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978-0-521-45250-2 - Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education

Edited by Gunter Zoller and Robert B. Louden

Excerpt

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General introduction

The present volume in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant in Translation* differs from all of the other volumes in the series in that it is not devoted solely to one major work of Kant (e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*), does not focus on writings from a specific period of his writing career (e.g., *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–70*; *Opus postumum*), is not confined to one specific subfield or area of his philosophy (e.g., *Practical Philosophy*, *Religion and Rational Theology*), and does not focus on a distinct genre of writing or mode of presentation (e.g., *Correspondence*, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, *Lectures on Ethics*). At the same time, *Anthropology, History, and Education* is no mere miscellany of occasional pieces that stands awkwardly outside of Kant’s central philosophical concerns. Rather, these writings (whose original publication dates span thirty-nine years of Kant’s life) are linked together by their central focus on human nature – the most pervasive and persistent theme in all of Kant’s writings. Kant repeatedly claimed that the question “What is the human being?” should be philosophy’s most fundamental concern (*Jäsche Logic* 9: 25; cf. letter to Stäudlin of May 4, 1793, 11: 429, *Metaphysik Pölitz* 28: 533–4),¹ and over the years he approached the question from a variety of different perspectives. In addition to addressing this question indirectly under the guises of metaphysics, moral philosophy, and philosophy of religion, Kant broached the question directly in his extensive work on anthropology, history, and education gathered in the present volume.

However, ultimately Kant’s different perspectives on human nature are themselves linked together by an underlying moral concern, since on his view “the sciences are *principia* for the improvement of morality” (*Moralphilosophie Collins* 27: 462). Knowing ourselves and the world in which we live is subordinate to the moral imperative of making ourselves and our world morally better. Theoretical inquiry itself serves the ends of morality. Ultimately, we seek knowledge of ourselves and our world in order to further the goal of creating a moral realm, a realm in which each human being as a rational being is viewed as “a lawgiving member of the universal kingdom of ends” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics*

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of *Morals* 4: 438). The study of the human being as envisioned by Kant was not at all a Weberian value-free social science whose ends are either indigenous to theory or entirely arbitrary, but rather from the start was a deeply value-embedded and morally guided enterprise. In this broader sense, the writings in *Anthropology, History, and Education* may also be viewed as central contributions to what Kant called “the second part” of morals, “*philosophia moralis applicata*, moral anthropology, to which the empirical principles belong” (*Moral Metaphysics II* 29: 599). In order to successfully apply *a priori* moral philosophy to human beings, we need accurate empirical information about the subjects to which the theory is being applied. The Kantian study of human nature is intended to supply this needed information.

ANTHROPOLOGY

The term “anthropology” within the context of Kant’s writings connotes above all his book, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) (*Anth*). But this late work, published two years after Kant’s retirement from teaching and described modestly by its author in a footnote to the Preface as “the present manual for my anthropology course” (*Anth* 7: 122n.), is itself the capstone to a lifelong interest in the study of human nature. Kant first offered a formal course in anthropology in the winter semester of 1772–3, and thereafter taught the course annually until his retirement in 1796. However, the roots of his anthropology course lie much further back. As early as 1757, in his *Sketch and Announcement of a Lecture Course on Physical Geography*, he wrote that his geography course (first offered in summer semester 1756) would include a discussion of “the inclinations of human beings which flow from the climate in which they live, the variety of their prejudices and ways of thinking, in so far as this can all serve to make the human being more known to himself, along with a short sketch of their arts, business, and science” (2: 9).

Feelings of Beauty and Sublimity. Another important source for Kant’s anthropology is his 1764 work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, which is included in the present volume. Though traditionally viewed as Kant’s first work on aesthetics, anthropological and moral themes definitely dominate the latter part of the essay, where Kant discusses differences between the two sexes, as well as among different cultures and nations, in their capacities for the feelings of the beautiful and the sublime. This discussion of sexual, cultural, and national differences is later expanded on not only in the many different student and auditor transcriptions of Kant’s popular anthropology course that have surfaced over the years,² but also in the final part of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. However, despite Kant’s opening claim

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of examining such topics “more with the eye of an observer than of the philosopher” (2: 207), not to mention his frequently stated assertion that “the science of the human being (anthropology)” is to be based on “observation and experience” (*Collins* 25: 7; cf. Kant’s letter to Marcus Herz, late 1773, 10: 145), contemporary readers should be forewarned that what we often find in these discussions are not objective, empirically based accounts of human difference but rather the prejudices of an era.

