

The Social Nature of Kantian Dignity

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Abstract: Most scholars describe Kant's idea of dignity as what I term his "vertical" account—that is, our human dignity insofar as we rise above heteronomous natural inclinations and realize human freedom by obeying the moral law. In this paper, I attempt to supplement this traditional view by exploring Kant's neglected "horizontal" account of dignity—that is, our human dignity insofar as we exist in relationship with others. First, I examine the negative aspect of this horizontal account of dignity, found in Kant's discussion of public heteronomy perpetuated by unjust social institutions. Second, I explore Kant's idea of public dignity realized *via* social interaction: both (1) at the interpersonal level of education and friendship, and (2) at the societal level, in terms of moral education in the public sphere and a communal moral striving towards the highest good. I argue that we cannot realize our full human dignity for Kant outside of the context of concrete social relations with other moral agents.

The idea of human dignity plays a fundamental role in modern rights talk. In his book *Individualism*, Steven Lukes writes that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family (as stated in the 1948 U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights) finds its most impressive and systematic expression in the writings of Immanuel Kant, who asserted that 'man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end.'"¹ I want to focus here on Kant's historical views about 'human dignity'. When enlisted by thinkers such as Rawls, Nozick, Dworkin, and Melden, such dignity is typically explained in terms of the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative—the so-called Formula of Humanity.² For Kant, 'humanity' in each person sets a basic constraint upon action. Morality only enjoins acts that do not violate, and indeed that strive to promote and to harmonize with, the rational agency of each person. In treating all humans as ends and never only as means, we acknowledge the dignity of other persons.

Kant's view is often regarded as a strong defense of individual rights. We can never reduce someone to the status of a thing, to be used merely for our own purposes; instead, we must respect her basic dignity as a rational agent entitled to set her own ends. What is traditionally overlooked in this picture, however, is Kant's *social* account of dignity. That is, for Kant, we attain personal dignity, not just in the individual exercise of rational agency, but insofar as we find ourselves in community with others. We somehow fail to realize our full dignity apart from such contexts, precisely because, according to Kant, ideal human nature is, in its essence, fundamentally social.

I term these two complementary views present in Kant's texts as, respectively, 'vertical' and 'horizontal' accounts of human dignity. First, I discuss Kant's more well-known 'vertical' picture of dignity. Kant's argument for 'vertical' dignity rests upon two main premises: (1) in a negative sense, we rise above the 'heteronomy' of natural determinations, thus setting ourselves apart from mere things, and (2) in a positive sense, we possess the ability to engage in rational self-legislation.

Second, I examine Kant's much-overlooked views about 'horizontal' personal dignity. Parallel to the vertical personal dignity that exists for an individual moral agent, Kant (particularly in his later 1790 moral writings) also explicitly (1) condemns those societal conditions that impose a kind of *public* heteronomy in personal relationships and (2) grounds the ideal realization of human dignity in a necessarily *communal* moral striving—ultimately aimed at the highest good, as what he terms an essentially 'social good' (Ak 6: 97/89). Put differently, in much of his later ethical reflection, Kant defends a more fully consistent view of what it means to say that reason is public. We experience conditions of publicity, not only in justifying what moral principles we ought to adopt, but also as conditions for the very possibility of achieving those ideals that practical reason demands of us.³

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In the 1785 *Groundwork*, personal dignity is fundamentally linked to conditions of autonomy.⁴ Kant writes:

In the kingdom of ends [i.e., where we exist as legislative rational beings] everything has either a price [Preis] or a dignity [Würde]. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity. [Ak. 4: 434/40]

How does Kant justify possession of such dignity? It is by virtue of our autonomy as rational agents, that is, that we can choose, in an act of rational self-legislation, what morality requires. Kant later explains:

Now morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself, for only thereby can he be a legislating member in a kingdom of ends. Hence morality and humanity, insofar as it is capable of morality, alone have dignity. [Ak 4: 435/40-41]

