

# Chapter 15

## Kantian Friendship

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Kant's culminating work in practical philosophy, the *Metaphysics of Morals*, concludes its account of the elements of ethics with a very brief discussion of friendship. The discussion of the elements of ethics forms the largest part of the second half of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the half entitled the *Tugendlehre* or Doctrine of Virtue. The main division within the discussion of virtue is between duties to oneself and duties to others and the concluding discussion of friendship is part of the latter. However the account of duties to others is itself divided between a discussion of duties of *love* to other human beings and duties of virtue towards them in the strict sense. The duties of virtue in the strict sense arise from the *respect* we owe to others. Given this division of the discussion of duties to others the fact that the concluding discussion of friendship is articulated as indicative of an intimate union of love and respect suggests that this concluding discussion is inserted as a way of bridging the division between the two areas just demarcated. The cultivation of friendship would appear then to be a way to overcome the division between these two kinds of duty. However, whilst this appears a first clue to comprehending the importance of the concluding discussion of friendship, it also points us to a couple of questions. The first question could be put in terms of the status of the reference to love and respect in the division of duties since Kant describes them as "feelings that accompany the carrying out of these duties" (Ak. 6: 448). This reference to feeling is one that has one clear advantage in Kant's account which is that it allows for the contrast between the two types of duty to others in terms of *forces* as when Kant suggests an analogy between the relationship of love and respect with that of attraction and repulsion in the physical world (Ak. 6: 449). However, whilst the advantage of the reference to feeling is that it makes this comparison intuitively plausible, the disadvantage concerns the fact that Kant's general account would

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seem at odds with such a reference to feeling and furthermore he subsequently states that in this context love is not to be understood as a feeling but as the ground of the maxim of benevolence (Ak. 6: 449).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he moves on to state that respect is not to be grasped here as a sense of comparative worth, which would be a mere feeling but rather as the basis of a maxim of “limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person” (Ak. 6: 449). So once again it is a practical sense, which is being given to the notion of the “feeling” in question and a pathological sense is being discarded. However, whilst the advantage of this element of Kant’s account is that it preserves the purity of the moral motivation, it undermines the analogous reference to forces and creates a problem with seeing the contrast between the two types of duties as one that is based on them pulling us in different directions.

This gives us our first set of problems. They can be summarized as follows. Either Kant is serious in viewing the division between two forms of duty to others as grounded in some sense on feeling and hence can justify the comparison of the relationship between them with the physical forces of attraction and repulsion or he is not serious about this reference to feeling and can maintain the purity of moral motivation but not the analogy between the two types of duty to others and physical forces. Either way part of the account seems to be lost. If we lose the reference to the comparison with physical forces it is not merely that the reconciling role of friendship appears less necessary it is also that the nature of the division between the two duties seems not to be one that can be captured in the terms Kant seems to wish.

Before moving on to stating the second sort of problem I want to consider, there is something that should be mentioned as possibly mitigating the concern with the general contrast between the two types of duty to others that underlies the concluding account of friendship. This mitigation is grounded on the point that Kant makes that whilst we can treat the two types of duty to others separately and they can even exist separately that they are nonetheless basically always united “by the law into one duty” (Ak. 6: 448). Since this is so then the division between the two types of duty to others has to do with the relative standing of the reference to one of the principles in relation to the circumstances of moral judgment. However in some respects this mitigating comment complicates the problem further since if we regard the two types of duty to others as essentially two aspects of one and the same law then does this not weaken further the analogy between the two types of duty to others and physical forces?

