

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the possibility of using Kant's theory of moral formation in the context of virtue education, as it aims to highlight its practical implications through an analysis of his works *Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766*, *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice* (1783), with an emphasis on his theory of moral development and its rational basis, and the analysis of virtues.

**Key words:** Kant, Morality, Bildung, Cosmopolitanism, Virtue

## Introduction

Moral thinking today is often associated only with the level of rational reasoning (cognition), which can often cause it to be structurally separated from other theories (faculties of reason) of understanding the world. According to Kant, we have not yet reached the moral stage in the philosophy of history, but we are moving towards it and see various emerging initiatives to develop moral teaching<sup>1</sup>, critical thinking, or character education as possible gradual initiatives to fulfil his ideas. When we speak about moral theory connected to Kant, we can trace it in various of his works, such as *The Critique of the Practical Reason*, *The*

<sup>1</sup> For more information look at: Paul, R. W., Elde, L., 2013. *The Thinker's Guide to Ethical Reasoning*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools*, 2024. University of Birmingham: The Jubilee Centre for Characters & Virtues. [Accessed: 2024-11-3]. Available at: <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/The-Jubilee-Centre-Framework-for-Character-Education-in-Schools-April-2024.pdf>; Gardner, H., 2006. *Five Minds for the Future*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press; Friedman, M., 2000. Educating for World Citizenship. *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 110(3), pp. 586 – 601. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/233325>.

*Metaphysics of Morals*, *The Critique of Judgment*, etc. This idea is connected not only with practical application of one's will but also with the formation of his thinking or enhancing virtues. As Ziche (2023) writes, the virtues must be flexible and open-ended because they are characterized by being universally applicable without knowing in advance what situation we may encounter, which creates a paradox in the formation of one's own virtues through education, for example: it is a problem to develop clearly structured and controlled educational programmes to train fully autonomous, creative citizens (scientists, artists, etc.) when they do not have a uniform structure. In his paper, Giesinger (2012) suggests that the possibility of moral education is challenged in Kant by the existence of two selves (noumenal and phenomenal self). "If the free self is non-empirical, i.e. not embedded in the temporal and causal order of the natural world, then it is not clear how it can develop and how its development can be influenced by education."<sup>2</sup>

### Virtuous formation

The last stage of Kant's notion of education, the process of moralization, is where the idea of world citizenship is anchored, to be carried across generations and thus reached its ultimate purpose. The virtuous action of the individual, laid down in his moral thought by a categorical imperative, is the instrument of providence that causes the growth of humanity. Morality is not a mere theoretical base but a place from which practical virtuous action begins. It is not enough to speak of the individual acting morally only for himself. The consequences of his actions are cosmopolitan, manifesting themselves at the level of society, which I will try to indicate by an analysis in the following lines. Theory in Kant's writings does not merely remain a written word for his readers, but he uses it to spur man to its realization, which is in no small measure manifested in his connection of theory with practice, e.g. in the text *On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice* (1793), where he writes: "Everyone in his capacity as a human being, a being subjected by his own reason to certain duties, is accordingly a *man of affairs*."<sup>3</sup> He points here to the direct relation between theory and practice,

<sup>2</sup> Giesinger, J., 2012. Kant's Account of Moral Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44(7), p. 775. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2011.00754.x.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, I., 1793. *On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice*. In: *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 289.

adding at the same time that the striving for the improvement of the human race and its advance towards virtuous action is its ultimate purpose:

I shall therefore be allowed to assume that, since the human race is constantly advancing with respect to culture (as its natural end) it is also to be conceived as progressing toward what is better with respect to the moral end of its existence, and that this will indeed be interrupted from time to time but will never be broken of [...]. For I rest my case on my innate duty, the duty of every member in the series of generations - to which I (as a human being in general) belong and am yet not so good in the moral character" required of me as I ought to be and hence could be - so to influence posterity that it becomes always better (the possibility of this must, accordingly, also be assumed), and to do it in such a way that this duty may be legitimately handed down from one member [in the series of] generations to another.<sup>4</sup>

