

Duty and Desolation

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This is a paper about two philosophers who wrote to each other. One is famous; the other is not. It is about two practical standpoints, the strategic and the human, and what the famous philosopher said of them. And it is about friendship and deception, duty and despair. That is enough by way of preamble.¹

I. Strategy and Friendship

In 1791 Kant received a letter from an Austrian lady whom he had never met. She was Maria von Herbert, a keen and able student of Kant's philosophy, and sister to Baron Franz Paul von Herbert, another zealous Kantian disciple. The zeal of her brother the Baron was indeed so great that he had left his lead factory, and his wife, for two years in order to study Kant's philosophy in Weimar and Jena. Upon his return, the von Herbert household had become a centre, a kind of *salon*, where the critical philosophy was intensely debated, against the backdrop of vehement opposition to Kant in Austria as in many German states. The household was, in the words of a student of Fichte's, 'a new Athens', an oasis of Enlightenment spirit, devoted to preaching and propagating the Kantian gospel, reforming religion, and replacing dull unthinking piety with a morality based on reason.² Here is the letter:

1. To Kant, From Maria von Herbert, August 1791

Great Kant,
As a believer calls to his God, I call to you for help, for comfort, or for

¹ This paper was first given at a conference on moral psychology at Monash, August 1991, and has since been read at the University of Queensland, the Australian National University, and the University of Delhi. I am indebted to those present on all these occasions for stimulating and searching comments. I am especially grateful to Philip Pettit and Richard Holton for helpful discussion, and to Margaret Wilson and Christine Korsgaard for written comments on an earlier draft.

² According to Arnulf Zweig in his introduction to *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence, 1759–1799* (University of Chicago Press, 1967), 24.

counsel to prepare me for death. Your writings prove that there is a future life. But as for this life, I have found nothing, nothing at all that could replace the good I have lost, for I loved someone who, in my eyes, encompassed within himself all that is worthwhile, so that I lived only for him, everything else was in comparison just rubbish, cheap trinkets. Well, I have offended this person, because of a long drawn out lie, which I have now disclosed to him, though there was nothing unfavourable to my character in it, I had no vice in my life that needed hiding. The lie was enough though, and his love vanished. As an honourable man, he doesn't refuse me friendship. But that inner feeling that once, unbidden, led us to each other, is no more—oh my heart splinters into a thousand pieces! If I hadn't read so much of your work I would certainly have put an end to my life. But the conclusion I had to draw from your theory stops me—it is wrong for me to die because my life is tormented, instead I'm supposed to live because of my being. Now put yourself in my place, and either damn me or comfort me. I've read the metaphysic of morals, and the categorical imperative, and it doesn't help a bit. My reason abandons me just when I need it. Answer me, I implore you—or you won't be acting in accordance with your own imperative.

My address is Maria Herbert of Klagenfurt, Carinthia, care of the white lead factory, or perhaps you would rather send it via Reinhold because the mail is more reliable there.

Kant, much impressed by this letter, sought advice from a friend as to what he should do. The friend advised him strongly to reply, and to do his best to distract his correspondent from 'the object to which she [was] enfeathered'.³ We have the carefully prepared draft of Kant's response:

2. *To Maria von Herbert, Spring 1792 (Kant's rough draft)*

Your deeply felt letter comes from a heart that must have been

³ Letter to Kant from Ludwig Ernst Borowski, probably August 1791. The correspondence between Kant and Maria von Herbert, and the related letters, are in Volume XI of the Prussian Academy of Sciences edition of Kant's works (Walter de Gruyter, 1922). The English translations given in this paper are closely based on those of Arnulf Zweig, partly revised in the light of the Academy edition, and very much abridged. See Arnulf Zweig, *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence, 1759–99*. ©1967 by The University of Chicago. All Rights Reserved. I make use of the translations with the kind permission of Professor Zweig and the University of Chicago Press. Readers who would like to see fuller versions of the letters than those given here should consult the Academy edition, or the Zweig translations.

created for the sake of virtue and honesty, since it is so receptive to instruction in those qualities. I must do as you ask, namely, put myself in your place, and prescribe for you a pure moral sedative. I do not know whether your relationship is one of marriage or friendship, but it makes no significant difference. For love, be it for one's spouse or for a friend, presupposes the same mutual esteem for the other's character, without which it is no more than perishable, sensual delusion.

A love like that wants to communicate itself completely, and it expects of its respondent a similar sharing of heart, unweakened by distrustful reticence. That is what the ideal of friendship demands. But there is something in us which puts limits on such frankness, some obstacle to this mutual outpouring of the heart which makes one keep some part of one's thoughts locked within oneself, even when one is most intimate. The sages of old complained of this secret distrust—'My dear friends, there is no such thing as a friend!'

We can't expect frankness of people, since everyone fears that to reveal himself completely would be to make himself despised by others. But this lack of frankness, this reticence, is still very different from dishonesty. What the honest but reticent man says is true, but not the whole truth. What the dishonest man says is something he knows to be false. Such an assertion is called, in the theory of virtue, a *lie*. It may be harmless, but it is not on that account innocent. It is a serious violation of a duty to oneself; it subverts the dignity of humanity in our own person, and attacks the roots of our thinking. As you see, you have sought counsel from a physician who is no flatterer. I speak for your beloved and present him with arguments that justify his having wavered in his affection for you.

Ask yourself whether you reproach yourself for the imprudence of confessing, or for the immorality intrinsic to the lie. If the former, then you regret having done your duty. And why? Because it has resulted in the loss of your friend's confidence. This regret is not motivated by anything moral, since it is produced by an awareness not of the act itself, but of its consequences. But if your reproach is grounded in a moral judgment of your behaviour, it would be a poor moral physician who would advise you to cast it from your mind.

When your change in attitude has been revealed to your beloved, only time will be needed to quench, little by little, the traces of his justified indignation, and to transform his coldness into a more firmly grounded love. If this doesn't happen, then the earlier warmth of his affection was more physical than moral, and would have disappeared anyway—a misfortune which we often encounter in life, and when we do, must meet with composure. For the value of life, in so far as it consists of the enjoyment we get from people, is vastly

overrated.

Here then, my dear friend, you find the customary divisions of a sermon: instruction, penalty and comfort. Devote yourself to the first two; when they have had their effect, comfort will be found by itself.

