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Kant's *Metaphysics of Permanent Rupture*: Radical Evil and the Unity of Reason

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Introduction

In *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Susan Neiman traces the history of modern philosophy – and of Kant's pivotal role in that history – along a trajectory shaped by the problem of evil rather than by the problems of knowledge, certainty, and doubt that have been the staple of standard readings of that history. She characterizes Kant's account of our human circumstances as a "metaphysic of permanent rupture" in which

> [t]he gap between nature and freedom, *is* and *ought*, conditions all human existence ... Integrity requires affirming the dissonance and conflict at the heart of experience. It means recognizing that we are never, metaphysically, at home in the world. This affirmation requires us to live with the mixture of longing and outrage that few will want to bear.[1]

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[1] S. Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 80. For a similar reading of the challenge that Kant takes reason to face, see O. O'Neill, "Reason and Autonomy in *Grundlegung* III," in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 61: "From the first sentence of the first *Critique* we are warned of the predicament of a reason that aspires to a task that it cannot achieve. Reason's failure is that it cannot give a unified account of nature and freedom. *The metaphor of the intelligible world signals the finitude, not the transcendence of human reason.*"

In this essay I plan to show how the duality that Neiman marks out as "the dissonance and conflict at the heart of experience" functions to outline the contours of a philosophical anthropology that is embedded in Kant's critical project. The spatio-temporally embodied freedom of finite human reason stands at the conceptual center of this anthropology and serves as locus for Kant's account of evil.[2] That account exhibits evil as marking a fissure that lies athwart human efforts to render fully intelligible the world that presents itself to us, in our embodied freedom, both as nature – an object for reason's theoretical inquiry – and as freedom – a field for human action shaped by reason's moral exercise.

My presentation of the path that leads to this anthropology, as well as the brief sketch of it offered in the final section, builds upon Neiman's reading of the central role that the question of evil plays in Kant's thought, but it will not directly attempt to supplement the case that she makes in favor of the faithfulness of that reading to Kant's thought. This essay is thus offered not primarily as an exercise in analyzing and reconstructing particular arguments about evil in Kant's texts but as an interpretative exploration of a central question that Neiman's reading of Kant's treatment of evil raises: Why, in the face of the intractable resistance evil presents to human efforts to render it intelligible, is it important – indeed, even necessary – for the integrity of our humanity to persist in those efforts?[3] The reason that Neiman proposes to justify such persistence – "To abandon the attempt to comprehend evil is to abandon every basis for confronting it, in thought as in practice"[4] – is more than an expression of a moral concern that, if we cease to engage in intellectual efforts to make sense of evil, we eventually will falter and ultimately fail in our moral efforts to resist and overcome it. Neiman's remark also expresses an incisive understanding

[2] Kant's discussions of "incentives," though not explicitly framed in terms of embodiment, nonetheless artiçulate a central dimension of the embodied character of human freedom: Our freedom is such that we can incorporate into maxims determining our action incentives both from reason and from inclination, which, in view of our embodiment, functions under spatio-temporal determinants. See KpV 5:71–8; R 6: 36–7, 44–52.

[3] See R 6: 47–51; KU 5: 450–3 for two important texts in which Kant underscores how the sustaining of moral effort is a function of a hope originating in the recognition of the "moral vocation" we have in virtue of our freedom.

[4] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 325.

that at stake in the question of evil for Kant is nothing more nor less than a principle that lies at the heart of his critical project: the unity of the theoretical and the practical uses of our finite human reason that is necessary for our efforts to render intelligible the world that we engage both in thought and in action.[5] The unity of reason provides our most fundamental human recourse against the power that evil has – as unintelligible surd, adamantly resistant to efforts to exact sense from it – to shatter our efforts to make sense of the world and to fracture into disarray whatever hope we may have to give meaning to our human lives. So the question needs to be posed: How is it possible for us to hold together as one – as Kant affirms we can and must for the very integrity of our humanity – these fragile powers of our reason in the face of the metaphysical rupture that evil presents?

What I thus also hope to show in this essay is how we may understand Kant's affirmation of the unity of reason as an integral feature of his account of evil and our human possibilities for overcoming it. Within that account, the unity of reason is not given beforehand but rather *enacted by the exercise of our finite freedom in resistance to evil.*[6] In the absence of that resistance, evil otherwise presents itself as thoroughly intractable to our human efforts to make sense of it as a factor in the world in which we think and act. Affirming the unity of our human uses of reason, in the face of a "metaphysical rupture" that runs both through the world and through the very makeup of our humanity, is thus recognition that reason gives us power to stand against evil: the only way to "make sense" of evil is to commit oneself to the project of resisting it. In affirming the unity of reason we affirm the power reason provides us to envision – and to act upon – ways to stand against evil by bringing together the fractured pieces of the world and of our own humanity that lie along the fissure that evil drives through our

[5] Cf. KrV "The Canon of Pure Reason," esp. A795–819/B823–47, for Kant's articulation of the unity of reason at the outset of his critical project. As is the case for many of the key aspects of that project, Kant revisits, refines, and reformulates his account at a number of later points. See S. Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) for an account of the trajectory along which Kant's account moves.