Nevertheless, the more empirically oriented Kant of the 1760s who was determined to consider “historically and philosophically what *happens* before specifying what *ought to happen*” (*Announcement of the Organization of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–66*, 2: 311) – multiple traces of whom survive the over-emphasized “critical turn” of 1770 (see, e.g., *Inaugural Dissertation* 2: 395–6) – was certainly a great success with his contemporaries. Herder, in a frequently cited passage, praises the author of the *Observations* for being

altogether an observer of society, altogether the accomplished philosopher. . . . The great and beautiful in the human being and in human characters, and temperaments and sexual drives, and virtues and finally national characters: this is his world, where he has observed up to the finest nuances, analyzed down to the most hidden incentives, and worked out many a tiny caprice – altogether a philosopher of the sublime and beautiful of humanity! And in this humane philosophy a German Shaftesbury.³

Similarly, when Kant informed his former student that he was “now working on a Metaphysics of Morals (*eine Metaphysik der Sitten*) . . . which I hope to be finished with this year”⁴ (Kant to Herder, May 9, 1768; 10: 74), Herder effused: “You send me news of your forthcoming Moral [Philosophy]. How I wish it were finished. May your account of the Good contribute to the culture of our century as much as your account of the Sublime and the Beautiful have done” (Herder to Kant, November 1768, 10: 77).

Goethe also had high praise for Kant’s *Observations*. In a letter to Schiller he writes: “Do you know Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*? . . . It is full of the most delightful observations about human beings, and one already sees how his principles are developing. Surely you know all about it.”⁵

“*Philosophical Physicians*” and *Physiological Anthropology*. The writings of physicians constituted another important source for much anthropological writing during the Enlightenment, including Kant’s. Kant’s ongoing interest in the medical theories and debates of his day is sometimes attributed solely to his own well-documented hypochondria.⁶ But while this undoubtedly played a causal role, it is also the case that many, many

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Enlightenment intellectuals were deeply fascinated by medicine. Peter Gay writes:

For men of the Enlightenment, medicine . . . was the most highly visible, and the most heartening, index to general progress: nothing after all was better calculated to buoy up men's feeling about life than growing hope for life itself. But beyond this, for the *philosophes* medicine had a more than visceral, it had intellectual meaning. It was in medicine that the *philosophes* tested their philosophical position; medicine was at once the model of their new philosophy and the guarantee of its efficacy. . . . Nothing could be plainer than this: medicine was philosophy at work; philosophy was medicine for the individual and society.⁷

Many of the leading medical authors of the Enlightenment were themselves known as “philosophical physicians.”⁸ Perhaps the best known (and certainly the most radical) was Julian Offray de La Mettrie (1709–51), who in the opening of his *L'Homme machine* [Man a Machine (1748)] declared confidently that in studying human nature we should be

guided by experience and observation alone. They abound in the annals of physicians who were philosophers, but not in those of philosophers who were not physicians. Physician-philosophers probe and illuminate the labyrinth that is man. They alone have revealed man's springs hidden under coverings that obscure so many other marvels.⁹

Kant of course was no philosophical physician in this blunt empiricist sense. In addition, he rejected the materialism and determinism, and the ensuing reductionist view of human nature, embraced by many of the philosophical physicians. Alluding to La Mettrie in the final sentence of his famous essay *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), for instance, he warns that we must learn “to treat the human being, who is now *more than a machine*, in keeping with his dignity” (8: 42).

But as several of the shorter selections in the present volume indicate, Kant did, in a more restricted sense, endorse the Enlightenment coalition between philosophers and physicians. For instance, early in his *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (1764), he states: “I see nothing better for me than to imitate the method of the physicians” (2: 260). And at the end, while insisting that “it is the physician whose assistance one chiefly has to seek” in treating maladies, he also adds: “Yet, for honor's sake I would rather not exclude the philosopher, who could prescribe the diet of the mind – but on the condition that, as also for most of his other occupations, he requires no payment for this one” (2: 271). Similarly, at the beginning of *On the Philosophers' Medicine of the Body* (1786 or 1788), he notes that while physicians attend to the body by physical means, the business of philosophers is “to assist the afflicted body by a mental regimen” (15: 939). And in *A Note to Physicians* (1782), he encourages

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physicians “with enlarged concepts” not just to study the symptoms of and remedies for diseases and epidemics, but also to investigate their respective epidemiologies (8: 6). Finally, in his *Review of Moscati* (1771), he congratulates the “astute anatomist” for his insight into early human life – an insight at “which *Rousseau* as a philosopher did not succeed” (2: 423).

