Macalester Journal of Philosophy

Volume 7
Issue 1 *Spring, 1997*

Article 2

11-22-2010

Kant and Romanticism

Gabriel Bell
Macalester College

Gabriel Bell

"Kant and Romanticism"

Northup Frye once wrote that "the shadow of Kant's [philosophy] falls across the whole of the Romantic movement" (Frye, 84). Indeed, it is commonly accepted among Romantic literary scholars that the writings of Immanuel Kant were deeply influential on Romantic ideas and urges. Many Romantic poets and philosophers found Kant's work intriguing and persuasive, including Coleridge, Schiller, J. G. Herder, and August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel (Orsini, Walzel). But one question which has received far less attention from either the philosophic or the literary community is, to what degree can Kant's critical philosophy *itself* be called Romantic? The reason for this is understandable. Most people who study Kant are students of philosophy and therefore tend to be more interested in the 'truth' of Kant's philosophical claims and care less how his treatises may be read in the light of contemporary literary movements. But the consequence of ignoring this aspect of philosophical writing is to miss how readers' preconceived notions color their interpretations of Kant's work. Philosophy students tend to approach Kant's work with the knowledge that it is considered to be the apotheosis of Enlightenment thinking. This has caused Kant scholars to often focus narrowly on the Enlightenment themes of reason and rationality (O'Neill), thus missing broader and more profound themes. One of those often missed themes, I will argue, is Romanticism.

Kant is traditionally thought of as a devoted member of the European Enlightenment. Kant's admiration for Newtonian physics and philosophy and his dedication to the German *Aufklärung* have tended to close the door on any dispute over whether to classify Kant's work as part of the Enlightenment. The driving force behind much of Kant's work was to come up with a working compromise between Christian Wolff's deterministic philosophy and the Pietists' rejection of Wolff's determinism, which demanded a philosophy that accounted for both morality and freedom. Kant believed that if he was successful, he "could rescue the *Aufklärung's* faith in reason... [by providing] a rational justification for our moral and religious beliefs, and thus a middle path between skepticism and fideism" (Beiser, 30). Though Kant was challenging the Enlightenment orthodoxy of his day, his work is still considered very much part of the "Enlightenment project" (O'Neill, 281). In this paper I wish to challenge, at least partially, the assumption that Kant's work should only be read as part (though a recalcitrant part) of the German Enlightenment. I hope to show that Kant's philosophy has deep and profound Romantic themes which contradict this traditional "Enlightenment project" view. To prove this, I will first define what I mean by "Romantic" by explicating two themes: the Romantic movement inward, and the search for the ineffable. I will then concentrate on the historical circumstances which account for Kant's Romanticism. Finally I will outline an interpretation of Kant's critical work which explicates the parallels between it and Romanticism.

The Concept of Inwardness

Isaiah Berlin, in his essay *The Apotheosis of Romantic Will*, cites the "movement inward" as a theme central to the Romantic movement. In the following section I will expound on this concept of inwardness which will be important in my linking of Kant to Romantic themes.

History of Influence

The German Romantic movement inward has specific historic origins (Berlin, 218-219). Germany in the first hundred and fifty years before the mid-eighteenth century shared little in the great cultural renaissance of the west, which had seemingly reached its apex with the Enlightenment. Berlin writes:

> [Germany's] cultural achievement after the Reformation is not comparable to that of the Italians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of Spain and England in the age of Shakespeare and Cervantes, of the Low Countries in the seventieth century, least of all France, the France of poets, soldiers, statesmen, thinkers, which in the seventeenth century dominated Europe both culturally and politically (Berlin, 218).

And with regards to liberalism and the ethical teachings of the Enlightenment, Germany lagged far behind. Put bluntly by the German historian Theodore Hamerow:

> In search for a theory of state expressing its civic aspirations, the bourgeoisie came upon liberalism, which [much of Europe] had constructed as a new philosophy of man and society out of the practical experiences of English Parliamentarianism and the ethical teachings of the Age of Enlightenment. The Holy Roman Empire, economically backward and politically divided, had contributed little to its development (Hamerow, 60).