This first set of questions arises from considering the background to the introduction of friendship at the conclusion of the Doctrine of Virtue. Some of these questions are connected however to the ones arising on turning to the account of friendship itself. Kant opens this treatment with three determinations of friendship in his first sentence concerning it: “*Friendship* (considered in its perfection) is the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect.” (Ak. 6: 469) Friendship is presented in its perfection. Hence the treatment of friendship will be part of Kant’s

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<sup>1</sup>The maxim of benevolence is equated with practical love and said to result in beneficence.

general perfectionism as indicated in his earlier reference to the “ethical law of perfection” (Ak. 6: 450), the law to love your neighbour as yourself. However the oddity of treating friendship in terms of perfection is that the general basis of the division between duties to oneself and duties to others is that the former are based on cultivation of one’s own perfection, the latter on the happiness of others (Ak. 6: 385). If friendship is to be considered in terms of perfection but friendship clearly involves a relation with others then it would appear that the discussion of friendship will in a sense cross the divide between duties to oneself and duties to others.

The second determination of friendship in the above citation states that friendship involves the union of two persons. This second determination of friendship is interesting in two different respects. The relation between two persons friendship involves is particularly intimate if it involves *union* as this implies a comparison with a type of physical conjunction as Kant treated in the Doctrine of Right.<sup>2</sup> Not only is there a reference to union, but Kant also treats the union as one between *two* persons. The final element of this determination of friendship is that it involves not merely love and respect but an equal mutuality of them.

The first point to bring out is that Kant treats the discussion of friendship as clearly part of the description of duties declaring that human beings have a *duty* of friendship although he qualifies this point by stating that friendship is unattainable in practice and that it is the *striving* for it which is a duty. Since to strive is to exercise a willed volition then the duty concerns the summoning of a kind of force within us. The impossibility of the ideal of friendship being achieved is indicated to be connected to the forces in question which are none other those of love and respect which we have already been focusing on. Kant here clearly refers to feelings that come from the different duties and he explicitly again draws the parallel between these feelings and the physical forces: “For love can be regarded as an attraction and respect as a repulsion, and if the principle of love bids friends to draw closer, the principle of respect requires them to stay at a proper distance from each other” (Ak. 6: 470). Despite the oscillation we noted above between speaking of the distinction between the duties to others in terms of feelings and speaking of it in terms of maxims the reference to feelings is of cardinal import for the treatment of friendship. Not only does this reference emerge here clearly but it also does so once again in connection with the same analogy between the feelings in question and physical forces that was mobilised at the beginning of Kant’s treatment of duties to others.

The next point of focus concerns the manner in which the principle of love is limited by the principle of respect in the striving for friendship. Kant brings out both a key rule that governs such striving and connects the two involved in this striving to a wider social network: “This limitation on intimacy, which is expressed in the rule that even the best of friends should not make themselves too familiar with each other, contains a maxim that holds not only for the superior in relation to the inferior but also in reverse.” (Ak. 6: 470). The limitation of love by respect follows the

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<sup>2</sup>“Sexual union (*consummation*) is the reciprocal use that one human being makes of the sexual organs and capacities of another” (Ak. 6: 277).

model of a restriction and realization schema as love is restricted precisely with regard to expression. There is only so much one should say to one's friend: limitation of what one says is the means by which respect governs love. This first point concerning limitation of expression is connected however to a recognition that whilst the friends may themselves be striving for a relation in which each is united to the other in a bond that involves equality (of love and respect), that this does not prevent it from being the case that they are in fact not equal to each other in social standing as one will always be (in some degree) the superior of the other. The importance of this point is that there are relations that require respect of the position of the other.<sup>3</sup> So one of the problems the striving for friendship has to deal with is precisely the unequal standing of the two involved in the striving with regard to social networks that exist over and beyond that of their attempted union.

The general social inequality that marks the relation between the two involved in striving for friendship affects the degree to which these two can be candid with each other. The limitation of love by respect is one that we have found concerns this ability for candid expression. If friendship was approached as resting on feelings says Kant it would never be safe from interruption so he re-determines his notion of perfect friendship as moral friendship and describes it now in terms of the exchange between the two of secrets: "*Moral friendship*...is the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other, as far as such disclosures are consistent with mutual respect" (Ak. 6: 471).