Kant's letter has an enormously interesting and sensitive discussion of friendship and secrecy, much of which turns up word for word in *The Doctrine of Virtue*, published some six years later.⁴ But what Kant's letter fails to say is as at least as interesting as what it says. Herbert writes that she has lost her love, that her heart is shattered, that there is nothing left to make life worth living, and that Kant's moral philosophy hasn't helped a bit. Kant's reply is to suggest that the love is deservedly lost, that misery is an appropriate response to one's own moral failure, and that the really interesting moral question here is the one that hinges on a subtle but necessary scope distinction: the distinction between telling a lie and failing to tell the truth, between *saying 'not-p'*, and *not saying 'p'*. Conspicuously absent is an acknowledgement of Herbert's more than theoretical interest in the question: is suicide compatible with the moral law? And perhaps this is just as well from a practical point of view. The sooner she gives up those morbid thoughts the better; the less said on the morbid subject, the less likely the morbid thoughts will arise. Perhaps it is also just as well, for Kant, from a theoretical point of view. Kant's conviction that suicide is incompatible with the moral law is not nearly as well founded as he liked to think; so here too, the less said, the better. What I want to talk about though is not the ineptitude⁵ of an elderly bachelor in relieving a young woman's grief (for Kant is 67 by now, and Herbert 22), nor the ineptitude of an academic philosopher in addressing the realities of moral life. Instead, I want to follow Kant's lead for the moment, and think about friendship and deceit, in Kant's terms. What's good about friendship? And what's bad about deceit? The answers to these questions are connected. I'll begin with the latter.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, Part II of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Mary Gregor (trans.) (Harper and Row, 1964). One wonders whether these parts of *The Doctrine of Virtue* may have been influenced by Kant's thoughts about Herbert's predicament. An alternative explanation might be that *The Doctrine of Virtue* and Kant's letter to Herbert are both drawing on Kant's lecture notes.

⁵ Justin Oakley has commented on what he calls the 'moral ineptitude' of people who act from the motive of duty alone: an ineptitude that prevents them from achieving the very goal duty aims at, for example, that of comforting a friend. See 'A Critique of Kantian Arguments against Emotions as Moral Motives', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7, No. 4 (October 1990), 441–59.

Kant thinks it is always wrong to lie. Lying has a special place in his taxonomy of vices, meriting a special denunciation all of its own in an essay 'On a supposed right to tell lies from benevolent motives'.⁶ When the murderer is at your door, and your friend hidden in your house, you must reply truthfully to the murderer: yes, my friend is here. The moral law commands categorically. The ifs and buts from anxious consequentialists—and anxious friends—must fall on deaf ears. Some have seen in this stringency a *reductio ad absurdum* of rationalist ethics, a blind and hideous attachment to principle that flies in the face of all moral decency. Others—notably Christine Korsgaard—have looked further and discovered, even in this apparently harsh aspect of the Kantian system, 'an attractive ideal of human relations',⁷ an ideal that she finds to underpin Kant's views on both lies and friendship.⁸ Now I must say from the outset that the Kant she finds is a warm and kind Kant, a Kant who thinks well of spontaneous natural sentiments, and thinks we should cultivate them, a Kant who shares much common ground with Aristotle. I will call him the *sane* Kant (for I need a technical term). Notoriously, there is another Kant to be found who thinks just the opposite, whom I shall call the *severe*, and we shall be encountering him too. My own opinion is that the sane Kant is partly a reconstruction, but a reconstruction well worth performing.

The 'attractive ideal of human relations' comes along with a more general picture of the world and the place of human beings in it, a picture that is as familiar as it is problematic. I shall not be addressing its problems. As human beings we find ourselves in a natural world that consists, first, of things, rocks and reindeer, corn and cotton, moulds and mistletoe. And we try as best we can to understand just how the world ticks; why corn grows when watered and not otherwise; why a rhinoceros is never born from a reindeer; why the big planetary rocks attract each other with a force that obeys an inverse square law. Science is good at finding out about things, and it goes about it by discovering more and more causal patterns in nature. Given the drought, given the

⁶ First published in 1797; an English translation is included as an addendum to L. W. Beck's translation of *The Critique of Practical Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1949).

⁷ As she says on page 327 of 'The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15, No. 4 (1986), 325–49.

⁸ Korsgaard's views on Kant and lying are developed in 'The Right to Lie' (*ibid.*). Her views on Kant and friendship are developed in 'Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Responsibility and Reciprocity in Personal Relations', forthcoming in *Philosophical Perspectives 6: Ethics*, James Tomberlin (ed.) (Atascadero, California: The Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1992). As will become evident, I owe a very great debt to Korsgaard's approach in both papers.

dependence of living tissues on water, the corn had to wither. Given the facts about gene and species, the reindeer can only give birth to a reindeer. But we do more than try to understand how things tick. We use them. We do things with them. We build houses out of some of the smaller rocks. We smelt other rocks, to make hammers and needles. We eat the seeds of the corn plants. We make medicine out of some of the moulds, and inject it into our bodies to make us healthy. Things in the world are, on this picture, a resource, to be used as means for human ends. And this only works because we understand, at least partly, the causal laws in which the things feature. Broadly speaking, science makes technology possible. We predict that the corn will yield seeds for us to eat, if we give it water. We predict that our house will keep us safe, because we know how rocks behave. Furthermore, things we use have a certain worth that is captured in their price. Some rocks are better than others at serving human ends, and their price is higher. Industrial diamonds are priced higher than gravel. When something has a price, it can be exchanged for something else having the same price. When something is a tool, it can be exchanged for something else that will do the job just as well. Things, says Kant, are essentially replaceable.⁹ Whether Kant's is the right stance to take towards the natural world—the world of things—is a question I'll leave aside.

Besides things, there are people. And in our dealings with people, we have a different way of going on, though it is hard to capture just what that is. I doubt that I could do better than Strawson, in *Freedom and Resentment*.¹⁰ Strawson points out that in our dealings with people, we attribute responsibility to others in a way that manifests itself in a range of attitudes. We feel resentful when somebody hurts us on purpose. We do not (usually) feel resentful towards the rock that stubs our toe. We feel grateful when somebody helps us on purpose, out of good will, not as an accidental spin-off of something else he wanted to do. We do not (usually) feel grateful towards the sunshine that lifts our grey moods. We expect resentment for the hurt we cause, and try to excuse ourselves when we do not think we are responsible for the hurt. We don't simply observe people as we might observe planets, we don't simply treat them as things to be sought out when they can be of use to us, and avoided when they are a nuisance. We are, as Strawson says, involved.¹¹

⁹ Kant is wrong about this. We often value particular items in such a way that they *aren't* replaceable by a duplicate: it is this very teacup that I value, this very house, this very painting.