Only insofar as we are moral agents, and thus self-legislating members of a rational kingdom of ends, do we realize our full dignity. Nonetheless, if we act immorally, we do not thereby cease to have dignity. Only the *potentiality* for morality is needed here. We may fail to live up to our human dignity, but we can never altogether lose it.⁵

Kant draws two important distinctions here. First, he contrasts things that have ‘price’ with things that have ‘dignity.’ Objects with a ‘market’ or an ‘affective’ price have only relative value, based on their relationship to human inclination or taste. We may freely exchange these objects for something of equal worth if we so happen to lack the relevant desire. Objects with ‘dignity,’ however, have no such exchange value. Rather, this class of objects, which includes humans, possesses unconditional worth. We must regard ourselves as intrinsically valuable, never as a mere trade commodity with market value, as something indifferently bought or sold.⁶

Second, Kant affirms that our dignity is fully realized only when we act as autonomous, rather than heteronomous, agents. Autonomy is self-legislation—when we determine our ends in accordance with practical reason. Heteronomy occurs, however, when the will seeks its laws outside ‘the fitness of its own maxims’ [Ak 4: 441/45]. What is the nature of such legislation? It occurs whenever we regard ourselves only as members of the ‘kingdom of nature’ as opposed to the ‘kingdom of ends,’ that is, when we take ourselves “as subject only to the natural law of our own needs” [Ak 4: 439/43]. Both contrasts highlight the fact that human dignity is fully realized only insofar as we are not *mere things*, neither commodities to be bought or sold, nor simply physical objects in a ‘kingdom of nature,’ mechanically determined by the laws of nature.

In the 1787 *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant reconfirms this picture, now in terms of a basic contrast between our ‘animal’ and our ‘rational’ nature:

Man is a being of needs, so far as he belongs to the world of sense, and to this extent his reason certainly has an inescapable responsibility from the side of his sensuous nature to attend to its interest. . . . But still he is not so completely animal as to be indifferent to everything that reason says on its own and to use it merely as a tool for satisfying his needs as a sensuous being. *That*

he has reason does not in the least raise him in worth above mere animality if reason serves only the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by instinct: if this were so, reason would be only a specific way nature had made use of to equip man for the same purpose which animals are qualified, without fitting him for any higher purpose. . . . But he has reason for a yet higher purpose, namely, to consider also what is in itself good or evil, which pure and sensuously disinterested reason alone can judge. . . . [Ak.5: 61-62/64, emphasis added]

As Kant later affirms in the 1797 *Tugendlehre*: “It is one’s duty to raise himself out of the crudity of his nature, out of his animality (*quoad actum*) more and more to humanity, by which alone he is capable of setting himself ends” [Ak. 6: 387/44-45]. We fully achieve this ‘vertical’ personal dignity for Kant only when we rise above brute animal nature and realize higher aims, setting our own ends as opposed to yielding, as a mere thing, to the dictates of natural laws.

II

Notably, even in the *Groundwork*, Kant’s view of dignity has strong ‘horizontal’ elements. Self-legislation only makes sense in the context of the parallel activity of other agents in community. We must all legislate together in order to create a harmonious ‘kingdom of ends’ in which human dignity can be fully realized.⁷

Nevertheless, one might fairly protest that this Kantian scenario is too abstract. Kant envisions here a mere ‘ideal of reason’—participants in a perfect moral order where every agent’s ends coordinate with all others—an ideal which apparently has no immediate practical relevance for dealing with ordinary life. In the remainder of this essay, I will try to show how Kant supplements this abstract picture with later reflection on ‘horizontal dignity’ in actual, non-ideal social contexts. In the present section, I first discuss the negative aspect of such Kantian horizontal dignity; in the next two sections, I explore its more positive dimension.

