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OF PHILOSOPHY



IMMANUEL KANT  
*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*

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IMMANUEL KANT

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*Anthropology from  
a Pragmatic Point  
of View*

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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## Introduction

### **The origins of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View***

Anthropology as understood today is a discipline concerned with the study of the physical, cultural, social, and linguistic development of human beings from prehistoric times to the present. It is a relatively new phenomenon, which came into its own only during the early nineteenth century. Its roots, however, can be traced back to the last third of the eighteenth century. Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Condorcet in France, Lord Kames, Lord Monboddo, and William Robertson in Scotland, and Immanuel Kant, Georg Forster, Christoph Meiners, and Ernst Platner in Germany were among the most important early contributors to this new field of study. It grew ultimately from a fundamental concern of the European Enlightenment, being conceived as an alternative to the theological understanding of the nature of man and born of the belief that the proper study of mankind is man, not God.

Kant fully subscribed to this Enlightenment conception, even though, as we shall also see, he did not want to deny that theological concerns were very important for the proper understanding of human nature. He was, in any case, one of the first thinkers ever to lecture on anthropology as an independent academic discipline at university level. Though the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* was published at the end of the eighteenth century in 1798, he had by then already lectured on it for twenty-five years. Indeed, his first lectures predate Kames's *Sketches of the History of Man* of 1774 by more than a year. And his concern with anthropological topics is already evident in his first course on physical

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geography, which he offered in the summer of 1756. Kant's *Anthropology* is thus an important document in the history of this discipline. When he first offered a course explicitly dedicated to anthropology in the winter semester of 1772–3, he had already thought about its contents for some time. On the other hand, there was not much precedent for it, and he had every right to feel like a pioneer.

Kant's conception of anthropology was in many ways rather different from the way it is conceived of today. From the very beginning he viewed it not just as an empirical or descriptive discipline, but also as a useful tool for the moral and cultural improvement of his students. Thus he wrote toward the end of 1773 to his former student Marcus Herz – someone who he knew had a great interest in the subject – that he was offering for the second time a *colloquium privatum* on anthropology, and that he was planning to transform this subject into a proper academic discipline. This plan was, he said, “unique,” for the main purpose of the new course of studies was to

introduce the sources of all the sciences that are concerned with morals, with the ability of commerce, and the method of educating and ruling human beings, or all that is practical. In this discipline I will, then, be more concerned to seek out the phenomena and their laws than the first principles of the possibility of *modifying* human nature itself. (10, p. 145)<sup>1</sup>

His goal was twofold: (1) a theoretical investigation of the source of all practical philosophy, its phenomena, and its laws, and (2) a doctrine that was itself practical in teaching the rudiments of prudence, wisdom, or knowledge of the world.

Kant went on to assure Herz that the contents of the course would be enjoyable rather than dry and academic. Drawing an explicit parallel to his lectures on physical geography, he characterized it as an “observational doctrine” (*Beobachtungslehre*) that he intended to develop in such a way that it would serve his students in later life. He also felt it necessary to point out explicitly that he would not address such “subtle” but

<sup>1</sup> All references in the text refer to Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vols. 1–22, ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 23, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, from vol. 24, Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1907– ) (AA). Since the Cambridge edition of Kant's works includes the pagination of the Akademie edition, they can also be checked in the English translation.

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“eternally futile” questions or philosophical problems as the mind–body relation. The lectures should be “popular” both in the sense that the subject matter was treated “popularly” and in the sense that the lectures should attract many students as (paying) customers.

It should also be obvious that the plan for this new academic discipline, concerned with the sources of all that is practical, moral, or has to do with human interaction, is connected with the attempts of other contemporaries in this direction. Indeed, Herz’s review of Ernst Platner’s newly published *Anthropology for Physicians and Philosophers* provided the immediate occasion for his remarks in the letter. And there is other evidence which shows how closely he was attuned to the developments having to do with the newly emerging study of anthropological issues, and how he consciously chose a different direction from that taken by his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup>

It appears by all accounts that he was successful in his attempt to be popular. While his lectures on metaphysics were considered very difficult by most of his students, the lectures on anthropology (like the lecture on physical geography) were among the best attended he ever offered, even though they were not free like the lectures on metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Kant felt at the end of his teaching career that the notes for these lectures that he had prepared over the years deserved to be published in their own right as a textbook on which other professors could base their lectures, just as he had relied for so many years on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* in his lectures on metaphysics and anthropology. He must have taken this decision during the early summer of 1798.<sup>4</sup> Johann Friedrich Abegg, who visited Königsberg in 1798, wrote on June 1 in his travel journal that earlier that morning Kant had corrected his *Anthropology*, as this work would

<sup>2</sup> In the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 20 (1773), pp. 25–51. Platner plays some role in Kant’s lectures on anthropology as well. See AA25, p. 83 and the index at p. 1082. Kant contrasts his own conception to that of Platner and other “philosophical *medici*,” who speculate about things that he is not going to cover. Herz’s review constitutes the occasion for Kant’s remarks. It also suggests that Kant and Herz had talked about anthropological concerns earlier. For a discussion of the different “programs” for the new discipline of anthropology, see John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), pp. 237–253. Kant was obviously aware of most, if not all, of these developments.

<sup>3</sup> See Manfred Kuehn, *Immanuel Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); see also Reinhard Brandt and Werner Stark, “Introduction” to vol. 25 of the Akademie edition.

<sup>4</sup> See also Kuehn, *Immanuel Kant*, pp. 391f.