¹⁰ 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment* (Methuen, 1974), 1–25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

This standpoint is manifested in more than our attitudes, as Korsgaard is keen to point out.¹² It shows up in the way we act when we communicate and co-operate with others. When you hold someone responsible, you are prepared to work with them, view them as someone who has goals of their own that you might come to share, or as someone who might come to share your goals. You are prepared to *do something with them*, in a sense very different from the sense in which you might do something with a tool. When my friend and I make a cake, I'm *doing something with* my friend, and I'm *doing something with* flour, chocolate, cherries, brandy—but there is a difference. My friend, but not the flour, is doing something with me. My friend, and not the flour, is doing what I am doing, sharing the activity. As a human being, she can choose ends of her own, and can choose to make them coincide with mine. The standpoint we take towards human beings is interactive, and it is different from the standpoint we take with things. Kant thinks this is because human beings have an intrinsic worth that has its basis in our capacity for rational choice. Human beings are ends in themselves, who have a dignity, and not a price.¹³ The moral law is the requirement to recognize and respect this dignity, and to act in a way consistent with it.

Of course, we don't adopt the moral standpoint—the interactive standpoint—towards everybody, all of the time. Suppose my neighbour forms a habit of vandalizing my car when it is parked outside his house. He emerges stealthily, at dead of night, and gently twists the wipers into intricate and elegant knots. The next day I stride to his door and knock, brimming with indignation, planning to ask him to be reasonable, hoping to reach mutual understanding. But if he responds with bulging eyes and a torrent of incoherent invective, and I see that he is a badly shell shocked war veteran, indignation instantly vanishes, to be replaced by pure alarm. I stop thinking of him as an agent, whose reasons, mysterious as they might be, I can in principle come to understand. My neighbour becomes a problem to be managed, an obstacle to be avoided, not a person to be argued with. He becomes just one more of the hazards of Elwood, along with the threat of the flooding canal. I have switched from the participant standpoint to what Strawson calls the *objective*. This is the attitude we have to things, items in the natural order, whose behaviour is explicable under causal laws, and manipulated if you know enough about them. To adopt it is to see a person as, perhaps, 'an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a

¹² Op. cit., note 8.

¹³ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Paton (trans.) (Harper and Row, 1964), 435.

wide range of sense, might be called treatment; [someone] to be managed or handled or cured or trained.¹⁴

Nor do we confine the objective attitude to these special cases where it seems to be forced upon us, where the person in question seems to be deranged or compulsive. The attitude is there for everyday use, if we want it. And typically we will often move from the objective to the interactive and back. Strawson says that although the two attitudes are deeply opposed to each other, they don't exclude each other. We *can* step back, and observe people as we observe the planets. We can observe a friend's rising anger as if it were the rising of the canal waters—something to be feared and avoided, not to be understood and respected. We can cast an objective eye on our students, our friends, our lovers, and no doubt we often do, when the interactive stance proves too exhausting. Kant would say that when we do this, we fail to treat people as human, as agents in the kingdom of ends, as ends in themselves.

Kant seems to think that this coincides with treating people as a *means to one's own ends*. But these don't, I think, have to coincide. My failure to treat my mad neighbour as an end—as a human being with reasons of his own to be respected—does not have to coincide with my using him as a means to further any goals of my own, partly because I do not at present see what he could be useful for. (False. What a useful philosophical example he's just proved to be.) But perhaps they often do coincide. When we look with the objective eye, and view people in the same way that we view natural phenomena, as items whose behaviour is the subject for explanation and prediction, perhaps it does become easier to think of them as things in other respects: items that are there to be used. We can do things with people in just the same sense that we do things with flour and chocolate, when making a cake; or do things with rocks, when building a house. We can think of people as human resources. We can regard people and treat people as tools, things that are there to be used, things that do not control themselves, things whose 'nature is to be directed by something else'.¹⁵ We can have a kind of human technology, otherwise known as management skills. To treat a person *merely* as a means would be to violate the categorical imperative, as captured in the formula of humanity: 'Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, and never as a means only'.¹⁶ Treating a person as an

¹⁴ Strawson, *op. cit.*, note 10, 9.

¹⁵ The phrase is Korsgaard's, *op. cit.*, note 7, 335.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, note 13, 429. Kant has many formulations of the categorical imperative. I restrict myself in this paper to the formula of humanity, partly because it best captures the 'attractive ideal' Korsgaard and I are hoping to find.

end, as a being who can form her own ends and act on them, does not entirely rule out treating her as a means. It does not rule out the possibility of human technology. The important thing is not to treat a person *merely* as a means. I treat a person merely as a means when I act towards her in a way that blocks her ability to form her own ends and act on them. I do this when I make it impossible for her to assent to my action towards her, impossible for her to share the goal I have in acting. I treat her as a means when I act in a way that prevents her from choosing whether to contribute to the realization of my end. This is a violation of duty, in Kant's terms.

One way that this can happen is through deception. Kant says in the *Groundwork* that the man who makes a lying promise to repay money he has no intention of repaying is making use of another 'merely as a means to an end he does not share. For the man whom I seek to use for my own purposes by such a promise cannot possibly share the end of the action'. The lender consents to the transaction under the description: 'giving the man temporary use of my money'. The action is in fact: 'giving the man permanent use of my money'. But the borrower's deceit has made it impossible for the lender to choose whether to consent to *that* action.¹⁷ To deceive is thus to make a person thing-like: something that cannot choose what it does. We begin to have an inkling as to how Kant's apparently harsh pronouncements about lying might stem from an 'attractive ideal of human relations': the ideal of treating persons as persons, the ideal of maintaining, as far as possible, the interactive stance. What is distinctive about human beings is that we are authors of our actions, that we can form ends and share them. What is bad about deception is that it blocks human agency, and in so doing, reduces persons to things.¹⁸

Think back to my cake making endeavours. There is a sense in which I might indeed be using my friend as a means: she is an excellent cook, and without her my cake would be a dismal flop. But if she knows I want to exploit her culinary abilities, thinks baking is fun and still wants to do it with me, she shares my end; she is not *merely* a means. But now

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430. This characterization draws heavily on Korsgaard.

¹⁸ To say this is not yet to address Kant's own characterization of what's wrong with lying in his letter, namely that it is a failure of duty to the self. That is because I think that what he says here is less plausible. He says, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, that to lie is to violate humanity in one's own person. It is to use one's natural being, one's power of speaking, as a means to an end that is nothing to do with 'the intrinsic end' of speech, which is the communication of thought. In this respect, lying is an unnatural use of one's natural self, like masturbation (*op. cit.*, note 4, 93, 94). Herbert's view, that honesty is something one owes to a friend, owes to others, has far more going for it, and finds independent support in Kant.

suppose my secret plan is to use the delectable cake as the *pièce de résistance* of this evening's romantic candle-lit dinner for two—a dinner to which her equally delectable and notoriously sweet toothed boyfriend is to be invited and, with luck, seduced. Now my friend is *merely* a means, merely a cog in the machine of my evil designs, just as surely as are the cherries and chocolate. Now I am *doing something with* my friend in the very same sense that I am *doing something with* cherries and chocolate, flour and brandy. My deceit makes it impossible for my friend to assent to the action, to share my goal, to share that activity. Consent, outright enthusiasm, is there for our joint action under the description: 'making a delicious cake'; but not, sadly, under the description: 'helping Rae to seduce Otto'. My deceit makes it impossible for her to choose that end as her end.

