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Abstract. Kant's reflection on happiness starts from the theme of morality as it focuses on the attempt to reconcile moral virtue and the attainment of happiness. The peculiarity of this reflection is to enter the religious sphere, since the need for moral fulfilment and a contemporary state of happiness must be referred to a non-phenomenal sphere. It is therefore necessary to propose the immortality of the soul and the presence of a God who guarantees this moral fulfilment of man to speak of a real achievement of happiness. This perspective is also interesting for contemporary philosophical reflection because it overturns the relationship between morality and religion: it is no longer the latter that provides the basis for morality, but morality, to be complete, requires that we proceed towards the sphere of spiritual reality.

Keywords: morality, religion, God, soul, happiness

***Dedicated to the people suffering in Ukraine and against all wars.
Happiness is the goal of a more beautiful and more peaceful world.***

When Kant deals with the difficult question of the antinomy of practical reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he points to happiness as «the condition of a rational being in the world, to whom, in the whole course of life, everything happens according to his desire and will, and is thus founded on the agreement of nature with the total end of it, and so also with the essential determining motive of his will».⁵ But such a condition is not attainable only by adherence to one's own inclination; even if one turns one's attention completely away from the call of the categorical imperative, by promoting the 'principle of self-love' as the guide of one's conduct, man cannot attain a condition whereby 'in the whole course of life, everything happens according to his desire and his will'. It is not possible to think of the events of the human world as completely fulfilling the expectations of the individual. Man is not able to influence the course of the world in such a way that everything can take place according to his own expectations. Thus, the expectation of happiness is chimerical in the human sensible world; Kant points out that man «cannot be the cause of this nature by his will, and, as far as his happiness is concerned, he cannot by his own strength continually produce the agreement of this nature with his practical principles».⁶

Perhaps, then, the perceptible happiness that follows the attainment of the object of human desire is not the same happiness that is to be expected from the perspective of the highest good, a condition attainable in the intelligible sphere; also because in the end a perceptible happiness proves to be in reality ephemeral, never quite capable of giving

⁵I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, trad. it. a cura di F.Capra, Laterza, Bari 1997, p. 273.

⁶*Ibidem*.

complete satisfaction to the faculty of desire. In order to promote the highest good as the goal of the moral life, it is necessary to postulate the existence of an intelligible world as a guarantee.⁷ Without such a guarantee, the highest good would be an empty concept and the human hope of perfection and happiness would no longer be so reasonable. «The sanctity of morals is already shown in this life as a model; but the well-being proportionate to it, the beatitude, is presented as attainable only in eternity; for that must always be the prototype of the way in every state, and progress towards it is already possible and necessary in this life; this, on the other hand, in this world under the name of happiness, cannot be attained at all (so far as it depends on our power), and therefore can only be the object of hope»⁸. Ultimately, happiness, understood as a condition of total fulfilment with nothing left to desire, must be distinguished from sensible happiness and considered as "the beatitude attainable only in eternity", that is, as the goal to be reached in the perspective of the eternity of the intelligible world through a path of continuous progression. The irrefutable proof of the reality of this intelligible sphere is given precisely by the moral law and freedom, the faculty that allows one to emancipate oneself from the deterministic bonds of the sensible world to identify man's own landing place in the world of pure rational entities. On the other hand, if man is also an inhabitant of that world, he must live by the rules of that world, namely the rules of moral law. The postulate of the immortality of the soul is always explained starting from the concept of the highest good. «Thus, the highest good is practically only possible with the supposition of the immortality of the soul; therefore, this, as inseparably linked with the moral law, is a postulate of practical pure reason».⁹

In the succession of moments of human existence, the complete adherence of will and moral law is not realised. It has already been mentioned above that freedom does not consist in the immediate implementation of a state of bliss for man: in the end, it is always man who chooses whether or not to follow the moral norm, and it is difficult to see holy wills in the experiential world. However, infinite progress leading to complete adherence of will and moral law must surely be admitted by virtue of the concept of the highest good. Nevertheless, the human destination towards a state of holiness turns out to be that end of the moral life which, while not being a sufficient reason for morality, is posited as an incentive of the greatest practical utility and, moreover, rationally admissible for human fulfilment. Kant writes on this subject: «Conformity of will and law, while nevertheless required as practically necessary, can only be found in an infinitely advancing progress towards that complete conformity».¹⁰ Herein lies precisely the value and strength of this postulate: man in his actions is well aware of his limitations, of how the sensible world in which he lives is an obstacle to the affirmation of action for duty. «But the complete conformity of the will with the moral law is holiness, a perfection of which no rational being in the sensible world is capable at any moment of its existence».¹¹ It is therefore a necessary continuation of the soul on its path of improvement, otherwise man would not be able to achieve the state of perfection

⁷Cfr. P. Salvucci, *L'uomo di Kant*, Argalia, Urbino 1963, p. 418.

