

PREDISPOSITIONS TO THE GOOD (*ANLAGEN ZUM GUTE*).

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In Part I of *Religion*, Kant defines “the predispositions of a being [as] the constituent parts required for it as well as the forms of their combination that make for such a being” (R 6:28). Unlike the propensities to evil, which are “contingent for humanity in general” and designate “the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination” (R 6:29), the predispositions to good are “*original (ursprunglich)*, for they belong to the possibility of human nature” (R 6:28). As such, predispositions are not themselves a matter of choice, but a sheer anthropological fact that conditions the exercise of freedom and has an implicit teleological and normative character. So construed, predispositions express the moral dimension of Kant’s “pragmatic” anthropology: they indicate “what [the human being] as a free acting being (...) can and should make of [herself]” (A 7:119), since they “are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions *to the good* (they demand compliance with it)” (R 6:28).

“As elements of the determination of the human being”, Kant argues, “we may justifiably bring this predispositions... under three headings” (R 6:26):

1. The predisposition to the *animality of the human being*, as a *living being*;
2. To the *humanity* in him, as a living and at the same time *rational being*;
3. To his *personality*, as a rational and at the same time *responsible being*. (R 6:26)

While “the *first* does not have reason at its root at all; [...] the *second* is rooted in a reason which is indeed practical, but only as subservient to other incentives; and [...] the *third* alone is rooted in reason practical of itself, i.e., in reason legislating unconditionally” (R 6:28). Animality and humanity, then, express two different variants of self-love: while self-love is “mechanical” in animality, for it is “a love for which reason is not required” (R 6:26), it is “comparing” in humanity, “for only in comparison with others does one judge oneself happy or unhappy” (R 6:27). The presumed lack of reason of mechanical self-love, however, needs elucidation. For,

if animality did not involve a form of practical rationality, neither would it count as a “predisposition to good” nor could it give rise to the “vices of savagery (*Laster der Rohigkeit*), and, “at their greatest deviation from the natural ends, (...) [to] the bestial (*viehische*) vices of *gluttony, lust, and wild lawlessness* (in relation to human beings)” (R 6:27).

To shed light on Kant’s view, it is useful to place it in its Rousseauian context. Seen that way, it becomes clear that the two variants of self-love Kant attributes to animality and humanity derive, respectively, from what Rousseau calls *amour de soi* and *amour propre*:

Amour de soi is a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation and which guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. *Amour propre* is only a relative sentiment, factitious, and born in society, which inclines every individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else, inspires men with all the evil they do one another, and is the genuine source of honor.²

Like *amour de soi*, “mechanical” self-love implies a mode of self-relation and relation with other agents based on the immediacy of feeling. It lacks reason, then, not because it is devoid of moral meaning, but because it is “unreflective.” In its primordial function, self-love prompts human beings to care for the satisfaction of their basic needs: “*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” (R 6:27). These drives (*Triebe*) are “to the good” (R 6: 28), since the appetites for food, sexual intimacy, kinship, and community not only lead human beings to incorporate elements of the external world and associate with one another, but also facilitate the compliance with various duties (to themselves and to other agents). Like Rousseau, Kant connects these tendencies with the state of nature, and believes that, though on them “can be grafted all sort of vices,” they “do not of themselves issue from this predisposition at its root” (R 6:26). These vices, instead, are observable manifestations of the propensity to evil (*Hang zum Bösen*), which affects all human beings, even the best (R 6:32).

Like *amour propre*, “comparing” self-love implies a mediated and calculative mode of relation in which an agent’s sense of worth depends upon the opinion of others. Conflict is inevitable here, for what starts as a demand for “*equal worth*, not allowing anyone superiority over oneself,” is soon “bound up with the constant anxiety that others might be striving for ascendancy,” and hence triggers the “unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others” (R 6:27). These are the comparative/competitive tendencies Kant had identified in *Idea for a Universal History* (1784) with our “unsociable sociability,” the “propensity (*Hang*) to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society” (I 8:20). As he explained in that text, “[t]he human being has an inclination to become *socialized*, since in such a condition he feels himself as more. But he also has a great propensity to *individualize* (isolate) himself, because he simultaneously encounters in himself the unsociable property of willing to direct everything so as to get his own way” (I 8:21). This ambivalence, Kant believes, is the driving force of historical progress, for it leads human beings to discipline their inclinations and develop all their faculties: “Thanks be to nature, therefore, for the incompatibility, for the spiteful competitive vanity, for the insatiable

desire to possess or even to dominate! For without them all the excellent natural predispositions in humanity would eternally slumber undeveloped” (I 8:21). Once again, one can hear here the echo of Rousseau’s “perfectibility,” “a faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others” (SD, 141), and is simultaneously the source of our misery and refinement.

