

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO KANT

ASPECTOS POLÍTICOS E RELIGIOSOS DA COMUNIDADE DE ACORDO COM KANT

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ABSTRACT

Based on the concept of community, Kant's conception of religion may be connected, on my view, to the question of which mental attitude is suitable for the collective life of human society. It is possible to imagine a successful community, even if such a community does not exist in the empirical world, and to be oriented toward this ideal without ever being able to realize it. According to Kant, human moral self-understanding is developed by human reason, and this explains the structural similarity between the secular republic and the Kingdom of God under the specific conditions of the enlightened consciousness of a person who thinks for herself. Thus the anthropological "fact": the self-understanding of the human being characterised by his faculty of reason.
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Preliminary Aspects: the epistemological function of the concept of community

This essay does not offer a Kantian anthropological or political theory; rather, it is a reflection on the concept of community in the context of Kant's philosophy of religion. In my view, this reflection can help us to develop a philosophical anthropology that Kant himself did not present in any systematic way. Thus I will discuss in detail neither the different positions on this theme developed by Kant scholars nor contemporary political philosophy. Instead, I would like to present an interpretation of the link between religion and politics that is implicitly developed by Kant in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. It is in this later work that Kant explains the idea of community, answering the fundamental question: what are we talking about when we discuss an "ideal human community" (*ideale menschliche Gemeinschaft*), defined by Kant as the "ethical community" ("*ethisches Gemeinwesen*") or the "church invisible"?

Having reflected on the concept of community in Kant as an element of his conception of the invisible church, I draw the following conclusion: Kant's philosophy of religion may be

considered political philosophy, and therefore a kind of “anthropology without metaphysics”. Accordingly, the true political attitude consists in human religiousness. That is to say, insofar as Kant views the concept of community as the basis of human moral self-understanding, human morality necessarily possesses both a political and a religious character. Importantly, Kant does not dogmatically affirm the identity of religion and politics. Nor does he identify the state and religious “spirit”, as did his successors. Religiousness is necessarily political, but the political is *not* necessarily *moral*.

Based on the concept of ethical community, Kant’s conception of religion may be connected, on my view, to the question of which mental attitude is suitable for the collective life of human society. It is possible to imagine a successful community, even if such a community does not exist in the empirical world, and to be oriented toward this ideal without ever being able to realize it. According to Kant, human moral self-understanding is developed by human reason, and this explains the structural similarity between the secular republic and the Kingdom of God under the specific conditions of the enlightened consciousness of a person who thinks for herself. Thus the anthropological “fact”: the self-understanding of the human being characterised by his faculty of reason.

Here is not the place to explain in detail the epistemological foundation of the human consciousness of community – namely, the formal category of “community” (a category of the understanding [*Verstand*]) and common sense, which characterises the faculty of judgement. These two aspects are important when it comes to comprehending Kant’s philosophical (as opposed to psychological) conception of self-consciousness. The essential idea in this regard may be summed up as follows: According to Kant, the subject – insofar as he or she is conscious – intrinsically contains the foundation of community, namely in the pure forms of sensible intuition and in the categories of the understanding, given that the a priori thought of community is a condition of the possibility of experience, or, to put it less philosophically, the basis of our comprehension of the world we inhabit.

In the context of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 292-3), Kant presents the formal or logical category of “community” by means of which we are able to recognize the existence (but not the essence) of various substances. Thus, in the context of his theory of cognition, Kant asserts that the logical category of community does not allow us to penetrate the essence of human existence, will say to understand what it means to exist, because it does not transcend formal relations in space. Thus, being restricted on formal functions the logical category ‘community’ is not sufficient for understanding existence under spatiotemporal conditions.