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now be published as well. We do not know whether these “corrections” were revisions of Kant’s own manuscript, a version of which is extant in the Library of the University of Rostock, or whether he was working on the proof sheets sent by the printer. It seems likely that it was the former, as Kant was not in the habit of going carefully through the proofs himself.<sup>5</sup>

Two thousand copies of the *Anthropology* were printed – more than any of his other works.<sup>6</sup> The book seems to have sold well, for just two years later a second edition appeared. But it was not a critical success. Apart from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s entirely negative review in the *Athenäum*, a journal devoted to the cause of Romanticism and highly critical of many of the ideals of the Enlightenment, there was no discussion.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, Schleiermacher’s review was not designed to create a need for such a discussion. It begins as follows: “A summary of this book could not be much more than a collection of trivial matters. If, on the other hand, it were intended to give a sketch of the plan and its execution . . . it would necessarily give a distinct picture of the most peculiar confusion.”

These claims are not entirely unfair. Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is a difficult book, and it is difficult precisely because it reveals a certain tension between particular factual observations and assertions that seem homely and trivial, if not downright false, and somewhat muted suggestions that the whole enterprise is highly significant without a clear indication of what precisely makes it so significant. On the one hand, it is described by Kant as a “manual” or *Handbuch* concerned with the down-to-earth task of providing the rudiments of “knowledge of the world” to students in their early teens, the implication being that it is not just based on his own lectures but it could and should be used by other university teachers as the basis for their own lectures on this subject. On the other hand, the book ends with the assertion that

<sup>5</sup> It is catalogued as “Mss Var. 32.” Its contents are, of course, taken into consideration in this translation.

<sup>6</sup> See Friedrich Wilhelm Schubert, *Immanuel Kant’s Biographie zum grossen Theil nach handschriftlichen Nachrichten dargestellt* (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1842), p. 154. Schubert also claims that this was the largest printing of all of Kant’s works.

<sup>7</sup> *Athenäum* 2 (1799), pp. 300–306. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), vol. 5.1, pp. 366–369. All other quotations from Schleiermacher are from this review.

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the admission that this race of terrestrial rational beings deserve no honorable place among the (to us unknown) other rational beings . . . [precisely] reveals a moral disposition in us, an innate demand of reason, to also work against this propensity. So it presents the human species not as evil, but as a species of rational being that strives among obstacles to rise out of evil in constant progress toward the good. (6, pp. 332f.)

It thus presents itself as a contribution to the political task of the progressive organization of the *citizens of the earth*, “united by cosmopolitical bonds,” and aligns itself with the earlier essays on history and the *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

It is this peculiar combination of the homely and the sublime that makes for both the charm and the difficulty of the book. And the question is how Kant can hope to perform in one book two tasks that are ultimately quite different. The *Anthropology* clearly belongs among the small group of works which were conceived as textbooks for introductory courses given at university level. In this respect it is similar to the *Logic*, the *Physical Geography*, and the *Pedagogy*, which were edited by Benjamin Jäsche and Friedrich Theodor Rink on the basis of Kant’s notes. What makes the *Anthropology* different from those works, however, is that Kant himself edited it; but he clearly had some difficulties in doing so. We may also ask whether a textbook should be measured by the same criteria as an original contribution to philosophical discussion. How precisely can the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* be compared with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, or the *Metaphysics of Morals*, for instance? Does the published *Anthropology* give the best possible expression of Kant’s fundamental intention?

### The philosophical nature of the work

Some philosophical scholars have argued not only that the *Anthropology* does not express Kant’s deepest philosophical concerns, but that it is irrelevant to them. Some have even argued that it actually contradicts them. But there are also passages in Kant’s work that suggest the opposite view, and so it has also been argued that the *Anthropology* is of central importance to the entire Kantian project. Support for this view can be found in a passage from Kant’s *Logic* that summarizes “philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense of the word” in four questions:

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What can I know?  
 What should I do?  
 What may I hope for?  
 What is a human being?

The first question is answered in *metaphysics*, the second in *morals*,  
 the third in *religion* and the fourth in *anthropology*. (9, p. 25)

Kant then claims that all this can be included within anthropology because the four questions “relate to anthropology.”<sup>8</sup> Since the first three questions also appear in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a summary of all the “interests of my reason” (no matter whether they are speculative or practical), one may indeed argue that the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* need a foundation in a critical anthropology that uncovers the very essence of humans as finite beings and constitutes a fundamental ontology.<sup>9</sup> This has been argued most famously by Martin Heidegger, who claimed that Kant’s philosophical enterprise could be summed up as the attempt to lay the ground of metaphysics by revealing its “inner possibility” in “the subjectivity of the human subject.” Kant’s “question as to the essence of metaphysics is the question concerning the unity of the basic faculties of the human ‘mind.’ The Kantian ground-laying yields [this conclusion]: the grounding of metaphysics is a questioning with regard to the human being, i.e., Anthropology.”<sup>10</sup> However interesting such a conception of a Kantian anthropology may be in its own right, it is clearly not the one Kant himself envisaged. As we have just seen, his anthropology is an Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, perhaps even an “Anthropology from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” but it is most definitely not an “Anthropology from an Ontological (or Metaphysical) Point of View.” Because of this, it does not belong to the very center of Kant’s philosophical concerns. It is a “pragmatic” enterprise: peripheral, but important for the application of his thought. We can see this also from the characterization of the three

<sup>8</sup> See also *Metaphysik Pölitz*, 28.2.1, pp. 33f., where he makes the same claim about “philosophy *in sensu cosmopolitico*.” Compare also the letter to Stäudlin of May 4, 1793 (10, p. 429).

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A 804f./B 833f. (from now on, all references preceded by “A” and/or “B” are to this edition). In this context Kant does not characterize the three questions as anthropological and claims that they exhaust all interests of reason.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th, enlarged edition, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 144.

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questions that make up the question “What is a human being?” as questions that are asked “in the cosmopolitan sense” of the philosophy, not in a transcendental sense. They are important when we are concerned with the application of philosophical principles, or indeed when we talk about the role or function which philosophical principles can assume in the world. They are not important when we come to talk about the foundation or justification of such philosophical principles.

