
KANTIAN PRACTICAL LOVE

BY

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Abstract: In the *Doctrine of Virtue* Kant stipulates that ‘Love is a matter of feeling, not of willing . . . so a duty to love is an absurdity.’ Nonetheless, in the same work Kant claims that we have duties of love to other human beings. According to Kant, the kind of love which is commanded by duty is *practical love*. This paper defends the view that the duty of practical love articulated in the *Doctrine of Virtue* is distinct from the duty of beneficence and best understood as a duty of self-transformation, which agents observe by cultivating a benevolent disposition and practical beneficent desires.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue* Kant stipulates that ‘Love is a matter of feeling, not of willing, and I cannot love because I *will* to, still less because I *ought* to (I cannot be constrained to love); so a duty to love is an absurdity’ (*MS* 6:401).¹ According to Kant, because we cannot will ourselves to feel love, love cannot be commanded by duty; hence, there can be no duty to love. Nonetheless, in the same work Kant claims that we have duties of love to other human beings (*MS* 6:448–458). These duties are by no means trivial; duties of love to other human beings comprise one of only two categories of ethical duties to others. Given that Kant takes love to be a matter of feeling, which cannot be commanded as duty, we might wonder why he deliberately employs the language of love in his account of our duties to others, especially given that alternative descriptions appear readily available. Why not, for instance, speak simply of duties of *beneficence* to others?

An obvious first step in resolving this puzzle is to take note of the kind of love Kant believes can be a duty. According to Kant, the kind of love which is commanded by duty is *practical love* (*MS* 6:449). Unfortunately, Kant’s account of practical love in the *Doctrine of Virtue* is obscure, inspiring more questions than answers. Consider the following passages:

[In the context of our duties to others], love is not to be understood as a *feeling*, that is, as pleasure in the perfection of others; love is not to be understood as *delight* in them (since others cannot put one under obligation to have feelings). It must rather be thought as the maxim of *benevolence* (practical love), which results in beneficence. (MS 6:449)

Since the love of human beings (philanthropy) we are thinking of here is practical love, not love that is delight in them, it must be taken as active benevolence, and so as having to do with the maxim of actions. (MS 6:450)

... the maxim of benevolence (practical love of human beings) is a duty of all human beings toward one another, whether or not one finds them worthy of love. (MS 6:450)

Kant defines practical love as the *maxim of benevolence* or *active benevolence*, but it is not clear how we should understand these terms. Kant employs more than one conception of *benevolence* (*Wohll wollen*) in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. He speaks, for instance, of the 'benevolence present in love for all human beings,' which, we are told, is nothing more than a nominal interest in the wellbeing of another, such that 'I am only not indifferent to him' (MS 6:451). But Kant also defines benevolence as 'satisfaction (*Vergnügen*) in the happiness (well-being) of others' (MS 6:452), which suggests that benevolence is an affective state.² This conception of benevolence appears to be incompatible with Kant's unambiguous claim that practical love is *not* to be understood as a feeling (MS 6:449). How then are we to understand practical love as a duty, given that it cannot be a duty to feel love for others?

This paper will attempt to provide an answer this question. In doing so, it will be important to bear in mind that practical love belongs to a cluster of ethical duties Kant calls *duties of love to other human beings*. These duties include, in addition to practical love, the duty to make the happiness of others one's end, the duty to promote others' happiness, the duty of gratitude, and the duty of sympathetic participation. When we ask *How should we understand Kantian practical love?* what we seek is an account which explains this duty in the context of the taxonomy of duties we find in Kant's later work.

In the first section of the paper I examine a pair of reductive accounts of Kantian practical love. I refer to these accounts as *reductive* insofar as they liken practical love to some other component of Kant's ethical system. The first account, proposed by Robert Johnson, reduces practical love to a species of respect. The second, endorsed by Paul Guyer and, at times, Allen Wood, reduces practical love to a policy of performing beneficent actions. I argue that neither of these accounts provides us with an acceptable rendering of practical love as it figures in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. The reductive accounts lead us astray by presupposing that there is one doctrine of practical love that Kant endorses throughout his earlier and later works. I demonstrate that the evidence suggests otherwise.

In Section 2 I propose an alternative, non-reductive account of Kantian practical love. I argue that the duty of practical love is best understood as a duty of self-transformation; agents observe this duty by cultivating a benevolent disposition and practical, beneficent desires. In Sections 3 and 4 I provide additional support for my interpretation of practical love. In Section 3 I explore what adopting an obligatory end – an end prescribed by reason – must entail. I argue that making an obligatory end one's own requires more than simply adopting a policy to promote the end. Adopting an obligatory end additionally requires agents to cultivate the appropriate attitudes, feelings, and desires toward the end. In Section 4 I connect the duty of practical love to the moral endowment Kant calls *love of human beings* (*Menschenliebe*). Acknowledging this feature of Kantian moral psychology both supports my interpretation of practical love and illuminates the nature of this duty. Understanding practical love as I propose provides us with an account of Kant's duties of love that is more coherent and more attractive than the alternatives.

1. *Two reductive accounts of practical love*

We began by observing that there is a certain peculiarity to Kant's view that love is a matter of feeling, and while there can be no duty *to love*, we nonetheless have duties *of love* to other human beings. One approach, taken by Robert Johnson, attempts to reconcile this peculiarity by denying that duties of love constitute a unique category of duties to others. Johnson reasons as follows:

... Kant certainly *calls* certain duties 'duties of love,' but these are derived from the basic principle of respect for humanity, and we have a duty to perform them *out of respect* for humanity. This alone should warn us that the term 'love' here signifies nothing more than respect as it applies to helping others and the like.³

According to Johnson, practical love is just a species of respect. I will refer to this view as the *respect account* of practical love.