Particularly in his late 1790 moral writings, Kant offers a striking picture of what we might call *public heteronomy*, parallel to the essentially private heteronomy of the moral agent in the 1785 *Groundwork*. That is, for Kant, we can be subject, not only to our own private natural inclinations, but also, in some sense, to unjust domination by others. In his 1798 *Anthropology*, Kant notably identifies a peculiar class of inclinations which he calls ‘passions.’ We share basic natural inclinations with all animals, insofar as we are sensuous creatures with physical desires. Passions, however, are distinctively human traits. Kant identifies two types of passion: (1) *innate* passions arising from natural inclinations for freedom and sex;

and (2) *acquired* passions derived from culture, such as ambition, lust for power, and avarice. Passions, Kant writes, are ‘desires directed only by men *to men, not to things*’ [Ak. 7: 269/175, emphasis added]—that is to say, inclinations that seek to realize, in often perverse ways, the human need for social recognition.

In Kant’s discussion of freedom here, he strikingly defends what present-day political theorists term the classical ‘republican’ view of freedom as non-domination.⁸ Kant writes, discussing those social conditions prior to the establishment of civil society:

Whoever is able to be happy only at the option of another person (be this person as benevolent as you please) justly feels that he is unhappy. What guarantee does he have that his powerful fellow human will concur with the person’s own judgment concerning well-being. The uncivilized person (not yet accustomed to submission) knows no greater misfortune than to have this befall him, and justly so, as long as no public law protects him. . . . [Ak. 7: 269/175]

In the state of nature, we suffer fundamental social heteronomy. We are helpless in the face of a more powerful person, who can do to us whatever he may please. We are at the mercy of his paternalistic control, whether for good or bad. It is only when we achieve ‘public right’ that we can escape such enslavement, not from our own passions, but now, from the arbitrary whim of others.⁹

Even in civil society, however, the potential still exists for social heteronomy as perpetuated by unjust, hierarchical institutions. The 1797 *Tugendlehre* provides perhaps Kant’s most well-known discussion of what I am calling here ‘social heteronomy’ in his attack upon servility. Servility consists in disparaging one’s own dignity, or moral worth, merely as a means to acquire the favor of someone else *via* hypocrisy and flattery. Kant offers a list of imperatives against servility:

Do not become vassals of men. Do not suffer your rights to be trampled underfoot by others with impunity. Incur no debts for which you cannot provide full security. Accept no favors which you might do without. Do not be parasites or flatterers nor (what really differs from these only in degree) beggars. [Ak. 8: 136/99]

Certain social arrangements render us especially vulnerable to the arbitrary will of others. This becomes apparent when Kant specifically addresses the practice of incurring favors. In doing so, Kant writes, we ‘contract’ a debt. Kant declares that “we can never get on equal terms with the one who has conferred the favors upon us.” Instead,

We shall always owe him a debt of gratitude, and who will accept such a debt? For to be indebted is to be subject to an unending constraint. I must forever be courteous and flattering towards my benefactor, and if I fail to be so he will very soon make me conscious of my failure... [Ak. 27: 314-342/118-119].

Notice that this violation of a duty to oneself creates a *direct social obligation* to another person—an obligation by which we are necessarily constrained, even if we possess natural inclinations to the contrary. As Kant later writes in the *Anthropology*, the passion of ‘ambition,’ where a person aims at forcing others into a kind of ‘servile submission,’ consists in:

controlling the inclinations of other people in order to direct and manage them according to one’s intentions, [which] almost amounts to being in possession of them as mere instruments of one’s own will. [Ak 7: 271/179]

Thus, in social heteronomy, including Kant’s paradigmatic example of servility, we are enslaved now not to the private domination of our own natural inclinations, but to a public domination, to arbitrary control by the ‘passions’ of other persons.

