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Kant and a culture of freedom

ABSTRACT: The expression “a culture of freedom” is unmistakably modern. Yet its meaning is not immediately clear. My purpose in this paper is to clarify the possible meaning of this expression by taking Kant’s practical philosophy as a point of reference. In order to do so, I will depart from Kant’s explicit conception of culture, and try to relate it to his own distinction between external and internal freedom, especially as it appears in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the three Critiques, which are quoted by their initials in German (*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* = KrV; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* = KpV; *Kritik der Urteilskraft* = KU), the rest of Kant’s works are quoted by their initials in English, followed by the volume and page of the Prussian Academy edition of *Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften*. Thus, Anth.7: 342 is the *Anthropology*, vol. 7, page 342. To quote the *Education*, instead the page, it will be given the paragraph in the English translation. Thus, Education (9); 9: 445, refers to the paragraph 9 in the English edition, and the page 445 in the volume 9 in the edition of the Akademie.

Other abbreviations: MM: *Metaphysics of Morals*. TP: *On the Common Saying: ‘This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice*. End All Things: *The End of All Things*. SBHH: *Speculative Beginning of Human History*. KrV: *Critique of Pure Reason*. KpV: *Critique of Practical Reason*. KU: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Idea: *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*. Religion: *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. QQ: A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: ‘Is the Human Race Continually Improving?’. GG: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

I have employed the following editions in English:

*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of view*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, with an introduction by Frederick P. Van de Pitte, ed. Hans R. Rudnick, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Edwardsville, 1978.

*Education*, trans. Annette Churton, University of Michigan Press, 1960.

*Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and edited by Mary Gregor, with an introduction by Roger J. Sullivan, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

*On the Common Saying: ‘This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, in *Kant Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition, 1991.

“A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: ‘Is the Human Race Continually Improving?’”, trans. H. B. Nisbet, in *Kant Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup>, enlarged edition, 1991.

*The End of All Things*, trans. Ted Humphrey, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1983.

*Speculative Beginning of Human History*, trans. Ted Humphrey, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1983.

*Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, trans. Ted Humphrey, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1983.

*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

*Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and edited by Mary Gregor, with an introduction by Andrews Reath, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, ed. Paul Guyer, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. and ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, with an introduction by Robert Merrihew Adams, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, with an introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Kant's explicit conception of culture involves the assimilation of "culture" to the "perfection of human nature".<sup>2</sup> This meaning, in turn, can be applied not just to the individual human being but also to the human species if only we adopt a higher perspective—that of Providence, or also that of the educators or social scientists.<sup>3</sup> In this case Kant associates culture with "civilization", whose highest achievement is precisely the institution of Right.

The institution of Right is thought by Kant as setting the conditions for external freedom, just as virtue is seen as the condition of internal freedom. Thus, we could think of Right as defining the core of "a culture of external freedom", and Virtue as defining the core of a "culture of internal freedom", even if, as we will see below, the development of a culture of freedom requires the introduction of further conditions.

While Kant speaks sometimes of a "moral culture",<sup>4</sup> he nowhere speaks of a "culture of right". Nevertheless, the latter is implied in the fact that Kant himself places law and juridical institutions at the top of culture or civilization. More interesting, however, is the fact that, according to Kant, there is a gap or a lack of continuity between civilization—as a "culture of right"—and the so called "moral culture", which stretches from pragmatic reason to moral reason.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he writes in the *Education*: "We live in an age of discipline, culture and refinement, but we are still a long way of from the age of moral training".<sup>6</sup> How are we supposed to cover this insurmountable gap, to walk that long way, actually an abyss, from culture and refinement to morality? And, how does this distance affect the very notion of a culture of freedom?

In my view, the detailed account of the paradoxes and problems involved in this notion constitutes a privileged way to show the aspirations and paradoxes of humanity. To that end, I begin by summarizing Kant's distinction between external and internal freedom. That summary will serve as a preliminary step towards clarifying Kant's notion of a "culture of right" and a "moral culture" which I outline in the following two

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<sup>2</sup> See Ana Marta González, La doble aproximación de Kant a la cultura, *Anuario Filosófico*, vol. XXXVII/3, n° 80, 2004, 679-712.

<sup>3</sup> See *Education* (17); 8: 449.

<sup>4</sup> He uses the expression "moral culture" literally in the following passages: "Moral culture must be based upon 'maxims', not upon discipline; the one prevents evil habits, the other trains the mind to think", *Education* (77); 9: 480; "Maxims ought to originate in the human being as such. In moral training we should seek early to infuse into children ideas as to what is right and wrong. If we wish to establish morality, we must abolish punishment", *Education* (78); 9: 481; "(physical training) aims only at nature, while moral training aims at freedom. A man may be highly cultivated physically, he may have a well-cultivated mind; but if he lacks *moral culture*, he will be a wicked man", *Education* (63); 9: 470; "To expect not simply to train good citizens but good men who can improve and take care of themselves; to expect that his will eventually happen by means of education of youth in the home, then in schools on both the lowest and the highest level, in intellectual and moral culture fortified by religious doctrine—that is desirable, but its success is hardly to be hoped for". *QQ*, 7: 92; "Without such confidence the wholesome gratification of enjoying moral culture within society and of enjoying culture itself would be denied". *Anth.*, 7: 279; "This tendency can be observed in the smallest child, because in him, starting from culture toward morality, and not (as reason dictates) from morality and its laws, Nature strives to establish a culture which conforms with morality. This inevitably establishes the wrong tendency which does not answer the purpose. For example, one would try in vain to deduct morality if religious instruction, which should necessarily be a moral cultivation, starts with historical, which is only memory training". *Anth.*, 7: 327-8.

<sup>5</sup> "Physical culture must, however, be distinguished from practical culture, which last is pragmatic or moral. In this last case morality is the aim rather than culture". *Education* (63), 9:470.

<sup>6</sup> *Education* (19); 9: 451.

sections. Finally, I try to work out the meaning of a culture of freedom, without any further qualification.

### *I. Kant's distinction between external and internal freedom*

According to Kant, inasmuch as we take human behavior to be part of nature, it is ruled by the Laws of Nature. Yet, to the extent we take it as free, it is ruled by the moral law. The moral law is, then, a law of freedom. The Laws of Nature, on the other hand, are the product of our understanding whereas the moral law is originated in Reason. Thus, the only aspect it has in common with the Law of Nature is its universality. This is true of juridical and moral laws alike. At the same time, however, Kant introduces a distinction between juridical laws and moral laws:

“As directed merely to external actions and their conformity to law they are called juridical laws; but if they also require that they (the laws) themselves be the determining ground of actions, they are ethical laws, and then one says that conformity with juridical laws is the legality of an action and conformity with ethical laws is its morality. The freedom to which the former laws refer can be only freedom in the external use of choice, but the freedom to which the latter refer is freedom in both the external and the internal use of choice, insofar as it is determined by laws of reason”.<sup>7</sup>

In this text, it is implied that external freedom is merely a “lack of coercion”. External freedom is constituted by a lack of external coercion on the human person. Accordingly, nobody could prevent me from doing whatever I want so long as I do not break the juridical laws.

