

Kant on Moral Autocracy, Moral Faith and Happiness


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Abstract: Kant's account of moral autocracy as the strength of will to impose inner self-constraint is usually interpreted as being strengthened and promoted by the pursuit of the obligatory ends of perfection and holiness. In this context, moral autocracy is seen as something that can be achieved through one's self-activity guided and encouraged by the ideals of perfection and holiness. In this paper, I argue that, in addition to the moral ends of perfection and holiness, moral autocracy also requires moral belief or faith as a guide to achieve a lifestyle that is peculiar to the highest good, i.e. a life conduct that is well-pleasing to God. In view of this, I argue that moral autocracy in conjunction with moral belief or faith leads to a morally pure and refined way of living directed towards the purity of the moral law. Finally, I conclude that the morally refined and elevated form of lifestyle achieved by morally autocratic activity opens the ground for happiness that does not only refer to the satisfaction of one's needs and desires but is also inclusive of the elements of enduring contentment, well-being, and bliss, which leads me to interpret Kant's account of happiness as encapsulating a eudaimonistic dimension in it.

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Introduction

Kant's notion of moral autocracy¹ is usually understood as self-discipline and self-governance that can be achieved through the individual striving of agents to realize the moral goals of perfection and holiness. In this context, scholars such as Denis (2013, 2019), Stratton Lake (2005), Gregor (1963) and Allison (1990) aptly point out that striving for the realization of perfection and holiness plays a crucial role in strengthening one's autocratic activity in order to achieve conformity with the purity of the moral law. Denis (2013) points out that moral perfection plays an essential role in strengthening autocratic striving and gives agents direction, integrity, and meaning to their lives (Denis 2013, 179). Gregor (1963) also claims that while the duties of holiness and perfection are imperfect duties that entail some latitude in their realization, the pursuit of perfection and holiness is essential to the cultivation of one's resolute activity and virtuous disposition (Gregory 1963, 170). Allison (1990) also sees the cultivation of moral autocracy and strength of will to be related to the ideal of holiness and maintains that the resolute struggle of agents against inclinations and evil cannot be conceived independently of the pursuit of holiness as an indispensable ideal (Allison 1990, 171). While these accounts provide a comprehensive reading of moral autocracy to be based on the pursuit of perfection and holiness, what they essentially have in common and somewhat limitedly is that they view moral autocracy merely as a matter of ethics or morality by excluding religion from its purview. Indeed, this has a firm basis in Kant's notion of the highest good (*summum bonum*), which entails that religion should be included in the framework of ethics or morality under the

¹ I have used the translations of Cambridge editions of the works of Immanuel Kant that are abbreviated as follows: CPR: Critique of Pure Reason; G: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals; CPrR: Critique of Practical Reason; MM: The Metaphysics of Morals; Rel: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason; LE: Lectures on Ethics; LA: Lectures on Anthropology; Refl: Notes and Fragments, LPDR: Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion, and O: Orientation.

questions “What may I hope for?” (*CPR*, A 805/B 833) and “What then is the result of our right conduct?” (*Rel*, 6:5). Kant’s inclusion of moral belief or faith at the stage of the distribution of happiness thus suggests that religion does not have a practical significance in the context of the cultivation of morally autocratic activity to achieve the purity of the moral law, which is strictly associated with the principle that “ought implies can.” However, as I will argue against the standard reading of moral autocracy, the morally autocratic or virtuous pursuit of perfection and holiness cannot be fully cultivated without appealing to moral belief or faith as an active disposition of agents. To this end, I will argue that while Kant seems to include moral belief or faith in the realm of ethics only in the context of the distribution of happiness for one’s moral worthiness or virtue, he more fundamentally attributes an active role to moral belief or faith in the process of the cultivation of virtuous activity and moral struggle by constituting a model or moral ideal that encourages and guides agents to their moral ends (without violating the principle of “ought implies can”).

To elucidate my argument, I follow three steps. First, I explain why I think that moral belief plays an indispensable role in the process of cultivating virtue and self-discipline by claiming that moral belief encourages and guides agents to impose inner constraint on themselves in order to achieve self-mastery and autonomy of their moral character. Second, I argue that moral belief or faith is an active disposition of agents that helps them to orient themselves towards their moral goals and enhance their virtuous activity and disposition, which, I will claim, opens up the possibility of a refined and morally pure way of life. Finally, the discussion of the moral purity and refinement that can be achieved through moral autocracy and the commitment to moral faith leads me to the claim that Kant’s concept of happiness contains eudaimonistic elements, such that happiness for Kant is more than the maximal satisfaction of one’s empirical needs and desires, which contains the elements of moral self-satisfaction, well-being, and bliss. This account will ultimately show that Kant’s notion of the highest good involves a form of lifestyle that is gained by the autocratic struggle of agents seeking purity, perfection, and holiness and it cannot be conceived independently of moral satisfaction with a lifestyle that is characterized by purely refined and elevated elements.

1. Virtue, autocracy and obligatory ends

In the Introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue* (*Tugendlehre*) Kant sets out by distinguishing between two types of duty, namely duties of right and duties of virtue, on the basis of the fact that the former relies on external constraint, while the latter depends upon internal self-constraint (*MM*, 6:383). This distinction is based on the fact that the duties of virtue are end duties, which cannot be coerced by external factors but can only be practised by the inner coercion of agents to make something an end by free choice (*MM*, 6:381). According to Kant, duties of virtue are exercised in the form of autocratic activity (*autarchia*) of imposing self-constraint on the self, since finite rational agents are always under the threat of inclinations and evil that leads them to violate the duty (*MM*, 6:383). Kant characterizes such autocratic activity as “the capacity to master one’s inclinations when they rebel against the moral law” (*MM*, 6:383) and “the capacity to master oneself, to possess oneself, to be sufficient to oneself” (*LE*, 27:656). As the lecture notes on ethics make it clear, autocratic activity, which relies on one’s inner strength and resolution, ultimately gives rise to self-mastery and self-governance in one’s moral character (*LE*, 27:361). As Kant suggests, moral character, when not limited by moral discipline, creates nothing more than a “plaything” that has no stable and enduring resistance against inclinations and evil, but is dominated by them (*LE*, 27:362). However, when the character is governed by moral self-discipline and autocracy, it gains moral self-mastery and self-control by its ability to control sensibility under its rational principles (*LE*, 27:361). How, then, can we understand moral self-discipline and autocracy as a capacity that must be cultivated to establish the possibility of moral character that would elevate us to self-mastery and autonomy?

