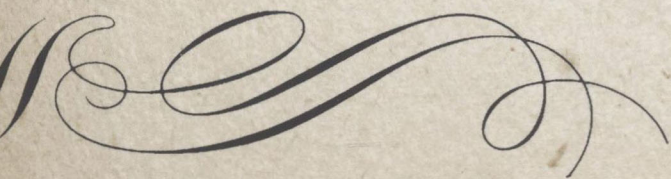


Kant
and
Milton



Sanford Budick

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Kant and Milton



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KANT AND MILTON

*To
Stanley Cavell,
Michael Kaufman,
and the memory of
Wolfgang Iser*

Acknowledgments

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Last, I must emphasize that the imperfections in the finished product are my responsibility alone.

Notes on Citations and the Term *Succession*

Citations of Kant in German are from *Kants Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968). Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Kant given in English are from the following texts: *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1993); *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason* in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) or, as indicated, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven*, trans. Ian C. Johnston, www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/kant/kant1.htm. (I have sometimes slightly modified Johnston's translations.) In the case of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, an additional page reference, marked *Obs.*, is given after the English translation and refers to Goldthwait's volume. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given to the A or B texts;

those for the *Groundwork*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of Judgment* are to the *Akademie-Textausgabe* page numbers, which Meredith and Gregor give in the margins of their translations. All page number references to Kant's texts are given in parentheses immediately after citations. Page numbers of the *Akademie-Textausgabe*, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Critique of Judgment*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* are, except where noted otherwise, usually preceded by the abbreviations *AA*, *CPR*, *GMM*, *CPrR*, *CJ*, *Rel*, and *Anth*, respectively, though references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are most often given simply to the A or B texts. If not mentioned above and not otherwise indicated, translations are mine. All underlining, whether in my text or in quotations, indicates my added emphases.

Citations of Milton are from John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957). I have used this text rather than excellent newer editions because it preserves the capitalizations that generally remained standard in eighteenth-century editions of Milton's poetry. References to the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder (preceded by the abbreviation *SW* in my text) are to *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin, 1877–99).

Throughout this book I have adopted the rendering “succession” for *Nachfolge* that has recently been offered by Guyer and Matthews at 5:283 in their translation of the third *Critique*. This translation of *Nachfolge* suggests far more accurately than Meredith's translation, “following,” the independence achieved in this exceeding of imitation by a special kind of imitation. Yet the terms *Nachfolge* or *succession*, like the terms *Nachahmung* or *imitation*, are still subject to confusion because they do not by themselves make clear whether they refer to a process or an achieved condition (or product). In addition to the term *succession* by itself, I have therefore frequently employed the phrases *procedure of succession* and *succession procedure* or, alternatively, *condition of succession*, as the context requires. We have Kant's direct warrant for speaking of the “procedure” of succession (*CJ*, 5:253). In making this my normative form of reference, I have also followed the example of John Rawls, “Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy,” in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart

Förster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 81–113, who suggests that Kant’s term *categorical imperative* is clarified by referring to it as “the procedure for applying the categorical imperative” or “the CI-procedure” (p. 81). In fact, the need for appending the term *procedure* to both the *categorical imperative* and the *succession* reflects, as I will explain in due course, a significant relationship between these activities in Kant’s thought.

KANT AND MILTON

Succession which has reference to a precedent, and not imitation, is the proper expression for all influence which the products of an exemplary *author* [*originator*] may exert upon others. . . . [They] serve as a model, not for *imitation*, but for *succession*. The possibility of this is difficult to explain.

—Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790)

Such a painting, designed with freedom, is cause for admiration. This, Milton executes preeminently.

—Kant, anthropology lecture (1788–89)

Aesthetic ideas are those representations that contain a wealth of thoughts which *ad infinitum* draw after it a succession of thoughts. Such ideas draw us into an immeasurable prospect, e.g. Milton's saying, "Female light mixes itself with male light, to unknown ends." Through this soulful idea the mind is set into continuous motion.

—Kant, anthropology lecture (1792–93)

The will is thought as independent of empirical conditions and hence, as a pure will, as determined *by the mere form of law*, and this determining ground is regarded as the supreme condition of all maxims. The thing is strange enough, and has nothing like it in all the rest of our practical cognition.

—Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)

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Introduction

Over the course of three decades Kant was repeatedly drawn to Milton's poetry for aid in reflecting principally on one question: How can one achieve a mental life that is characterized by *independence and spontaneity*—the *originality* (*Originalität*) of the poetic genius, preeminently—and at the same time inherit one's given world, one's past, through the mere *imitation*, which, says Kant, underlies all learning?¹ Directly and indirectly, he spent his life searching for an answer. To be sure, this same question has preoccupied innumerable other individuals over many centuries in many parts of the globe. Indeed, the ways in which we answer this question may be said to constitute culture itself, perhaps even what is considered to be human. Yet Kant's attempts at an answer are of special interest. In the history of thought no one else has so powerfully described the independence of the individual human mind. And, undeniably, whether or not one agrees or disagrees with this or that aspect of his descriptions, no one else's account of that mental independence has more significantly shaped the ways in which countless individuals, in the West and well beyond, think of their independence, even, indeed, of what their minds are.

This book tells the previously untold story of how Kant's reflections on this question crystallized into a concrete answer in the years 1785–90. At the core of this story is a scene of the relation of moral philoso-

1. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §47: "Every one is agreed on the point of the complete opposition between genius and the *spirit of imitation*. . . . Learning is nothing but imitation" (5:308). In Chapter 6 I will show that these statements are preamble to the claim for originality that, in §49, Kant actively derives from Milton's poetry.

phy to the experience of a certain kind of poetry, namely, Milton's poetry of the sublime. Almost eighty years ago René Wellek published a book about the early impact of Kant on British philosophy and British literature entitled *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838*.² For the present book an alternative, accurate title would be *Milton and Miltonism in Immanuel Kant, 1764–95, with Special Emphasis on 1785–90*. Whether or not I have been adequate to the telling of the story laid out here, its inherent excitement is that it shows one of the greatest of all philosophers in the act of discovering his freedom and moral feeling by encountering the poetry of one of the greatest of all poets. It shows concretely how poetry functioned for Kant as the co-worker of philosophy.

Kant said that what “can be called *poetry*” encompasses everything that provides experience of art: “poetic art includes the arts of painting, horticulture and architecture, as well as the arts of composing music and verse (*poetica in sensu stricto*.)” But he added that *poetry in the strict sense* provides the most significant kind of artistic experience: “poetry wins the prize . . . over every other fine art. . . . A good poem is the most penetrating means of stimulating the mind” (*Anth*, 7:246–247). “*Poetry*,” he asserts at the heart of the *Critique of Judgment*, “holds the first rank among all the arts. It expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination” (5:326). For him the poetry that was of special philosophical interest because of its “painting, designed with freedom” (*in freyheit entworfenes Gemälde*) was exemplified by “Milton preeminently” (*Milton vorzüglich*: AA, 25.2:1494). Milton's poetry projects freedom in its representation of the experience of the sublime. I will argue that during Kant's most intense and creative years of writing moral philosophy, 1785–90, his engagements with the experience of the sublime, especially in Milton's poetry, repeatedly made possible—for Kant himself—what he regarded as the highest achievement of “practical rea-

2. René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931). This is a good place to mention Stephen Fallon's highly informative *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Fallon's interest, like Wellek's, is in the impact of philosophers on poetry. My interest here is in the integral role of poetry in philosophy: how Milton's poetry is an active partner in Kant's philosophical work, and, equally, how the grounds of that joint work give us a new understanding of the nature of Milton's poetic enterprise.

son”: “the grand disclosure” of freedom and moral feeling (*CPrR*, 5:94).

