


The Community Aspect of Kant's Virtuous Circle Between Ethics and Politics*

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ENG Abstract: This article examines the interplay between the moral and the political in Kant's thought the concept of community. In doing so, it draws an analogy between two relations: that between the ethical and the political community, and that between moral and political progress. Through this analogy, I argue (i) that Kant grants logical precedence to political progress, (ii) that there is a virtuous circle between moral and political progress, and (iii) that forming a community is both a duty and a human predisposition.

Keywords: Kant, ethics, politics, philosophy of history.

Summary: 1. Analogy as a means of understanding progress. 2. The ethical community and political goals. 3. The political community as a precondition for the ethical community. 4. Community: a duty and a predisposition. 5. Concluding remarks. 6. Bibliographical references.

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The idea of a “moral world” has taken many forms in Kant's philosophy.¹ In 1784, he describes history as the progression from a “pathologically compelled agreement to form a society” to a “moral whole” (IaG, AA 8:21).² Nearly a decade later, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, this idea takes the form of an “ethical community”, evoking the possibility of the Kingdom of God on earth (RGV, AA 6:93). While these concepts emerge at different levels of Kant's discourse, both represent the realization of morality in history.³

If we take seriously the parallel between the “moral whole” of *Idea for a Universal History* and the “ethical community” of the *Religion*, Kant's 1793 articulation of the relationship between the moral community and the political community may be seen as a reformulation of the enduring question concerning the relationship between moral progress and the development of political institutions.⁴ This article explores this idea by

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¹ On this matter, see Paul Guyer (2011).

² Quotations from Kant's works are cited by volume and page number of the *Akademie-Ausgabe* (AA). English translations are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, except for *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where I quote from Werner S. Puhar's translation. The following abbreviations are used for Kant's works: Prol: *Prolegomena to Any Further Metaphysics* (1783); IaG: *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784); GMS: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785); KpV: *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788); RGV: *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793); TP: *On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice* (1793); V-MS/Vigil: *Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius Lecture Notes* (1793/1794); ZF: *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795).

³ This article builds on two interpretative assumptions. The first is that Kant's philosophy of history encompasses not only juridical/political progress but also moral progress. Thus, the criticism—advanced by Fackenheim (1957), Höffe (1994), and Yovel (1980)—that the idea of moral progress conflicts with subjective freedom is not at issue here. For a detailed response to this criticism, see Kleingeld (1995). The second assumption is that moral and political progress are related. Precisely *how* they are related is the central focus of this article. Furthermore, I subscribe to the thesis that there is no fundamental rupture between Kant's writings from the 1780s and those from the 1790s in terms of the importance of the good will in politics. However, this does not exclude the possibility of other important differences between these periods.

⁴ This article analyzes the relationship between ethics and politics through the concept of community, emphasizing the collective dimension of the realization of morality. To this end, it focuses on the concept of the “ethical community” in *Religion* and the “political community” as presented in Kant's philosophical writings on history. However, this analysis does not exhaust all the aspects involved in this relationship. Therefore, we will deliberately set aside the intersection between ethics and politics through the concepts of law and maxim, for example.

drawing an analogy between the two types of community and the two forms of progress they embody. If this analogy holds, it will provide a conceptual framework for three interpretative hypotheses regarding Kant's philosophy of history. The first asserts that political progress logically precedes moral progress. The second posits a virtuous circle between ethical and political development: just political institutions foster the formation of moral citizens, while moral citizens contribute to the establishment of just political institutions. The third hypothesis suggests that establishing a well-ordered political community is a significant part of fulfilling the duties of virtue.

This article is structured as follows. Section I examines the concept of analogy and its applicability to the relationship between communities and types of progress. Sections II and III investigate the relationship between the ethical and the political community in light of this analogy: the second section focuses on the ethical community's relation to political goals, while the third considers the role and impact of the political community in shaping the ethical community. Finally, Section IV argues that the very act of constituting a community is both a duty and a fundamental human predisposition.

