

Response to Professor Yang

Christopher Fremaux

I thank Professor Yang for reviewing my paper and for his thoughtful comments. He has asked me to expand upon my discussion of the heterogeneity between virtue and happiness and how Kant establishes a causal connection between them such that virtue becomes the basis of one's expectation of happiness. In the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that the highest good, that is, the supreme end of pure practical reason, consists in the expectation of one's own happiness, conditioned by one's degree of moral virtue. Virtue is the criterion for happiness; it is the measure of one's worthiness to be happy. However, unlike the natural lawyers,¹ Kant insists that this relation is not analytic but synthetic. Virtue and happiness are heterogeneous concepts insofar as virtue is not contained in the concept of happiness, nor is happiness contained in the concept of virtue. Therefore, in order for virtue to be the condition for happiness, and so for the highest good to be possible, some further concept is required to synthesize these heterogeneous elements. At this point in the text, Kant introduces the three postulates of pure practical reason: freedom, immortality, and God. As Kant

¹ Along with the Stoics and the Epicureans, as Kant discusses at KpV 5:111-12.

explains, “these postulates are not theoretical dogmas but *presuppositions* having a necessarily practical reference.”² Kant argues that these postulates are required to secure the possibility of the highest good because, by means of them, virtue and happiness are synthesized. Although freedom and immortality are most important with respect to the possibility of perfect virtue,³ Kant privileges the postulate of God’s existence as the fundamental ground of this synthesis. This is because only an omnipotent being could create a universe in which one’s happiness conforms to one’s worthiness to be happy (i.e., virtue), if not in this life, then in a postulated life to come. Moreover, only an omniscient being is capable of perfectly understanding one’s degree of virtue and of ensuring, through its infinite power, that one receives precisely as much happiness as one deserves.⁴ Thus, practical reason postulates the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient being (i.e., God) in order to synthesize virtue and happiness and thereby make the highest good coherent. In view of Professor Yang’s question, it should be noted that Kant’s introduction of God as essential for the synthesis of virtue and happiness does not render these elements homogeneous in themselves. As concepts, virtue and happiness remain heterogeneous. Nevertheless, a degree of homogeneity is accomplished insofar as the idea of God synthesizes these in such a way that it is rationally coherent for one to hold virtue as the ground in view of which one can expect happiness, where the latter is in exact proportion to the former. I hope I have clarified Professor Yang’s thoughtful question with this brief response.

² Kant, KpV 5:132: “Diese Postulate sind nicht theoretische Dogmata, sondern Voraussetzungen in nothwendig praktischer Rücksicht” (Gregor’s translation).

³ See Ibid, 5:122-23 and 5:132-33.

⁴ See Ibid, 5:124-32 for Kant’s discussion of God’s existence as a practical postulate and the central role this postulate plays in securing the possibility of the highest good.