[6] That the unity of reason is enacted rather than fully given beforehand should not be surprising in view of the primacy that Kant assigns to the practical use of reason, i.e., the use of reason through which "the highest good" is to be effected. See KpV 5: 134–6.

attempts to make coherent sense of our experience of the world as, at once, nature and freedom. The unity of finite human reason is thus not simply given, nor can it be taken for granted as unproblematically attainable; it is a unity that is forged and constantly re-forged in and through human resistance to evil.

Evil and the Relentless "Why" of Reason

Kant used a variety of coordinate terms to characterize the duality which, on Neiman's account, constitutes a "dissonance and conflict at the heart of experience" that renders problematic the unity of human reason's effort to resolve it. These terms have vexed generations of sympathetic and hostile commentators alike – perhaps most famously and problematically, the distinction between "phenomenon" and "noumenon."[7] It has rarely been the case, however, that the question of radical evil that Kant articulates in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* has been pressed into service as a key interpretative guide to the contours of the fissure that he sees running through our human engagement with the world. That discussion of the moral structure of evil seems to offer little promise for interpretative purchase upon distinctions fundamental to the critical project so long as Kant's affirmation of a duality of nature and freedom is understood – as it has often been – as a response to epistemic and metaphysical issues that are taken to stand in isolation from moral and anthropological ones.[8] In

[7] See KpV 5: 5–8 for Kant's affirmation of the importance of the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon with respect to differentiating the theoretical and the practical uses of one and the same reason.

[8] The reasons for such interpretative separation are multiple. Some arise from tensions within Kant's texts about how these forms of inquiry stand to one another within the critical project, such as his claims about the primacy of the practical use of reason. Others stem from larger anti-metaphysical and a-metaphysical trajectories taken in the philosophical discourses into which Kant's work was received for much of the twentieth century, particularly among English-language commentators. Within these trajectories Kant's ethics can be read as unproblematically detachable from the metaphysical and epistemic context in which the critical project locates human moral activity; or, conversely, the metaphysical and epistemic context of the uses of reason can be understood to stand in independence from the moral character Kant attributes to the full range of human reason's engagement with the world. Still other reasons for the separation lie in the fact that Kant's most explicit and extensive treatment of evil occurs quite late in his articulation of the critical project; this suggests it might be merely a codicil to that enterprise rather than a fundamental interpretative locus.

consequence, his explicit engagement of the question of human evil in the later phases of the critical enterprise has often been considered marginal to the main conceptual and argumentative strands of his monumental endeavor to delimit the scope of human reason's engagement with the cosmos of which it is a part, in which it functions, and beyond which it drives itself to aspire.

This section will thus dispute such relegation of Kant's treatment of evil to a minor role in his critical philosophy. It takes its cue from Neiman's re-reading of the history of modern philosophy, which makes the case that evil poses questions about the intelligibility of the world that are even more basic than those that have been engaged under the heading of "the problem of evil" by the varied religious and secular forms of modern theodicy. Evil presents a problem so fundamental to the efforts of human reason to render the world intelligible – including efforts of a reason disciplined to function within the self-imposed limits of a Kantian critique – that it makes the standard modern distinctions among the genres of philosophical inquiry break down:

> Every time we make the judgment *this ought not to have happened*, we are stepping onto a path that leads straight to the problem of evil. Note that it is as little a moral problem as it is a theological one. One can call it the point at which ethics and metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics meet, collide and throw up their hands. At issue are questions about what the structure of the world must be like for us to think and act within it.[9]

On the deeply ruptured conceptual terrain she sees as the philosophical inheritance that modernity has bequeathed to us from the efforts of its thinkers – including those of Kant – to make sense of evil,

[9] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 5. See KpV 5: 146–8 ("On the Wise Adaptation of the Human Being's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation") for one text in which Kant engages the issue of "what the structure of the world must be like for us to think and act in it" in a way that suggests the aptness of Neiman's characterization of the problem of evil as "the point at which ethics and metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics meet, collide and throw up their hands." Kant argues here that if the moral structure of the world were transparent to the theoretical use of human reason, it would become impossible for us to lead morally worthy lives; we would do what is right in view of the reward we know accrues to it, rather than in view of recognizing that its rightness makes it fit for us to do. This is part of what Neiman calls "one of his greater arguments: if we knew that God existed, freedom and virtue would disappear" (Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 327). See KrV A818–19/B846–7.