In this situation of essential ignorance – the impossibility of knowing the essential –, Kant nevertheless recommit us to ourselves rather than to some divine being, the latter option having been adopted by Leibniz, the great metaphysician with whose ideas Kant often engaged. Kant criticises Leibniz for his insisting on a divine being who, in according “community” to the substances in the world, guarantees the identity of beings in spite of their diversity. In other words, according to Kant, human consciousness is already sufficient for understanding “community” as an existential structure to be realized in and by individuals, whose senses perceive their own existence just as well as they perceive the existence of others. The comprehending consciousness, or the understanding, forms these perceptions or sensations in the same way that intuition does. Thus the community of extended (in space) and thinking substances already lies *inside* the conscious human individual as a being endowed with a “body and soul”.

To this conception of “community” as the a priori basis of empirical cognition, a complementary aspect may be added: the possibility of concordance (*Übereinstimmung*) in judgments of experience, a possibility already structurally given in human cognition and consciousness. Kant also speaks about this notion of “community” in the context of his theoretical philosophy (in the Transcendental Analytic of the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena*). Moreover, this possibility of logical concordance comprehends and conditions the possibility of an approval (*Beistimmung*) related to the aesthetic judgment of taste, which Kant deals with in the *Critique of Judgment*. Thus the formal category of community becomes the foundation of a kind of “general” consciousness: the formal character of the category of community is complemented by a *content*, namely the content of sensation, which, as a sentiment, is integrated in judgments of taste, generating its specific sentiments of pleasure or displeasure. We can therefore assert that ‘community’ expresses itself in judgments of taste as “concordance” or “approval” in relation to the judgment, permitting a certain generality, or indeed a “subjective universality”.

These theoretical aspects of the concept of community summed up in short and presupposed, I would like to complete the interpretation by dealing with what we might call the practical aspect of the ideal of community – practical because our concept is now developed in connection with a moral theory appropriate for human beings as rational beings. The methodology of the second *Critique* clearly demonstrates that human moral consciousness arises from the “common human understanding” or common sense. In short, human morality does not require theoretical or speculative knowledge; rather, it is constituted

by nature (the nature of practical reason, to be more precise) as the moral interest in the human mind. The end of morality – the ideal community of human beings – is unthinkable without practical reason in its expression as “*gemeiner Menschenverstand*”.

Hence, with regard to both theoretical and practical reason, the concept of community is, according to Kant, an epistemological condition of human self-understanding. At the same time, community is the central matter of Kant’s moral philosophy. Since moral theory – based on the law of reason – leads to the philosophy of religion, we arrive finally at the second important aspect of our subject: the concept of the invisible church.

The concept of community as invisible church

In his later writing, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant connects, at the ideal level, the political and the ethical community (*politisches/ ethisches Gemeinwesen*) by means of the concept of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as a union of human beings under laws.

I’ll start by pointing out aspects of community in this sense.

According to Kant, the main point of moral and political theory is to work out and to produce and to promote the highest good in the world as described in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (cf. KpV, AA 05: 126). It is precisely this conception of the highest good as an idea of reason that allows us to join these practical theories (moral and political) in a “religion of reason”. The philosophical problem that unites the two matters is the problem of community, arising from the difficulty of *conceiving* the supra-individual character of reason, that is, of thinking of reason not merely as a property of any human exemplar, belonging to the species of conscious beings, but as a property of humanity, exclusively realized in individual existences. In fact, it concerns the effort to produce and to promote the highest good *in the world*, where this good is defined as the “object and final end of pure practical reason” (cf. KpV, AA 05: 129, 129f.). While the concept of intersubjectivity emphasises the relations between individuals, Kant’s idea of human reason represents a philosophical conception that does not emanate from the principle of individuality in order to show how a genuine human community could be possible and real. Rather, the Kantian theory undertakes to explain the a priori or “quasi a priori” foundation of individuals’ mutual communication and understanding – individuals as representatives of humanity.

The success of this undertaking depends on the fact that Kantian reason is not

restricted to the theoretical faculty of the understanding, standing in need of experience to generate objectively recognised knowledge. In addition, it depends on the fact that Kantian reason is not restricted to the practical faculty, which is competent but imperfect when it comes to the determination of the good will in the face of inclinations. Furthermore, Kantian reason is the faculty of rational faith and of hope – without which neither the thought nor the realization of the ethical community would be possible.