Kant’s account of moral character (*Character*) relies on the exercise of agent’s capacity of freedom. In lectures on anthropology, Kant is reported to have said, “Proper character is character of freedom” (*LA*, 25:1385). In the *Religion* he likewise argues that moral *Gesinnung* (moral disposition) or the fundamental maxim that defines the moral character of agent is freely chosen and therefore imputable (*Rel*, 6:25). By defining the moral *Gesinnung* as “the subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims” (*Rel*, 6:25),

Kant argues that moral evil or good can be imputed to agents when they choose certain maxims over the others on the basis of free-choice. Kant's characterization of moral character as a freely chosen maxim or way of thinking (*Denkungsart*) (*LA*, 25:649), which is an underlying and enduring disposition of agents, implies that it is not innate but must be cultivated and improved by labor and moral striving (*Rel*, 6:25; *LA*, 25:654).² On the other hand, the freely chosen and acquired aspect of moral character does not suggest that agents are loosely free to determine an evil or good character by their personal choice, but that they are obligated to cultivate a positive capacity of free choice by adhering to the moral law to create the possibility of forming a morally good character. Indeed, this has a firm basis in Kant's famous distinction between *Willkür* and *Wille* as the two reciprocal capacities of human volition. Thus, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant claims that *Willkür* signifies a positive capacity and ability when it conforms to the *Wille*, whereas it signifies a misuse of one's freedom and incapacity when it deviates from the moral law (*MM*, 6:227). Likewise, Kant's account in the *Groundwork* suggests that free will, if not bound by "the lawful causality of immutable laws", is an absurdity (*Unding*) (*G*, 4:446).³ In underscoring the idea that freedom of choice, if not based on the *Wille*, is a negative capacity, Kant affirms that deviation from the moral law reflects the misuse of one's freedom.⁴ In parallel to his two-sense characterization of *Willkür* (the positive and negative capacity of *Willkür*), one can surmise

² For a comprehensive discussion on the dynamic structure of moral character that is not "a fixed and innate ground of moral change" but a progression towards a moral direction and end, see Coble (2003).

³ For a helpful reading on Kant's notion of free will from the perspective of moral necessitarianism, see Ware (2023, 1–28).

⁴ This account has been defended by Silber (1960), who has argued that the true and rational use of *Willkür* is to orient itself to the principle of the *Wille* (Silber 1960, cvi). Silber holds the rational agents have an original predisposition of the will to personality and they can realize it only by subordinating their *Willkür* to the *Wille* (Silber 1960, civ, cv). Thus, Silber suggests that the heteronomous choice of the *Willkür* is a misuse of one's freedom. Henry Allison, on the other hand, argues that the human *Willkür* has the capacity to deviate from the moral law or obey the *Wille*, but this capacity of the deviation of the moral law merely refers to a misuse of freedom (Allison 1990, 135–36).

that Kant develops a similar approach in his theory of virtue in constructing a morally good character. Accordingly, while he identifies virtue as an autocratic and courageous activity (*fortitudo moralis*), denoting the willkürlich and meritorious capacity of agents to impose self-constraint on themselves (*MM*, 6:380), he affirms that the meritorious quality of virtue does in no way entail that agents are loosely free to pursue it or not. In this context, while he recognizes virtue as an ideal that can never be fully attained, he firmly affirms that the constant striving for approximation to virtue is a real duty (*MM*, 6:406). He further asserts that, despite its meritorious quality, the pursuit of virtue has an inner worth in itself when it is sought for its own sake (*MM*, 6:409). In light of the Kantian notion of autonomy, it is easy to see that, despite the meritorious and willkürlich aspect of virtue, the true exercise of virtue, which improves the autonomous activity of agents, consists in striving for it in a rigorous and resolute manner. Within the framework of his notion of moral character, Kant emphasizes the vitality of such virtuous striving, by stating: “Character is that which marks a resolution in principles in the human being” (*LA*, 25:1169). In this sense, Kant holds that moral character has an inner value in itself to the extent that agents freely choose to strive for virtuous disposition by their all powers and resolution that signifies the true use of their freedom.

Kant’s advocacy of autocratic and resolute activity of virtue as the fundamental element in determining moral character is closely related to the duties of seeking one’s own moral perfection and holiness. Kant defines holiness as “the purity of one’s disposition to duty”, which refers to acting out of pure respect for the moral law (*MM*, 6:446). Moral perfection, on the other hand, is defined as “fulfilling all one’s duties and attaining completely one’s moral end with regard to oneself” (*MM*, 6:446). The duties of holiness and moral perfection, then, appear to be one’s task to cultivate virtue to attain the final end of his vocation, that is, the complete fulfilment of his moral duties and ends. In his lecture course on ethics, Kant is recorded as affirming that the duties of virtue are not strictly obligatory but to be cultivated by the free choice of agents that desire to pursue the end of moral perfection and holiness as the ultimate end of their vocation (*LE*, 25:579). However, he notes that to determine the extent to which agents desire to seek moral perfection and holiness is up to them, since it is a wide duty

that is not strictly obligatory but to be pursued to the degree possible (*LE*, 27:582). In these lecture course notes, then, moral perfection and holiness are seen as meritorious duties that depend on the execution of the strength of will and autocratic activity of agents to the degree that they can. However, as the *Metaphysics of Morals* makes clear, Kant describes moral perfection and holiness as highly exceptional in comparison to the other duties of virtue. According to his account, both moral perfection and holiness are unfathomable ideals that can never be attained by agents but must strictly be promoted in an ongoing progress (*MM*, 6:447). In this context, moral perfection (perfection and holiness) is seen as “a narrow and perfect duty in terms of its quality” but “a wide and imperfect one in terms of its degree because of the frailty (*fragilitas*) of human nature” (*MM*, 6:447). In Kant’s view, then, moral perfection and holiness are the duties that must be strictly pursued by agents but there is latitude in their fulfilment because human agents have a frailty by nature that prevents them from committing themselves fully to these duties.

The fact that Kant refers to the duties of moral perfection and holiness as necessary and obligatory ends in determining one’s moral purpose and final vocation suggests clearly that they play an indispensable role in strengthening the moral resolution and strength of will of agents in their pursuit of morally good character. As such, scholars such as Denis (2013, 2019), Stratton Lake (2005)⁵, Gregor (1963), and Allison (1990) contend that agents’ virtuous disposition to self-impose autocracy in order to realize the full potential of their autonomy and moral character cannot be conceived independently of the pursuit of the obligatory ends, as they serve as a guide and ideal for agents in their pursuit of the adherence to the moral law.

