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# Remarks on Immanuel Kant's assessment of the use of the thesis of innate evil in moral philosophy (*Religion*, 6:50-51)

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## Abstract

In Part One of Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), the so-called thesis of innate evil ('The human being is by nature evil') notoriously plays a central role. Yet in the General Remark closing that part, Kant minimizes the weight of that thesis. In his view, it is of no use in moral dogmatics, and also in moral discipline its meaning is of a limited nature. Consequently, the thesis of innate evil is both relegated to a short footnote in the Introduction and completely passed over in silence in the Doctrine of the methods of ethics in Kant's *Metaphysical Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue* (1797). This article investigates Kant's assessment of the use of the thesis of innate evil in moral philosophy. It explores Kant's semantics of the thesis in order to find out why the thesis makes no difference in moral philosophy, and tries to demonstrate why it is silenced furthermore in the methods of ethics.

## Keywords

Immanuel Kant; moral philosophy; philosophy of religion; evil; moral deficiency; doctrine of original sin; propensity; human freedom; virtue

Kant's moral philosophy is strongly committed to the human being's capacity of acting morally, viz. its ability to act from respect for the moral law. Yet this commitment seems to be severely challenged by Kant's so-called 'thesis of innate evil' ('der Satz vom angeborenen Böse')<sup>1</sup> in Part One of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (*Religion* hereafter), claiming that 'the human being is by nature evil'. For how to conceive of the human being's ability to acquire virtue, if evil is said to have perverted its 'nature'? This question has given and still gives rise to numerous comments and debates among Kant scholars.<sup>2</sup> Dependent on how this question is dealt with and answered, interpretations range from secular readings emphasizing the human being's capacity to recover from evil on its own effort<sup>3</sup> to a variety of interpretations claiming that in Kant's view the depraved human being needs divine assistance.<sup>4</sup>

In the General Remark concluding Part One of *Religion*, also Kant deals with the question to which extent the thesis of innate evil challenges the human being's moral abilities. Kant unequivocally maintains however, that 'the thesis of innate evil is of no use in moral *dogmatics*, for the precepts of the latter would include the very same duties, and retain the same force, whether there is in us an innate propensity to transgression or not'.<sup>5</sup> So the thesis makes no difference in Kant's view: 'in spite of the fall', moral philosophy remains fully committed to its ought-implies-can principle.<sup>6</sup> The only part of moral philosophy in which the thesis might be of use for sure is moral discipline (ethical ascetics), that deals with how virtue is to be exercised and cultivated. But even there its meaning is of a limited nature according to Kant ('In moral *discipline*, however, the thesis means more, yet not more than this').<sup>7</sup> To be sure, we must begin ethical training from the presupposition of a depravity in our power of choice in adopting maxims contrary to the moral law, in order to counteract against it unremittingly.<sup>8</sup> Yet Kant subsequently downplays the efficacy of this precept, 'since this only leads to a progression from bad to better'.<sup>9</sup> The disposition of a good human

being cannot but be acquired by a radical transformation of our attitude of mind (a change of heart).<sup>10</sup> Kant thus appears to decline the use and to lessen the meaning of the thesis of innate evil within moral philosophy at the end of Part One of *Religion*.

How to make sense of these assessments? According to Stephen Palmquist, at least Kant's proposition about the use of the thesis of innate evil within moral *dogmatics* does not come as a surprise, for the second *Critique*, and hence moral dogmatics as a whole, is not about embodied (human) rational beings and hence does not have to reckon with the depravity of the latter.<sup>11</sup> Yet Part Two of Kant's *The metaphysics of morals (Metaphysical first principles of the doctrine of virtue, Doctrine of Virtue* hereafter) published four years after *Religion*, is both part of Kant's moral dogmatics and undeniably developed from a 'more human-oriented perspective' on ethics.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Palmquist fails to explain why the thesis of innate evil does not have a central position in the Introduction of *Doctrine of Virtue* that deals with the concept of virtue and its enemy, but is only once referred to in passing in a footnote, and why it is also only once implicitly alluded to as 'the inner enemy within the human being' in The doctrine of the methods of ethics.<sup>13</sup> For his part, James Dicenso claims that 'Kant stresses that with regard to 'moral discipline' the thesis of innate evil actually has considerable significance',<sup>14</sup> thereby completely silencing Kant's overt relativizing tone. Moreover, Dicenso presumes that the passage on moral discipline echoes Kant's criticism of Epicurus in the second *Critique*; yet he overlooks that Epicurus' ideal of a cheerful frame of mind, 'that is aware of no intentional transgression in himself and is secured against falling into any', is fully embraced in that part of Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* that deals with ethical ascetics.<sup>15</sup>