Nevertheless, we understand the systematic function of faith and hope – how they offer a new perspective, leading us to a better future, despite the difficult situation in which we find ourselves in the world. Kant writes: “Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail his [the human being’s] nature, which on his own is undemanding, as soon as he is among human beings. Nor is it necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples that lead him astray: 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 another evil” (Rel, AA 06: 93f., Cambridge ed. 129).

In fact, this description reveals Kant’s very realistic idea of man: the human being begins to compare himself with others, “as soon as he is among human beings”. He develops “malignant inclinations”, such as “envy, addiction to power, [and] avarice”; the “causes and circumstances” that draw him into the danger of evil “do not come from his own nature, so far as he exists in isolation, but rather from the human beings to whom he stands in relation or association” (cf. Rel, AA 06: 93; 129). The mutual relations of human beings are therefore not appropriate to serve as criteria for defining true morality. Furthermore, it seems that the mere “being there” of individuals in mutual relations or associations suffices to render them evil – under these conditions, how is the establishment of a human “community” (be it political – i.e. juridical – or ethical) possible?

In my view, what is needed is a “third” element: the relation of all to something else. This relation is the real subject of the theory of religion: if we disregard the “exterior” reference point, if we view so-called “intersubjectivity” as the whole and single measure, we’ll never transcend prudential techno-rationality and reach morality. We will remain firmly seated in the world of phenomena – lost in singularity, particularity, and diversity, without a genuinely common point of reference.

Kant explains this relation of all to something else, which I call the “third” element, in Part Three of the “Philosophical Doctrine of Religion” (entitled “The victory of the Good Principle over the Evil Principle [...]”), where he explicitly identifies the ethical community

with “the founding of a kingdom of God on earth” (second part of the quoted title). Here, he explains that a voluntary, conscientiously chosen association is required, and that humans commit themselves to contributing to a “republic under laws of virtue” (Rel, AA 06: 100; 134). This obligation is “a duty *sui generis*, not of human beings toward human beings but of the human race toward itself” (Rel, AA 06: 97; 132). Thus the “third” element can be defined as the community of human beings who consider themselves part of the human race, itself more than a sum of individuals – or, in other words, who understand themselves as representatives of humanity.

According to this, the community of human beings is both the cause of evil, insofar as there exists a continuous propensity (*Hang*) to evil, and at the same time the single locus of the final end on earth, where the good can be realised by approaching the ideal.

This approach operates via a continuous development of reason, the enduring cultivation of thinking on one’s own, and finally the “revolution in the disposition [*Gesinnung*] of the human being”. To this effect, Kant speaks of “a human being’s moral education”, which “must begin [...] with the transformation of his attitudes of mind and the establishment of a character” (cf. Rel, AA 06: 47f.; 92).

We cannot discuss here other important aspects of this context in detail, but I would like to mention some basic theoretical elements belonging to Kant’s theory of community. First, there is *common sense*. Originally part of the theory of cognition, common sense is further explained in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant introduces the “maxims of the common human understanding” (*Maximen des gemeinen Menschenverstandes*), which are as follows: (1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) always to think consistently, which means to think in an unprejudiced, enlarged and consistent way (KU, AA 05: 294). In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant hails these as “maxims of wisdom” (cf. Anth, AA 07: 200). We have already talked about common sense as the condition of the possibility of concordance (*Übereinstimmung*) in judgments of taste; in the same way, “natural religion as morality”, being a pure practical concept of reason, implies the foundation of our awareness with regards to concordance between the law of reason and divine legislation. “Concordance” in this context means “communality of insight” (*Einhelligkeit*), expressing the “qualification for universality” that is the “great prerequisite [or: the condition of the possibility! M.R.] of the true church” (Rel, AA 06: 157f.; 180). On the one hand, the idea of “natural religion” is characterized by “infinite fruitfulness”; on the other hand, the concept of “communality of insight” is devoid of the theoretical conditions of the rational faculties of cognition. The idea of natural religion, the

basis of the idea of the ethical community, “yet presupposes only so little a capacity of theoretical reason that, practically, we can sufficiently convince every human being of it and everyone can expect its effect, at least, as duty” (ibid.).