Internal freedom also means a lack of coercion, but in a different sense, for in this case, the coercion to which Kant refers is internal: its origin lies not in other people, but in our own (empirical) nature, which prevent us from acting from reason alone. Thus, internal freedom, for Kant, means the capacity to act entirely from reason alone, without being determined by nature.

Now, Kant assumes that not being determined by nature amounts to taking reason as the determining ground of our actions, and, thereby, acting morally well. In other words: good ethical behavior, for him, is identical with pure rational behavior. Reason is assumed to be always “right reason”. And only a rational behavior could be called free.

While the identification of “reason” with “right reason” –as if reason would not need eventual rectification- is surely a rationalist heritage, it is nevertheless true that, as Kant puts it, “freedom can never be located in a rational subject’s being able to choose in opposition to his (lawgiving) reason, even though experience proves often enough that this happens (though we still cannot comprehend how this is possible)”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MM, 6: 220.

<sup>8</sup> MM, 6: 226.

In other words: the possibility of choosing against (right) reason is not freedom. The argument Kant gives is a classic one: “only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really an ability; the possibility of deviating from it is an inability”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the ability or the capacity to act badly is not a capacity at all. This is true both in arts and in morality. The capacity of singing badly is not a capacity in the positive sense of the term: it is rather a shortcoming. Likewise, the capacity of departing from the rule of reason is not a capacity, in the proper sense of the term, but a shortcoming: inability to determine one’s behavior by reason alone. Instead, one lets oneself be determined by nature, rather than by reason.

This is why Kant places internal freedom in acting from duty alone.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while external freedom depends on the lack of coercion secured by a juridical state, internal freedom does not depend on merely fulfilling the law. It depends rather on our fulfilling the law *out of respect for the law*. Only then are we really free from the coercion of our nature.

This is the ground of Kant’s division of the *Metaphysics of Morals* in a “Doctrine of Right” and a “Doctrine of Virtue”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, “ethical lawgiving (even if the duties might be external) is that which cannot be external; juridical lawgiving is that which can also be external. So it is an external duty to keep a promise made in a contract; but the command to do this merely because it is a duty, without regard for any other incentive, belongs to internal lawgiving alone”.<sup>12</sup>

Now, according to this distinction, the expression “a culture freedom” could mean two different things. It could namely mean merely a “culture of right”, that is, a culture with sound legal institutions, which allow anyone to do their will as long as it does not collide with someone else’s freedom; or else it could also mean a “moral culture”, in which every one would fulfill the law out of respect for the law. At this point, further comment is needed: while the incentive of any moral behavior must lie merely in the respect for the law, and never in the ends provided by the inclinations, it is also the case that human actions must always have a matter and an end.<sup>13</sup> This is why

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<sup>9</sup> MM, 6 :227.

<sup>10</sup> MM, 6: 219.

<sup>11</sup> For Kant these are “distinguished not so much by their different duties as by the difference in their lawgiving, which connects one incentive or the other with the law”. MM, 6: 220

<sup>12</sup> MM, 6: 220

<sup>13</sup> “Although on its own behalf morality does not need the representation of an end which would have to precede the determination of the will, it may well be that it has a necessary reference to such an end, not as the ground of its maxims but as a necessary consequence accepted in conformity to them. For in the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will can take place in human beings at all, since no such determination can occur without an effect, and its representation, though not as the determining ground of the power of choice nor as an end that comes first in intention, must nonetheless be admissible as the consequence of that power’s determination to an end through the law; without this end, a power of choice which does not thus add to a contemplated action the thought of either an objectively or subjectively determined object (which it has or should have), instructed indeed as to how to operate but not as to the whither, can itself obtain no satisfaction. So morality really has no need of an end for right conduct; on the contrary, the law that contains the formal condition of the use of freedom in general suffices to it. Yet an end proceeds from morality just the same”. Religion, 6: 4-5

Kant introduces the somewhat problematic notion of “an a priori end of reason”,<sup>14</sup> which is the basis of the so-called “duties of virtue”.<sup>15</sup>

Although he does not refer to it explicitly, it seems reasonable to think that this “a priori end of reason” is somehow connected to the *highest good*, which in the *Critique of Practical Reason* had been described as “the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in the KpV Kant referred to the practical character of the highest good,<sup>17</sup> only that at that time he was more interested in showing the antinomy of practical reason than in properly showing our practical contribution to the emergence of the highest good. It is not until the *Metaphysics of Morals* that he sets out to disclose the way we are supposed to realize the highest good, namely, through our virtuous actions.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he particularizes the “ends that are also duties” in “one’s own perfection” and “the happiness of others”.<sup>19</sup>

All this is relevant for working out the notion of a “culture of freedom”. For, if we take this to mean merely “external freedom”, we would be pointing at the realization of a merely “formal culture”; on the other hand, if we take this to mean “internal freedom”, it would imply not merely acting from duty, but since actions from duty must have a content- the commitment to realize the highest good-,<sup>20</sup> it follows that all actions must be made under the auspices of a positive effort to advance the happiness of others.

## II. *Kant’s culture of right*

Focusing on Kant’s explicit meaning of culture as “perfection of human nature”, one may still choose two different approaches: either a practical approach, or a naturalistic one. While the first, moral, approach regards man as the author or promoter of

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<sup>14</sup> “Since the sensible inclinations of human beings tempt them to ends that can be contrary to duty, lawgiving reason can in turn check their influence only by a moral end set up against the ends of inclination, an end set up against the ends of inclination, an end that must therefore be given a priori, independently of inclinations”: MM, 6: 381

<sup>15</sup> Not every ethical duty is a duty of virtue: “Setting aside the question of what sort of end is in itself a duty and how such an end is possible, we have here only to show that a duty of this kind is called a duty of virtue and what is called by this name (...) Those duties that have to do not so much with a certain end (matter, object of choice) as merely with what is formal in the moral determination of the will (e.g., that an action in conformity with duty must also be done from duty) are not duties of virtue. Only an end that is also a duty can be called a duty of virtue”. MM, 6:383. Notice that, in this text, Kant speaks of an ethical duty which is not an ethical virtue nor a duty of right.

<sup>16</sup> KpV, 5:108

<sup>17</sup> “In the highest good which is practical for us, i.e., one which is to be made real by our will, virtue and happiness are thought of as necessarily combined, so that the one cannot be assumed by a practical reason without the other belonging to it”. KpV, 5: 113

<sup>18</sup> “It cannot be a matter of indifference to morality, therefore, whether it does or does not fashion for itself the concept of an ultimate end of all things (although, to be sure, harmonizing with this end does not increase the number of morality’s virtues but rather provides these with a special point of reference for the unification of all ends); for only in this way can an objective practical reality be given to the combination, which we simply cannot do without, of the purposiveness (deriving) from freedom and the purposiveness of nature”. Religion, 6: 5.

