores in more depth in the essays "Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim" and "Conjectural beginning of human history," where he discusses the progress our species makes due to reason as well as the downsides of being endowed with reason. Reason is a "faculty of extending the rules and aims of the use of all its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no boundaries to its projects" (IaG 8:18-19). Precisely because we are endowed with reason, we generate new and artificial desires, which are more difficult to satisfy than our natural desires, and come to "need" luxuries beyond our necessary needs to feel satisfied and content in life (MAM8:111).

Apart from these issues that seem to be internal to the concept of happiness itself, Kant thinks that our human nature and psychology further diminish our chances of being satisfied in life. A key source of the problem (problem #5) has to do with our inclinations. Our inclinations are fickle, inconstant, and fluctuating, which means that any subjective version of happiness we form for ourselves will likely change over time (KpV 5:25; TP 8:298). Happiness is thus more life a shifting target rather than a settled rational goal.[7] In addition, we can want inconsistent and incompatible things. As we have already seen (problem #1), our desires can conflict duty, but they can also conflict with one another. For example, Hannah might be inclined to keep the deposit to which she has no legal claim even though she cognizes that doing so would be contrary to duty, but it is also possible for her to be both inclined to keep the deposit for the wealth she might gain as well as inclined to return the money to its rightful owner for the good reputation that option would presumably afford. The fact that our inclinations can conflict with one another poses a genuine practical challenge, given that happiness involves a maximum possible satisfaction of our inclinations taken together.

Furthermore, a single inclination whose satisfaction might provide immediate gratification can conflict with an agent's overall happiness, as in Kant's *Groundwork* example of the gout sufferer, whose occurrent desire for rich foods at the banquet table would bring momentary pleasure if indulged, but would likely detract from the longer-term happiness that supposedly lies in health

[7]As Herman aptly characterizes Kant's view, happiness "marks a practical challenge, not a discrete goal" (Herman, 2007, 135).

(GMS 4:399). The conflicting and variable nature of our inclinations explains why Kant warns of the "changing illusion" in which we place our happiness (TP 8:298).

Finally (problem # 6), Kant holds that there is a key social dimension to happiness in that how happy we are will depend on the people around us, the kind of society we inhabit, and, more generally, our social nature. As social creatures, we tend to measure our happiness in relation others, often feeling happier in the face of others' misery and less happy when we see that they are prospering. In the essay "Conjectural Beginning," Kant states that our dissatisfaction is directly tied to others' opinions of us and our relative social standing (MAM 8:113). In *Religion*, he goes as far as insisting that "only in comparison with others does one judge oneself to be happy or unhappy (RGV 6:27). In his lectures from the 1770's, he illustrates this point about the comparative nature of happiness and the way in which social comparison can affect (and often detract from) our own sense of well-being by observing:

> If I alone have poor fare to eat, and everyone else is faring well, that vexes me, and I grudge it them; but if nobody in the whole town is any better fed, then I am contented…We take our stand on the relativities of things, not on the things themselves. We are grudging, because others are happier than we are. (V-Mo-Collins 27:438-39).

As Kant sees it, human beings in the social condition have strong tendencies to competitiveness, self-conceit, and self-deception. Our social nature thus has a significant impact not merely on how we evaluate our own happiness compared to others but whether our attachment to happiness ultimately has a corrosive effect on our moral character, even lending itself to vice. The Cynic element of Kant's ethics is his endorsement of Rousseau's idea that human misery (and moral corruption) are largely products of our social condition, giving rise not only to competitiveness and hostility between people but also to destructive social passions and tyranny, greed, and ambition.[8]

3. Some of Kant's worries about our human search for happiness are less pressing than others

In Section 4, I try to show that several of the central challenges Kant identifies with happiness diminish when we think about the ways in which Kantian virtue transforms and governs a moral agent's pursuit of happiness. But before considering how the requirements of Kantian virtue help mitigate some key obstacles to approximating happiness in life, I suggest that some of Kant's reservations about our overall prospects for finding happiness are not grounds for serious despair.