Physicians, as dissectors “of the visible in the human being,” and philosophers, as “dissectors of the invisible in the human being,” thus can and should work together “towards a common goal” (Kant to Samuel Thomas Soemmering, August 10, 1795, 12: 30; see also, in the present volume, *From Soemmering’s On the Organ of the Soul* 12: 31–5). But again, while Kant’s early as well as late writings exhibit a strong and informed interest in the medical debates of the day, at bottom his own view of human nature is quite different from that of most of the philosophical physicians. This comes out most clearly in his rejection of the approach advocated by one of the most influential of the German philosophical physicians, Ernst Platner (1744–1818). In 1772 – the same year Kant inaugurated his annual anthropology course – Platner published *Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise* (Anthropology for Physicians and Philosophers). Although the book received many positive reviews in leading journals (one of which was written by Kant’s former student, Marcus Herz, himself a practising physician in Berlin),¹⁰ Kant was extremely critical of several of Platner’s key assumptions. In a well-known letter to Herz describing his new anthropology course, written shortly after Herz’s review of Platner appeared, Kant abruptly criticizes what he regards as Platner’s “eternally futile inquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought”; adding that “my plan [for the new discipline of anthropology] is quite different” from Platner’s (Kant to Herz, late 1773, 10: 145).

Twenty-five years later, in the Preface to his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant summarizes the differences between Platner’s physiological approach and his own pragmatic approach by noting that physiological anthropology “concerns the investigation of what *nature* makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what *he* as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (7: 119). In the Introduction to an earlier transcription (1781–2) of his anthropology lectures, he also criticizes Platner for having merely “written a scholastic anthropology” (*Menschenkunde* 25: 856). The “scholastics,” he notes, did produce “science for the school,” but it was of “no use to the human being.” Pragmatic anthropology, on the other hand, aims to promote “enlightenment for common life” (25: 853). Similarly, at the beginning of the *Mrongovius* anthropology lectures (1784–5), he states: “There are two ways of studying; in school and in the world. In school one learns scholastic knowledge, which belongs to professional scholars; but

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in dealings with the world one learns popular knowledge, which belongs to the entire world” (25: 1209). Kant’s pragmatic anthropology aims at this latter popular knowledge (a knowledge explicitly not restricted to Platner’s target audience of “physicians and philosophers”) – a kind of knowledge intended to be “useful not merely for *school*, but rather for *life*, and through which the accomplished apprentice is introduced to the stage of his destiny, namely the *world*” (*Of the Different Races of Human Beings* (1775) (2: 443).

Essentially, the physiological anthropology championed by Platner and others is the predecessor of *physical* anthropology; while Kant’s pragmatic anthropology, with its emphasis on free human action, is the progenitor of various philosophical and existentialist anthropologies. For instance, Max Scheler, an important voice in this latter tradition who also influenced Martin Heidegger, holds that the human being is not only an animal being but also “a ‘spiritual’ being” (*ein ‘geistiges’ Wesen*) that is “no longer tied to its drives and environments, but rather ‘free from the environment’ (*‘umweltfrei’*) or, as we shall say, ‘open to the world’ (*‘weltoffen’*).”¹¹

Race, culture, and colonialism. Controversies concerning the classification of human beings and their relationships to one another constitute another key source for the development of eighteenth-century anthropology and social science. How do peoples of the New World compare to those of the Old? What to make of human beings’ different physical characteristics and intellectual abilities? To what extent are such differences hereditary, and to what extent are they due to contingencies of (e.g.) climate? Does a universal human subject and moral agent endure underneath biological and cultural differences? What (if anything) do human beings share in common?

In Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, the section entitled “On the Character of the Races” is less than one page long and rather innocent looking (see 7: 320–1). And in his Preface, he remarks that “knowledge of the races of human beings as products belonging to the play of nature” (7: 120) is not strictly speaking even a part of pragmatic anthropology, but only of physiological anthropology. Race [which on Kant’s view is not a social construction but a natural kind – albeit one that develops “only over the course of generations” (*On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* 8: 164)] is a prime example of what nature makes of the human being, rather than of what the human being “can and should make of himself” as a free acting being (see 7: 119). Nevertheless, the race issue looms large in three separately published essays included in this volume [*Of the Different Races of Human Beings* (1775), *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race* (1785), *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* (1788)], and other versions of Kant’s classroom lectures on anthropology and geography contain much more

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explicit and controversial discussions of race (see, e.g., *Menschenkunde* 25: 1187–8, *Physical Geography* 9: 311–20). Additionally, related discussions of “civilized (i. e., western) Europeans” and “uncivilized natives” also feature prominently in several of the history writings included in this volume [see, e.g., *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784) 8: 21–2; *Review of J. G. Herder’s Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity* (1785) 8: 64–5].

