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978-0-521-77161-0 - Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Anthropology

Edited by Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Louden

Excerpt

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General introduction

Immanuel Kant is best known to us as a systematic metaphysician who defended the *a priori* status of both the principle of morality and the fundamental principles of a science of nature. It may therefore come as a surprise to learn that as a university teacher, Kant's most frequently offered and most popular courses had to do with empirical materials to which he had difficulty giving any systematic form. These were lectures on what Kant called the two kinds of "world-cognitions" (*Welterkenntnise*): *physical geography* and *anthropology* (VPG 9:157, ApH 7:122n, RM 2:443). Both deal with the environment in which human beings live and act, the former with the outer, natural environment, the latter with both the constitution of the human soul and the social and historical environment in which human beings, both individually and collectively, shape their own nature as rational creatures. Both of these empirical sciences were new in Kant's time, and he could even claim to share in their invention.

Kant began his academic career as a natural scientist, whose special interest in geology and earth sciences is clear from his early treatise *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755). In this work he proposed the earliest version of the nebular hypothesis of the origins of the solar system (though the hypothesis became well known only after its later and more mathematically sophisticated presentation by La Place). For most of the previous decade, Kant had been writing treatises on physics, astronomy, and geology, discussing such subjects as earthquakes and questions of meteorology. He began lecturing on physical geography in 1756, offering the same course on a more or less regular basis during the summer semester. His interest in anthropology, or at least one side of it, appears to have grown out of this, insofar as Kant sought to "display the inclinations of human beings as they grow out of the particular region in which they live" (Ak 2:9). It was for this reason that Wilhelm Dilthey argued that Kant's interest in anthropology should be fundamentally understood as arising out of his interest in physical anthropology – focusing, however, not on the natural environment as such but on human beings' activities in it.

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Kant was not appointed to a professorship until 1770; from 1755 until then he was an unsalaried *Privatdozent*. Two years later, in the winter of 1772–1773, he announced a new course on anthropology, which he taught every winter without fail until his retirement from teaching in 1796. His textbook for these lectures was always A. G. Baumgarten’s empirical psychology, and already in the early 1760s, Herder lists “anthropology” among the topics Kant taught under the heading of ‘metaphysics’.¹ This has led to a fundamentally different interpretation of Kant’s interest in anthropology from Dilthey’s, arising out of an interpretive tradition affiliated with Benno Erdmann and Erich Adickes, which links Kant’s anthropology in its origins to his metaphysics, and more specifically to the portion of metaphysics having to do with psychology and the theory of the human mind.

Kant’s anthropology lectures were, year in and year out, the most popular of his lecture courses. They were attended by his professorial colleagues as well as students, registering an average of more than forty paid students every time they were given. In 1798, Kant finally published a textbook based on these courses. In the years after his retirement, Kant also encouraged the publication, in editions prepared by others, of versions of his lectures on logic, physical geography, and pedagogy. But Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is the only textbook on any subject that Kant ever published under his own name drawn from his own lecture courses.

PRAGMATIC ANTHROPOLOGY

The study of human nature was of course not an entirely new subject when Kant took it up in the 1770s. It had already been a focus of attention for some of the greatest minds of the eighteenth century, including Vico, Montesquieu, Wolff, Voltaire, and Hume. Even before Kant, “anthropology” was already being taught in Germany at the Universities of Leipzig (by G. P. Müller and J. Kern) and Halle (by C. D. Voss).² But Kant’s approach to anthropology was new, and even played a role in the emergence of the field of anthropology in the next century, in part through the influence of his student J. G. Herder.³ One fashionable approach to the study of human nature at the time was physiological, or even medical. The radical French Enlightenment attempted to understand the human being as a physical mechanism, following Julien Offray la Mettrie’s *Man a Machine* (1748). Diderot’s dialogue *D’Alembert’s Dream* (probably composed in 1769) provides us with a lively record of a range of such materialistic speculations. Le Comte de Buffon, Albrecht von Haller, and Charles Bonnet were among those who took a physiological approach to understanding human beings.