<sup>19</sup> See MM, 6: 387-388; 6: 392-394.

<sup>20</sup> “The doctrine of right dealt only with the formal condition of outer freedom (the consistency of outer freedom with itself if its maxim were made universal law), that is, with right. But ethics goes beyond this and provides a matter (an object of free choice), an end of pure reason which it represents as an end that is also objectively necessary, that is, an end that, as far as human beings are concerned, it is a duty to have”. MM, 6: 381

culture,<sup>21</sup> the second sees man's perfection almost as the effect of a natural process, which began with man's expulsion from the garden, that is, once man abandoned the state of nature.<sup>22</sup> I will focus on the practical approach to a "culture of right", as it can be worked out from Kant's exposition in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

The first thing we can expect from this practical approach is to lay down the principle of Right. Thus, keeping with his definition of right as "the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choice of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom",<sup>23</sup> Kant states the "Universal Principle of Right" in the following terms: "Any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law".<sup>24</sup>

According to Kant, this principle is essentially connected with an authorization to use coercion any time one's right is threatened:

"If a certain use of freedom is itself a hindrance to freedom in accordance with universal laws (i.e., wrong), coercion that is opposed to this (as a hindering of a hindrance to freedom) is consistent with freedom in accordance with universal laws, that is, it is right. Hence there is connected with right by the principle of contradiction an authorization to coerce someone who infringes upon it".<sup>25</sup>

Now, given the close connection between right and coercion, it is only logical that Kant makes the completion of right dependent on the exit of the state of nature and entrance into a civil state. It is not that he does not acknowledge the existence of right in the natural state. On the contrary: he says quite clearly that in the state of nature it is already possible to speak of possession, and, therefore, of "mine" and "yours".<sup>26</sup> However, this kind of right would be merely private<sup>27</sup> and provisional: in order to totally secure those possessions it is necessary to exit the state of nature and create a civil constitution.<sup>28</sup> This is why the creation of a civil constitution becomes a duty.<sup>29</sup> This is true not merely for justice that holds among persons in their exchanges with one another (*iustitia commutativa*), but also for distributive justice.<sup>30</sup> In both cases, a transition from private to public right is morally necessary.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> And thus Kant speaks of a duty to acquire culture. MM, 6: 392.

<sup>22</sup> See SBHH.

<sup>23</sup> MM, 6: 230. See also TP, 8: 290.

<sup>24</sup> MM, 6: 230. "So act externally that the free use of your choice can coexist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law". MM, 6: 231.

<sup>25</sup> MM, 6: 231.

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Pippin, Mine and Thine: the Kantian State, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer, 2006, 416-446.

<sup>27</sup> "The highest division of natural right cannot be the division (sometimes made) into natural and social right; it must instead be the division into natural and civil right, the former of which is called private right, and the latter public right. For a state of nature is not opposed to a social but to a civil condition, since there can certainly be society in a state of nature, but not civil society (which secures what is mine or yours by public laws). This is why right in a state of nature is called private right". MM, 6:242. See also 6:306.

<sup>28</sup> See MM, 6: 257.

<sup>29</sup> MM, 6:264.

<sup>30</sup> MM, 6: 297.

<sup>31</sup> "Right is the limitation of each person's freedom so that it is compatible with the freedom of everyone, insofar as this is possible in accord with a universal law; and public right is the totality (Inbegriff) of external laws that makes such a thoroughgoing compatibility possible. Now, since every limitation of freedom by the will (Willkür) of another is called

Now, public right is defined by Kant as “a system of laws for a people, that is, a multitude of human beings, or for a multitude of peoples, which, because they affect one another, need a rightful condition under a will uniting them, a constitution (*constitutio*), so that they may enjoy what is laid down as right”.<sup>32</sup>

The distinction between “a multitude of human beings” and “a multitude of peoples”, in turn, is the basis for a distinction within Public Right itself, namely that between the Right of a State and the Right of Nations, which “lead inevitably to the idea of a right for all nations (*ius gentium*) or cosmopolitan right (*ius cosmopoliticum*)”.<sup>33</sup>

According to Kant, whereas the *Right of Nations* treats Nations as if they were in the state of nature –and therefore in a state of war-, the *Cosmopolitan Right* puts forward an ideal: that of a federation of nations aiming at perpetual peace,<sup>34</sup> because perpetual peace is “the highest *political* good”.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Kant holds the latter not to be a merely “philanthropic (ethical principle) but a principle having to do with rights”.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in Kant’s view, “establishing universal and lasting peace constitutes not merely a part of the doctrine of right but rather the entire final end of the doctrine of right within the limits of reason alone; for the condition of peace is the only condition in which what is mine and what is yours are secured under laws for a multitude of human beings living in proximity to one another and therefore under a constitution”.<sup>37</sup>

The final end of the Doctrine of Right is establishing universal and lasting peace. Why is this so? As we have just read, Kant holds peace to be the condition under which everybody’s right is finally secured. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, this final end –the highest political good- is something to be achieved through human agency insofar as it advances the juridical institutions necessary to warrant peace.

Yet in other contexts, Kant takes a less practical and more naturalistic approach to the highest political good. Thus, instead of stressing the duty to advance juridical institutions, he simply argues that nature itself makes its way through the unsocial sociability of human beings, to further the advancement of those very institutions, even if men themselves do not act in a properly moral way, but only pragmatically.

Without explicitly rejecting the possibility of advancing those ends through righteous behavior, Kant’s writings on the philosophy of history seem to indicate that

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coercion, it follows that the civil constitution is a relation among free men (notwithstanding their complete freedom in uniting with others) who yet stand under coercive laws, for reason itself –indeed, pure a priori law-giving reason, which takes no notice of any empirical ends (which can all be grasped under the general name of happiness)- wills it so”. MM, 6: 306-308. See also TP, 8:290.

<sup>31</sup> MM, 6: 230.

<sup>32</sup> MM, 6: 311.

<sup>33</sup> MM, 6: 311.

<sup>34</sup> MM, 6: 344-345.

<sup>35</sup> MM, 6: 355.

<sup>36</sup> MM, 6: 352.

<sup>37</sup> MM, 6: 355. Yet this goal should not be realized “by way of revolution, but rather “carried out by gradual reform in accordance with firm principles”

he sees reasons for hope in moral progress despite all of men's wrongdoings. Accordingly, he appeals not so much to duty as to pragmatic intelligence: it would be in man's own interest to advance those juridical institutions.

While it is certainly surprising that institutions aimed to regulate man's external freedom can have their origin merely in a combination of nature and pragmatic intelligence, I would like to point out that Kant's naturalistic account of the origin of right, is coherent with his general account of right as necessarily involving coercion, if only we assume that in this case we would be coerced not by law –since, at the origin of the institution of right there is no civil state to coerce- but by nature itself.