Kant's silencing of the thesis of innate evil in *Doctrine of Virtue* fits his assessments of that thesis in the General Remark closing Part One of *Religion*. It remains unclear however, why there is such a sharp contrast between this silencing and these assessments at the one hand, and the central position of the thesis of innate evil in part one of *Religion* at the other. In this article, I intend to answer this question. In order to do so, it is necessary first of all to elucidate thoroughly the meaning of the thesis of innate evil, viz. the meaning of the expressions used in the wording of that thesis. The first part of this article will deal with this elucidation. Against this backdrop, I will subsequently show why the thesis of innate evil is of no use in moral dogmatics, yet plays such a central part in *Religion*. In line with my answer to the latter question, I will indicate why Kant avoids the use of the phrasing of his thesis of innate evil in *Doctrine of Virtue*.

## 1. Kant's semantics of innate evil

Kant's thesis of innate evil ('the human being is by nature evil') holds the central position in Part One of *Religion*. Basically, this thesis contains the claim that evil is a universal human phenomenon, or to be more precise, that 'considered in his species',<sup>16</sup> the human being has a natural and innate propensity to evil. Curiously however, Kant's proof of the universality of this propensity (and hence of the validity of his claim) is quite concise,<sup>17</sup> and does not seem to be his principal concern. For the most part, Kant primarily pays attention to the meaning of his thesis as a phrase (the German "Satz" also means phrase or sentence) and to an elucidation of expressions used to characterize the human being's propensity to evil, such as 'natural' and 'innate'. Kant not only cautions against possible misinterpretations of the wording of his claim and of aforementioned expressions, but also appears to aim principally at a legitimation of their use. Kant's main concern with his thesis of innate evil thus appears to be a semantics of a set of wordings and expressions that are used to represent the nature of human moral deficiency. In this part of my article, this semantics is at the center of my attention.<sup>18</sup> A study of this semantics is necessary in order to shed a light on

Kant's assessments of his thesis of innate evil at the end of Part One of *Religion*, and on Kant's silencing of his thesis in *Doctrine of Virtue*.

It is generally agreed upon that part one of *Religion* contains Kant's mature conception of the use of the freedom of the *human will*.<sup>19</sup> The nucleus of this view is the so-called incorporation thesis: the freedom of the power of choice of a human being 'cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself)'.<sup>20</sup> To start, I briefly call into memory in which respect this thesis accounts for both Kant's conception of moral evil and Kant's conception of the nature of human moral deficiency in Part One of *Religion*. Both play a central part in Kant's 'semantics of innate evil'.

According to Kant, there is an original predisposition to good in human nature that cannot be corrupted in any way: the predisposition to personality, meaning the human being's 'susceptibility to respect for the moral law' as of itself a sufficient incentive to the moral power of choice.<sup>21</sup> Because of this moral predisposition, the law imposes itself irresistibly on the human being, viz. the human being naturally incorporates the moral incentive into his maxims.<sup>22</sup> The moral law is hence always present as an incentive in the maxims or policies on the basis of which human beings, as rational beings, decide on their course of action. Consequently, evil deeds cannot occur unless 'an incentive opposed to the moral incentive has influence on the power of choice of the human being'.<sup>23</sup> In line with aforementioned incorporation thesis, this can only happen because the human being also naturally incorporates this incentive (and consequently also the deviation from the moral law) into his maxim.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, not only the human being's disposition as regards the moral law is never indifferent (never neither good nor bad).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a human being's actions that do not agree with but depart from the law cannot but result from an active and conscious choice to reverse the original hierarchical (ethical) order between the moral incentive on the one hand, and the incentive stemming from the principle of self-love on the other. Evil has therefore to be conceived of as resulting from an active resistance against the moral incentive on the part of the human being's power of choice. Evil deeds result from a deliberate choice not to fulfill the moral law, viz. from a real determination of the power of choice that opposes the moral law.<sup>26</sup> Evil thus consists in our *will* not to resist the inclinations when they invite transgression, and hence is to be sought not in the human being's inclinations, but in his perverted maxims, 'and hence in freedom itself'.<sup>27</sup>