First (problem #1), sacrifice is surely part of a moral life. Although we human beings want to be happy and prefer to have our desires fulfilled instead of thwarted, we tend to agree that happiness is outweighed or overridden by moral requirements. This common human consensus about what has supreme value appears to remain robust, even on those occasions when we succumb to temptation, heeding the call of desire over duty. It is not merely that it is a given (to be expected, perfectly understandable) that imperfect human beings sometimes want things we should not want from a moral perspective, in which case abiding by duty requires setting aside the immediate concerns of happiness. Sometimes there are conflicts that arise between the demands of morality and considerations of happiness that would otherwise be *perfectly permissible* to choose—in life generally, but especially under non-ideal social and political circumstances where compliance with the most trivial moral requirements can make moral agents vulnerable to violence or manipulation by others.[9]

[8]See Wood (1999, 250–282 and 291–295). Wood's interpretation of Kant's account of the social origins of vice and unhappiness emphasizes Kant's debt to Rousseau. For an excellent sustained treatment of the significance of Rousseau's Cynic moral ideal for Kant's practical philosophy, see Forman (2016).

[9]For instance, political turmoil and instability are circumstances in which the cost of abiding by even basic moral requirements can be especially high, negatively impacting a person's happiness through no fault of their own. On this point, see Pinheiro Walla (2015, 741–742). For a related insightful discussion of what she identifies as a puzzle concerning how we

This central theme that morality and happiness can conflict and that, accordingly, a moral life will at times require forgoing the pursuit of desire is a deep-seated and ineliminable feature of Kant's view. It is why morality is a discipline of virtue and not a doctrine of happiness. It lies behind his observation that the satisfaction of the sum of a human being's needs and inclinations is felt as a "counterweight" to duty (GMS 4:405). More importantly, the conviction that sometimes we must refrain from pursuing our own pleasure and happiness for the sake of morality is a common, perhaps dominant (contemporary) view about the relationship between personal happiness and morality. To deny that morality has a cost is effectively to hold an implausible Stoic-type view that nothing apart from virtue is genuinely valuable. To embrace it is to accept a fact about what it means to live an ethical human life governed by a commitment to a priority of values (morality or virtue is supremely good) that strikes me at least as uncontroversial and worth upholding. That we are sometimes called to sacrifice happiness for weightier moral demands is not typically considered a grave threat to our overall chances for happiness in general, even if it means we ought to abstract from considerations of happiness in circumstances where happiness is not permissible to choose.

As for luck (problem #2), this seems to be an obvious fact about success in finding happiness on any desire theory. We have desires for all sorts of objects, events, projects, ends, goals, outcomes, where our desires are aimed at bringing about or realizing certain states of affairs in the world. *Striving* to realize the objects of our desires is up to us and a matter of what we can will, but *success* in satisfying our desires is always tied to external circumstances and thus not fully within our control. Sometimes our best-laid plans go awry, and we do not get what we want. Over the course of a life, there might be times when our worst-case scenario materializes, and we suffer for it. As Kant is aware, there are myriad ways in which life can narrow one's choices along with one's prospects for happiness. Even Aristotle (not a desire theorist!) recognizes this important point about fortune when he insists that *eudaimonia* is largely but not completely within our control because it requires external goods. In reminding us that happiness depends at least in part on luck, Kant is registering a common theme about the role fortune plays in our lives, and yet this idea seems to have little impact on our motivation in striving for happiness, nonetheless.

Next, while Kant characterizes it as a "misfortune" that we can never form a definite idea of what would make us happy, the indeterminacy of happiness seems to follow if we think, as Kant does, of happiness as effectively a placeholder for the satisfaction of the sum total of all our subjective desires and ends taken together. For Kant, happiness amount to an imagining of all that it would take to feel content and satisfied in life.[10] For any human being, the challenge of articulating with any degree of confidence or accuracy all the many and various things one wants, now and in the future, is a challenge most of us would fail to meet. Given Kant's view's that happiness is all-encompassing,

understand the notion of conflict between morality and happiness, see Foot (2001, 94–97). Foot argues that there are two senses of happiness at play in how we tend to think about sacrifice. On one use of the term, morality can require sacrificing happiness when abiding by moral demands entails giving up something one desires. On a different use of the term, no benefit can come from acting contrary to the requirements of virtue and thus morality cannot require sacrificing happiness. Foot thinks this second account is the best description of people who demonstrated great courage in opposing the Nazi regime and faced death as a result. In other words, it is not that Nazi resisters sacrificed their happiness in risking their lives to save their neighbors from political persecution, because they saw that no genuine happiness could have come from renouncing their anti-Nazi allegiance. As Foot captures how things might have seemed to them, based on this second sense of the term, according to which happiness is conceptually inseparable from virtue: "Happiness in life, they might have said, was not something possible for them" (Foot, 2001, 95). Foot's discussion highlights the fact that Kant thinks of happiness in the first and not the second sense of the term, given that he conceives of happiness (in this life) as separable from virtue.

