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Annie Hounsokou
University of Scranton, USA
ORCID: 0000-0001-9213-3844
e-mail: annie.hounsokou@scranton.edu

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Exemplary Originality in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Kant: The Case of Naiveté

There are many problems with Kant's aesthetic theory, no doubt because in the field of aesthetics he acted as a chronicler of sorts, who brought all the questions about beauty and its creation under one roof, namely that of the *Critique of Judgment*. As such, the Third *Critique* need not be as cohesive a system as we might first expect it to be. Among, then, all the topics thrown pell-mell into the Third *Critique*, one particular stumbling block is the concept of exemplary originality. Kant defines artistic genius as exemplary originality. Of all the aspects of genius, exemplary originality seems to be the most fascinating, but also the most elusive. At first glance, one intuits the meaning of exemplary originality: of course, it is what makes a work of art striking and admirable and allows us to look at it as an example to follow. But after careful consideration, one cannot help but suspect Kant of having begged the question by coming up with a paradoxical and romantic phrase[1] that merely excites the imagination but provides no new content for the understanding: how is the work of genius an example? And what exactly is originality?

[1] Timothy Gould in "The Audience of Originality: Kant and Wordsworth on the Reception of the Genius", in: *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Paul Guyer in "Autonomy and Integrity in Kant's Aesthetics", *The Monist* 66, 2 (1983), Peter Lewis in "Original Nonsense: Art and Genius in Kant's Aesthetic", in: *Kant and his influence*, ed. G. M. Ross and T. McWalter (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990) to mention only a few, have puzzled over the paradoxical nature of that phrase.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, exemplary originality appears in the midst of a discussion on creativity in general and genius in particular. The concept is introduced as a way of explaining what makes genius genial. Kant concludes that works of genius are judged to be such because they display "exemplary originality" as opposed, presumably, to non-exemplary non-originality, i.e. insipid imitation. However, in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that a moral original exemplar is a "model" that cannot even be perceived! The present paper attempts to (1) define exemplary originality (a) in ethics and (b) in aesthetics, according to Kant, (2) show in what ways the aesthetic definition of exemplary originality illuminates and widens the possibilities for its moral counterpart in Kant's thought, with a special look at (3) the case of naïveté. As an illustration for my analysis, I will point to one of the most beloved characters of literature, Don Quixote de la Mancha. Don Quixote is an original in many senses, but for our purposes he is useful in that he incarnates exemplary originality both from the point of view of art and from the point of view of morality, and he does this precisely by approaching life as if it were a work of art.

I. Exemplary Originality

a. In Ethics

The expression "exemplary originality" appears first in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, unsurprisingly enough, in Kant's discussion of the use of examples in morality. This is what he tells us: "Worse service cannot be rendered morality than that an attempt be made to derive it from examples. For every example of morality presented to me must itself first be judged according to principles of morality in order to see whether it is fit to serve as an *original example, i.e., as a model*. […] Imitation has no place at all in moral matters"[2] (my emphasis). Few statements of Kant's are stronger than this. Moral character is not built by imitating others. It is a bit ironic that Kant should turn to examples almost immediately when he is trying to show us how the categorical imperative is used in section two:[3]

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, transl. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 20. I will refer to this work only as *Grounding*, and to the *Critique of Judgment* as CJ in the footnotes.

[3] Kant gives us four instances of duty: "the man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes" who contemplates suicide; the man "in need [who] finds himself forced to borrow money" and who considers making a false promise in order to obtain it; the man who "finds in himself a talent whose cultivation could make him a man useful in many respects" but whose circumstances are so comfortable that he need not bother to develop his talent; and the man who "finds things going well for

but we may grant him, with Timmerman,[4] that this use of examples is for illustration or description, not imitation. Kant's own use of the same expression (i.e. exemplary originality) less than five years later[5] may be an indication that he was aware of the possibility of rapprochement –or separation- between ethics and aesthetics on this very point. It will take explaining this term in the context in which it was originally intended before we can turn to the similarities between the exemplar of virtue and the exemplar of art.

The project of Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* is to uncover the grounds of the moral principles through which all rational beings that are subject to an imperative (i.e. beings endowed with reason and will) can attain virtue. Accordingly, the treatise is divided into three sections: in the first section, Kant refutes the classical path for attaining virtue, especially eudaemonistic ethics, which rest on the principle of happiness. The prominent classical treatise that defends such a principle is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, although many of Plato's works come to mind as well. All men desire happiness, but happiness is virtue, therefore we should be virtuous. For Kant, this is the worst possible argument one could make for something as important as morality. If we take morality seriously as something valid for all human beings, then we must ground morality in reason, a faculty that we know all human beings possess. But grounding all basis of morality in reason alone means to eliminate all other grounds for the performing of good works; hence the necessity of doing away with consequences: happiness, external law (either human or divine), or examples (e.g. role models) as justification for moral actions.