This is not just an argument against the fundamental importance of anthropology to Kant’s enterprise; it is also an argument against anyone who would claim that Kant’s anthropological considerations are so peripheral that they would not be missed if they had not survived. I would argue that they would be missed in so far as they add a certain dimension to the “cosmopolitical sense” of Kant’s entire philosophy. Even if the published *Anthropology* were to express this dimension only imperfectly, it might give significant clues about how we should or should not conceive of it.

As Schleiermacher pointed out, neither the contents nor the overall plan of the book are easily summarized. Kant defines anthropology as “a doctrine of the knowledge of the human being, systematically formulated,” and he claims that such a doctrine can take (only?) two forms. It is either physiological or pragmatic. The first “concerns the investigation of what nature makes of the human being,” the second “the investigation of what he as a free acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself.” Physical anthropology may be observational or speculative. The latter is absolutely useless, or, as Kant puts it, “a pure waste of time.” But even the former is not useful because “the observer” must let “nature run its course” without being able to change it (7, p. 119). Added to this, both introspection and the observation of others encounter difficulties that are “inherent in human nature itself” (7, p. 119). We can observe neither ourselves as we “really” are nor others as they “really” are because the very act of observing changes the behavior that is observed. Dissimulation and habit interfere. So it is difficult to grasp what human nature actually is, and it is better to concentrate on what humans as free acting beings make of themselves and what they can and should make of themselves. That is the reason why Kant does not want to discuss issues of physical anthropology in the context of a pragmatic anthropology, even though he was very interested in such issues and wrote articles on topics of race and the physical nature of human beings in learned and popular journals.

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[More information](#)*Introduction***The structure of the *Anthropology***

The work itself is divided into two parts, namely the “Anthropological Didactic” and the “Anthropological Characteristic.” The first of these parts deals with what Kant would have called “empirical psychology,” but it is perhaps better characterized as his “faculty psychology” or his classificatory scheme for mental “phenomena” as more or less static tendencies and faculties. It consists of three “books,” the first of which deals with the “cognitive faculty,” i.e., with such things as inner sense, the five external senses, the understanding, the voluntary and involuntary imagination, fantasy, and memory, as well as with many things closely connected with it. One might say that he deals in this book with those matters that form the psychological background of the first *Critique*. Book II deals with the “feeling of pleasure and displeasure,” or with matters related to taste, while Book III is concerned with the “faculty of desire,” or with the psychological background of moral philosophy or ethics. Indeed, paragraphs 73–88 must be carefully read by anyone concerned with Kant’s moral philosophy, if only because one finds there clear definitions of the psychological vocabulary which is relevant to his moral theory. This first part of the *Anthropology* seems to be most closely connected with the first origins of the lectures on anthropology, since Kant first conceived of anthropology as a replacement and expansion of his discussion of empirical psychology in the lectures on metaphysics, and this part deals with psychological issues. That the metaphysical origin of the lectures remained important is shown by the fact that Kant continued to use as a basis for his lectures on anthropology the *Psychologia Empirica*, i.e., the third part of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*. Previously he had used this part in the lectures on metaphysics to introduce psychological issues to his students; now he used it less in his lectures on metaphysics and more in his lectures on anthropology. As late as 1778 he explicitly pointed out to Herz that after having begun lecturing on anthropology he no longer treated empirical psychology extensively in his lectures on metaphysics, which suggests that he thought of anthropology as a replacement for that part of the lectures on metaphysics (10, p. 181).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Even the word “anthropology” seems to come from Baumgarten, who speaks in the section on rational psychology of his *Metaphysica* of “*anthropologia philosophica*,” “*anthropologia mathematica*,” “*anthroponomia*,” and “*anthropognosia*” (17, p. 142). Kant himself contrasts “anthropology”

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Part II bears the subtitle “On the Way of Cognizing the Interior of the Human Being from the Exterior,” but Kant also seems to have considered the subtitle “By What is the Peculiarity of Each Human Being to be Cognized?” and thought that the first part could be described as the doctrine of the elements of anthropology and the second as the doctrine of method (7, 299). A similar division can be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Critique of Judgment*, and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. If we were to take this seriously, then Part II would amount to an “estimate of the building materials” and the determination of their suitability “for what sort of edifice, with what height and strength” we may build (A 707/B 735). The second part would have less to do with the materials than with the blueprint for the building (or discipline). And this blueprint is a plan for the future of the human species. Unfortunately, the “Doctrine of Method” is even shorter in the *Anthropology* than it is in the other works mentioned above.

It is the notion of “character” which is of central importance for Kant and which plays a key role in the second part of the *Anthropology*. He deals with the character of individual human beings, the character of the sexes, the character of different peoples or nations and of different races, and ultimately the character of the human species. This part of the book has little to do with Baumgarten’s *Psychologia Empirica*, but rather deals with issues relating to the final goal of human beings (*die Bestimmung des Menschen*). As such it belongs in the context of discussions by Thomas Abbt, Moses Mendelssohn, and Johann Joachim Spalding on the one hand, and of Kant’s own writings on the philosophy of history and theology on the other. Repeating claims he defended in those writings, Kant says that ultimate moral achievement cannot be expected of any one individual, but only of the species as a whole. Morality and anthropology thus lead to political and historical considerations, to questions about what the ultimate destination of the human race is.

Furthermore, anthropology is for Kant a description not of human beings but of human nature. Even when we speak of the nature of the individual or of the “character” of an individual, we do not speak of his particular choices, but about his principles or maxims. An individual’s nature cannot be reduced to that individual’s choices. Indeed, the

with “anthroponomy” at one point in his *Metaphysics of Morals* of 1798, saying that the former is merely empirical and cannot count as evidence against the latter, which “is established by the absolute power of the law-giving reason” (6, p. 406).