Respect Account: The duty of practical love is a duty of respect for humanity as it applies to helping others.

A more common approach is to regard practical love as simply a policy of performing beneficent actions. At times Allen Wood appears to endorse this view. He writes, for instance, that "Practical love" or "love of good will" is the policy of benefiting others on moral principle from the motive of duty.⁴ In a similar vein, Paul Guyer has offered the following account of practical love:

Duties of love are characterized in general as duties of benevolence. This is not to be understood simply as a feeling of 'pleasure in the perfection of other men' but as the policy or 'maxim of benevolence (practical love), which results in beneficence' (*Virtue*, §25, 6:449). That is, the duty of love requires that we adopt a general policy of doing what we can to advance the happiness of others, which general policy will result in specific beneficent acts under appropriate circumstances . . .⁵

For the sake of simplicity I will refer to this view as the *policy of beneficent action (PBA) account* of practical love.

PBA Account: The duty of practical love is a duty to adopt a general policy of advancing the welfare and happiness of others.

It should be noted that the respect account and the PBA account are not necessarily exclusive. Kant's *Groundwork* derivation of the duty of beneficence from the formula of humanity at 4:430 certainly suggests a connection between respecting the humanity of others and adopting a general policy of advancing their welfare and happiness. Despite this potential for overlap, I will treat these accounts of practical love as distinct.

Let us consider the account of practical love proposed by Robert Johnson. In defense of his claim that duties of love are properly understood as duties of respect, Johnson argues that these duties are 'derived from the basic principle of respect for humanity, and we have a duty to perform them *out of respect* for humanity.'⁶ While it is true that in the *Groundwork* Kant derives a duty of beneficence from the categorical command to treat humanity always and only as an end in itself (*G* 4:430), he does not do so in his later work. References to the unconditional and absolute value of humanity are conspicuously absent from Kant's account of our duties of love to other human beings. This gives us reason to think that the duties of love are, in fact, a unique set of duties, and thus speaks against the respect account of practical love.

More importantly, Johnson's view that duties of love signify 'nothing more than respect as it applies to helping others and the like' is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the ways in which Kant explicitly differentiates duties of love and duties of respect. Kant claims that duties of respect are *owed* to other persons, whereas duties of love are not.⁷ Because we do not *owe* services of love to others, our beneficence puts others under an obligation of gratitude; conversely, when we show others respect, we merely give them what they are due and they thereby incur no debt to us (*MS* 6:450). Kant further claims that these two categories of duties are characterized by different affective states. '*Love and respect*,' Kant writes, 'are the feelings that accompany the carrying out of these duties' (*MS* 6:448).

It is clear then that whatever the duty of practical love entails, it must be distinct from duties of respect if we are to make any sense of Kant's division of duties.⁸ This is sufficient to merit rejecting the respect account of practical love. Let us turn our attention now to the second reductive account.

Strong support for the PBA account can be found in the *Groundwork*, where Kant presents what is arguably his clearest definition of practical love. Here practical love is contrasted with pathological love, or love from inclination. Following his discussion of action done *from the motive of duty* Kant writes,

It is undoubtedly in this way . . . that we are to understand the passages from scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For, love as inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty – even though no inclination impels us to it and, indeed, natural and unconquerable aversion opposes it – is *practical* and not *pathological* love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in principles of action and not in melting sympathy; and it alone can be commanded. (*G* 4:399)

The *Groundwork* account maintains that practical love is simply beneficent action performed from the motive of duty, which is more or less identical to the PBA account.⁹ Now, if this were Kant's only explanation of practical love, the textual evidence would overwhelmingly point in favor of the PBA account. However, Kant does not affirm his *Groundwork* description of practical love in later texts.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, published just a few years later, we find a significantly different account of practical love. Here Kant explains that the biblical commandment, *love God above all and your neighbor as yourself*,

. . . requires respect for a law that *commands love* and does not leave it to one's discretionary choice to make this one's principle. But love for God as inclination (pathological love) is impossible, for he is not an object of the senses. The same thing toward human beings is indeed possible but cannot be commanded, for it is not within the power of any human being to love someone merely on command. It is, therefore, only *practical love* that is understood in that kernel of all laws. To love God means, in this sense, to do what He commands *gladly*; to love one's neighbor means to practice all duties toward him *gladly*. But the command that makes this a rule cannot command us to have this disposition in dutiful actions but only to *strive* for it. (*KpV* 5:83)

In this later work, Kant still reads the Gospel injunction to 'love your neighbor' as commanding *practical* rather than *pathological* love; but here Kant understands practical love, not as beneficent action, but rather as performing *all of one's duties gladly*.¹⁰ *Practical love* signifies a morally ideal disposition, one which describes not just the agent's motive, but her

affective state as well. Because the law cannot directly command this disposition, our duty can be only to *strive* for it.