One would be hard pressed to give an example of a significant cultural contribution which Germany made in the seventeenth century. Moreover, though Germany may not have had much to offer by way of ostentatious achievement, they were certainly aware of their supposed inferior status among the competing European provinces (Hamerow, 60-61). Because of this sense of their own "relative backwardness," of being considered Europe's beer-swilling mass of peasants, and having suffered under French cultural condescension and scorn, Germany underwent a collective physiological reaction to their position. The Germans at first imitated their French neighbors and then rebelled against them. One of the upshots of this social phenomenon was the movement called Pietism. Disgusted by the sycophantic attitude taken by the Germans toward the French before the Enlightenment, the Pietists turned inward, demanding exaltation of the German

language and culture.[1] The Pietists rejected the French's utilitarian and secular notion of morality as represented by Voltaire and the *Encyclopedists* (Walsh, 5).[2]. According to the Pietists, what made the German people equal to the French, if not superior, was their inward purity: that even without all the fancy intellectual accoutrements adorned by the French, the German people knew moral right from wrong, pure from impure, with unrivaled authenticity. Later Fichte and other Romantic philosophers would pick up on the idea of expunging French influence, advocating a purification of German culture (Kedourie). This movement away from the exaltation of utilitarian pleasure and worldly (or outer) achievement to a philosophy based on inward purity is what that may be seen as the historic Romantic movement inwards.

Kant grew up in Königsberg, a province of Prussia, and was educated by the Pietists. His philosophy reflects the sociological attitude of a people culturally humiliated. The Germans moved within in order to escape this humiliation thrust upon them by the rest of Europe, and Kant's moral philosophy reflects that desire. I will discuss Kant's philosophical disgust with the exaltation of pleasure and outer success in the next section.

But the movement inward was not particular to the German people. Kant is an example of the extreme nature of the German search for inner sanctuary, but European Romanticism as a whole has also been characterized by the movement within.

European Romanticism and Inwardness

Romanticism should not be seen as limited to a particular historical context. Instead, it is more appropriate to view Romanticism as a set of principles which, though reaching an apex in European culture ca. 1770-1850, can be valued at any period to greater or lesser degrees. Lascelles Abercrombie stated this idea well while attempting to determine a reference for the term "Romantic":

> In dealing with [the term Romantic] I shall concern myself with the essential nature of the thing thus named by an accident throughout its whole expansion, rather than with the historic bearing of the name; with the uses of a intelligible word which criticism has found not only intelligible but necessary, rather than with the origin of these

---

[1] "The attempt of Frederick the Great in the middle of the eighteenth century to introduce French culture and a degree of rationalisation (economic and social as well as military) into East Prussia, the most backward part of his provinces, provoked a peculiarly violent reaction in this pious, semi-feudal, traditional Protestant society (which also gave birth to Herder and Kant)" (Berlin 1979, 6-7).

[2] As stated by Walsh in a modern romantic way, "The period [circa 1770-1800, the rise of German idealism] was not only notable for its glittering collection of individual talents, but for the way in which the force of eighteenth-century value and style was being sapped by the contrary [force] ... of Utilitarianism."

> uses. I shall simply assume that when we speak of Romanticism we have pickt something, however complex, out of the ruck of things and made it available for discussion. Our inquiry will be, What is the essence of the thing? How does it appear? Why does it appear in such a variety of shapes? (Abercrombie, 16)

I will use Abercrombie's approach to Romanticism: that Romanticism is a particular set of ideas and attitudes to be plucked from different time periods and historical circumstances, with the *possibility* of being valued at any point in time. One of the consistent values found in Romanticism is a striking turn inwards.

Abercrombie defines Romanticism as "a withdrawal from outer experience in order to concentrate on inner experience" (Abercrombie, 54): that "it is when inner experience assumes the first importance, still more when it assumes the only importance, in the composite fact of life, that Romanticism appears" (Abercrombie, 125). Two types of this exaltation will be the focus of this essay: (1) a claim of superiority for inner experience or the inner life, and (2) a disgust or rejection of the influence of outer contingencies or empirical factors on important aspects of life, e.g., morality or poetry.