Kant points out that what is required is not sophisticated competence with regards to our faculties of theoretical cognition, but rather the use of reason as an integral – that is, both spiritual and mental – faculty of human consciousness. In addition to hope, the power of conviction also belongs to this faculty. Natural religion in the strict sense of ‘re-ligio’, as ‘re-linking’, is as it were the pure practical concept of reason if we’re speaking of “community” itself.

The principal aspect of this idea is universality, whether related (theoretically) to comprehensibility or (practically) to the power of self-commitment. According to Kant, what he calls “communality of insight” is necessary in order to give rise to a community – both as a mental union and as a “visible”, and thereby empirically perceptible, union of human beings. The natural re-ligion, the “third element” I’ve spoken about, thus involves committing oneself to duty via one’s personal and voluntary conviction, or believing in the realisability of the good on earth.

In addition, Kant asserts that “such a communality of insight could not of itself preserve itself, nor without taking on the form of a visible church [could it] propagate itself to its [full] universality, but [could] only [do so] if a collective universality, or the union of the believers in one (visible) church according to principles of a pure religion of reason, is added to it” (Rel, AA 06: 158; 180). Nevertheless, he insists on the necessity of distinguishing between the ideal community, that is to say the invisible church or the ethical community (*ethisches Gemeinwesen*) belonging to the religion of reason, and organised religions (called by Kant “historische Religionen”) based on the authority of their founders.

In the fourth and final part of the text on religion, Kant offers a critical analysis of historically situated, organised religion. It serves to clarify the relation between organised religions (beginning with Christianity) and natural religion, viz. the religion of reason. Kant’s conclusions can be summed up as follows: The inwardness of morality does not correlate to the political or civil community even where this is represented ideally (viz. as a republic), but instead to the ethical community, even if this should only exist as an ideal, as a thought. Under the limited conditions of human existence, not only does the realization of the legal-political community not succeed as it should, but the actualization of the ethical community according to its ideal remains imperfect as well. As such, both states and visible churches

require a continuous process of reformation, for both are founded and operated by human beings. “The sublime, never fully attainable idea of an ethical community is greatly scaled down under human hands,” Kant remarks, “namely to an institution which [...], with respect to the means for establishing a whole of this kind is greatly restricted under the conditions of sensuous human nature” (Rel, AA 06: 100; 135). Kant continues: “To found a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself.” Thus what can be required by the idea is nothing more than the visible church, displaying “the (moral) Kingdom of God on earth inasmuch as the latter can be realized through human beings” (cf. Rel, AA 06: 101; 135). This actual union of human beings striving for the ethical community can be compared, to a certain extent, to a political community striving for constitutional legality for its members. As the only possible form for actualizing the idea of the ethical community (or a People of God, which amounts to the same thing), the visible church needs a constitution just as the political community needs a constitution – one according to the moral laws of reason considered as divine laws. But the structure of the true visible church is “neither *monarchical* [...], nor *aristocratic* [...], nor *democratic* [...]”. In order best to describe the church’s constitution, Kant suggests the example of a household, using the metaphor of a family “under a common though invisible moral father whose holy son [...] stands in blood relation with all the members of the family” (cf. Rel, AA 06: 102; 136).

