

The Downfall of the „Kingdom of Ends“ in the Muddle of Interpretation¹

Kant makes use of the term "realm of ends" 28 times in the *Groundwork*. There, he first makes it clear that „*morals* [as the *Groundwork*] considers a *possible* realm of ends as a *realm of nature*“², and then, that the realm of ends is as such only an idea and that it would get objective reality only by being united with the realm of nature (under a sovereign as the sole absolute lawgiver).³ But, given the heterogeneity of laws of freedom and laws of nature, it is impossible to assume the two realms as the *same* realm.⁴ That's why the realm of ends has in the *Groundwork* only the function of a moral ideal⁵ and why the antinomy in it leads, in the second *Critique*, to the doctrine of the highest good and of the postulates. Accordingly, the third special formula⁶ does not speak simply of a realm of ends (as most interpreters erroneously have it), but of a realm of ends as a realm of nature. Its general function, like that of the other three categorical imperatives, is only a guiding rule for man's actions, and its special function, as that of the other two special categorical imperatives, is „also to provide access for the moral law [...] and thereby, as far as possible, bring it closer to intuition“. ⁷ That's all!

The term also appears twice in the third *Critique*,⁸ rightly in the chapter about *ethico-theology*; and also, in the same thematic context, once in another publication⁹ and various times in the corresponding lectures; but not in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, not in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and never ever in a political context, so also

¹ Annotation to: Monique Hulshof, *Political Aspects of Kant's Concept of „Kingdom of Ends“*; in: *Natur und Freiheit. Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, im Auftrag der Kant-Gesellschaft herausgegeben von Violetta L. Waibel et al.; De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston 2018, vol. 3, pp. 1877-1884.

² *Groundwork* 04.436.24-25 (my italics). All volume-, page- and line-numbers of the Akademie Edition.

³ *Groundwork* 04.439.

⁴ Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason* 05.113.30-114.01; 05.145.14-17; On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy 08.256.30-31.

⁵ *Groundwork* See 04.462.34-463.02.

⁶ *Groundwork* 04.436.23-26.

⁷ *Groundwork* 04.437.

⁸ *Critique of Judgement* 05.444.

⁹ On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one 08.250.21-34.

not, as Hulshof suggests, in the *Naturrecht Feyerabend* lectures where there is not even an allusion to it. From a very simple reason, Kant nowhere in his ethical and juridical writings makes use of the term: the mere idea of a realm of ends can get objective reality only as a realm of nature. Man's capacity, however, is limited to striving for the realization of the „realm of freedom“¹⁰ or „realm of morals“¹¹ (subject of the *Analytic* of the second *Critique*). And that striving is at the same time man's only possible contribution to the possibility of the highest good in a „kingdom of God“¹² or „a realm of grace“¹³ (subject of the *Dialectic*): man can promote it by being virtuous, not more. In the sensible world, the result would be „an ethical community“ (invisible church), which Kant also calls the „kingdom of God on earth“, to be strictly distinguished from the „kingdom of God“, or the „realm of grace“, as the reality of the highest good.

For Kant, the decisive difference between the concept of an „ethical community“ and the concept of a „realm of ends“ is that the latter is, and remains, only an idea without any possibility to be realized, be it only ‚a little bit‘, „as a realm of nature“, i.e. here on earth. Its characterization in political terms would therefore be contradictory to itself.

The attempt to give a political meaning to the idea of a realm of ends or, more appropriately, to comprehend it in terms of public Right, is futile.

Such a realm is possible only *by analogy with* a realm of nature.¹⁴ For Kant, his considerations in the *Groundwork*¹⁵ are the „fruitful“ basis on which he first¹⁶ can develop the third special formula;¹⁷ the explanation of which he then gives two pages later,¹⁸ taking, of course, according to the function of the special formulas, the realm of ends *as a realm of nature*. Given the impossibility implied therein, it becomes immediately clear that it is by no means about a goal to be attained in *this* world, but only about a guiding principle for our actions. If only because of that, the idea of a realm of ends is out of question with regard to the forming of a community, be it ethical or political.

¹⁰ Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason 06.82.

¹¹ Critique of Practical Reason 05.145.

¹² Critique of Practical Reason 05.128.