Abercrombie uses Empedocles, the Greek philosopher and poet, as a good example of Romantic value in a period before the Romantic period proper. In his poem *Purifications*, Empedocles illustrates the superiority of inner experience by drawing a strong contrast between his inner and outer life; between "man in the state of knowing himself, and man in the state of knowing his world" (Abercrombie, 78). For Empedocles, the inner life is a philosophical necessity for the outer world to have reality. He reasons that what is external becomes an "irrelevant necessity of the senses" because inner experience, as exemplified by imagination, has the rightful claim to reality. Like Blake's claim that the "Vision or imagination is a representation of what *actually exists, really and unchangeably,*" Empedocles' "[inner experience] claims to be more real than the whole" of the outer world (Abercrombie, 82). Thus, for Empedocles, the inner life becomes superior in all aspects. Empedocles demands for one "to believe wholly in one's inmost self--to live with perfect security in one's inmost experience" (Abercrombie, 83). Kant would eventually claim absolute certainty about morality based solely on inner experience with the intelligible realm. I shall tie Kant's philosophical work to Empedocles' Romanticism more clearly further on. For now it is enough to note that Empedocles' claim for the superiority of the inner life, this exaltation of inner experience over all else, is deeply Romantic.

Percy Shelley, the English Romantic poet, exhibits a different aspect of this same movement inward: a repugnance for and rejection of any contingencies of outer experience. Shelley's Romanticism "is *a priori*, an original repugnance for the outer necessities of life in this world, for the gross embodiment enclosing a spirit longing for freedom" (Abercrombie, 113). It was Shelley's nature to "despise and loath reality" and he advocated a journey inward in order to find poetry and counter the outer necessities of a lost world. As he writes in *A Defense of Poetry,*

> we want the poetry of life--our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world--man, having inslaved the elements, remains a slave. (Wu, 963)

Thus an inverse relationship exists between the expansion of our empirical knowledge and the guiding light of "the internal world," conceivable only through poetry. But where is poetry to be found? For Shelley,

> this power arises within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed.... [Poetry] defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions .... [It] equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions ... , and it purges from our *inward sight* the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being (Wu, 965-7; italics mine).

Poetry alone, according to Shelley, can cleanse the lens of "inward sight" of the subjective and contingent empirical knowledge forced on us through the sciences run amok. Poetry frees us from the "curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions" and transports one to a familiar realm of the "internal world." Shelley advocates the abandonment of knowledge of the outer world he loathes for an inner world made clear through poetry. Here Shelley exemplifies the Romantic movement inward based on a rejection of the outer world, on a disgust with subjective exterior experience.

A good combination of these two themes are found in Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*. Keats writes that he might drink poison and

> ... leave the world unseen
> And with thee fade away into the forest dim--
> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou amoung the leaves have never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre thin, and dies,
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs (Wu, 1057).

For Keats, to die is to rid himself of this world full of "weariness, the fever, and the fret": to leave the world where his brother Tom Keats "grows pale ... and dies" of

consumption, and where to think is to "be full of sorrow." Keats hungers for "easeful death" but at the same time exalts what is eternal, the song of the "immortal bird" (Wu, 1057). The bird's song is eternal and universal, heard "In ancient days by emperor and clown," and now heard by Keats in the depth of his despair. Keats, like Shelley, disgusted with the outer world and its deprivation, exalts something higher. But Keats does not make it clear, other than symbolically, what exactly he values. For a more explicit answer, it is helpful to review one of Keats' personal correspondence. In a letter to his sisters, Keats bemoans the "world of circumstance" (Wu, 1054) which corrupts peoples' souls "in a thousand diverse ways." He also contends that deep within children lies "the spark or intelligence [which] returns to God without any identity, it having no time to learn of, and be altered ... by human passions," which have themselves been corrupted by circumstance. For Keats, a purity within--and by purity he does not mean merely the innocence of adolescence, but an eternal truth which lies within each person--is the only thing uncorrupted by the cruel and ugly external world. This rejection of the outer world intertwined with an exaltation of inner experience is a subtle combination of two profoundly Romantic themes.

Kant's own movement inward resembles that of Empedocles, Shelley, and Keats. Empedocles is convinced of the predominance of inner experience over exterior because the former always appears to be dependent on the latter. Kant's ontology, and his insistence that all appearances be contingent on the "subjective forms of intuition" (Kant 1929, 65-91), make his movement inward a necessity in order to attain anything of worth. Like Empedocles, Kant is driven inward by a philosophical necessity and is then forced to place value on the only thing left to him: inner experience. Richard Rorty has written well on this point.

> Once we give up, as Kant did, on the idea that scientific knowledge of hard fact is our point of contact with a power not ourselves, it is natural to do what Kant did: to turn inward, to find that point of contact in our moral consciousness--in our search for righteousness, rather than our search for truth (Rorty, 30).