Yet, arriving at a juridical state, and so at a state of external freedom, does not entail arriving at a properly moral culture. As Kant himself observes in the *Anthropology*, “in the civil constitution of a state, which represents the highest degree of artificial enhancement of the good characteristics in the human species toward final purpose of its destiny, animality still manifests itself earlier and basically stronger than pure humanity... Man's own will is always ready to turn hostile toward his neighbor. He never fails to press his claim to an unconditional freedom; he does not merely want to be independent, but he even wants mastery over others who are equal to him by nature”.<sup>38</sup>

Civilization *per se* does not secure morality. The animal in us is always ready to wake up, ready to turn hostile towards his neighbor. To the extent that external freedom is all we can get through the process of civilization, civilization is plainly not enough to foster a true culture of freedom. Even if human beings have managed to create the appropriate juridical institutions, they would still be in need of morality, in order to renounce unjust domination on one another. We could say, then, that beyond the highest political good –perpetual peace- we are still in search of the highest good which can only be the effect of a moral culture.

### ***III. Kant's moral culture***

In speaking of “moral culture”, Kant points at a behavior based on maxims rather than on discipline. This sort of behavior cannot possibly arise from nature, for its origin and its ground of determination lies solely in reason.<sup>39</sup> So the “institution” of a moral culture cannot be expected to arise merely from historical progress. In fact, what Kant has to say about moral education does not look at first very promising:

“Since good men, who must themselves have been trained for it, are required for moral education, and since there is probably not one among them who has no (innate or acquired) depravity himself, the problem of moral education for our species remains unsolved. It remains unsolved not only with regard to the degree, but even as to the quality of the principle, because an innate, evil tendency in our species

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<sup>38</sup> Anth., 7: 327.

<sup>39</sup> “This tendency can be observed in the smallest child because in him, starting from culture toward morality and its laws, Nature strives to establish a culture which conforms with morality. This inevitably establishes the wrong tendency which does not answer the purpose. For example, one would try in vain to deduct morality if religious instruction, which should necessarily be a moral cultivation, starts with the historical, which is only memory training”. Anth., 7: 328.



may be censured by common human reason, and at best also be controlled, but it will thereby still not have been extinguished”.<sup>40</sup>

With those words Kant is pointing at a similar problem he had already noted in his *Idea for a Universal History*: the problem of government, which Kant takes to be the “hardest and the last to be solved by the human species”,

“For he certainly abuses his freedom in relation to his equals, and although as a rational creature he desires a law that establishes boundaries for everyone’s freedom, his selfish animal propensities induce him to except himself from them wherever he can. He thus requires a master who will break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will, whereby everyone can be free”.<sup>41</sup>

According to this text, the reason why man needs both an educator and a master is because his animal nature opposes his rational nature. While this could lead us to think that the ideal fulfillment of a moral culture should involve the overcoming of this opposition, we should observe that this way of thinking about “moral culture” involves a sort of paradox. This paradox arises because, in Kant’s view, human morality is defined by the conflict between nature and reason.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, at some places Kant points at this ideal, especially when he suggests the idea of a “return to nature” or a “second nature”.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, the contrast between nature and reason should not be too rapidly equated with the struggle between the good and the evil principle in us. According to Kant, nature is not evil of itself. Radical evil cannot be identified with it. Since the biggest obstacle to the advancement of education comes from the radical evil in us, we must turn our attention not so much to the ideal of a second nature as to how we overcome evil. From this perspective, the only way to speak of a moral culture would be to engage in the moral philosophy he develops in his book on *Religion*, particularly when he speaks of the conditions for the establishment of an “ethical commonwealth”.

### **III. 1. Moral culture as second nature (or return to nature)**

One of the places where Kant most clearly suggests the idea of morality becoming nature is at the end of the final part of his small essay *Speculative Beginnings of Human*

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<sup>40</sup> Anth., 7: 327.

<sup>41</sup> Idea, 8:23. “There are two human inventions which may be considered more difficult than any others –the art of government, and the art of education; and people still contend as to their very meaning”. Education (12); 9: 446.

<sup>42</sup> “The very concept of duty is already the concept of a necessitation (constraint) of free choice through the law. This constraint may be external constraint or a self-constraint. The moral imperative makes this constraint known through the categorical nature of its pronouncement (the unconditional ought). Such constraint, therefore, does not apply to rational beings as such (there could also be holy ones) but rather to human beings, rational natural beings, who are unholy enough that pleasure can induce them to break the moral law”. MM, 6: 379.

<sup>43</sup> Kant himself speaks of art which becomes nature again (*Kunst wieder Natur wird*). In the English translation it is used the expression “second nature”. The problem with this expression is twofold: a) on the one hand, Kant himself uses this expression in the *Critique of Judgment*, in a different context, to describe morality, as a second –supersensible- nature: “Simplicity (artless purposiveness) is as it were the style of nature in the sublime, and so also of morality, which is a second (supersensible) nature, of which we know only the laws, without being able by intuition to reach the supersensible faculty in ourselves that contains the ground of this legislation”. KU, 5:275. b) In the English translations the expression “second nature” is also used to translate ideas other than “return to nature” or morality as a supersensible nature. In these cases what the translations report as second nature is nothing other than habituation or prejudice: See, Anth., 7: 121; Anth., 7: 312.

*History*. Kant has just given his own account of Rousseau's contraposition of nature and culture, as well as what he takes to be Rousseau's main concern: "how must culture progress so as to develop the capacities belonging to mankind's vocation as a moral species and thus end the conflict within himself as (a member of both a) moral species and a natural species?"

Kant himself was concerned with this problem. In this interesting essay he goes on to observe that the conflict between man as a cultural being and natural being is the origin of "all true evil that oppresses human life and vice that dishonours it". Indeed: natural capacities –he says- are good and serve a purpose; as such they are not to be regarded as the origin of evil. Yet, "they will conflict with culture as it proceeds, just as it will conflict with them *until art so perfects itself as to be a second nature*, which is the final goal of human species' moral vocation".<sup>44</sup>

According to this text, we could think of an end to that conflict, namely, when art –that is, culture-, so perfects itself that it becomes a second nature. Likewise, in the *Education* he writes: "Vices, for the most part, arise in this way, that civilization does violence to Nature; and yet, our destiny as human beings is to emerge from our natural state as animals. Perfect art becomes second nature".<sup>45</sup>

In both cases Kant speaks of art, or culture, as perfecting itself, until it becomes nature again. Now, how are we supposed to understand this "perfecting itself" of culture? Shortly before this passage, Kant makes a brief reference to the imperfection of present culture. He says: "culture founded on true principles for the education of men and citizens has not even properly made a beginning, much less been completed".<sup>46</sup>

In Kant's view, the true principles upon which culture should begin are rational, moral principles, and not simply nature<sup>47</sup> or *mores*<sup>48</sup>: otherwise it is very difficult to adjust one another. In saying that culture should begin by reason, Kant does not mean that moral training must begin first in time, but rather that "it must be taken into account from the beginning, at the same time with physical training".<sup>49</sup> Yet, in his view, this entails already a revolution in *Education*, for, "with education is involved the great secret of the perfection of human nature".<sup>50</sup>

Kant himself thought that his Enlightened times were the first in producing the necessary conditions for making a new start in this field: a new start which would lead the human race to the achievement of its moral destiny: "It is only now that something

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<sup>44</sup> SBHH, 8: 117-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Education* (102), 9: 492.

