

A Dynamic View of Moral Autonomy

Abstract

This essay explores the structure of moral experience, centring on the self's role as creative mediator between moral ideals and conditioned reality. Equal emphasis is given to intuitive, rational and tacit elements of moral knowledge. The resulting theory illuminates the interrelationships of a range of moral philosophies, from Aristotle to Tillich, and clarifies the nature and domain of fundamental moral questions such as: Are moral principles universal, culturally-determined, or personal? Do intentions or results determine an action's moral value? What are the roles of elements such as justice, reason and empathy in moral life?

At one pole of moral experience are the ideal principles and values which establish our moral orientation; at the other pole are the deeds and experiences of our conditioned existence. Ideal principles and conditioned reality stand in an initially dialectical relationship; to mediate between them we require a faculty ‘to which understanding contributes unity of intellectual synthesis and sensibility manifoldness of expression’: the creative imagination.¹ Imagination possesses the power to bridge the gap between moral principles and outer reality;² it does this by generating intentions to transform the present form of reality into a better representation of ideal principles. In the moral dialectic, the antithesis of ideal principles and existing reality is thus resolved in the synthesis of creatively generated intentions.

Ideals, intentions and execution are the essential moments of the moral process; all three are necessary to our moral existence. To achieve full moral autonomy we must find an autonomous stance to each of these aspects; we must establish moral principles on the basis of a self-determined insight into the moral ground of being, formulate concrete intentions that imaginatively translate our principles into a situationally-appropriate form, and competently and courageously realise these intentions in the complex actuality of the world. The following further

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn, in *Kant*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), p. 58.

² Friederich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), letters XII and following.

analysis of this dynamic will clearly define the various faculties requisite for moral autonomy and also explicate these faculties' interrelationships.

The approach taken here begins from moral being's ideal ground and concludes with its practical realisation. This approach sacrifices a degree of fidelity to phenomenological experience for the sake of clarity of structure. Moral action can equally well begin with concrete experience and arrive at moral ideals, or begin with the formation of creative intentions and extend into the realms of ideals and actions. As the latter approach, in particular, has much to recommend it on epistemological grounds, I have attempted a brief summary of it in the concluding section of this paper.

A necessary note: Some readers might assume that, as this essay affirms the validity of various kinds of experiences –sensory, psychological, and eidetic – that it is therefore suggesting that these reference ontologically distinct realms. I believe this assumption to be unwarranted; that, epistemologically, there are several mutually complementary means of access to reality should no more imply the existence of distinct ontological worlds than the fact that space has three dimensions implies that there are three distinct spaces, or than the existence of a number of disparate senses implies that these reveal ontologically distinct realities (a smell reality, a touch reality, and so on). I would like to suggest that we must learn to co-ordinate our moral, psychological, and sensory experience in the same way as we learn to co-ordinate between our various senses.

The Transcendental Ground of Moral Being

Tillich points out that love in its highest form, self-transcendence as *agape*, is ‘the ultimate source of moral demands’:

“Love, agape, offers a principle of ethics that maintains an eternal, unchanging element, but makes its realisation dependent on continuous acts of a creative intuition. (...) *Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing the eternity and dignity and unconditional validity.*”³

As the ‘transcendent source of the content of the moral imperative’ that opens all further motives, love is universal in its essence, infinitely adaptable in its application.⁴ Though autonomy can only be found through a morality grounded in love,⁵ as a universal motive underlying all moral existence, love is as yet undifferentiated, that is, it does not yet express a variety of specific moral principles particular to cultures, persons and situations. It embraces all

³ Paul Tillich, *Morality and Beyond* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 88-9 (italics in original).

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42

⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (Bristol: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1992), pp. 105-7.

other moral motives and constitutes their common essence. For Goethe, at this level even duty, ‘where a man loves what he commands himself to do’, is sublimated under love.⁶ In this view, also shared by Tillich and Steiner, to live morally is not to battle against one’s essential nature, but to fulfil it; it is when we realise that moral acts are not acts ‘in obedience to an external law, human or divine’, but rather those in accordance with the ‘inner law of our true being’ that we realise that to live in accordance with one’s inner law is to live through love, and to live through love is to live in accordance with one’s essential being.⁷

Justice

‘Justice is the first virtue of social institutions. ... Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.’⁸

‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.’⁹

⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections of Goethe*, trans. by Bailey Saunders (London: Macmillan, 1906). Maxim 402, p. 147.

⁷ Tillich, p. 20; Steiner, op. cit.

⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3

Through love as ‘the consciousness of my unity with another’,¹⁰ the moral subject comes to recognise others as subjects with equal moral authority, i.e. as self-subsisting authors of their own moral existence. Out of the fundamental basis of moral life, love, thus arises a second fundamental principle, the equality of moral persons *as* moral persons.¹¹ The moral principles of fairness, justice, and human rights all derive from this essential recognition of others as moral subjects; the awareness that others are subjects equal in significance to myself, despite my privileged consciousness of my own experience, is a necessary basis for all further moral experience.

Though ‘the first virtue of social institutions’,¹² justice is not the first determinant of individual virtue. Consider two situations: in the first, I give one-third of a loaf of bread to another person and keep two-thirds for myself; in the second, I give two-thirds to the other person and keep one-third for myself. Both actions create the same degree of structural injustice. Yet if, in the one case, my care for another has allowed me to transcend my personal interests,

⁹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. D. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) II: 49 [428-9]

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952). §158A., p. 133.

¹¹ Tillich, p. 90.

¹² Rawls, *op. cit.*

giving away more than structural justice demands, my moral position surely is very different from the case when I retain the larger amount for myself.

Plato reminds us that what lies at the core of justice is an inward quality, ‘the true self and concernment of man’. The truly just person ‘sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself’; as in music, in moral life there is a just temperament, a ‘perfectly adjusted nature’.¹³

Love and justice are both universal principles, whereby love ‘contains justice in itself as its unconditional element’.¹⁴ Justice is more differentiated a principle than love, however; the continuum of interpretations of justice embraces justice as an inner state of the moral subject (Plato’s just person) through justice as a relationship between moral subjects (Kant and Tillich) to justice as an objective condition (Rawls and human rights theorists generally). This range, spanning from the most inward point of human experience to the most objectified element of the societal framework, encompasses interrelated aspects of justice: *pace* Rawls, just institutions cannot create a just society unless the relationships and individuals active in these institutions are just in Tillich’s and Plato’s senses, while just persons can only fully exist through just relationships with others and social institutions that are also structurally just.

¹³ Plato, *Republic*, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), Book IV, pp. 354-5.

¹⁴ Tillich, p. 39.

Intuition

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within*. I have not to search for them and conjecture them as though they were veiled in darkness or were in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them directly with the consciousness of my existence.”¹⁵

Moral principles such as love, duty, compassion and justice are not empirical phenomena observable by the outer senses. How do such principles come to consciousness, then? Without an immediate and original relationship to the source of moral principles there can be no moral autonomy.¹⁶ Kant suggests that we discover moral direction via direct experiences, an intuitive vision comparable to the physical sense-experiences through which we have access to the world external to us.

¹⁵ Kant, p. 360 (italics in original).

¹⁶ Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. T. K. Abbott, in *Kant* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), p. 263.

Intuitive perceptions of the moral realm are directly experienced with the same certainty and self-verifying originality with which we experience objects in nature.¹⁷ But to achieve intuitive knowing, it is essential to turn away from sense-impressions and toward a noetic dimension.¹⁸ The outer world cannot be seen without using our physical eyes; the moral world cannot be experienced without accessing our intuition, for which an act of inward contemplation is necessary. We arrive at sensory perceptions by turning our attention to the outer, sensory world; we arrive at moral perceptions by attending to the eidetic realm. The one perception we call sight; the other insight, or (the equivalent in Latin form) intuition.

Just as we cannot know sensible things as they are in themselves, but only as mediated by our perceptions of them, so we cannot know the moral principles in themselves, but only as mediated by our inner perceptions. We cannot pretend to absolute knowledge in either realm. Nevertheless, the intuition that allows us to perceive moral principles has brought many moral ideals, including enlightened self-interest, duty, compassion, non-violence, justice and love.

It is certainly a good thing to live a moral life in any of these senses: to live lovingly, justly, non-violently, compassionately, dutifully, and/or out of enlightened self-interest. Yet we only live in an *autonomous* fashion if the impulse to be any of these things arises out of a personal contemplative act that connects us with the moral core of our being. Finding an internal source of moral principles -- an internal moral compass -- is an absolute condition for moral

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 155.

¹⁸ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Sense for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), p. 160.

autonomy; the principles that arise from perceptions of this source are morally valid by virtue of their origin, not their content.¹⁹ Finally, even the content of moral principles is affected by this relationship: when these have their origin in a genuine intuitive-contemplative relationship to the moral realm within us, we discover a different self-interest, a different duty, a different justice and a different love.