Kant's ideas connected to pedagogy are explicitly related to his philosophy of history, which suggests their permanent process of being shaped, and includes the various meanings of education, as Friedrich Theodor Rink, Kant's disciple and relative, writes about them in the introduction to *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1931 / 1803), published after Kant's death. Here he speaks of the phenomenon of education in connection with care (*Wartung*), tending, nourishment (*Verpflegung*, *Unterweisung*), discipline (*Disziplin*, *Zucht*), teaching (*Unterweisung*), and moral education / formation (*Bildung*). From these meanings of education, then, a scheme of education can be constructed as a succession of linear stages through which man is disciplined, cultivated, civilized, and moralized. By disciplining, man frees himself from savagery by the control of his own reason. By cultivating, one builds a new nature (culture), which is concretely manifested in the building of intellectual and technical skills. In the third phase of education, man socializes, builds society, civilizes himself. These are external manifestations of culture, such as politeness or adaptation to social conditions.<sup>5</sup> The last culminating phase of human and social development is moralizing, i.e. "a person [...] has to acquire such a mindset that he chooses only good goals. Good ends are those which are necessarily approved of by everyone and which also at

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>5</sup> Kyslan, P., 2015. Multikultúrna výchova verus Kantova výchova k svetoobčianstvu. In: Belás, E. – Zelizňaková, E., eds. *12. kantovský vedecký zborník*. Prešov: Filozofická fakulta PU v Prešove, p. 58. Available at: <https://www.pulib.sk/web/pdf/web/viewer.html?file=/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Belas2/subor/9788055514536.pdf>.

the same time can be the ends of everyone.”<sup>6</sup> The practical application of the theory of world citizenship is thus the education of the individual to a moral stage, which thus tends towards his ultimate purpose, and thus builds a world-civic society. Education is the fulfilment of cosmopolitanism, which thus moves from generation to generation to its ultimate purpose: “the design for a plan of education must be made in a cosmopolitan manner.”<sup>7</sup>

In Kant's system of morality, we are bound with the idea of categorical imperative forming his ethics. This imperative is a maxim, but not a subjective one. The categorical imperative is a maxim, which is categorical because, if it is to be necessary, it cannot depend on the will of the contingent conditions of the subject. In men, then, the moral law is a categorically imperative because the law is unconditioned; such a will is in a relation of dependence to that law called binding, which implies a compulsion to act, even if only by pure reason and its objective law:

In the first case [case of human beings, author's note], however, the law has a form of an *imperative*, [...] that commands categorically, because the law is unconditioned; the relation of such a will to this law is *dependence* under the name of obligation, which signifies a *necessitation*, though only by reason and its objective law, to an action which is called *duty*, because a choice that is pathologically affected (though not thereby determined, hence still free), brings with it a wish arising from *subjective* causes, because of which it can often be opposed to the pure objective determining ground and thus needs a resistance of practical reason which, as moral necessitation, may be called an internal but intellectual constraint.<sup>8</sup>

It is the duty of mankind to gradually approach eternal peace through morally-minded individuals who improve their virtue through practice. But what is virtue itself in Kant's thought? In his book *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in the section *The Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant defines virtue not as the capacity and long-standing habit of morally good actions, but as the strength of will of the human maxim in the fulfilment of its duty<sup>9</sup>, which is acquired by man overcoming his natural inclinations that come into conflict with moral discernment:

<sup>6</sup> Kant, I., 1931. *O výchově*. Praha: Dědictví Komenského, pp. 42 – 43.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, I., 1803. Lectures on Pedagogy. In: *Anthropology, History, and Education*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 442.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, I., 1793. Critique of Practical Reason. In: *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 165 – 166.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, I., 1797. The Doctrine of Virtue. In: *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 189.