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expression “an individual’s human nature” would be an oxymoron for Kant (and for others besides him). But none of this is explicitly argued for or fully developed. Kant seems to want to refer his readers to the earlier essays and books which he had written about these subjects.

The *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* reads like a work in progress, not like a finished product. And it may just be that old age – Kant had to stop lecturing in 1797, one year before the publication of the *Anthropology* – prevented a development that might have given rise to the “complete anthropology” that he had envisaged in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as being the true home of “empirical psychology” after it had been “banned from metaphysics.” This complete anthropology would have been “the pendant to the empirical doctrine of nature.” Unfortunately, Kant did not live long enough for this to happen, but we are fortunate to have access to other materials. The intentions and conclusions of these materials can be properly understood only if their background in Kant’s teaching is taken into account, which is why it is important to say something about the relation of the published text to the lecture notes by Kant and his students. The notes show how Kant’s thoughts on anthropology developed, and how this discipline relates to his philosophical system as a whole.

### **The relation of the published *Anthropology* to the lectures on anthropology**

In the early 1770s Kant began to deliver his lectures on empirical psychology – which until then had formed part of his course on metaphysics – in a new course, entitled “anthropology.” The reason for this appears to be quite simple, and has to do with a radical change of his views on metaphysics in the Inaugural Dissertation of 1770. One of the most important new doctrines in this work was the radical distinction between “intellect” on the one hand and “sensation” on the other. Kant argued that these two faculties are independent and irreducible. They constitute sources of entirely different kinds of knowledge, namely the intellectual and the sensible. Because of this, he argued, we must assume two worlds, namely a *mundus intelligibilis* and a *mundus sensibilis*. Each of these worlds obeys its own principles and exhibits forms peculiar to it, and each of them has its own objects: “The object of sensibility is the sensible, that which contains nothing but what is to be cognized through



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the intelligence is intelligible. In the schools of the ancients the former was called a *phenomenon* and the latter a *noumenon*" (2, p. 393). Phenomena are "representations of things *as they appear*," and noumena are "representations of things *as they are*" (2, p. 392). It would therefore be a serious mistake in his view if we were to regard sensibility as nothing but confused thinking, or thinking as nothing but distinct sensation (as Leibniz, Wolff, and most other moderns have done). To quote Kant's own words, "the sensitive is poorly defined as that which is *more confusedly* cognized, and that which belongs to the understanding as that of which there is a *distinct* cognition. For these are only logical distinctions which *do not touch* at all the things *given*, which underlie every logical distinction" (2, p. 395). Even if sensitive knowledge presupposes the use of certain concepts of the understanding, this use of the understanding is merely logical or formal. It is of secondary importance compared with the real use of the understanding by means of which "the concepts themselves, whether of things, or relations, *are given*" (2, p. 393).

Eleven years later, in his first *Critique*, Kant accused Leibniz and Locke in particular of having committed this error, saying that the former had "intellectualised appearances," while the latter had "sensualised all concepts of the understanding" (A271/B327). In the Dissertation, however, he singles out for special criticism "the illustrious Wolff," who "has, by this distinction between what is sensitive and what belongs to the understanding, a distinction which for him is only logical, completely abolished, to the great detriment of philosophy, the noblest of the enterprises of antiquity, the determining of the *character of phenomena and noumena* . . ." (2, p. 394).

This implies that "empirical psychology belongs just as little to metaphysics as empirical physics" (28, p. 223). Metaphysics deals with "*conceptus puri* or concepts which are either given purely through reason or whose knowledge has at least its source within human knowledge," whereas anthropology has to do with empirical concepts only. Even if these empirical concepts are to a large extent based on inner sense, they do not afford any rational knowledge of man (25, p. 243). His first lecture course was therefore entitled "Natural Knowledge of Man." Since the sharp division of reason and sensibility that characterizes the first lecture on anthropology and the excision of empirical psychology from metaphysics can be traced back to the changes that characterize the Inaugural Dissertation, we may also claim that these changes lead ultimately to



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Kant's conception of anthropology as an empirical discipline of the knowledge of human beings.

It is well known that this new thesis of the radical discontinuity of sensibility and intellect is closely connected with another doctrine that makes its first appearance in this work, namely that of the subjectivity of space and time. What is generally overlooked, however, is that Kant's rejection of the continuity thesis also had immediate consequences for moral philosophy. As Kant himself points out in the Dissertation, the pure principles of the understanding or reason allow us to have the concept of an important "paradigm." This paradigm is "noumenal perfection," and "noumenal perfection" has two senses: it is "perfection either in the theoretical sense or in the practical sense. In the former sense it is the Supreme Being, GOD; in the latter sense it is MORAL PERFECTION. *Moral philosophy*, therefore, in so far as it furnishes the first *principles of judgment*, is cognized by the pure understanding and belongs only to pure philosophy" (2, p. 396). Moral principles are intellectual and therefore cannot be reduced to sensibility. Pure moral metaphysics has just as little place for sensible concepts as has pure speculative metaphysics.

Kant argued from this time on that as well as metaphysics in the theoretical sense and metaphysics in the practical sense, we need an empirical physics, i.e., an empirical discipline concerned with the investigation of material objects, and an empirical psychology or anthropology. In the Inaugural Dissertation he believed that reason could secure the foundation of a universal moral theory in knowledge of things as they are in themselves, and he believed that we could obtain this knowledge through reason. It is thus not surprising that in the letter in which he first told Herz of his new lecture, he also speaks of moral philosophy, saying that the concept of "reality" should not be applied to morals because it

is so important in the highest abstractions of speculative reason and so empty when applied to the practical. For this concept is transcendental, whereas the highest practical elements are pleasure and displeasure, which are empirical, and their object may thus be anything at all. Now, a mere pure concept of the understanding cannot state the laws or prescriptions for the objects of pleasure and displeasure, since the pure concept is entirely undetermined in regard to objects of sense experience. The highest ground of morality must not simply be inferred from the pleasant; it must itself be

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pleasing in the highest degree. For it is no mere speculative idea; it must have the power to move. Therefore, though the highest ground of morality is intellectual, it must nevertheless have a direct relation to the primary springs of the will. (10, p. 145)

Even though Kant believed in 1773 that “the highest ground of morality is intellectual,” he also thought that it needed “primary springs of the will,” which were *not* intellectual. He takes this position also in the lectures on ethics delivered during the summer of 1775. We need both moral motivations and purely intellectual principles to judge whether an action is moral. There must be a *principium diiudicationis* that is objective, and a subjective principle that motivates us, a *principium executionis* that is related to human nature and sensibility.

