

# A Kantian Account of Moral Trust

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## 1. Introduction

- Turning the focus from Respect: Morality as a two-way street.
- The Moral-Good Friend example.
- The role of social interactions in Kant's moral framework:

*It is a duty to oneself as well as to others not to isolate oneself (separatistam agere) but to use one's moral perfections in social intercourse (officium commercii, sociabilitas). [...] Not exactly in order to promote as the end what is best for the world but only to cultivate what leads indirectly to this end: to cultivate a disposition of reciprocity — agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love and respect (affability and propriety, humanitas aesthetica et decorum) and so to associate the graces with virtue To bring this about is itself a duty of virtue. (MS 6:473)*

The Kingdom of Ends: “a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws” (G 4:434).

## 2. Ground Clearing

### What do we currently have?

- Trust in contemporary philosophy: Reliance vs. Trust (Marušić 2017; McLeod 2021).
- Trust (in general) entails a duty, a normative commitment on the part of the trustee — Moral Trust entails a commitment or respect for the moral law,
- Context-specific discussions of trust within Kantian scholarship: trust in Kant's theory of international relations (Schröder 2010); or trust within religious faith (Sussman 2001).
- Longworth (2017): Holds true that someone is trustworthy to enable practical cooperation, without an actual assessment of their trustworthiness.

*I wish to table [questions that] concern trust in other people's good disposition of the will, rather than in other competences of theirs on which we might rely. [...] Can we have sufficient evidence about the dispositions of others' will? (2017, 269)*

### Where do we go from here?

- A Kantian Account of Moral Trust: Reliance grounded in other people's good dispositions of the will. If trust consists of having confidence that an agent will  $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is the action commanded by the moral law in certain circumstances, then moral trust entails a confidence that they will  $\phi$  following their moral disposition—a confidence we get from our assessment of their moral conduct.
- Kant's shopkeeper:

*For in the case of what is to be morally good it is not enough that it conforms with the moral law but it must also be done for its sake; if not, that conformity is only very contingent and precarious (GMS 4:390)*



- The murderer at the door:

*[Kant] goes so far as to maintain that it would be a crime to lie to a murderer who asked us whether a friend of ours whom he is pursuing has taken refuge in our house.... It is a duty to tell the truth. (VRML 8:425)*

*If you had lied and said that he isn't at home, and he has actually gone out (though you aren't aware of it), so that the murderer encounters him while going away and perpetrates his deed on him, then you can by right be prosecuted as the author of his death. (VRML 8:427)*



### 3. Respect Grounds Trustworthiness

- *So act that you use humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. (G 4:429)*
- *But man regarded as a person [...] isn't to be valued merely as a means to the end of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world. [...] Humanity in his person is the object of respect which he can demand from every other man, but which he must also not forfeit. (MS 6:135)*
- *As regards necessary duty to others or duty owed them, he who has it in mind to make a false promise to others sees at once that he wants to make use of another human being merely as a means, without the other at the same time containing in himself the end. For, he whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving towards him, and so himself contain the end of this action. (G 4:429-430)*
- *[Persons] exact respect for [themselves] from all other rational beings" in virtue of their dignity, and that "humanity in [one's] own person is the object of the respect which [one] can demand from every other human being (MS 6:434-435).*
- *[respecting others is] the maxim of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person (6:449) (S. Darwall 2008, 265).*

### 4. The Puzzle of Morally Trusting Others

- *We must so conduct ourselves to a friend, that it does us no harm if he were to become our enemy; we must give him nothing to use against us. We are not, indeed, to suppose that he may become our enemy, for then there would be no trust between us. But if we give ourselves entirely to a friend, and entrust him with all the secrets which might detract from our happiness, and might well be divulged if he did become an enemy, then it is very unwise to tell him these things, since he could either give them away through inadvertence, or use them to our hurt if he became our foe. (VE 27: 429–30)*
- Friendship: *"the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect" (MS 6:469)*
- A Kantian conception of moral trust, of the kind we could potentially find in friendship, must accommodate and embrace vulnerability as an attitude of respect for others, and still provide justification for morally trusting them.

### 5. An Ideal Solution to the Puzzle

- *To hold someone responsible is to regard her as a person — that is to say, as a free and equal person, capable of acting both rationally and morally. It is therefore to regard her as someone with whom you can enter the kind of relation that is possible only among free and equal rational beings: a relation of reciprocity. When you hold someone responsible, you are prepared to exchange lawless individual activity for reciprocity in some or all of its forms [...] you are ready to trust, and generally speaking to risk your happiness or success on the hope that she will turn out to be human (Korsgaard 1992:189–90)*
- *A neighborhood where the kingdom of ends is real (Korsgaard 1992, 194)*
- *The general concept of the ideal is introduced this way. 'No objects can be represented through pure concepts of the understanding apart from the conditions of sensibility.' When applied to appearances, the pure concepts of the understanding — the categories — "can be exhibited in concreto," This is so because ideas "contain a certain completeness to which no possible empirical knowledge ever attains.' [...] Reason, rather, 'thinks for itself an object which it regards as being completely determinable in accordance with principles' Although the ideal cannot exist, even in example, it is not 'a figment of the brain.' The ideal supplies reasons with a standard of judgment. (Herman 1997, 200)*
- Kant's Opacity Thesis (see GMS 4:407; R 6: 51/71; cf. MS 6:447) vs. Kant's assertion that *"certainty of a disposition in accordance with [the moral] law is the first condition of any worth of a person" (KpV 5:73)*
- *[Practical ideals] are not chimeras, for they constitute the guideline to which we must constantly approach. [...] a yardstick by which to estimate our moral worth, and to know the degree to which we are faulty and deficient; and here I have to conceive of a maximum, so that I know how far away I am, or how near I come to it. (VE 29:604-605)*
- *[practical ideals may serve us to] compare and judge ourselves, and so reform ourselves. (A569/B597)*
- *The expression of Belief is [...] an expression of modesty from an objective point of view, but at the same time of the firmness of confidence in a subjective one" (A827/B855)*

**Works Cited****Kant's Works**

I refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* by the A/B pagination. All other references refer to the Akademie Ausgabe (AA) of his collected works in 29 volumes by the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (1902 –). The first number refers to the volume, the number(s) after the colon to the AA pagination. All translations come from The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–), and are located by the following abbreviations:

- GMS*, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Translated by Mary Gregor;
- KpV*, Critique of Practical Reason. Translated by Mary Gregor;
- MS*, The Metaphysics of Morals. Translated by Mary Gregor;
- RGV*, Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. Translated by George Di Giovanni;
- VE*, Lectures on Ethics, translated by Peter Heath and J.B. Schneewind;
- VRML*, On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy. Translated by Mary Gregor.

**Other Works**

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