This seems important to me: we find here an anthropological description of human morality – a morality that is necessarily deficient, but one that is nonetheless in accordance with the self-conception of human beings. We cannot expect that we or others will overcome evil, which is always present as a propensity (*Hang*) (or, in other words, as a temptation). In the Kantian context, this means that we cannot expect to be able permanently to establish the moral law as our supreme maxim. But for all that, “each must [...] so conduct himself as if everything depended on him.” This seems to me a very important conclusion: this is in practice how to be representative of humanity. “Only on this condition,” Kant goes on, “may [each] hope that a higher wisdom will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort.” (Rel, AA 06: 101; 135)

Factually or empirically speaking, we can only assert that there are differences, but not an irreconcilable opposition, between secular and religious endeavours for the ideal community, viz. the ethical community, if we consider these efforts as a specific and particular duty of human beings. The main point is voluntary subordination to the “law of reason”, or the moral law, and what matters is the intensity of one’s commitment. Under the

sole condition of considering our duties as divine commands, it is guaranteed that the members of the community refer to a rational order, represented by a common lawgiver superior to all, but one who is just and fair-minded because he is not led by sensuous inclinations and egoistic interests: that is, a divine lawgiver. According to Kant, this is precisely what the true religious attitude consists in: rather than requiring ecclesiastical doctrine, it requires moral theory – a philosophical doctrine that incites thinkers to a mental revolution of their consciousness.

It is fitting, here, to examine the concept of religion offered by Kant in a philosophical interpretation of Enlightenment positions, which, in my view, defines the “religion of reason” in a way that provides a basis for the construction of a public moral space.

First, however, we have to consider more precisely the differences between two kinds of “religion” – the religion of reason, or natural religion, on the one hand, and the “historical” or institutionalized religions, on the other. The Kantian conception of religion is based on a broad and abstract concept: on an idea of reason that is real in terms of its conceivableness and its possibility, but not in terms of empirical or historical fact. (I think it could be useful to deepen our comprehension of Kant’s conception of religion as a means of better understanding the complicated and conflicted situation of today concerning the religions of the world.)

At the beginning of Part Four of the *Religion*, entitled “Concerning Service and Counterfeit Service under the Dominion of the Good Principle, or, Of Religion and Priestcraft”, Kant defines the object of his analysis by differentiating his concept from historically given forms of religion (as his title suggests). The non-empirical definition of the concept of religion leaves no doubt that “religion” must be considered not a factual and contingent phenomenon, but rather the expression of one mode of human self-understanding. In this regard, it concerns an anthropological constant.

This formal definition is followed and completed by another, even more ‘material’ one at the beginning of the first Part of Part Four: “Religion is (subjectively considered) the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.” (Rel, AA 06 : 153 ; 177) In a long footnote, Kant writes that “[w]ith this definition some erroneous interpretations of the concept of religion in general is obviated.” (ibid.) Concerning theoretical cognition, religion does not require any “assertoric knowledge”, because our knowledge never extends to supra-sensuous objects, such as God’s existence. But this definition presupposes “an *assertoric* faith, practical and hence free”, which, “with respect to the object toward which our morally legislative

reason bids us work”, makes us hope for the effectiveness of reason with regards to its final aim and intention.

Kant undoubtedly held that the rational aspect of religion is to be distinguished from the rational faculty of cognition involved in theoretical knowledge (which, as is the case with understanding, is limited to experience). He consistently emphasises the fact that what he is actually talking about is a “pure faith of reason” (p.ex. Rel, AA 06: 129; 158). Related to the philosophical notion of “*Fürwahrhalten*” (“assent”, or “holding-to-be-true”) from the methodology of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this “faith” is a sign of a differentiated and developed consciousness, in contrast to “opinion”. It is the pure faith of reason, which, “when operative [*praktisch*], is what truly constitutes religion in every faith” (Rel, AA 06: 153; 176). This means that the faith of reason, as one of human reason’s specific attitudes or faculties, precedes religious faith, and insofar as it is “operative” or practical, it constitutes what we call religion.