Kant explicitly argues that the latter is to be found in a moral sense.<sup>12</sup> And this is the domain of empirical psychology and is concerned with the “sources of all the sciences that are concerned with morals, with the ability of commerce, and the method of educating and ruling human beings, or all that is practical” (10, p. 145). Kant’s anthropology originates thus from a new conception of the metaphysics of nature and the metaphysics of morals. Both call for an empirical counterpart. Anthropology is to contain moral psychology or the discussion of “the primary springs of the will.” Though Kant’s faith in the possibility of founding pure morality in purely rational knowledge of things in themselves dissipated as he developed the doctrines put forward in the first *Critique* of 1781, he continued to hold the view that moral philosophy had both a pure and an empirical part. Like the epistemic or metaphysical context, the moral context required both pure rational principles and sensible content.

The anthropology is pragmatic but provides moral knowledge of man because we must find in it the motives (*Bewegungsgründe*) for morality and without it morality would be scholastic and not applicable to the world at all. It would not be pleasant for it. Anthropology is related to Morality as spatial geometry to geodesics. (25, p. 1211)

and:

Morality cannot exist without anthropology, for one must first know of the agent whether he is in a position to accomplish what

<sup>12</sup> See Manfred Kuehn, “Einleitung” to Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen zur Moralphilosophie*, ed. Werner Stark (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. vii–xxxv.

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is required of him . . . One can . . . consider practical philosophy even without anthropology, or without knowledge of the agent, only then it is merely speculative; so man must at least be studied accordingly. (27, p. 244)

This is in stark contrast to the view Kant puts forward in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785, where he argued that the categorical imperative constituted both the *principium diiudicationis* and the *principium executionis* and relegated the moral sense or moral feeling to the periphery of moral philosophy.

This had important consequences for the role of anthropology in his system. While it was central in 1773 and 1775 because it concerned “the primary springs of the will” that he thought were not rational but rather part of our empirical nature, it became peripheral as soon as these primary springs themselves were conceived as rational. In 1775, Kant went so far as to argue that moral philosophy without anthropology was “merely speculative” and “empty”; anthropology was needed in ethics in so far as “ought” must imply “can” and we must therefore first determine whether we *can* meet the demands that a purely rational morality makes on us (19, p. 137 – written around 1772). In 1785, he was convinced that anthropology and metaphysics of morals have nothing in common and should not be mixed. Because “ought” implies “can,” we *are* “obligated.” “Practical anthropology” is no longer part of morals proper. The task was to work out a “pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be empirical and that belongs to anthropology” (4, pp. 388f.).

We may therefore say that the moral relevance of the lectures on anthropology decreased as Kant’s thought on moral issues developed. It may appear that after 1785 anthropology lost all importance for morals proper, because

all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely a priori in reason . . . Just in this purity of their origin lies their dignity, so that they can serve us as supreme practical principles, that in adding anything empirical to them one subtracts just as much from their genuine influence and from the unlimited worth of actions . . . it is of the greatest practical importance not to make its principles dependent upon the special nature of human reason . . . just because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such.

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Morality needs anthropology only “for its application to human beings,” not for morality itself (4, pp. 411f.) But “all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part; and it does not borrow in the least thing from acquaintance with mankind (from anthropology)” (4, p. 389). Partly as a result of this, the pragmatic dimension of anthropology, which had always been important, now became the most important concern of anthropology, something that is borne out by the very title of the published *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

But what does “pragmatic” mean? While this is not the place to trace the details of the development of the term in Kant’s thinking, it is worth pointing out that its meaning also undergoes some change, and that this change roughly corresponds to the change in Kant’s conception of moral motivation. First of all, there is a sense of “pragmatic” that concerns a certain way of writing history, namely a non-scholastic way that indicates writing not just for the academy but for a broader public. It is roughly equivalent to “popular” as opposed to “academic” and remains constant in all of Kant’s writings. But this is not the sense of “pragmatic” which is primarily relevant in anthropological and moral contexts. More important is the sense that has to do with “motivation.” Around 1773 “pragmatic” meant “what moves the will” or is an “incentive” (*Triebfeder*) that “corresponds to a rule” (15, p. 516). Differentiating between “impulse” (*Antrieb*), which is subjective and pathological, on the one hand, and objective, “*motiva*,” on the other, Kant characterized the motives as either “pragmatic or moral,” and asserted that even the “pragmatic imperatives are categorical” (19, p. 104). “Pragmatic” and “moral” do not exclude one another at this point. This changes in 1785. From then on, “pragmatic” imperatives are for Kant always “conditioned” and “hypothetical,” and only moral imperatives are categorical. He now worries about “mistaking the pragmatic for the moral” (19, p. 93). Pragmatic imperatives concern rules of prudence. And rules of prudence concern mainly the use we can make of other people to achieve our own ends, or the means of obtaining our own happiness. They are thus in Kant’s mature philosophy essentially at cross-purposes with the fundamental duties of virtue. Given the sharp contrast between anything that is prudential and what is truly moral in Kant’s mature ethics, pragmatic considerations are *per se* non-moral.