Lara Denis (2013), for instance, argues that obligatory or objective ends strengthen inner freedom and enhance agents’ motivation to battle evil and

⁵ Phillip Stratton Lake (2005) argues that when we strive to make ourselves virtuous or struggle to make the moral law as the sole incentive of our actions, this requires not only respect for the moral law as the sufficient ground of our action, but also that we make our perfection as an end (Stratton Lake 2005, 105–6). Stratton thus suggests that we cannot cultivate virtuous disposition as resolution and strength (striving to become virtuous) without appealing to perfection as an end.

inclinations (Denis 2013, 178). In her view, unconditionally necessary ends give direction, integrity and meaning to our lives toward the realization of the highest good as the highest end of practical reason (Denis 2013, 179). Denis further writes that moral perfection is an end that aids agents to realize their full potential of autonomy and personality and it is a necessary end that must be embraced in order to enhance the dignity of character and moral agency, despite the human frailties that are faced in realizing it (Denis 1999, 24).

Mary Gregor (1963) also argues that while the duties of holiness and perfection are imperfect duties that entail certain latitude in their performance, the pursuit of perfection and holiness are vital in the cultivation of virtue (Gregor 1963, 170). According to Gregor, Kant's notion of the moral life as the cultivation of virtue cannot be achieved independently of the end of moral perfection, since moral perfection should be viewed as the concrete capacity that must be developed through the maxims of agents in the process of forming a moral character (Gregor 1963, 171).

Henry Allison (1990) sees the cultivation of moral autocracy and strength of will in connection with the ideal of holiness, claiming that the resolute struggle of agents to battle inclinations and evil cannot be conceived independently of seeking holiness as an indispensable ideal (Allison 1990, 171). Allison firmly affirms that to fail to adopt the maxim of the pursuit of holiness literally means to remain outside of the moral struggle (or autocracy) against evil, which deprives one's character of moral worth (Allison 1990, 179). Thus, Allison's account aptly suggests that moral perfection and holiness play an essential role in strengthening one's resolution to control inclinations and evil and that the duties of moral perfection and holiness have an impact on the cultivation of one's character, moral life and orienting agents as ethical beings (Allison 1990, 178).

The accounts of Denis (1999, 2013), Gregor (1963) and Allison (1990) offer a comprehensive reading of the obligatory ends of perfection and holiness as the necessary ideals that help agents improve their moral strength and incentive to pursue the purity of the moral law. They rightly point out that virtue as an autocratic activity of agents would remain inefficient unless it is provided with a practical guidance and orientation by the moral ends and ideals of perfection and holiness. What these accounts essentially

have in common is that they regard moral autocracy or moral strength as a capacity to be developed within the framework of morality or ethics, and exclude religion from its purview. Without a doubt, this is the standard reading of moral autocracy in the literature, which is consistent with the notion that Kant includes religion and theology in the realm of ethics or morality merely within the context of the highest good (*summum bonum*), under the questions “What may I hope?” (*CPR*, A 805/B 833) and “What is then the result of this right conduct of ours?” (*Rel*, 6:5). According to the usual reading, then, religion or theology has no practical significance within the scope of the cultivation or acquisition of virtue (as it would suggest the violation of the principle of “ought implies can”),⁶ but enters the scene as part of the distribution of happiness through divine help in rewarding one’s virtue and moral worthiness. In his discussion of the highest good (*summum bonum*), Kant seems to advocate the idea that virtuous activity has to be fulfilled for its own sake with human powers (“ought implies can”) and the appeal to moral belief in divine help takes on practical significance especially for the distribution of happiness (*CPrR*, 5:124). However, a close examination of Kant’s theory of the highest good tells us that moral faith plays a practical role not only in obtaining divine help for the distribution of happiness, but also in strengthening agents’ virtuous activity with respect to the moral good. In parallel, Allen Wood (1970) points out

⁶ Regarding this basic problem within the context of Kant’s notion of highest good, Silber (1959) aims to offer a solution by his two-sense theory of the highest good, namely the immanent and transcendent conceptions of the highest good (Silber 1959, 469–86). As such, Silber argues that moral agents strive for moral worthiness within the “ought implies can” principle in an immanent sense, but there is a transcendent aspect to it that constitutes an ideal for practical reason. As he further suggests, the transcendent ideal of the highest good (including the notions of holiness, and moral belief) plays a regulative role in realizing one’s duty to the highest good on an immanent level. Likewise, Pasternack (2017) argues that virtue is a capacity to be cultivated and realized by human capacity (“ought implies can”) and the divine assistance of happiness is an aid that is not incompatible with the autonomy of agents (Pasternack 2017, 461–64). According to his account, divine assistance for the distribution of happiness does not clash with the autonomy of agents because agents are merely provided with the element of happiness as an encouragement that does not interrupt their individual struggle and resolution to achieve this end by their own powers.

that the endorsement of moral belief or hope merely in the context of the divine help for receiving happiness in proportion to one's moral worthiness is a deeply mistaken idea (Wood 1970, 166). In a helpful passage, Wood underscores that Kant's inclusion of God "in the ends of morality" as the distributor of happiness leads to the misunderstanding that moral belief must be cultivated for the purpose of obtaining happiness, stating:

Moral faith does not consist so much of an expectation of future happiness as an acceptance of present sufferings. Moral faith does not promise me a world better than the actual one, but consists in the courage to trust that this world, as it is, a world in which there is suffering and apparent moral failure, is itself a morally good world. In moral faith, I do not flee this world to a better one; rather, I *choose* this world, I refuse to despair of it, I make it by my choice the world in which I will rationally act in pursuit of my final moral end. Trust in God is thus not characterized by the gleeful anticipation of my "future rewards," but rather by "humility and modesty, combined with resignation" (Wood 1970, 169).

In this excerpt, Wood makes clear that the primary purpose of moral belief or hope cannot be understood as the expectation, belief or hope for happiness as a reward of our virtuous conduct, but rather that it is to cultivate a firm trust in the real possibility of the existence of God such that it encourages agents to overcome moral despair and motivates them to struggle rigorously to make their life and world morally better. Parallel to Wood's assertion that moral belief or faith plays a profoundly significant role in encouraging agents to pursue and strive for the moral good meticulously and overcome moral despair, my contention is that moral belief or faith is an active and dynamic disposition to encourage agents to strive for virtue and autonomy, not simply because of the encouragement it provides via the distribution of happiness, but primarily because it gives encouragement to agents by directing them to seek virtue or moral worthiness for moral improvement as an end in itself. In contrast to the usual reading of moral autocracy that is conceived as a capacity to be cultivated by human powers through the model and ideal of obligatory ends, the next section will thus focus on the fact that the autocratic activity of agents towards perfection and holiness in the process of gaining

moral worthiness (or the highest good) also requires moral belief or faith as an active disposition of themselves.