In *Grounding*, then, exemplary originality cannot mean an originality that produces imitation, since imitating someone else's actions, as virtuous as this other person might be, would amount to receiving the law from a source other than the moral agent's faculty of reason. This of course, as we have seen above, is not permissible. Even though the command of the moral law – essentially to act as if the world were

himself but sees others (whom he could help) struggling with great hardships" and feels no inclination to help them. *Grounding* 30–32, 4: 421–424.

[4] Timmerman argues rightly that Kant distinguished between the German *Exempel* and *Bespiel*. *Bespiele* are examples that are useful for illustration. Exemplars are held up as ideals. This distinction illuminates the problem with exemplars in morality: they are a kind of "go-cart of judgment", and they act as crutches that encourage the moral agent not to use his own moral faculties. Jens Timmerman, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53–56.

[5] *Grounding* was published in 1875, five years before the publication of the *Critique of Judgment* (1870). All translations are from *Critique of Judgment*, transl. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

governed by reason – is identical for all human beings, and even though the law holds at all times, in all places and in all circumstances, the moral agent's relationship to the law must be entirely her own. In other words, the moral agent's response to the command must come from her own reason; the act must be performed *out of duty*.[6]

In what, then, could moral exemplary originality consist? On the side of the pupil, the good act of the moral "teacher" is not useful: the pupil is not allowed to imitate it. On the side of the original exemplar himself (the "teacher"), the issue is complicated as well. For Kant points out – with rather unusual psychological insight – that the mixture of motives that often accompanies our moral decision-making disqualifies most, if not all, our actions as original exemplars.

> It is indeed sometimes the case that after the keenest self-examination we can find nothing except the moral ground of duty that could have been strong enough to move us to this or that good action and to such great sacrifice. But there cannot with certainty be at all inferred from this that some secret impulse of self-love, merely appearing as the idea of duty, was not the actual determining cause of the will. We like to flatter ourselves with the false claim to a more noble motive; but in fact we can never, even by the strictest examination, completely plumb the depths of the secret incentives of our actions. For when moral value is being considered, the concern is not the actions, which are seen, but rather with their inner principles, which are not seen.[7]

For our actions to be worthy of being models, they have to be performed purely out of respect for the moral law present. And this is a hard standard to uphold, as anyone with any life experience would admit, and Kant does admit it. He even recognizes that our psyche is so murky, and our interior life so complex, that we might not be able to tell whether our actions are performed for the right reason.

A morally good act, that is to say, an act performed out of respect for the moral law, is perfectly free: from consequences, from the tyranny of our inclinations, and finally, from the legislation of any power outside of our faculty of reasoning. Thus, *ideally*, every good act must be exemplary, i.e. free, and therefore will be original. However, *actually*, as we have no way of knowing whether someone else's action is really performed for good reasons (and, as shown above, neither can the other person, really), we would be ill-advised to imitate it blindly. The

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[6] "Finally there is one imperative which immediately commands a certain conduct without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is categorical. This imperative may be called that of morality. *Grounding*, 4: 416.

[7] Ibidem, 407.

problem, then, is that we have no way of determining whether a moral act is actually an original exemplar. There is no way to prove that any of the good actions performed in the world so far actually *were* good actions. Therefore they are not reliable grounds.

That we cannot rely on the actions of others to determine our own is made even more manifest by the fact that human beings often change their minds about the cause of their actions. Sometimes, with the passing of time, we might discover a hidden reason for our actions, or an unconscious motivation that invalidates the act which we previously held as good. Therefore it is impossible for the agent herself to be able to determine whether her act was truly good or not.[8] Finally, even if the moral agent were able to determine that her act was truly performed from duty (that is, out of respect for the moral law and the moral law alone), and if the would-be virtuous agent (the pupil) were able to determine that as well – for these are two different things – it might still be a problem for the pupil to imitate the virtuous agent, because he should not act for any reason other than respect for the moral law. Imitating another would be tantamount to receiving the law from another rather than from the individual reason, which commands always and unfailingly to "act as if your maxim could be turned into a universal law."[9] Consequently, as Kate Moran rightly points out, even though Kant does have a theory of moral education in the *Anthropology*, this education must be an education unto freedom.[10]

To summarize, it is impossible to speak of exemplary originality in the moral realm for Kant, and this for three reasons. Firstly, even if such an action were performed, the outside observer would have no way of knowing for sure that it was a truly good act. Secondly, Kant is agnostic about whether human beings ever have, or will, perform acts solely out of duty: the mixture of motives behind our actions is such, and our psyche so complex, that inclinations might creep, as it were, onto our respect for the moral law. And thirdly, since we must receive the law only from our reason, imitation is essentially immoral, and so holding someone else's actions as a source of imitation would be immoral too.