But Kant was also a product of his time. Kant combined an exaltation of inner experience with a disgust with the contingent and empirical matters of the sensible world. As I have argued above, this disgust can be traced to the prevailing attitude in his home province of Prussia toward the empirical, utilitarian, and *philosophie*-driven French. Further on I will discuss Kant's philosophic movement inward in greater detail. Above we have clearly seen the movement inward as a hallmark of the Romantic tradition.

The Romantic Search for the Ineffable

Romantics, once turned inward, set out on a tenacious search to discover what is possible to know about inner experience. The search for the ineffable refers to a broad

quest on the part of German Romantics[3] to attain knowledge about what lies beyond immediate sensation, what is knowable about our inner experience. As Oskar Walzel wrote in his book *German Romanticism*, "The impulse of men of reason toward the infinite and eternal has always been accepted as the distinguishing mark of the Romantic generation" (Walzel, 29). While English empiricists often stopped with what they thought to be the limits of knowledge (Locke, 186; Hume, 37-53), the German Romantic desired to put persons in touch with what lay beyond those limits. Their project was indeed paradoxical: to make the inconceivable conceivable, the ineffable somehow knowable.

Entailed within any search for the ineffable is the Romantic assertion that there *exists* a realm of the ineffable. Many Romantic philosophers worked in reaction to the schism of ontology which Kant had set forth in his first critique (Frye, 84-87). Though many fought to transcend these limits, all accepted the initial premise that a split existed between the readably sensible world and a shadow world beneath. As August Wilhelm Schlegel, one of the founders of German Romanticism, writes,

> ...the beautiful is a symbolic representation of the infinite, for from this formulation it becomes clear how the infinite can appear in the finite. The infinite is not to be regarded as a philosophic fiction, nor to be sought beyond the world: it surrounds us on all sides , we can never escape it, we live, exist and are in the infinite. Admittedly we have its testimony only through reason and imagination; we can never grasp it with our senses and understanding.... The finite forms the surface of our nature, otherwise we could have no firm existence: the infinite forms its basis, otherwise we should have everywhere no reality (Schlegel, 94-5).

There are two points to be made here. First, though Schlegel uses the terms 'infinite' and 'finite' these are better understood as expressing the separation of a sensible world, the "surface of our nature," and the ineffable, what "surrounds us on all sides" but can only be grasped by "reason and imagination." These terms are intended to express a separation between a world known to our senses and one which exists behind it. For Schlegel, even though knowledge of the ineffable is not available to the senses or understanding, its existence should in no way doubted or ever be considered a "philosophic fiction." The demand for a shadow world to this one is the first theme of Romanticism expressed by Schlegel in this paragraph. We will later be able to see the parallels between Schlegel's reasoning and Kant's arguments for ontological dualism.

The second point of Schlegel's quote is a logical (though fallacious) derivative of the first: if the infinite cannot be grasped through our senses or understanding, but must exist; and if our senses, or "surface of our nature," must necessarily have a ground

---

[3] For the sake of having very specific examples, in this section I have narrowed my focus of concentration to German romantic philosophers.

in order to give us a reality; then the infinite must be the ground of all our sensations and understanding of the world. Not only does the ineffable world exist, it exists as the *grounds* of the sensible one. The significance of the ineffable as more than just the "unknown" is that this ground is in position to affect us. The ineffable, contacted through reason and imagination, is *active* in the Romantic life: thus, Schlegel's cryptic passage that the infinite "surrounds us on all sides, we can never escape it." As we will see later, this idea of the infinite world being active in the finite becomes crucial in Kant's moral philosophy through his insistence that the actions of rational agents in the phenomenal world be commanded by the dictates of the noumenal realm.

Novalis wrote that "by investing ... the finite with the semblance of infinity, thereby I Romanticize it" (Novalis, 3). Here the search for the infinite, or ineffable, is identified with what it means to be a Romantic thinker *per se*. For Novalis, one is Romantic to the degree that they invest themselves in the search for connection with the infinite. Abercrombie sees this search and the movement inward as linked. In a discussion regarding W. B. Yeats, fairies, and Romantic poetic imagery, Abercrombie writes

> ... fairies are *Romantic*, when they are the fairies a Romantic *believes* in: really and truly believes in. Romantic fairies do not take their reality from poetry; on the contrary, when they are the topic, poetry seems to draw on reality precisely because of its concern with the fairies. They do not exist because they have been imagined ... rather, imagination reaches, in them, an existence superior to anything the senses can know. That is to say, in reaching toward it, the poet is concentrating the force of the belief inward.... It becomes for him a vaporous illusion, this life of the senses; and when his fairies must *appear* ... it can only be because the images of sense have become a shadowy hinting mystery, with something formidably, inexpressibly *real* hidden beyond it. Only the inner life can respond to the presence of that reality; only by concentrating belief inwards can that reality be felt (Abercrombie, 60).