2. Moral faith, virtue and moral perfection

Kant's theory of moral belief and faith (*moralischer Glaube*) is formulated as a moral postulate that is practically necessary for the real possibility of the highest good (*summum bonum*). In the second *Critique* Kant defines it as a subjective need (*Bedürfnis*) that is “not commanded as a duty” but is based on a voluntary judgment of agents that is “conducive to the moral purposes” (*CPR*, 5:146; *O*, 8:141.). Likewise, in the first *Critique* and the *Orientation* article Kant defines moral belief and faith (*Glaube*) as a form of conviction that is “objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient” (*CPR*, A 822/B 850), and that stands between the epistemic assents of opinion (*Meinung*) and knowledge (*Wissen*). Kant's notion of moral belief or faith is predominately examined as an indispensable theological element of the highest good, especially in terms of the role it plays in grounding the practical intelligibility and consistency of morality.⁷ Yet, the practical significance of moral belief or faith as an active element of one's moral disposition in cultivating virtue or moral worthiness is severely neglected in the

⁷ In this regard, Wood (1970) stresses that moral belief has a pivotal role in establishing the highest good and thereby avoiding the state of *absurdum practicum* or the practical absurdity of moral activity (Wood 1970, 26–27 and 29–30). Förster (2000) has drawn attention to this aspect of Kant's discussion of the moral-practical idea of God as a binding element in human morality, by remarking that God is analytically connected to the categorical imperative (Förster 2000, 142) and our freedom as a person demands that we relate ourselves to the binding nature of the categorical imperative that is ultimately grounded on the moral-practical idea of God (Förster 2000, 141). Palmquist (2000) likewise holds that moral postulates are indispensable for morality, as their absence would lead morality to the state of “abyss of meaninglessness” (Palmquist 2000, 75). Along similar lines, Zeldin (1971) endorses the theological approach, holding that moral belief is strictly necessary for morality, as it prevents the command of the moral law from becoming a mere “law of thought” (Zeldin 1971, 47).

literature.⁸ Kant's account of moral belief or faith, however, would remain very incomplete if its active content, which helps agents to orient their virtuous activity and struggle toward moral perfection and holiness, is overlooked. In parallel, in this section, I want to focus on moral belief or faith as an integral element of agents' moral disposition that encourages and promotes their autocratic striving for virtue or moral worthiness in an authentic and real experience that helps them to cultivate morally pure and refined life conduct.

The fact that Kant ascribes practical significance to moral belief and faith as an active disposition of human volition that aids agents to improve their virtuous struggle for moral perfection and holiness has a firm basis in Kant's discussion of moral belief and faith throughout his corpus. In the first *Critique*, Kant articulates this radical aspect of moral belief and faith by contrasting it with doctrinal belief in God, asserting that the moral certainty that moral belief and faith entails is highly different from the relatively unstable content of the doctrinal belief (theoretical and hypothetical belief in the existence of God) (*CPR*, A 828/B 856). Kant firmly affirms that moral belief or faith entails an "absolutely necessary" and "inescapably fixed" conviction that there must be a God and a future life, provided that agents abide by the moral law (*CPR*, A 828/B 856). This tells us that moral belief or faith has a stable aspect, so that it is impossible to renounce it, as this would mean overturning all our moral principles (*CPR*, A 828/B 856). This is to say that moral belief or faith in the existence of God and a future world is inescapably vital for the orientation and foundation of one's moral activity, the absence of which would result in the lack of meaning, purpose or intelligibility of one's moral disposition and life (*CPR*, A 828/B 856). If we read this in light of Kant's famous claim in the *Lectures on Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, in which he argues that the absence of assent to moral belief or faith leads to the state of *absurdum practicum* (*LPDR*, 28:1083), we can easily see that moral theology, or the assumption of God as part of morality, leads agents to become "better human beings" and that its denial leads to the state of *absurdum practicum* and reduces agents into "scoundrels" (*LPDR*, 28:1083).

⁸ For a helpful reading that endorses the idea that moral belief or faith is an active disposition of one's moral disposition, see Wood (1970, 160–62).

At other times, Kant appears to reiterate the idea that moral belief or faith plays an active role in grounding the moral activity of agents. The account of moral belief in the second *Critique* is based on the idea that moral belief is a subjective need (*Bedürfnis*) that arises from the moral law for the ultimate realization of the highest good (*CPrR*, 5:146). Kant further notes that moral belief or faith is practically necessary for promoting the morally commanded ends (*CPrR*, 5:146). Accordingly, he emphasizes the indispensable significance of moral belief or faith in human life, noting that it arises from one's moral disposition and that it is therefore never possible to renounce it altogether (*CPrR*, 5:146). Thus, Kant writes that respect for the moral law leads agents to presuppose the existence of God, which ultimately improves their moral disposition and moral activity. As Kant points out, without such a genuine experience of the true respect for the moral law and the moral presupposition of God, human conduct would simply resemble "a puppet show" in which "everything would gesticulate well but there would be no life in the figures" (*CPrR*, 5:147). For Kant, then, the moral law when accompanied with moral belief or faith leads to a genuine and authentic experience in the moral life that elevates the virtuous disposition.

In the third *Critique* Kant spells out the practical significance of moral belief or faith as an active element of one's moral disposition by defining it as "habitus or reason's moral way of thinking in the affirmation of that which is inaccessible for theoretical cognition" (*CPJ*, 5:471). In this sense, he emphasizes the active role of moral faith in God through his notion of moral teleology, which suggests that the supersensible agency of God enters the scene of teleological paradigm of nature as the ground that connects the causality of the human agent as noumenon (freedom) to his final ends (*CPJ*, 5:448). By comparing physical teleology with moral teleology, Kant claims that the moral idea of God, which belongs to moral teleology, grounds the inner lawfulness of the causality of nature and the causality of the moral agents as noumenon. This, then, suggests that the moral idea of God as the ultimate ground for connecting human agents to their moral ends, plays an active role in enabling agents to ground their practical vocation as moral beings. In this sense, Kant's endorsement of the moral idea of God as the ultimate ground of synthesis of the teleological purposes of nature (in a

heuristic sense) shows that it has an immanent role in directing human life towards its ultimate purposes.

The main textual evidence for this reading, that moral faith has an active role in grounding one's virtuous activity, lies in Kant's account of moral faith in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where he describes moral faith as "an active disposition toward achieving a good-life conduct" (*Rel*, 6:116). In the third part of the *Religion*, Kant fundamentally proposes that pure religious faith is part of a person's moral disposition (or *Gesinnung*)⁹ that guides him into a morally good way of life. This is primarily based on the idea that moral faith is an active disposition that guides and promotes the enhancement of one's virtuous disposition as part of the realisation of a good life conduct. He writes:

The living faith in the prototype of a humanity well-pleasing to God (the Son of God) refers, in itself, to a moral idea of reason, insofar as the latter serves for us not only as guideline but as incentive as well; it is therefore, all the same whether I start out from it (as rational faith) or from the principle of a good life conduct (*Rel*, 6:119).