<sup>46</sup> SBHH, 8: 117

<sup>47</sup> See *Anth.*, 7: 328.

<sup>48</sup> "Human being's moral education must begin not with an improvement of mores, but with the transformation of mind and the establishment of a character, although it is customary to proceed otherwise and to fight vices individually, while leaving their universal root undisturbed". *Religion*, 6: 48.

<sup>49</sup> *Education* (33), 9:455.

<sup>50</sup> *Education* (7), 9: 443.

may be done in this direction, since for the first time people have begun to judge rightly, and understand clearly, what actually belongs to a good education”.<sup>51</sup>

His idea of the goal of education, as it was said above, has mostly to do with the internalization of the moral principles so that they become a sort of second nature.<sup>52</sup> Kant envisions a completely different world, for the time when human beings become acquainted with those principles:

“It is delightful to realise that through education human nature will be continually improved, and brought to such a condition as is worthy of the nature of man. This opens out to us the prospect of a happier human race in the future”.<sup>53</sup>

However, in Kant’s view, this optimistic prospect could never possibly be the work of any individual human being: it must rather be the work of the whole human race<sup>54</sup>, an art to be perfected “through the practice of many generations”,<sup>55</sup> because the transmission of knowledge and insight from one generation to another is very slow.<sup>56</sup>

In those words Kant seems fully confident in the progress of mankind.<sup>57</sup> Other times he shows more skepticism.<sup>58</sup> In either case, however, it is important to notice that expressing this hope in terms of a “return to nature” involves much more than speaking of morality as a second (supersensible) nature. Indeed, while the moral law can be called the archetypal world, which we cognize only in reason, the idea of a return to nature suggests a *complete realization in the sensible nature, of the moral law*. From this perspective, it can be related to the notion of a “natura ectypa”, developed by Kant in the *Second Critique*.

This notion is perfectly in line with what Kant says in the *KpV*, ideally, that the moral law or the law of freedom should be able to “furnish the sensible world, as a

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<sup>51</sup> Education (7), 9: 443.

<sup>52</sup> “Under the present educational system man does not fully attain to the object of his being; for in what various ways men live! Uniformity can only result when all men act according to the same principles, which principles would make to become with them a second nature”. Education (9); 9: 445.

<sup>53</sup> Education (7), 9: 444.

<sup>54</sup> Education (10), 9: 445.

<sup>55</sup> Education (11), 9: 446.

<sup>56</sup> Moreover, “if ... the children are to progress beyond their parents, education must become a study... the mechanism of education must be changed into a science”, Education, (14), 9: 447. Now, one of the principles to keep in mind in this new scheme of things is that “children ought to be educated not for the present, but for a possibly improved condition of man in the future; that is, in a manner which is adapted to the idea of humanity and the whole destiny of man” (15), 9: 447. Accordingly, education must be entrusted to “enlightened experts” (17), 9: 449.

<sup>57</sup> “In the natural progress of the human race, talents, skills, and tastes (along with its result, voluptuousness) become cultured before morality develops, and this state is precisely the most burdensome and dangerous possible for morality, as well as for physical well-beings, for needs grow much more vigorously than do the means to satisfy them. However, humanity’s moral capacity, which always lags behind, will someday overtake them (as one may hope to occur under a wise world ruler), though in its hasty course it becomes tangled in itself and often stumbles”. *End of All Things*, 8: 332.

<sup>58</sup> “If we now inquire as to the means by which this eternal progress towards betterment can be maintained and perhaps even sped up, one soon sees that this immeasurably distant result depends not so much on what we do (e.g. on the education we give the world’s children), nor on what method we adopt so as to bring it about; instead, it depends on what human nature does in and with us so as to compel us onto a path that we ourselves would not readily follow. Only from nature, or rather only from providence (since supreme wisdom is required for the fulfillment of this end), can we anticipate a result that will affect the whole and, as a consequence, the parts”. TP, 8: 310.

sensible nature (in what concerns rational beings), with the form of a world of the understanding, that is, of a supersensible nature, though without infringing upon the mechanism of the former”,<sup>59</sup> i.e., in a way compatible with this mechanism. What Kant calls “*natura ectypa*” contains the possible effect of the idea of the moral law as the determining ground of the will.<sup>60</sup>

Accordingly, the *natura ectypa* is not simply the sensible nature, but, rather, *the way in which the intelligible nature is present in the sensible nature*. So, Kant is assuming the law that forms the *natura archetypa* as a sort of causal law, able to produce a proportionate effect in the sensible nature, which constitutes in turn the *natura ectypa*.<sup>61</sup>

From this perspective, the whole point of speaking of a “return to nature” would be to highlight the ideal of a second, moralized nature, in which the moral law would not conflict with historical culture (or nature). To a certain extent this is a radical way of expressing the ideal of a harmony between nature and morality that makes up the notion of a highest good.

Yet, just as the highest good itself, moral culture so understood –as moralized nature- is more an ideal than anything else. On the one hand, because, as it was pointed out above, Kant’s own moral psychology does not leave much room for such a harmony between nature and reason.

But there is a further, more fundamental reason to regard this moral culture as an ideal; this reason is that “the moral law in fact transfers us, in idea, into a nature in which pure reason, *if it were accompanied with suitable physical power*, would produce the highest good, and it determines our will to confer on the sensible world the form of a whole of rational beings”.<sup>62</sup>

The conditional clause, however, is meant to mark a limit to the realization of this ideal. It seems, indeed, as if the moral law of itself would be enough to realize the highest good in the sensible world –a *natura ectypa*, provided that it were accompanied with “suitable physical power”, but it is not. What the text suggests, then, is that the impossibility of realizing the highest good in this world is due mainly to the lack of physical power to implement the idea of the *natura archetypa*.

This thought is similar to another one conveyed in the *KrV*, except for a significant difference. In the *KrV*, the hindrances to the realization of the highest good arise not so much from the lack of physical power proportioned to morality, but from the fact that, once in the real world, not everyone acts according to the moral law, and –

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<sup>59</sup> KpV, 5: 43.

<sup>60</sup> KpV, 5: 43.

<sup>61</sup> See also: “According to the law, each and every human being should furnish in his own self an example of this idea. And the required prototype always resides only in reason, since outer experience yields no example adequate to this idea”. Religion, 6: 63.