Kant's thesis of innate evil ('The human being is by nature evil') does not seem to fit this conception of moral evil. If understood at face value, it rather sets on the wrong path of inferring that moral evil is something the human being might not have brought upon himself freely, and hence might not be held accountable for entirely, but could also be traced back to a determination through natural causes.<sup>28</sup> Yet from the very opening paragraphs of part one of *Religion* onwards, Kant repeatedly cautions against such a misunderstanding.<sup>29</sup> Kant admits that 'the expression *nature*' usually refers to 'the opposite of the ground of actions [arising] from *freedom*', to an 'object *determining* the power of choice through inclination', viz. to 'natural impulses'. Yet used in this sense, this expression 'would contradict freedom'.<sup>30</sup> Kant therefore explains, 'that 'the nature of a human being' refers to the subjective ground (...) of the exercise of the human being's freedom in general (under objective moral laws) that is behind every deed that falls within the scope of the senses'.<sup>31</sup> 'Nature' thus refers to the fundamental disposition, the 'first subjective ground' within human beings that defines the moral characteristic of their deeds: it is this ground that is identified in Part One of *Religion* as the propensity to evil within human beings.<sup>32</sup> This 'nature' however 'must, in turn, itself always be a deed of freedom', and hence cannot but lie 'in a rule that the power of

choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e., in a maxim'. However, since the subjective ground of the adoption of a maxim must be sought 'always again in a maxim', and 'since any such maxim must have its ground as well, yet apart from a maxim no *determining ground* of the free power of choice ought to, or can, be adduced', the first subjective ground that is behind every deed that falls within the scope of the senses is 'to us inscrutable'.<sup>33</sup> The moral 'nature' of a human being is hence a freely chosen or freely developed fundamental disposition (a 'character') that is inscrutable, yet defines the maxims of his deeds, and is said to be universally evil in Kant's thesis of innate evil.

Despite Kant's caution concerning the meaning of the expression 'nature' however, a kind of ambiguity seems to remain. For saying that the human being is evil *by nature* seems to suggest that human beings have an evil character 'by nature', viz. while being human. The expression 'by nature' hence inevitably seems to imply an important or even decisive amount of complicity of that being's belonging to the human species, and this complicity undoubtedly seems to be confirmed or even amplified by calling the human being's evil nature or the human being's propensity to evil 'innate'<sup>34</sup> or 'entwined with humanity'<sup>35</sup> itself. How to read these expressions without casting doubts on Kant's conviction that the human being is itself the author of its character? Kant is aware of this problem, and explains that 'the human being is by nature evil' 'only means that he holds within himself a first ground (to us inscrutable) for the adoption of (...)evil (unlawful) maxims, and that he holds this ground *qua* human, universally –in such a way, therefore, that by his maxims he expresses at the same time the character of his species'.<sup>36</sup> At face value, the expression 'qua' in this quotation seems to suggest that aforementioned first ground in human beings is universal as a consequence of these beings' being members of the human species. Yet Kant emphasizes, that the quality of being evil cannot be inferred from the concept of the human species, for that would imply the necessity of that quality and hence would deny the human being's accountability.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, wordings such as 'the human being is by nature evil' or 'evil is entwined with humanity' do not explain why human beings are evil, but only expresses the universality of a propensity to evil within human beings. Or so Kant maintains in every respect: 'if it is legitimate to assume that this propensity belongs to the human being universally (and hence to the character of the species), the propensity [to evil] will be called a *natural* propensity of the human being to evil'.<sup>38</sup>

In a similar vein, Kant elucidates the expression 'innate' in sayings such as 'Human beings have an innate propensity to evil'. Kant admonishes to always acknowledge 'that the human being is alone [the] author [of this propensity]' when using this expression, and subsequently maintains:

(...) Since the first ground of the adoption of our maxims, which must itself again lie in the free power of choice, cannot be any fact possibly given in experience, (...) the evil in the human being is said to be innate (...) only *in the sense* that it is posited as the ground antecedent to every use of freedom given in experience (from the earliest youth as far back as birth) and is thus represented as present in the human being at the moment of birth – not that birth itself is its cause.<sup>39</sup>

The saying that the evil disposition is an innate characteristic of human beings hence again does not explain that disposition, but only indicates that it has not been earned in time, viz. that it is a(n) (intelligible) deed<sup>40</sup> that *precedes* every use of freedom that is given in experience from birth onwards, and consequently 'applies' to the entire use of freedom universally'.<sup>41</sup> Also the expression

'innate' thus merely expresses the universality of the propensity to evil, by representing it as *always already* there, preceding every deed that falls within the scope of the senses.