We find yet a third description of practical love in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. As noted at the outset of the paper, in this work Kant defines practical love as 'the maxim of benevolence . . . which results in beneficence' (MS 6:449). This account of practical love is admittedly the most obscure, for it is not entirely clear how we should understand *maxim of benevolence*. Those who endorse the PBA account would have us believe that the maxim of benevolence is simply a general policy of performing beneficent actions. But this interpretation is at least suspect, for it appears to disregard the distinctions Kant draws between the terms *benevolence* (*Wohlwollen*), *beneficence* (*Wohltun*), and *beneficent activity* (*Wohltätigkeit*). Consider the following passages:

Benevolence is satisfaction in the happiness (well-being) of others; but beneficence is the maxim of making others' happiness one's end . . . (MS 6:452)

Benevolence can be unlimited, since nothing need be done with it. But it is more difficult to do good . . . (MS 6:393).

. . . even mere heartfelt benevolence, apart from any such act (of beneficence), is already a basis of obligation to gratitude. (MS 6:455)

These passages make it clear that Kant does not take *benevolence* and *beneficence* to be synonymous. Given Kant's understanding of *benevolence*, the term would appear to be an odd choice for a maxim or policy of performing beneficent actions. Matters are complicated, however, by the addition of adjectives like *active* and *practical* in the following passages.

. . . what is meant here is not merely benevolence in wishes, which is, strictly speaking, only taking delight in the well-being of every other and does not require me to contribute to it . . . what is meant is, rather, *active, practical benevolence (beneficence)*, making the well-being and happiness of others my end. (MS 6:452, emphasis mine)

Since the love of human beings (philanthropy) we are thinking of here is *practical love*, not love that is delight in them, it must be taken as *active benevolence*, and so as having to do with the maxim of actions. (MS 6:450, emphasis mine)

These passages, taken together, suggest that *practical love* and *beneficence* are synonymous. But even this does not constitute evidence in support of the PBA account. For Kant does not understand *beneficence* (in this context) to mean adopting a policy of advancing the welfare of others; rather, *beneficence* designates 'making the well-being and happiness of others my end.'¹¹ The *Doctrine of Virtue* duty which most closely corresponds to the PBA account is the duty of beneficent activity designated by the term *Wohltätigkeit*. Kant writes, 'To be beneficent (*Wohltätig*), that is,

to promote according to one's means the happiness of others in need without hoping for something in return, is everyone's duty' (*MS* 6:453). Given that duties of virtue can prescribe only maxims of actions, not particular actions (*MS* 6:390), what the duty of beneficent activity requires is the adoption of a policy or maxim to promote unselfishly, and according to one's means, the happiness of others.

The PBA account would thus render the duty of practical love indistinguishable from the duty of beneficent activity. Guyer, in fact, openly acknowledges that his account of practical love renders these duties 'virtually identical.'¹² If we accept the PBA account, then we must acknowledge a redundancy of duties; we must accept that Kant assigned multiple designations to the same duty without ever acknowledging their equivalence. It is in virtue of this observation that I refer to the PBA account of practical love as a *reductive* account. Only when viewed in the context of the *Doctrine of Virtue* is the PBA account reductive; in the context of the *Groundwork*, there is nothing reductive about it.

In summary, we have seen that the PBA account most closely resembles the account of practical love that we find in the *Groundwork*. This description of practical love, however, is not found in Kant's later work. There is no evidence which supports the view that the PBA account is an accurate description of the duty of practical love that we find in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, though there is some evidence, namely the redundancy of duties, which suggests that the PBA account may not be the most plausible or attractive interpretation. In the next section I will propose an alternative rendering of Kantian practical love. What I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of the paper is that Kant's duties of love are more complicated and richer than the PBA account would lead us to believe.

2. *A non-reductive account of practical love*

How should we understand the duty of *practical love* as Kant presents it in the *Doctrine of Virtue*? We have noted that in this later work Kant defines practical love as the *maxim of benevolence* (*MS* 6:449). We are told that practical love should be understood as 'active benevolence and so having to do with the maxim of actions' (*MS* 6:450). Understanding Kantian practical love will thus require understanding what is intended by the *maxim of benevolence*. It will be helpful to begin by considering maxims of actions more generally.

In the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue* Kant tells us that 'Only the concept of an end that is also a duty, a concept that belongs exclusively to ethics, establishes a law for maxims of actions by subordinating the subjective end (that everyone has) to the objective end (that everyone ought to make his end)' (*MS* 6:389). An end that is also a duty is an end that pure

practical reason represents as objectively necessary for all human beings (*MS* 6:380). What are the ends that are also duties? In response to this question only two ends are identified: one's own perfection and the happiness of others (*MS* 6:385). Kant supplies two maxims of actions for the first end. With respect to our *natural* perfection, the prescribed maxim of actions is: 'Cultivate your powers of mind and body so that they are fit to realize any ends you might encounter' (*MS* 6:392). With regard to our *moral* perfection, however, the maxim is: 'Strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty' (*MS* 6:393).

Curiously, Kant is less forthcoming when it comes to supplying specific maxims of actions corresponding to the second end that is also a duty, the happiness of others. While it is clear that we are to promote others' happiness, Kant does not announce any particular maxim of actions as he does for one's own perfection. If we are to formulate these maxims on our own, it will be instructive to pay close attention to the maxims of actions Kant does provide. From the two maxims of actions quoted above, we can make the following observations. First, one obligatory end (e.g. one's own perfection) may give rise to more than one maxim of actions (e.g. the maxims of natural and moral perfection). And second, a maxim of actions may prescribe the performance of particular kinds of actions (e.g. actions that develop one's talents), but it may also, as is clearly the case with the maxim of moral perfection, prescribe the cultivation of a particular disposition or virtue.

