

Freedom and Bonds in Kant *Libertad y Vínculos en Kant*

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Abstract

The thesis that I intend to address in this article can be summarized with the idea that positive bonds¹ engender not only dependence, but also freedom and autonomy. Accordingly, it is worth asking what positive human bonds are based on. Or, to phrase the question another way, how can dependence and autonomy be blended when we talk about relationships in terms of bonds, that is, relationships with a special quality of union?

I will try to answer these questions through a selection of texts that pay special attention to these issues from Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and his *Lectures on Ethics*². I will thus briefly address the Kantian concept of freedom and introduce the idea of bonds that, as we will see below, is not as alien to Kantian ethics as it may at first seem.

Keywords

Freedom, Kant, friendship, beneficence, bonds

Resumen

La tesis que pretendo abordar a lo largo de estas pocas páginas se condensa en la idea de que cuando los vínculos son positivos, no hay solo dependencia, sino que reina también la libertad y la autonomía. De acuerdo con esto cabe preguntarse lo siguiente: ¿de qué depende que los vínculos

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¹ What I mean by “positive bonds” is the idea of being bound to someone without becoming passive, that is, without losing your autonomy. As Lara Denis holds: “We owe it to ourselves to avoid relationships in which we are continually dependent on someone else” (Denis, 2001, p.5).

² I will cite Kant's texts according to their initials in German, followed by the volume and page of the Prussian Academy edition of *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*. Thus, the *Critique of Practical Reason* corresponds to KpR; *Metaphysics of Morals* corresponds to MS; *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* to RGV; and his *Lectures on Ethics* from Collins correspond to V-Mo/Collins.

humanos sean positivos? o, ¿cómo pueden conjugarse la dependencia y la autonomía cuando hablamos de relaciones en términos de vínculos, esto es, de relaciones con un especial carácter de unión?

Intentaré dar respuesta a estos interrogantes a través de una selección de textos procedentes de la *Metafísica de las Costumbres*, de las *Lecciones de ética* y de la *Religión dentro de los límites de la mera Razón*, en los que Kant parece especialmente preocupado por estas cuestiones. Trataré así de abordar brevemente el concepto kantiano de libertad y de introducir la idea de vínculo que, como veremos a continuación, no es tan ajena a la ética kantiana como puede parecer en un primer momento.

Palabras clave

Libertad, Kant, amistad, beneficencia, vínculos

I.

The idea of bonds in Kant has always been linked to the idea of obligations. The term in German for both is: *Verbindlichkeit*. It is the idea of each human being bound to the moral law and it is also the idea that governs Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and also his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. In this brief article we will try to introduce a broader notion of this idea, one that includes social relations, that is, the idea of being bound to others. We will see that both, the idea of being bound to the moral law and the idea of being bound to others, do not contradict each other. On the contrary, the first one grounds the moral character of our social relations. In her article, Eleni Filippaki considers this same issue:

[Human beings are] “beings that stand in essential relation to one another: not as isolated rational machines with a merely vertical relation to the moral law, but as rational substances in dynamic horizontal interrelations which provide the indispensable context for the proper conception of Kantian rational moral action” (Filippaki, 2012, pp.34-35).

At first the idea of social bonds may seem non-existent in Kant's moral theory, but among his texts we do find certain references to the idea of it. On the one hand, friendship is defined in a positive way as a “special bond” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 430). But, on the other hand, the situation of bonding is described as a situation of passive obligation (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 259-60). The distinction made by Kant between “passive obligation” and “active obligation”, and the identification of the idea of bonds with the first type of obligation, gives us the impression that for Kant the fact of being bound to someone is a negative fact, a situation of passivity and dependence. This perspective contrasts with the one about friendship in which Kant values very positively the union of two people as “purely moral” (MS AA 06: 470-471). It seems therefore that we have two alternatives when it comes to addressing the question of social bonds in Kant: one positive and one negative. However, it is possible to address both alternatives in a complementary way. Both in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and in his *Lectures on Ethics* we find a whole moral reflection in which the protagonist is no longer “the rational being in general” or “the

rational nature of human beings”, as it happens in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, but it is “the man”: a rational being indeed, but also a being corporally and socially situated. In these works, Kant tries to find the balance between man as “noumenon”, that is, as a radically active being, and man as “phenomenon”, that is, as a receptive being (not only in terms of knowledge, but also in terms of interaction with other human beings). In short, between the moral vocation of men to autonomy, on the one hand, and their necessity of society, on the other.