Understanding the way Kant grasped Milton’s poetry is no less significant for our appreciation of Milton than of Kant. Better than anyone else since Milton, Kant understood why Milton has no anxiety of influence.³ Milton, Kant saw, *imitates* no one. In 1792–93 Kant characterized Milton’s poetry as an art of “succession.” In 1790, with one eye already firmly fixed on Milton’s poetry, he had explained why the poet who engages in the procedure of succession is freed from the relation of dependency that is entailed by imitation: “*Succession* which has reference to a precedent, and not imitation, is the proper expression for all influence which the products of an exemplary *author* [*originator*] may exert upon others. . . . [They] serve as a model, not for *imitation*, but for *succession*. The possibility of this is difficult to explain” (*CJ*, 5:283, 309). Kant hits upon the proper expression for Milton’s and his own way of succeeding to an effectively endless line of a *special kind of influence*, that is, of exemplary representations by exemplary authors. Those who achieve this procedure of *succession* can experience influence in the condition of freedom. The efficacy of this procedure is not self-evident. In fact, Kant’s qualifier to the above explanation—“the possibility of this is difficult to explain”—has been the occasion for this book.

Kant’s way of experiencing the influence of Milton on his own thought is, I maintain, the source and the occasion for his explanation of the difference between influence by succession and influence by imitation. This is to say that in the act of theorizing and giving examples of the procedure of succession, Kant, too, is in a relation of influence-in-freedom to his immediate exemplary author, Milton. At highly important junctures of Kant’s moral philosophy, Milton’s poetry provides Kant with experience of an effectively endless line of sublime representations. In its fully developed form, Kant’s Milton-derived and Milton-applied concept of influence-in-freedom has significance far beyond Kant’s relation to Milton. This concept can explain any in-

3. In using the phrase *anxiety of influence*, I refer, of course, to the wide currency given to the phrase by Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), where Bloom’s great exemplar of a writer who occasions this anxiety in later writers is Milton.

fluence within which—and as a function of which—the successor achieves creative freedom.

The Kantian-Miltonic idea of influence certainly applies to the effect of Milton's poetry not only on poets and philosophers but on the attentive general reader. Largely lost in oblivion, Kant's Miltonic aesthetics and Miltonic moral reason, firmly linked to his direct comments on Milton, constitute the most penetrating account ever written of the inner workings, and the inner impact on the reader, of Milton's poetry. Kant provides nothing less than a formal explanation of how that poetry discloses moral agency. Aside from Kant, in three and a half centuries of Milton criticism no one else has come to grips with this fundamental issue at this fundamental level.⁴ My chapters accord-

4. A recent study that locates a point of departure for thinking about moral agency in Milton's poetry is Stanley Fish's *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), with its thesis that "Milton works from the inside out" (p. 23). The economy of argument in my chapters has led me to avoid, in general, entering into the debates of contemporary Milton criticism, especially since these debates lately revolve around issues different from the ones that Kant sees in Milton. It will be evident, however, that though I have a different view of what goes on in the Miltonic "inside," I am strongly in agreement with what might be called the directionality of Fish's thesis. My disagreement is with his blanket assertion that there is no "evidentiary procedure" (p. 10) in Milton's representation of what occurs in the inside of ethical thinking. Fish's assertion blocks the possibility of seeing, and experiencing, the poetic-moral procedure—the *procedure of succession* identified in Milton's poetry by Kant—that Milton pervasively follows. Not surprisingly, Fish's *en passant* remarks about Kant's interest in "public knowledge" leave out of account Kant's profound acknowledgment of the always subjective re-discovery of the maxims of the categorical imperative. Fish's statement that Milton is different from Kant because in Milton's "epistemology . . . the circuit of communication goes from one regenerate heart to another" (p. 59) is in fact an apt restatement of the workings of the Longinian line of sublime inspiration that Addison applied to Milton's poetry and that (we will see) Kant inherited from Addison and the constellation of German Miltonism. I will be showing that for Milton, knowledge of the "inside" is demonstrably earned—as it is for Kant following Milton—by a formalism in the mind that the formalism of poetry discloses. Kant engages the feature of Milton's poetry that the eighteenth century, at least, viewed as most profoundly Miltonic: the ethically productive (not merely eliminative) power of poetry of the sublime. For Fish "conversion . . . must come *first*"; that is, it must already be in place before a state of moral enlightenment can be represented or recognized (p. 59). We will see that for Kant, and for what Kant saw in Milton, achieving a moment of rational "conversion," "revolution," or "rebirth" is the principal work of achieving "sublimity" and its effects (*Rel*, 6:47–48, 73; *CPrR*, 5:71,