III

I turn next to the positive dimension of Kantian horizontal dignity. Does Kant recognize relationships with other persons as a *constitutive* feature of human dignity? In order to make Kant’s position more concrete we might be tempted to invoke here, following Hannah Arendt, Kant’s idea of a ‘*sensus communis*.’ In the 1790 *Critique of Judgment* Kant describes three maxims required for engaging in ‘reflective judgment’:

1. To think for oneself.
2. To think from the standpoint of everyone else.
3. To think consistently. [Ak. 5: 294/160]

Indeed, in the *Logic*, Kant declares these three conditions as necessary for any thinking whatsoever [Ak 9: 57/63]. It is only by satisfying Kant’s second demand—thinking from the standpoint of everyone else—that we attain true *sensus communis*. Essentially, Kant argues here that we cannot be intellectual ‘monads.’ Rather, reason requires that in ordinary rational reflection, we must measure our private opinions against the considered judgments of all others. As Arendt writes, in her own development of Kant’s view:

The power of judgment rests on potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement.¹⁰

Our human dignity, insofar as we are rational, relies upon potential acknowledgment by others. The ‘publicity of reason’ places us in necessary community with other rational thinkers.

Yet, one might protest that this picture again fares no better than the *Groundwork*: it still remains a mere abstraction. Arendt’s interpretation insufficiently answers a famous attack on Kant leveled by contemporary thinkers like Habermas—that Kant endorses mere ‘monological’ reflection.¹¹ Kant’s practical reason always envisions only a *projected* encounter between participants, rather than genuine dialogical exchange.

Where then, if at all, do we find in Kant’s writings recognition of the need for a *concrete* engagement with others in order to realize true ‘horizontal’ dignity? I believe that the best prospect for this lies in Kant’s ideas about moral education: (1) at the personal level, in terms of moral friendship and (2) at the societal level, in terms of rational discourse with others.¹² Basic to Kant’s idea of education is the demand that we think and judge for ourselves. In his *Education* lectures, Kant declares that “in the culture of *reason* we must proceed according to the Socratic method,” where each person’s understanding of a subject must be autonomously elicited from her own reasoning [Ak 9: 477/81]. In the *Logic*, Kant reaffirms this dictum. He writes:

Erotemetatically [Gk. *eromai* = to ask] one cannot teach otherwise than by the Socratic dialogue, in which both teacher and pupil ask and must mutually answer, so that it seems as if the disciple were also the teacher. For the Socratic dialogue teaches through questions, making the apprentice cognizant of his own principles of reason and sharpening his attention to them. Through common catechizing, however, one cannot teach but only examine what one has taught akroamatically [*akroaomai* = listen to]. The catechistic method therefore is valid only for empirical and historical cognitions, the dialogic method, however, for rational cognitions. [Ak. 9: 150/149-150]

True education requires this necessary face-to-face, explicitly dialogical encounter between student and teacher in which, as Kant says, it is “as if the disciple were also the teacher.”

This ideal of education underlies Kant’s account of moral friendship, a relationship he describes as the ‘most intimate union of love’ [Ak 6: 439/135]. As Kant writes about it in his early 1775-1780 *Lectures on Ethics*:

We all have a strong impulse to disclose ourselves, and enter wholly into fellowship; and such self-revelation is further a human necessity for the correction of our judgments. To have a friend whom we know to be frank and loving, neither false nor spiteful, is to have one who will help us to correct our judgment when it is mistaken. This is the whole end of man, through which he can enjoy his existence. [Ak 27: 427/206, emphasis added]

As Kant later writes in the *Tugendlehre*, the thinker never exists alone, ‘as if in prison’ [Ak. 6: 472/138]. Instead, she must involve herself in concrete personal relationships with others. And this deep, ‘intimate communication’ with another person, as noted above in the *Lectures on Ethics*, fulfills the ‘whole end of man.’

This underscores a deep insight present in Kant’s discussion of lying. If universalized, lying would certainly undermine the very possibility of friendship. What is most contemptible about lying, however, rests not in its adverse effects upon others, but in how it ‘violates the dignity of humanity in one’s own person.’ Put starkly, lying is “the throwing away and, as it were, the obliteration of one’s dignity as a human being” [Ak. 6: 429/90-91]. Why is this so?