1. Analogy as a means of understanding progress

In §58 of the *Prolegomena*, Kant defines analogy as “a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things” (Prol, AA 4:357). Thus, establishing an analogy between *A* and *B* involves indicating that while they are distinct, they bear a similar *relation*. Analogy, in this sense, serves as an instrument for conceptualizing a relationship where none was previously evident. Kant illustrates this in the *Prolegomena* with an analogy between the *juridical relations governing human actions* and the *mechanical relations governing moving forces* (Prol, AA 4:358n). He formulates this analogy as follows: “I can never do anything to another without giving him a right to do the same to me under the same conditions; just as a body cannot act on another body with its motive force without thereby causing the other body to react just as much on it” (Prol, AA 4: 358n). This analogy does not equate *right* with *moving forces*; rather, it allows us to comprehend the structure of juridical relations by comparing them to the familiar concept of mechanical causation.

A similar analogical structure appears in the third part of the *Religion*, where Kant introduces the concept of an *ethical community* by analogy with a political community, “with regard to which the ethical community can also be called an *ethical state*, i.e., a *kingdom of virtue* (of the good principle)” (RGV, AA 6:94). Keeping Kant's explanation in the *Prolegomena* in mind, this analogy states that even though the two types of community are different in principle, they bear a certain structural similarity. The fundamental difference between them is that while the political community is governed by public laws backed by external coercion, the ethical community must dispense with external coercion altogether, for it unifies human beings “under laws free from coercion, i.e., bare *laws of virtue*” (RGV, AA 6:95). Yet despite these differences, there remains something constant across both: the ethical community and the political community represent types of “civil state” within their respective domains (ethics and right). Their shared structure, highlighted by the opposition between the *civil state* and the *state of nature*, enables Kant to apply a common theoretical framework to both. It allows him to formulate a duty to leave the state of nature, to discuss the role of the legislator, and to consider the law's publicity in both contexts. Indeed, Kant takes this analogy so seriously that he extends the notion of an “international state of nature” (the condition preceding the establishment of a federation of nations) to the realm of religion, conceiving of a conflict among particular ethical societies (i.e. visible churches) as analogous to a conflict between states (RGV, AA 6:96).⁵

With this noted, my aim in this paper is not to shed light on the structural similarities between the ethical and the political community as such. Rather, my aim is to draw on the analogy between the ethical and the political community to illuminate the relationship between moral and political *progress*. This analogy operates on a different level: it seeks to clarify how the ethical and the political community influence one another and, by extension, the extent to which moral and political progress are interrelated.

There are two key aspects of the relationship between the ethical and the political community that must be taken into account, both of which concern the analytical starting point one adopts. By this I mean that the answer to the question “How are the ethical community and the political community related?” necessarily involves considering the bidirectional nature of their interaction. Each community exerts an influence on the other—and neither remains unaffected by the idea or presence of the other. However, it is crucial to remember that thinking about the interplay between the ethical and political communities does not imply their unification. Instead, Kant sees the ethical and political communities as separate units that serve different purposes and are grounded on laws with different natures.⁶

⁵ It is important to emphasize that Kant himself refers to the visible churches in this passage not as “ethical communities” but as “particular ethical societies” (RGV, AA 6:96). This distinction underscores two key points. First, the ethical community is an *ideal* that encompasses all of humanity, and precisely because of its ideal nature, it can never be fully realized. While a political organization may still be regarded as a political community even if it falls short of the ideal republic, no particular ethical society can legitimately claim the title of an ethical community. Second, this distinction serves as a cautionary reminder when seeking as sensible equivalent to the ethical community. Overemphasizing earthly religious institutions risks conflating them with an ideal that transcends any specific historical or institutional form.