In this passage, Kant portrays moral faith as equal to the pursuit of a good life conduct that is well-pleasing to God within an authentic experience.¹⁰ He thus emphasizes that moral belief is more than an abstract idea, but that has an immanent role in determining one's moral experience. Accordingly, Kant further notes that, "the disposition of virtue has something to do with *actual*, which is in itself well-pleasing to God and conforms to what is best for the world" (*Rel*, 6:173). In this remark, Kant also suggests that the main purpose of virtuous disposition is to struggle to establish harmony with the moral idea of God in an actual experience. In this context, what

⁹ For a parallel reading, see Munzel (1999, 205–6); Wood (1970, 156); and Palmquist (2015, 247–48).

¹⁰ Akin to my approach, Palmquist (2015) argues that moral belief as a pursuit of "lifestyle that is satisfactory to God" is not a psychological attitude or metaphysical disposition but a volition that is embedded in one's *Gesinnung* (Palmquist 2015, 247–48). Likewise, Wood (1970) holds the view that moral belief or faith or "personal trust in God" is an immanent element of human volition and moral *Gesinnung* (Wood 1970, 160–62).

is remarkable to note is that moral faith has an active aspect in aiding agents to improve their virtuous activity toward the purity of the moral law, namely, perfection and holiness, when agents create a moral world for themselves that conforms to the ideals of holiness, beneficence and justice of God (*LPDR*, 28:1076). This is essentially evident in Kant's notion of moral theology, which entails that the moral idea of God has a determinate character in itself insofar as it is understood as an ideal that is to be pursued in one's moral activity (*LPDR*, 28:1073). While Kant assumes that the moral idea of God is a mystery in itself, it has no mystery if we conceive it as a moral ideal and model for our moral purposes (*Rel*, 6:137-140). In parallel, he suggests that the cultivation of moral faith does not help us to know the real essence of God in itself, which is a mystery, but has practical implication, in the context of our morality, that we should aspire to the moral idea of God as the highest form of perfection (*Rel*, 6:139). Accordingly, in this picture Kant paints, moral faith in God and immortality seems to play an immanent role in our moral experience insofar as we cultivate it in our moral struggle for perfection and holiness.

The fact that holiness and perfection encompasses the pursuit of a life conduct that is well-pleasing to God suggests that it opens up a lifestyle that is characterized by morally pure and refined elements that are reinforced by the autocratic activity. Thus, in the Lectures on Philosophical Doctrine of Religion, Kant writes: “*Holiness* is the absolute or unlimited moral perfection of the will... Thus the human being can *never* be *holy*, but of course [he can be] *virtuous*. For virtue consists precisely in *self-overcoming*” (*LPDR*, 28:1076). In this passage, we can easily see that the pursuit of holiness refers to the state of constant struggle to control the natural inclinations and evil in one's heteronomous nature and conform to the purity of the moral law. In this context, Kant identifies virtue as a never-ending process of achieving victory over one's immoral inclinations and evil and pursuing the state of holiness as conformity to the purity of the moral law. The pursuit of holiness (or self-overcoming or self-conquest) essentially means that agents gain proper rational control over their inclinations and evil through their radical struggle towards perfection and holiness.¹¹ The moral struggle towards perfection and

¹¹ Regarding Kant's notion of moral self-overcoming or self-conquest, Baxley (2010) has critically argued that the notion of self-overcoming involves the pursuit of a

holiness thus involves a radical transformation in agents, which gives rise to a morally pure and refined way of living that conforms to the purity of the moral law. In a similar fashion, Kant's account of "change of heart" as the radical transformation of agents from an evil or bad disposition to a good disposition involves a radical change in one's virtuous disposition that affects one's moral *Gesinnung* or way of thinking (*Denkungsart*) (*Rel*, 6:47). By this, Kant means that the radical transformation to the purity and holiness of the moral law cannot be understood as a habitual or gradual development towards the realization of the moral good (*virtus phenomenon*), but involves an endless struggle to be well-pleasing to God through the revolutionary change in one's virtuous disposition (*virtus noumenon* or the intelligible character of virtue). Kant's formulation of *virtus noumenon* is thus something highly transformative that affects the moral *Gesinnung* or character of agents, leading them to rise to the sublimity of perfection and holiness in a constant struggle. The fact that Kant refers to agents who undergo a revolutionary transformation from the bad disposition to the good under the terms of "new man" or "change of heart" suggests that virtuous activity from evil toward the predisposition of the good entails a noumenal and atemporal change in a person's disposition or character¹² that elevates him to a morally sublime and pure state (*Rel*, 6:47).

"disembodied God" that suggests the extirpation and suppression of sensible inclinations and desires altogether (Baxley 2010, 65). Baxley affirms that this notion of self-overcoming leads to the standard idea that Kant's theory of virtue entails constant tension between sensibility and reason and constant battle with the self (Baxley 2010, 67). However, as she notes, moral self-overcoming, in Kant's view, can be better understood as a rational self-governance that does not necessarily mean to fight sensibility or our sensible self, but more fundamentally to cultivate a rational mastery over our sensible inclinations and desires in accordance with our moral principles (Baxley 2010, 75–79). In doing so, Baxley contends that Kant's notion of virtue as the pursuit of perfection and holiness has an affirmative aspect in its scope, as it explicitly denies a "harsh and dehumanizing" form of self-discipline or autocracy, which suggests that the deprivation of all enjoyment and pleasure of life through self-discipline is not a proper form of virtue (Baxley 2010, 76).

¹² On the timeless and atemporal aspect of moral character (or *Gesinnung*), see Allison (1990, 140–141); Wood (1984, 97–99); Hill (2014, 91–93).

Moreover, Kant's account of moral perfection and holiness has a radical aspect to it, for it entails that agents emulate a model or ideal of human being that autocratically struggles to perfect himself, which leads them to create a morally pure and refined life conduct. Accordingly, Kant argues in the *Religion* that the pure conformity to the moral law or the duty to rise to moral perfection and holiness, involves emulating "the prototype of human being that is well-pleasing to God", which is characterized as an ideal and model of human being that the practical reason has within itself (*Rel*, 6:62). According to this account, the pursuit of holiness and moral perfection is based on the ideal of human being that pursues moral perfection and holiness through an autocratic struggle to overcome evil and unruly inclinations and comply with the purity and holiness of the moral law. Kant depicts the autocratic agent struggling to conform to the purity and holiness of the moral law as

willing not only execute in person all human duties, and at the same time to spread goodness about him as far wide as possible through teaching and example... And surrounded by obstacles and yet—in the midst of the greatest possible temptations- victorious" (*Rel*, 6:62).