In what, then, does moral exemplary originality consist? In the moral realm, exemplary originality seems to be an ideal. In other words, it is

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[8] "If we look more closely at our planning and striving, we everywhere come upon the dear self […]. Such is especially the case when years improve and one's power of judgment is made shrewder by experience and keener in observation", *Grounding* 4: 407.

[9] Ibidem, 422.

[10] This education must avoid habituation, allow children to experience their freedom, but also the natural consequences of their bad actions. Cf. Kate Moran, "Can Kant have an Account of Moral Education?", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, 4 (2009): 476.

an internal standard that the moral agent's reason holds up faithfully, as a testimony that this is what human nature demands of the human being. All acts performed out of duty are original exemplars. But we cannot assume that they exist in the phenomenal world. Therefore they must be ideas according to which moral agents mold their actions. If exemplary originality cannot lead to imitation in *Groundings*, it is because of the peculiarity of the human condition: our finitude, our subjection to space and time, make it difficult to discern whether an act is exemplary or not. The concept of exemplary originality in ethics, then, is supremely paradoxical: the very notion of exemplarity seems to suggest imitation; but imitation is denied us. We will see further whether this paradox can be resolved.

It is important to note here that Kant is not discarding the possibility of a moral education. That Kant has a sophisticated and solid theory of moral education is a fact that scholars have defended persuasively. Munzel convincingly shows that Kant is first and foremost an educator: Doctrine(s) on Method (*Methodenlehren*) are present in every Critique. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment*, all have a section on how to teach Critical philosophy, or how to use Critical philosophy to teach students.[11] Moran, too, argues rightly that Kant has a "moral catechism" where pupils are encouraged to use their own power of judgment; and these ideas are recurrent in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and the lectures on pedagogy.[12] Giesinger, while recognizing that there is a seeming paradox between the way the moral law demands to be obeyed and the possibility of an education, argues that Kant has a solution for this problem in his lectures on pedagogy.[13] Finally, Timmerman shows that what Kant rejects is not the use of illustrations (*Bespiele*), without which it would be difficult to communicate anything at all, but exemplars (*Exemple*) through which we hold certain behaviors as the ones which must be followed, thus avoiding the work which the moral agents must do themselves.[14] Kant himself gives us illustrations throughout his works on morals. It is, then, not the case that by discarding imitation Kant is discarding the possibility of a moral education. The question here is that the notion of exemplarity is highly problematic in moral education. When we enter the aesthetic realm, where we deal with the senses, the model is visible, tactile, audible and generally perceivable. Here the concept will

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[11] G. Felicitas Munzel, "Kant on Moral Education, or 'Enlightenment' and the Liberal Arts", *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2003): 45.

[12] Moran, "Can Kant Have an Account of Moral Education?", 471–484.

[13] Johannes Giesinger, "Kant's Account of Moral Education", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, 7 (2012): 775–786.

[14] Timmerman, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 53.

have an easier fate, one which might help us rethink the moral specimen of exemplary originality.

b. Exemplary Originality in Aesthetics

By comparison with *Grounding*, much is made of exemplary originality in the *Critique of Judgment*. Exemplary originality is an intrinsic characteristic, indeed the very definition of artistic genius. "On this point everyone agrees: that genius must be considered the very opposite of a spirit of imitation."[15] Kant adds in section 46 that "(1) Genius is a talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other; hence the foremost property of genius must be originality (*originalität*). (2) Since nonsense too can be original, the products of genius must also be models, i.e., they must be exemplary (*exemplarisch*); hence, though they do not themselves arise through imitation, still they must serve others for this, i.e. as a standard or rule by which to judge."[16] Genius is something new, singular, unique. We can get a better idea of what we mean by a work of artistic genius if we compare it to works of imitation. There is no technique by which genius can be reached and there is no determinate path or rule to reach genius. But it is not enough to be new or original, as we see from the products of art nouveau or kitsch: just the exemplarity must be original, so must the originality be exemplary.