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Kant himself should also be accounted among the representatives of the “medical” approach to human nature, as is evident from short works such as *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (1764), *Review of Moscati’s “On the Essential Corporeal Differences Between the Structure of Animals and Human Beings”* (1771), *Note to Physicians* (1782), and the third essay in *Conflict of the Faculties* (1797). But he was also persuaded that the value of this way of studying human nature was sharply limited, and his conception of ‘pragmatic’ anthropology was deliberately intended to contrast with it. The immediate incitement for him to think critically about the medical or ‘physiological’ approach was provided by Ernst Platner’s *Anthropology for Physicians and Philosophers* (1772), and a review of this book by Kant’s student (also a physician) Marcus Herz. In a letter to Herz, Kant projected a new science of anthropology which would avoid Platner’s “futile inquiries into the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought” (Ak 10:146). Later that year, Kant offered his first course on anthropology that same winter, employing the contrasting approach to which he gave the name “pragmatic.”

This term, as Kant uses it, combines several different meanings. First, he means to contrast the “pragmatic” approach with the “physiological”: Anthropology, he says, “can exist either in a *physiological* or a *pragmatic* point of view. – Physiological knowledge of the human being investigates what *nature* makes of the human being; pragmatic, what *he* as a free acting being makes, or can and should make of himself” (ApH 7:119). Closely related to this is Kant’s intention to provide lectures on anthropology that will be “pragmatic” in the sense that they will be *useful* to the audience. Kant hopes his observations about memory, for example, can be used to help people increase the scope and efficiency of their own faculties of recollection (ApH 7:119). He intends a parallel with what was then called “pragmatic” history – history written with the aim of learning from it about how to act successfully in human affairs (Hume’s *History of England* was considered the paradigm) (VA 25:472, 1212).

“Pragmatic” anthropology is also contrasted with a “scholastic” approach (ApH 7:120). Here Kant may be seen as taking up, in his lectures on human nature, the task of a “popular” philosopher, in the tradition of Christian Thomasius and of the Berlin Enlightenment philosophers, such as Garve and Mendelssohn. This was a role that he deliberately declined to play in many areas of philosophy, such as metaphysics, pure moral philosophy, and the new discipline of transcendental philosophy through which he hoped to provide a critical grounding to the sciences. But it was one that he apparently thought appropriate for the study of anthropology. Scholastic studies, Kant says, involve knowledge or acquaintance with the world (*die Welt kennen*), while a pragmatic anthropology involves “having a world” (*Welt haben*): “The first only understands the play [*Spiel*], of which it has been a spectator, but the

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other has participated [*mitgespielt*] in it” (ApH 7:120, cf. VA 25:9, 854–855, 1209–1210).

Following this intention, Kant also attempts to give lectures on anthropology that will be popular and entertaining (evidently with some success, in view of their popularity). Some topics, according to Kant, such as the critique of reason or the metaphysical foundations of ethics, resist popularization (KpV Axviii, G 4:409, MS 6:206). But pragmatic anthropology is not such a topic. “Our anthropology can be read by everyone, even by women at the dressing table [*Damen bei der Toilette*], because it has much about it that is engaging” (VA 25:856–857). (This remark might conjure up the image of the Marschallin Maria Theresa in the first act of Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*, perusing a copy of Kant’s *Anthropology* while having her hair done – amusing and edifying herself with Kant’s anthropological observations as she haggles with tradespeople, converses with her boorish country cousin Baron Ochs, and listens to the aria of the Italian tenor.)

The term “pragmatic” in Kantian terminology also means “prudential” – both in the sense of reason used in the pursuit of happiness and in the shrewder sense of the rational manipulation of other people (G 4:415–416, MS 6:215–216, ApH 7:312, 322, VA 25:469, 855, 1037, 1210, 1296, 1436). Kant clearly intends his anthropology lectures to be *pragmatic* in this sense too, by providing us with self-knowledge about human follies and foibles, so that we may be in a position to protect ourselves against our own and perhaps also take advantage of the failings of others.

It is a more difficult question how Kant’s *pragmatic* anthropology relates to what he sometimes calls “practical anthropology” – the *empirical* part of morals, which Kant claims is required if the *a priori* moral law is to be applied to human actions (G 4:388, 410n, MS 6:217–218). The term “pragmatic” ought to suggest that Kant’s lectures *do not* have this aim, but deal at most with empirical information of *prudential* value. But the matter is more complicated than this, as we shall see later.