Neiman offers two tropes to orient us, first, to what the fractured world of the aftermath of modernity "is like" and, second, to the manner in which we must "think and act within" that world. The first trope – which stands for what the world "is like" – is "homeless." She offers this to frame our human circumstances of a "conceptual helplessness" in the face of evil that seems to have taken intellectual hold in the aftermath of the massive horrors that humans have inflicted on each other since at least the start of the twentieth century – and continue to do so in the twenty-first. The second – which stands for how we must "think and act" in the world – is the insistent "Why?" of a child's questioning. She offers this as a model for the hope in which we are called to persist as we seek our human way through the inhospitable terrain of a disenchanted world. In keeping with the remark in her first chapter – "Immanuel Kant has already appeared in this book, and will accompany it to the end"[10] – Neiman imparts to these tropes a tonality resonant with the regulative demand for intelligibility that Kant understood to be at work in the principle of sufficient reason: "that the *is* and the *ought* should coincide,"[11] that "the real should become the rational."[12]

The two tropes around which Neiman centers her account of evil thereby function as coordinates, rooted in Kant's articulation of the practical use of reason, for locating the source of the fault line running through human experience, as well as the dynamics that shape its contours, within the ambit of the exercise of finite human freedom as it is embodied into the contingency of the spatio-temporal world. This line demarcates the fracturing of human intents, purposes, and meanings as they move athwart the radical contingency that, as Neiman notes, the workings of nature present to us as the context in which we strive to make sense of the world and to satisfy our aims within it:

> our power over the consequences of our actions is really very small[13] ... The gap between our purposes and a nature that is indifferent to them leaves the world with an almost unacceptable structure.[14]

[10] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 61.

[11] Ibid., p. 322.

[12] Ibid., p. 323. See KrV A542–57/B570–85 for an extensive discussion of the regulative use of reason precisely with respect to judgments regarding what "is" and what "ought to be."

[13] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 74.

[14] Ibid., p. 75. In the section of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* noted above (n. 3), Kant articulates this gap in terms of a "righteous" unbeliever (explicitly mentioning

In addition to providing bearings on the fault line between "is" and "ought" upon which evil confounds human intent, each trope also captures a distinctly different modulation – one resonant and one dissonant – sounded in Kant's claims and hopes for the reason that is relentless in its pursuit of unity across the fault line demarcating what "is" and what "ought to be."[15] The insistent "Why?" of the questioning child is powered by a dogged expectation that all will, in the end, fit together in measured order. The sense that we are "homeless," a sense that, at its deepest level, the world cares not to welcome us – because, it seems, the world *is such as not to care at all* – draws us into a din where all that there is may turn out to be only unrelieved, terrifying dissonance. Attention in turn to each trope – the child's insistent "Why?" in the rest of this section, "homeless" in the next – and to the modulation each displays will provide markers along which this essay will then track the route that human reason hopes to open by persisting in the one effective mode it has for forging moral sense from and in a world fractured by evil: steadfast resistance. This route is one along which we may start to open a space upon which to learn how, even in the absence of a lasting "home" provided by the world as its "is," to make one another "at home" by welcoming each other in all our human

Spinoza) who experiences the indifference of nature even to persistent human moral efforts (KU 5: 452): "But his effort is limited; and from nature he can, to be sure, expect some contingent assistance here and there, but never a law-like agreement in accordance with constant rules (like his internal maxims are and must be) with the ends to act in behalf of which he still feels himself bound and impelled. Deceit, violence and envy will always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable and benevolent; and the righteous ones besides himself that he will encounter will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, which pays no attention to all that, to all the evils of poverty, illness and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth and will always remain thus until one wide grave engulfs them all together (whether honest or dishonest, it makes no difference here) and flings them, who were capable of having believed themselves to be the final end of creation, back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn."

[15] Charles Taylor is another interpreter who sees Kant's project fundamentally engaged with a "fault line" between reason and nature: "Just because it is a theory of freedom, Kantian moral philosophy finds it hard to ignore the criticism that the rational agent is not the whole person. This didn't lead Kant to want to alter his definition of autonomy, but he did see that the polar opposition between reason and nature was non-optimal; that the demands of morality and freedom point towards a fulfillment in which nature and reason would once more be in alignment." C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 385.

circumstances in a manner befitting the shared fragility and dignity of our finite, embodied human freedom.[16]

Both tropes – which Neiman takes to serve as indispensable coordinates for orienting ourselves not just to the fault line, but also to the hope by which to shape efforts to traverse it – have their origin in her Kantian reading of "the principle of sufficient reason" as a dynamic of practical intelligibility. This principle articulates reason's drive not simply to make sense of the world, but to make sense of the world as *a field that human moral activity has power to shape.* It is a demand for making sense that reason places with at least equal force upon our decision and action as it does upon our thought: "Belief that there may be reason in the world is a condition of the possibility of our being able to go on in it."[17] She characterizes this demand as "transcendental," i.e., as "located neither in normative nor descriptive space"[18]; it is one that lies inseparably at the root of both metaphysics and ethics as demands for making sense of the world that we, as beings endowed with the powers of finite reason, place upon ourselves. Inasmuch as reason, as practical, determines our possibilities for acting in a world so shot through with radical contingency, what we do, not merely what we think, in response to that contingency is crucial to the project of "making sense": "Belief that the world should be rational is the basis for every attempt to make it so."[19]