⁶ This consideration is especially significant when examining the connection between earthly religious institutions and political states. In this case, it is also important to recall that not all entities commonly classified as religions align with Kant's notion of a “particular ethical society,” which serves as a potential earthly equivalent to an “ethical community”. Instead, Kant's analysis ultimately indicates that many of the earthly religious institutions operate as political communities, which instill in their adherents a sense of fear regarding earthly repercussions for transgressions rather than fostering the moral consciousness that, according to Kant, is associated with the contemplation of a reality beyond this life. (RGV, AA 6:125)

To examine this relationship,⁷ I will proceed in two stages. First, I will consider the ethical community as a starting point to explore its potential impact on the political community. In doing so, it is crucial to avoid reducing the ethical community to a mere instrument for achieving political ends.⁸ Second, I will reverse this perspective, examining how the political community conditions the possibility and development of an ethical community. Here, care must be taken not to subordinate moral autonomy to political contingencies.⁹

2. The ethical community and political goals

Interpretations that seek to understand the role of the ethical community within the political community typically rest on the premise that members of the ethical community are virtuous¹⁰ and that political institutions benefit from having virtuous citizens.¹¹ If there is no fundamental conflict between the duties of virtue and the duties imposed by the political constitution—if instead, there is concordance between them—then virtuous individuals have an additional motivation to obey the law: not merely out of respect for its legality, but out of respect for its moral legitimacy. In such a state, citizens would refrain from theft and murder not out of fear of punishment but because they regard it as their moral duty to do so. Kant himself acknowledges that political communities may desire “a domination over minds according to laws of virtue” for a simple reason: “for where the coercive means of dominion are not sufficient, because a human judge cannot see through the inside of other human beings, there the virtuous attitudes would bring about what is required” (RGV, AA 6:95).

Something very similar is at stake when, in the sixth proposition of *Idea for a Universal History*, Kant emphasizes the importance of a good will¹² prepared to accept the political constitution (IaG, AA 8:23). Likewise, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he suggests that decency facilitates the government’s task of guiding the people by means of laws (MS, AA 6:325). This notion also resonates in Kant’s well-known reference, in *Towards Perpetual Peace*, to a state of demons endowed with understanding (ZF, AA 8:366). Notably, Kant does not posit a *republic* of demons, only that even such beings could form a state.¹³ While the problem of establishing a state could be solved even among a nation of demons endowed with understanding, the formation of a perfect republic is possible only among a nation of angels. The refinement and effectiveness of juridical laws themselves is closely linked to both the morality of legislators and the ethical disposition of the citizens who obey them.

Yet, despite the advantages a state may derive from the existence of an ethical community, it cannot actively create one. Unlike the duty to leave the juridical state of nature, which can be enforced through coercion, the duty to leave the ethical state of nature cannot be fulfilled by means of coercion, since the defining characteristic of an ethical community is precisely the absence of external compulsion. Kant explicitly warns that a state that forces its citizens into an ethical community would be a contradiction *in adjecto* (a contradiction in terms) (RGV, AA 6:95). The principles of virtue cannot be subject to external enforcement. Instead, the cultivation of moral behavior, which is essential for fostering an ethical community, must arise from the voluntary choices of each individual. Coercion can only ensure the legality of actions, rather than their moral standing. True morality requires a voluntary commitment to act according to one’s duties, rather than merely adhering to them out of obligation. Moreover, from a purely political perspective, such an approach would be not only ineffective but counterproductive. As Kant states unequivocally: “But woe to the legislator who sought to bring about through coercion a [public] constitution directed to ethical purposes! For he would thereby not only bring about precisely the opposite of the ethical purposes, but would also undermine his political ones and render them insecure” (RGV, AA 6: 96). Thus, the moral formation of citizens emerges not as a direct aim of political legislation but as an unintended consequence of laws that, while not explicitly designed to cultivate virtue, nonetheless create conditions conducive to its development.

Differently, if the analysis centers only on the ethical community as a mere idea of reason, it is possible to assess the implications of such an idea on the direction of a political community. As noted by some scholars¹⁴, the idea of an ethical community can guide humanity toward more cosmopolitan societies, as it is founded based on humanity as a whole governed by the same laws of virtue.

⁷ In a previous article (Martinazzo 2022), I argued that the relationship between the two communities is mutually beneficial, while also emphasizing that the political community serves as a precondition for the ethical community. In this article, I revisit this argument, taking the opportunity to refine its conceptual framework and address any linguistic imprecisions present in its initial formulation.

⁸ See, for instance, Rossi 2005, 99, and Rossi 2019, 45.

⁹ This kind of “conditioning reading” can be found in van der Linden 1988, 160; DiCenso 2011, 190fn; Marey 2021.