Kant’s text for the anthropology lectures was always the empirical psychology sections of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*. There is a history of controversy (already mentioned), that began with an exchange between Erich Adickes and Wilhelm Dilthey, over whether Kant’s anthropology is rooted in his reception of empirical psychology in the Wolffian tradition, which belonged to his lectures on metaphysics, or represents a different project entirely, one that allies it more closely to his lectures on physical geography.⁴ Without attempting to settle the question, it can be noted that there are such weighty arguments on both sides as to render any simple view on either side difficult to maintain. The structure of Kant’s lectures, especially at the beginning, is oriented to Baumgarten’s text and makes use of the faculties of the human mind as organizing

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principles. These contents bear a decided affinity with the discussion of empirical psychology that takes place in Kant's lectures on metaphysics. At the same time, it is Kant's clear intention to develop an approach that is "pragmatic" in the multiple senses we have just been describing, and over time his organization of the material came more and more to include a separate division on human character, following the division on human mental faculties, in which the materials from empirical psychology are developed and applied in this new way.

THE LECTURE TRANSCRIPTIONS

The materials on which Kant drew in his anthropology lectures is impressively broad. The official text for the lectures was always the paragraphs from Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* dealing with empirical psychology, but Kant is critical of Baumgarten's approach and always leaves this text far behind almost from the beginning. In the lecture notes from which the selections in this volume were translated, Kant refers to nearly a thousand different sources.⁵ Many of them are literary: Horace, Lucretius, and other classical writers, but also modern writers including Molière, La Fontaine, Rabelais, Klopstock, Swift, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Shakespeare, Cervantes. Other sources are historical: Tacitus, Livy, Polybius, Hume, Robertson; or philosophical-literary, Montaigne, Voltaire, Addison, Shaftesbury; or travel narratives written by European explorers: Hearne, Sherlock, Cook, Marion-Dufresne, Bougainville. This erudition no doubt contributed to the popularity of Kant's lectures, but also indicates his aim of writing about human nature based on a wide-ranging consideration of human interactions, observations, and sources of information.

Kant's published *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* has been translated by Robert B. Louden in the Cambridge Edition volume of *Kant's Writings on Anthropology, History and Education*. The present volume contains excerpts of the lecture notes and transcriptions included in Volume 25 of *Kant's Schriften* in the Prussian Academy Edition (1997), but includes the translation of two complete texts: *Friedländer* (1775–1776) and *Mrongovius* (1784–1785). What we have in these texts is unlikely to be a verbatim report of what Kant said on any single occasion; they seem to be compilations of accounts from different students and other auditors of Kant's lectures. There was an established tradition in German universities of taking notes at oral speeches (sermons, lectures, public addresses), sometimes based on the transcriptions of professional note-takers. After 1770 there seems to have been a lively market for copies of notes from many of Kant's lectures: metaphysics, ethics, logic, rational theology, and anthropology.⁶ The texts of Kant's anthropology lectures are probably compilations produced for this purpose. As I

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have just observed, they cannot be regarded as trustworthy word-for-word transcriptions, but are syntheses of different sets of notes, aiming at the preservation of those contents that would be of most interest and value to the purchasers of such documents. The texts we translate here (like most of the other lecture texts translated in other volumes of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*) are thus a critically edited version of what students in Königsberg might have purchased, in the form of manuscript copies, either to substitute for their not being able to attend Kant's lectures or to supplement their own recollection of them. Although the texts are identified by a single name, most of them seem to combine notes from different sources. Thus the earliest source from which we excerpt – called “*Collins*” – appears to be a collection of transcriptions by seven different note-takers. *Friedländer* draws from two: *Friedländer* and *Prieger*.

The exceptions to this are *Pillau* and *Busolt*, which are apparently the work of a single transcriber, and the *Menschenkunde*, which is based on an edition published in 1831 attributed to the editorship of “Friedrich Christian Starke” – a pseudonym for Johann Adam Bergk (1769–1834) – a nineteenth-century popularizer of Kantian philosophy who used the name “Starke” in other such activities as well. The text of the published *Menschenkunde* was based on a manuscript now in the possession of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. This manuscript has also been used in the preparation of the version edited by Werner Stark and Reinhard Brandt, published in the Academy Edition, on which the present translation is based.