To sum up, in 1773 “pragmatic” meant for Kant “everything that pertains to the practical,” but at least since 1785 it indicated everything

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that pertains to the practical, *except* what is purely moral. This can also be seen from Kant's description of the relationship between pure morals and moral anthropology in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the only passage in all of his published works in which he uses the expression "moral anthropology":

The counterpart of a metaphysics of morals, the other member of the division of practical philosophy . . . would be moral anthropology, which, however, would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder or help us in fulfilling the laws of the metaphysics of morals. It would deal with the development, spreading, and strengthening of moral principles (in education through schools and popular instruction), and with other similar teachings and precepts based on experience. It cannot be dispensed with, but it must neither precede it nor be mixed with it, for one would then run the risk of bringing forth false or at least indulgent moral laws that would misrepresent as unattainable what is not attained just because the law has not been presented in all its purity (which constitutes its very strength) or because false and impure incentives were used in addition to it in itself in accordance with duty and good. This would leave no certain moral principles as a guide for judging or disciplining the mind in the observance of duty, the precepts of which must be given a priori by pure reason alone. (6, p. 217)

"Pragmatic" in the title of the published *Anthropology* cannot include the strictly "moral" dimension. Kant says that

Just as there must be principles in a metaphysics of nature for applying those highest universal principles of nature in general to objects of experience, a metaphysics of morals cannot dispense with principles of application, and we shall often have to take as our object the particular *nature* of the human being, which is known only through experience in order to *indicate* the inferences from the universal moral principles [relevant] for it. But this will in no way detract from the purity of these principles or cast doubt on their a priori origin. – In other words: a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology, but it may be applied to it. (6, p. 217)

And at the beginning of the *Groundwork*, he further claims that the "empirical part" of morality will treat "the will of human beings in so far as it is affected by nature" (4, p. 387).

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Anthropological questions are therefore not morally irrelevant, and for this reason the published *Anthropology* is not irrelevant either. “Pragmatic” is defined by Kant here as “what the human being as a free acting being can and should make of himself.” It primarily concerns what is open to observation or what we can be observed to make of ourselves (i.e., what we *can* do), but at least secondarily it also concerns moral rules (or what we *ought* to make of ourselves). We must now ask what the precise relevance of the published *Anthropology* for Kant’s mature moral theory is. How far does or can it extend? The *Groundwork* does not seem to leave much room for it.

**Anthropology and moral philosophy: the mature view**

Kant claims in *The Metaphysics of Morals* that anthropology cannot be dispensed with, but it cannot precede morality. And mixing anthropology in any way with the discussion of the pure principles of morals is for him one of the most serious mistakes of moral theory. Thus moral anthropology is a secondary concern. Moral anthropology would have to deal with what empirical agents do, i.e., with the observation of what they actually do in contexts that we call “moral.” If only for this reason, he must have thought that he could not dispense with anthropological concerns in a full discussion of morality.

This is not all that can be said, however. In so far as a specifically moral anthropology has to deal with the conditions that hinder or further the execution of the moral laws “in human nature” and the “spread and strengthening of moral principles through the education” in schools and in public, and also with the personal and public contexts of morality that are open to empirical observation, it is even more important. Anthropology must be concerned with the sociological and even historical developments which are relevant to morality. In so far as pragmatic anthropology also deals with these questions, it is also relevant here. Furthermore, in so far as it also addresses the question of the relationship between “can” and “ought,” it necessarily raises (or leads up to) questions that belong to moral anthropology. Nevertheless, as should be clear from Kant’s claims in the *Groundwork* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, these do not seem to be questions that can be answered within the context of a pragmatic anthropology itself. A specifically moral anthropology can cover at best only a very small

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part of what Kant intends to deal with in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Even if there is perhaps some overlap between the pragmatic anthropology and the projected moral anthropology, this overlap is not very great. So where is the moral anthropology Kant envisaged?

The answer to *this* question is easy, for, strictly speaking, it does not exist. Kant clearly never completed it. There is no book or article in which he explicitly sets himself that task and tackles it directly. Still, there are beginnings. We might look for hints in the place where Kant talks most explicitly about both the moral law and human nature, namely the “Doctrine of Virtue” in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, where he claims that “virtue” is the point at which morality makes contact with *human nature*. This is interesting, as “virtue” or *Tugend* does not play a significant role in Kant’s *Groundwork*, and while it is important in the discussion of the postulates in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, even there it is not an explicit topic of discussion. Even though Kant claims that “virtue is the greatest that finite practical reason can achieve” (5, p. 33), he does not pursue the topic any further.

This is no accident, since virtue is for Kant not a topic of pure moral philosophy, which is concerned with reason in general. Virtue is of the greatest importance for a specific kind of reason, namely our *own* reason. It concerns morality “applied” to human beings. Kant makes this very clear in the early lectures on moral philosophy, where he argues that a doctrine of virtue cannot capture moral philosophy as a whole:

Ethics explained by a *doctrine of virtue* is good inasmuch as virtue belongs solely to the inner tribunal; but since virtue entails not just *morally good* actions, but at the same time the possibility of the opposite, and thus incorporates an inner struggle, this is therefore too narrow a concept, since we can also ascribe *ethics*, but not virtue (properly speaking) to the angels and to God, for in them there is assuredly holiness but not virtue. (27, p. 13)

Virtue cannot express “quite accurately the notion of moral goodness” precisely because it has to do with the “strength in mastering and overcoming” ourselves, i.e., with our moral disposition (27, p. 300). It is important, however, because it is the ability to overcome the inclination of evil “on moral principles” (27, p. 463) and is “the moral perfection of man. To virtue we attach power, strength and authority. It is a victory

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over inclination" (27, p. 465). For this reason it is also "the greatest worth of the person" (29, pp. 599f.).