It seems then that it is not necessary to keep only one of the two alternatives about bonds, but it should be possible to transform the situations of negative bonding into new situations of positive bonding. In fact, Kant also defined freedom in this way: first, as a negative concept, and then he confirmed its positive reality.

Therefore, in order to address the question of social bonds in Kant, we will make use of the Kantian concept of friendship as a reference. In the same way that freedom does not destroy the reality that contradicts it (the natural inclinations), but it introduces its law and with it, a new order³, so does the concept of friendship. It does not replace dependence (which characterizes negative bonds) with pure autonomy, but it introduces that “equality in mutual love and respect” (MS AA 06: 469) with which dependence (attraction) and autonomy (repulsion) are balanced (MS AA 06: 470).

There hasn't been a full investigation of this topic yet, but some experts on Kant have done deep work in this direction. Experts such as Christine Korsgaard, Marcia Baron, Andrews Reath, Kyla Ebels-Duggan, Ana Marta González, have studied the social aspect of Kant's moral theory and they have developed new lines of interpretation which do not break the traditional ones but completes them. We will take into account this recent research and try to introduce the positive concept of bonds which, as I will try to hold, is not alien to Kant's moral theory, but central.

II.

In the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the concept of freedom is defined, on the one hand, as the “independence from being *determined* by sensible impulses” (MS AA 06: 213-214), and, on the other hand, as “the ability of pure reason to be of itself practical” (MS AA 06: 214), that is, as offering itself (reason) laws for human will and human action.

³ “we are conscious through reason of a law to which all our maxims are subject, as if a natural order must at the same time arise from our will. This law must therefore be the idea of a nature not given empirically and yet possible through freedom, hence a supersensible nature to which we give objective reality at least in a practical respect, since we regard it as an object of our will as pure rational beings” (KpV AA 05:44).

In effect, freedom requires independence from sensible nature, as well as from external coercion⁴. However, for Kant, properly speaking, freedom is a positive reality. An undeniable reality lies behind the first definition of freedom as a negative concept: on the one hand, there is a sensible nature, which has its own laws, and, on the other hand, “the spherical surface of the earth unites all the places on its surface” and thus *community with one another is a necessary result of human’s existence on the earth* (MS AA 06: 262). Thus, if freedom is a positive, rather than a merely negative, reality, it requires the affirmation of a new order and, with that, new laws. Hence, Kant speaks of laws that differ from those of nature, which correspond to the laws of freedom. These laws, when introduced among men, inaugurate a new order, i.e., the moral order⁵.

Freedom is thus responsible for the transformation of man’s factual aspects (his sensible nature and the existence of human beings on a spherical surface) into a moral reality. If we focus on the concept of freedom as independence from the influence that others exercise over us with their actions, its positive version consists of new ways of relating that are compatible with freedom. The moral principles therein correspond to right and virtue.

The fact that freedom transforms this factual situation of coexistence and renews it “as a beautiful moral whole in its full perfection” (MS AA 06: 458) is due to the very fact that freedom— as a faculty of reason that is practical— introduces new ends that differ from nature’s ends.

These new ends respond to a certain concept with which Kant introduces the concept of duty at the same time. It corresponds to what Kant calls an “end that is also a duty”. “[I]t is not a question here of ends the human being *does adopt* in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature, but of objects of free choice under its laws, which he *ought to make* his ends” (MS AA 06: 385).

Another term that Kant uses to talk about these new ends of freedom is that of “duties of virtue” with which he highlights such duties as those of beneficence, sympathy, gratitude, as well as friendship. They all come from reason and are possible as ends of human action because of freedom, not because of nature.

To deal with the question that here concerns us—freedom and bonds in Kant— I will focus on comparing two of the duties of virtue that Kant seems to prefer, namely the duty of beneficence and the duty of friendship.

⁴ In the first pages of the *Doctrine of Right*, Kant also writes about the negative version of external freedom, referring to the coercive influence that others and their actions can exercise over one’s own action. In this sense, freedom consists in the “independence from being constrained by another’s choice” (MS AA 06:237).

⁵ In this respect, it is interesting to consider the arguments that Andrews Reath uses to give priority to the secular version of the Highest Good, that is, to the version in which not God but human beings are the agents responsible for bringing morality and happiness together in this world (Reath, 1988, pp.609-612).