*Virtue* is the strength of man's maxims in fulfilling his duty. Strength of any kind can be recognized only by the obstacles it can overcome, and in the case of virtue these obstacles are natural inclinations, which can come into conflict with man's moral resolution; and since it is man *himself* who puts these obstacles in the way of his maxims, virtue is not merely a self-constraint (for then one natural inclination could strive to overcome another), but also a self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom, and so through the mere representation of one's duty in accordance with its formal law.<sup>10</sup>

It is an intrinsic limitation in accordance with the prescriptions of intrinsic freedom and with the pure representation of human duty according to its formal law with which he relates his idea of the categorical imperative. The attainment of virtue is not merely a possibility for man, but his inner duty, for it exists in man not only as a prerequisite of his freedom, but as a power which is acquired by the contemplation of the dignity of the rational law and the practice of virtue:

It is also correct to say that man is under obligation to [acquire] *virtue* (as moral strength). For while the capacity (*facultas*) to overcome all opposing sensible impulses can and must be simply *presupposed* in man on account of his freedom, yet this capacity as *strength* (*robur*) is something he must acquire; and the way to acquire it is to enhance the moral *incentive* (the thought of the law), both by contemplating the dignity of the pure rational law in us (*contemplatione*) and by *practicing* virtue (*exercitio*).<sup>11</sup>

And according to Kant, "the utmost that finite practical reason can effect is to make sure of this unending progress of one's maxims toward this model and of their constancy in continual progress, that is, virtue..."<sup>12</sup> The prerequisite for the practice of virtue is his encounters with vices, which he must combat through the will. The will adopts the rule, and thus gives to desire a universal law:

Virtue is, therefore, the moral strength of a *man's* will in fulfilling his *duty*, a moral *constraint* through his own lawgiving reason, insofar as this constitutes itself an authority *executing* the law. Virtue itself, or possession of it, is not a duty (for then one would have to be put under obligation to [have] duties); rather, it commands and accompanies its command with a moral

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, I., 1793. Critique of Practical Reason. In: *Practical Philosophy*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 166.

constraint (a constraint possible in accordance with laws of inner freedom). But because this constraint is to be irresistible, strength is required, in a degree we can assess only by the magnitude of the obstacles that man himself furnishes through his inclinations. The vices, the brood of dispositions opposing the law, are the monsters he has to fight.<sup>13</sup>

What are the conditions of virtue? Kant speaks of mastery in the repression of affects and in the control of one's passions. Affect is merely a lack of virtue, whereas passion is a rational desire which became a permanent inclination (it is already hatred). Virtuous action here, then, consists in the subjection of human faculties and inclinations to the commands of reason, to the rational government of the self: "Affects and passions are essentially different from each other. Affects belong to feeling insofar as, preceding reflection, it makes this impossible or more difficult. Hence an affect is called *precipitate* or *rash* (*animus praeceps*), and reason says, through the concept of virtue, that one should *get hold of oneself*."<sup>14</sup>

An interesting observation, which can be found in the note to the 16<sup>th</sup> article of this dossier, is its gradual acquisition and always new beginning of formation. Virtue is an ideal to which we can only approach, and it always begins anew, for each man struggles with his own nature and inclinations:

Virtue is always in *progress* and yet always starts *from the beginning*. It is always in progress because, considered *objectively*, it is an ideal and unattainable, while yet constant approximation to it is a duty. That it always starts from the beginning has a *subjective* basis in human nature, which is affected by inclinations because of which virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all but, if it is not rising, is unavoidably sinking.<sup>15</sup>

In the gradual line of pedagogy which Kant suggests, moral sense must be in the last part of education, because it is to be laid on principles, maxims, not on habit. If we want to develop moral thinking we cannot use punishments, since "[m]orality is something so holy and sublime that one must not degrade it and place it on the same level with discipline."<sup>16</sup> The first task in the development of the moral mind is the devel-