¹³ Critique of Pure Reason B 840.

¹⁴ See Groundwork 04.438.

¹⁵ Groundwork 04.433-435.

¹⁶ See Groundwork 04.436.

¹⁷ The correct abbreviation would have to be: FREARN (= formula of the realm of ends as a realm of nature), not, as usual, just FRE.

¹⁸ See Groundwork 04.438-9.

Kant calls the world of rational beings, the „intelligible world“, as dealt with in the *Groundwork* and in the *Analytic* of the second *Critique*, the „realm of freedom“ or the „realm of morals“. ¹⁹ In determining it, i.e. when duty is the issue, one has to abstract from all ends. ²⁰ Thus, it can't be about the realm of ends.

Also the fact that Kant talks, with regard to the idea of this realm, of self-legislation is of no help here, since, according to the third special formula, it is just not about establishing a realm of ends in which then everybody would be giving universal law for all, but about the case in which everybody gives to himself laws for his maxims so that these maxims „harmonize with a possible realm of ends as a realm of nature“ ²¹. Talking of „legislating in *community*“, as Hulshof does, is completely out of question. This is another reason why one can't possibly apply the concept of a realm of ends to an ethical or a political community. Furthermore, „if, however, the community is to be an ethical one, the people, as a people, cannot itself be regarded as lawgiving.“ ²²

In ethics, it is about the „will of everybody which refers to all“ ²³; „for myself universally with regard to all actions“ ²⁴. In the doctrine of Right, it is about the „united will of all which refers to everybody“ ²⁵; „universally for everybody against each other“ ²⁶. In ethics, it is about the individual person who gives himself, and only himself, a law which is universal and insofar applying to every rational being; the ethical law can only be thought „as the law of *your own will*“. ²⁷ And also „the lawgiving by which alone a realm of ends [in idea] is possible [...] must be found in every rational being himself and be able to arise from his will“, to be more precise, from a will which „can at the same time regard [sic] itself through its maxim as universally lawgiving.“ ²⁸ Thinking of „legislating in community or establishing conjointly principles of conduct“, as Hulshof does, goes inevitably astray.

For the doctrine of Right, it suffices that the lawgiving will, which is the „will in general, which could also be the will of others“ ²⁹, *necessarily* can be thought as one's own

¹⁹ See Critique of Practical Reason 05.82; 05.145; Religion 06.82; The Conflict of the Faculties 07.70.

²⁰ See Groundwork 04.427; RGV 06.04.

²¹ Groundwork 04.436.

²² Religion 06.98.

²³ Handwritten remains regarding the Doctrine of Right 23.284.

²⁴ Handwritten remains regarding the Doctrine of Virtue 23.376.

²⁵ Handwritten remains regarding the Doctrine of Right 23.284.

²⁶ Handwritten remains regarding the Doctrine of Virtue 23.376.

²⁷ Doctrine of Virtue 06.389.

²⁸ Groundwork 04.434. Kant's statement is considerably distorted by the translation both of Herbert James Paton and Mary J. Gregor.

²⁹ Doctrine of Virtue 06.389.

will. Talking of self-legislation here, can only refer to the united will of all. In this united will, one's own will, it's true, is necessarily included, but as brought to the *collective* unity of the rational will of everybody, and just not as everyone's particular will generalized to the will of all through its maxim as allegedly universally lawgiving.³⁰ It is a will which everybody *necessarily* can agree with.³¹ Moreover, this united will aims at the establishment of a realm of outer freedom, not of a kingdom of ends.

The small essay of Monique Hulshof found here so much attention because it reflects a widespread mistaken view whenever the idea of a realm of ends enters the debate about Kant's practical philosophy.

p.s. See the ground-breaking booklet by Klaus Reich, *Kant und die Ethik der Griechen*, Tübingen 1935 (*Kant and Greek Ethics*, in: *Mind*, XLVIII N. S., 1939, 338-354; 446-463). In the light of Reich's essay, quite a lot of what has since been written about the formulas of the categorical imperatives looks obsolete.

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³⁰ Such a generalization would lead to a Hobbesian/Kantian state of nature without, in principle, any possibility of leaving it.

³¹ Cf. *Toward Eternal Peace* 08.371; *Doctrine of Right* 06.263.