Kant's semantics of innate evil thus reveal that both the thesis ('der Satz') of innate evil and expressions such as 'by nature', 'natural', 'innate' and 'entwined with humanity' only express the universality of the propensity of evil in human beings. As far as the propensity to evil appears to be universal and to apply to the entire use of the freedom of the human will, it hence can be *called, said to be, or represented* as natural, innate, 'somehow entwined with humanity itself and, as it were, rooted in it'.<sup>42</sup> Yet it nevertheless *has* to be considered as having the human being itself as its author. How to combine these two perspectives however? How can it possibly be legitimate to call x natural or to say that it is innate, if x is to be considered as imputable and hence is to be sought in freedom? Apparently, it is the very contingency, the very incomprehensibility and inscrutability of the 'presence' of the propensity to evil within each and every human being (even the best)<sup>43</sup> that give leave to the thesis of innate evil and to the use of expressions such as 'natural' and 'innate'. Kant indeed maintains: 'the chief reason' to say that the propensity to evil is natural and innate is 'that we are just as incapable of assigning a further cause for why evil has corrupted the very highest maxim in us, though this is our own deed, as we are for a fundamental property that belongs to our nature'.<sup>44</sup> How to understand this claim?

According to Kant, the propensity to genuine, moral evil *must* be thought of as brought by the human being upon itself,<sup>45</sup> because it 'can only attach to the moral faculty of choice', and is hence 'imputable' since it is to be sought in freedom.<sup>46</sup> Yet this 'must' is intrinsically bound up with the moral-practical perspective, not with the theoretical one. It does not explain why the human being has brought this propensity upon itself: the first subjective ground for the adoption of evil maxims remains inscrutable. In this sense, the human being's propensity to evil is a contingent, incomprehensible characteristic of the use of the freedom of the human will. Yet how to represent an inscrutable characteristic of that use? In a footnote within the second part of *Religion*, Kant explains that 'in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us', 'we always need a certain analogy with natural being'.<sup>47</sup> This so-called 'schematism of analogy' most likely also explains the use of expressions such as 'innate' or 'natural' with respect to the human being's propensity to evil, since the analogy between the quality of being evil as a supersensible characteristic of human beings and a fundamental property of natural beings is precisely their universality. The thesis of innate evil and expressions such the aforementioned ones thus *represent* the universal presence of a contingent feature in *human* beings by using an analogy with fundamental properties of *natural* beings. This analogy is legitimate, yet only as 'a means of elucidation'.<sup>48</sup> It hence does not imply (and is not allowed to be considered as) an expansion of our cognition of the human being's propensity to evil, and consequently does not add to the conception of the nature of human moral deficiency that Kant develops in part one of *Religion*. The use of expressions such as natural and innate and the wording of the thesis of innate evil itself is thus legitimate in order to portray the universality of the propensity to evil by analogy, yet only if this propensity is proven to be universal.

According to Kant, it is our cognition of the human being through experience that allows for the assumption of the propensity to evil's universality.<sup>49</sup> The way Kant proceeds in this respect is peculiar: examples of undeniably evil deeds of human beings (such as those mentioned by Kant in section three of part one of *Religion*)<sup>50</sup> are of such a kind, that one cannot judge the human being

otherwise, viz. that one cannot but posit an evil disposition or a propensity to evil in each and every human being, even the best.<sup>51</sup> Apparently, this judgment is not based on induction, but on reflection:<sup>52</sup> reflecting on instances of evil human deeds, we cannot but infer that the evil disposition that we have to presuppose in such deeds is typically human, and may be posited consequently in each and every human being. So 'we are entitled' to presume that every human being has an evil nature 'if it transpires from instances of evil action that the grounds that justify us in attributing an evil character to a human being are of such a nature that there is no cause for exempting anyone from it, and that the character *therefore* applies to the species'.<sup>53</sup>