Whilst the relation in question is demarcated from feeling it is also intricately connected to it since the secrets the friends will wish to reveal to each other concern not only judgments but feelings also. The risks are considerable in such exchanges since secret judgments will include views on such sensitive matters as religion and politics which may be imprudently disclosed but also because in speaking of feelings candidly faults may be openly stated which others can take advantage of. So in tying friendship in to a consideration of society Kant brings out the publicity that we often wish for judgments and feelings runs into a barrier of fear concerning how others will use and abuse our declarations.

So our second set of questions can now be stated as arising directly from the treatment of friendship itself rather than from the division of duties towards others that precedes it. Firstly, the fact that friendship involves an ideal brings in an element of perfectionism to duties to others that is otherwise contained within the treatment of duties to oneself alone. This suggests a kind of crossing of this divide, a crossing that possibly has something to do with the point that there is a striving in friendship for union with the other so that they are treated as like oneself in some sense. During the course of discussion of the striving for this union with the other Kant both insists on the role of feeling—stressing as central to understanding it the need to harmonize the feelings of respect and love in a manner analogous to that of physical forces—and he constantly marginalizes the place of feeling in the treatment of friendship, regarding friendships based on feeling as unsafe. Finally the

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<sup>3</sup>See also Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36–49.

striving for friendship with the other involves a desire for communication up to and including mutual exchange of secretly held feelings and judgments and yet is also circumscribed by a clear need for limitation on intimacy. Just as the general treatment of duties to others pointed to what appeared to be a need for a decision between two options neither of which would allow for the breadth of discussion Kant appeared to wish so also the direct treatment of friendship itself seems to require a similar set of choices whilst also preventing either pole being chosen.

In order to begin tackling these problems we need to isolate the central elements of them. In fact, it is the same apparent tension that underlies both the division of duties to others and the specific treatment of friendship. This is that there appears to be a reference to feeling that is both required and yet unsustainable within the terms of the account given. Additionally to this we note also however that the specificity of friendship carries with it the feature that it appears to complicate the question of the range of Kant's perfectionism and that there is an apparent *aporia* in Kant's view of the place of communication of secrets in his model of striving for friendship. These three points: the problem about the role and status of feeling, the range of Kant's perfectionism and the point of reference to a communication that is also strictly limited point to all the problems enumerated as concerning the *scope* of something in Kant's treatment. Questions of scope are modal questions for Kant and are thus connected to the possibility of friendship, a possibility which Kant declares on, when he states that moral friendship is not merely an ideal but "actually exists here and there in its perfection" (Ak. 6: 472). Since this is so then the scope of feeling, perfectionism and allowable communicability must be such that we are capable of them.

If we begin with the question of the role and status of feeling in Kant's general moral psychology it is so that we can start to clarify the reference to feeling we have noted both in his discussion of the division of duties to others and specifically in the treatment of friendship. As early as the *Groundwork* Kant treated of respect and indeed did so within the first section of this work. Kant here responds to the accusation that reference to respect is no more than seeking refuge in obscure feelings by stating that whilst respect is a feeling it is "not one *received* by means of influence" but is rather self-wrought by means of a rational concept and hence *different* from the type of feeling that can be understood as a product of inclination. Kant then adds:

What I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect, which signifies merely consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law without the modification of other influences on my sense. Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called *respect*, so that this is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject, and not as the *cause* of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love. Hence there is something that is regarded as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, though it has something analogous to both. (Ak. 4: 401n)

There are a number of interesting elements involved in this account of respect. Since the feeling of respect is distinguished from the inclinations and from fear by means of its relation to reason the arrival at the feeling of respect has something to do with a self-limitation. Consciousness of the law is effectively equivalent to a feeling of respect for it and this respect for it causes a restriction of self-love indicating a possible basis for Kant's subsequent view of friendship as concerning

more than one. The thing that is an object for our feeling but not for inclination or fear nonetheless can be analogically compared with these latter just as we note that Kant later analogically compares respect to the physical force of repulsion. The following through of the analogy with inclination and fear is by means of the feeling of subordination which compromises self-love. The analogy with inclination by contrast is based on the fact that the subordination of us to the law is something that we ourselves bring about. Another person can be invoked however as an *example* of the law (Ak. 4: 401n).