III.

Kant takes into account that human beings have an innate social impulse; it cannot be eradicated from man's nature. It is part of man's disposition toward animality:

“The predisposition to animality in the human being may be brought under the general title of physical or merely *mechanical* self-love, i.e., a love for which reason is not required. It is threefold: *first*, for self-preservation; *second*, for the propagation of the species, through the sexual drive, and for the preservation of the offspring thereby begotten through breeding; *third*, for community with other human beings, i.e., the social drive” (RGV AA 06: 26-27).

However, man has other dispositions— such as those toward humanity and personality—that engender growth and the expression of that animal impulse in other ways. In effect, the social impulse that resides in man's animality appears in his disposition towards humanity as “the inclination to *gain worth in the opinion of others*, originally, of course, merely *equal worth*: not allowing anyone superiority over oneself” (RGV AA 06: 27).

The disposition to personality already assigns man the freedom that corresponds to him as a being endowed with reason and amounts to the freedom of the law. In effect, the predisposition to personality is, according to Kant, one of the three elements that determine the nature of the human being (RGV AA 06:26-28). And it is this one where freedom becomes real. It is here where the moral law “announces to be itself an incentive, and, indeed, the highest incentive. Were this law not given to us from within, no amount of subtle reasoning on our part would produce it or win our power of choice over to it” (RGV AA 06:26*).

In accordance with these three dispositions, man must “raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality (*quoad actum*), more and more toward humanity, by which he alone is capable of setting himself ends” (MS AA 06: 387). Taking into account the difference between humanity and personality, man must also strive to arrive at moral perfection which lies in making “one's object every particular end that is also a duty” (MS AA 06: 387). That is so because “freedom of choice cannot be defined -as some have tried to define it- as the ability to make a choice for or against the law (*libertas indifferentiae*)” (MS AA 06: 226). “[F]reedom 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” (MS AA 06: 226).

This growth, which man owes to himself through his very dispositions, happens by virtue of a few principles, which Kant reveals in his *Metaphysics of Morals*. In fact, according to Kant, “every human being also has it [such a metaphysics] within himself” (MS AA 06: 216). Therefore, if the *Metaphysics of Morals* is divided into the *Doctrine of Right* and the

Doctrine of Virtue, it is because the laws that emerge from both doctrines constitute the new laws in which freedom finds its own affirmation, and these are the laws that every human being finds within him.

Right and virtue are, for Kant, principles that are introduced among men not just for the individual progress of each man towards his personality but are also there to transform the inevitable situation of coexistence into a properly human coexistence that is, in short, a moral one. Friendship and marriage reflect the possibility of that transformation. He thus speaks of both bonds as particularly exemplary cases of a social exercise in which those who interact experience freedom. They are relations of equality or, at least, relationships in which reciprocity (legal and/or ethical) tries to restore the inequalities that can arise in interaction⁶.

This moral transformation occurs, for Kant, through constriction⁷. Intuitively, it may sound contradictory to speak of freedom in terms of coercion (or self-coercion), as Kant does. However, since man is a natural as well as a rational being, the subjective and the objective do not coincide in him immediately⁸. Morality is tinged with contingency⁹, that is, this moral transformation does not occur in man with absolute necessity. It depends on whether man attends to the imperatives of the moral law. Whether he does or does not, it is under this law that human reality, with all its dispositions, finds unity¹⁰.

“Hence a person constrained by motivating grounds of reason is constrained without it conflicting with freedom” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 268).

⁶ According to Kant, freedom is an innate right and from it emerges an innate equality: “independence from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them” (MS AA 06:237-238).

⁷ “No other necessitation save practical necessitation *per motiva* is compatible with freedom. These motives can be pragmatic and moral, the latter being drawn from the *bonitas absoluta* of the freewill. The more a man can be morally compelled, the freer he is; the more he is pathologically compelled, though this only occurs in a comparative sense, the less free he is. It is strange: the more anyone can be compelled, in a moral sense, the more free he is. I compel a person morally through *motiva objective moventia*, through motivating grounds of reason, whereby he is maximally free, without any incentive. Hence it takes a greater degree for freedom to be morally compelled, for in that case the *arbitrium liberum* is more powerful -it can be compelled by motivating grounds of reason and is free of stimuli. So the more a person is free of stimuli, the more he can be morally necessitated. His freedom increases with the degree of morality” (V-Mo/Collins VE AA 27: 268).