## 2. Kant's silencing of the thesis of innate evil in the metaphysics of morals

Part One of *Religion* contains Kant's mature conception of the nature of human moral deficiency, including the concept of a propensity to evil within the human being. It is clear however from above, that the thesis of innate evil, that is at the very center of part one of *Religion*, does not add to the conception of that nature. It only contains the claim that aforementioned propensity can be posited in each and every human being, and is hence universal. Admittedly, it goes without saying that this propensity's universality raises questions about how to conceive or imagine the human being's recovery from evil. But since the thesis of innate evil and sayings about the propensity of evil such as 'natural' or 'innate' only affirm the contingency of the propensity to evil and do not imply the corruption of the human being's predisposition to personality (on the contrary, this predisposition not only cannot be corrupted according to Kant, but is also presupposed in the very concept of a propensity to evil itself), the universality of the propensity to evil does not challenge the possibility of that recovery:

But, since by our previous admission a tree which was (in its predisposition) originally good did bring forth bad fruits, and since the fall from good to evil (if we seriously consider that evil originates from freedom) is no more comprehensible than the ascent from evil back to good, then the possibility of this last cannot be disputed.<sup>54</sup>

Consequently, Kant thrice maintains in the General Remark concluding Part One of *Religion*, that despite this propensity, moral philosophy remains committed to the ought-implies-can principle. The thesis of innate evil is hence of no use in moral dogmatics.

Yet how to conceive of the recovery from evil if the propensity to evil is universal? Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* substantially contributes to an answer to that question, not only by investigating how virtue is to be acquired (in the second part, called Doctrine of the methods of ethics), but also by first of all answering the question which duties of virtue are to be obeyed in order to fight virtue's inner enemy (in the first part, called Doctrine of the elements of ethics). The way Kant portrays the inner enemy of virtue in the Introduction of *Doctrine of Virtue* fully fits Kant's conception of moral evil in the first part of *Religion*. To be sure, *Religion's* mature conception of the use of the freedom of the human will reverberates through the manner in which Kant portrays the conflict between duty and inclinations (the obstacles of virtue are natural inclinations, 'but it is the human being himself who puts these obstacles in the way of his maxims').<sup>55</sup> In this respect, Kant also mentions the human being's propensity to resist the moral law. Kant refers to it in the context of a portrait of the conflict within the human will that fully echoes both his conception of moral evil and the

incorporation thesis on which it is built in a peculiar way. When a human being does obey the moral law, so Kant maintains, he does it reluctantly in the face of opposition from his inclinations; yet '*as a moral being* he is also holy enough to break the inner law *reluctantly*; for there is no human being so depraved as not to feel an opposition to breaking it and an abhorrence of himself in the face of which he has to constrain himself [to break the law]'.<sup>56</sup> Kant continues:

Now it is impossible to explain the phenomenon that at this parting of the ways (where the beautiful fable places Hercules between virtue and sensual pleasure) the human being shows more propensity to listen to his inclinations than to the law. For we can explain what happens only by deriving it from a cause in accordance with laws of nature, and in so doing we would not be thinking of choice as free. – But it is this self-constraint in opposite directions and its unavoidability that makes known the inexplicable property of *freedom* itself.<sup>57</sup>

Kant's conception of the human being's propensity to transgress the moral law in this passage is undeniably consistent with *Religion's* conception of the propensity to evil as a fundamental (yet contingent) property of the use of the freedom of the human will. Moreover, Kant emphasizes the human being's unavoidable reluctance to break the law, and consequently confirms that no human being is so depraved as not to feel the moral incentive that stems from duty. In this way, Kant reaffirms his convictions in *Religion* that the human being is not fundamentally corrupted and is consequently able to repress his propensity to break the law and to acquire virtue. Nevertheless, two things attract attention. First of all, Kant only refers to this propensity in passing, almost incidentally or parenthetically, in a footnote, clearly indicating thereby that the universality of the human being's propensity to listen to his inclinations does not play a central part when it comes down to catch sight of the enemy of virtue, viz. that it does not add substantially to the enemy of virtue's concept drafted by Kant in the Introduction. Secondly, Kant mentions this propensity without quoting *Religion's* thesis of innate evil, viz. without using one single expression, one single phrasing that makes for *Religion's* thesis of innate evil. Kant's thesis of innate evil is conspicuous by its absence, not only in this footnote, but in the *Doctrine of Virtue* as a whole. This inevitably raises the question as to why Kant silences a thesis ('ein Satz') that is at the center of his conception of the nature of human moral deficiency in *Religion*.