Kant's notion of the ideal autocratic agent struggling for moral perfection and holiness provides a guide and model for ordinary human agents to strengthen their virtuous disposition towards a refined and morally pure state of moral existence. Moral autocracy, then, entails that agents cultivate their moral character and lifestyle to an elevated state by exposing themselves to a rigorous struggle to overcome their sensible and heteronomous nature and conform to the purity of the moral law. At first glance, the pursuit of perfection and holiness suggests an ascetic lifestyle characterized by rigorous striving and struggling for moral improvement. However, Kant's notion of virtue is not compatible with the notion of ascetism in a robust sense, as Kant clearly affirms that ascetism without joyful and cheerful elements is an inaccurate type of ascetism, which is known to represent "monkish ascetism" (*MM*, 6:485).¹³ Thus, Gregor (1963) argues that Kant's

¹³ In this sense, in the *Doctrine of Virtue* Kant argues for a moderate form of moral ascetism that is characterized with cheerfulness and valiance as an outcome of one's

notion of moral perfection does not suggest a strict and harsh form of self-discipline aiming to curb inclinations or sensible desires altogether (Gregor 1963, 171). Instead, Gregor argues that Kant's theory of virtue is opposed to moral purism per se, for it entails that inclinations and evil should only be marshalled and curbed to the degree that one can avoid vices and evil (Gregor 1963, 172). In this regard, Gregor argues that moral perfection does not refer to the "the habit of ascetism" (Gregor 1963, 172). Akin to Gregor, my contention is that Kant's notion of moral autocracy does not entail ascetism in an ordinary sense. However, unlike Gregor, I believe that the autocratic pursuit of the purity of the moral law inevitably contains ascetic elements in the moderate sense, to suggest that moral lifestyle that is well-pleasing to God aims to overcome a robust and uncultivated form of lifestyle by establishing refinement and simplicity in itself.

In sum, we can now see that morally autocratic activity when accompanied with moral belief or faith as an active disposition in guiding agents towards a better virtuous disposition results in an authentic lifestyle characterized by refined and morally pure elements. It has thus become clear that the pursuit of moral perfection and holiness with the aid of moral faith opens up a life conduct that raises one's moral state and existence towards a more sublime and refined form of experience. This means that the pursuit of moral perfection and holiness requires agents to overcome the sensible inclinations and desires that limit their sphere of life, which is burdened by robust and unruly elements. On the contrary, the autocratic pursuit of perfection and holiness enables them to cultivate an authentic experience of moral purity that elevates them to the sublimity of their moral personality and existence. On this basis, in the next section, I will focus on the way in which agents' virtuous struggle for perfection and holiness through their commitment to moral belief leads to a lifestyle that contains morally pure

moral struggle for becoming virtuous and morally worthy. Comparing it with monkish ascetism, Kant affirms that virtuous lifestyle does not necessarily mean the eradication of inclinations or desires through the strict punishments and brutal practises over the self, but rather battling the unruly and non-moral inclinations to the degree that we gain mastery over them which "makes one valiant and cheerful in the consciousness of one's restored freedom" (*MM*, 6:485).

and refined elements, which will lead me to interpret Kant's theory of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) as containing eudaimonistic elements related to such life conduct.

3. Virtue, moral faith and happiness

My considerations so far have shown that moral autocracy to impose inner self-constraint to comply with the purity and holiness of the moral law requires the element of moral belief and faith in order to give encouragement and order to our moral activity within an authentic experience. Clearly, this way of life conduct, which strives for the perfection and holiness of the moral law through the ideal image of God as a moral model (or moral worthiness), is characterized by moral refinement, purity and sublimity. According to the classical theories of virtue, such a virtuous lifestyle is accompanied by a form of happiness that includes a refined form of satisfaction with one's disposition and state. Nevertheless, on a usual reading, Kant's theory of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) as a reward for virtuous activity or moral worthiness does not favour such a lifestyle that can be associated with a eudaimonistic kind of happiness. Instead, Kant's notion of the highest good encompasses the idea that morally worthy agents can hope for the possibility of a happiness that grants them with "satisfaction of one's all inclinations" (*CPR*, A 806/B 834) or the state in which "everything goes according to their wish and will" (*CPrR*, 5:124). Such definitions of happiness, which emphasize the maximal satisfaction of one's needs and desires, lead some scholars to interpret Kant's notion of happiness as contradictory to the eudaimonistic concept of happiness, since it contains a pleasure-based content.¹⁴ Contrary to such accounts, in this section I will argue that Kant's

¹⁴ Wood (2000) argues that Kantian notion of human nature is starkly different from the eudaimonistic notion of human nature in the sense that happiness cannot be simply explained through the activity of virtue. Instead, Wood holds that the Kantian notion of human nature has a natural-social aspect as well as its moral aspect, which leads him to suggest that happiness has as a pleasure and desire-directed aspect which cannot be identified in the classical eudaimonist accounts (Wood 2000, 265–67). See also Loudon (2015, 118–20) for a non-eudaimonist reading of Kant's notion of happiness.

notion of happiness is not antithetical to eudaimonism,¹⁵ since, as I will suggest, the full picture of happiness is not confined to satisfaction of one's empirical needs and wishes, but also includes the eudaimonistic elements of enduring well-being, contentment and bliss to be pursued as an ideal. This account will ultimately indicate that within the framework of the highest good, in which agents strive for purity and refinement through the pursuit of perfection and holiness, they could achieve a form of happiness that is much deeper and refined than the mere satisfaction of their empirical needs and desires.

Despite Kant's sharp criticism to ancient eudaimonism for violating the rule of autonomy of reason by subordinating morality to pleasure and happiness¹⁶, there are some elements in his account of happiness that bears

¹⁵ For similar accounts that identify eudaimonistic elements in Kant's theory of happiness see Holberg (2018); Grenberg (2022); Elzondo (2023); Engstrom (1996).