⁸ As Ana Marta González explains: “As finite beings, humans need to be impelled to activity by some incentive (KpV AA 05:79), yet there is a difference between being merely impelled by a sensible incentive and being impelled by reason, between “having an interest” and “taking an interest”. That finite rational beings can *take* an interest in the moral law, however, follows from their mixed nature as rational and sensible beings: while as sensible beings they are influenced by inclinations, as rational beings they do not find those inclinations decisive in themselves. Negative freedom creates room for the thought of the law to have its peculiar effect on our sensible nature, inducing a peculiar kind of feeling, which, unlike other feelings, has its source in moral law itself and enables us to act to not just in conformity with the law, but also out of respect for the law (KpV AA 05:81)” (González, 2019, p.5).

⁹ This contingency is not about the moral law, but about human beings because they may or may not follow the moral law.

¹⁰ As Korsgaard holds at the end of her Prologue to *The Sources of Normativity*: “Obligation is what makes us human” (Korsgaard, 1996, p.5).

Below I include two fragments from the *Lectures on Ethics* in which Kant addresses this very question with a somewhat pressing tone:

“All animals have the capacity to use their powers according to choice. Yet this choice is not free but necessitated by incentives and *stimuli*. Their actions contain *bruta necessitas*. If all creatures had such a choice, tied to sensory drives, the world would have no value. But the inner worth of the world, the *summum bonum*, is freedom according to a choice that is not necessitated to act. Freedom is thus the inner worth of the world. But on the other hand, insofar as it is not restrained under certain rules of conditioned employment, it is the most terrible thing there could ever be. [...] If freedom is not restricted by objective rules, the result is much savage disorder. For it is uncertain whether man will not use his powers to destroy himself, and others, and the whole of nature” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 344).

“I shall therefore not follow my inclinations but bring them under a rule. Anyone who allows his person to be governed by his inclinations is acting contrary to the essential end of mankind, for as a free agent he must not be subject to his inclinations but should determine them through freedom; for if he is free, he must have a rule; and this rule is the essential end of mankind” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 345).

These “essential ends of mankind” are the ends of right and virtue. They are ends in which freedom recovers itself because with them and in them man does not remain in his disposition to animality, but rather is integrated into a higher, rational and properly human order, which corresponds to personality.

According to the above-cited text, we can affirm that freedom brings conciliation with it. Freedom as law is integrated among men and their inclinations. It does not try to destroy that which falls under other laws (under the laws of nature, for example)¹¹, but rather tries to order it according to certain conditions¹², namely those under which the greatest use of freedom is possible, because freedom is “the highest *principium* of life” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 346).

IV.

Right and virtue complement and require one another. On the one hand, civil society is not simultaneously moral, but, on the other hand, an ethical community can only emerge from

¹¹ “This law is to furnish the sensible world with the form of a world of the understanding, though without infringing upon the mechanism of the former” (KpV AA 05:43).

¹² “For us -dependent as we are on objects of the senses – happiness is by *nature* the first that we desire and desire unconditionally. Yet by our nature (if this is how we want to name something innate in us) as a substance endowed with reason and freedom, this very happiness is not the first by far, nor is it indeed the object of our maxims unconditionally: this is rather the *worthiness of being happy*, i.e., the agreement of all our maxims with the moral law. Now that this worthiness is objectively the condition under which alone the wish for happiness can conform with the law-giving reason, in this consists every ethical advance; and in the disposition to wish only under such condition, the ethical frame of mind.” (RGV AA 6: 46)

a political community¹³. Kant indicates this in his work *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* in speaking of an “ethical community” as “an association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue” (RGV AA 06: 94). According to him, “it can exist in the midst of a political community and even be made up of all the members of the latter (*indeed, without the foundation of a political community, it could never be brought into existence by human beings*)” (RGV AA 06: 94). Along with this complementarity, Kant does not fail to distinguish right from virtue because the augmented external freedom that comes with the law of right upon establishing civil society is not the only advance in freedom to which man can aspire. Indeed, we must consider the sense of freedom that Kant addresses in his *Doctrine of Virtue*.