Notice that I need not lie to my friend in order to deceive her. A dose of reticence will do the trick. Indeed, a dose of reticence will work far better for this plot than any lie. What would the lie be? I nonchalantly remark to my friend as we are busily sieving the cocoa, measuring out the brandy: 'Oh, and by the way Dora, let me assure you that the seduction of Otto is the last thing on my mind.' Hm. The lady doth protest too much, methinks. Far safer to keep quiet. This suggests that Kant's careful distinction between lying and reticence is not something that springs from his fundamental principles. The important question, as far as the formula of humanity is concerned, is whether you manage to deceive.

The important issue, to put it in terms borrowed from Habermas, is whether your speech acts are *communicative* or *strategic*. What matters is not whether your locutions have the right truth values: what matters is what your speech act is doing with people. Kant notes in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, in a characteristic outburst against lying, that the Bible calls the Devil the author of all evil, and the father of all lies.¹⁹ Kant is right. But if you know your Bible, you know that what the Devil is *really* good at is not lies, but *strategic truth telling*. The Devil tries to achieve his nefarious ends by borrowing God's words. He challenges Jesus, during the Temptation, to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple: 'For it is written' he says, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone' (Matthew 4:6). It is indeed so written (Psalm 91: 11, 12), and if what is written is true, the Devil speaks the truth.

Kant's principles support not a rejection of lying *per se*, but a rejection of strategic speech in general, speech which treats people as things, not persons. This perspective finds added support in Kant's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 430. Kant is alluding to John 8:44.

discussion of another vice, again in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. There we find that it can be a duty *not to speak the truth*. Kant is not so famous for this duty. But as we have just seen, to speak truly can be to speak strategically, and Kant says that it can be a duty to remain silent, rather than to tell the truth in a way that undermines the respect due to persons. The truth-telling vice we have a duty to avoid is that of calumny. 'By calumny I mean merely the inclination to bring into the open something prejudicial to respect for others. This is contrary to the respect due to humanity as such. The wilful spreading of something that detracts from another person's honour— . . . even if what is said is true—diminishes respect for humanity as such'. We have a duty to 'throw the veil of benevolence over [people's] faults, not merely by softening our judgements but also by keeping these judgements to ourselves.'²⁰

Contrary to Kant's letter, there is no principled distinction to be drawn between lies and reticence. The question—in this context—is whether actions were strategic, and whether deception occurred. Whether Herbert said 'not-p' or whether she failed to say 'p' is irrelevant in the face of the categorical imperative, construed in this way. The question is what she got her friend to believe. If he was deceived, and it seems he was, then she forced him to perform actions he had no chance to choose. To that extent, she made him thing-like. She prevented him from being the initiator of his own action, and what is distinctive of things as opposed to people is that they do not choose what they do. Herbert failed to treat him as an end, in the Kantian sense: as a being who must be able 'to share the end of the action'.²¹

What actions did the friend choose to perform? Well, we can only speculate here, but let's suppose he chose to perform this action: 'courting a beautiful, intelligent young woman'. And this one: 'courting a beautiful intelligent young virgin'. It seems that that is what he thought he was doing. (The curious may skip to letter 4 for an explanation.)²² But the action he performed was not the action he chose, if he chose the latter. The courtship he freely engaged in was not what he thought. Deceived, he was prevented from fully being the author of his actions. And that is just what is bad about deception, on the Kantian view.

I have been talking about how Kant would answer the question 'What's so bad about deception?' and about how his answer draws on a picture of human relations that is in many ways attractive. What of friendship? His answer here draws on just the same picture. Friendship

²⁰ Ibid., 466.

²¹ Op. cit., note 13, 429.

²² See also Zweig, op. cit., note 2, 24.

(for the sane Kant of the *Doctrine of Virtue*) is a good thing because it is, as Korsgaard says, the moral relation 'in a perfected form'.²³ It is, in Strawson's terms, involvement at its best. We can take the objective standpoint occasionally towards friends, but the friendship will disappear if we take that attitude all the time, or even a significant part of the time. Kant thinks we have a duty of friendship.²⁴ Friendship is not 'a union aimed at mutual advantage' but an 'intimate union of love and respect'.²⁵ Friends want to share their activities, and this means that friends choose their ends in such a way that the other can choose those ends too. Friends need to view themselves and the other as responsible if they are to share activities at all, and especially if they share activities that are on-going. Friends do not just predict that they will be together, do things together. They plan to be together, do things together. As well as sharing their activities, friends want to share their thoughts. Ordinarily, Kant says—both in the letter to Herbert, and in the *Doctrine of Virtue*—we have to 'lock up' our thoughts. The man who is without a friend is the man who 'must shut himself up in himself, who must remain 'completely alone with his thoughts, *as in a prison*'.²⁶ But to a friend, one can—ideally—reveal oneself without anxiety or fear of betrayal. Friendship liberates, provides release from the prison of the self, enlarges the scope of the arena of virtue. When one is with a friend one is no longer 'completely alone with one's thoughts, as in a prison, but enjoys a *freedom* [otherwise] denied.'²⁷ The sphere of friendship is the sphere where one ideally has no temptation to lie, to remain reticent, to act strategically, but speaks one's mind: 'moral friendship is the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret thoughts and feelings to each other'.²⁸ In short, as Korsgaard puts it: 'to become friends is to create a neighbourhood where the Kingdom of Ends is real'.²⁹

II. Duty and Desolation

Having posted his moral sedative off to Austria, and received no reply from the patient in more than a year, Kant enquired of a mutual friend

²³ Op. cit., note 8, 4.

²⁴ Op. cit., note 4, 469.

²⁵ Ibid., 468, 469.

²⁶ Ibid., 471, my italics. This is a remarkable metaphor for a philosopher who finds in the autonomous human self, and its self-legislating activity, the only source of intrinsic value.

²⁷ Ibid., 471.

²⁸ Ibid., 471.

²⁹ Op. cit., note 8, 8.

who often saw her about the effect his letter had had. Herbert then wrote back, with apologies for her delay. This is her second letter:

3. *To Kant, from Maria von Herbert, January 1793*

Dear and revered sir,

Your kindness, and your exact understanding of the human heart, encourage me to describe to you, unshrinkingly, the further progress of my soul. The lie was no cloaking of a vice, but a sin of keeping something back out of consideration for the friendship (still veiled by love) that existed then. There was a struggle, I was aware of the honesty friendship demands, and at the same time I could foresee the terribly wounding consequences. Finally I had the strength and revealed the truth to my friend, but so late—and when I told him, the stone in my heart was gone, but his love was torn away in exchange. My friend hardened in his coldness, just as you said in your letter. But then afterwards he changed towards me, and offered me again the most intimate friendship. I'm glad enough about it, for his sake—but I'm not really content, because it's just amusement, it doesn't have any point.