A man who does not himself believe what he says to another . . . has even less worth than if he were a mere thing . . . to communicate one’s thoughts to someone by words which (intentionally) contain the opposite of what one thinks is an end directly contrary to the *natural purposiveness of his capacity to communicate his thoughts*. In so doing, he renounces his personality and, as a liar, manifests himself as a mere deceptive appearance of a man, not as a true man. [Ak. 6: 429/91, emphasis added]

In Kant’s view, ideal human nature necessarily involves genuine communication of our thoughts with other persons. Failing to realize this ideal, which occurs whenever we lie, contradicts the ‘natural end’ of our own humanity. In Kant’s words, we are reduced to a ‘mere deceptive appearance’ of a person: one no longer acts as a true person. Thus, being in direct and honest communication with others plays a constitutive role for the realization of our human dignity.

IV

How do we achieve horizontal dignity at the societal level? Kant offers a view here parallel to his treatment of personal friendship in terms of the ideal of moral education in the public sphere. In his famous essay ‘What Is Enlightenment?’ Kant defines ‘enlightenment’ as ‘the courage to think for oneself,’ to emerge from a self-incurred immaturity. Kant explicitly defines a ‘public use of reason’ in terms of education. He writes:

The public use of man’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. . . . By the public use of one’s own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public. [Ak. 8: 37/55]

Charitably understood, this is likely how Kant regarded his own moral writings. Kant chose that well-established dialogical route most clearly available to him as a reflective intellectual within his historical context—submitting his ideas to the reflective scrutiny of the educated reading public, to those members of the *salons* or the *Tischgesellschaften* of Kant’s day.¹³

More radical in a political sense, Kant endorses the public use of one’s reason even for judging acts of the government. In Kant’s words, a learned scholar must “put before the public his thoughts on better ways of drawing up laws, even if this entails forthright criticism of the current legislation” [Ak. 8: 41/59]. Kant’s famous dictum is “To argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!”—that is, to engage in unbridled exercise not in terms of one’s civil, but rather, in terms of one’s *intellectual* freedom, via the activity of writing.

Ultimately, Kant remained optimistic that such public use of reason might some day help to achieve true progress for the human race as a whole. In concluding his Enlightenment essay, Kant writes:

Thus once the germ on which nature has lavished most care—man’s inclination and vocation to think freely—has developed within this hard shell, it gradually reacts upon the mentality of the people, who thus gradually become increasingly able to act freely. Eventually, it even influences the principles of governments, which find that they can themselves profit by *treating man, who is more than a machine, in a manner appropriate to his dignity*. [Ak. 8: 41-42/59-60, emphasis added]

It is only through a public use of reason that we can hope to compel governments to treat persons in a way that respects basic human dignity. And it is only through a public use of reason that this germ of progress will cause us ‘to act freely,’ to ultimately achieve our highest vocation as moral beings.

Further, in order to realize true progress for the human race itself, just as we cannot, for Kant, be isolated *thinkers*, neither can we remain purely private *moral agents*. That is, in the end, morality cannot be a merely individualistic enterprise. If it were so, we would forever be trapped in what Kant calls an ‘ethical state of nature’ (in direct analogy to the earlier discussed juridical ‘state of nature’). In this situation, despite all our best moral efforts:

the good principle, which resides in each man, is continually attacked by the evil which is found in him and also in everyone else. Men mutually corrupt one another’s moral predispositions; despite the good will of each individual, yet, because they lack a principle which unites them, they recede, through their dissensions, from the common goal of goodness, and, just as though they were *instruments of evil*, expose one another to the risk of falling once again under the sovereignty of the evil principle. [Ak. 6:97/ 88]

It is inadequate to opt for merely individual moral striving. In this situation, we always remain fundamentally vulnerable, not just to the private influence of our own natural inclinations, but more importantly here, to the heteronomous influence of immoral persons around us. In such circumstances, we become, even unintentionally, ‘the instruments of evil’ ourselves.