How the trope of the child's persistent "Why?" issues from the principle of sufficient reason understood as a human dynamic demanding that the world make sense is not too difficult to see:

The urge to greet every answer with a question is one we find in children not because it's childish, but because it's natural. Once you begin the

[16] Kant's discussion of "the cosmopolitan right to hospitality" both in *Perpetual Peace* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* suggests that recognition of our common human identity also involves respect for the very difference and otherness of "the foreigner" that, were we to follow self-protective inclination, we would otherwise make the basis for hostility: EF 8: 357; MS 6: 352–3.

[17] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 324.

[18] Ibid., p. 323. See KrV:A808/B836: "I call the world as it would be if it were in conformity with all moral laws (as it **can** be in accordance with the **freedom** of rational being and **should** be in accordance with the necessary laws of **morality**) a **moral world**. This is conceived thus far merely as an intelligible world, since abstraction is made therein from all conditions (ends) and even from all hindrances to morality in it (weakness or impurity of human nature). Thus far it is therefore a mere, yet practical, idea, which really can and should have its influence on the sensible world, in order to make it agree as far as possible with this idea."

[19] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 325.

search for knowledge, there is no obvious place to stop. The fact that the desire for omniscience cannot be met does not make it either foolish or pathological. Indeed, it is embodied in the principle of sufficient reason itself.[20]

Less immediately evident, however, is the manner in which the *moral* intelligibility of the world is at stake in such persistent questioning. Neiman elucidates this point by noting that the child's persistent questioning is directed not simply at discovering how the world works but at finding reasons why the world works the way it does:

> The principle of sufficient reason expresses the belief that we can find a reason for everything the world presents. It is not an idea we derive from the world, but one that we bring to it ... Kant called it a regulative principle ... Children display it more openly than adults because they have been less often disappointed. They will continue to ask questions even after hearing the impatient answer – *Because that's the way the world is.* Most children remain adamant: *But why is the world like that, exactly?* The only answer that will truly satisfy is this one: *Because it's the best one.* We stop asking why when everything is as it should be.[21]

The child's persistent "Why?" is thus a marker of human reason's engagement with the fissure that runs between the world as it is and the world as it should be. As we explore that fissure – especially in the light of disappointment that the world too often turns out to be not as it should be – we begin to find that the fissure also runs within us, for we find ourselves standing on each side of the fracture between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. The principle of sufficient reason thus also articulates a drive to find ways to bring into alignment the fundamental duality we experience in seeking to make full sense of the world our reason engages: On one hand, reason in its theoretical use, renders the world to us in terms of causal dynamism in which we are ourselves inextricably enmeshed; on the other hand, as moral agents, despite those capacities to grasp the causal dynamism of the world as it is, reason in its practical use renders the world to us in terms of possibilities for shaping the world in accord with what it

[20] Ibid., p. 320. See also P 4: 367: "That the human mind would someday entirely give up metaphysical investigations is just as little to be expected, as that we would someday gladly stop all breathing so as never to take in impure air."

[21] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 322.

should be, possibilities to which the world as it is all too often manifests itself as recalcitrant.

Neiman thus frames the overall question of intelligibility – and the unity of the reason that seeks to make sense of the world and the place of humanity within it – as a question of our human "capacities to find and create meaning in the world" and pointedly asks whether they are "adequate to a world that seems determined to thwart them?"[22] She takes these capacities to function in terms of the distinction that Kant makes between the theoretical and the practical uses of reason, i.e., the former as the manner in which reason engages the world as it "is," the latter as reason engages the world as it "ought to be."

Yet, even as she follows Kant in taking the theoretical and the practical to be uses of one and the same reason upon one and the same world, the different forms of reason's engagement with the world make manifest to us a distance between "is" and "ought" that stands as a challenge to reason's fundamental task of rendering that world fully intelligible. The world "as it is" presents itself to the theoretical use of reason as the "appearance" of a nature that in its causal dynamism works, at best, indifferently to the ends and purposes that the practical use of reason proposes as befitting the dignity of our finite human freedom. Neiman notes:

> It would be easy to acknowledge that not controlling the natural world is part of being human, were it not for the fact that *things go wrong*. The thought that the rift between freedom and nature is neither error nor punishment but the fault line along which the universe is structured can be a source of perfect terror.[23]

So as mightily as Kant labors in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as well as his occasional essays on history, politics, and culture, to legitimate the application of categories of purpose to the workings of nature, that legitimation is not put forth as the basis for a claim about how the world "is": Whatever purposes, if any, the world of nature may have as it "is" – "in-itself" – remain opaque in principle to the theoretical use

[22] Ibid., p. 318; see also p. 322: "the drive to seek reason in the world – even, or especially, at the points where it seems most absent – is as deep a drive as any we have."