<sup>13</sup> Kant, I., 1797. The Doctrine of Virtue. In: *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1991, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 209 – 210.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, I., 1803. Lectures on Pedagogy. In: *Anthropology, History, and Education*. The Cam-

opment of character, which, according to Kant, resides in the capacity to act according to maxims, which are the subjective laws of the individual. This task is to be secured in the making of a definite plan of certain laws which they must observe, such as the setting of times for sleep, work, etc.: “If one wishes to form a character in children, it is very important to draw their attention to a certain plan in all things, certain laws, known to them, which they must follow exactly. Thus, for example, one sets for them a time for sleep, for work, for amusement, and these one must then not extend or shorten.”<sup>17</sup> The second task consists in truthfulness, the third in the creation of sociability.<sup>18</sup>

In the writings analysed so far, Kant comes up with a certain draft to be followed in order to create character in the individual. It manifests itself in the learning of duties towards oneself (preservation of dignity, truthfulness, etc.) and towards others (reverence, respect, sincerity).<sup>19</sup> Moral education culminates in the young individual who is able to enter into marriage, is aware of the differences between social classes and is conscious of his cosmopolitan disposition: “The young man should learn early to foster a decent respect for the other sex, to earn its respect through activity which is free from vice, and thus to strive after the high prize of a happy marriage [...] One must stress to him philanthropy towards others and then also cosmopolitan dispositions.”<sup>20</sup>

### How to *teach* a character?

The possible problem I hinted in the introduction to this paper is expressed by Giesinger’s idea. He asks how we can educate, that is, encourage the development of a self that is embedded in a noumenal world without causality. The categorical imperative, however, presupposes the existence of moral maxims that the individual finds in himself by his reason, which Kant suggests in his lectures: “Maxims must originate

bridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 468.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, I., 1931. *O výchově*. Praha: Dědictví Komenského, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Zákutná deals with Kant’s view on the question of moral formation, which is supported by cosmopolitan education of individuals who become self-conscious people who are able to think independently and at the same time make decisions for the good of the commonwealth. Zákutná, S., 2023. Sebaporozumenie v Kantovej teórii svetoobčianstva. *Filozofia* 78(6), 462 – 473. doi: <https://doi.org/10.31577/filozofia.2023.78.6.4>.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, I., 1803. Lectures on Pedagogy. In: *Anthropology, History, and Education*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 484 – 485.

from the human being himself.”<sup>21</sup> The fact that the moral law is necessarily presupposed by every human individual does not at the same time imply that the individual must be aware of these presuppositions, so that there is naturally room for the development of these presuppositions. In the *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803), Kant also gives an example of a method by which to arrive at moralization, and that is *the Socratic method* used in the case of teaching universal religion<sup>22</sup> (*geoffenbarte Religion / allgemeine Religion*). Education here, then, consists in the evocation of those rational presuppositions which were already primordially present in the individual. To promote the realization (*Bestimmung*) of one's vocation thus means to enable the pupil to understand and accept what he necessarily presupposes: to see himself as a noumenal self that can determine his will in accordance with the moral law.<sup>23</sup> Here Giesinger refers to other point mentioned in the *Lectures*: “Maxims too are laws, but subjective ones; they originate from the human being's own understanding.”<sup>24</sup>

Other Kantian scholars stress the method called *zetetic*<sup>25</sup> which Kant also mentions, for example in his text *Announcement of the Programme of Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765—1766*. In this text, Kant emphasizes that the method of the teacher should orient towards understanding the difference between thoughts and thinking because “it is not *thoughts* but *thinking* which the understanding ought to learn. It ought to be *led*, if you wish, but not *carried*, so that in the future it will be capable of *walking* on its own, and doing so without stumbling.”<sup>26</sup> Kant's zetetic method is particularly mentioned afterwards: “The method of instruction, peculiar to philosophy, is zetetic, as some of the philosophers of antiquity expressed it. [...] In other words, the method of

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

<sup>23</sup> Giesinger, J., 2012. Kant's Account of Moral Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44(7), p. 785. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2011.00754.x.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, I., 1803. Lectures on pedagogy. In: *Anthropology, History, and Education*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 469.