Let us turn now to the concept of benevolence. As noted earlier, Kant defines benevolence as 'satisfaction in the happiness (well-being) of others' (*MS* 6:452). This definition suggests that the maxim of benevolence (practical love) might be a maxim of finding satisfaction in others' happiness. There is some evidence which speaks in favor of this view. In the first paragraph under the heading *On the Duty of Love in Particular* Kant writes, 'Since the love of human beings (philanthropy) we are thinking of here is practical love, not the love that is delight in them, it must be taken as active benevolence, and so as having to do with the maxim of actions' (*MS* 6:450). Immediately following this account of practical love Kant writes, 'Someone who finds satisfaction in the well-being (*salus*) of human beings considered simply as human beings, for whom it is well when things go well for every other, is called a *friend of humanity* in general (a philanthropist)' (*MS* 6:450). Though Kant distinguishes practical love from love which is the delight we take in others, his use of the terms *philanthropy* and *philanthropist* suggests a correlation between practical love and the disposition of the friend of humanity. The friend of humanity is said to find satisfaction in the wellbeing of others, which is precisely Kant's definition of benevolence (*MS* 6:452 quoted above). Furthermore, in the *Conclusion to the Elements of Ethics* Kant

acknowledges a 'duty of being benevolent as a friend of human beings' (*MS* 6:473).

But a duty to *be benevolent*, that is, to take pleasure in the happiness and wellbeing of others, presents a serious problem. If feelings cannot be willed, then there can be no duty to have a particular feeling, even one as laudable as benevolence. The solution to this problem may be found in Kant's second *Critique* interpretation of the biblical commandment to love one's neighbor. Recall that in this work Kant endorses the view that 'to love one's neighbor means to practice all duties toward him *gladly*.' Anticipating a version of the problem just identified, Kant immediately adds the following qualification: 'the command that makes this a rule cannot command us to have this disposition in dutiful actions but only to *strive* for it' (*KpV* 5:83).¹³ Though we cannot will ourselves to have a particular feeling the way we can will ourselves to perform particular actions, it does not follow that there can be no duties corresponding to an agent's affective disposition. What follows is that the duty must be restricted to the pursuit of or progress toward the disposition. What duty can command, then, is the *cultivation* of an affective disposition.

We cannot ignore Kant's frequent expression that our love for others should be channeled into the promotion of their welfare. As he explains,

[W]e must see to it that our inclination to love the other, and wish for his happiness, are not idle longings, or desires with no outcome, but practical desires. A practical desire is one that is directed not so much to the object as to actions whereby this object is brought about. We should not only take satisfaction in the welfare and happiness of others, but this satisfaction should relate to the effectual actions that contribute to this welfare. (*LE* 27:421)

Nonetheless, it is clear that Kant is not *exclusively* interested in beneficent actions. In addition to promoting the happiness of others, he tells us that we should find satisfaction in their wellbeing.

We observed earlier that a maxim of actions can be formulated in terms of the cultivation of a disposition or virtue. In light of the evidence above, I propose that we understand the maxim of benevolence, practical love, as the maxim of cultivating a benevolent disposition and practical beneficent desires. I will refer to this view as the *cultivation account* of practical love.¹⁴

Cultivation Account: The duty of practical love is the duty to cultivate a benevolent disposition toward other human beings as well as practical beneficent desires.

I understand 'benevolent disposition' to mean the state of being disposed to derive satisfaction from the happiness and wellbeing of others – the

disposition exemplified by Kant's friend of humanity. A 'practical beneficent desire,' in this context, is understood as a desire or inclination to perform beneficent actions (under the appropriate conditions). It should be noted that 'cultivate' in the cultivation account of practical love is not intended to be a success term. Universal benevolence is a moral ideal. Insofar as we are always susceptible to opposing inclinations, the cultivation of a benevolent disposition, like the cultivation of virtue, must always be *in progress* (MS 6:409).

The cultivation account avoids conflating the duty of practical love and the duty of beneficent activity and, in this respect, is more attractive than the PBA account. Comparing the PBA account of practical love to the cultivation account might lead one to think that Kant radically changed his view about practical love in the period between the publication of the *Groundwork* in 1785 and the publication of the *Metaphysics of Morals* twelve years later. The appearance of a radical shift in views is, however, contradicted by what we find in Kant's lectures. In the Collins lecture notes, which purportedly represent Kant's teaching from 1775-1784,¹⁵ we find passages such as the following.

I am not only obligated to well-doing, but also to loving others with well-wishing, and well-liking too . . . The injunction to love others is thus equally applicable to love from obligation and love from inclination; for if I love others from obligation, I thereby acquire a taste for loving, and by practice it becomes love from inclination. (LE 27:418-9)

A better explanation for the contrast we find between Kant's accounts of practical love in the *Groundwork* and the *Doctrine of Virtue* is that the two works are devoted to rather different philosophical tasks. *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is, as the title suggests, a preliminary work which aims to lay the foundations for a future metaphysics of morals. This preliminary work is 'nothing more than the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality, which constitutes by itself a business that in its purpose is complete and to be kept apart from every other moral investigation' (G 4:392). Kant's expressed intention, when writing the *Groundwork*, is to postpone a systematic articulation of our duties for an anticipated future work.¹⁶

There are two additional pieces of evidence that support the cultivation account of practical love – the unique nature of the fundamental duty of love, the duty to make the happiness of others one's end, and the moral endowment Kant calls *love of human beings*. In the following two sections I will examine how these components of Kant's moral theory reinforce to the interpretation of practical love that I have proposed.