[23] Ibid., pp. 80–1.

of finite human reason.[24] Even more important for Kant's account of evil and for the anthropology of finite freedom that forms its context, is the fact that whatever *moral* purposes we may think are necessary for our making sense of the world are not features *of* the world but rather a demand that our reason *brings to* the world. Bringing to the world as it "is" the demand of practical reason to fashion the world as it "ought to be" is central to what Kant affirms as the primacy of the practical use of reason.[25] The exercise of our finite reason brings those purposes to the world not in the mode of theoretical knowledge but in the mode of a practical hope that, by heeding the dictate of practical reason to do as we ought, we make it possible for the world to have, in a least some small measure, a moral order of which it would otherwise seem devoid.

The Unity of Reason: Finding Home on Fractured Ground

This point about the primacy of the practical use of reason provides a crucial link for elucidating the bearing of the principle of sufficient reason upon the trope "homeless." "Homeless" is a figure that, in the first instance, expresses how the world as it is presents itself as seemingly inhospitable to the hopes to which the principle of sufficient reason gives rise about the sense and meaning that we may exact from that world. It is also a figure, however, of how *we* engage a world that presents us with such a blank and bleak face. This figure thus also indicates a central formative mode for our *use* of the principle of sufficient reason in such a context. It situates our finite, embodied rational agency upon the radically fractured metaphysical and moral terrain upon which reason is nonetheless called to enact, precisely in the face

[24] See also *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, KU 5: 181–7, especially 186–7: "The power of judgment thus also has itself an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature, though only in a subjective respect by means of which it prescribes a law, not to nature (as autonomy), but to itself (as heautonomy) for reflection on nature, which one could call the **law of the specification of nature** with regard to its empirical laws, which it does not cognize in nature *a priori* but rather assumes in behalf of an order of nature cognizable for our understanding in the division that it makes of its universal laws when it would subordinate a manifold of particular laws to these."

[25] Important affirmations of the primacy of practical reason can be found in KrV "The Canon of Pure Reason," Second Section, KrV A804–19/B832–47; KpV 5: 119–21, 236–8.

of such "dissonance and conflict," a unity to its uses. As is the case for the insistent "Why?" reason's demand for intelligibility as expressed in the trope "homeless" is primarily "practical": It bears on how, in the world that "is," we are to shape what we do to accord with the world as it "ought to be." Reason's demand bears most centrally upon the manner in which our responses to the question "What ought we to do?" appropriately engage the exercise of our practical (moral) reason, i.e., our freedom, in a world in which the course of modernity and its aftermath has made manifest – even more so than was manifest to Kant – that, in the world as it "is," we stand "homeless." That world runs its course indifferently – perhaps even inhospitably – to human efforts to exact from it – under the insistent pressure of asking "Why?" – a meaning that can be ordered to our purposes.

On this terrain, the principle of sufficient reason thus becomes that in virtue of which we, as embodied agents of reason, seek to *enact a unity to reason* that will at least make possible a space for us to dwell with one another on such inhospitable terrain: the fact that the world turns an inhospitable face to us does not require that we be inhospitable to one another. Being "homeless" need not be inevitable.[26] Reason's demand that moral intelligibility be brought to the world is inextricably united with its demand for a metaphysical intelligibility of the world as the place we inhabit as embodied agents of finite reason. We enact the unity of reason in meeting the demand of the practical use of reason that we act to make the world as it "ought to be." This trope thus provides a signpost to an important feature of the anthropology of finite freedom at work in Kant's account of evil: This is an anthropology of the hope that finite reason offers us for putting back together what evil has fractured, a hope that has the sturdiness that

[26] The principle that Kant invokes in *The Metaphysics of Morals* with respect to envisioning our human capacities for making peace possible over against the putative "inevitability" of war is instructive here. Being "homeless" is no more inevitable than war, once we grasp (in hope) the possibilities that lie within our power *for making it not so*: "Now morally practical reason pronounces in us its irresistible veto: *There is to be no war*, neither war between you and me in the state of nature nor war between us as states ... So the question is no longer whether perpetual peace is something real or a fiction, and whether we are not deceiving ourselves in our theoretical judgments when we assume that it is real. Instead, we must act as if it is something real, though perhaps it is not; we must work toward establishing perpetual peace and the kind of constitution that seems to us most conducive to it ... and even if the complete

comes only from a recognition of the fragility of freedom from which it issues.