"Holy beings are not virtuous" (27, p. 215). In this respect, virtue is similar to piety. Both concern internal matters and consist in dispositions. They differ "not in actions, but in their motivating grounds." In virtue the motivating ground is morality or the "good disposition" alone. In piety there are other reasons. Piety not only does not exclude virtue; it actually demands it (27, pp. 308f.), but just as God and the angels are not pious, so they are not virtuous. Virtue is something essentially human, and for this reason it cannot serve as a central concept in a "pure moral philosophy that is completely cleared of everything which can only be empirical and anthropological." To argue that virtue is impossible would be misanthropic and would amount to what Kant calls "moral unbelief" (27, p. 316). The doctrine of the virtues is important in describing the common moral praxis, but it is not part of the science of morals. Only beings like us can be or need to be virtuous. This is a position that Kant never gave up. Thus he defines virtue in the *Metaphysics of Morals* as "the ability and the considered purpose to resist . . . the enemy of the moral disposition (*Gesinnung*) within ourselves" (6, p. 380). In his more technical terminology, he says that virtue is "the strength of man's maxim in fulfilling his duty" (6, p. 394).

To sum up: virtue is something human, perhaps even all-too-human. It is a notion that gives us a preliminary idea of morality, and it must be discussed in anthropological contexts. Already in his announcement of his lectures of 1765, Kant said as much when he proclaimed that he intended to make clear what his method is by first considering "what actually takes place before indicating what should happen." And as late as 1785 he says that "morality" may not be the best word to indicate what he is after, but he is sure that "we cannot take virtue to do so" (27, p. 300). Still, virtue must form the beginning of Kant's moral anthropology or his "morality applied to man."

The discussion of virtue is embedded in a more general discussion of human ends or goals. Kant argues there that there is at least one end that is "in itself" or "at the same time" a duty, and he calls this a "duty of virtue" or *Tugendpflicht*, in specific contrast to general "ethical obligation." While ethical obligation is singular and concerns the "merely formal" aspect of moral obligation, there are many duties of virtue (6, p. 383). Actually, there are, according to Kant, two basic or fundamental duties



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of virtue (which give rise to many others), namely the duty to perfect oneself and the duty to further the happiness of others. To perfect oneself, for him, means among other things to raise oneself “from the crude state” of our nature or animality “more and more to humanity” (6, p. 387). And to promote the happiness of others depends also on their own conception of happiness. For both these duties anthropological considerations are not only relevant but even necessary. We need to know others and ourselves, for without such knowledge we are likely to go wrong in the application of moral principles. Only if we know the nature of human beings can we hope to become virtuous. And it is for this reason that anthropology from a pragmatic point of view is important. Just because it is concerned with “what the human being as a free acting being can and should make of himself,” it is also important for the discussion of those virtues that are also duties. It is also relevant for a better understanding of the concept of “virtue,” for if virtue is “the strength of a maxim” in the actual fulfillment of duty, and if this strength can be measured only “by the obstacles it can overcome,” then we must know these “obstacles.” And because they are “in the case of virtue . . . natural inclinations which can come into conflict with the human being’s resolution, and since it is man himself who puts these obstacles in the way of his maxims,” the kind of self-knowledge that pragmatic anthropology provides is very important for the discussion of virtue (6, p. 393).

Now, virtue or the virtues as discussed by Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals* correspond very closely to the notion of character in anthropological contexts. “Virtue” is the moral and ideal concept; “character” refers to the empirical reality (6, p. 47). A person who is virtuous must also have a good character, even if someone with a good character need not necessarily be virtuous. More importantly, perhaps, someone without character cannot possibly be virtuous in Kant’s view. Indeed, one might say that a good character is a necessary condition for virtue and that virtue would be a necessary and sufficient condition for a good character. Therefore, questions about virtue in moral contexts become questions about character in anthropological contexts.

Thus, when Kant talks in anthropological contexts of a good character, he is indirectly talking also about a virtuous person. In his *Religion* he distinguishes between the firm ability that allows us to fulfill our duty in a legal sense and goodness in the eyes of God, calling the former *virtus phaenomenon* and the latter *virtus noumenon*. If the “practical” or “moral

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anthropology” and pure moral philosophy require an *Übergang* or a connecting link, then this link must be the one between “virtue” and “character.” It is clear that Kant’s discussion of character in the second part of the *Anthropology* (and in the lectures on anthropology) is very important for his moral anthropology and his applied ethics. According to Kant, “the character of any human being is based on the rule of the maxims. Character could therefore also be defined as the determination of the free will of man by lasting and firm maxims” (25, p. 1385). For this reason he identifies character with our “way of thinking” (*Denkungsart*), which is opposed to the way of sensing (*Sinnesart*).

The close relation of character to virtue should be almost immediately apparent. Even though they are not identical and the phrase “moral character” is for the mature Kant almost an oxymoron, he frequently uses it in the early lectures on anthropology and sometimes also in his critical writings. But the concept of “character” is more deeply embedded than “virtue” in anthropological concerns. Indeed, Kant’s moral psychology is a psychology of character: in applied morality the question is not “What shall I do?” but “What kind of person should I be?” It has to do with leading a certain kind of life, or being a certain kind of person. But character is not fundamental. Indeed, as he says in his *Anthropology*,

The sole proof a man’s consciousness affords him that he has character is his having made it his supreme maxim to be truthful, both in his admission to himself and in his conduct toward every other man. And since having character is both the minimum that can be required of a reasonable man and the maximum of inner worth (of human dignity), it must be possible for the most ordinary human reason to be a man of principles (to have determinate character) and yet, according to its dignity, surpass the greatest talent. (7, p. 295)

Ultimately it comes down again to the question of the morality of the supreme maxim, not to a question about empirical character. Still, the discussion of the nature of character in the second half of the *Anthropology* is highly relevant for any understanding of Kant’s view of the nature of morality and its relation to virtue.