¹⁶ In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant makes it clear that eudaemonism, which assumes pleasure or happiness as the guiding principle for one's moral actions leads to the problem of heteronomy that is a fatal mistake in morality (*MM*, 6:378). Kant's denouncement of eudaemonism as a tragically mistaken approach in ethics, therefore, relies on the idea that the eudaimonists ground morality on the principle of happiness as the ultimate end of humanity. Nevertheless, as Irwin (1996) suggests, Kant's assumption that eudaemonism reduces morality to the pursuit of happiness is problematic in itself (Irwin 1996, 81). Irwin argues that the eudaimonists regard happiness as the end of morality not in the sense that morality should be subordinated to pleasure but rather in the sense that morality should be purposeful towards the realization of the highest good (*summum bonum*) (Irwin 1996, 83). In this context, Irwin suggests that happiness, as it is understood by the ancient eudaimonists (specifically Aristotle and the Stoics), does not necessarily refer to pleasure, but in fact refers to an enduring state of contentment and peace of mind that is achieved through virtue (*summum bonum*). Irwin's point suggests that eudaimonistic approach in ethics is not a failure due to the problem of heteronomy, since it grounds morality not on the principle of pleasure or happiness, but rather on the purpose of achieving the state of eudaimonia that relies on virtuous activity (*summum bonum*). In fact, this eudaimonistic approach is not entirely excluded from Kant's deontological ethics, since Kant never denounces the idea that happiness can be pursued by agents on a rational and moral ground, thereby suggesting that morality is not completely free from the pursuit of happiness insofar it rests upon moral worthiness.

affinity with eudaimonism, especially with regard to the eudaimonistic elements he attributes to the content of happiness. As is well known, according to the standard account of eudaimonism, happiness means a pure and elevated state of contentment that is largely free from unruly inclinations and desires. Thus Aristotle describes eudaimonia as a pure and stable form of pleasure and contentment achieved through virtue (*NE*, 1177a). In contrast to the empirical and sensible content of Kantian happiness, Aristotle's eudaimonia refers to the state of the highest good (*summum bonum*), which is characterized by enduring contentment and pleasure and is achieved through a morally pure and elevated lifestyle. In contrast, Kant argues that contentment with one's person and freedom cannot be regarded as a form of happiness, but as something that is akin to *beatitudo*, which denotes self-sufficiency that only belongs to God (*CprR*, 5:118). In this context, Kant seems to recognize self-contentment as a form of moral satisfaction that lies between happiness and *beatitudo*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this distinction between self-contentment and happiness does not necessarily mean that Kant excludes self-contentment with one's own person and freedom from the purview of his concept of happiness altogether.¹⁸ This is evidently clear from his following remarks:

Another pivotal point that Kant is critical of eudaemonism is that the ancient eudaimonists (Epicurus and Zeno) recognize the highest good as the supreme principle of morality (*LE*, 27:248–50). According to Kant, this assumption violates the principle of autonomy of reason that is detrimental to ethics. Nevertheless, Kant's criticism of ancient eudaemonism for violating the rule of autonomy of reason is not easily applicable to the Aristotelian eudaemonism, since within his discussion of the problem of heteronomy in the Epicurean and Stoic notion of the highest good and happiness, Kant does not mention Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia as a fallacious doctrine (Louden 2015, 112–14). Therefore, one could suggest that Kant's notion of happiness is not in direct opposition to Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia.

¹⁷ This point is also made by Walschots (2017), who holds that self-contentment is a form of moral satisfaction that is a “middle place” between happiness and bliss (Walschots 2017, 287).

¹⁸ Despite his non-eudaimonist reading of Kant's notion of happiness, Wood (2000) does not exclude contentment from the scope of happiness by holding that complete happiness has three different aspects, namely “pleasure, contentment with one's state and desire-satisfaction” (Wood 2000, 267).

Contentment with our entire existence is happiness; among human beings, this also requires physical causes, i.e., welfare (*Refl*, 18:460). Happiness is really not the greatest sum of gratifications but the pleasure of being satisfied by the consciousness of one's own power, at least this is the essential formal condition of happiness, although still other material conditions (as with experience) are required (*Refl*, 19:277).¹⁹

In these remarks, Kant is concerned with the idea that contentment with one's freedom and person is a form of happiness insofar as it is accompanied with physical contentment or welfare with one's state. In the first place, he assumes that happiness involves physical and moral contentment with one's whole existence. The second remark suggests that happiness as contentment with one's own power denotes a form of satisfaction that does not necessarily mean the maximal gratification of one's needs and desires, but rather a moral satisfaction that is accompanied by the physical satisfaction of one's state in a moderate manner. Likewise, Kant's famous assertion in the *Groundwork* that happiness is an indirect duty to be pursued as "a form of contentment with one's condition", insofar as it denotes the satisfaction of one's needs and desires to avoid transgression of the moral law, clearly implies that happiness for Kant does not simply signify maximal satisfaction of one's needs and desires, but refers to the satisfaction of one's needs and desires to the extent that it sustains the physical and moral well-being of agents (*G*, 4:399). I guess Kant's inclusion of contentment within his notion of happiness through the moderate form of physical satisfaction is consistent with his account of the moral purity and elevation that the pursuit of the perfection and holiness leads agents into. Such a reading of happiness reveals that Kant's account of happiness does not involve a robust form of physical satisfaction of one's needs and desires, but, more fundamentally, a refined form of satisfaction with one's state that arises through the morally autocratic pursuit of perfection and holiness.

Associating Kant's notion of happiness with a pure and refined way of life conduct guided and controlled with moral principles and laws leads to the idea that happiness refers to a state of existence that is characterized

¹⁹ See also *LE*, 27:648–50.

by enduring contentment and well-being.²⁰ Accordingly, in the Lecture notes on Philosophical Doctrine of Religion, Kant characterizes happiness as an uninterrupted inner pleasure and well-being that helps us to overcome the hardships and troubles of life:

Human good fortune is *not a possession, but a progression toward happiness*. Yet full self-contentment, the consoling consciousness of rectitude, is a good which can never be stolen from us, whatever the quality of our external state may be. And in fact all earthly happiness is far outweighed by the thought that as morally good human beings we have made ourselves worthy of an uninterrupted future happiness. Of course this inner pleasure in our own person can never compensate for the loss of an externally happy state, but it can still uplift us even in the most troubled life when it is combined with the prospect for the future (*LPDR*, 28:1090).

This passage clearly shows that Kant's concept of happiness has a eudaimonistic aspect, for it states that happiness refers to an inner pleasure that has an enduring and stable quality in the face of the troubles and misfortunes of life. Kant believes that while such inner contentment cannot make up for the lack of earthly happiness, it is a primary aspect of happiness that raises one's spirit as he faces and combats the hardships of life. Clearly, this eudaimonistic aspect of Kant's notion of happiness has a strong continuity with his notion of an autocratic lifestyle characterized by morally pure and refined elements. Therefore, it seems plausible that the moral pursuit of purity and refinement through virtuous endeavour opens up the possibility of happiness, which enables them to withstand the hardships of life with inner strength and power.