The two tropes are thus connected to one another through the practical use of our finite reason. Exploration of this connection will provide a context for subsequently articulating the centrality of the fragility of freedom for the anthropology at work in our enactment of the unity of reason as resistance to evil. The persistent "Why?" – which Neiman understands as a demand of reason that we refuse only at the peril of demeaning our humanity – is one that we now pose in conditions that, more starkly than did Kant, we must confront as "homeless," bereft of secure places on which to anchor a comprehensive, abiding intelligibility that makes sense beyond question of our human place in such a world. The conditions of human life at the outset of the twenty-first century provide little from which we may glean firm assurance that we have yet learned how to make the space on which we dwell a fitting "home" for one another as fellow humans, let alone for other living beings with whom we share the earth. The workings of the world of nature provide little guarantee – and we seem to provide even less to one another in the social worlds we construct to affirm "our" identity against "their" identity – that we have mastered the skills to share, in a modicum of peace, even some little space side by side with fellow human beings who are not "us." It has also started to become more apparent that even modest expectations we may have about our own security and the well-being of the generations to succeed us may fail to be satisfied on a planet on which the effects of our resource depleting human modes of living increasingly crowd and even render uninhabitable the life space of many fellow creatures.

Locating the connection between the trope of "homeless" and the principle of sufficient reason in the practical use of reason thus suggests that "homeless" stands as more than just a trenchant image of the influence that understandings (and misunderstandings) of Kant's treatment of practical reason have historically had on later depictions of the character and circumstances of the exercise of autonomous human moral agency. There may very well be sound reasons for taking Kant's articulation of "autonomy" as central to the character of moral

realization of this objective always remains a pious wish, still we are not deceiving ourselves in adopting the maxim of working incessantly toward it" (MS 6: 354–5).

reasoning and agency to stand at the head of a stream of intellectual history leading (most notably through Hegel) to later claims about "alienation" as a defining feature of the human condition and for which "homeless" could then be taken as one apt descriptor.[27] Yet Neiman's discussion implies that this trope has a connection to Kant's thought about the form that human finite reason takes that is conceptually stronger than what may be provided by even indisputable claims of historical influence. I take her to be at least suggesting – if not advancing the first stages of an argument – that this trope aptly expresses a central dynamic in Kant's understanding of the demand of human finite reason that we render the world intelligible: the trope is apt inasmuch as reason's demand for intelligibility arises in virtue of its engagement with "homeless" *as the given condition from which* our human efforts to make sense of the world begin and as the *condition to which* the demand for moral intelligibility is addressed.[28] The principle of sufficient reason is "reason's attempt to be at home in the world,"[29] an effort that arises when what "is" and what "ought to be" fail to coincide:

> For as Kant implied, but never actually stated, behind the principle of sufficient reason itself is the assumption that the *is* and the *ought* should coincide. The principle of sufficient reason starts its work where they fail to meet. When the world is not as it should be, we begin to ask why.[30]

On Kant's account human reason's demand for making sense is both relentless – there is always another "Why?" to pose – and thoroughgoing – it seeks to put the response to each "Why?" into connection with every other one. Neiman faults Kant, however, for confounding the first with the second: "Kant's greatest error was to mistake the

[27] The Kantian roots of such an "alienation" – and the "liberation" that it consequently demands – lie in the central value given to autonomy and the respect due to it. Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 363–7.

[28] O'Neill comments upon Kant's image of building a shelter (KrV A707/B735) to characterize the project of critique: "Like Descartes, Kant uses metaphors of construction to explain his view of philosophical method; but he starts with a more down to earth view of building projects ... The result is in some ways disappointing, especially when matched against the rationalist ambition to build 'a tower would reach the heavens' ... We may not need a lofty tower that reaches the heavens, but we need at least a modest cottage" (O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, pp. 11–12).

[29] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 323. [30] Ibid., p. 322.

demand for reason with the demand for system."[31] With Kant she thus affirms the unity of reason, but distinguishes that unity from a "will to system." To the extent that the latter became identified as "the heart of rationalism," she considers it to be "the miserable, unspoken legacy of German philosophy."[32] As we shall see in the next and final section, recognition that the locus for "reason's attempt to be at home in the world" is constituted by a dynamic of "fracture" rather than of "system" is crucial to the articulation of an anthropology of finite freedom adequate for moral engagement of the conditions of intelligibility provided by a "metaphysic of permanent rupture." Such an anthropology, I will argue, provides the context in which the practical use of human finite reason can be the locus from which to shape a fragile but nonetheless effective hope that envisions and enacts possibilities for rendering humanly habitable for one another the fractured terrain of modernity and its aftermath.