[10]As an ideal of imagination, any notion we form of happiness is like a "wavering sketch" incapable of furnishing any rule (KV A570–571/B598-599).

seemingly inclusive not just of one's considered or informed desires but all of them, over time, it is no wonder we cannot form a determinate conception of what our happiness (*in toto*) would include.[11]

So, it might be that some of Kant's concerns about the practical issues we face in aiming for happiness are less pressing than others. More importantly, several of them are made more manageable if we consider the ways in which virtue diminishes some key sources of unhappiness.

4. How Kantian virtue alleviates some of the main sources of human unhappiness

Kant thinks of virtue as moral courage or fortitude, understood as a firm disposition to do one's duty from the motive of duty and the strength to withstand temptations to transgress the moral law (MS 6:394, 396-397, 405, 524-525, 526-527, 533-534; V-Mo-Collins 27:465; V-Mo/Mron II 29:603-604; V-MS/Vigil 27:492). He appeals to the notion of "autocracy of practical reason" in characterizing virtue as a form of moral self-rule or self-governance involving "consciousness of the capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law" (MS 6:383).[12] The Kantian autocratic agent is one in whom practical reason has not merely legislative but also executive authority. That is, she possesses the freedom to give herself moral laws in virtue of her recognition of their authority for all rational beings (based on autonomy), but she also demonstrates a broad power to rule over her sensible nature and to execute those laws in a way that demonstrates moral self-command (*Selbstbeherrschung*) (based on autocracy).

Finite rational (human) beings need autocracy for virtue because we have inclinations that pose a powerful obstacle to abiding by moral demands (MS 6:384, 394, 397). More importantly, we have what Kant sees as a universal human tendency to act on our inclinations even when our inclinations conflict with duty, or a tendency to prioritize self-love and personal happiness over the moral law. Given that virtue entails such a formidable (internal) opponent to combat, the very concept of virtue signifies a moral disposition in conflict (KpV 5:84), and its ideal expression takes the form of self-constraint or self-mastery in accordance with pure practical reason over sensibility, and not a harmony of the two.

As Kant makes clear, the self-command central to virtue is not innate or easy, but rather a hard-won moral strength of will that takes time and effort to acquire. It is achieved through a process of moral discipline through which an agent works to strengthen and cultivate moral feeling and to weaken sensibility (V-Mo/Collins 27:361). Having disciplined herself, the autocratic agent rules herself in accordance with reason and is portrayed as having subjected her powers, condition, and sensibility to the authority of reason (V-Mo/Collins 27:360-368).

Unsurprisingly, virtue, on Kant's account, can make a person downcast, for "virtue not only has to muster all its forces to overcome the obstacles it must contend with; it also involves sacrificing many of the joys of life, the loss of which can sometimes make one's mind gloomy and sullen" (MS 6:484; cf. MS 6:379-380). At the same time, Kant notes that virtue brings with it its own significant rewards in the form of inner freedom, tranquility, and moral contentment (KpV 5:117-119, 160-164; MS 6:377, 387-388, 391).

In his lectures from 1784-1785, Kant depicts the inner freedom associated with virtue in terms of independence and freedom from the "rabble" of natural inclinations:

> Without discipling his inclinations, man can attain to nothing, and hence in self-mastery there lies an immediate worth, for to be master over oneself demonstrates an independence of all things. Where there is no such self-mastery, there is anarchy. (V-Mo/Collins 27:361-362).

[11]Whether one can find in Kant's texts the resources for a Kantian account of happiness as the satisfaction of one's considered or informed desires is not a topic I can pursue here.

[12]For my extended treatment of Kant's account of autocracy, see Baxley (2010).