In *Religion*, Kant speaks of “the ethical state of nature” as that in which “[the citizen of the political community] may wish to [...] remain” (RGV AA 06: 94). This corresponds to a peaceful situation in which the law of right regulates external relationships between men (RGV AA 06: 94), but it is not yet an “ethical community” in which, in addition to being legally bound to one another, men mutually engage in moral relationships.

This lack of ethical union with other citizens is described in his *Metaphysics of Morals* as follows:

“the benevolence present in love for all human beings is indeed the greatest in its *extent*, but the smallest in its *degree*; and when I say that I take an interest in this human being’s well-being only out of my love for all human beings, the interest I take is as slight as an interest can be. I am only not indifferent with regard to him” (MS AA 06: 451, paragraph 28).

With this, Kant seems to indicate that the ethical union to which man has to aspire to get out of the “ethical state of nature” consists in something more than individual relationships with the moral law; more than a general respect towards human beings. Particular relationships of love are necessary¹⁴. Hence, Kant believes that the duty to love other men is a duty to love in particular (MS AA 06: 448-452). Love cannot be reduced to “taking delight in the well-being of every other” but must also consist in the action of “contributing

¹³ As Kyla Ebels-Duggan holds: “people are not perfectly virtuous, so we can reasonably trust them to respect our external freedom only in the context of an institution that gives them an independent incentive to do so. Thus, we forge the unity of the state by setting up a sovereign with both power and authority to exercise coercion” (Ebels-Duggan, 2009, p.16). That is the political community.

¹⁴ “The *Groundwork* argument purports to establish an obligation to, as it were, create a benevolence fund but does not entitle any particular person to draw on it. That is, you don’t owe the duty to any particular person. It is merely an obligation *with respect to* others, not one that recognizes another person as having the authority to give you reasons. We can read the *Religion* discussion of the Ethical State of Nature as attempting to fill this gap by grounding a class of positive duties *beyond* the general duty of benevolence: duties owed to particular others to do particular things. These are different from, though obviously related to, the duties established by the general duty of beneficence. Ethical duties—duties of virtue—are duties to acknowledge certain considerations as reasons and act accordingly. The duties in question are duties to particular others to regard their choices as providing reason to act.” (Ebels-Duggan, 2009, pp.9-10)

to it” (MS AA 06: 452). The duty to love is possible only in particular. Hence the differences between benevolence and beneficence that Kant coined a little later:

“benevolence is satisfaction in the happiness (well-being) of others; but beneficence is the maxim of making others’ happiness one’s end, and the duty to it consists in the subject’s being constrained by his reason to adopt this maxim as a universal law” (MS AA 06: 452, paragraph 29).

Beneficence is undoubtedly the consequence of taking benevolence as the maxim of our actions. However, the moral horizon to which man can aspire is broader. While beneficence generates situations of debt (dependence), friendship is formed with a certain equality¹⁵.

For Kant, friendship is a moral and particular phenomenon: it brings together the moral duties of men and their particular aspirations toward happiness. Friendship does not lose its moral character because of its particularity.

“Ties to others may occasionally make it harder for me to act morally -since morality requires that I not make exceptions for my friend- but this is no reason to sever ties to others. What is needed is a firm commitment to putting morality first, no matter what the competing considerations” (Baron, 1997, p.150).

Friendship between two people does not arise because both parties independently propose benevolence as the maxim of their actions; it does not consist in the exercise of mutual beneficence¹⁶. If friendship could be reduced to this, it would not be possible to speak properly of bonds; we would remain in a context of obligations— mutual ones, but obligations nonetheless. For that “ethical union” between fellow citizens to exist, something else must emerge, namely bonds, and not just (individual) obligations¹⁷. To

¹⁵Friendship “is the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect” (MS AA6: 469).

¹⁶ In her article “Against beneficence: A normative account of love”, Kyla Ebels-Duggan discusses the concept of beneficence and introduces “the shared-ends view” about love: “The shared-ends view requires even more. It demands not just that you advance your beloved’s ends but that you share ends with her, and this requires reciprocal interaction. Since, as I claimed above, neither party in a relationship may set a significant end without the other’s concurrence, the shared- ends view requires that you and your partner interact to decide together what you will do together. The shared-ends view thus understands love as inherently seeking reciprocity” (Ebels-Duggan, 2008, p.162).