> Genius is the exemplary originality of a subject's natural endowment in the free use of his cognitive powers. The other genius, who follows the example, is aroused by it to a feeling of his own originality, which allows him to exercise in art his freedom from the constraint of rules and to so in such a way that art itself acquires a new rule by this, thus showing that the talent is exemplary […]. But since genius is nature's favorite and so must be regarded as a rare phenomenon, his example gives rise to a school for other good minds.[17]

Here then, we have a marked contrast with moral exemplary originality, where the model cannot serve others as a standard by which to judge. This is also the most intuitive and most difficult aspect of artistic genius to explain: it inspires us to imitate it. The product of genius both expresses a human experience with unparalleled eloquence and does it in such a way that it spurs its audience to follow the artist in his quest to shed light on the world. The question, then, is what kind of imitation

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[15] CJ, 5: 308.
[16] Ibidem, 5: 309.
[17] Ibidem, 5: 318.

we are talking about when we say that the work of genius, although it itself did not come about as the result of imitation, must now become a model to be imitated and provide a rule for others to follow. What could Kant mean when he claims that the work of genius is the new rule, and how can one follow such a rule?

In *Autonomy and Integrity in Kant's Aesthetics* Paul Guyer[18] proposes an explanation of exemplary originality which he repeats later in *The Creation of Art: Genius, Universality, and individuality*.[19] Because he places the emphasis in the phrase on originality, Guyer deduces that every work of genius must become the new standard for imitation in such a way that every work of genius goes in an entirely different direction than previous works of genius. For Guyer, the meaning of exemplary originality implies that the history of art must be "a succession of artistic revolutions."[20] The product of exemplary originality must upturn the rules that had held sway until the creation of the new work.

Such an interpretation runs the risk of reducing genius to the founding of new techniques, which genius might include, but to which it certainly is not limited. And this limitation does seems to be what Guyer describes when he claims that "genius, as exemplary originality, would be a stimulus and a provocation to continuing revolution in the history of art"[21] Guyer adds that Kant understands "the sense in which the originality of genius is "exemplary" precisely both as a provocation to and a model for the originality of others, thus guaranteeing that the works of genius will not constitute a stable canon but a locus of constant upheaval."[22] Makkreel, on the contrary, holds that "Kant allows our cultural traditions to provide us with the useful prejudices that can guide our taste." The exemplarity of tradition is not against us; nor neither does it fundamentally restrict us: "what we use as exemplary functions solely as an external constraint. But what we take as exemplary functions as an external guide that awakens an internal source as well. […] Thus I discern my place in the world by reference both to the external position of the sun and my internal capacity to discern left from right."[23] We may take the exemplarity of the work of art as a formal guide, which still leaves enough space for the new artist's own imagination to develop. For

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[18] Paul Guyer, "Autonomy and Integrity in Kant's Aesthetics", *The Monist* 66, 2 (1983): 167–188.

[19] Guyer, *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 117–137.

[20] Ibidem, 181.

[21] Ibidem, 117.

[22] Ibidem, 124.

[23] Rudolf Makkreel, "Reflections, Reflective Judgment and Aesthetic Exemplarity", in: *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Kukla (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 223–244.

Makkreel, exemplarity allows for an exquisite conversation between the subject, tradition, and the community today. Makkreel's interpretation, while not directly disagreeing with Guyer's, is more open. Liu however, disagrees strongly with Guyer. For him, Guyer's theory that geniuses must be "willy-nilly patricidal in relation to their predecessors and suicidal in relation to their successors,"[24] although interesting, is both unattractive and erroneous. Liu contends that Guyer and Gould's reading comes from their "modernist or postmodernist frame of reference" which is essentially anachronistic and fails to take Kant's own rejection of unbridled genius.[25]

We can be fairly certain that Kant's usually conservative views would not accord with Guyer's conception of the history of art. Kant's own emphasis, I argue, is actually not on originality, but on exemplarity, as I shall show below. In other words, Kant is not interested in originality at all costs, "since nonsense can be original."[26] This is not because he is against novelty, but because of what he thinks exemplarity consists in, namely the very purpose of the human being: sociability, or again, morality.[27] We must find a way to restore *exemplarity* to exemplary originality, while not ignoring originality. Again, reclaiming exemplarity does not mean that originality has no place in genius. It obviously does, as the phrase exemplary originality strongly suggests.