¹⁰ Dörflinger 2009; Lo Re 2020.

¹¹ Stefano Lo Re describes this as the “political function” of the ethical community (Lo Re 2020, 69). Lawrence Pasternack claims that it is “possible to augment the juridical with the ethical” (Pasternack 2014, 176–7).

¹² On this matter, see Guyer 2009. He argues that the notion of ‘good will’ in the Sixth Proposition of the *Idea* aligns with its meaning in the *Groundwork*, which implies that establishing a just state cannot be accomplished solely through prudence. I am convinced that this understanding also holds true for Kant’s later political philosophy.

¹³ For commentary, see Klein 2014, Section II.

¹⁴ Williams 1983, 268; Anderson-Gold 1986; Pasternack 2014, 177.

3. The political community as a precondition for the ethical community

What role does the political community play in relation to the ethical community? As established in the previous section, a political community cannot compel its citizens to form an ethical community. The direct consequence of this is that the political community does not play the role of *creating* or *founding* an ethical community. Yet, with scant elaboration, Kant asserts at the beginning of the third part of the *Religion* that the ethical community could not be brought about by human beings at all “if the political community did not lie at the basis (*zum Grund liegen*)” (RGV, AA 6:94). In other words, Kant affirms that the political community is a *precondition* for the ethical community.¹⁵ However, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition.¹⁶ This raises two crucial questions: What exactly does Kant mean here? And how can this be true, given that Kant explicitly rejects the idea of a political community’s intentionally *creating* an ethical community?

First, it is important to clarify that Kant is not suggesting that the concept of an ethical community in general depends on that of a political community. Rather, he is arguing that *if* human beings wish to establish an ethical community, *then* a political community must lie at its foundation. This implies that something in human nature makes political organization necessary for the realization of morality. As sensible beings, humans do not possess a holy will and are often tempted to act out of self-love rather than respect for the moral law.

Kant’s idea of the *state of nature* helps to clarify what is at stake in the constitution of a political community. Particularly in the *Religion* and contemporaneous writings, his reference is the Hobbesian state of nature.¹⁷ Kant draws on Hobbes’s formulation of the state of nature as a *status belli*—a “state of war of everyone against everyone” (RGV, AA 6:97). Both the juridical and the ethical state of nature share a fundamental deficiency, on Kant’s view: the absence of a unifying principle that binds individuals. As Kant puts it: “In both [states of nature] each person legislates to himself, and there is no external law to which he, along with everyone else, might recognize himself to be subjected” (RGV, AA 6:95).

Throughout the third part of the *Religion*, Kant claims that it is possible to leave the juridical state of nature while remaining in the ethical state of nature: “In an already subsisting political community, all political citizens are, as such, nonetheless in the *ethical state of nature* and are entitled also to remain in it” (RGV, AA 6:95). Furthermore, given that a state can be founded even among a nation of demons with understanding (ZF, AA 8:366), it follows that leaving the *ethical* state of nature is not a necessary condition for establishing a political community. Notably, Kant never claims the opposite—that one can leave the ethical state of nature while remaining in the juridical one. This suggests that such a possibility is not viable. Indeed, the very nature of the juridical state of nature as a state of imminent war presupposes that those living within it would have little incentive to act morally. On the contrary, their actions would likely be dictated by self-interest.

Whereas the juridical state of nature is a fiction,¹⁸ the ethical state of nature is nothing more than the name Kant gives to the social order of his time.¹⁹ He describes this state in empirical terms, emphasizing the antagonistic passions inherent in social life. At the outset of the third part of the *Religion*, Kant identifies dissent among human beings as a given and presents the ethical community as an ideal towards which humanity must strive but which, as an idea of reason,²⁰ cannot ever be fully realized. “Envy, lust for power, greed, and the hostile inclinations linked with these” (RGV, AA 6:94) arise inevitably from human coexistence, since comparison is inherent to social life.²¹ Given the conditions imposed by sociability among human beings, the transition out of the juridical state of nature must logically precede the transition out of the ethical state of nature. Indeed, in *Towards Perpetual Peace*, Kant describes the establishment of a political state as a first step towards morality, though not yet a *moral* step (ZF, AA 8:376n). This first step is significant because the formation of a political state provides the conditions for the moral development of its citizens. Yet, the idea that establishing a political community is a precondition for forming an ethical community raises a challenge concerning the relationship between autonomy and external laws. Some interpreters argue that external laws enable the development of *autonomy*.²² Such a claim risks implying that moral action is conditional on the existence of a political community—a conclusion that would undermine Kant’s foundational concept of autonomy.