He praises autocracy as good self-government precisely because it keeps peace within one's soul so that one is not at war with oneself (V-Mo/Collins 27:368-369). In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant claims that the inner freedom of virtue entails being one's own master and ruling over oneself, by subduing one's affects and governing one's passions (MS 6:407-409). Similarly, in the second *Critique*, he characterizes the inner freedom of virtue in terms of "*independence from the inclinations*, at least as motives determining (even if not as *affecting*) our desire" and notes that consciousness of such freedom is a source of "unchangeable" moral contentment (KpV 5:117). Such contentment that follows from consciousness of one's own virtue is distinguished from happiness (desire-satisfaction) in that it is a uniquely moral feeling of self-contentment (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) concerning one's own inner worth, or an intellectual contentment of heart achieved through good conduct (MS 6:388; V-MS/Vil 27:647; KpV 5:117-118).[13]

In his account of virtue (the supreme good), Kant's primary focus is that virtue is the ideal state of moral character for human beings and crucial for living an ethical life governed by the requirements of practical reason. Yet, it seems clear that the self-mastery or self-rule distinctive of Kantian virtue will significantly impact the virtuous agent's pursuit of happiness as well. In other words, while self-mastery is key for Kantian moral agency, it has broader implications for a moral agent's prospects for personal happiness in the way it helps minimize some of the main obstacles to finding happiness in life. This connection between virtue and its indirect benefits for our natural end of happiness seems most obvious with respect to Kant's problems #1, 5, 6, and 2, which I return to here.[14]

As noted earlier, Kant's view that virtue at times requires sacrifice entails that there can always be conflict between what we are morally obligated to do and what we desire for happiness. (This was problem #1). At the same time, the degree of conflict one is likely to experience between the demands of morality and happiness over the course of a life will be attenuated if one has acquired virtue. It stands to reason to think that the virtuous person will be less prone to the kind of inner conflict that comes from having strong desires actively resistant to duty and moral concerns, and less prone to feel disappointment about having to set aside the immediate concerns of happiness when duty demands it. The reason the virtuous person is less likely to want things she should not want (morally) is because she has worked to master and govern her inclinations, by weakening and uprooting feelings and desires opposed to moral reasoning, and by cultivating feelings and desires that are conducive to the fulfillment of duty and the realization of moral ends. As Kant envisions it, true self-mastery is a form of sovereignty in which morality "holds a categorical sway over sensibility," whereby we give morality supreme power over ourselves so that practical reason rules over sensibility (V-Mo Collins 27:361). From his perspective, the self-rule or self-command constitutive of virtue involves the fortitude to resist temptations to duty and the ability to govern one's feelings and desires so that one's sensible nature better accords with the demands of practical reason. This is not to suggest that the Kantian virtuous agent's desires fully harmonize with the demands of practical reason, but her desires have nevertheless been shaped and cultivated by reason in a way that secures their subordination and promotes a state of inner freedom and peace of soul. Moreover, in situations where the virtuous agent wants something that she recognizes would be

[13]Kant recognizes that moral contentment might appear to be an analogue of happiness, which is why we might be inclined to label it "moral happiness." He insists, however, that the sense of moral contentment by which the virtuous are rewarded is distinct from happiness (desire-satisfaction). Moral contentment involves "satisfaction with one's person and one's own moral conduct, and so with what one does" (MS 6:387-388). It amounts to "contentment with oneself," whereas happiness involves "contentment with one's lot" (V-MS/Vil 27:643). In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant himself appeals to a notion of "moral happiness" to characterize the positive contentment that follows from one's awareness of virtue. Yet, even there, he is consistent in stressing that moral happiness (rational or intellectual contentment resulting from virtue) is distinct from happiness (empirical contentment) in that the latter is "the assurance of the everlasting possession of contentment in one's *physical state* (freedom from evils and enjoyment of ever mounting pleasures), that is *physical happiness* (RGV 6:67).

[14]Whether virtue on Kant's account helps make happiness more determinate and reason a better guide at identifying an overall account of happiness and the means to it are larger questions than I can attend to here. A proper treatment of problems #3 and #4 is a topic for another paper.