The importance of the other being an example of the law is returned to in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where this example is used to demonstrate the practicability of submission to the law. Once again Kant makes the point here that respect is a feeling quite distinct from anything pathological and to mark the difference he speaks here of “moral feeling” (Ak. 5: 76), an expression that recurs in the *Metaphysics of Morals* where it is defined in the following way: “a *susceptibility* on the part of free choice to be moved by pure practical reason (and its law)...this is what we call moral feeling” (Ak. 6: 400). However whilst these determinations go some way to addressing the question as to why there is a discussion of feeling in the treatment of duties to others they also primarily suggest that the reference to the other is one in which the other stands in for the law. However whilst there is something to this way of putting the matter we need to amend it slightly in view of our comprehension of what the moral law is really concerned with. In the *Groundwork* Kant lays out the basis for a contrast that is repeated on a number of subsequent occasions in his later ethical writings. This is the contrast between conditional and unconditional worth. Objects of inclination have only conditional worth as they first require that there are needs that they are grasped as meeting. This is the ground of Kant’s notorious remark to the effect that any rational being would wish to be without inclinations (Ak. 4: 428) but whilst this remark may in some respects be problematic the key point underlying it here concerns the limited value of objects that we wish to *acquire*.<sup>4</sup> Discussion of beings that arise from nature but are without reason falls under the heading of *things* and such beings effectively are related to as candidates for hypothetical imperatives. By contrast the relation to a *person* is quite different: “because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself, that is, as something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence so far limits all choice (and is an object of respect)” (Ak. 4: 428).

On the basis of this treatment Kant arrives at the so-called Formula of Humanity (Ak. 4: 429) the formula of treating humanity in others and oneself as never merely a means but also always as an end in itself. This reference to ends is repeated in the supreme principle of the doctrine of virtue: “act in accordance with a maxim of *ends* that it can be a universal principle for everyone to have” (Ak. 6: 395). These

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<sup>4</sup>See Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) *passim*. My point, however, is somewhat surprisingly missing from Baron’s extended and fascinating analysis, namely, that it is in the context of establishing the essential relativity of all objects of acquisition that Kant makes this remark about inclination. This is important in terms of his point that what has an end-in-itself is beyond all market price.

two formulas are importantly related as including such a key reference to ends although the formula from the *Groundwork* is one that treats an end as something self-subsistent, “something the *existence of which in itself* has absolute worth” (Ak. 4: 428), as *given* in other words, not as an aim to be achieved. This self-subsistent end is, as it were, that which we have to have regard for. It limits the permissible ends that can be adopted as the basis of maxims whether those ends be thought of as involving aim-oriented action or as concerning the preservation and promotion of the self-subsistent end-in-itself. That there is a difference between these two senses of “end” is the point of David Velleman’s comment: “Self-existent ends are the objects of motivating attitudes that regard and value them as they already are; other ends are the objects of attitudes that value them as possibilities to be brought about”.<sup>5</sup> The key point here is that the person is valued in a way distinct from an end thought of as an aim despite the fact that our relations with persons include actions in which we work with them to achieve aims. Were it permissible to relate to persons simply in terms of aims there would be no inherent problem in slavery. So the distinction between the two forms of end is essential to the understanding of the formula of humanity.

What is key from what we have uncovered in our treatment here of the formula of humanity is the understanding that whilst the other can serve as an example of the law, the basis of them so serving is not merely that they can act in ways that humble my self-love. It is also that the law is revealed in the formula of humanity as centred on respect for persons. Persons are thus that the value of which the law enjoins us to care for. Having established this much I now wish to turn to how Kant builds on this point in the *Groundwork* in order to establish the basis of his analogical comparison between moral motivations in the discussion of duties to others and physical forces. Uncovering the basis of this comparison should subsequently aid us in describing ways of understanding the relation between the two forms of duty to others and how they are combined in friendship.