My vision is clear now. I feel that a vast emptiness extends inside me, and all around me—so that I almost find myself to be superfluous, unnecessary. Nothing attracts me. I'm tormented by a boredom that makes life intolerable. Don't think me arrogant for saying this, but the demands of morality are too easy for me. I would eagerly do twice as much as they command. They only get their prestige from the attractiveness of sin, and it costs me almost no effort to resist that.

I comfort myself with the thought that, since the practice of morality is so bound up with sensuality, it can only count for this world. I can hope that the afterlife won't be yet another life ruled by these few, easy demands of morality, another empty and vegetating life. Experience wants to take me to task for this bad temper I have against life by showing me that nearly everyone finds his life ending much too soon, everyone is so glad to be alive. So as not to be a queer exception to the rule, I shall tell you of a remote cause of my deviation, namely my chronic poor health, which dates from the time I first wrote to you. I don't study the natural sciences or the arts any more, since I don't feel that I'm genius enough to extend them; and for myself, there's no need to know them. I'm indifferent to everything that doesn't bear on the categorical imperative, and my transcendental consciousness—although I'm all done with those thoughts too.

You can see, perhaps, why I only want one thing, namely to shorten this pointless life, a life which I am convinced will get

neither better nor worse. If you consider that I am still young and that each day interests me only to the extent that it brings me closer to death, you can judge what a great benefactor you would be if you were to examine this question closely. I ask you, because my conception of morality is silent here, whereas it speaks decisively on all other matters. And if you cannot give me the answer I seek, I beg you to give me something that will get this intolerable emptiness out of my soul. Then I might become a useful part of nature, and, if my health permits, would make a trip to Königsberg in a few years. I want to ask permission, in advance, to visit you. You must tell me your story then, because I would like to know what kind of life your philosophy has led you to—whether it never seemed to you to be worth the bother to marry, or to give your whole heart to anyone, or to reproduce your likeness. I have an engraved portrait of you by Bause, from Leipzig. I see a profound calm there, and moral depth—but not the astuteness of which the *Critique of Pure Reason* is proof. And I'm dissatisfied not to be able to look you right in the face.

Please fulfil my wish, if it's not too inconvenient. And I need to remind you: if you do me this great favour and take the trouble to answer, please focus on specific details, not on the general points, which I understand, and already understood back when I happily studied your works at the side of my friend. You would like him, I'm sure. He is honest, goodhearted, and intelligent—and besides that, fortunate enough to fit this world.

I am, with deepest respect and truth, Maria Herbert.

Herbert's letter speaks for itself. The passion, the turbulence, has vanished. Desolation has taken its place, a 'vast emptiness', a vision of the world and the self that is chilling in its clarity, chilling in its nihilism. Apathy reigns. Desire is dead. Nothing attracts. Bereft of inclination, the self is 'superfluous', as Herbert so starkly puts it. Nothing has any point—except of course the categorical imperative. But morality itself has become a torment, not because it is too difficult, but because it is too easy. Without the counterweight of opposing inclination, what course could there be but to obey? The moral life is the empty, vegetating life, where one sees at a glance what the moral law requires and simply does it, unhampered by the competing attractions of sin. Herbert concludes that morality must be bound up with sensuality, that moral credit depends on the battle of the will with the sensual passions, a battle which, when there are no passions, is won merely, and tediously, by default—and where can be the credit in that? The imperative requires us never to treat persons merely as means to one's own ends. But if one has no ends, if one is simply empty, what

could be easier than to obey? Herbert draws hope from her conclusion: if morality is bound to sensuality, with luck the next life will not be thus accursed.

This sounds like heresy. Is it? If so, Kant is blind to it. But perhaps it is not heresy at all. What Kant fails to see—what Herbert herself fails to see—is that her life constitutes a profound challenge to his philosophy, at least construed one way. Consider Kant's views on duty and inclination.

An action has moral worth when it is done for the sake of duty; it is not sufficient that the action conforms with duty.³⁰ Now, inclinations are often sufficient to make us perform actions that conform with our duty. To preserve one's life is a duty; and most of us have strong inclinations to preserve our lives. To help others where one can is a duty; and most of us are sympathetic enough and amiable enough to be inclined to help others, at least some of the time. But—if we take Kant at his word here—actions thus motivated have no moral worth. The action of moral worth is that of 'the wretched man . . . [for whom] disappointments and hopeless misery have quite taken away the taste for life, who longs for death' but who, notwithstanding, preserves his life. The action that has moral worth is that of the misanthropist, 'the man cold in temperament and indifferent to the sufferings of others' who none the less helps others 'not from inclination but from duty'.³¹

This looks as though moral credit depends on both the absence of coinciding inclinations, such as sympathy; and the presence of opposing inclinations, like misanthropy. If so, Herbert is right: morality depends on there being inclinations to defeat. She has anticipated Schiller's complaint against Kant. An alternative reading, though, might be that the issue is epistemological: the presence of opposing inclinations helps us to *know* that we are acting for duty's sake.³²

These views on the sympathetic inclinations take us far away from the 'attractive ideal of human relations' that Korsgaard hoped to find. The severe Kant is very far from the sane. It is important to see though that even here, what Kant says is not motivated by a kind of blind rule worship, but by a sense of the gulf between the two standpoints from which we must view ourselves. We are at once cogs in the grand machine of nature, and free agents in the Kingdom of Ends. We are persons, members of an intelligible world, authors of our actions; and at the same time animals, puppets of our genes and hormones, buffeted

³⁰ Op. cit., note 13, 397.

³¹ Ibid., 398.

³² For a defence of the latter reading, see Barbara Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty', *Philosophical Review* 90, No. 3 (1981), 359–82.

about by our lusts and loathings. Inclinations are *passions* in the sense that they *just happen* to us. And in so far as we let our actions be driven by them we allow ourselves to be puppets, not persons. We allow ourselves, to use Kant's own metaphors, to become marionettes or automata, which may appear to be initiators of action, but whose freedom is illusory, 'no better than the freedom of a turnspit, which, when once wound up also carries out its motions by itself'.³³ The inclinations are effects on us, they are *pathē*, and for that reason pathological. If we let them be causes of our behaviour, we abandon our personhood.