Building on the work of Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–88), “the great author of the system of nature” (*Anth* 7: 221), Kant argues that all “animals which produce fertile young with one another . . . belong to one and the same physical species” (*Of the Different Races* 2: 429). This puts him squarely in the camp of the monogenists: “All human beings on the wide earth belong to one and the same natural species” (*Of the Different Races* 2: 429; cf. *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race* 8: 100) – *contra* Voltaire, Henry Home (Lord Kames) and other polygenists who held that the human races originate from different genetic sources, and thus are not members of the same species.

Kant then proceeds to identify “race” with certain sets of invariably inherited characteristics that do not belong to the species as such:

hereditary differences . . . which persistently preserve themselves in all transplantings (transpositions to other regions) over prolonged generations among themselves and which also always beget half-breed young in the mixing with other variations of the same phylum are called *races* (*Of the Different Races* 2: 430; cf. *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race* 8: 99–100, *On the Use of Teleological Principles* 8: 165).

In emphasizing the hereditary nature of race, Kant parts ways with those who understood race solely as a function of climate. But at the same time, he also argues that climate did play a decisive causal role earlier on:

The human being was destined for all climates and for every soil; consequently, various germs (*Keime*) and natural predispositions (*Anlagen*) had to lie ready in him to be on occasion either unfolded or restrained, so that he would become well suited to his place in the world and over the course of generations would appear to be as it were native to and made for that place.

(2: 435; cf. 8: 93, 8: 166)

On this view, racial characteristics are present in the human species because they help us to reach our collective destiny. Originally the same “germs and natural predispositions” for various skin colors were present in each of our ancestors, with some predispositions rather than others being actualized depending on the specific climate in which they lived. At one point, we were all potentially black, red, yellow, and white. Racial differences emerged gradually with the dispersal of human beings to different climatic conditions. “The end of Providence is this: God wants

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that human beings should populate the entire earth. All animals have their special climates, but human beings are to be found everywhere. Human beings are not to stay in a small region, but to spread out across the entire earth” (*Friedländer* 25: 679). Again, though, on Kant’s view the role of climate in determining skin color is both partial and temporary. Once the appropriate “race germ” is actualized by the requisite climatic conditions, there can be neither a reversion to the original condition nor a change to another race: “after one of these predispositions was developed in a people, it extinguished all the others entirely” (*Determination* 8: 105). At this point, as Arthur Lovejoy notes, “the other germs obligingly retire into inactivity.”¹²

And what was the original human skin color? Kant is often accused of holding the view that all the races derive from an ideal “stem genus” that just happens to be white, and that “other skin colors are *degenerate*, ugly variants – reflecting the morally ‘fallen’ and inferior mental status of their carriers – of the white original.”¹³ But the evidence is mixed at best. In his 1775 essay, he does speculate that the phyletic species (*Stammgattung*) was “white” – albeit “brunette” rather than blond (2: 441). However, in his 1785 essay, *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race*, he states that it is “impossible to guess (*unmöglich zu erraten*) the shape of the first human phylum (*der erste Menschenstamm*) (as far as the constitution of the skin is concerned); even the character of the whites is only the development of one of the original predispositions” (8: 106). And in *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* he asserts explicitly that the germs and natural predispositions for different skin colors had “to have been *united* in the first human couple” (8: 173). So his considered view on the matter appears to be that, as regards skin color, the original humans were “none of the above” – not white, black, yellow, or red.

Strictly speaking, skin color on Kant’s view is the only true mark of race. With the sole exception of skin color, “no other characteristic property is *necessarily hereditary* in the class of whites than what belongs to the human species in general; and so with the other classes as well” (*Determination of the Concept*, 8: 94). At the same time – as is true of so much of the sorry history of race discourse – Kant’s discussions of race abound with value judgments concerning the alleged level of intellect, talent, and cultural development of the different races. For instance, in his *Geography* lectures he proclaims: “Humanity is in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians already have a lesser talent. The Negroes are much lower, and lowest of all is part of the American peoples” (9: 316; cf. *Menschenkunde* 25: 1187).