Volume 25 of the Academy Edition (which encompasses two very thick bound volumes, totaling over 1,800 pages) contains seven distinct texts:

Collins (1772–1773, 239 pages)

Parow (1772–1773, 226 pages)

Friedländer (1775–1776, 263 pages)

Pillau (1777–1778, 120 pages)

Menschenkunde (1781–1782, 356 pages)

Mrongovius (1784–1785, 226 pages)

Busolt (1788–1789, 102 pages)

The present volume includes *Friedländer* and *Mrongovius* complete, substantial excerpts from *Menschenkunde*, and smaller excerpts from each of the other texts. *Friedländer* was the most complete of the anthropology manuscripts dating prior to the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. *Menschenkunde* and *Mrongovius* represent the most complete versions during the period of Kant's maturity. In addition (though the matter is uncertain) *Menschenkunde* probably dates from the year following the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, while *Mrongovius* more certainly

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dates from the year in which Kant wrote *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

It would be a complex task to trace the development of Kant's views through the nearly two decades encompassed by these lectures. This would require a number of distinct narratives, corresponding to the many topics Kant takes up in his anthropology lectures, and their relation to other parts of his philosophy. Paul Guyer, for example, has used these lectures to trace the development of Kant's views on aesthetics from the early 1770s up to the composition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in 1790.⁷ What we can usefully do here is only to provide a brief overview of the alterations in structure and organization that Kant's anthropology lectures seem to have undergone from the first version (*Collins*) until the last complete version (*Mrongovius*), the fragmentary *Busolt* version, and the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).

The *Collins* transcriptions (1772–1773) are not organized according to any major divisions, but consist of a series of notes under separate headings. But there is nevertheless even at this early stage a discernible structure to their ordering. It has already been mentioned that throughout their long history, Kant always used Baumgarten's empirical psychology as his text and structured his anthropology lectures (or at least their first division, once he had come to see them as falling into two main divisions), around a theory of the faculties of the human mind. The earliest lectures devote nearly the first half to a discussion of conscious mental processes, before turning to a roughly seventy page long discussion of human mental capacities and incapacities. This is followed by sections dealing with imagination and taste (about thirty pages), fifteen pages on the faculty of desire, and then the final twenty pages on human character and temperament.

The *Parow* text, dated the same years, is similarly without large-scale divisions, but the structure of Kant's lectures emerges a bit more clearly. Kant appears to be organizing his discussion around the three principal faculties of the human mind, as he will later present them in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (KU 5:198): First, the faculty of cognition, second, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and third, the faculty of desire. The account of mental representation is included, as in the *Collins* lectures, under the first heading and the account of human character is included under the third.

The *Friedländer* lectures, dated three years later, is (as noted above) the longest and most complete account of anthropology prior to the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In *Friedländer*, anthropology is for the first time divided into two major parts: the first dealing with human mental capacities, and the second with temperament and character, which is now clearly separated from treatment of the faculty of desire. These are the divisions which, in the published *Anthropology*

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of 1798, Kant was later to call (respectively) “Anthropological Didactic” and “Anthropological Characteristic.” *Pillau*, two years later still, is a fragmentary text, covering only the faculty of cognition, and organized explicitly as commentary to the relevant paragraphs in Baumgarten.

Menschenkunde is the first text dating from after the first Critique. It retains Friedländer’s division of anthropology into two main parts: the second now explicitly given the title “characteristic.” But it also makes explicit within the first part the three-part division of human faculties into cognition, pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire.

Mrongovius (1784–1785) again divides anthropology into the same two main parts, and also provides a much clearer set of subdivisions beyond this. There is an introductory chapter dealing with self-observation and methodology in anthropology, followed by an explicit three-part division of the human faculties. The cognitive faculty is treated in nine separate chapters. The feeling of pleasure and displeasure is grouped together with the faculty of desire in a second section of the first part, with one chapter devoted to pleasure and displeasure, and three further chapters devoted to the faculty of desire. *Mrongovius* also dates from about the time when Kant was composing the *Groundwork*, in which he divides moral philosophy into a “metaphysics of morals” (or *a priori* part) and an empirical part, called “practical anthropology” (G 4:388). This division is reflected in the structure of the lectures, where the second main part (earlier called “characteristic” is now (temporarily) re-named: “Second or practical part of anthropology,” which is divided into two sections: “The character proper of the human being.” The first of these sections has four chapters: 1. “On nature [*Naturell*]”; 2. “Temperament”; 3. “Physiognomy”; and 4. “The character proper [*eigentlichen Character*] of the human being.” The second section deals with “The actual character [*wirklichen Character*] of the human being,” that is, with the character of sexes, nations, and the species as a whole.