Whether they lead us towards the action of duty or away from it, inclinations are among virtue's chief obstacles. When inclination opposes duty, it is an obstacle to duty's performance. When inclination coincides with duty, it is an obstacle at least to knowledge of the action's worth. 'Inclination, be it good-natured or otherwise, is blind and slavish . . . The feeling of sympathy and warmhearted fellow-feeling . . . is burdensome even to right-thinking persons, confusing their considered maxims and creating the wish to be free from them and subject only to law-giving reason.'³⁴ In the battle against the inclinations we can enlist the aid of that strange thing, respect, or reverence for the moral law. Reverence for the law serves to 'weaken the hindering influence of the inclinations'.³⁵ Reverence is a kind of feeling, but it is not something we 'passively feel', something inflicted upon us from outside. It is the sensible correlate of our own moral activity, the 'consciousness of the direct constraint of the will through law'.³⁶ Its function is not to motivate our moral actions, for that would still be motivation by feeling. Rather, its function is to remove the obstacles, to silence inclinations, something we should all look forward to. For inclinations are 'so far from having an absolute value . . . that it must . . . be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them'.³⁷

Kant goes so far as to say we have a *duty of apathy*, yet another duty he is less than famous for. 'Virtue necessarily presupposes apathy', he says in *The Doctrine of Virtue*. 'The word "apathy" has fallen into disrepute', he continues, 'as if it meant lack of feeling and so subjective indifference regarding objects of choice: it has been taken for weakness. We can prevent this misunderstanding by giving the name "*moral*

³³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, L. W. Beck (trans.) (Macmillan, 1956), 97, 101.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, note 13, 428.

apathy” to that freedom from agitation which is to be distinguished from indifference, for in it the feelings arising from sensuous impressions lose their influence on moral feeling only because reverence for the law prevails over all such feelings’.³⁸ Something rather similar to apathy is described in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, but this time it is called not apathy, but ‘bliss’ (*Seligkeit*). Bliss is the state of ‘complete independence from inclinations and desires’.³⁹ While it must be the universal wish of every rational being to achieve bliss, can we in fact achieve it? Apparently not, or not here. Bliss is ‘the self-sufficiency which can be ascribed only to the Supreme Being’.⁴⁰ The Supreme Being has no passions and inclinations. His intuition is intellectual, and not sensible. He can be affected by nothing, not even our prayers. He can have no *pathē*. God is the being more apathetic than which none can be conceived.

What of Kant’s moral patient? She is well beyond the virtue of apathy that goes with mastery of the inclinations. She has no inclinations left to master. She respects the moral law, and obeys it. But she need not battle her passions to do so. She has no passions. She is empty—but for the clear vision of the moral law and unshrinking obedience to it. She is well on the way to bliss, lucky woman, and, if Kant is right about bliss, well on the way to Godhead. No wonder she feels that she—unlike her unnamed friend—does not quite ‘fit the world’. She obeys the moral law in her day to day dealings with people from the motive of duty alone. She has no other motives. She is no heretic. She is a Kantian saint. Oh brave new world, that has such moral saints in it.⁴¹

What should Kant have said about inclinations? I have no clear view about this, but some brief remarks may be in order. A saner view is arguably to be found in Kant’s own writings, a view that has been defended by Korsgaard and Herman. In the *Doctrine of Virtue*⁴² Kant apparently advocates the cultivation of natural sentiment to back up the motive of duty. It is hard, though, to reconcile this with his other teachings, which tell us that inclinations, all inclinations, are to be abjured, as ‘blind and slavish’, in the graphic phrase from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. ‘Blind’ is an evocative word in the Kantian context, associated as it is with the blind workings of nature, with the sensual as opposed to the intellectual. It calls to mind the famous slogan of the first *Critique*: thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without

³⁸ Op. cit., note 4, 407.

³⁹ Op. cit., note 33, 118.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Susan Wolf, ‘Moral Saints’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), 419–39, on the perils of sainthood.

⁴² See for example op. cit., note 4, 456.

concepts are blind. That slogan famously captures the synthesis of rationalism and empiricism Kant thought necessary for knowledge. It acknowledges the twin aspects of human creatures, as Kant sees us: we have a *sensible* intuition, a *passive* intuition, through which we are affected by the world; and an active intellect. *We need both*. If only Kant had effected a similar synthesis in the moral sphere: for if it is true, as he says, that inclinations without reasons are blind, it seems equally true that reasons without inclinations are empty. The moral life without inclinations is a life of 'intolerable emptiness', as Herbert found. We need both.

I said that Herbert has no inclinations: but there are two exceptions. She wants to die. And she wants to visit Kant. She is, it seems, like the would-be suicide Kant describes in *The Groundwork*: her persistence with life has moral worth, because it is so opposed to her inclinations. But is she really like him? Not quite. For she is not even sure that duty points to persistence with life. Notice the change here. In her first letter she believed that self-respect, respect for 'her own being' required her to persist with life. But as her 'being' has begun to contract, as the self has withered, sloughed off, become superfluous—as the emptiness has grown—so too has her doubt. Now her conception of morality is 'silent' on the question of suicide. She wants to die. She has almost no opposing inclinations. And morality is silent. It takes no expert to wonder if she is in danger.

Why does she want to visit Kant? She says (letter 3) 'I would like to know what kind of life your philosophy has led you to'. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant cites approvingly what he took to be the practice of the ancients: no one was justified in calling himself a philosopher—a lover of wisdom—'unless he could show [philosophy's] infallible effect on his own person as an example'.⁴³ Kant thinks we are justified in inquiring after the effect of philosophy on the philosopher, daunting as the prospect seems today. But what does Herbert have in mind? She wonders, perhaps, whether Kant's life is as empty as her own, and for the same reason. She discovered that love is 'pointless' when inclinations have withered, when you have no passions of your own and therefore no passions to share. And she wonders whether Kant's life reflects this discovery. She wonders whether Kant's philosophy has led him to think that it was simply 'not worth the bother' to marry, or to 'give his whole heart' to anyone. Perhaps she is right to wonder.

⁴³ Op. cit., note 33, 109.

III. Shipwreck

In reply to an enquiry, Kant received this explanatory letter from a mutual friend, Erhard:

4. To Kant, from J. B. Erhard, January 17, 1793

I can say little of Miss Herbert. She has capsized on the reef of romantic love. In order to realize an idealistic love, she gave herself to a man who misused her trust. And then, trying to achieve such love with another, she told her new lover about the previous one. That is the key to her letter. If my friend Herbert had more delicacy, I think she could still be saved.

Yours, Erhard.

Kant writes again, not to Herbert, but to someone about whom we know little:

5. From Kant, to Elisabeth Motherby, February 11, 1793

I have numbered the letters⁴⁴ which I have the honour of passing on to you, my dear mademoiselle, according to the dates I received them. The ecstatic little lady didn't think to date them. The third letter, from another source, provides an explanation of the lady's curious mental derangement. A number of expressions refer to writings of mine that she read, and are difficult to understand without an interpreter.