Kant defines personality as “the susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice” (R 6:27). As a predisposition, it deserves a category of its own, since it is irreducible to any form of self-love. It can neither be derived from our (pathological) feelings nor from the systematic arrangement of inclinations associated with humanity: “For from the fact that a being has reason does not at all follow that, simply by virtue of representing its maxims as suited to universal legislation, this reason contains a faculty of determining the power of choice unconditionally, and hence to be ‘practical’ on its own. The most rational being of this world might still need certain incentives, coming from the objects of inclination, to determine his power of choice” (R 6:26 n.). “[N]o amount of subtle reasoning on our part” (R 6:26 n.), Kant believes, would give rise to the feeling of unconditional necessitation that the moral law elicits. “Were the law not given to us from within,” as it were, as a *Faktum der Vernunft* (see KpV 5:32), we would never experience the (a priori) feeling of respect, which allows us to become “conscious of the independence of our own power of choice from determination by all other incentives (of our freedom) and [...] also of the accountability of all our actions” (R 6:26 n.). The predisposition to personality designates our aesthetic receptivity to morality, the “subjective ground” without which we would not be able to incorporate duty as the motive of our maxims and acquire a “good character” (R 6:27-8). Unlike the other predispositions, “nothing evil can be grafted” onto it: even the most depraved human being must acknowledge the authority of the moral law, for were she “able to lose the incentive that consists in the respect for [it] (...) [she] would also never be able to regain it” (R 6:46). The incorruptibility of personality is, therefore, the condition for the possibility of our moral regeneration.

The Rousseauian background of Kant’s view not only helps explain the lexical ordering of the system of predispositions, but also brings to the fore its epigenetic character. For, Kant conceives predispositions as if they were “seeds” (*Keime*) that actualize their potential in response to the pressures of the environment. Human reason has a history, for it “does not operate instinctively, but rather needs attempts, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight into another” (I 8:19). Animality, i.e., practical reason in its incipient form, manifests itself in the so-called state of nature, a state in which individuals act unreflectively and limit the extent of their moral horizon to the vagaries of feeling. Humanity becomes dominant in civilization, for here individuals put their reason to work at the service of their inclinations, and are forced to submit themselves to the coercive power of the state in order to escape the destructive effects of their unsociable passions. Personality, however, is not the mere unfolding of the preceding states but implies a qualitative jump: it contains the promise of a future in which a federation of republican states will put an end to all wars and cultural institutions will reflect the autonomy our species is destined (*bestimmt*) to have. This future Kant identifies with the “highest good,” a moral ideal of a world in which, through hu-

man efforts, “the purposiveness deriving from freedom and the purposiveness of nature” will finally combine (R 6:5).

Abstract: In Part I of *Religion within the boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant distinguishes three predispositions to the good: animality, humanity, and personality (R 6:26). Unlike the propensities to evil, which are “contingent for humanity in general” (R 6:29), the predispositions to good are “original (*ursprünglich*), for they belong to the possibility of human nature” (R 6:28). Animality and humanity express two different variants of self-love (“mechanical” and “comparing”), whose mode of operation can be traced back to Rousseau’s distinction between “*amour de soi*” and “*amour propre*.” Seen this way, the predispositions to the good are not merely determinants of our anthropological structure, but have also a diachronic implication. Animality designates the characteristic moral outlook of agents in the state of nature, while humanity expresses the moral orientation of civilized individuals (their unsociable sociability). Upon these tendencies, Kant believes, all sorts of vices can be grafted. The predisposition to personality, however, stands as a category all of its own: it is irreducible to self-love and immune to any moral corruption (a feature of great importance for the prospects of moral regeneration). Kant conceives of personality as the end towards which all the other predispositions to the good contribute as necessary conditions. The attainment of this end requires a qualitative shift in the moral orientation of the human species, a transformation without which it would be impossible for the species to comply with the collective duty of realizing the highest good.

KEYWORDS: propensity to evil, moral anthropology, animality, humanity, personality, vices of savagery, vices of civilization, amour de soi, amour propre, unsociable sociability.

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