Reason

“Socrates, then, thought the virtues were rules or rational principles (for he thought they were, all of them, forms of scientific knowledge), while we think they *involve* a rational principle.”²⁰

Ideal principles are not sufficient to guide us in particular situations. Their abstract, formal nature is innately antithetical to the actuality of life in an imperfect world. Ideal principles must thus be led over into the particular character of a situation. To accomplish this we employ reason. Reason can analyse the nature of the problem at hand, raise important questions, explore potential directions, and investigate consequences. In short, it is capable of transforming abstract ideals into concrete and relevant components. Moral insight ‘determines the end and [reason]

¹⁹ Steiner, p. 112

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W. D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle*, v. 2 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 1144b. (Italics in translation.)

makes us do the things that lead to the end',²¹ clarifying the process that will enable an ideal to move toward becoming a practical goal.

Kant believed reason alone to be a sufficient ground for morality.²² Reason, however, is a formal operation, with no a priori content other than its own operations and what is inherent in these operations. Reason can only proceed from a ground; it cannot give itself its own ground. Reason is as willing a handmaiden to bad as it is to good purposes; it will serve a 'clever rogue...mischievous in proportion to his cleverness' as willingly as a virtuous person.²³ Reason can neither provide moral ideals or motives nor practical experience or skills, and for the same reason: it operates upon, but cannot substitute for, experience.

Much of what Kant proposed as conclusions of reason prior to empirical experience are, in reality, intuitions; essentially, they appeared to Kant to be inevitable consequences of reason only because he believed he knew them to be true *before* beginning to reason. Examples of this include Euclidean geometry, which we now recognise as one of several reasonable metageometries,²⁴ and the categorical imperative, which we now recognise as one of a number of reasonable moral goals. What is truly inherent in reason is its form, its logic. Once we have

²¹ Aristotle, 1145a.

²² Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. by A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). Preface to the 1st edition, 6:3.

²³ Plato, Book VII, p. 390.

²⁴ Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 270ff.

chosen a type of geometric space from the range of valid geometries, or a moral orientation from the range of valid moral principles, reason can show us the consequences that logically arise from this. It cannot make the choice.

To a certain extent, the choice of cultural norms play the role in moral reason that the choice of meta-geometric space plays in geometry. Reason cannot, for example, decide upon the appropriate punishment for the perpetrator of a crime – whether the guilty party should be outcast from the society, imprisoned, rehabilitated, or reconciled with the victim – but once society has determined a framework within which moral action will normally unfold, reason can serve as a guide to appropriate action in particular situations.

Reason can accept any self-consistent starting point, but can never essentially depart from what lies implicit in its starting point. Reason is too greatly obligated to the assumptions from which we start to be free to do more than show the formal consequences of these. It thus provides no basis for the linchpin of our moral being, creative action.

The Creative Imagination

“The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.... [It is] the organ of the moral nature of man.”²⁵

²⁵ Pierce Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (Hawthorne, CA: Shelley Press, 2007), p. 34.

A remarkable range of moral philosophers concur that the imagination is uniquely capable of generating a creative synthesis of the ideal and phenomenal worlds.^{26, 27, 28, 29} As the sole faculty capable of fashioning what has never been, imagination is a prerequisite of human freedom.³⁰ Out of imagination turned to moral ends can be born an intention to transform the world, a vision of how the real could be made more ideal, the ideal more real. Such intentions are seeds with the potential to change the world in a morally significant way.

‘Happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination.’³¹ The place and validity of the hedonistic perspective within the range of moral perspectives is clarified by locating imagination’s ability to form a creative synthesis of ideals and reality at the creative heart of moral virtue. Happiness is a measure of our success at this synthesis; thus Aristotle called happiness ‘activity in accordance with virtue’.³²

²⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, in M. J. Adler (ed.), *Kant*, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952) pp. 54, 58.

²⁷ Schiller, especially letters VI and XXVI.

²⁸ Steiner, Chapter 12 : ‘Moral Imagination’.

²⁹ Brian Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 70.

³⁰ Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, ‘Historical Introduction’, in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 26.

³¹ Kant, *Metaphysic of Morals*, p. 267.

³² Aristotle, Book X.7 (§1177), p. 431.

The creative imagination must hold the balance between the ideal and actual; to produce fruitful concrete intentions it must engage with both moral values and the facts of the world. Imagination enables reason to overcome the rigidity of ideally formulated principles and universal moral principles by conceiving feasible alternatives. This is a difficult synthesis of apparently polar opposites to accomplish, and sometimes even to accept, as we see by the political feuds between proponents of a “hard”, or principle-based, and “soft”, or situational, ethic.

Most important, imagination “enables the self to imagine itself as another and to imagine the other as another self.”³³ Upon this all ethical life depends.