<sup>62</sup> KpV, 5: 43.

we presume- not just because of “lack of physical power”, unless we take this “lack of physical power” in a broad sense, as not being able to overcome the inclinations:

“In an intelligible world, i.e., in the moral world, in the concept of which we have abstracted from all hindrances to morality (of the *inclinations*), such a system proportionately combined with morality can also be thought as necessary, since *freedom*, partly moved and partly restricted by moral laws, would itself be the cause of the general happiness, and rational beings, under the guidance of such principles, would themselves be the authors of their own enduring welfare and at the same time that of the others. But *this system of self-rewarding morality is only an idea, the realization of which rests on the condition that everyone do what he should*, i.e., that all actions of rational beings occur as if they arose from a highest will that comprehends all private choice in or under itself”.<sup>63</sup>

According to this text, the intelligible world is identical with the moral world without inclinations, and this is thought as “naturally” conducive to the highest good – where the word “naturally” stands for the natural effect of a system of self-rewarding morality.<sup>64</sup>

By contrast, Kant stresses in the *KpV* that *even* in a perfect moral world –in the *natura ectypa*-, to the extent that it is a *sensible* world, an intrinsic harmony between the moral-intelligible world and the natural-sensible world would still be missing,<sup>65</sup> unless physical power proportionate to the moral law were present. In other words, to the extent that the moral law must be realized in a sensible world, no happiness flowing “naturally” from morality can be expected because there are insurmountable hindrances deriving from the fact that sensible nature is subject to a different law. This law, however, is not merely the mechanic law, which, as such, could never oppose morality, for they are in different realms. The insurmountable hindrance Kant has in mind is the fact that we are beings with particular inclinations, which constitute a “*natural whole*” concurrent with the legislation arisen from pure practical laws:

“In *actual nature*, insofar as it is an object of experience, the free will is not of itself determined to such maxims as could of themselves establish a nature in accordance with universal laws, or even to such maxims as could of themselves fit into a nature arranged in accordance with them; they are, instead, private inclinations *which do constitute a natural whole in accordance with pathological (physical) laws* but not a nature that would be possible only through our will in accordance with pure practical laws”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> KrV, A 811/B839.

<sup>64</sup> Andrews Reath has stressed that in the *KrV* Kant seems to consider the possibility of the highest good as emerging from a system of self-rewarding morality. This account of the highest good would not require to introduce the idea of God as a condition for its possibility. In a moral world where people would behave morally, freedom would be moved only by moral laws, and as a consequence, everyone would act morally and promote the other’s happiness, so that rational beings would be the authors of their own welfare. See Andrews Reath, Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1988, 593-619.

<sup>65</sup> Something which, according to the *KrV*, would make room for a hope which has its ground neither in nature nor in the causality of actions, but in a highest reason alone: “Since the obligation from the moral law remains valid for each particular use of freedom *even if others do not conduct themselves in accord with this law*, how their consequences will be related to happiness is determined neither by the nature of the things in the world, nor by the causality of actions themselves and their relation to morality; and the necessary connection of the hope of being happy with the unremitting effort to make oneself worthy of happiness that has been adduced cannot be cognized through reason if it is grounded merely in nature, but may be hoped for only if it is at the same time grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature”. KrV, A 811/B839.

<sup>66</sup> *KpV*, 5: 44.

Stated in this way, the moral deficiency hindering the implementation of the highest good would indeed be rooted in the fact that our will is not determined “necessarily” to maxims according to universal laws, but, instead, many of them arise from private inclinations. This is what happens in “actual nature”, as opposed to the “intelligible world” or “*natura archetypa*”, where abstraction is made of every particular inclination. Yet, the interesting point here is that, it is not particular inclinations *as such*, but the *natural whole they constitute according to physical laws*, that hinders morality. This “natural whole” is to be clearly distinguished from that “nature that would be possible only through our will in accordance with practical laws”.

In view of this, it is apparent that the word “nature” is used here in two different ways. The “physical laws” which constitute a “natural whole” are of a different kind than the “Law of Nature”, which represents a reference even for the Moral Law. The former takes its form from the Understanding, and is to be understood as *type* or *symbol* of the Moral Law; the other is an ideal shaped by the Imagination, which unifies the objects of the inclinations under the idea of happiness,<sup>67</sup> or –which is the same: the principle of self-love.<sup>68</sup> The crucial point is that it is not inclinations as such –which according to Kant are to be held as good<sup>69</sup>–, but the “natural whole” that they constitute which hinders morality.<sup>70</sup> And this is because the “natural whole” cannot, according to Kant, be subordinated to the Moral Law.

We come to see, also at a practical level, the relevance of Imagination in Kant’s philosophy. It is evident that the Law of Nature, which holds as a causal law for every natural being, holds also for humans. But in humans it generates a different logic which is not merely mechanic. Happiness cannot be explained in a mechanical way. It is an ideal, but not an ideal of reason, but of imagination.

While the longing for happiness is deeply rooted in our sensible nature, it is also responsible for the opposition that this very nature offers to morality. As a possible ground for decisions that depart from the moral law, it furnishes the concept of “radical evil” –so called because it corrupts the ground of all maxims.<sup>71</sup> However, insofar as the

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<sup>67</sup> “For happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting merely upon empirical grounds, which it is futile to expect should determine an action by which the totality of a series of results in fact infinite would be attained”. GG, 4: 418.

<sup>68</sup> “All material practical principles as such are, without exception, of one and the same kind and come under the general principle of self-love or one’s happiness”. KpV, 5: 22.

<sup>69</sup> “The ground of this evil cannot be placed, as is so commonly done, in man’s sensuous nature and the natural inclinations arising therefrom. For not only are these not directly related to evil (rather do they afford the occasion for what the moral disposition in its power can manifest, namely, virtue); we must not even be considered responsible for their existence (we cannot be, for since they are implanted in us we are not their authors)”. Religion, 6: 34.

<sup>70</sup> “The distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the difference between the incentives which they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of the maxim), but rather must depend upon subordination (the form of the maxim), i.e., which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other. Consequently man (even the best) is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into his maxim. He adopts, indeed, the moral law along with the law of self-love; yet when he becomes aware that they cannot remain on a par with each other but that one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law; whereas, on the contrary, the latter, as the supreme condition of the satisfaction of the former, ought to have been adopted into the universal maxim of the will as the sole incentive”. Religion, 6: 36.

<sup>71</sup> Religion, 6: 36. “The rational origin of this perversion of our will whereby it makes lower incentives supreme among its maxims, that is, of the propensity to evil, remains inscrutable to us, because this propensity itself must be set down to our

desire for happiness is rooted in our finite nature, Kant will be willing to unite both ideas –morality and happiness, under the moral ideal of the “highest good”. The main obstacle to its realization does not come from nature, but rather from the presence of an evil principle in man, which leads us to subvert the grounds of determination of our will. Hence, if the idea of a “moral culture” is to have some meaning at all, this cannot be linked to the overcoming of the difference between nature and reason, but rather to the victory of the good principle over the evil one.