James DiCenso’s interpretation provides a useful illustration of this issue. In a footnote in his *Kant, Religion, and Politics*, he states—following Terry Pinkard—that “without law in some form, there would be no

¹⁵ For a different approach to this passage, see Palmquist 2015, 254.

¹⁶ A question that arises from that statement is “which political community?”. Authors like Harry van der Linden (1988, 160), Robert S. Taylor (2010, 2), and Wolfgang Ertl (2020, 57) argue that given Kant’s presupposition that the ethical community is formed by the whole of humanity, then the only political scenario adequate for its establishment would be a condition of perpetual peace.

¹⁷ In both the *Religion* (RGV, AA 6:97f) and the *Vigilantius Lectures* (V-MS/Vigil, AA 27:590), Kant mentions Hobbes explicitly.

¹⁸ See V-MS/Vigil, AA 27:589.

¹⁹ On this matter, see Anderson-Gold 1986, section III (28–30).

²⁰ KrV B376. An idea of reason is, by definition, unrealizable.

²¹ Kant’s emphasis on comparison as a source of negative social passions is particularly evident in his analysis of the predisposition to humanity—one of the three predispositions to the good—in the first part of the *Religion*. There, he describes the predisposition to humanity as a “*comparing* self-love (for which reason is required)” that initially seeks equality but is then corrupted into a desire to gain superiority over others (RGV, AA 6:27). Such a bound between self-love and comparison has taken many interpreters to equate it to Rousseau’s *amour-propre*. This can be seen in different modes in Muchnik 2009, Pasternack 2014, Wood 2020. However, I believe that the initial desire for equality is a key point to distinguish both. A detailed analysis of this relationship (and its limits) is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

²² Examples of this reading can be found in the interpretations of Harry van der Linden (1988, 154) and James DiCenso (2011, 190f.).

autonomy, only the anarchic condition classical theorists called *the state of nature*" (DiCenso 2011, 190f.). This claim suggests that human beings in the state of nature would lack autonomy altogether. Such a view goes beyond acknowledging the influence of social and political contexts on moral agency. Rather, it asserts that the human *capacity* to act morally is historically contingent. Yet Kant is explicit in the *Groundwork* that the moral worth of an action depends solely on the maxim adopted by the agent. From the perspective of virtue, the agent's political and social context is irrelevant. As Kant sees it, autonomy must be possible in all contexts—otherwise, moral responsibility itself would be incoherent and moral imputation impossible. Thus, moral action must be possible even for pre-political agents or those living in the state of nature.

In his extensive commentary on Kant's *Religion*, however, DiCenso takes a more nuanced position: "Just as subcommunities or non-state political entities can influence the mores instituted on the juridical level, reciprocally, the capacity to realize moral laws collectively is affected by political conditions" (DiCenso 2012, 134). This formulation draws a crucial distinction: rather than asserting that *there would be no autonomy without external laws*, it suggests that *the collective realization of moral law is shaped by political conditions*. It is possible to defend the latter without advocating the former. Thus, Kant's affirmation of moral progress does not commit him to the view that the moral capacity (autonomy) itself has developed throughout history. Rather, it should be understood as an affirmation of our collective improvement in the use of reason.²³

Thus, what is really at stake here is the possibility of a *collective* realization of morality. The political community is not a precondition for *individual* moral action but for establishing an ethical community. Establishing an ethical community is not a duty that can be fulfilled individually. Kant's description of the ethical state of nature strongly suggests that the realization of a collective moral order requires more than a mere aggregate of individual good wills. Kant explicitly states that human beings corrupt each other reciprocally "even with the good will of each individual human being" due to "the lack of a principle uniting them" (RGV, AA 6:97). Hence, fulfilling the duty to leave the ethical state of nature requires the adoption of a collective end and is characterized by Kant as a duty *sui generis*—a duty "not of human beings toward human beings, but of humankind toward itself" (RGV, AA 6:97).