II. Imitating What is Exemplary

Because there can be no determinate standard by which to judge a work of art, (i.e. an explicit, objective standard to which we could turn to determine whether this is in fact a work of genius or not), the "new standard" to which Kant refers when he says that "though [works of genius] do not themselves arise through imitation, still they must serve others for this, i.e. as a standard or rule by which to judge"[28] can only be *free lawfulness*:

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[24] Yu Liu, "Celebrating both Singularity and Commonality: The Exemplary Originality of the Kantian Genius", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52, 1 (2012): 100.

[25] Ibidem, 111.

[26] CJ, 5: 308.

[27] The link between human purpose and sociability is made clear, not only in the Critique of teleological judgment, but also in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and in *What is Enlightenment*? That is why taste matters so much to Kant: ultimately, it is the capacity to understand and to be understood by human beings, i.e. the political life, that fulfills all their powers. Nor is there anything novel about the association of morality and politics, although Kant, who reviles "the ancients" (Aristotle, Plato and the Christian tradition), does not give them the credit they are due.

[28] CJ, 175.

the work of art is unique, but it must be unique in a way that allows us to follow it. But in order to follow, we must understand, which means that the work cannot be nonsensical. So what is our mimetic activity directed towards? Surely not the *what* (as proved by the many insipid imitations of famous paintings), but the *how*, and the how is free.

Thus the "new standard by which to judge" is in fact the same old standard, so to speak, namely, that of freedom. Freedom, of course, is spite of being old, is always new and produces unexpected results. Hence the freshness that we behold, hear, or touch in a work of genius:

> Since, then, the natural endowment must give the rule to (fine) art, what kind of rule is this? It cannot be couched in a formula and serve as a precept […]. Rather, the rule must be abstracted from what the artist has done, i.e., from the product, which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model, not to be copied [*Nachmachung*] but to be imitated [*Nachfolge*].[29]

The work of genius cannot be copied, or aped. But it can be imitated. What must be imitated in the work of genius is not its outward appearance but its intimate essence: the ineffable life that animates it, the freedom that inhabits it. In this way, exemplary originality is the mirror image of free lawfulness, the free play of our faculties, which is at work in a judgment of taste. Taste is playful, but in a way that is lawful. Genius is original and free, but it is also exemplary. Robert Wood argues rightly that this dialectical approach grounds Kant's aesthetics. "The experience out of which the artist works involves what Kant calls "free lawfulness," following out the spontaneous and unaccountable upsurge of a personal and fully satisfying aesthetic idea and producing a work which, in its exemplarity, exhibits a lawfulness that others recognize as legislating a style or a genre."[30]

Of course, neither life nor freedom can really be imitated. Rather, they must be communicated. Hence Kant's insistence on the universal communicability of the feeling of life ("the quickening of our powers of cognition")[31] that we experience upon contact with a work of fine art. We may be able to imitate a work of genius by first copying it, for there is

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[29] CJ, 5: 310.

[30] Robert E. Wood "Kant's 'Antinomic' Aesthetics", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75, 2 (2001): 276. Wood's argument is that genius is in tension between taste and complete originality. The middle, in a sense, is exemplary originality. Wood's conception of the contribution of new works to the canon is also much more sophisticated than Guyer's: the canon which forms taste contributes to the "new" work, which in turn contributes to the canon of taste.

[31] CJ, 181: "spirit is the animating principle in the mind".

"an element of academic correctness"[32] i.e. of skill that goes into the production of art. But the life must take over at some point (in a way that we cannot really explain), or the artist has failed to produce a work of art.[33]

There is, then, room for mimesis in Kant's aesthetics, even if this mimesis is defined in a very peculiar way: what we must imitate is the freedom of the genius, and the freedom of the genius is something that can be imitated.

III. Naiveté: Yet Another Kind of Exemplary Originality

Having looked at aesthetic exemplary originality, let us return to exemplary originality in its pragmatic manifestation. Now we are in a measure to ask again: can we speak of exemplary originality, i.e. an instance of free lawfulness in the moral realm? It would seem at first blush, for the reasons mentioned earlier, that we can *theoretically*, but not empirically, since we cannot determine whether a moral act is really an act of genius or not.

And yet, surprisingly, Kant does give us a concrete case of a phenomenon that is a moral original exemplar. More surprisingly yet, this phenomenon does not make its appearance in the moral treatises: neither in *Grounding* nor in the *Critique of Practical Reason* do we encounter our practical exemplary original exemplar. We find her instead, in the aesthetic treatise; and in the most unlike places of the aesthetic treatise: in the treatment of humor. We will see that Kant remains faithful to his assertion in *Grounding* that we cannot ape an original exemplar of morality; but here is a time when we know that someone is being good and not "faking it."