Thus we face the following situation: there is a subjective consciousness that – as far as it is rational – contents itself with a “*minimum* of cognition (it is possible that there is a God)” (ibid., n.). Cognition reduced to the possibility of forming the idea of God becomes the point of departure for religion. To be sure, this concerns a situation that is completely different from that of contemporaneous consciousness, defined as requiring the maximum of scientific knowledge, on the same scale as the natural sciences. According to Kant, it is just this minimum of cognition “which must occur to every morally earnest [...] pursuit of the good”; therefore there is no need to ensure the objective reality of God’s existence. On the subjective level, “the assertoric, and hence free faith” is sufficient for the moral consciousness of human beings. The method by which (cognitive) reason comprehends the particular “recognition of all our duties as divine commands”, viz. religion (according to Kant’s definition), is the subjectively sufficient act of “holding-to-be-true” (*Fürwahrhalten*, KrV, A 820/B 848). In the case of religious faith, the certainty of the result of this holding-to-be-true does not refer to the existence of the object, but to the necessity of its idea.

Kant explains this necessity in the following way: it is not analogous to a logical deduction, but is rather a characteristic of human nature in the form of a natural need of reason. In “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786), Kant characterizes the faith of reason (or natural faith) as certain and immutable, in spite of its subjectivity: “[...] pure rational faith can never be transformed into knowledge by any natural data of reason or experience [...]” (WDO, AA 08 : 141). This is what differentiates it from historical belief. The inability to demonstrate something’s existence does not in itself constitute a demonstration of

that thing's non-existence. Thus, the firmness or certainty of rational faith is not affected by historical fact.

The inseparable union of morality and religion constitutes the central point, here. The question of their interdependence – which is the cause, which is the effect – is, in my opinion, academic. What matters is the fact that Kant presents us with the idea of a moral consciousness that leads to religion (as he writes, “morality leads inevitably to religion” (Rel, AA 06: 08, Preface), as well as a religiousness that arises from moral consciousness. Furthermore, he demonstrates that rational faith is to be considered appropriate for religious (but rational) conviction, in which firmness or certainty is not subordinate to theoretical knowledge. This interdependence maintains the primacy of the one over the other: we can think of neither a “true religion” without morality, nor a nonreligious morality, realized by human beings who are convinced that they do not need faith. There is nobody who believes in nothing at all.

Individual confession of the conviction that God exists is not necessary; rather, what suffices is the confession of an ethics whose highest law is the commandment of *pure* reason. Pure reason is not given to the sensuous-rational human being, and it does not exist on earth. This is also the faith of reason: the act of holding-to-be-true, as subjectively sufficient, which results in the possibility and the hope that respect for that which reason imposes at the same time animates human beings, regardless of their own needs and intentions. In the following passage, Kant talks about religion; but it seems to me possible to interpret “pure rational faith” as “respect for the law”, and in so doing we encounter again connected secular and religious elements:

“A pure rational faith is therefore the signpost or compass by means of which the speculative thinker orients himself in his rational excursions into the field of supersensible objects; but a human being who has common but (morally) healthy reason, can mark out his path, in both a theoretical and a practical respect in a way which is fully in accord with the whole end of his vocation [...].”(WDO, AA 08 : 142)

As with rational faith, respect for the law as a sentiment – the sole moral sentiment, for Kant – has a subjective but rational character: respect is “spontaneously produced by a concept of reason.” This admittedly unequal comparison allows us to assert that, in the field of practical reason, Kant aims to provide definitions of a rational and hence communicable subjectivity. We subjectively need to have sentiments to incite the good will (that is, to realise practical reason), to motivate us to moral actions. For neither isolated theories and

speculations, nor doctrines ground a moral disposition (*Gesinnung*). This is why Kant affirms (in the passage quoted above) that both the “speculative thinker” and the “human being who has common but (morally) healthy reason” can orient themselves through faith. In the field of the supersensible, there remains nothing to recognize or to know; this is the space of convictions.

The objects of faith are, at the same time, the imperative of reason, a reason that generates the procedure of auto-critique and which is conscious of the limits and boundaries between the known/knowable and the unknown/unknowable, but which nonetheless connects them by thinking. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant asks: “what is reason’s attitude in this connection of what we know with what we do not, and never shall, know?” At least, reason is capable of having a distinct notion of this connection, viz. the limits or boundaries wherein we find religion: “We must therefore accept an immaterial being, a world of understanding, and a Supreme Being [...], because in them only, as things in themselves, reason finds that completion and satisfaction, which it can never hope for in the derivation of appearances from their homogeneous grounds [...]”(cf. Prol, AA 04 : 354).