Empathy

“Our sense, therefore, of the propriety of conduct arises from what I shall call a direct sympathy with the affections and motives of the person who acts.”³⁴

Empathy brings the concrete facticity of existence closer to the imaginative realm by making it morally meaningful. I am only in a position to make my response to a situation meaningful when I have entered into its various human aspects: the emotional relationships, the human lives and

³³ Richard Kearney, ‘The Narrative Imagination’, in Alfonso Montuori and Ronald E. Purser (eds.), *Social Creativity*, vol. 1 (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999) p. 78

³⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 86-7.

hopes. Empathy is literally a process of feeling my way into the situation at hand. Above all, this is a compassionate perception, reaching out with the heart to encompass a situation. Empathy illuminates reality, revealing its morally relevant human dimensions. The bare fact that someone is a prisoner, for example, gives me little basis for moral engagement with the situation. Only by empathising with his or her situation, discovering the path that led to this point and the prisoner's present condition, is it possible to engage in a morally significant way.

Empathy has been elevated to the origin of all morality,³⁵ a claim that is valid when rightly interpreted, for empathy as higher compassion links to what we have addressed above as *agape*, transcendent love, the foundation of moral existence. Empathy as unreflective sympathy, on the other hand, runs the danger of holding too closely to, and thus being unable to free itself from, extant reality,³⁶ and of being 'weak and always blind'.³⁷

In empathy's defence, reason has as justly been accused of being cold and unfeeling. There is some truth to both statements, and thus the two faculties serve to balance one another. Yet so long as empathy is not detached from reason, it need not be blind, just as reason, so long as it retains its imaginative connection with empathy, need not be cold or unfeeling. As we have seen, the element that unites the two is the creative imagination.

³⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), §§16-17.

³⁶ Schiller, Letter XXV.

³⁷ Kant, quoted in Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau Kant Goethe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 16.

Empathy lifts the practical situation out of its bare facticity; it grants the world human significance. Reasoning through and empathising with are complementary activities; together they give the creative imagination tools to resolve the tension between principle and reality. Through reason I trace the underlying factors at work and thus discover aspects of the situation with which I must empathise. Through empathy I become sensitive to the human reality of the situation and thus discover what I need to understand.

Moral action

“Cowardice asks the question: is it safe? Expediency asks the question: is it politic? Vanity asks the question: is it popular? But conscience asks the question: is it right? -- And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular -- but one must take it because it's right.”³⁸

Imagination can give birth to a reasonable, empathic, morally-motivated and situationally-appropriate goal. There then remains the challenge of realising this goal. A life of unfulfilled intentions is not a morally competent life. There are two aspects to this. On the one hand, moral

³⁸ Martin Luther King, ‘Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution’, <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/kingpapers/article/remaining_away_through_a_great_revolution/> [Accessed 15 July 2009].

intention is lamed without the courage to act. This is the courage to overcome fear, sloth and vanity and to be prepared for a position ‘neither safe, nor politic, nor popular’.

Finding the courage to realise an imagined purpose is one of the most challenging aspects of achieving moral autonomy.³⁹ Yet even if I am courageous, the extent to which I possess practical competencies will determine whether I can translate my imagined intention into reality. This is the second requirement: moral action depends upon my being capable of executing actions in ways that effectively realise my intentions. Unless I can accomplish what I intend – overcoming inner resistance through courage and outer obstacles through practical competencies – I will fail in my moral purpose.

Practical abilities lie in the realm of tacit knowledge: worldly skills, often difficult to formulate verbally, that facilitate the accomplishment of practical ends.⁴⁰ Art, i.e. skilled making, is one of the capacities central to moral virtue,⁴¹ and thus practical ability as tacit knowledge, as ‘the ability to transform the world of percepts without violating the natural laws by which these

³⁹ Tillich, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 373 and passim.

⁴¹ Aristotle, Book VI.4 (§1140), pp. 388-9; Book X.8 (§1178) pp. 432-3.

are connected', is an integral part of the moral dialectic.⁴² 'We must be physicists in order to be, in every sense, creators.'⁴³

The various realms in which it is possible to work practically include the technical, social and cultural worlds. Technically, homes can be built, the ill healed, and ecologies restored. Socially, conflicts can be resolved, friendships founded and organisations developed. Culturally, works of art can be created, scientific theories propounded, and philosophical or religious ideas developed. The technical, social, and cultural realms have distinct competencies.

Passions are also part of the facticity of my existence in which I must develop competencies. I can embrace passions as an integral aspect of my being while recognising that my existence as a free individual depends upon my finding an autonomous relationship to them in precisely the same way I aim to achieve an autonomous relationship to any other determining factor of my life. This includes, for instance, the courage and ability to alter the character of my passions should my moral imagination suggest the appropriateness of such an intention.