Freedom: The Sturdy Fragility of Practical Reason

Even as she rejects Kant's association of reason's demand for making sense with a demand for system, Neiman strongly affirms Kant's view that satisfaction of the demand for intelligibility must exhibit a unity to the theoretical and the practical uses of reason, a unity in which practical use has primacy:

> Belief that the world should be rational is the basis of every attempt to make it so .:. the demand that reason and reality come to meet is the source of whatever progress occurs in actually bringing them together. Without such a demand, we would never feel outrage – nor assume the responsibility for change to which outrage sometimes leads.[33]

Human reason places its demand for making sense upon a world that, even as it presents itself as yielding an intelligible order of causal necessity to the theoretical use of reason, stands resistant in its radical contingency to yielding a stable unity of "is" and "ought" that is at the heart of the demand for moral intelligibility required by and for the practical use of reason. Human finite reason's engagement with the world as a demand for making sense of it all – including making sense

[31] Ibid., p. 326. [32] Ibid. [33] Ibid., pp. 325–6.

morally – can thus result only in partial satisfaction. To the extent that it has yet to result in making full moral sense of the world as a whole (including the inconstancy of our own moral efforts within it) pressing the demand seems an exercise in futility that offers grounds for contesting the primacy Kant assigns to the practical use of reason. If we cannot make moral sense of all of it, why continue efforts to make moral sense of any of it? Let us settle for making sense of the world "as it is" and be done with it. Perhaps the most we can expect is to figure out how, for the most part, the world presenting itself to our senses works; then, in emulation of Hume, we may put aside as idle any question about what purpose, if any, we serve as part of its workings. Selective attention to the principle of sufficient reason might make life less vexing, at least for those for whom the workings of the world have provided more fortunate circumstances.

Against this objection, the suggestion that we untangle human reason's demand for making sense from a demand for system – which seems a way to re-articulate Kant's distinction between metaphysics as a disposition and metaphysics as a science – provides a basis for understanding the principle of sufficient reason in terms of Kant's affirmation of the unity of reason: the principle of sufficient reason is the juncture at which the moral and metaphysical demands for making sense of the world as a whole meet. It is at peril to the integrity of reason embodied in our humanity that we ignore either side of its demand or the dynamics of their juncture with each other. This suggestion, moreover, provides a needed gloss for understanding Kant's affirmation of the primacy of the use of the practical within the unity of human finite reason. Kant's affirmation of the unity of the reason that demands we "make sense" is not also an affirmation that the finite reason that makes such a demand will finally reach the comprehension it seeks of how it "all" makes sense. Articulation of this limitation to reason's demands is central to Kant's enterprise of critique, which he sees precisely as a discipline for effecting human finite reason's self-appropriation of this limitation in each form of its exercise. The practical use of reason has primacy in this regard in that this use of our finite reason most clearly manifests the difference between "making sense" and "making system": What the practical use of our reason enjoins here and now is a making of "moral sense" with regard to specific actions and their maxims – which, for Kant, always require

resistance to a maxim of self-preference, the fundamental form in which evil presents itself to finite reason – not a comprehensive making moral sense "of it all."[34] The latter is an object of hope – which Kant takes as rationally founded – but for the immediate exercise of practical reason such hope is as much an acute awareness of the *absence* of "moral sense" in the totality of the world as it is an expression of confidence that our moral action helps bring the world closer to being as it ought to be.

To the extent that we confound – as many of Kant's successors tended to do – reason's demand for making sense with a demand for system, we are likely to overlook fragility, fracture, and incompleteness as central to the anthropological structure of the moral freedom that is the practical use of our finite reason. We are likely to miss that it is a particularly important consequence of a central point that Neiman sees Kant making insistently:

> Of the many distinctions Kant took wisdom and sanity to depend on drawing, none was deeper than the difference between God and the rest of us. Kant reminds us as often as possible of all that God can do and all we cannot. Nobody in the history of philosophy was more aware of the number of ways we can forget it.[35]

This consequence – simply put – is that while "making sense of it all" lies always beyond our grasp, that does not doom this human project to a futility that renders pointless our specific efforts to make sense of "this" or of "that." We still may make sense of the part, and put various parts together, even though comprehensive grasp of the whole ever exceeds our farthest horizon. In the exercise of the theoretical use of our reason, this sense for the limitation of reason can be a spur to ever widening the field of theoretical inquiry to find

[34] P. Guyer, "The Strategy of Kant's Groundwork," in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 207–31, notes that in the *Groundwork* Kant had already identified giving priority to a maxim of self-preference as fundamental to the structure of what he will later term, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, "radical evil." See G 4: 424: "If we now attend to ourselves in any transgression of a duty, we find that we do not really will that our maxim should become a universal law, since that is impossible for us, but that the opposite of our maxim should instead remain a universal law, only we take the liberty of making an exception to it for ourselves (or just for this once) to the advantage of our inclination."

[35] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 75.

out how and why the world works as it "is": recognition that efforts to "make sense" of the spatio-temporal workings of the world will never be complete is far more likely to be a source of the exhilaration that prods further inquiry than a cause of the discouragement that leads to its abandonment.