Kant’s firm belief that certain peoples are “incapable of any culture” (*On the Use of Teleological Principles* 8: 176; cf. *Pillau* 25: 843, *Menschenkunde* 25: 1187) and lack a sufficient “drive to activity” (8: 174 n.) in turn leads him to ask “why they exist at all.”¹⁴ The most notorious

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example here is his critique of the Tahitians – a people whom Diderot, following Rousseau and others, viewed as being “close to the origins of the world;”¹⁵ i.e., in a more natural and happier state, uncorrupted by the false progress of European civilization. In his *Review* of Part 2 of Herder’s *Ideas*, Kant writes:

Does the author really mean that if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more cultured nations, had been destined to live for thousands of centuries in their tranquil indolence, one could give a satisfying answer to the question why they exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as good to have this island populated with happy sheep and cattle as with human beings who are happy merely enjoying themselves? (8: 65; cf. *Idea for a Universal History* 8: 21, *Groundwork* 4: 423, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* 5: 378, *Reflexion* 1500 (*Refl*), 15: 785).

While there is certainly plenty to object to in this passage, its underlying message has often been misunderstood. First of all, Kant’s main animus is directed not at Tahitians *per se* but at human beings everywhere who are “merely enjoying themselves.” On his view, our central vocation is to develop our rational capacities and talents. People who ignore this fundamental moral obligation to develop their rational capacities and talents (and Kant thinks there are *a lot* of them) come in for some very heavy-handed criticism. The Poles and the Russians, for instance, “do not appear to be properly capable of civilization” (*Menschenkunde* 25: 1185); and the Spaniard “remains centuries behind in the sciences; resists any reform; [and] is proud of not having to work” (*Anth* 7: 316). So the fundamental issue, in Kant’s mind, is not one of civilized Europeans versus uncivilized Tahitian natives, but rather one of earnest cultivators of rational humanity versus those who are content to remain uncultivated. And in so far as Kant sees this battle being played out collectively by different peoples and cultures (which, alas, he often does), it is not so much Europe versus the “savages” or whites versus blacks as certain parts of *western* Europe versus . . . the rest of humanity.

At the same time, while he is clearly convinced that we “must search for the continual progress of the human race in the Occident” rather than elsewhere (*Refl* 1501, 15: 788–9), one should not infer from this that Kant believes that the Tahitians’ only hope is to make contact with white Europeans and adopt the Ways of the West. For the moral duty to cultivate one’s humanity is fundamentally a duty *to oneself*. And on Kant’s view “it is a contradiction for me to make another’s *perfection* my end and consider myself under obligation to promote this” (*The Metaphysics of Morals* 6: 386). In other words, I can’t perfect you, and you can’t perfect me. People must rather try to perfect *themselves*, employing the concepts of self-perfection that are alive within their own cultural traditions and practices.¹⁶

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Also, it follows from Kant's fundamental opposition to treating people as means rather than as ends in themselves (see *Groundwork* 4: 428–31) that he is a staunch opponent of all practices of colonialism and conquest by force. Regardless of whether there is a satisfactory answer to the question of why a given people “exist at all,” it is Kant's view that no people, under any circumstances, ever has the right to take possession of land that has already been settled by other people without the latter's consent. As he states in *The Metaphysics of Morals*:

It can still be asked whether, when neither nature nor chance but just our own will brings us into the neighborhood of a people that holds out no prospect of a civil union with it, we should not be authorized to found colonies, by force if need be, in order to establish a civil union with them and bring these human beings (savages) into a rightful condition (as with the American Indians, the Hottentots and the inhabitants of New Holland); or (which is not much better), to found colonies by fraudulent purchase of their land, and so become owners of their land, making use of our superiority without regard for their first possession. . . . But it is easy to see through this veil of injustice (Jesuitism), which would sanction any means to good ends. Such a way of acquiring land is therefore to be repudiated.

(6: 266; cf. 6: 353, *Perpetual Peace* 8: 359)

No good end (and clearly Kant did think that “civilizing savages” was a good end) can justify means that involve the violation of people's rights.

HISTORY

The writings on history included in this volume¹⁷ were all composed in the mid-1780s, and appeared originally as independent essays and reviews in journals. Like the other texts in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, in the past they have often been viewed as incidental pieces standing outside of Kant's central philosophical concerns. As Lewis White Beck remarked in his Editor's Introduction to Kant, *On History*, Kant's strong focus on unchanging concepts and categories in the three *Critiques* naturally suggests to many readers that he was “a philosopher, with a philosophy that seems singularly unlikely to encourage a philosopher to take history seriously.”¹⁸ But it is now generally recognized that the basic issue of how the realms of nature and morality link up with each other – more specifically, of how the second arises from the first – is central to all three *Critiques*, and that Kant's philosophy of history is essentially an attempt to address these two questions. At bottom, Kant's philosophy of history is a theory about the human species' movement over time from nature to morality and freedom – or (less controversially), a theory about its movement from nature toward external and tangible “veneers” and “resemblances” of morality that themselves serve as preparations for