### ***III. 2. Moral culture as the ethical commonwealth***

The overcoming of the evil principle is the theme of Kant’s *Religion within the boundaries of reason alone*. Its second book begins with a simple observation: “To become a morally good human being it is not enough simply to let the germ of the good which lies in our species develop unhindered; there is in us an active and opposing cause of evil which is also to be combated”.<sup>72</sup>

In Kant’s view, natural inclinations are good; we must not extirpate them, but rather discipline them and prudently harmonize them into a whole called happiness. It is true that inclinations, left to their own, can make difficult the execution of good maxims opposed to them; but genuine evil consists in not willing to resist the inclinations when they invite to transgressions.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, the enemy “is not to be sought in the natural inclinations, which merely lack discipline and openly display themselves unconcealed to everyone’s consciousness, but is rather as it were an invisible enemy, one who hides behind reason and hence all the more dangerous”.<sup>74</sup>

What we have to eradicate, then, are not the inclinations, but rather the unlawful, since this alone is evil in itself. Its origin, says Kant, is

“a corruption that lies in all human beings and cannot be overcome except through the idea of the moral good in its absolute purity, combined with the consciousness that this idea belongs to our original predisposition and *we only need to be assiduous in keeping it free of any impure mixture*, and to accept it deeply in our disposition, to become convinced by the gradual influence that it has on the mind that the dreaded powers of evil have nothing to muster against it”.<sup>75</sup>

This, however, involves a struggle: the struggle between the good and the evil principle in us. Victory in this struggle is what definitely brings “freedom from the dominion of evil”, that is, internal freedom: “the highest prize that he can win”.<sup>76</sup>

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account and because, as a result, that ultimate ground of all maxims would in turn involve the adoption of an evil maxim (as its basis). Evil could have sprung only from the morally evil (not from mere limitations in our nature); and yet the original predisposition is a predisposition to good; there is then for us no conceivable ground from which the moral evil in us could originally have come”. *Religion*, 6: 43.

<sup>72</sup> *Religion*, 6: 57.

<sup>73</sup> See *Religion*, 6: 58, footnote.

<sup>74</sup> *Religion*, 6: 57.

<sup>75</sup> *Religion*, 6: 83.

<sup>76</sup> *Religion*, 6: 93.

Yet, individual struggle is not enough to overcome the threats that the human beings face in their natural state. According to Kant, there is no possibility of overcoming the effect of the evil principle in us as long as we fight in isolation. Instead, we must enter into an ethical community. The reason for this is that the threat to the good principle arose because of society with other human beings in the first place:

“It is not the instigation of nature that arouses what should properly be called the passions, which wreak such great devastation in his originally good predisposition. (...) Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding, *as soon as he is among human beings*”.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike inclinations, or even emotions, “passions” have always a negative connotation for Kant,<sup>78</sup> and passions do not arise merely because of the instigation of nature, but rather because of the influence of society. For it is only in society that man begins to compare himself with others and gets anxious that “other human beings will consider him poor and will despise for it”.<sup>79</sup> There is no need to invoke the eventual evil examples of others, “it suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt each other’s moral disposition and make one another evil”.<sup>80</sup>

This is why, in order to counteract the evil influence of society, human beings have to enter into another kind of society, living according the laws of virtue: “Inasmuch as we can see... the dominion of the good principle is not otherwise attainable, so far as human beings can work toward it, than through the setting up and the diffusion of as society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue”.<sup>81</sup>

Accordingly, Kant regards the establishment of this ethical society as a duty of the entire human race, “for only in this way can we hope for a victory of the good principle over the evil one”.<sup>82</sup> To the extent that the laws of this society –the laws of virtue- are public, it can be called an “ethico-civil society” or “ethical community”. Thus, Kant traces an analogy to the juridical society: both societies would be the result of a pact, whereby men would abandon a former state of nature –either a juridical state of nature or an ethical state of nature.<sup>83</sup> While the juridical society would be the means to overcome social conflict and wars, the ethical community would be the means to overcome the evil principle in us.

Several particularities should be noted in this regard: first, the ethical community could exist in the midst of the political one, but, in Kant’s view, the latter must take

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<sup>77</sup> Religion, 6: 93.

<sup>78</sup> “Beyond inclination there is finally a further stage in the faculty of desire, passion (not emotion, for this has to do with the feeling of pleasure and pain), which is an inclination that excludes the mastery over oneself”. Religion, I, 1, footnote. See also KU, 5: 272 and MM, 6: 408

<sup>79</sup> Religion, 6: 93.

<sup>80</sup> Religion, 6: 94.

<sup>81</sup> Religion, 6: 94.

<sup>82</sup> Religion, 6: 94. “The idea of such a state has an entirely well-grounded, objective reality in human reason (in the duty to join such a state), even though we cannot subjectively ever hope of the good will of human beings that these will work harmoniously toward this end”. Religion, 6: 95.

<sup>83</sup> Religion, 6: 95.



precedence over the former<sup>84</sup>; second, unlike the political community, the ethical community could ideally comprise the entire human race;<sup>85</sup> third, while the laws of the juridical society are public juridical laws, the laws of an ethical community are laws of virtue alone. Consequently, the first can be enforced, but the second cannot. Thus, while one could be obliged to enter into the social contract which supports the culture of right, the sole idea of being obliged to enter into the social contract which defines the ethical commonwealth involves a contradiction, “since the latter entails freedom from coercion in its very concept”.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, the absence of coercion is involved in the very notion of ethical duties.<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, while the abandonment of an ethical state of nature and an entrance into an ethical community must be regarded as an ethical duty,<sup>88</sup> it is still true that one could only enter into this community through an act of his freedom.

This duty is special for two reasons: first, it is not a duty merely “of human beings toward human beings, but of the human race toward itself”,<sup>89</sup> second, this is a very particular duty, because it commands the realization of an ideal, which we don’t know we, as a whole, are able to realize.

Indeed, the achievement of the highest moral good depends not merely upon every individual person striving solely for his or her own moral perfection, “but requires rather a union of such persons into a whole toward that very end, i.e. toward a system of well-disposed human beings in which, and through the unity of which alone, the highest moral good can come to pass”;<sup>90</sup> Kant describes the goal of this duty as the realization of a “universal republic based on the laws of virtue”, and takes it to be an ideal “of which we cannot know whether as a whole it is also in our power”. This is why this duty is completely different “from all others in kind and in principle”.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, unlike the highest *political* good, which we can think as possible through the combination of the mechanism of nature and our pragmatic intelligence, the attainment of the highest *ethical* good depends essentially on the good will of men, and, “we cannot subjectively ever hope of the good will of human beings that these will work harmoniously toward this end”.<sup>92</sup>

Accordingly, the hope in the arising of an ethical community depends in a qualitatively different way on the presupposition of another idea, namely, the idea “of a

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<sup>84</sup> “Without the foundation of a political community, it (the ethical community) could never be brought into existence by human beings”. Religion, 6: 94.