3. *Adopting an obligatory end and the cultivation of benevolence*

Adopting an end, any end, entails, at the very least, a commitment to act in certain ways. As Allen Wood describes it, 'To set an end is to undertake a self-given normative commitment to carry out some plan for achieving the end.'¹⁷ Agents who regard the obligatory ends as *their* ends should be committed to a policy of consistently promoting these ends. Does adopting an obligatory end require any *more* than this? There is reason to believe that it does. Consider Kant's description of the vices directly opposed to love of human beings:

Envy is a propensity to view the well-being of others with distress, even though it does not detract from one's own . . . (MS 6:458-9)

. . . ingratitude is a vice that shocks humanity, not merely because of the harm that such an example must bring on people in general by deterring them from further beneficence . . . but because ingratitude stands love of humanity on its head . . . (MS 6:459)

And with respect to the vice of malice (*Schadenfreude*) Kant explains,

It is indeed natural that, by the laws of the imagination (namely, the law of contrast), we feel our own well-being and even our good conduct more strongly when the misfortune of others or their downfall in scandal is put next to our condition, as a foil to show it in so much the brighter light. But to rejoice immediately in the existence of such enormities destroying what is best in the world as a whole, and so also to wish for them to happen, is secretly to hate human beings; and this is the direct opposite of love for our neighbor, which is incumbent on us as a duty. (MS 6:460)

What we learn from Kant's account of these vices is that certain feelings, attitudes, and dispositions are fundamentally opposed to our duties of love to others, independent of the actions which may or may not follow from them. This is because these feelings and dispositions, referred to as vices of hatred, are incompatible with regarding the happiness of others as one's end. In what sense can I be said to hold others' happiness as one of my ends if their wellbeing conjures feelings of resentment or distress, or worse, if I wish for or rejoice in their misfortunes?

Discussions of our duties of love to others, even Kant's own discussion, tend to treat the adoption of the obligatory end as a fairly trivial endeavor. The performance component of the duty, promoting the end, has historically garnered the lion's share of attention. Questions such as, to whom should we be beneficent, how often, and to what extent, are common topics of debate. Unfortunately, this encourages the view that the adoption of the obligatory end is a brief event that occurs once, ideally early in one's moral life, which is then followed by so many

beneficent actions. This, I believe, is a gross distortion of what must be entailed in making the happiness of others one's end, for it fails to acknowledge that adopting a moral end requires agents to transform themselves in non-trivial ways.

As Christine Korsgaard has pointed out, adopting an obligatory end is significantly different from adopting a personal (optional) end. As she describes it,

When the end is one that is suggested by natural inclination, we are already inclined to perceive the world in the relevant way. Indeed, that you are inclined to perceive the world that way is the form that the incentive takes. Our sensible nature here helps us out. But when the end is one prompted by reason this may not be the case. Here, you are imposing a change on your sensible nature, and your sensible nature may, and probably will, be recalcitrant. Although adopting an end is a volitional act, it is one that you can only do gradually and perhaps incompletely.¹⁸

Korsgaard recognizes that adopting an end also entails an affective component.

To the extent to which moral ends have really become our ends, we will take pleasure in the pursuit of them. Indeed, we will have all the emotions appropriate to having them . . . Although only the outward practices can be required of us, Kant makes it clear in many passages that he believes that in the state of realized virtue these feelings will be present . . . Feelings of sympathy, gratitude and delight in the happiness of others are not directly incumbent upon us, but they are the natural result of making the ends of others our own, as the duty demands.¹⁹

Korsgaard's account suggests a causal relation between adopting the happiness of others as an end and acquiring certain feelings, such as delight in their wellbeing. If we make the end our own, we will come to have certain feelings. But how is it that we come to have this change in feelings? Some explanation seems to be required.

I want to propose a modification to Korsgaard's account of adopting an obligatory end. Rather than thinking that the adoption of a moral end necessarily changes the agent, it is more reasonable to think that duties of virtue (duties which correspond to obligatory ends) are duties which command agents to change themselves. We *make* the happiness of others our end, in part, by actively cultivating the appropriate attitudes, feelings, and desires.²⁰ Thus understood, adopting an obligatory end is a *process* rather than an *event*. One component of the process requires agents to adopt a policy of promoting the end. A second component requires agents to transform themselves such that they come to regard the end as truly their own.²¹ This second component is the duty of practical love as described in the cultivation account. The duty of practical love should thus be understood as derivative of the duty to *make* others' happiness one's end.

I have argued that adopting the happiness of others as one's end requires the kind of active self-transformation described in the cultivation account of practical love. Let us turn now to a final piece of evidence in support of this interpretation of practical love, Kant's account of our natural moral endowments.

4. *Love of one's neighbor and the duty of practical love*

In the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue* Kant identifies four moral endowments – *moral feeling*, *conscience*, *love of one's neighbor*, and *respect for oneself* (*self-esteem*). These moral endowments are described as 'natural predispositions of the mind (*praedispositio*) for being affected by the concepts of duty, antecedent predispositions on the side of feeling' and 'the subjective conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty' (*MS* 6:399). There can be no obligation to have or acquire any of these moral endowments, Kant tells us, for in their absence a human being could not be placed under obligation. Kant is confident that every human being does possess these moral endowments; however, one becomes aware of these predispositions only after one is conscious of the moral law (*MS* 6:399).