Even if we reject the Kantian definition of the connection between the knowable and the unknowable as the thinking of an “immaterial” or “supreme” being, it is worthwhile to follow his arguments. According to Kant, it is necessary, through reason, to think of the idea of God, without its being necessary to provide any definition or determinations of this idea. And it is precisely this position that opens the space, limited by reason, wherein the followers of historical religions have occasion to ‘enlighten’ themselves through thinking for themselves. In this way, it is possible to attain mutual consensus and the pacification of conflicting differences.

Another important aspect of Kant’s position is the mode of necessity with respect to thinking about (the idea of) God. It is not possible to require human beings to have faith or to be religious. Faith and religiousness express a need of reason, a truly natural need, in the sense of a moral or practical necessity (in contrast to the theoretical necessity of logical thinking). In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant sums up the matter of re-ligio (or, in other words, the synthesizing capacity of reason) as follows:

“What belongs to duty here is only the endeavour to realize and promote the *summum bonum* in the world, the possibility of which can therefore be postulated; and as our reason finds it not conceivable except on the supposition of a supreme intelligence, the admission of this existence is therefore connected with the consciousness of our duty, although the admission itself belongs to the domain of speculative reason [...]”(KpV, AA 04: 126)

To summarise, I would like to emphasize three points: 1) the faith of reason expresses a necessary need of reason in its practical use, a need that will remain as long as human beings are alive, as Kant remarks in “What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” Without doubt this need is connected to the real existence of human beings; thus we can consider religiousness an anthropological constant, as the necessary definition and determination of human rational consciousness. Evidently, it is possible, on the level of individuality, to refuse, to deny, to restrain or to compensate natural needs, including that of faith as a natural need of reason. 2) The faith of reason (as natural religion) does not compete with knowledge, but has an intensity that is both similar and equivalent to that of knowledge; hence its own a priori certainty and firmness, even if such traits remain subjective. Faith is to be distinguished from theoretical knowledge by its moral receptivity. 3) Because a pure and permanent good will does not exist in the world, human beings require a measure of duty: the moral law. This law (the categorical imperative) is itself an object of rational faith, as far as its content can be understood only in relation to, or connection with, a supreme intelligence, which Kant calls God. The content or matter of the moral law is the duty “to realize and promote the *summum bonum* in the world”, consisting in the connection of virtue (the promotion of the well-being of others) and happiness, viz. the dignity of happiness.

Therefore, the relation between the concept of community – as an idea and ideal – and the conception of natural religion in Kant’s thinking seems to be an inseparable one. If religiousness is nothing other than the search for the ideal of community, viz. the ethical community or the invisible church, religiousness can be analysed by means of Kantian transcendental philosophy: the possibility of the moral self-obligation to respect and accept one’s duties is, at the same time, the condition of the establishment of successful human political communities. On the cultural and societal level, we actualize the ideal of the legal-political community; as an ethical community, this body must be conceived as governed by divine legislation, in the sense of the “third” element I spoke about at the beginning of my talk. This divine legislation is identified with the laws of pure practical reason.

The idea of community as such represents humanity as a whole, not as a sum of individuals, but as the moral quality or the capacity for morality which belongs to the rational nature of human beings.

The free and public use of reason (conceived as thinking for oneself), the veracity and communicability of our convictions and, finally, the rational force of self-obligation are the

conditions under which moral laws and maxims can be realised. However, the dawning of consciousness of the matter of the moral law and of its connection to a merely rational, thus divine legislator is the condition of the possibility of comprehending what it means to be human. It is accompanied by a progressive acceptance of human reason as a limited faculty, and by the need to maintain hope and faith with regards to reason, which is the source of morality. Such a human self-conception involves the presupposition and the acceptance of a re-ligio, a connection to a superior wisdom, and, at the same time, the avoidance of underestimating our human rational faculties.

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