

INSTITUT FÜR PHILOSOPHIE HUMBOLDT-KOLLOQUIUM



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Beatrix HIMMELMANN

LOVE AND LAW: SOURCES OF MORALITY IN KANT

Kant's ethics, arguing that the source of morality is a self-imposed law in accordance with which we ought to act, has met with criticism right from the beginning. Kant's critics call for love to play a role in grounding and exercising morality. They see the problem of separating human beings into two parts, reason and sensibility, if we follow Kant's account. While reason is the author of the moral law, human sensibility regularly fails to comply with the demands of this law. The law is a "curse", as St. Paul put it; we should abandon it, and trust in love and grace instead.

For Kant, the law commands "respect" (*Achtung*), exerting influence on our sensibility in the guise of "coercion" (*Nötigung*). No room seems left for love. Nonetheless, Kant discusses love, which is a "matter of feeling", as a possible source of morality. He rejects the idea that moral agency arises "from love". The late Kant, though, acknowledges that human beings inescapably "seek something that they can love" even when dealing with requirements presented to them by mere reason. For them, it is not enough to nurture their capacity for freedom as autonomy. Their sensible dispositions can and need be cultivated in line with their rational faculties. Hence, Kant envisages "love of the law", understanding that humanity would ultimately "dissolve" into mere animality (*Tierheit*) if the "moral vital force" (*die sittliche Lebenskraft*) were not able to involve and "excite" human feeling.

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