(morally) wrong to pursue and knows she must abstract from the immediate concerns of happiness for the sake of morality, the cost of virtue will not matter as much to her. Perhaps this is because the fully virtuous Kantian agent does not see a (genuine) reason to act in a way that contravenes duty. But even if she does see a reason to act otherwise than virtuously, she understands that the self-approbation she would feel in acting contrary to duty would diminish any pleasure or satisfaction to be gained from choosing happiness over morality. As Kant captures this thought that, for the virtuous person, happiness obtained impermissibly does not amount to happiness one could enjoy:

> an upright man cannot be happy if he is not first conscious of his uprightness; for, with such a disposition, the censure that his own cast of mind would force him to bring against himself in case of a transgression, and his moral self-condemnation would deprive him of all enjoyment of the agreeableness that his state might otherwise contain. (KpV:116).

Next, Kant's worries about the nature of inclinations and the trouble they can pose in the search for happiness (problem #5) likewise seem to diminish when we think about the psychology of the virtuous agent. To be sure, it is part of our human nature to be affected by inclinations, which is why virtue is always in progress and can never settle down once and for all (MS 6:409). At the same time, the inner freedom of virtue involves bringing one's capacities and inclinations under reason's control, which Kant depicts as going beyond forbidding oneself to be governed by feelings and inclinations by having reason hold "the reins of government" firmly in hand (MS 6:408). This tells us that while virtue does not make a person completely immune to the features of inclinations that tend to make happiness difficult, it does promote some measure of peace of soul, emotional regulation, and reliable control over inclinations. As a result, the virtuous person's inclinations are likely to be more stable and less fickle, and she is less likely to want inconsistent and incompatible things. The virtuous agent enjoys a state of (moral) health signifying a tranquil mind and freedom from disturbance by unruly inclinations (MS 6:409). The vicious person, by comparison, is dependent on, and effectively a hostage to, her inclinations. As Kant expresses this point in his lectures from 1784–1785, "The state of vice is one of enslavement under the power of inclination. The more a man is virtuous, the more he is free" (V-Mo/Collins 27:464).

Furthermore, given that virtue for Kant involves a duty to perfect oneself, both morally and naturally, presumably the skills the virtuous agent will have developed and strengthened in connection with her duty to develop herself will help minimize some of the complications in seeking the satisfaction of inclinations. For instance, prudence as a skill in the means for happiness should go some way in enabling her to distinguish between desires that are more central for her happiness and those that are trivial, as well as desires that are best renounced or abandoned for the sake of long-term happiness. Moreover, prudence and wisdom should give her insight about the importance of second-order desires for her overall happiness.[15]

With respect to problem #6, it makes sense to think that the virtuous agent will also be less susceptible to the feelings of social competitiveness and social vices that Kant views a key source of human unhappiness. Part of the reason for this is that she rules herself in a way that prevents her feelings and desires from becoming affects and passions.[16] In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant explains

[15]The thought that prudence and wisdom should help the virtuous agent regulate and harmonize her inclinations with an eye toward her overall or long-term happiness is obviously relevant to how problems #3 and #4 might be resolved on a more complete treatment of the relation between Kantian virtue and the search for happiness than I can offer here.

[16]See MS 6:407-409; Anthro 7:251–282; KU 5:272n; and RGV6:29n, 52n-53n for some of Kant's representative discussions of affects and passions. In his account of affects and passions, Kant appeals to some of the same analogies the Stoics used in their account of the passions and the therapeutic treatment they believed these passions require. He characterizes a person subject to these them as "ill," in that they "exclude the sovereignty of reason" altogether (Anthro 7:251). Despite a difference in their degree of "vehemence," both affects and passions are maladies in need of healing. This is why virtue presupposes moral apathy (*Affektlosigkeit*). As his emphasis on the importance of moral apathy indicates, Kant maintains that the autocratic agent in whom reason is sovereign will be largely immune to the kind of affects and passions that disrupt the soul of the non-virtuous.

that two things are required for the inner freedom associated with virtue: "being one's own master in a given case (*animus sui compos*) and *ruling* oneself (*imperium in semetipsum*), that is subduing one's affects and governing one's passions" (MS 6:407). Affects, like anger, are sudden, rash feelings that obscure a person's judgment and prevent reflection. Kant characterizes such strong emotions as weak and childish, and claims that affects signal a lack of virtue even though they can coexist with the best will (MS 6:408). In relation to affects, reason, through the concept of virtue, commands that one get hold of oneself (MS 6:407-408).