Moral intentions and practical competency are two moments in the moral process, each with an independent worth, and 'the absolute or perfect form of virtue does not reside in either intention or act singly, but in the union of both'.⁴⁴ Rarely can a single person competently both

⁴² Steiner, *Philosophy of Freedom*, trans. Michael Wilson (Bristol: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964) p. 164.

⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books: 1974) p. 335.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in W. M. Hatch (ed.), *The Moral Philosophy of Aristotle*. (London: John Murray, 1879) p. 571.

plan and execute a large undertaking, and different persons are often responsible for formulating a goal and for its execution; there are architects and there are builders.

In such a case, neither party is fully autonomous. This raises an intriguing question about co-operative endeavours between morally autonomous individuals: How will such individuals relate to others' moral principles when these differ from their own?

If autonomy, as suggested here, is taken to mean that a person has found moral principles through direct experience, to discover a meaningful answer to this question we must enter into this generative awareness. By doing so we can discover that those who enter the immediacy of moral perception may experience a deep communion of intention with other moral beings (just as our perceptual experience enables us to relate deeply to another person's sensory perceptions, though these differ from our own), thus building a moral community based not upon the identity of the content of its member's principles, but rather on these principles' shared source.⁴⁵

Communication and Community

Walker examined the opposition between an empathic, situationally sensitive approach to moral being and a systematic approach founded on universal ethical principles. For proponents of universalist ethics such as Sidgwick, context, personal considerations and sympathies are only distractions from a "perfection of practice" and "theoretical completeness", while for proponents

⁴⁵ Steiner, *Spiritual Activity*, p. 108.

of a situationally-sensitive practice, impersonal, generalized principles appear excessively rigid, theoretical, and authoritarian.

Walker proposes to resolve the opposition between the personal and impersonal through an *interpersonal* view focusing on the communicative process and involving a wider community in moral decisions.⁴⁶ Communicative processes bring the wisdom of the greater community to bear in every respect: relevant moral principles may be articulated, reason applied, empathy fostered, situational aspects illuminated, practical suggestions made, and potential resolutions of the tension between moral and practical imperatives imagined.

In addition, involving a wider circle of those whose lives are touched by a situation to confer on its resolution makes it far more likely that all factors of the situation will be acknowledged and the actions chosen accepted by the various parties.

Conclusion

The dynamic of moral autonomy encompasses a wide range of eidetic, noetic and practical faculties. The above presentation has described this as an objective structure: The transcendental source of moral experience is found in the capacity to encompass the not-I in the I, *agape*. This gives rise to culturally-differentiated expressions of the intrinsic equality of other moral beings (justice as inward, relational or objective condition) and then takes on individually-differentiated

⁴⁶ Margaret Urban Walker, "Moral Understandings: Alternative "epistemology" for a feminist ethics," *Hypatia* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 19f.

forms through intuitions of more specific moral principles. Reason enables us to analyse these ideals and comprehend their import; imagination suggests creative ways to attempt to harmonise this import with the practical world; and empathy discovers human concerns relevant to our moral intentions. Cultural, social, and technical skills allow us to practically implement the envisioned solutions.

It is also possible to take a phenomenological approach to describing moral experience. This approach might start from the active, imaginative consciousness, which can then be extended in both ideal and practical directions. Through our contact with the world we discover empathy. To manifest our empathy meaningfully we seek to develop cultural, social, and practical competencies, competencies that lie largely in the realm of tacit knowledge. Simultaneously, contemplating our experience leads us to reason about it. Seeking a guide for reason, we arrive at individual intuitions of moral principles. Underlying various moral principles we discover culturally-specific ideals such as the inalienable dignity of human beings. At the basis of all such ideals we come to the universally available experience of transcending the ego to encompass the Other.

As Tillich points out, it requires courage to undertake the transformation of practical reality, thereby crossing the threshold leading from our inner life into an existence beyond our control.⁴⁷ To undertake the intuition of moral principles requires of us equal courage, and for the same reason. Both crossings demand the courage existentially to commit to what is beyond us.

⁴⁷ Tillich, p. 46.

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Brief critique of Kant's categorical imperative

Anscombe points out that Kant's categorical imperative is useless as a moral guide "without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action".⁴⁸ Any act can be framed in various ways and regarded as the result of various motives. Some of these ways will be justified, others condemned by the categorical imperative; for example, a burglary can be framed as the abrogation of another's property but also the honorable attempt to support oneself in one's line of work. Defining which of these is the "relevant description" would require an entire moral theory as a superstructure upon the categorical imperative.

⁴⁸ G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern moral philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 1-19.