¹⁷ Korsgaard holds something similar. What bounds one another aren’t just obligations, but also feelings, the moral feelings of love and respect: “Friendship in its perfection involves what Kant calls the most intimate union of love with respect (MS, 6:469). While love moves you to pursue the ends of another, respect reminds you that she must determine what those ends are; while love moves you to care for the happiness of another, respect demands that your care for her character too. Kant means here the feelings of love and respect, for he is defining the friendship of sentiment, but this does not sever the tie to morality. Love and respect are the primary duties of virtue we owe to others. Although only the outward practices can be required of us, Kant makes it clear in many passages that he believes that in the state of realized virtue these feelings will be present. In one place he even defines love and respect as the feelings which accompany the exercise of our duties towards others (MS, 6:448; see also R 23-24n). Feelings of sympathy, gratitude, and delight in the happiness of others are not directly incumbent upon us, but they are the natural result of making the ends of

highlight the difference between the two, we will stop to consider the set of obligations in which the duty of beneficence consists, and in what way bonds of friendship can be developed from such dynamics. We will see that friendship completes, rather than annuls, the goodness that characterizes all beneficent action.

V.

The concept of obligation in Kant does not apply to the individual in solitude; rather, it applies to his relational situation (if there is one already), or it generates a new one, in such a way that we can indeed speak of bonds. To understand this latter consideration, we will introduce Kant's distinction between passive obligation and active obligation. According to him,

“If I am under an obligation [verbunden] to help the unfortunate, and thus to the action but not the man, that would be *obligatio activa*. But if I owe a debt to someone, I am obligated [verbunden], not only to the act of payment, but also to the creditor, and that is *obligatio passiva*. It seems, however, that all *obligatio* is *passiva*, for if I am obligated [verbunden] then I am constrained [genöthigt]. Yet with an *obligatio activa* there is a constraint of reason, I am constrained by my own reflection, so there is nothing passive about it; and *obligatio passiva* must come about through another, whereas if a man is necessitated by reason, he rules himself” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 259-60).

It seems that, for Kant, “being bound to someone” involves passive obligation and is, therefore, a negative situation of debt that can be improved upon. The ones which are “non-binding” to another are the active obligations. They do correspond with “an instance of reason” alone. In such situations, I am no longer forced by anyone; rather, I am “constrained by my own reflection, so there is nothing passive about it”. It is this active situation that is, for Kant, preferable to debt.

However, Kant does not ignore that human society is founded on relationships based on reciprocal actions, which generate bonds for which active and passive elements are distributed and balanced differently. Kant speaks positively of these relationships insofar as they succeed in reflecting a moral reality. A clear example of this corresponds to the relationships generated by the practice of beneficence. In them, the receptivity and passivity that affect the beneficiary must be transformed (if they want to be a reflection of a moral reality) into new occasions for moral action. For this, according to Kant, a benefit

others our own, as duty demands. The feeling of respect, a still higher achievement, is the natural result of keeping the humanity of others and so their capacity for good will always before our eyes. So this kind of friendship really is in Kant's eyes the friendship of virtue, the moral relation in a perfected form” (Korsgaard, 1996, p.191).

She is referring to a perfect moral situation and that need not to be a problem. For Kant perfection is an ideal and, as such, it can be assumed by human agents as a moral disposition, that is, as an internal disposition directed towards external actions. In effect, although ideals can never be empirically experienced, they do influence the sensible world in an imperfect way. The ideal can remain real as a perfect form in the dispositions of the agent.

should not be considered “as a burden one would gladly be rid of (since the one so favored stands a step lower than his benefactor, and this wounds his pride), but taking even the occasion for gratitude as a moral kindness, that is, as an opportunity given one to unite the virtue of gratitude with love of man, to combine the *cordiality* of a benevolent disposition with *sensitivity* to benevolence (attentiveness to the smallest degree of this disposition in one’s thought of duty), and so to cultivate one’s love of human beings” (MS AA 06: 456). It seems, therefore, that situations of debt or passive obligation can present an occasion for new moral activity in relationship with the benefactor. In fact, for the benefactor himself, “it is our duty to behave as if our help is either merely what is due him or but a slight service of love, and to spare him humiliation and maintain his respect for himself” (MS AA 06: 448-449). The beneficiary thus becomes free to correspond to the favor received without being forced to do so; it is as if this were a case of active, and no longer merely passive, obligation. Indeed, if in the exercise of the duty of beneficence, in addition to generating relationships of debt, one takes into account “the self-love of others” (MS AA 06: 448-449), one will thereby avoid humiliating the other and will open up a space of interaction between equals. In fact, self-respect or self-esteem is, according to Kant, a natural predisposition that resides in every human being and which makes us receptive to the concept of duty (MS AA 06: 399). Therefore, if the beneficiary is not humiliated in addition, he will conserve an active disposition (the one called “self-esteem”) toward corresponding to the favor received because he counts on internal freedom; he is still capable of obligating himself (MS AA 06: 418), rather than being only externally obligated. It seems then that, beyond the position of inferiority in which the beneficiary is placed with respect to his benefactor, it is possible to restore equality if both the benefactor and the beneficiary attend completely to what the moral law prescribes: for the former, to perform the duty of beneficence in a certain way (respecting the other’s self-love) and for the latter, to receive the favor in a certain way (reacting in a moral, grateful way).