The moral endowment that is particularly relevant to our discussion of practical love is the endowment Kant calls *love of one's neighbor* (*MS* 6:399) or *love of human beings* (*Menschenliebe*) (*MS* 6:401). (Henceforth I will refer to this moral endowment simply as *Menschenliebe*.) Following a general account of the moral endowments, Kant devotes a section of text to the explication of each. Unfortunately, the section devoted to *Menschenliebe* is peculiar, for unlike the sections devoted to the other moral endowments, here Kant never tells us what *Menschenliebe* actually is. In fact, he mentions *Menschenliebe* only once in this section, where his focus seems to be on our *duties* of love to others rather than the moral endowment for which there can be no duty.

Nonetheless, we can appeal to what Kant does say about the other moral endowments in order to make a case for how we ought to think about *Menschenliebe*. Kant claims that the moral endowments are predisposition for being affected by the *concepts* of duty. The fact that the plural 'concepts' is used suggests that some moral endowments are necessary for being affected by particular concepts of duty and others are not. This interpretation is supported by Kant's description of self-respect. He explains, 'it is not correct to say that a human being has a duty of self-esteem; it must rather be said that the law within him unavoidably forces from him respect for his own being, and this feeling (which is of a special kind) *is the basis of certain duties*, that is, certain actions that are consistent with *his duty to himself*' (*MS* 6:402–403,

emphasis mine). If self-respect is the basis of duties to oneself, then it is natural to think that *Menschenliebe* must be the basis of other-regarding duties, in particular, duties of love to others. We might say that *Menschenliebe* is the subjective condition of receptiveness to the duty to make the happiness of others one's end.

If we turn our attention to the section devoted to the endowment Kant calls *moral feeling*, we learn that these moral endowments are the kinds of things that can be cultivated. *Moral feeling*, Kant tells us, is 'the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty' (*MS* 6:399). He continues,

Since consciousness of obligation depends upon moral feeling to make us aware of the constraint present in the thought of duty, there can be no duty to have moral feeling or to acquire it; instead every human being (as a moral being) has it in him originally. Obligation with regard to moral feeling can only be to cultivate it and to strengthen it through wonder at its inscrutable source. This comes about by its being shown how it is set apart from any pathological stimulus . . . (*MS* 6:399–400)

If there is a duty to cultivate and strengthen moral feeling, then it is plausible to think that there are corresponding duties to cultivate and strengthen the other moral endowments, including *Menschenliebe*. Kant, in fact, appears to suggest just this. In the section devoted to *Menschenliebe* he writes that,

Beneficence is a duty. If someone practices it often and succeeds in realizing his beneficent intention, he eventually comes to actually love the person he has helped. So the saying 'you ought to love your neighbor as yourself' does not mean that you ought immediately (first) to love him and (afterwards) by means of this love do good to him. It means, rather, do good to your fellow human beings, and your beneficence will produce love of them (*Menschenliebe*) in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general). (*MS* 6:402)

Here Kant suggests that the feeling of love for others is a natural and desirable consequence of beneficent conduct and thus might be cultivated through the consistent practice of beneficence.²² But this need not be the whole story. Like moral feeling, *Menschenliebe* can be cultivated and strengthened by reflecting on its inscrutable source. Agents may cultivate general benevolence by reflecting on the equal worth of all persons, and can strengthen these feelings by considering the attributes one shares in common with others. In reflection, I can acknowledge that all human beings stand in the same relation to their happiness as I stand to mine, and that we are all vulnerable to the capriciousness of nature and dependent upon others for the successful realization of our ends. It is also plausible to think that a benevolent attitude is fostered by reflecting on the fact that agents are deserving of happiness to the extent that

they are virtuous. This gives us reason to hope that virtue is rewarded with happiness.²³

Thus I believe that acknowledging the moral endowment Kant calls love of human beings, as well as the likely duty to cultivate this moral feeling in us, supports the cultivation account of practical love and illuminates the nature of this duty. If what the duty of practical love prescribes is the cultivation of *Menschenliebe*, then what we are to cultivate is not mere pathological feeling, but rather a special kind of moral feeling, namely, the general love of human beings which makes us receptive to particular concepts of duty.²⁴

5. Conclusion

At this point I take it that we have resolved our original query regarding the duty of practical love. I have argued that the cultivation account is the best interpretation of practical love as Kant construes it in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Understanding practical love as a duty to cultivate a benevolent disposition and practical beneficent desires allows us to make sense of Kant's decision to employ the language of love in his account of our ethical duties to others. It is fairly clear that Kant does not wish to exclude love as a feeling from the moral sphere. His claim, at the beginning of the section devoted to the duties of virtue to others, that '*Love and respect are the feelings that accompany the carrying out of these duties*' (MS 6:448, emphasis mine), should alone suffice to dispel any opinions to the contrary. By framing practical love in terms of the cultivation of an affective disposition we preserve the correct meaning of love, as Kant understands it (i.e. we do not reduce love to respect or beneficent action), while not obliging agents to do that which is beyond their capacity to will (i.e. to feel a particular way immediately). This account thus solves the problem of how a duty *of love* is possible even though a duty *to love* is not.