You have been so fortunate in your upbringing that I do not need to commend these letters to you as an example of warning, to guard you against the wanderings of a sublimated fantasy. But they may serve nonetheless to make your perception of that good fortune all the more lively.

I am, with the greatest respect, my honoured lady's most obedient servant,

I. Kant.

Kant is unaware that he has received a letter from a Kantian saint. Indeed, it is hard to believe that he has read her second letter. He relies on the opinion of his friend, whose diagnosis of the patient resorts to that traditional and convenient malady of feminine hysteria. Herbert 'has capsized on the reef of romantic love'. The diagnosis is exactly wrong. Herbert has no passions. Her vision is clear. Her life is empty. But it is easier not to take this in, easier to suppose a simpler illness. She is at the mercy (aren't all women?) of irrational passions. She is evi-

⁴⁴ Letters 1, 3 and 4 above. Elisabeth Motherby was the daughter of Kant's friend Robert Motherby, an English merchant in Königsberg.

dently beyond the reach of instruction, beyond the reach of his moral sedatives; so Kant abandons her. It is hard to imagine a more dramatic shift from the interactive stance to the objective. In Kant's first letter, Herbert is 'my dear friend', she is the subject for moral instruction, and reprimand. She is responsible for some immoral actions, but she has a 'heart created for the sake of virtue', capable of seeing the good and doing it. Kant is doing his best to communicate, instruct, and console. He is not very good at it, hardly surprising if he believes—as I think he does—that he should master rather than cultivate his moral sentiments. But there is little doubt that the good will is there. He treats her as a human being, as an end, as a person. This is the standpoint of interaction.

But now? Herbert is *die kleine Schwärmerin, the little dreamer, the ecstatic girl, suffering a 'curious mental derangement', lost in the 'wanderings of a sublimated fantasy', who doesn't think, especially about important things like dating letters. Kant is here forgetting an important aspect of the duty of respect, which requires something like a Davidsonian principle of charity. We have 'a duty of respect for man even in the logical use of his reason: a duty not to censure his error by calling it absurdity . . . but rather to suppose that his error must yet contain some truth and to seek this out.*⁴⁵ Herbert, now deranged, is no longer guilty. She is merely unfortunate. She is not responsible for what she does. She is the pitiful product of a poor upbringing. She is an item in the natural order, a ship wrecked on a reef. She is a thing.

And, true to Kant's picture, it now becomes appropriate to use her as a means to his own ends. He bundles up her letters, private communications from a 'dear friend', letters that express thoughts, philosophical and personal, some of them profound. He bundles them up and sends them to an acquaintance under the title, 'Example of Warning'. The end is obscure and contradictory: it seems it is to warn somebody who, on Kant's own view, needs no warning. Is it gossip? Ingratiation? But the striking thing is that the letters are no longer seen as human communications. Far from it: Kant's presumption is that they *will not be understood* by their new recipient. For the letters 'refer to writings of mine that she read, that are difficult to understand without an interpreter'. This is not the speech of persons, to be understood and debated; this is derangement, to be feared and avoided. These are not thoughts, but symptoms. Kant is doing something with her as one does something with a tool: Herbert cannot share the end of his action. She cannot be co-author. Kant's deceiving of her—neatly achieved by reticence—has made sure of that. Her action of pleading for help, asking advice, arguing philosophy, her action of writing to a well-loved

⁴⁵ Op. cit., note 4, 462, my italics.

philosopher and then to a friend—these have become the action of warning of the perils of romantic love. She did not choose to do *that*. Well may Kant have warned, ‘My dear friends, there is no such thing as a friend’.

IV. Strategy for the Kingdom’s Sake

Enough. This is not a cautionary tale of the inability of philosophers to live by their philosophy. What interests me is what interested Kant at the outset: friendship and deception. What interests me is the very first problem: the ‘long drawn out lie, disclosed’. Was it wrong for Herbert to deceive? Was it wrong for her to act strategically? Is it always wrong to deceive? Apparently, yes, from the Kantian perspective. In deceiving we treat our hearers as less than human. We act from the objective standpoint. We force others to perform actions they do not choose to perform. We make them things. If I reply to the murderer, ‘No, my friend is not here’, I deceive a human being, use his reasoning ability as a tool, do something that has a goal (saving my friend) that I make impossible for him to share, make him do something (abandon his prey) that he did not choose to do. I have made him, in this respect, a thing.

But let’s think about this some more. We want to say—though Kant did not want to say—that I *ought* to lie to the murderer. Christine Korsgaard proposes a way in which we can have what we want, and remain faithful to the Kantian spirit. She raises some important questions about the role of the idea of the Kingdom of Ends, a Kingdom of persons who always treat people with the dignity that is their due, a Kingdom where the performance of duty does not backfire. According to Kant, we must act as if we are already inhabitants of the Kingdom. We must obey the categorical imperative regardless of the consequences, regardless of the realities of life in this world, a world that is far from the Kingdom, a world that, as Korsgaard says, is often evil. In such a world, acting in accordance with the moral law can lead to bad consequences, not simply in the prudential sense that Kant so despises, but in the sense of actively promoting evil. If I tell the truth to the murderer, I become an *instrument of evil*, as useful to his ends as the brandished axe. Kant thinks the evil that results is no responsibility of yours. But that is an impossible view. It is a terrible mistake for moral theory to blinker itself to the presence of evil, says Korsgaard, and she calls for revision—but a revision that makes sense in Kantian terms.

Much moral and political philosophy concerns itself with the construction of an ideal: we ask what a perfectly just, or a perfectly moral, society would look like. There are many answers. Kant’s answer is the

Kingdom of Ends. We then observe that the world we live in is very far from this ideal. And the question arises: what should we do? Should we live by our ideal now? Or should we do all that is in our power to make our ideal a reality? The questions are not the same: in an evil world, acting in accordance with the ideal may backfire, and make the achievement of the ideal more, and not less, remote. Acting justly in every circumstance may lead to more, not less, injustice. Telling the truth to the murderer will lead to more evil, not less. Kant thinks we must ignore this fact: the ideal of the Kingdom is an ideal to be lived by, not a goal to be sought after.