In the subsequent development of the discussion in the *Groundwork* Kant makes a reflexive turn in his consideration of the formula of humanity. It is not merely with regard to others after all that the formula applies as it is what will be related in the Doctrine of Virtue as the basis of duties to oneself. This is made clear in the *Groundwork* when Kant states that: “to say that in the use of means to any end I am to limit my maxim to the condition of its universal validity as a law for every subject is tantamount to saying that the subject of ends, that is, the rational being itself, must be made the basis of all maxims of actions” and from this “it follows incontestably that every rational being, as an end in itself, must be able to regard himself as also giving universal laws with respect to any law whatsoever to which he may be subject” (Ak. 4: 438). Hence the law is founded in what Kant terms *autonomy* but the key point about this foundation is that we are each united with all other rational beings in the capacity of such law-giving and that the possible communion with others that it provides is what can be envisaged as the kingdom of ends which is analogous

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<sup>5</sup>J. David Velleman, “Love as A Moral Emotion,” *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 357–358.

to the kingdom of nature (Ak. 4: 438). The analogy is founded on the way of thinking the law. Whilst with nature we deal with law in general in relation to sensuous determination, with the moral law we have a “schema of the law itself” (Ak. 5: 69) whereby the law of nature is made “the type of a *law of freedom*” (Ak. 5: 70).<sup>6</sup>

The use of this practical form of schematism is at work in the comparison of the relationship between the division of the duties to others and the operation of physical forces. Just as the fundamental move between attraction and repulsion is determinative for physical phenomena so, it is suggested, the oscillation between the attraction to others manifested in a practical orientation of love and a practical repulsion of respect is at work in the intelligible moral world. How does the contrast work with the moral-practical (non-pathological) feelings and the maxims that are founded on them? We have noted in our treatment of respect to date that the operation of it is in terms of self-limitation by reference to the recognition of the worth of the other. If duties of respect are connected to this feeling of self-limitation the maxim that accompanies such a feeling is described by Kant in accordance with the feeling, that is, it is a maxim of self-limitation that is primarily at work in the duties in question. This is the reason why Kant describes the duties of respect as negative in character as in performing them we merely do what is owed to others in their capacity as fellows in the kingdom of ends which is to give respect to their humanity. The key to such an approach is not to exalt oneself above others in a moral sense and this indicates a moral egalitarianism. Others are not, insists Kant, put under obligation to me when I carry out duties of respect to them as I am here safeguarding the moral world by treating persons as they should be treated, as ends that are self-subsistent. These duties are described in broadly negative ways as it is acting in ways that are opposed to respect that is covered by the duties of respect rather than direct commands to act in ways that manifest respect in some positive sense (with the examples given including arrogance, defamation and ridicule).

By contrast the duties of love are determined as duties that do put others under obligation to me, and the cardinal example here, is the cultivation of the feeling of benevolence that will produce actions in accordance with the maxim of beneficence. The standard problem with placing value on benevolence however (which is typically the key virtue for utilitarians) is that it would appear to express an impersonal wish for the good of others that is precisely at odds with loyalties to specific others such as loved ones and friends. However Kant precisely denies this impersonal valuation of benevolence stating that it arises from thinking of benevolence in terms of wishes rather than in terms of maxims. Whilst one may wish everyone well this is not how action in accordance with ends can be structured. Rather: “in acting I can, without violating the universality of my maxim, vary the degree greatly in accordance with the different objects of my love (one of whom concerns me more closely than another)” (Ak. 6: 452).

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<sup>6</sup>The most extensive use of this notion is in *Religion within the Limits* where the notion of a “schematism of analogy” is explicitly set forward, a notion which I argue elsewhere is determinative for this work’s decisive stages of argument. See G. Banham, *Kant’s Practical Philosophy: From Critique to Doctrine* (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Chap. 5.