⁸I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, cit., p. 283.

⁹Ivi, p. 269.

¹⁰*Ibidem*.

¹¹*Ibidem*.

demanding by the concept of the highest good and, on the other hand, he would not complete the tension of achieving complete adherence between his will and the moral law. As well as rationally clarifying the possibility of the realisation of the goal of moral life, the postulate of the immortality of the soul also manages to be of great practical use for two reasons. First, without this postulate «the moral law is completely degraded of its sanctity, since it is represented as tolerant (lenient) and so conforms to our comfort».¹² The risk would then consist in a rather limited categorical nature of the law, which does not match the command with an adequate consequence. If the prospect of holiness were to be denied, the law itself would no longer be so unconditional, and man would be faced with the risk of justifying moral conduct that was too close to his needs, too accommodating to his expectations. The sanctity of the law demands, in its categorical nature, that the wills of men begin the journey that leads them to become holy themselves, precisely by doing violence to themselves, but with the legitimate expectation of reaching perfection in the eternity of the intelligible sphere.

Secondly, without this postulate it would happen that «one extends one's vocation, and at the same time one's expectation, to an unattainable determination, that is to say, to the hope of a complete acquisition of the sanctity of the will, and one wanders into extravagant theosophical dreams that contradict self-knowledge at all»¹³. In this case, man would instead fall into the irrational sphere, not having a clear idea of what rational expectations await him, going to hope for expectations beyond any rational legitimacy, ultimately falling back into the old metaphysics. The postulate of the immortality of the soul is followed, almost inevitably, by the postulate of the existence of God. Here too there is a very precise reference to the role of the highest good in the enunciation of this postulate. It is necessary «...to postulate the existence of God as necessarily belonging to the possibility of the highest good».¹⁴ Kant goes on to emphasise that it is impossible to achieve happiness in earthly life if one remains close to the call of duty: «So in the moral law there is not the slightest principle of a necessary connection between morality and happiness».¹⁵ However, it is repeatedly emphasised that the highest good must be promoted, that end of the moral life which describes the state of bliss that man can attain. In order to admit the highest good, it has been seen that it is necessary to postulate a continuation of the life of the soul beyond death, but this is not enough: for the realisation of the highest good it is also necessary to postulate «the existence of a cause of all nature, different from nature, which contains the principle of this connection, that is, of the exact agreement of happiness with morality».¹⁶ It is therefore also necessary to think of a first cause that structures nature in such a way that the highest good is realisable. Such a cause is God: «Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being who through the intellect and will is the cause (hence the author) of nature, namely God. Consequently, the postulate of the possibility of the supreme good derived from the optimal world, and at the same time the postulate of the reality of an original supreme good, i.e. of the

¹²*Ibidem*.

¹³Ivi, p. 269.

¹⁴Ivi, p. 273.

¹⁵*Ibidem*.

¹⁶Ivi, p. 275.

existence of God».¹⁷ This first cause must then be thought of as capable of guaranteeing pure rational entities a situation of complete fulfilment, of total and absolute independence with respect to subjective cravings, which can ultimately ensure a situation of absolute happiness. The God of the third postulate is the guarantor of the realm of ends, the realm of the intelligible, the "optimal world" in which it is plausible to think of attaining, in the perspective of eternity, the highest good. In this extra-phenomenical sphere, those conditions of supersensible existence that are adequate for the fulfilment of the intelligible man are plausibly granted; so that the ultimate moral improvement, accompanied by the attainment of happiness, is made feasible. The postulates are necessary for the expectation of happiness in the afterlife in that they become the foundation of the human intelligible constitution: «The preliminary question on the cognitive level is that of human freedom, but on the practical level freedom cannot be observed except in the external actions of man, in the results of the freedom of the phenomenon, in connection therefore with the sensible conditioning. On this pragmatic level, where happiness sometimes seems to be in conflict with morality, the conviction of the immortality of the soul and of the existence of God are the only principles that can play a role of discipline, of rule, of canon to reason in its practical use».¹⁸ Promoting the highest good declares the purpose of moral life and thus opens up the perspective of happiness that is so far removed from moral life in the sensible world. However, Kant emphasises that moral investigation remains far from the teleological perspective of the attainment of happiness: one cannot look to the highest good for the expectation of happiness that it succeeds in filling. The highest good is to be pursued on the basis of the moral law: «...and although my happiness is included in the concept of the highest good as a whole in which the greatest happiness is represented as being linked in the most exact proportion to the greatest amount of moral perfection (possible in creatures), yet it is not the latter but the moral law (which then limits my unlimited desire with strict conditions) that is the determining motive of the will, which is indicated for the promotion of the highest good».¹⁹