In section 54, Kant wonders whether there can be an art "of making people laugh." While he concedes that some people can do this quite well, he ends up dismissing humor as something "not serious enough."[34] Be that as it may, he spends an inordinate amount of detail on this lack of seriousness, and even gives hints that humor might very well be the perfect association of all the powers of cognition, and, as such, a species of the sublime.[35] It is in this treatment that the naïve person makes her appearance, in all her glory.

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[32] Ibidem, 178.

[33] CJ, 187.

[34] "[…] The object of fine art must always show itself as having some dignity; and so an exhibition of it requires a certain seriousness, just as taste does when it judges the object", CJ, 206, 5: 335.

[35] For more on this topic, see Annie K. Hounsokou, "Exposing the Rogue in Us: an Exploration of Laughter in the *Critique of Judgment*", *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, 2 (2012): 317–336.

> Something composed of both of these [the body and the intellectual feeling of gratification and moral respect] is found in naïveté, which is the eruption of the sincerity that was natural to humanity and which is opposed to the art of dissimulation that has become our second nature. We laugh at such simplicity as does not yet know to dissemble, and yet we also rejoice in the natural simplicity here thwarting the art of dissimulation. We are expecting the usual custom, the artificial utterance carefully aimed at creating a beautiful illusion – and lo! There is uncorrupted, innocent nature which we did not at all expect to find and which is displayed by someone who also had no intention of doing so […]. But that something infinitely better than all accepted custom, viz. integrity and character (or at least the disposition to it), is after all not wholly extinct in human nature does mingle seriousness and esteem with this play of the power of judgment.[36]

What is naïveté? It is an accidental irruption of sincerity, and a manifestation of our natural disposition to integrity and character. In other words, it is a disruption of nurture by nature, in the form of virtue. It is also one of the few times that Kant identifies a positive action that is unquestionably good. How, when we know that it is impossible to find one unquestionably good action among all the actions performed by human beings since the beginning, can we say that what happens in naiveté is good? Consider the phenomenon itself: we can see that there is no guile behind it because the speaker himself is surprised at his own utterance. It is human nature speaking for itself. We know for sure that this act is authentic, because it is not, in the speaker's control. Naïveté is an instance of our natural goodness triumphing over our acquired hypocrisy.[37]

"We must not confuse naiveté with homely simplicity, which refrains from covering nature over with artificiality only because it does not understand the art of social relations very well."[38] In order to be naïve, a person must know the rules of society, and at the same time, break them in an unguarded moment. Naiveté, then, is not simple mindedness.

The reason why naiveté is so important to Kant's moral theory is that it is an anomaly that nonetheless teaches us how we should be. It is certainly exemplary: we *should* be innocent and free of guile. It is original in the sense that it is primitive or primal, since it is our original innocence that is manifested, trumping the guises of custom. But is this moral agency? After all, the naïve person is overtaken by nature against her will; she does not intend to be naïve. Naïveté is highly problematic:

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[36] CJ, 206 V: 335.

[37] Here Kant sounds like Rousseau, but this is not the first time that Rousseau bursts into Kant's philosophy. See Richard Velkley's, *Being After Rousseau* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

[38] Ibidem.

unlike other displays of virtue, we know this one is genuine. But, like genius, it cannot be mimicked; not even by the person who displayed it in the first place. We esteem naïveté the way that we esteem "the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me;"[39] the phenomenon is undoubtedly moral in nature. Yet the fact that it is not done for the sake of duty shows that naiveté is not, strictly speaking, a moral *act*.

Here we have another case of nature giving the rule to us. The naïve person is an original in the sense that she does not act like everybody else, but also in the sense that she displays what is original to human nature.[40] The naiveté displayed is exemplary: honesty, integrity and character should be imitated. As in the case of genius, human nature suddenly does the work, leaving the enjoyment and the play to us. Nor is it a coincidence that naiveté should make us laugh.[41] Works of genius delight us and makes us feel more alive because of what they display, i.e. freedom. Naiveté too, stakes it claim on our moral patrimony both by showing what morality is and by reminding us of who we are; however, it does so effortlessly. Finally, Kant presents naïveté as something that is "good without qualification," and we know from the very first sentence of *Grounding* that nothing can be good without qualification except a good will.[42]

By definition there can be no art of being naïve; it cannot be manufactured, but Kant continues, "there is certainly the possibility of presenting naiveté in a fictional character, and then it is fine, though also rare, art."[43] In other words, although we cannot be naïve by design, it is enough for us to see a case of naiveté for the desire to be good to be communicated to us. A work of fine art that displayed naiveté would really be the summit of all works: it would be a work of artistic genius displaying a moral exemplar, an original exemplar displaying exemplary originality; it would show that art and morality really are linked insofar as the purpose of the human being is concerned.