In contrast to affects, passions, like hatred, are not just blind but more narrowly focused on some intense desire at hand. Passions tend to be more deeply rooted than affects and do not easily subside (MS 6:408). When passions strike upon something contrary the moral law, they can lead the agent in their grip to brood and can even end up becoming vices (MS 6:409). Importantly, Kant thinks passions interfere with both moral and prudential reasoning in the way they prevent a person from making the kind of overall comparison with her other desires that is necessary to achieve happiness (the satisfaction of the sum of desires). In other words, Kant views passions as destructive for morality as well as happiness for the agent who has given herself over to them. But, given that virtue presupposes moral apathy (*Affektlosigkeit*) regarded as strength in relation to affects and passions, the virtuous person is much less likely to be moved by the types of problematic feelings and desires that can otherwise be a source of both moral temptation and unhappiness (MS 6:409).

Finally, although it is more of a stretch, it is plausible that happiness for the genuinely virtuous Kantian agent will be more insulated from the vagaries of fortune in so far as virtue involves a level of self-sufficiency that provides some measure of freedom from unhappiness. In our earlier discussion of problem #2, we saw that Kant thinks of happiness as heavily tied to external conditions that are outside of our control. Such external conditions can easily affect one's internal state and preclude the satisfaction of desire. Yet, the degree to which happiness is subject to fortune and luck will itself depend in part on what one wants and how much one needs to be content in life. Kant registers this point in suggesting that a type of independence in the form of self-sufficiency minimizes or at least reduces one common source of unhappiness. In his words:

> We have already said earlier that man has a source of happiness in himself; this cannot, indeed, consist in the fact that he acquires complete independence of all needs and external causes, yet it may be such that he requires little. But to attain this, he must have an autocracy over his inclinations. He must curb his inclination to things that he cannot have, or can obtain only with much trouble, and then he is independent in regard to them. (V-Mo/Collins 27:392).

Here, Kant endorses a kind of "moderate Cynicism" he finds in Rousseau, according to which our chances for approximating happiness in life are enhanced if we are willing to do without luxuries we have come to see as necessary (through social corruption), and to reduce our dependency on external factors for happiness, including the opinions of others.[17] Modest living of this sort is by no means a guarantee for being happy, but Kant appears to consider it a valuable (or perhaps sensible) way of safeguarding against unhappiness in the way it reduces the role luck can play in achieving the satisfaction of one's desires.

5. Conclusion

Kant recognizes the significance of happiness for human beings when he insists that all human beings wish for happiness by natural necessity and includes happiness as part of our highest good.

[17]Here, I follow Forman (2016), to whom I am indebted for his insightful treatment of Kant's moderate Cynicism and the way in which Kant's endorsement of an ethical ideal he finds in the Stoics and Rousseau helps minimize the gap between virtue and success in approximating happiness in this life.

However, he often registers the thought that happiness is difficult for us and never guaranteed. On his perspective, there are numerous obstacles to finding happiness in life, and thus the overall picture he paints is that that happiness tends to be elusive and not fully within our reach. But while Kant sharply rejects the eudaimonist view that virtue directly promotes the agent's own happiness, we can find in his texts the resources for thinking that Kantian virtue at least indirectly mitigates some key sources of unhappiness. Our primary human aims of cultivating a good will or virtue and achieving the satisfaction of the sum of our desires are separable and may never harmonize in this lifetime. However, the particular form of self-mastery and self-governance Kant sees as constitutive of virtue goes some way in making the virtuous agent's pursuit of happiness easier, by reducing conflict between the demands of morality and the concerns of happiness, by enabling her to regulate her inclinations in a way that makes happiness more stable and less dependent on external circumstances beyond her control, and by helping her avoid some key sources of human unhappiness tied to our social condition and tendency to social competitiveness. Although happiness is not a given even for Kant's perfectly virtuous agent, the agent who has instantiated virtue as an ideal will have likely enhanced her prospects for happiness by living a life governed by the requirements and norms of pure practical reason.[18]

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