Korsgaard disagrees, and her proposed revision is this: when circumstances are far from the ideal, the ideal becomes a goal, something to strive towards, not something to live up to.⁴⁶ The Kantian ideal is one that should indeed guide us in daily life. But since we live in a world that is far from the Kingdom, we will sometimes encounter evil circumstances, and when we do, we must think of the Kingdom as an ideal to be worked towards, not lived by.⁴⁷

And the murderer? We are, first, allowed to lie. Lying is, ordinarily, impermissible. But in these evil circumstances it is permissible. Then other duties come in to play that make it not simply permissible, but required: duties of mutual aid, duties of self respect. To lie would be to be to allow yourself to be made an instrument for evil. 'You owe it to humanity in your own person', says Korsgaard, 'not to allow your honesty to be used as a resource of evil'. You will come closer to achieving the Kingdom of Ends if you lie, in this case, than if you do

⁴⁶ In the non-ideal case, she says, one's actions may be guided by a more instrumental style of reasoning than in ideal theory. But Korsgaard also wants to say that non-ideal theory is not a form of consequentialism. The goal set by the ideal is not one of good consequences, but of a just state of affairs (*op. cit.*, note 7, 343). I am unhappy with this defence: her view does apparently endorse a kind of consequentialism. It permits actions that are likely to have a certain good consequence, namely a just state of affairs. (Of course this is not consequentialism of a utilitarian variety.)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* There are constraints on what we are permitted to do for the sake of this end. Briefly: on Korsgaard's view, the formula of universal law provides constraints on what we are permitted to do in our attempts to make the Kingdom a reality, when faced with evil. In the case of lying to the murderer, she believes that the formula of universal law, correctly applied, will yield a permissive conclusion. Korsgaard's reconstruction is subtle and complex, drawing on a Rawlsian distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory. I have not done Korsgaard justice here, and readers are referred to her article for the fuller picture. I should also say that my final conclusion, namely that in this case Herbert may have had a duty to lie, is not endorsed by Korsgaard herself.

not. So that is what you should do. What we have here is something like: strategy for the Kingdom's sake.

I shall not comment on Korsgaard's proposal. But I suggest that it may have implications here. Herbert puts her dilemma like this: 'I was aware of *the honesty friendship demands* and at the same time I could see the terribly wounding consequences . . . The lie . . . was a . . . keeping something back *out of consideration for the friendship*.'⁴⁸ She is torn. Friendship demands honesty; and friendship demands dishonesty. Is she confused? Is she in contradiction? Not at all. It is the same old dilemma: having an ideal you want to live by, and an ideal you want to seek and preserve. You owe honesty to your friend; but the friendship will vanish if you are honest. Friendship is a very great good: it is, on the sane Kantian view we have been looking at, the Kingdom of Ends made real and local. One of the goods of friendship is that it makes possible the kind of relationship where one can unlock the prison of the self, reveal oneself to the compassionate and understanding eye of the other. But Kant sees true friendship to be a very rare thing, rare, he says as a black swan.⁴⁹ And what threatens friendship most is asymmetry, inequality with regard to love or respect, which can result in the partial breakdown of the interactive stance. This asymmetry can be brought about by the very act of self-revelation: if one person 'reveals his failings while the other person concealed his own, he would lose something of the other's respect by presenting himself so candidly'.⁵⁰ What Kant is pointing to is the very problem encountered, far more acutely, by Herbert: in being a friend, in acting in the way that friendship demands, one can sometimes threaten friendship. To act as a member of the Kingdom can make the Kingdom more, and not less, remote. It resembles, in this respect, the problem of the murderer at the door. If Korsgaard is right, then it is sometimes permissible and even required to act strategically for the Kingdom's sake. Does that apply here?

Korsgaard says that we take this route when we are faced with evil. But she doesn't say what evil is. For Kant, what could evil be but this: the reduction of persons to things? Now consider Herbert's position. There is something we have been leaving out. Herbert is a *woman* in a society in which women start out on an unequal footing and then live out their lives that way, where women—especially women—must perpetually walk a tightrope between being treated as things and treated as persons. She must make her choices against a backdrop of social institutions and habits that strip her of the dignity due to persons,

⁴⁸ Letter 3, my italics.

⁴⁹ Op. cit., note 4, 471. Kant's ignorance of Antipodean bird life is (just) forgivable.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 471.

where what she does and what she says will always be interpreted in the light of that backdrop, so that even if she says ‘my vision is clear’, and speaks in a manner consistent with that claim, her speech will be read as the speech of the deranged, a mere plaything of the passions. Central among the institutions she must encounter in her life is that of the sexual marketplace, where human beings are viewed as having a *price*, and not a dignity, and where the price of women is fixed in a particular way. Women, as things, as items in the sexual marketplace, have a market value that depends in part on whether they have been used. Virgins fetch a higher price than second hand goods. Such are the background circumstances in which Herbert finds herself. They are, I suggest, evil circumstances, evil by Kantian lights (though Kant himself never saw it).

Despite these handicaps, Herbert has achieved a great thing: she has achieved something like a friendship of mutual love and respect, found someone with whom she can share her activities and goals, become a partner in a relationship where ends are chosen in such a way that the ends of both agents coincide (prominent among which was, it seems, the happy study of Kant’s works!). She has achieved a relationship where frankness and honesty prevail—with one exception. Her lie is the lie of ‘keeping something back for the sake of the friendship’. If she tells the truth, evil circumstance will see to it that her action will not be taken as the honest self-revelation of a person, but the revelation of her thinghood, her hitherto unrecognized status as used merchandise, as an item with a price that is lower than the usual. If she tells the truth, she becomes a thing, and the friendship—that small neighbourhood of the Kingdom—will vanish. Should she lie? Perhaps. If her circumstances are evil, she is permitted to have friendship as her goal, to be sought and preserved, rather than a law to be lived by. So she is permitted to lie. Then other considerations come in. She has a duty to ‘humanity in her own person’, of which Kant says: ‘By virtue of this worth we are not for sale at any price; we possess an inalienable dignity which instils in us reverence for ourselves’. She has a duty of self esteem: she must respect her own person and demand such respect of others, abjuring the vice of servility.⁵¹ I think she may have a duty to lie.

This is strategy, for the Kingdom’s sake. Kant would not allow it. He thinks we should act as if the Kingdom of Ends is with us now. He thinks we should rely on God to make it all right in the end. But God will not make it all right in the end. And the Kingdom of Ends is not with us now. Perhaps we should do what we can to bring it about.

⁵¹ Ibid., 434, 435.

V. Coda.

Kant never replied, and his correspondent, as far as I know, did not leave Austria.⁵² In 1803 Maria von Herbert killed herself, having worked out at last an answer to that persistent and troubling question—the question to which Kant, and her own moral sense, had responded with silence. Was that a vicious thing to do? Not entirely. As Kant himself concedes, ‘Self-murder requires courage, and in this attitude there is always room for reverence for humanity in one’s own person.’⁵³

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⁵² There is one final letter from her on the record, dated early 1794, in which she expresses again a wish to visit Kant, and reflects upon her own desire for death.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 424.