IV. An Illustration

The following section serves us as an example, not to say an exemplar, of what Kant means when he states that fine art can represent naiveté.

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[39] *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5: 161.

[40] Namely, honesty, "or at least the predisposition to it", CJ, 5: 335.

[41] "Since this phenomenon manifests itself only for a little while, and since the art of dissimulation soon draws its veil over again, regret is mingled at the same time, This regret is an emotion of tenderness which, since it is play, can readily be combined with this sort of good natured laughter, and usually is in fact so combined with it", CJ, 206, Ak. 335.

[42] *Grounding*, 7, 4: 393.

[43] Ibidem.

We will see that the representation of naiveté will have the same effect on us as the real thing. Such is the greatness of that virtue, and such is the greatness of fine art, that the depiction and the real thing have identical effects. We will also see a certain kind of mimesis at work here, one that is acceptable, though by no means constitute of what naiveté is, since naiveté does not require mimesis; and this hopefully better illustrates what the exemplarity of originality consists in. Let us then see what true naiveté looks like, and what its effects are, by turning to *Don Quixote*. The *Quixote* is itself a work of naiveté: its original intent was to make fun; but somehow the fun gave way to something quite serious when the main character's naiveté started speaking for itself. Cervantes wrote the greatest book of chivalry by mimicking[44] the genre.

Everyone knows Don Quixote: Alonso Quesada, the man who becomes Don Quixote de la Mancha is

> an elderly gentleman verging on fifty, of tough constitution, lean-bodied, a great and early riser and a lover of hunting. The reader must know, then, that this gentleman in the times when he had nothing to do – as was the case for most of the year – gave himself up to the reading of books of knight errantry; which he loved and enjoyed so much that he almost entirely forgot his hunting, and even the care of his estate. […] In short, he so buried himself in his books that he spent the nights reading from twilight till daybreak and the days from dawn to dark; and so from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits.[45]

Thus begins the tale of the ingenious Don Quixote, whose insanity takes the form of the resolution to live according to rules days of knight errantry.

Is not Don Quixote's problem, to adopt an incomplete and caricatured Kantian pragmatic stance as expounded on in *Groundings* and the second *Critique* for a moment, that he apes the books of chivalry he reads? Incapable of distinguishing between the true and the false, and unwilling to rely on his own powers and to be autonomous, he literally falls into his books and does precisely what he is not supposed to do. He believes the example so much that all of reality must become unreal. Far from being an original, he mimics the contents of the novels he has read: the codes of knight errantry with its battles, its steeds, its damsels, its giants and its enchantments. Don Quixote takes aping to the extreme identification which is insanity.

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[44] This mimicry is yet another form of imitation that we have not analyzed here. To be sure, the point of the mimicry is to mock. However, the mocking would be ineffective if the mimicry were not faithful.

[45] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, transl. John Michael Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1950), 32.

But of course we know that Don Quixote's aping of Lancelot and Amadis of Gaul is really sublime, even by Kant's own definition of the sublime.[46] And this is the case, not only because madness itself can be sublime,[47] but for several other reasons: first of all, Don Quixote imitates knight errantry as closely as he can, and yet he is still an original (he is naïve and so he imitates with all his heart, thus making the imitation so much his own that he creates an original). It is actually the fact that he imitates knight errantry with all his heart that makes him an original. It is both what he is imitating and the "with all his heart" that make him an original. Don Quixote is involved in a conversation with his books, and the heroes of his book. And after having consulted them, he concludes that the life of chivalry, which consists in liberating the oppressed, protecting the widow and the orphan and achieving great deeds for the sake of his lady love – in other words, the dedication of all his energies to the moral life – is the only thing worth doing with his time.

That the Quixote is a naïf hardly needs proof: he is always honest and candid. Naiveté, as we recall, is an "eruption of sincerity."[48] Lest someone argue that the Quixote's candidness does not hearken to nature but to custom (to whit, the custom of knight errantry), we must clarify that Don Quixote's naiveté stems from the *belief*, held by the code of knight errantry, that virtue is its own reward. What makes him naïve is his failure to exhibit shrewdness and cynicism in situations when ordinary human beings would:

> But Don Quixote, gathering from [the two women's] flight that they were afraid, raised his pasteboard visor, partly revealing his lean and dusty face, and addressed them with a charming expression and in a calm voice: 'I beg you, ladies, not to fly, nor to fear any outrage; for it ill-fits the order of chivalry which I profess to injure anyone, least of all maidens of such rank as your appearance proclaims you to be. The girls stared at him, trying to get a look at his face, which was almost covered by the badly made

[46] "That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small", 5: 250, and again, 5: 251: "sublime is what even being able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense". For Kant, the sublime, after all, is the experience of one's imagination being overpowered by an object, either because of its size of because of its power. The sublime is both unpleasant (insofar as the imagination realizes its powerlessness) and ecstatic (inasmuch as the mind realizes its vocation of being able to stand up to even that which the imagination cannot grasp).