Given the preceding discussion, it might be thought that Kant’s moral theory must ultimately be understood as some sort of virtue ethics. But

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this is not so. Kant's published texts do not offer a theory that can usefully be described as "virtue ethics," and were not intended to do so. They were intended to offer something much more general, namely the beginnings of a "metaphysics of morals" or a fundamental discussion of what Kant took to be the general framework of morals. Contemporary discussions of Kant's virtue ethics often confuse different levels of discourse that, as we have seen, Kant meant to keep separate. For this reason, they distort his view of the virtues. On the other hand, Kant's published texts do presuppose or start out from a particular kind of virtue ethics. His general discussion of the framework of morals is based on a certain conception of morals in which virtues played a fundamental role. Therefore we may expect on the one hand that Kant's theory has some relevance for the virtues, and on the other hand that his conception of the framework of morals is not independent of the conception of the virtues from which he started out.

It is sometimes suggested that this virtue theory is close to that of Aristotle, but the *Anthropology* suggests that this is a mistaken view. The virtue ethics presupposed by Kant is definitely not Aristotelian in character; rather, it is an example of the kind of ethics prevalent in Europe and North America during the eighteenth century. It possessed (almost inevitably) some Aristotelian features, but it was much more influenced by Christian and Stoic doctrines and imbued with local Prussian convictions. Also in the *Anthropology*, however, are the beginnings of a universalist virtue ethics that would be appropriate for a cosmopolitan or a citizen of the world, and that is further developed in Kant's writings on history. It would not be entirely inappropriate to call these "virtues of the Enlightenment," although Kant himself did not develop them because he was convinced that the progress of human individuals was insignificant compared with the progress of the human race as a whole. But even that latter point is for Kant an anthropological question, and the discussion of this problem must therefore be informed to some extent by the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. So, while the "moral anthropology" described by Kant is obviously not identical with what we find in the lectures on anthropology or the published *Anthropology*, the views presented there may have some relevance for it. This means that there is at least the possibility that this work includes considerations and materials that would also form part of a genuinely moral anthropology, but it also means that it should not be straightforwardly identified

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with it. The approach to Kant's moral anthropology must ultimately be "multi-textual."<sup>13</sup>

Kant intended in his mature works to offer an ethical theory which was "carefully cleansed of everything empirical." The *Anthropology* shows us what an empirical morality looks like, and which concepts in such an empirical morality correspond to the pure concepts of will and maxim. The *Anthropology* also discusses the implications which Kant's doctrine of the relation between the empirical and the pure part has for the virtues. In doing both of these things it helps us to develop a Kantian ethics in a direction that Kant himself would have recognized as Kantian – something that is not true of all contemporary positions that are purportedly "Kantian." Kant's rigorous moral theory emphasizes that "rational beings" need not necessarily be human, and that we ought nevertheless to be motivated by pure rational principles. Some critics regard this as a departure from the Enlightenment motto that the proper study of mankind is man. Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* provides an answer to these critics, because it contains the kernel of a cosmopolitan virtue theory in the Enlightenment tradition. The task of the contemporary Kantian should be to develop the suggestions contained in this profound text.

Finally, at a time in which there is an increasing tendency to "naturalize" Kant, it is advisable to take a very close look at what Kant does and does not say about "human nature." A new translation and edition of Kant's *Anthropology* is therefore timely and important, and a discussion of the relevance of this work in the context of Kant's philosophy is long overdue.

<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Loudon's *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) argues most persuasively for the importance of this "impure ethics."

# Chronology

1724	Immanuel Kant born April 22 in Königsberg, East Prussia
1730–1732	Attended Vorstädter Hospitalschule (elementary school)
1732–1740	Attends the Collegium Fridericianum (parochial – Pietist – school)
1740–1746	Attends the University of Königsberg
1747	<i>Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces</i>
1747–1754	Serves as private tutor for families in the vicinity of Königsberg
1755	Completes dissertation entitled “Succinct Exposition of Some Meditations on Fire” and receives his doctoral degree from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Königsberg <i>Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens</i> , in which Kant proposes an astronomical theory now known as the Kant–Laplace hypothesis <i>New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition</i> , paper presented to the Philosophy Faculty
1756	Three treatises on an earthquake in Lisbon <i>Physical Monadology</i>
1762	<i>The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures</i>
1763	<i>The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God</i>
1764	<i>Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime</i>

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| 1764 | <i>Inquiry Concerning the Distinctiveness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals</i>   |
| 1766 | <i>Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics</i>   |
| 1770 | Appointed Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Königsberg; inaugural dissertation entitled <i>Concerning the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World</i> |
| 1781 | <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , first (A) edition   |
| 1783 | <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i>   |
| 1784 | <i>Ideas Towards a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View</i><br><i>An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?</i>   |
| 1785 | Review of Herder's <i>Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind</i><br><i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>   |
| 1786 | Elected to the Academy of Sciences in Berlin<br><i>Conjectural Beginning of Human History</i><br><i>Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science</i><br><i>What is Orientation in Thinking?</i>     |
| 1787 | <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , second (B) edition  |
| 1788 | <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i><br><i>Concerning the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy</i>  |
| 1790 | <i>Critique of Judgment</i> , first edition  |
| 1793 | <i>On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory but is of No Practical Use</i><br><i>Critique of Judgment</i> , second edition<br><i>Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone</i>                  |
| 1794 | Censured by the Imperial Censor; elected to the Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg<br><i>The End of All Things</i>  |
| 1795 | <i>On Perpetual Peace</i>  |
| 1796 | July: Kant's last lecture  |
| 1797 | <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i><br><i>On the Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives</i>  |
| 1798 | <i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i><br><i>The Conflict of the Faculties</i> (Part II: "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?")                    |