Kant and the Moral Necessity of Civil Society

by

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For Heidi Payne, because I promised
Curriculum Vitae

Jacqueline Augustine was born in Rochester, New York on September 29, 1977. She attended William Smith College from 1995 to 1999, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude* with Honors in Philosophy, in 1999. She came to the University of Rochester in the fall of 2000 and began graduate studies in philosophy. She received a University Fellowship in 2001, a teaching assistantship for 2002, and a Writing Fellowship for 2003-2005. She was twice-nominated for the Edward Peck Curtis award for Excellence in Teaching. She pursued her research under the direction of Professor Randall Curren and received the Master of Arts degree in 2006. She maintains the position of City Councilor in Geneva, NY having been first elected to the post in 1999 at the age of 22. She is married to Gregory Baker and is currently a stay-at-home mother to their three young children.
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Kant’s political theory has not received as much attention or analysis from commentators as is enjoyed by other areas of his thought. This appears to be due to one of two assumptions: either that Kant’s political writings were merely tangential to his philosophical system, a kind of end-of-life dabbling in other studies; or that if Kant intended the political writings to be part and parcel of his overall philosophical project, he failed to demonstrate it as such. I argue that both assumptions are incorrect. There is good textual evidence that Kant intended his political writings to be taken as part of the whole of his philosophy, and throughout that body of work, the conceptual framework exists to make the connection evident.

Fundamental to Kant’s philosophy is an examination and understanding of the nature of man. Kant’s epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics all support the consideration of man qua noumenon and man qua phenomenon. In Chapter 2, I introduce the concept of reciprocity as the bridge between those two realms. Reciprocity is at work in Kant’s earliest writings, as he argued in favor of a Leibnizian doctrine of ‘living forces.’ But reciprocity evolves for Kant in such a way as to avoid the ‘pre-established harmony’ that he believed undermined the very agency that a living force represents. Through historical and textual exegesis, I seek to illuminate the concept of reciprocity as bridging both the physical and metaphysical aspect of human action. With reciprocity as a ‘dynamical’ concept, I proceed, in Chapter 3, with a defense of the Kantian claim that the formulations of the
categorical imperative introduced in the *Groundwork* are indeed equivalent. It is the
claim of equivalency that shows the necessary connection of politics to Kant’s ethical
theory.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the content of Kantian morality, as derived by the
categorical imperative. In particular, I wish to show that an individual’s duties to
himself and to others require him to be an active participant in civil society. Chapters
6 and 7 present the essential aspects of civil society according to Kant and the
reciprocal nature of duty between citizens and their government. These requirements
demonstrate the true moral necessity of pursuing a ‘rightful condition.’