Busolt, the latest set of lecture transcriptions, is again fragmentary, dispensing with the organizing divisions found in *Friedländer*, *Menschenkunde*, and *Mrongovius*. But its headings follow the same general order, and the “characteristic” part of anthropology is now introduced as a “doctrine of method” – perhaps in a sense intended to be related to the one Kant used in structuring his published works, such as the three Critiques and the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

When we consider the reference of Kant’s term “practical anthropology,” we see that over the years, it tended to include three distinct things:

First, in a few earlier reflections, Kant seems to have thought that it was the task of practical anthropology to decide the scope of human moral responsibility, and to show that human beings are capable of

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doing what morality asks of them: “These two sciences [morality and practical anthropology] are closely connected, and moral philosophy cannot endure without anthropology, for one must first know of the agent, whether he is also in a position to accomplish what is required of him that he should do” (Ak 27:244). “The human being, however, the subject, must be studied to see whether he can even fulfill what is required of him, that he should do” (*Friedländer* 25:471–472).⁸ Yet by the time of the second Critique, Kant does not seem to have thought any longer that regarding rational beings, the *general* issue of moral responsibility was even one for empirical inquiry. Instead, he argues that we learn from the command of morality itself that we have the capacity to obey it: “[The human being] judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which without the moral law would have remained unknown to him” (KpV 5:30). (There are still presumably empirical issues regarding whether and to what extent a human being might be regarded as capable of rational action and moral responsibility.)

Second, Kant regards moral anthropology as dealing with “the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in the carrying out of the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (MS 6:217). This would appear to include what Kant describes elsewhere as helping moral laws to obtain “access” (*Eingang*) and “emphasis” (*Nachdruck*) (G 4:389, 412, 436), that is, roughly speaking, increasing their psychological appeal to people, human nature being what it is.

Third, practical anthropology is needed in order to apply the *a priori* law of morality to the nature of human beings and the circumstances of human life in the derivation of specific duties. Kant appears to be asserting both the second and third functions of practical anthropology when he says that the *a priori* laws of morality “require a judgment sharpened through experience, partly to distinguish in which cases they have their application and partly to obtain access for them to the will of the human being and emphasis for their fulfillment” (G 4:389).⁹

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, however, Kant appears to be reassigning this third function, withdrawing it from “practical anthropology” and attaching it to “metaphysics of morals” itself, which, he says, “cannot dispense with principles of application, and we shall often have to take as our object the particular *nature* of human beings, which is cognized only by experience, in order to *show* in it what can be inferred from universal moral principles” (MS 6:217). But it may be cutting things too fine to take this too precisely, as saying that Kant had definitively redefined the scope of “practical anthropology,” or excluded from it the task of applying moral laws to human nature and human life. What is clear, however, is that Kant regarded empirical knowledge of human nature,

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as well as consciousness of the *a priori* moral law, as required both for knowing specifically what morality requires of us and for helping people to fulfill these requirements.

If, finally, we compare with the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* the principles of organization that developed through time in these lecture transcriptions, it is easy to see how Kant retained the basic divisions that emerged over time. As already mentioned, Part One is now called “Anthropological Didactic” and Part Two “Anthropological Characteristic”; Part One is divided into three Books, dealing with cognition, pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire. And the “Characteristic” is divided into five sections: A. The Character of the Human Being; B. The Character of the Sexes; C. The Character of Nations; D. The Character of Races; and E. The Character of the Species. It is noteworthy that after *Mrongovius*, Kant did not retain “practical anthropology” as an explicit title for the “characteristic” part, or indeed for any part of his anthropology. This raises the question whether lectures on “pragmatic” anthropology were supposed to include moral (or “practical”) anthropology as a part, or were rather meant to exclude this (focusing on the “pragmatic” as the *prudential*, in contrast to *moral* anthropology). Yet the concluding section of the *Anthropology* of 1798, with its discussion of the historical vocation of the human species and its moral destiny, should be enough to justify our dismissing any suggestion that through use of the term “pragmatic” Kant intended to ban moral considerations from his anthropology lectures.

Kant’s anthropology has always been an important part of his philosophy, contributing to both his theoretical and practical philosophy, and being the principal site of the development of his views on aesthetics. This importance has long been ignored on account of simplistic views of Kant based on the importance for him of *a priori* cognition, both in the theoretical and practical realms. But to hold that there are *a priori* cognitions and principles, and even that these ground the principal philosophical sciences, is not to deny that empirical cognitions are also indispensable to them. The importance of Kant’s anthropology has received increasing attention in recent years, as attested by the works listed in the Bibliography at the end of this volume. It is to be hoped that an English translation of Kant’s lectures on anthropology will contribute further to this trend.