According to Abercrombie, by concentration on the inner life the Romantic's outer world becomes a "vaporous illusion," leaving only the "shadowy hinting mystery" within. But this mystery must, if anything is to have any reality or truth at all, have the "inexpressibly real hidden beyond it." For the Romantic, what was traditionally real is expunged and its replacement transcends the former's claims. Expectedly, different Romantics settle on different realities in the end. Yet what they have in common is their *yearning* to unite with the ineffable. Romantics are driven inward for truth and then refuse to be denied that end.

In the next section I will show Kant's insistence for a direct connection to the noumenal realm. Kant both moves inward and searches the intelligible realm for certainty within the sensible world. In these ways Kant is profoundly Romantic.

Kant's Movement Inward

Kant's movement inward is most clearly seen in his moral philosophy. One of the most powerful ideas contained within Kantian morality is the rejection of the contingency of morality on empirical factors. Another idea, interrelated to the first, is Kant's insistence that the inner realm is superior to the outer with regard to claims of morality. Both of these parallel my earlier comments on Romanticism and reflect Kant's own Romantic movement inward.

History of Influence

J. B. Schneewind (1992) cites the introduction of the concept of autonomy as the single greatest achievement made by Kant in his moral philosophy. No philosopher hitherto had put such unadulterated weight on the independence of persons in their moral decision-making. Schneewind breaks up Kant's concept of 'autonomy' into two components. The first is "that no authority external to ourselves is needed to constitute or inform us of the demands of morality," i.e., we do not need to be directed by any outside force in order to have full knowledge of moral demands. The second is "that in self-government we can effectively control ourselves" (Schneewind, 309). According to Kant, though the temptation to do what is immoral can often be great, we nonetheless always have "sufficient motive to act as we ought." It is hard to appreciate historically just how revolutionary Kant's ideas were. Let us briefly review the ideas of morality which were popular in Kant's day and which he eventually rejected.

As noted by Schneewind, "Kant's attribution of autonomy to every normal adult was a radical break with the prevailing views of the moral capacity of ordinary people" (Schneewind, 311). The common viewpoint on morality in Europe during the seventeenth century, and through much of the eighteenth, was what is now called the 'natural law theory.' This doctrine held several points. First, that God had granted everyone the possibility of grasping the basic tenets of morality, but that the ramifications and intricacies of such moral principles were very often beyond the grasp of ordinary intelligence. Hence there was a need for a lawyering class to work out the details of basic moral principles for the layman. More importantly, the natural lawyers held that "obligation could only be explained as necessity imposed by a law backed by threats of punishment for disobedience" (Schneewind, 312). In other words, God made man such that he could only respond to disincentives. For the natural law theorist, thinking otherwise was "not only blasphemous but foolish" (Schneewind, 312). Such a view was antithetical to Kant's demands of autonomy. But even before Kant, the natural law theorists were being challenged.

A view intended to contradict the views of the natural law theorists was that held by the British philosophers Shaftsbury and Hutchenson who placed "virtue rather than law and obligations central to morality" (Schneewind, 312). These philosophers resembled David Hume in that they believed in a natural sentiment which would guide persons to benevolent activity. If such sentiments were followed regularly, this activity would give rise to a habit of virtue in the agent. Christian Wolff, the German philosopher

whose theories on morality were the dominant ones in universities during Kant's time as an instructor, reached basically the same conclusion as Shaftsbury and Hutchenson.

Kant found neither of these conceptions of morality acceptable and rejected both on the grounds that they place morality contingent on external influences, i.e., the lawyering class and their intuitions about natural sentiment. Kant rejected the above theories on the grounds that they would place morality in a contingent, compromised position by making it dependent on "the necessity of using as a means to an end [one's own] desires" (Schneewind, 313). Whether the external influences were punishment, as proposed by the natural lawyers, or the formation of habit, as dictated by benevolent sentiment, Kant rejected all such conceptions of morality in favor of a moral motivation which he thought to be far purer. For Kant, such motivation was to come from a noumenal realm within. Kant outlines this theory of morality in his *Groundwork*.