It seems the opposite, however, for the exercise of reason's practical use. In that case, our inability to "make moral sense of it all" in the face of evil has had a variety of consequences, one of which has been what Neiman notes as the virtual abandonment of inquiry about evil as a central intellectual problem by much of twentieth-century philosophy: "If any one feature distinguishes twentieth century philosophy from its predecessors, it is the absence of explicit discussion of the problem of evil."[36] Of at least equal importance is the fact that the breakdown of distinctions that once offered promise for headway in making sense of evil – most notably the one between physical and moral evil that makes possible the location of evil in human intention – provides an impetus for abandoning any hope that we have power to do more than limited and local "damage control" in the face of evil that presents itself as, at once, capricious and inevitable. It seems that it will always be the case that (at least some) "things go wrong," that, at best, justice is (mostly) served imperfectly and far too often not well at all, that it is purely contingent for what "is" and what "ought to be" to converge and coincide. Discouragement about the possibility of contending with the "whole" of evil may lead to reluctance to contend with any particular instance beyond those few that appear most tractable.

Yet, as Neiman astutely notes, the fissure between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be, articulated as Kant's distinction between reason and nature, is not equivalent to the distinction between physical evil and moral evil that has been a staple for many of the arguments over theodicy. One line of argument she pursues in *Evil in Modern Thought* is that this last distinction has lost much of whatever usefulness it may once have had in consequence of the ways in which modernity has apparently accomplished a thoroughgoing naturalization of the human as itself a product of the processes of the world. What once looked to be a promising strategy for properly

[36] Ibid., p. 288.

apportioning responsibility for evil between the human and the divine has lost effectiveness once full realization that "God is dead" finally took hold in the main precincts of Western intellectual culture, and humanity could thus be conceived as itself nothing more than one more part of nature:

> The very naturalism that was the pride of those who sought to disenchant the world undermines the very distinctions they sought to establish. The more human beings become part of the natural world, the more we, like earthquakes, become one more unfortunate fact about it. The more evil itself seems explicable in terms of natural processes, the more nature itself is implicated.[37]

When there no longer is a God whose ways need justification by a theodicy, the "anthropodicy" that takes its place almost inevitably slides into a "cosmodicy." Having first disenchanted the workings of the world of nature into indifference to human purposes, we have proved ourselves no better at clearing space upon which to welcome one another's flourishing:

> Science may have abolished the sense that the world is inhabited by forces with will of their own, and in this way reduced the *unheimlich*. But the price is enormous, for all of nature stands condemned. Human beings themselves become walking indictments of creation.[38]

Bleak as Neiman's assessment may initially seem, it nonetheless helps to articulate a feature of the anthropology of the embodied freedom of finite human reason that serves well as a primary link to Kant's metaphysics of "permanent rupture." The human role in this ruptured landscape is to exercise in steadfast hope the fragile power our finite freedom has for bringing what "ought to be" to bear upon what "is." This fragility of human freedom is embodied in conditions of spatio-temporal finitude. It orients the larger anthropological framework of the critical project that Kant constructs to delimit the unique position human beings occupy in the cosmos as the embodied juncture of nature and freedom.[39] As embodied, our freedom is rendered

[37] Ibid., p. 236. [38] Ibid., pp. 236–7.

[39] For a more extensive treatment of the manner in which Kant understands human finite reason to stand at the juncture of nature and freedom see, P. J. Rossi, S.J., *The*

fragile not simply by the inconstancy of intention that Kant marks out as the "inversion of our maxims," nor only by the inattention and distraction with which we thoughtlessly descend into evil's banality. It is also rendered fragile by a vulnerability of body and spirit to violence and violation.

Yet within that larger framework, *the fragility of human freedom stands coordinate to its dignity*: As we each stand alone, our embodied state provides thin and tenuous protection to our core dignity of spirit; its ultimate bulwark is mutual recognition, the respect we accord each other for the fragile and vulnerable freedom we each embody. Kant's recognition of the inestimable dignity of the power of human freedom to effect good is equally a recognition that such power resides in agents who are themselves profoundly fragile, whose exercise of that power is correspondingly fragile, yet who are capable of empowering each other's freedom in mutual respect for one another's fragility. Exercising finite human freedom in a manner responsive and responsible to both its dignity and its fragility empowers human agents to bring the "ought" of a moral order of mutual respect to bear upon the "is" of the world. It is thus within and by the fragility of human finite reason that the unity of reason is enacted. The enactment of the unity of reason brings forth conditions that open possibilities for freedom and nature to work together effectively for the attainment of "the highest good." The human power for bringing about good in a world of shattered meaning thus thoroughly pertains to, and is rooted in, the fragmentary, fragile exercise of a finite embodied practical reason.

Social Authority of Reason: Kant's Critique, Radical Evil, and the Destiny of Humankind (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 19–65.