[47] One thinks of the madness of King Lear, whose grief at the murder of his daughter is so overwhelming that his mind buckles under the power of the revelation; or Captain Ahab's sublime madness, which inspires the mind with awe at the greatness (though dark) of his heart.

[48] *Critique of Judgment*, 206, Ak. 335.

> visor. But when the heard themselves called maidens – a title ill-suited to their profession – they could not help laughing […].[49]

To insist that two prostitutes are ladies, to speak to them as though they were gentlewomen, and to offer to protect them, is to fail to recognize the obvious signs that everyone in his or her right mind knows. Two single women loitering around an inn are probably prostitutes, *we* would think. And, having some kind of sense of what was really going on, we might have played by the bad rules of society, either by soliciting, or by ignoring or reviling them. Yet in his mistake and in his failure to realize that the physical world does not always bend to the demands of reason and the imagination, Don Quixote sees the world as an innocent place. He shows the superiority of the noumenal, that is, thought, over the phenomenal, which is physical reality. By treating them *as though*[50] they were ladies, he shows them, whether they want to listen to him or not, that all women are worthy of being called ladies, no matter the state to which circumstances might have reduced them.[51]

Cervantes, then, does precisely what Kant has in mind when he speaks of the portrayal of naïveté in art. But what is intriguing in Kant's concession that we can imitate – albeit only in art- naïveté, is what the portrayal is supposed to achieve: what will it do for us to show naïveté in art? What does it do for the audience to "see" the imitation of this moral phenomenon? Once we have taken the artistic detour in order to experience naïveté, what are we to do with it? Kant does not tell us. However, it is hard to deny that naïveté *can* be imitated, not directly, but aesthetically. And can we not say that while reading good books will not have a direct effect on our behavior, it will certainly accustom us to think a certain way?

Conclusion

To sum up, then: (1) exemplary originality is a unique and original way of acting in accordance with the rules of nature without work. (2) In either ethics or aesthetics absolutely admits of no aping; but in aesthetics,

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[49] Cervantes, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, 38.

[50] It does seem that there is an *als ob* that happens in moral actions as well in general, and in naiveté in particular. As Kant suggests in the Third *Critique*, to look at things aesthetically is to look at them as though they had a purpose, even though they might not.

[51] "Don Quixote begged [La Tolosa], as a favor to him, henceforth to take the tithe of lady and call herself Doña Tolosa, which she promised to do. The Don requested [the other lady] also to take the title of lady and call herself Doña Molinera, renewing his office of service and favours", ibidem, 46.

it allows itself to be imitated. Here we are speaking of an imitation that is free and open, instead of restricted and slavish. (3) Naiveté is a strange case of exemplary originality, neither art nor genuine morality, where our nature, which is inherently moral for Kant, bursts out of art and aesthetics. By definition there can be no art of being naïve because naiveté cannot be manufactured. However, the aesthetic depiction of naiveté can give rise to a moral phenomenon, i.e. a deliberate decision to reclaim the world aesthetically. That is indeed what Don Quixote does for himself, and for us: he shows us one way to behave towards naiveté, namely, to enter into conversation with it, reflecting on it and, finally, acting upon the idea that it suggests, which is really a question: what if it *were* possible to live that way?

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Summary

The following is an exploration of Kant's use of the expression "exemplary originality" in his practical philosophy and in his aesthetics. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* and in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that there can be no exemplary originality in morality because (1) there is no way for us to know whether an act is really exemplary (2) it is not licit for us to imitate others, because we must always act from duty, i.e. from our own call to duty. In the *Critique of Judgment*, exemplary originality is what makes a work of art a standard to follow, i.e. a work of genius. After comparing and contrasting the two, I use the definition of the *Critique of judgment* to clarify the definition of *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical reason*. I then examine the status of naiveté, a third, and puzzling, kind of exemplary originality.

Keywords: exemplary originality, genius, moral education, naïveté