Kant's relegation of the human beings' propensity to a footnote in *Doctrine of Virtue* and Kant's silencing of the thesis of innate evil in that footnote testify in my view, that '*der Satz vom angeborenen Böse*' is *intrinsically* bound up with the design and the aim of Kant's book on religion. From a pessimistic philosophical, anthropological or pedagogical point of view, it may be reasonable to doubt whether any virtue is to be found in the world.<sup>58</sup> Yet according to Kant, 'that 'the world lieth in evil'' (the opening line of Part One of *Religion*) is a complaint that does not stem from philosophers or pedagogues. On the contrary, it is 'the opposite heroic opinion, which has gained standing' among them,<sup>59</sup> and especially among those philosophers Kant admires the most in this respect: Rousseau and Seneca.<sup>60</sup> Aforementioned complaint stems from religion: it is 'as old as history, even as old as the older art of poetic fiction; indeed, just as old as that oldest among all fictions, the religion of the priests'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, from the opening lines of part one of *Religion* onwards Kant makes clear that the language of evil and the portraits of the human existential condition as depraved and fundamentally corrupted *intrinsically* relate to a religious point of view (they stem from the religion of the priests).

This way, the opening lines already point to what is *the central issue* of Part One of the 'experiment' Kant aims at in *Religion*. The overall design or experiment of a 'religion within the boundaries of mere reason' is: to start from some alleged revelation or from a history handed down to us, and to hold fragments of this revelation, as an historical system, up to moral concepts, in order to consider the harmony of pure practical reason with these and to show that there is no conflict between them.<sup>62</sup> As is well-known, it is the Doctrine of Original Sin that Kant holds up to moral concepts in Part One of *Religion*. Indeed, it is in this Christian Doctrine that the complaint of the oldest of all fictions still resonates. Kant explores whether and to which extent practical reason harmonizes with the claim about the human existential condition that is contained in this Doctrine. He articulates his mature views on both the use of the freedom of the human will and the nature of human moral deficiency, and gives a central part to a thesis of innate evil and expressions such as 'natural', 'innate' or 'entwined with humanity' that both represent human moral deficiency in a way that fits the religious representation of human depravity that is contained in the Doctrine of Original Sin at the one hand, yet can be philosophical accounted for at the other. This way, Kant is able to use his semantics of the thesis of innate evil in order to show to which extent practical reason and the Doctrine of Original Sin harmonize. Against the backdrop of the findings of this semantics, it does not come as a surprise for that matter, that Kant rejects the Doctrine's religious representation of the universality of moral evil in the human being ('its spread and propagation through the members of our species and in all generations') as 'having come to us by way of *inheritance* from our first parents'.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Kant also criticizes the Doctrine's representation of the human existential condition in a more subtle manner, viz. by endorsing the representation of human moral deficiency which is used in the Scriptures. The origin of evil is in Kant's view legitimately represented as a *fall* into sin (*Genesis* III: 6),<sup>64</sup> since it fits the rational idea of the human being's accountability, viz. the rational conviction that 'every evil action must be so considered, whenever we seek its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence'.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, by projecting evil 'in a spirit of an originally more sublime destiny' instead of within the human being, the Scriptures legitimately represent both the rational idea of the incomprehensibility of the fall and the rational conviction that the human being is 'not fundamentally corrupted' itself (and hence 'still capable of improvement').<sup>66</sup>

Kant's thesis of innate evil is hence especially 'of use' in a philosophy of religion, or in a context in which the common ground between moral anthropology and religious representations of human moral deficiency can serve as a starting point in order to examine the role that can be played (or unavoidably is to be played according to Kant) by elements stemming from religious traditions (especially the Christian one) in moral education.<sup>67</sup> For that matter, the thesis of innate evil is also used this way in the Vigilantius lecture notes on ethics,<sup>68</sup> in which the conception of human moral frailty plays an important part in order to explore religion as 'a necessary accompaniment to human nature'.<sup>69</sup> Yet the role the thesis *itself* might play in moral education is lessened by Kant already at the end of Part One of *Religion*. The footnote in the Introduction of Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* shows, that we do not need the thesis of innate evil's potentially misleading representation of human moral deficiency in order to conceive of the enemy of virtue. Above all however, Kant's silencing of the thesis in the Doctrine of the methods of ethics testifies in my view to Kant's conviction, that in order to acquire virtue, it is better to avoid a frame of mind that is intrinsically bound up with the representation of human moral frailty that accompanies that thesis. Admittedly, in order to acquire virtue, a frame of mind is needed that is 'valiant' ('wacker' in German, 'strenuus' in Latin), viz.