<sup>25</sup> To read more about zetetic method in Kant, see: Kubok, D., 2022. Kant and Zetetic Scepticism. *Ruch Filozoficzny* 78(3), pp. 7 – 25. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2022.020>; Belás, L. – Zákutná, S., 2016. Kant's method of teaching philosophy. *Studia Kantiana* 14(21), pp. 27 – 36. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5380/sk.v14i21.89153>.

<sup>26</sup> Kant, I., 1765/1766. Immanuel Kant's Announcement of the Programme of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766. In: *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 292.



philosophy is the method of *enquiry*.<sup>27</sup> In this very text, he mentions a phenomenon that can still be seen at some point in our educational methods, which are oriented towards learning facts rather than learning to think, which Kant corresponds to with a difference between learning philosophy and learning to philosophise. The emphasis on autonomy is very present here:

The philosophical writer, for example, upon whom one bases one's instruction, is not to be regarded as the paradigm of judgment. He ought rather to be taken as the occasion for forming one's own judgment about him, and even, indeed, for passing judgement against him. What the pupil is really looking for is proficiency in the method of reflecting and drawing inferences for himself.<sup>28</sup>

Švihura also mentions Kant's call for autonomous thinking while transforming current teaching of philosophy at higher secondary education with a specific reference to Kant's aforementioned note about the difference between thoughts and thinking. He also emphasizes the moral sensitivity that should be developed in current teaching of philosophy and its wide impact on life in connection with its affective goals:

[...] knowledge from philosophy in the environment of higher secondary education cannot even be assumed as a starting point for the formation of desirable "civic", moral, or value attitudes of students, because such a method of imparting knowledge (in addition, dominantly historical-philosophical) does not participate in their sensitization, which is apparently an essential prerequisite for acquiring desirable values – for example, respect for otherness.<sup>29</sup>

Ziche (2023) mentions Schelling's lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, in which Schelling describes Kant as an instinctive philosopher whose core is based on creativity – on the imperative of the creativity of the philosopher himself, as well as the creativity with which his readers adopt and transform Kant's ideas. The main idea here is that the author himself cannot have full control over what is done with

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Švihura, L., A., 2024. Affective Goals in Teaching Philosophy in Higher Secondary Education: Reality, Criticism, Perspectives. *Ruch Filozoficzny* 85(1), p. 102. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2024.007>.

his work in the future (that is the reference to hermeneutics).<sup>30</sup> Education for moralization, that is, for the last stage of education with the horizon of the cosmopolitan goal, can therefore take on new forms and shapes with the help of the teacher who does enhance autonomous philosophizing in his students connected to his character thorough challenging his reflective thinking as well as his consequent actions.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to outline the inspiration of Kant's moral thought by analysing the categorical imperative and virtue, the development of which affects both the individual and society (so it also contains a cosmopolitan aim in itself). Although the categorical imperative is based on the maxim of reason, it does not remain a simple theorem; it constitutes a constant reflexive basis for man's practical action. Moralization is the last stage in Kant's outline of pedagogy (after discipline, cultivation, and civilization) and is related to virtue, which is understood as the willpower of the maxim in the fulfilment of human duty by overcoming inclinations in conflict with moral discernment. The attainment of virtue is not merely a possibility for man, but his inner duty, for it exists in man not only as a prerequisite of his freedom, but as a power which is acquired by the contemplation of the dignity of the rational law and the practice of virtue. Virtue is always in progress and yet always starts from the beginning. The task of developing a character has three stages: first, the establishment of a plan which people must follow, e.g. setting a time for sleeping. Secondly, the man should be truthful and thirdly, he must be sociable. Giesinger's note creates a space for developing moral character through the Socratic method, and other Kantians speak of the zetetic method, both of which can represent a space for developing moral character through autonomous reflective thinking and working on virtues. Since Kant does not have full control over his text, the fulfilment of the cosmopolitan aim can take different forms.

<sup>30</sup> Ziche, P., 2023. Creativity and genius as epistemic virtues: Kant and early post-Kantians on the teachability of epistemic virtue. *Metaphilosophy* 54(2–3), p. 274. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12612>.

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