<sup>85</sup> “Since the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community”. Religion, 6: 96.

<sup>86</sup> Religion, 6: 95.

<sup>87</sup> See MM, 6: 381.

<sup>88</sup> “Just as the juridical state of nature is a state of war of every human being against every other, so too is the ethical state of nature one in which the good principle, which resides in each human being, is incessantly attacked by the evil which is found in him and in every other as well”. Religion, 6: 97.

<sup>89</sup> Religion, 6: 97.

<sup>90</sup> Religion, 6: 97.

<sup>91</sup> Religion, 6: 98.

<sup>92</sup> Religion, 6: 95.

higher moral being through whose universal organization the forces of single individuals, insufficient on their own, are united for a common effect”.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, although this higher moral being –God- was already presupposed since Kant first spoke of the Highest Good in KrV and KpV, as long as we remain in the realm of the political highest good, that is, in the realm of a culture of right, the role of God, from an objective point of view, could largely be played by nature alone. In the case of the ethical community, however, the role of God cannot be reduced to a subjective idea: there is no way to think of the establishment of the ethical community other than by attributing God the role of organizing the forces of single individuals to this end. A mechanical nature could never produce this effect. “Hence an ethical community is conceivable only as a people under divine commands, i.e., as a people of God, and indeed in accordance with the laws of virtue”.<sup>94</sup>

#### *IV. Understanding Kant’s culture of freedom*

While external freedom can be ensured by a “culture of right”, made up by juridical institutions –specifically by the civil state-, internal freedom can only be achieved in the context of a moral culture, defined by the law of virtue shared by a community of human beings. Accordingly, civil state and ethical community are the two aspects of a culture of freedom. Now, in order to work out the idea of a “complete” culture of freedom, it seems fit to ask how both aspects relate to each other.

Although Kant says that the ethical community can develop within the civil state, he also says that the civil state –the juridical community- must precede the establishment of the ethical community. Yet, at the same time, the establishment of the juridical community is not merely a duty of right, but also a moral duty. This could be seen as circular: we have the moral duty to establish a civil state, but the civil state, in turn, seems to be a pre-condition for defeating the evil principle in us.

This dilemma can be avoided by Kant to the extent that he leaves room for a naturalistic development of a culture of right. Men do not merely have moral reasons to establish a civil state: they have also pragmatic self-interested reasons. And, according to Kant, the combination of nature and pragmatic intelligence would suffice to generate a civil state, and, even, to a certain extent, Cosmopolitan Right.

The establishment of the civil state and cosmopolitan right would provide us with a state of peace necessary to develop a moral community. Yet, unlike the former, the latter cannot be guaranteed by pragmatic reasons and nature. While a civil state could be reasonably hoped for even against evidence of man’s wrecked behavior, the arising of an ethical commonwealth is entirely a matter of faith, not only from a subjective point of view, but also from an objective point of view. For only by assuming the

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<sup>93</sup> Religion, 6: 98.

<sup>94</sup> Religion, 6: 99.

intervention of God could the moral community be finally established and the evil principle controlled.

Accordingly, while we would have reasons to expect the realization of the highest political good –perpetual peace as the absence of war- the realization of the highest good would ultimately depend on faith in God, for while the highest good is defined in terms of “happiness proportioned to morality”, the possibility of morality itself depends on the establishment of the moral community, and this, in turn, depends on faith in God.<sup>95</sup> This is Kant’s way to introduce the concept of “Church”, which he essentially defines in terms of an “ethical community”.

From his perspective, historical Religions and Churches have merely the mission of paving the way for moral religion and the ethical community. Yet, what interests us here is noting that, according to him, internal freedom is linked to this moral community, which, in his view, could grow and embrace the different political communities. It is precisely at this point, where external freedom –depending on juridical institutions- and internal freedom –depending on faith in God and community of virtue- could finally meet each other. It seems to me that this is Kant’s way of reconciling external freedom and internal freedom: the only way, therefore, to create a complete “culture of freedom”.

It is true that considered from our perspective, this solution raises some problems, the most salient being that it makes the culture of freedom dependent on the elimination of historical-cultural differences. In fact, according to Kant, historical religions would have merely an educational purpose, and once they fulfilled their role, should be abandoned in favor of a single and pure moral religion. More generally, historical and cultural differences<sup>96</sup> are regarded as a major obstacle to the reign of pure reason, and should therefore be overcome. Indeed, in Kant’s approach, history and cult are merely means for the advancement of reason. They are not –as they will be among the romantics- different expressions of humanity.

Of course, to the extent that this universal ethical community is merely an ideal, cultural and historical differences are still in place, and, according to Kant, they even have a role to play, for instance, in preventing universal despotism. This role, however, is a mere pragmatic one. It does not involve a positive appraisal of cultural plurality in itself: cultural and historical differences remain something to be overcome.

In the meantime, we have another problem: if the ethical community does not grow enough to embrace the political community, human beings are bound to experience a kind of alienation: the distance between their internal moral law and actual

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<sup>95</sup> According to the definition of highest good as “happiness proportioned to morality”, all the happiness we are entitled to expect remains limited to the morality we live up to. If we did not consider Kant’s doctrine of radical evil, we could interpret this in two different ways: either we assume God as the one who dispenses happiness proportioned to morality, or we just think of happiness as a system derived from the system of morality, understood as a self-rewarding system. In this case, all the happiness we can expect is that we, following the duty to procure other’s happiness, dispense each other. From this perspective God could seem dispensable. Yet, if we take the doctrine of radical evil seriously, we must assume that the overcoming of evil requires the establishment of a moral community, and this, in turn, requires faith in God.

<sup>96</sup> Recall Kant’s rejection of any kind of cult. He regards cult in mere instrumental terms: Religion, 6: 13; 127.

social life. While they enjoy the external freedom assured by juridical institutions, he may have great difficulties to enact his positive freedom. For, on the one hand, the lack of a sufficiently strong ethical community leaves one more at the mercy of the evil principle; and, on the other, within a culture of merely external freedom it may be difficult for them to enact some positive duties of virtue, such as “promoting the other’s happiness”. Now, this involves a diminishing in the public –and thereby cultural- relevance of internal freedom.

Within Kant’s system, a culture of freedom remains an ideal, but a paradoxical one. Its achievement would involve the cessation of history as we know it, and with history, the cessation of transitory cultural differences. Yet, as long as humanity has not achieved that ideal –and ideals, by definition, are never achieved- the experience of freedom will never be complete. Kant’s own system –with his clear-cut distinction between external and internal freedom- not merely sets an insurmountable limit to the emancipatory program of Enlightenment; in setting those limits, it reminds us once and again the real meaning of human finitude.

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