The partiality that is at work in the maxim of benevolence is intrinsic to it since there is a physical limitation on the actions that can be performed. However the limitation is not only physical. If we return now to the example of friendship we do so with the understanding that what Kant is picturing in this relation is an engagement between two moral equals who embrace each other as such and wish to be engaged with as such. The problem that emerges within their relationship indicates the basis of the partiality that is at work in pursuing it. The friend is one to whom I reveal myself: this is the nature of the love I express in coming close to him. But in revealing myself to my friend I also request the discretion of the friend in terms of the way they subsequently treat my public image. Just as we noted that the duties of respect concerned essentially the standing and reputation of others (arrogance, defamation and ridicule) so the response of the friend to me is manifested most clearly in how they care for my standing and reputation. If they repeat my disclosures of secret judgments and feelings as matter for further diffusion they open me to the possible censure and contempt of others. Hence the relationship of candid disclosure that Kant treats as being that of friendship is one in which the force of my attraction to the other is expressed in my treating them as worthy of my confidence and trust. This confidence and trust however is not only something that the friend is under an obligation to respect: they are also mutually bound to me in an equivalence of disclosure.

So the mutual respect that is envisaged by Kant in friendship is concentrated on the relationship we have to the other of, as he puts it, “the ethical law of perfection” (Ak. 6: 450). The scope of this perfectionism is one in which my love for the friend is a love that is akin to that I must cultivate for my own rational nature. This parallel between the rational nature of myself and that of the other is the ground for the apparent crossing of the duties to oneself and duties to others involved in friendship. Whilst my duty to myself is to make myself morally perfect, my fundamental duty to others is to concern myself with their happiness inasmuch as they are worthy of happiness. But to form a bond of friendship is to engage with the other in a way that requires attention to their moral standing in a sense that is equivalent to the interest I have in my own. This, and not merely the mutual bond of respect, is the ground of Kant’s picture of friendship. Were the bond merely one of respect then the disclosure of secret judgments and feelings would be bound by a self-limitation in each of the friend’s case that would apply primarily to their own self-expression. However the relation with the friend is more intimate than this as friendship in Kant’s moral sense includes duties of love such as the benevolent duty to make clear to the other their failings (Ak. 6: 470). This element of the love for the other is the other delicate element of friendship. Such critical response to the friend is a permission embodied in the friendship but is one that has to be approached as selectively permitted and as always carefully limited by the respect for the other that the friendship also has to manifest.

The treatment of friendship hence is indeed integrally linked to the division of duties to others between duties of respect and duties of love. The division of duties to others is based primarily on the type of attitude our action is manifesting towards the other and how this attitude constitutes a kind of relation to them. In the case of

duties of respect we are offering only that which is due.<sup>7</sup> With duties of love we are offering rather more than this and it is precisely because we are that there is partiality at work in the exercise of duties of love. Without such partiality the attitude expressed towards others of practical love would not be able to be made manifest but this limitation is not merely physical but also moral as without limitation of practical love the delicacy required in specific relations would be necessary in all and this would provoke constant moral dangers. The reference to physical forces in the picture of friendship is a specification of the general procedure of Kant's "schema of the law itself" and helps to make clearer the kinds of maxim at work in friendship. The maxim is the manner in which the attitude expressed by the feeling has to be made operative. Finally, the mitigation of the contrast between the two types of duty to others that is offered by the reference to them having been artificially isolated when in fact they are part of one duty is clarified by the location of them both as ways of recognising autonomy. Kantian friendship is hence a picture of the kingdom of ends in relations of partiality that, in their very partiality, render more visible the publicity required for moral relations to thrive.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>When Kant states that one's neighbour may be little worthy of respect he is, as suggested above, indicating a more specific sense of respect than is at work in the formal treatment of duties of respect. It would be the work of another piece to see the extent to which the recognition of this additional determination of respect relates to Kant's standard sense but the suggestion that someone can be seen as not meriting respect is evidently connected to the attitudes they express to ourselves and others in such actions as arrogance.

<sup>8</sup>For a more political treatment of some of these themes that involves a discussion of the value placed on publicity in Kant's treatment of right see G. Banham, "Publicity and Provisional Right," *Politics and Ethics Review* 3, no. 1 (2007): 73–89.