

## Kant's Account of Personal Development:

### Comments on Paula Satne

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**Abstract.** In this paper, I focus on Paula Satne's discussion of moral development in her "Moral Development, Repentance, and Self-affirmation". I argue that, preceding moral development, we can identify in Kant a notion of existential development that foreshadows some of Nietzsche's ideas and emphasises the existential potential of the philosopher from Königsberg.

**Keywords:** moral development, existential development, Enlightenment, emancipation, courage, autonomy, Paula Satne, Kant, Horace, Nietzsche.

In reference to the article ["Moral Development, Repentance, and Self-Affirmation"], I would like to pose a question regarding the issue of development raised by the author. Specifically, I am interested in whether Kant's concept of development is exclusively moral in nature. I have serious doubts about whether the foundation of Kant's concept of development can be understood solely in this way. Why? I have in mind the famous essay: "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?" In it, Kant urges us to have "resolution and courage"<sup>1</sup> to "use our understanding without guidance from others. Sapere aude! [dare to be wise] Have the courage to make use of your own understanding!"<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this is just the beginning of the process of human emancipation and breaking free from "minority". However, this initial step demonstrates the fundamental basis for all development. So, why is independent reasoning so important, and what does Kant really mean? It seems to me that it is about the significance of continual reflection on, among other things, our own actions. As human beings, we tend to delegate our thinking to others (the "guardians"). We prefer to rely on pre-established thinking patterns. We like to act under the direction of others. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as we embrace such patterns reflectively. Philosophically, it is also about beginning to think autonomously ("walk alone"). According to Kant, only such thinking can yield fully moral outcomes. The second, or rather the first in a certain hierarchy, even more intriguing element is the path to independent thinking. To commence thinking independently and autonomously, one needs "resolution and courage". Why does thinking require courage when a rational mind seems far removed from any emotions? Well, non-independent thinking, which relies on an external element, is comfortable and tends to become dogmatic, a way of thinking that we consistently and universally

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1] I. Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (8: 36).

2] Ibid.

deem as correct. In such a mode of thinking, we feel comfortable because it becomes our secure refuge. Everything is familiar and as it has always been; the behavioral pattern is well-known to us and functions as expected. Moreover, we do not fully sense responsibility for decisions; rather, we follow instructions. After all, someone else makes decisions for us. What happens when the threat of impending change emerges? We feel fear! Fear of the unknown. Fear of losing our safe haven. Fear of embarking on the journey alone. To think in a new and perhaps risky manner, in a way previously unknown to us, we require courage. Kant is absolutely correct, or rather, not Kant, but Horace, the Roman poet he quotes in his pivotal call, “sapere aude!” The maxim cited by Kant actually originates from a letter to Maximus Lollius. In the entire fragment from which Kant borrowed only two words, we can read that “Well begun is half done”,<sup>3</sup> which clarifies why courage and determination are so significant here. Everything starts with them, and those who begin have already accomplished half of the work. Dare to be wise! Horace presents a situation in which someone who merely waits is akin to a simpleton who encounters a river on his path and waits on the bank, hoping that the water will cease flowing so he can continue. However, the river will not cease flowing, of course. What is the message of this story from the perspective of the Roman poet? Our independent thinking is necessary when we confront an obstacle that impedes our further progress. But why was the simple man (orig. *rusticus*), a mere villager, surprised by the presence of the river on his path? Because, as the story suggests, he did not know his path. Since he did not know it, he exhibited courage by venturing into the unknown, “walking alone”. Thus, this individual had already initiated the process. When we undertake a task, we usually do not know what obstacles we will encounter on our journey. Resolution and courage seem to emanate somewhat from ignorance and a lack of knowledge about what truly lies ahead. On the other hand, the decision to embark on the journey is, in a sense, evidence of faith in our abilities. In reality, resolution and courage reveal themselves when we venture “beyond the threshold of our own home,” when we depart from our secure haven. If we encounter an obstacle on our path, we cannot wait for the problem to resolve itself. Faced with a changing reality, we must respond wisely and autonomously. This means, once again, the necessity to leave our safe shelter. Therefore, we require resolution and courage; otherwise, we will not cross the “river”. We will not surmount the emerging difficulties. We will remain stagnant, awaiting problems to resolve themselves.

Expanding on the entire context of Kant’s call for wisdom, we perceive that resolution and courage, prerequisites for thinking, constitute crucial components here. The tragedy of the villager in Horace’s story seems to stem from his inability to overcome the obstacle he encountered. Perhaps he only waited momentarily until the river ceased flowing, and ultimately, nature compelled him to take action?

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3] Horace, Epistles, 1.2

Returning to the question of moral development, if I were to identify commonalities between Kant and Nietzsche (Paula Satne references both of these philosophers), I would see a certain heroism in the struggle with oneself. Heroism that commences with resolution and courage to venture into the unknown. This is something that precedes moral decisions in a way. Something I would label as existential. Of course, moral questions also arise, but somewhat later. The individual standing before the flowing river more closely resembles Nietzsche's depiction of the "last man". The risks he undertakes, the falls he experiences on the path to enlightenment, are more reminiscent of a struggle for survival. A struggle with oneself. Essentially, if one delves into Kant, a distinctive dramatic quality akin to Nietzsche can be discerned in him. I would perceive this as common ground between both philosophers. However, this is, of course, my perspective. I observe Nietzsche's figure from the standpoint characteristic of Karl Jaspers or Hannah Arendt, who regard this philosopher as a figure "on the road", in the full existential sense of the term. Incidentally, examining Kant from the perspective of Nietzsche, the disrupter of order, constitutes a highly intriguing approach, revealing the seldom emphasized existential potential of the philosopher from Königsberg.

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