With this affirmation Kant reiterates that the law must be the determining motive of the will; for man to abandon himself solely to the prospect of happiness means satisfying only subjective sensible instincts, with the consequent postponement of his action to empirical practical principles, which, as Kant himself repeatedly emphasises, cannot provide universal practical laws. Happiness, as the inevitable expectation of fulfilment in the intelligible world, is not, on the other hand, scrutinisable by the human eye, it remains part of that unknowable beyond that only morality discloses. The moment we begin to speak of the expectation of happiness and thus of what it is permissible to hope for, we enter the field of religion. For moral investigation, it is important to think of God as the primary cause and guarantor of the intelligible world, the sphere to which man belongs. Clearly, the existence of God can be a strong incentive for moral action, even though moral action must always be performed only to be worthy of happiness. On this Kant says: «Therefore morality is not the doctrine that teaches us how we should make ourselves happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness. It is only when religion comes, that the hope of one day participating in happiness comes, to the extent

¹⁷*Ibidem*.

¹⁸A. Rigobello, *Kant: che cosa posso sperare*, Studium, Roma 1983, p. 17.

¹⁹I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, cit., p. 285.

that we have ensured that we are not unworthy of it».²⁰ So with the postulates we proceed beyond the sphere of morality, with the three postulates we begin to talk about religion, about "what is it permissible to hope for?". Indeed, when Kant speaks of the 'realm of ends', it necessarily leads one to think of the continuation of man's life. «Now, since laws determine ends or purposes according to their universal validity, if one abstracts from the personal diversity of rational entities, and thus from any content of their own private purposes, a whole of all purposes in a state of systematic conjunction can be thought of, that is, a kingdom of ends possible according to the above principles».²¹ The realm of ends can only be definitively realised in an afterlife perspective; in the sensible world, one cannot think of such a systematic conjunction of all ends. It is also important to emphasise that the realm of ends is to be considered a collaborative enterprise of rational entities, the realisation of the individual cannot be separated from that of the others: «thus there arises a systematic connection of rational entities by means of objective communal laws, i.e. a realm, which, since these laws aim precisely at the relation of these entities to each other, as ends or purposes, and means, can be called the realm of ends».²² Considering man as an end means thinking of a system structured for man, a world that is for man. The very idea of an end is a strong incentive to account for an existence that does not seem to be born of chance. For the end, life will never be a nonsense, since life itself will be a whole effort of self-realisation, which ends in the community system of the kingdom of ends. As Weil noted, "once the end has been identified, it is necessary to think about the conditions for a kingdom of grace, a world of souls whose coherence is guaranteed by a just and remunerative God".²³

For Kant's moral system, a continuation of the investigation in the field of religion seems inevitable. This is also evident from Kant's comparison with two philosophical systems from the Greek world with an explicit moral content: Epicureanism and Stoicism. Of these two systems he shows how they both fail to see the horizon of a supreme good that makes the existence of God necessary; the supreme good of the Stoics and Epicureans remains on the ground, it is a supreme good that is not such. Thus, the two systems are reduced to prudential *tekné*. The Kantian moral system is not a prudential ethics, although it exhausts its own value of being in the human world, it inevitably leaves open the tension to the beyond. of being in the human world, it inevitably leaves open the tension to the beyond. Indeed, it is necessary to reiterate how, with moral investigation, the ideas of pure reason become postulates, and although there can be no experiential knowledge of the objects of the postulates, there is «nevertheless an extension of theoretical reason and knowledge of it to the supersensible in general, in that it is forced to admit that there are such objects».²⁴ Hence the reality, albeit unknowable, of these ultra-sensible concepts of self, world and God, which, as the moral investigation shows, are a condition of what humans experience.

²⁰*Ibidem*.

²¹I. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, trad. it. a cura di A. M. Marietti, Rizzoli, Milano 1995, pp. 179- 180.

²²Ivi, p. 181.

²³E. Weil, *Problèmes kantians*, Vrin, Paris 1963, p. 23.

²⁴I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, cit., p. 297.