A close inspection of Kant's duties of love reveals that all of these duties – beneficent activity, gratitude, sympathetic participation, and practical love – contain affective components. We are not simply obliged to promote others' happiness; we are obliged to promote their happiness *unselfishly* and in accordance with *their* conception of happiness (MS 6:453-4). Similarly, we do not satisfy the duty of gratitude by merely *showing* gratitude to our benefactors. We are obliged to cultivate in ourselves a disposition of *appreciativeness* (MS 6:455). Kant goes so far as to claim that we should take 'even the occasion of gratitude . . . as an opportunity given one to unite the virtue of gratitude with love of man . . . and so to cultivate one's love of human beings' (MS 6:456).

The duty of sympathetic participation is perhaps the best known Kantian duty that calls for the cultivation of our feelings. In accordance

with this duty, we are to employ our natural receptivity to share in others' feelings as a means to producing cultivated (moral) sympathetic feelings.²⁵ The duty of practical love, as I have described it, may appear to be very similar to the duty of sympathetic participation; however, there is no redundancy of duties here. Sympathetic feelings are the joy and sadness we feel as a direct response to others' feelings (*MS* 6:456). Benevolence, on the other hand, is a kind of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) that one feels in response to others' wellbeing or happiness. Benevolent feelings do not mimic or mirror the feelings of others, and do not depend on exposure to the particular feelings of others. An agent with a cultivated benevolent disposition may find satisfaction in learning that rain has fallen in a distant draught-stricken area without literally sharing in the feelings of others.²⁶

Once we acknowledge the affective components of the duties of love, we see that these duties reveal how Kant's moral theory is informed by his understanding of nature and human nature. In his 1784 essay, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,' Kant contends that the natural end of the human being is the complete development of its capacities, particularly the use of reason. This end cannot be achieved by the individual, but only by the species as a whole. 'The means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities is that of antagonism within society, in so far as this antagonism becomes in the long run the cause of law-governed social order' (*IAG* 8:20). Human beings are roused to develop their capacities by competitive vanity and the desire for property and power over others, which lead to the development of civilized society. However, there is a limit to the utility of this natural antagonism. As Allen Wood observes, 'Once we have attained a civilized condition, the further development of our faculties is threatened by social antagonism itself.'²⁷

When social antagonism ceases to promote the development of human capacities, morality is needed to eradicate it. Wood explains,

Morality's task is to replace nature with reason in human culture, to bring about a systematic rational community of all human ends. Whereas right is to *control* social conflict in the interests of nature's ultimate purpose, morality is to *abolish* it in order to actualize the final human end. The vocation of morality is to transform humanity into a harmonious community of free rational beings, a realm of ends whose members live together freely according to a consciously self-devised plan.²⁸

Understood in this context, the duties of love can be seen as part of morality's task of combating social antagonism and paving the way for the transition from civilization to moralization. For the individual, moralization requires 'the disposition to choose nothing but good ends . . . those which are necessarily approved by everyone and which can be the simultaneous ends for everyone' (*P* 9:450). We might speculate and

say that Kant's final interpretation of the latter part of the Gospel commandment takes shape in the doctrine of obligatory ends. Given that we express self-love by desiring and pursuing our own happiness, we love our neighbors *as ourselves* by making their happiness one of our ends.²⁹

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NOTES

¹ I use the following abbreviations for the following translations of Kant's works. Volume and page numbers refer to the Prussian Academy edition of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*.

MS *The Metaphysics of Morals*, M. Gregor, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

G *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, M. Gregor, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

KpV *Critique of Practical Reason*, M. Gregor, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

A *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, R. B. Louden, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

LE *Lectures on Ethics*, P. Heath, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

IAG 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,' A. Wood, trans., in *Immanuel Kant Anthropology, History, and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

P *Lectures on Pedagogy*, R. Louden, trans., in *Immanuel Kant Anthropology, History, and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

² The German term *Vergnügen* denotes pleasure.

³ Johnson, R. (1997). 'Love in Vain,' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 (supplement), pp. 45-50, at p. 46.

⁴ Wood, A. (1999). *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 270. Wood offers other descriptions of practical love which may or may not be equivalent to the account cited above. He alternatively describes practical love as: 'a kind of *action* in conformity with duty (though not necessarily done from duty)' (Wood, A. (2008). *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 35); 'a rational predisposition to unselfish beneficence in response to the command of duty' (Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 38); and 'a desire to benefit another in response to the command of duty' (Wood, A. (1997). 'The Final Form of Kant's Practical Philosophy,' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 (supplement), p. 15).

⁵ Guyer, P. (1993). *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 384.

⁶ By 'the basic principle of respect for humanity' I take Johnson to mean the formulation of the categorical imperative frequently referred to as the *formula of humanity* (*G* 4:429).

⁷ Kant claims that duties of love are *meritorious*. It should be noted that *meritorious* in this context is not equivalent to *supererogatory*. Rather, Kant understands *meritorious* to indicate that which is morally *required*, but which another is not entitled to demand of me as his or her due (*MS* 6:391).

⁸ For further discussion of this division of duties see Baron, M. (2002). 'Love and Respect in the *Doctrine of Virtue*,' in M. Timmons (ed.) *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: Interpretative Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ In defending their interpretations of practical love both Johnson and Wood appeal directly to the *Groundwork* passage quoted above. See Johnson, 'Love in Vain,' p. 45; Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, p. 35, and 'The Final Form of Kant's Practical Philosophy,' p. 15.

¹⁰ The German term is *gern*, which is also translated as *with pleasure*.