It is clear then that, for Kant, the fact of finding oneself under a passive obligation does not amount to a complete lack of freedom. Although it is true that, “[a] person under *obligatio passiva* is less free than one under *obligatio activa*” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 269). However, receiving a favor does not completely nullify the receiver's freedom, but it does affect his condition of being free. As Kant himself states, “we still have to distinguish here between the capacity for freedom and the state of being free. The capacity for freedom can be greater, although the state is worse” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 269). This may be the case for the passive situation in which the beneficiary remains. His personality is not annulled, that is, his ability to be free, although it is conditioned. It is in other cases where the exercise of freedom is impossible:

“where actions are simply not free, and nothing personal is involved, there is also no obligation; thus a man, for example, has no obligation to stop hiccupping, for it is not in his power. So for obligation we presuppose the use of freedom” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 261).

On the other hand, however, Kant does not settle the question of love when exploring the duty of beneficence, but rather introduces in this same framework the duty of gratitude. The beneficiary's grateful response initiates, in a certain sense, the bilateral nature of the positive bonds that are characterized by a balance between mutual dependence and each person's freedom or moral autonomy. In addition, when it comes to beneficence, the practice of love not only binds the receiver of an action, but also has an effect on the one who performs the action (MS AA 06: 453-454). With his action, the benefactor cultivates the disposition that Kant likes to call, "Menschenfreundschaft" (MS AA 06: 473). One can, in fact, overcome one's resistance to enter into close relationship with others starting from this disposition. This is how one, according to Kant, "each of us seeks to be worthy of being a friend for someone" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 429).

"[B]ut to be everybody's friend will not do, for he who is a friend to all has no particular friend; but friendship is a particular bond [eine besondere Verbindung]" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 430). Friendship as a particular bond is very different from beneficence; it is characterized as a "purely moral union" (MS AA 06: 470-471), rather than by the pragmatism that characterizes the way of being bound generated by beneficent actions.

In friendship, unlike beneficence, moral goodness takes preference over pragmatic goodness which "gives man no inner worth" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 247). It seems then that it is in the context of friendship where two people can enjoy the highest degree of freedom, since freedom is, as mentioned above, "the inner worth of the world, the *summum bonum*" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 344). Indeed, according to Kant, friendship arises from the idea that "a man clings especially to what gives worth to his person" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 422), and that is, freedom:

"Our free acting and refraining has an inner goodness, and thus gives man an immediate inner absolute worth of morality. The man, for example, who keeps his word, always has an immediate inner worth of free choice, be the end what it may. But pragmatic goodness gives man no inner worth" (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 247).

VI. Conclusion

If, according to Kant, moral (not pragmatic) demands serve the ends of freedom (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 256); if it is in fact in the ends of freedom where men coincide (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 276); and if the purpose of civil society is to guarantee freedom for all, then society must aspire to become a moral community. For this, morality must be understood not just as a matter of obligation, but also as a matter of bonds.

Right, undoubtedly, introduces the first level of bonds and it is from there that we can even speak of coexistence in terms of humanity, that is, of society¹⁸. However, “it is curious that, even when we engage in social intercourse and companionship, we still do not enter completely into society” (V-Mo/Collins AA 27: 427). A deeper level of bonding, which is found in friendship, is still needed. And it is in friendship, as a “purely moral union”, that freedom is fully itself.

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¹⁸ There is discussion about the moral character of the duties of right. It is not the topic of this paper, but it is related to it. Marcus Willaschek and Christoph Horn are representatives of this discussion and stand against the idea of understanding right as a moral concept.

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