Kant's Groundwork and the Movement Inward

In this section I will discuss Kant's moral epistemology in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, his assumptions about the concept of happiness, and his notion of the good will, in order to show explicitly how his philosophy resembles the Romantic movement inward discussed previously.

Kant uses a significant amount of the *Groundwork* in order to outline his particular epistemology. His intention is to show where he thinks the intuition of morality resides. Kant pays homage to the Greeks by asserting that Aristotle's distinctions within philosophy between physics, ethics and logic needs no improvement: except, he continues, "perhaps by adding the principle on which it is based--with the universal rules of thinking as such without regard to the differences in its object" (Kant 1953, i/387),[4] i.e., *a priori* principles of understanding. Thus, according to Kant, all knowledge has *a priori* grounds. Kant then divides knowledge into two components: material (being concerned with objects) and formal ("concerned solely with the form of understanding and reason themselves"). Kant places ethics, or moral philosophy, within the domain of material metaphysics because it deals with "determinate objects of the understanding," but demands that such a metaphysics of morals must be "scrupulously cleansed of everything empirical if we are to know how much pure reason can accomplish in both cases and from what sources it can by itself draw its own *a priori* teaching" (v/389). Kant then asks the reader a rhetorical question which summarizes what Kant saw to be the purpose of his endeavor into moral philosophy. Kant questions, "Do we not think it a matter of the utmost necessity to work out for once a pure moral philosophy completely cleansed of everything that can only be empirical?" (v/389). From the very beginning Kant places the study of morality strictly in the realm of the *a priori* and renders illegitimate all

[4] I will cite this text directly for the rest of the paper in the traditional (A/B) fashion.

attempts at discovering morality through empirical methods. By making morality wholly a product of *a priori* reasoning, Kant transfers the study of morality from the outer world to an inward reality. As Kant wrote later in Chapter II, "we cannot do morality a worse service than by seeking to derive it from examples" (29/408). Here Kant, like Empedocles, shows his preference for the inner realm; and like Shelley and Keats, shows a distaste for the empirically contingent. Both are deeply Romantic themes.

Kant further makes clear his rejection of the outer and contingent through his discussion of happiness. Kant writes that "in actual fact ... we find that the more a cultivated reason concerns itself with the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the farther does man get away from true commitment" (6/395). In order to get a sharper focus on what Kant takes for granted as an "actual fact," it is helpful to recall our earlier discussion of German history. Kant lived in Prussia, the area most rebellious to French influence. Pietists served as the most outspoken opponents of French hegemony, and it was under the influence of these Pietist teachers that Kant spent his formative years. His audience would have been very sympathetic to the notion that the endless self-indulgent and opportunistic attitudes displayed by the "enlightened" French should be rejected. Kant was able to assume that his German audience would instinctively accept the notion that the "aim of enjoying life and happiness" was a misguided one. Like Keats bemoaning the "world of circumstance," and Shelley expressing "an original repugnance for the outer necessities of life in this world," Kant, in this Romantic way, dismisses of any type of morality deriving value from happiness or any transitory outer contingency.

After developing his concept of duty, Kant sets up a strong dichotomy between the commands of duty and any concept of happiness. Kant writes that "man feels in himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty presented to him by reason as so worthy of esteem--the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, whose total satisfaction he grasps under the name of 'happiness'" (23/405). He further writes that the "quibble" between one's duty and inclination toward happiness gives rise to a "natural dialectic" which has a tendency "to pervert [duty's] very foundations and destroy their whole dignity--a result which, in the end, even ordinary human reason is unable to approve" (23/405). Thus, for Kant, happiness, or any type of contingent self-satisfaction, is placed in direct confrontation with reason and duty. The self is almost literally split in two, and the crux of Kant's morality lies in the rejection of all transitory outer stimulation in favor of inner experience.