¹¹ The difference between adopting an obligatory end and adopting a policy to promote the end will be explicated in greater detail in the third section of the paper.

¹² Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p. 385.

¹³ It should be noted that the disposition to which Kant refers in this passage is 'the moral disposition in its complete perfection' as exemplified in a holy will. I do not intend to address Kant's conception of moral perfection in this paper, though I suspect that the relationship between the command to *be holy* and the cultivation of feelings and dispositions particular to human beings is worth investigating. I refer to this passage only insofar as it provides us with an example of a duty to *strive* for a state of character which the moral law cannot directly command.

¹⁴ Mary Gregor has offered a similar interpretation of Kantian practical love. According to Gregor, 'benevolence or well-wishing is the general attitude toward men as such enjoined by the principle of practical love . . . The love which it is a duty to have for other men is . . . practical love, a maxim of concern for their welfare,' (Gregor, M. (1963). *Laws of Freedom*, New York: Barnes and Nobles, p. 191). Gregor's account of the duty of practical love, however, contains no indication that the *cultivation* this attitude is morally prescribed. Other commentators have proposed or acknowledged Kantian duties to cultivate positive feelings toward other persons, though not necessarily in connection with the duty of practical love. See Schaller, W. (1987). 'Kant's Architectonic of Duties,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48:2, pp. 299–314; Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, pp. 335–393; and Sherman, N. (1997). *Making a Necessity of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 121–186.

¹⁵ See Schneewind, J. B. (1997). 'Introduction', in *Immanuel Kant Lectures on Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ See *G* 4:422n. I thank an anonymous referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for bringing this point to my attention.

¹⁷ Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 61.

¹⁸ Korsgaard, C. (1996). *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 180.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 191. In addition to the pleasure Korsgaard acknowledges, it is also reasonable to think that an attachment to and pursuit of particular ends will also generate feelings of frustration and disappointment if and when our pursuit is less than successful. The relationship between an agent and her ends is undoubtedly a complex one, which entails pleasant as well as unpleasant emotions. I thank Paul D. Eisenberg for bringing this to my attention.

²⁰ For a similar view see Schaller, 'Kant's Architectonic of Duties.'

²¹ The duty of moral perfection is similarly divided into two components. On the one hand, the duty 'consists objectively in fulfilling all one's duties and in attaining completely one's moral end with regard to oneself.' But the duty also requires agents to strive for 'purity in one's disposition to duty' (*MS* 6:446). There is a concern that the cultivation of sensible feelings and practical desires would encumber or corrupt the cultivation of a *pure* disposition to duty. If this is the case, then it would appear that Kant articulated a set of duties that are in tension with one another. Alternatively, the cultivation of sensible feelings may be found

to *support* the cultivation of a pure disposition to duty, or be completely neutral to it. The relationship between the cultivation of sensible feelings and the cultivation of a morally pure will is an aspect of Kant's ethics that merits consideration that is beyond the scope of this paper. It should be noted, however, that my account of the duty of practical love merely highlights this potential for conflict; it does not introduce it. Kant frequently encourages the cultivation of feelings such as love, compassion, and appreciativeness in his later work. See *MS* 6:402, 455–457.

²² See also *LE* 27:417–421.

²³ One might wonder what the duties of love require of us with respect to vicious persons. While it seems clear enough that we are not required to promote the happiness of the vicious (and if their ends are vicious, we will not be *permitted* to assist them with these), what the duty of practical love requires of us may be less clear. Is it morally appropriate to find satisfaction in the happiness or good fortune of someone who is cruel or selfish? Several points should be borne in mind here. First, if the happiness is a product of immoral activity we clearly should take no pleasure in it. Second, we must always be cautious when assessing the virtue of others. We are never epistemically justified in presuming that any agent is *wholly vicious*, and thus never entitled to conclude that the agent is wholly undeserving of the good fortune she has received. In these situations we should be on guard not to confuse moral disapproval with resentment and envy. And third, we need not expect that the pleasure we take in the happiness or wellbeing of others will be uniform. The pleasure we take in the good fortune of an apparently cruel and selfish individual will naturally and appropriately be diminished by the reservations we have with respect to her character and worthiness. (I thank the faculty and graduate students at Bowling Green State University for introducing these questions during a discussion of an earlier draft of this paper in February 2007.)

²⁴ See *MS* 6:399. I thank an anonymous referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for bringing this point to my attention.

²⁵ See Fahmy, M. S. (2009). 'Active Sympathetic Participation: Reconsidering Kant's Duty of Sympathy,' *Kantian Review* 14, pp. 31–52.

²⁶ While the duties of practical love and sympathetic participation are distinct, they have much in common psychologically. The duty of sympathetic participation involves removing obstacles to sympathy, including as indifference, envy, resentment, jealousy, ingratitude, and *Schadenfruede*. These obstacles would also be impediments to cultivating a benevolent disposition and practical desires (or *appreciativeness* for that matter).

²⁷ Wood, A. (1991). 'Unsociable Sociability: The Anthropological Basis of Kantian Ethics,' *Philosophical Topics* 19, pp. 325–351, at p. 341.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

²⁹ I am very grateful to Marcia Baron, Paul D. Eisenberg, Richard B. Miller, Kevin Toh, an anonymous referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, as well as the faculty and graduate students at Indiana University, the University of New Mexico, the University of Guelph, the University of Georgia, and Bowling Green State University for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.