In this sense, the political community serves as a necessary condition for the ethical community insofar as it provides the conditions that make moral progress, and thus the establishment of an ethical community, possible. Just political institutions are conducive to moral progress²⁴ as they enable peace and interaction between human beings (VARL, AA 23:353–354).²⁵ These elements, in turn, enable the flourishing of culture, the development of natural predispositions, the refinement of social virtues, and the formation of citizens through the public use of reason.²⁶ Each of these factors contributes to the revolution in one's *Denkungsart* (mode of thought) that is a precondition for moral progress.

4. Community: a duty and a predisposition

The idea that establishing a community is a duty appears in various ways throughout Kant's work, both explicitly and implicitly. The most direct expression of this duty is the obligation to leave the state of nature.²⁷ Entering a civil state is so crucial that Kant acknowledges it may be enforced through coercion. Even if some individuals resist, Kant argues that coercion to leave the state of nature is legitimate because it is grounded in a moral duty.²⁸ Similarly, the duty to obey the sovereign is a moral duty (TP, AA 8:305; MS, AA 6:318), as obedience serves to maintain the established political order and prevent regression to the state of nature. The transition to a civil state is therefore not merely instrumental but essential, for it is only within a political community that human beings can fully develop their natural predispositions.

As early as *Idea for a Universal History*, Kant presents the development of our natural predispositions as a collective task. Unlike other animals, whose capacities are realized within the lifespan of the individual, human beings can only fully develop their natural predispositions at the level of the species (IaG, AA 8:18). This does not mean that development is restricted to a particular group of individuals who share certain characteristics. On the contrary, the full realization of humanity's potential requires a collective effort. The development of reason, in particular, depends on trial and error, practice, and instruction (IaG, AA 8:19), necessitating a prolonged historical process of learning, refinement, and intergenerational transmission.

Beyond the duty to leave the juridical state of nature, there is also the duty to leave the ethical state of nature (RGV, AA 6:96). Much of my argument in the previous section sought to show that Kant provides strong grounds for concluding that the transition out of the ethical state of nature—and thus the establishment of an ethical community—is only possible within the framework of a civil state.

²³ On this point, see Kleingeld 1999.

²⁴ See also ZF, AA 8:366 and ZF, AA 8:375n–376n.

²⁵ There is extensive scholarship on the relationship between social interaction and the development of moral character. A detailed analysis of this can be found, for instance, in Munzel 1999, Formosa 2010, and Moran 2012.

²⁶ WA, AA 8:37. Monique Hulshof (2018, 161–162) has an interesting approach that links self-legislation with the public use of reason. She argues that the development of political institutions helps realize the idea of autonomy of the will. By engaging in the public use of reason, individuals are able to articulate principles that hold validity for their entire community. Thus, the public use of reason proportionated by the political conditions could be considered a step towards the realization of morality, given that what is at issue in this realm is also the search for principles valid for all rational beings.

²⁷ RGV, AA 6:97; V-MS/Vigil, AA 27:590; MS, AA 6:267.

²⁸ TP, AA 8:292–3; MS, AA 6:306.

A closer reading of Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* reveals that even duties towards oneself are inseparable from the constitution of a community. In the introduction to this work, Kant presents two fundamental principles from which duties to oneself derive. The first is encapsulated in the maxim *naturae convenienter vive*—"live in conformity with nature" (MS, AA 6:419). These are *negative* duties, prohibiting actions that contradict the ends of human nature, such as self-destruction. The second principle is expressed in the maxim *perfice te ut finem, perfice te ut medium*—"make yourself more perfect than mere nature has made you" (MS, AA 6:419). Kant describes these as *positive* duties insofar as they command human beings to perfect themselves. Positive duties towards oneself are imperfect duties to develop and increase one's natural and moral perfections (MS, AA 6:444). While negative duties towards oneself (e.g. prohibitions against lying²⁹ or suicide³⁰) are strictly individual, positive duties towards oneself can only be fulfilled *in community*.