Kant skillfully combines this rejection of outer contingencies and an exaltation of inner experience in his concept of the good will. Kant begins Chapter 1 of the *Groundwork* with his now famous exclamation that "it is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will" (1/393). Kant later qualifies this statement with the definition that "a good will is not good because of what it affects or accomplishes--because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end: it is good through its willing alone--that is good in itself" (3/394). Here Kant attempts to strip the will of every possible contingency which he thinks as unnecessary to the function of morality, which is everything except reason itself. In addition, Kant takes this purity as an undeniable fact of moral existence. Kant asserts, in a self-evident manner, that "intelligence, wit, judgment, any... *talents* of the

mind we may care to name" or "qualities of *temperament*" or "*gifts of fortune*" may be "helpful to the good will itself and make its task much easier"; nevertheless, none of these have any "inner unconditioned worth." Tellingly, Kant emphasizes this concept of "unconditioned inner worth" several times throughout the *Groundwork* (3&4/394, 60/425, 78/435, 113/455). For Kant the pure good will is a thing contained within every individual, never something to be looked for outside the self; its purity is actually dependent on its being sealed from all external influences. In parallel to the principles which characterize the Romantic movement inward, Kant shows his preference for inner experience, as opposed to the outer, and insists that the only answer to the moral difficulties in the exterior world lie exclusively with an inner realm of reason. These similarities of theme and content reveal Kant's work to be profoundly Romantic.

Kant's strong rejection of inclinations toward worldly success and pleasure has much in common with Isaiah Berlin's characterization of Romantic inclinations. Berlin describes the Romantics as seeing "failure [as] preferable to success, which had about it something squalid and opportunist, and could surly be bought only at the cost of betraying one's integrity, independence, the inner light, the ideal vision within" (Berlin 1990, 215). For many Romantics happiness and success could, more often then not, only be achieved through infidelity to one's inner light. Thus, a parallel emerges between Romantics (like Keats and Shelley) and Kant. Both clearly embrace a demand to remain faithful to an ineffable something which lies within.

Kant's Search for the Ineffable

From the above arguments we can see that Kant deplores the use of anything outside of the self for moral judgment. But it is not yet clear on what the Kantian individual is expected to rely upon within for moral guidance. What is a person moving inward toward? What is the nature of Kant's 'inner experience'? More importantly, is there an inner experience on which one can rely upon for certain moral guidance?

In answer, Kant begins by making a distinction between the *sensible* and the *intelligible* world. For Kant even the "most ordinary intelligence" realizes that "...even the greatest effort of attention and clarification, brought to bear by understanding, serve only for knowledge of *appearances*, never of *things in themselves*" (106/451). Here we see, clearly stated, a very similar schism of ontology described in the previous section, The Romantic Search for the Ineffable. Every Romantic philosopher assumed this duality first introduced by Kant (Walzel, 32). Kant goes on to write that "once this distinction is made ... we must admit and assume ... things in themselves--although ... we can never be acquainted with these, *but only in the way they affect us*" (106/451, italics mine). By this Kant denies the ability to ever have a sensible cognition of *things in themselves*, but, like Schlegel, leaves open the possibility of the noumenal realm affecting persons. Kant thinks the only way to apprehend the effect of the noumenal realm on the sensible is through the "power of *reason*" as it "shows a spontaneity so pure that it goes far beyond anything sensibility can offer" (108/453). For Kant, things in themselves are unknowable to the degree that they remain empirical, perceived through sensible cognition; but insofar as things in themselves are ordered through reason, they thrust themselves upon the

understanding as laws of moral duty. It is important to emphasis that, for Kant, reason puts sensible beings in touch with the omni-presence of the noumenal realm underlying all sensible cognition. Kant writes of rational beings as actually "belonging to the intelligible world, not the sensible one" (108/453) when exercising their capacity of reason. This tenant of Kantian morality, the duality of corporal ontology, whereby one's reason transports a portion of the self to the intelligible world where it receives both universal free-will and the moral law, is almost mystical in quality.[5] Importantly, this connection to the noumenal realm through reason shows Kant's commitment to a nexus between the world of appearances and the ineffable noumenal realm. This search by Kant to "comprehend the *incomprehensible*" (paraphrase of 128/463), to put sensible beings in touch with the ineffable beyond, is very similar to Schlegel's claim of connection with the infinite through reason, or Shelley's assertion that poetry connects us with "the common universe of which we are portions." Kant's assertions about the nature of the intelligible realm (i.e., the categorical imperative, objectivity, etc.) certainly differ from those made by Schlegel, Shelley, Keats, and many other Romantic writers. What they do share in common is a consistent *form* to their endeavor: an acknowledgment of ontological dualism and an effort to discover how exactly those in this world are connected to that infinite realm. It is this effort which is a Romantic, and with which Kant's moral philosophy shares striking similarities.