In the end, Kantian morality can only be realized in a deeply social way. We achieve this goal not just by eliminating the negative moral influence of others, but also by positively aspiring in a joint venture to realize the ‘highest good’ as the shared goal of humanity. As Kant writes:

For the species of rational beings is objectively, in the idea of reason, destined for a social goal, namely, *for the promotion of the highest as a social good* [als eines gemeinschaftlichen Guts]. . . . [The] highest moral good cannot be achieved merely by the exertions of the single individual towards his own moral perfection, but requires rather a union of such individuals into a whole towards the same goal—into a system of well-disposed men . . . the idea of such a whole, as a universal republic based on laws of virtue . . . [Ak. 6: 97/89, emphasis added]

For Kant, we cannot realize the full dignity of our ideal humanity, as beings with moral worth, outside the context of concrete social relationships with others.¹⁴

V

In this paper, I have briefly tried to supplement the traditional ‘vertical’ view of Kantian dignity—where we rise above our animal nature to realize our rational dignity as self-legislating, moral agents—with a much-overlooked aspect of Kant’s view, ‘horizontal’ dignity, in which actual community with other persons constitutes a basic element of ideal human dignity.

A fundamental worry arises from this discussion: Does this stress upon ‘horizontal dignity’ somehow threaten our basic human worth, by leaving it vulnerable to the contingent, and often typically absent, conditions of needed social recognition? In particular, what happens to human dignity when it is *not* respected in concrete circumstances—dignity that includes recognition of our concrete, embodied identity as persons of specific race, sex, economic status, etc.?¹⁵ In such circumstances, do we somehow possess less human dignity, or even altogether lose it?

While as both thinkers and agents, we arguably always require *some* minimal condition of public rational deliberation, our basic human dignity always remain inviolable, despite any lack of positive affirmation by others.”¹⁶ As Kant declares in the *Groundwork*:

The essence of things is not altered by their external relations; and whatever without reference to such relations alone constitutes the absolute worth of man is also what he must be judged by whoever the judge may be . . . [Ak. 4: 439/44].

While ‘external relations,’ that is, those actual circumstances in which we find ourselves, may be less than ideal, this can never detract from the ‘essence’ of our human dignity as moral beings. Nevertheless, Kantian ‘horizontal dignity’ here still plays the crucial role of identifying for us a ‘regulative ideal’ of reason towards which we must strive—the establishment of those social institutions which best promote realization of the moral vocation of the human race itself.

We arguably require a ‘transcendental minimum’ of relationship with others, of not being confined to some private ethical language, in order even to be able to realize objective moral value. But how we achieve the fullest sense of our ideal human dignity, granted these minimal conditions of the ‘publicity of reason,’ remains a fundamentally open project.

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Notes

1. Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 49.
2. See, for example, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 179-183, 251-257; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 30-33, 333-334; and Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 197-199; A.I. Melden, *Rights and Persons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 189-192.
3. Cf. Onora O’Neill, “Reason and Politics in the Kantian Enterprise,” 3-28, and “The Public Use of Reason,” 28-50 in *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), as well as her “Vindicating Reason” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 280-308. See also Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), esp. 72-77; and Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 192-196. For further discussion, see below, §III-IV.
4. The following Kant texts are cited here with quotations located by volume and page number in the standard Akademie edition: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1783, trans. by James Ellington, in *Ethical Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983); “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 1784, trans. by H.B. Nisbet, in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. by