Another eudaimonistic aspect that we can attribute to Kant's notion of happiness is that he does not exclude the element of divine blessedness and bliss as a form of moral satisfaction as an ideal to be pursued through the pursuit of perfection and holiness. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's account of happiness as a life of wisdom, contemplation and noble actions

²⁰ For a eudaimonist reading of well-being by identifying it as the worth of one's condition, see Elzondo (2023, 8–9).

encapsulates the idea that humans can attain a state of contentment akin to divine bliss or a blissful life (*NE*, 1179a). He fundamentally suggests that such bliss and contentment is complete and self-sufficient to the extent that man finds enjoyment in the morally pure and contemplative elements that enable him to lead a “godlike activity.” On the contrary, Kant is highly critical of the idea that happiness refers to such a divine form of contentment and bliss. In the lectures on ethics, he states bluntly:

Well-pleasedness with one’s own existence, when this existence is dependent, is called *happiness*. Thus *happiness is contentment with my own dependent existence*. But a complete well-pleasedness with one’s independent existence is called *acquiescentia in semetipso* or self-sufficiency (*beatitudo*). This blessedness of a being consists therefore in a *well-pleasedness* with one’s own existence *apart from any need*, and thus it belongs solely to God alone; for he alone is independent (*LPDR*, 28:1060).

In this passage, Kant makes it clear that blessedness (*beatitudo*) refers to a state of complete independence from physical causes and inclinations, which he identifies as a state that is unique to God. In a similar vein, in the second *Critique*, Kant states that blessedness refers to a “self-sufficiency that can be ascribed to the supreme being” (*CPrR*, 5:119). Admittedly, Kant’s notion of bliss has no place in the standard reading of happiness, which assumes that virtue or moral worthiness is accompanied by happiness, which denotes the “satisfaction of all one’s inclinations or needs” as a physical or empirical form of satisfaction and fulfilment. Therefore, the standard reading of happiness condemns the idea that happiness has a eudaimonistic aspect because it involves the element of eternal or divine pleasure or contentment. Nonetheless, Kant’s notion of happiness does not entirely exclude the prospect of divine pleasure and bliss as an ideal that can be attained through the pursuit of virtuous activity for perfection and holiness. In the *Religion*, this aspect of happiness becomes clear in Kant’s notion of “Kingdom of God”, which is characterized as an ethical state to be achieved with the cooperation between human efforts and the divine aid that would bring salvation and bliss to human agents. Kant characterizes the ethical state as a sublime and pure state to be achieved with the aid of divine power, which will help human agents to achieve moral perfection with the help of divine

bliss (*Rel*, 6:183-185). In this sense, he envisions the ethical state as a family-like community in which God treats human beings like a father who helps his children to achieve a union of hearts (*Rel*, 6:102). This metaphor of the loving relationship between God and human agents is also echoed in Kant's notion of divine blessedness (or godliness), where he argues that human agents, as children of God, are obliged to respect his law by free choice, which gives them pleasure (*Rel*, 6:182). Accordingly, Kant suggests that respect and love for God as the supersensible being behind the possibility of the highest good gives agents pleasure and bliss because they associate themselves with the law and goodness of God, which helps them cultivate their moral perfection and holiness (*Rel*, 6:185).

By characterizing moral faith as “a receptivity to (worthiness of) eternal happiness” (*Rel*, 6:115), Kant further affirms that the pursuit of holiness and perfection through practical faith brings about the hope for a blessedness and bliss:

In the *practical faith in this Son of God* (so far as he is represented as having taken up human nature) the human being can thus hope to become pleasing to God (and thereby blessed); that is, only a human being conscious of such a moral disposition in himself as enables him to *believe* and self-assuredly trust that he, under similar temptations and afflictions (so far as these are made the touchstone of that idea), would steadfastly cling to the prototype of humanity and follow this prototype's example in loyal emulation, only such a human being, and he alone, is entitled to consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure (*Rel*, 6:62).

In this excerpt, Kant makes it clear that the moral struggle to fulfill moral duties to perfection and holiness and moral faith by emulating the ideal image of humanity (a human being that seeks to be well-pleasing to God through its autocratic self-struggle) will ultimately lead to the possibility of divine grace, which will cherish their moral activity with divine blessedness and bliss. This clearly suggests that divine bliss is an unattainable ideal for ordinary human agents. As such, Kant notably associates it with an ideal image of human being making superhuman efforts to realize such divine pleasure and blissful state. Nevertheless, this ideal image of human being

that seeks divine bliss and blessedness through moral striving and struggle is not a purely abstract notion. Instead, Kant's formulation of such a prototype of humanity as an ideal to be constantly pursued by the ordinary agents has a firm basis within the scope of morality and ethics as a moral duty to be fulfilled. Likewise, one should avoid the assumption that such divine pleasure or bliss is an afterlife issue. In his critique of the Christian doctrine of the highest good, which entails that happiness (or *beatitudo*) is an afterlife issue (*CPrR*, 5:129; *Rel*, 6:135), Kant conversely claims that the "Kingdom of God" is "a beautiful ideal of the moral world-epoch brought about by the introduction of the true universal religion and *foreseen* in faith in its completion - one which we do not *see directly*; in the manner of an empirical completion but *have a glimpse* in the continuous advance and approximation toward the highest possible good on earth" (*Rel*, 6:136). By framing the "Kingdom of God" as a duty to be approached in an ongoing struggle, Kant makes it clear that moral striving of moral worthiness with the aid of moral faith would ultimately bring divine pleasure and bliss to agents through their pursuit of holiness and perfection. Thus, it seems that while Kant severely criticizes the notion of *beatitudo* or bliss as a possibility that can be attained by human agents, at a deeper level, he retains the notion of the pursuit of divine bliss or pleasure as an object of hope within the framework of morality or ethics insofar as agents pursue a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout this paper, I have argued that morally autocratic activity based on the pursuit of perfection and holiness, requires moral belief or faith as an active disposition of agents to aid them to cultivate virtuous disposition towards a life conduct that is morally pure and refined. I have further elaborated that moral autocracy involves self-conquest (self-overcoming), which demands agents to control their inclinations and evil and seek the purity and holiness of the moral law. In the course of such virtuous activity towards moral purity and refinement, moral belief or faith, then, emerges to play a crucial role in guiding and encouraging agents to lead a lifestyle that is well-pleasing to God, i.e., life conduct that is peculiar to the

highest good. I have pointed out that such life conduct that is grounded on the active disposition of moral belief inevitably involves overcoming a robust and uncultivated form of living and raising one's moral character and lifestyle into an elevated and sublime state. Finally, I have concluded that the deeper and broader reading of happiness in Kant's account has a eudaimonistic aspect that adds to the maximal satisfaction of one's needs and desires and includes a form of moral self-satisfaction and bliss to the extent that agents achieve perfection and holiness through their autocratic self-struggle.

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