Conclusion

We have seen that what characterizes the Romantic vision is a movement inward and a searching for connection with the ineffable. We have also seen that Kant's philosophy embodies both of these characteristics. Our simple conclusion is, then, that when writing on Kant and of his place in philosophic history, we should refer to him, at least to a degree, as a Romantic philosopher. As mentioned above, Kant has always been thought to be an influence on the Romantics. This essay, however, hopefully has shown that Kant was more than merely influential: he *is* what he influenced. Kant thereby loses his antecedent status, joins the ranks of the Romantic fraternity, and may even, I think, be legitimately called a father of Romanticism. Yet to say Kant was only Romantic would obviously be mistaken. Kant was a self-proclaimed member of the German *Aufklärung* and was openly hostile to J. G. Hamman's "Storm and Stress," one of the catalysts to the Romantic movement. A more accurate description of Kant's achievement is that he served as nexus between the two movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Different parts of Kant's work emphasize particular aspects of each of these movements. When seen in this light Kant, I think, becomes even more complex and more interesting philosophically.

---

[5] As Kant states mysteriously "When we think of ourselves as free...we think of our selfs as under obligation, we look upon ourselves as belonging to the sensible world and the intelligable world at the same time" (110/453).

In closing, I would like to discuss Kant as a pluralistic individual. A pluralistic individual is one who has different, sometimes conflicting values, each taken from different intellectual bodies of thought. The pluralistic individual does not suffer cognitive dissonance. Instead, he is a blend of different values, each emphasized to a different degree. Kant is a good representation of such an individual because his philosophy contains themes from two seemingly incommensurable movements. Kant blends the value of reason with inward purity, the value of autonomy with a connection to the noumenal. This does not show that all beliefs are in the end commensurable, only that persons of deep reflection are often more complicated than the simple labels, like 'Enlightenment,' scholars often attach to their philosophy.

Isaiah Berlin, in his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*, outlines briefly his approval for what he calls pluralism. This idea has two fundamental concepts: (1) "human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and [are] in perpetual rivalry with one another" (Berlin 1969, 171), and (2) (from John Stuart Mill) the best organized societies are ones which recognize this plurality and treats its citizens with a respect for their own particular goals and ends. This paper, I believe, lends itself as evidence for Berlin's theory. If we can find Romanticism in Kant, it is probable that on closer inspection we can find in all great thinkers an amalgamation of divergent and diverse thought. As value pluralists, we can pick out any set of values. Each choice, or set of choices, represents a certain cost/value function. Value liberty, and we lose fraternity; value the demands of the genius, and lose the claims of society. In the end we are forced to choose. But our choices can be subtle, and in this way accommodating and inclusive. Kant is often charged with being an absolutist. But Kant's philosophy was ingenious not because of its absolutism, but because of its subtle combination of diverse contemporary ideas. Kant's philosophy reflects not just one age of ideas, but two. Kant's Enlightenment/Romantic philosophy turns out to be pluralism, not absolutism, at its most profound.

Bibliography

Abercrombie, Lascaelles, *Romanticism.* New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.

Beiser, Frederick C., *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte.* Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987.

Berlin, Isaiah, *Four Essays On Liberty.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

----------, *Against The Current.* New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

----------, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," pp. 207-237 in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity,* edited by Henry Hardy. London: Fontana Press, 1990.

Frye, Northup, *A Study of English Romanticism.* New York: Random House, 1968.

Hamerow, Theodore, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815-1871.* Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1958.

Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977.

Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Pure Reason.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929.

----------, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.* New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1953.

Kedourie, Elle, *Nationalism.* London: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.

Locke, John, *Concerning Human Understanding.* New York: Meridian, 1964.

Novalis (pseudonym of Friedrich von Hardenberg), "The World Must Be Romanticised," in *European Romanticism Self-Definition: An Anthology,* edited by Lilian Furst. New York: Methuen, 1980.

O'Neill, Onora, "Vindicating reason", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant,* edited by Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992.

Orsini, G. N. G., *Coleridge and German Idealism.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1969.

Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989.

Schlegel, August Wilhelm, *Lectures on Fine Art and Literature,* as quoted in Furst, *op. cit.*, 1980.

Schneewind, J. B., "Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy, " in Guyer, *op. cit.,* 1992.

Walsh, William, *Introduction to Keats.* London: Methuen Press, 1981.

Walzel, Ozkar, *German Romanticism.* New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1932.

Wu, Duncan (editor), *Romanticism: An Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.