Hans Reiss, 54-60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” 1784, 41-53, in Reiss (1991); *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788, trans. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company); *Critique of Judgment*, 1790, trans. by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 1793, trans. by Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960); *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* [Tugendlehre], 1797, in Ellington (1983); *Anthroplogy from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 1798, trans. by Victor Lyle Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); *Logic*, 1800, trans. by Robert Hartman and Wolfgang Schwarz (Indianapolis: Bobs Merrill Company, Inc, 1974); and *Lectures on Ethics* (LE), posthumously published, edited by Peter Heath and J.B. Schneewind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

5. Following Rawls’ (1971) distinction between concept and conception (5), I distinguish here between the ‘concept’ of vertical dignity (established by a mere capacity for morality) and a more substantive ‘conception’ of such dignity (in terms of full realization of this ideal by actually acting morally). [The same distinction applies *mutatis mutandis* for later discussion of horizontal dignity, below §§II-IV.] On Kant’s belief that we cannot lack this capacity, see his discussion about ‘moral feeling’ in the *Tugendlehre* where he invokes the ‘fact of reason’—namely, that “we *do* have a susceptibility of free choice for being moved by pure practical reason” and so cannot be “devoid of moral feeling.” Otherwise, Kant observes, our humanity would “be dissolved (as if by chemical laws) into mere animality, and would be irretrievably mixed with the mass of other natural beings” [Ak. 6: 400/58-59].

6. For an insightful Kantian discussion of the distinction between ‘things’ and ‘persons’, in terms of market relationships, see Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. Chapters 1, 7-9.

7. For an extension of this interpretation, cf. Andrew Reath, “Legislating for a Realm of Ends: The Social Dimension of Autonomy” in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, ed. Andrew Reath, Barbara Herman, and Christine Korsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214-239.

8. See discussion, for example, in Philip Pettit, *Republicanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), where Pettit defines someone having dominating power over another person to the extent that: “they have the capacity to interfere on an arbitrary basis in certain choices that the other is in a position to make (52).”

9. Our passion for freedom, as Kant writes in “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Purpose,” represents a ‘natural propensity’ for unsocial sociability:

Man has an inclination to *live in society*, since he feels in this state more like a man, that is, he feels able to develop his natural capacities. But he also has a great tendency to *live as an individual*, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas. [Ak. 8: 20-21/44]

For a helpful discussion of ‘unsocial sociability’, see Allan Wood, “Unsociable Sociability: The Anthropological Basis of Kantian Ethics,” *Philosophical Topics* 19, No. 1 (1991): 325-351.

10. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 26.

11. For a clear statement of this criticism, see, Jurgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 43-116, where Habermas writes:

Discourses take place in particular social contexts and are subject to the limits of time and space. Their participants are not Kant’s intelligible characters but real human beings driven by other motives in addition to the one permitted motive of the search for truth. [92]

As I try to show here, Kant *did* recognize such concrete interaction between actual persons – in terms of realizing his aims for ideal moral education.

12. Cf. Barbara Herman’s insightful discussion of education as the demand for active ‘political participation’ as citizens in “Training in Autonomy: Kant and the Question of Moral Education” in *Philosophers on Education*, ed. A.O. Rorty (London: Routledge Press, 1998), 255-272.

13. For a classic account of the ‘public sphere’ of the bourgeois world of letters and its political import, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), esp. 51-56.

14. For a broad-ranging discussion of the fundamentally social nature of the moral enterprise, compare Harry van der Linden, *Kantian Ethics and Socialism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).

15. For a stress upon the finite, situated character of our personal identity, about which we must always remain morally sensitive, see Onora O’Neill, “Children’s Rights and Children’s Lives” in *Constructions of Reason*, 187-205, and Barbara Herman, “Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons,” *Ethics* 94 (1984): 577-602.

16. In *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Christine Korsgaard presents an interesting argument for some such minimal publicity condition for the possibility of objective value (in contrast to moral solipsism) in terms of Wittgenstein’s private language argument. See esp. 141-151. Compare an earlier development of this line of argument by Thomas Nagel, in his *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), esp. 104-109.