prepared to oppose our 'propensity to listen to the inclinations'.<sup>70</sup> This conviction is consistent with the limited use within ethical ascetics Kant already endorses at the end of Part One of *Religion*. But the frame of mind that has to accompany virtue first and foremost is cheerfulness. Only cheerfulness directly opposes 'a monkish ascetics', 'which from (...) hypocritical loathing [or despising] oneself goes to work with self-torture and mortification of the flesh, is not directed to virtue but rather to fantastically purging oneself of sin',<sup>71</sup> and which distracts from 'the sublimity of our moral vocation'.<sup>72</sup> To conclude: in my view, Kant eventually bars the use of the thesis of innate evil within moral philosophy, since its representation of human moral deficiency is too much akin to the ominous, sinister, gloomy and dark religious portrait of human moral depravity, and hence potentially counteracts the human being's trust in its own moral capacities.

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<sup>1</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 50.

<sup>2</sup> Frierson, "Moral Pessimism"; Michalson, "Kant, the Bible, and the Recovery from Radical Evil".

<sup>3</sup> Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* and "Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil"; Dicenso.

<sup>4</sup> Palmquist; Firestone and Jacobs.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 45: 'For in spite of the fall, the command that we ought to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls; consequently, we must also be capable of it'; 6: 47: '(...) duty commands nothing but what we can do'; 6: 50: 'if the moral law commands that we *ought* to be better human beings now, it inescapably follows that we must be *capable* of being better human beings'.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 51 (my italics) (in German: 'In der moralischen *Asketik* aber will dieser Satz mehr, aber doch nichts mehr sagen als'). Di Giovanni translates 'Asketik' with 'discipline', yet the translation 'ascetics' (used in the English translation of the *Doctrine of Virtue*) is more reliable.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 51; compare with 6: 68-69 footnote.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 48 and 51. On this topic see Palmquist; Michalson, "Kant, the Bible, and the Recovery from Radical Evil".

<sup>11</sup> Palmquist, 139-140.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, "The Final Form"; Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*; Dennis, *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals*; Trampota, Sensen and Timmermann; Loudon, *Kant's Impure Ethics, Kant's Human Being* and "Vigilantius".

<sup>13</sup> Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 380 and 477.

<sup>14</sup> Dicenso, 81-82.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 485.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Kant's semantics of natural or innate evil can be found in the opening paragraphs and in the Remark preceding the first section of Part One of *Religion*, in the second section (concerning the propensity to evil in human nature), and in the opening paragraph of the third one (concerning the proof of the propensity to evil's universality and its ground). See also Wood, "The evil in human nature".

<sup>19</sup> Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*; Engstrom; Munzel.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 22 footnote.

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- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6: 58 footnote.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6: 21.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6: 21, 25, 31-32.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6: 21.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 6: 29.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6: 21 and 6: 21 footnote.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6: 29.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6: 32.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6: 21.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6: 32.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 6: 29.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 6: 22.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 6: 31.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 6: 25.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 6: 32.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6: 30 and 32.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 6: 32.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6: 29.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 6: 31.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6: 65 footnote.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology* (against Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*).
- <sup>50</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 32-34.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6: 32.
- <sup>52</sup> Munzel.
- <sup>53</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 25-26.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 6: 45.
- <sup>55</sup> Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 394 (see also 6: 405). Baxley; Denis, "Virtue and Its Ends"; Engstrom; Grenberg, "What is the enemy"; Wood, "The Final Form".
- <sup>56</sup> Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 380 and 380 footnote.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 4: 407.
- <sup>59</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 19.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 6: 20.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6: 19.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 6: 12-13; Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 488.
- <sup>63</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 40.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6: 42.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 6: 41.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6: 43-44.
- <sup>67</sup> vanden Auweele.
- <sup>68</sup> Kant, *Lectures on ethics*, 27: 571-572; Louden, "Vigilantius".
- <sup>69</sup> Kant, *Lectures on ethics*, 27: 530; Louden, "Vigilantius, 94-99.
- <sup>70</sup> Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 484. Louden interprets 'strenuus' as 'vigilant' ("Vigilantius", 94). Vigilance accompanies a 'animus strenuus' for sure, but is not the same. 'Strenuus' refers to power, to 'fortitudo', and hence to the very essence of virtue itself as 'fortitudo moralis' (Kant, *Practical philosophy*, 6: 380).
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 6: 485.
- <sup>72</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 6: 50.