Notably, the establishment of a community also figures in Kant's analysis of the original predisposition to the good in the first part of the *Religion*. There, Kant describes the original predisposition to the good as comprising three components: a predisposition to animality, a predisposition to humanity, and a predisposition to personality, each corresponding to an aspect of human experience. Of the three, only the predisposition to personality is directly connected to the moral law, as it corresponds to the predisposition to accept respect for the moral law as a motive for action. However, since animality and humanity are also predispositions *to the good*, they contribute indirectly to the realization of morality.³¹

The predisposition to animality is often understood merely in terms of biological instincts—such as self-preservation and the propagation of the species³²—or as a reference to Rousseau's concept of *amour de soi*.³³ Yet Kant also identifies the impulse to society (*Trieb zur Gesellschaft*) as an essential feature of this predisposition (RGV, AA 6:26). This suggests that human beings are instinctively driven to form social bonds—not, as Rousseau claims,³⁴ as a result of rational deliberation but as a fundamental aspect of their nature. Kant describes animality as a "physical and merely *mechanical* self-love" (RGV, AA 6:26), encompassing three primary instinctive behaviours for which the use of reason is not necessary: self-preservation, reproduction, and the impulse to society.

Crucially, this impulse to society is not limited to mere coexistence. Rather, Kant envisions the formation of a *community governed by laws*. This becomes clearer when he discusses the corruption of the predisposition to animality as resulting in "savage lawlessness (in relation to other human beings)" (RGV, AA 6:27), which is one of the bestial vices. From this perspective, the formation of community is not merely instrumental to virtue; it is an intrinsic part of the realization of our natural human predispositions. The impulse towards community belongs to the human being's predisposition to animality, while the realization of a just community contributes to the full development of the human being's predisposition to humanity. Viewed from this perspective, the idea of the development of our natural predispositions articulated in both the *Doctrine of Virtue* and the first propositions of *Idea for a Universal History* essentially includes the development and improvement of the life of the community itself.

5. Concluding remarks

In this article, I have sought to establish an analogy between the relationship between the ethical and the political community, on the one hand, and the interplay between moral and political progress in history, on the other. To do so, I examined how the ethical and the political community influence each other. Far from being mutually exclusive or independent, the political community deeply influences the ethical community, and vice versa. The ethical community enhances the functioning of the political community by fostering virtuous individuals who act from a good will, while the political community provides the necessary—though insufficient—conditions for the emergence of an ethical community.

I have argued that the logical precedence of political progress over moral progress stems from the nature of the human constitution itself. Political institutions facilitate the formation of moral individuals in various ways, providing stability, enabling the exercise of reason, and creating conditions conducive to ethical life. This interdependence suggests that moral and political progress are not separate trajectories but rather function as a virtuous circle, in which the presence of just political institutions encourages moral development and morally cultivated individuals contribute to the maintenance and improvement of those institutions.

What I thus hope to have highlighted is the importance of community in the realization of morality. Community serves as a necessary condition for, and an intrinsic element of, our predisposition to the good. From this perspective, the very notion of community emerges as both a duty and a human predisposition.

²⁹ MS, AA 6:429.

³⁰ MS, AA 6:422.

³¹ It is important to recall Kant's own definition of a predisposition to the good as something that *actively* contributes to the realization of the good. In the first part of the *Religion*, he states that "all these predispositions in the human being are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not conflict with the moral law) but are also predispositions *to the good* (they further compliance with that law)" (RGV, AA 6:28).

³² For example, Stephen Palmquist suggests that the predisposition to animality is good because it "enhances the likelihood of our survival" (Palmquist 2015, 66). The notion of self-preservation is also highlighted by Pasternack 2014, 94, and the idea of instinct by DiCenso 2011, 47.

³³ See Muchnik 2009, 144; Pasternack 2014, 94; Wood 2020, 71, 77.

³⁴ See Book I, Chapter VI, of the *Social Contract*.

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