

Manifesting Morality:

Affective Experience and Character Cultivation in Kant's Moral Philosophy

Underlying the motivation for this paper is the simple belief that Kant did indeed intend for his moral philosophy to be practically applicable. That is, in his moral writings, not only did Kant work toward the “identification and corroboration of the supreme principle of morality” (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:392), he also sought to demonstrate and educate us on the *application* of this principle to the human condition. Thus beyond the moral *theory* to be found in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*—which, to be sure, are of supreme importance in his greater moral system—Kant also elucidated a system of moral sentiment, behaviour, education and cultivation. Where his early moral works outline the intelligible capacities of the human mind as rational being, and appeal to such capacities as the basis for the recognition of moral duties, Kant's later moral writings explore the empirical aspects of humans as sensibly-affected beings, driven in part by impulse and desire, along with the possibility and requirements for the application of morality to empirically-situated human lives.

As I argue, ‘character’ plays a mediating role between reason and sensibility—in the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant identifies empirical character as the ‘sensible schema’ of intelligible character—and hence it is through the cultivation of moral character that one comes to be a reliable moral actor. For this reason, Kant claims that character is “the distinguishing mark of the human being as a rational being endowed with freedom” (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 7:285), a mark which “signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed by himself irrevocably by his own reason”. (7:292) Thus a person with character, for Kant, is one who consistently acts from self legislated moral maxims, i.e., one who successfully and reliably translates moral recognition into moral action.

In this paper I explore the role of affective experience for the cultivation of moral character in Kant's moral philosophy, focusing in particular on experiences of beauty in nature, and experiences of moral sublimity. In short, I show that experiences of both moral sublimity and natural beauty are not only *conducive to*, but may often even be *essential for* the cultivation of moral character. In short, I argue that the affective nature of both of these sorts of experience lead the agent to recognize first, that they possess the capacity to set ends of their own (through reason), and second, that the world is purposively ordered such that the ends set may actually be accomplished, both of which are necessary components of successful, and intentional moral action, and hence crucial for becoming a truly moral being.