

Immanuel Kant

Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View.

Trans. Robert B. Loudon.

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From 1772 until 1796, Kant lectured annually on anthropology, which he hoped would help establish the subject as an autonomous academic discipline. Spanning a twenty-four year period, these lectures documented a developing conception of anthropology with apparently ambiguous links to the entire critical project. The definitive edition of the lectures which Kant eventually published in 1798, however, makes no attempt to establish any such links, leaving scholars to debate its relative importance ever since.

While some prefer to treat the *Anthropology* as a separate work of cosmopolitan philosophy intended for a popular audience, others see it as holding the key to a new way of understanding the critical project. Could anthropology be used to ground metaphysics, as Heidegger—later seeking the transcendental conditions of *Dasein* in an ontological foundation—would contend in his book on Kant? Or must any such attempt to ground metaphysics in human finitude be abandoned in favor of an approach which would instead limit anthropology to the *a priori* conditions of human knowledge, as Foucault would argue in his *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*? Does it not pose a contradiction to posit Man as both the transcendental condition of empirical knowledge as well as the very object of that knowledge? This new, fully annotated translation of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is a welcome addition in light of the continuing focus among scholars on the question of whether empirical psychology is possible for Kant.

The *Anthropology* is divided into two parts, the first of which, the 'Anthropological Didactic', is in turn divided into three books: 'On the Cognitive Faculty', 'The Feeling of Pleasure and Displeasure', and 'On the Faculty of Desire'. The first book takes issue with the Leibniz-Wolffian school for positing sensibility merely in the indistinctness of representations, while making the distinctness achieved by apperception into the exclusive property of intellectuality (29). Kant contends that sensibility produces empirical apperception independently of the transcendental activity of the understanding in the form of the sensing 'I' of apprehension (in contrast to the knowing 'I' of reflection), and that it is therefore a cognitive faculty in its own right (32-3). He then goes on to distinguish the five senses, inner experience, enthusiasm, habit, affect, passion, inclination, and the powers of imagination, association, and signification as different modes and faculties of this sensing apprehension. The second book of Part I goes on to distinguish sensuous from intellectual pleasure in the judgment of taste, while

the third book orients the self-determination of the faculty of desire in relation to some of the different modes we have already named, such as inclination, wish, longing, passion, and affect.

Part 2 of the *Anthropology*, the ‘Anthropological Characteristic’, is divided into sections on ‘The Character of the Person’, ‘The Character of the Sexes’, ‘The Character of the Peoples’, ‘The Character of the Races’, and ‘The Character of the Species’. In the first section, Kant considers human temperaments according to the ancient fourfold division of humors, as both physiological facts of humoral complexion, as well as psychological tendencies determined by the constitution of the blood. However, Kant claims that the constitution of the blood cannot serve to indicate the cause of the phenomena observed in a sensibly affected individual, but only to classify these phenomena according to observed effects (187). The relationship between the four humors and the psychological play of feelings and desires is only analogical, yet Kant adheres to the symmetrical division of the four temperaments without authorizing their designation according to chemical blood mixture. Instead, he divides them first according to feeling (sanguine and melancholic) and action (choleric and phlegmatic), and then subjects each to conditions of intensity and relaxation. This results in the cheerful sanguine being characterized by speed and force of feeling but not by depth, while the sad melancholic by less speed and force of feeling but with greater depth, and the fierce choleric by speed and force of action but not by depth, while the calm phlegmatic by less speed and force of action but with greater depth. Kant emphasizes that the distinction of temperaments must be located in these differential characteristics, and not in the tendency to cheerfulness or sadness themselves, which are only the qualitative effects of these more genetic tendencies. Some character psychologists have credited Kant for redeeming the phlegmatic temperament for its intellectually productive lack of affect.

Another of Kant’s original contributions to the theory of temperaments is the idea that certain temperaments will be opposed to one another, while others will chemically neutralize each other (190-91). For instance, the sanguine is opposed to the melancholic and the choleric is opposed to the phlegmatic, since they have opposite determinations of intensity and relaxation. Meanwhile, the melancholic would neutralize the phlegmatic and the sanguine would neutralize the choleric, since the good-natured cheerfulness of the passive sanguine could not be conceived as being fused with the forbidding anger of the active choleric, any more than the pain and self-torment of the passive melancholic could be conceived as being fused with the contentment and mental self-sufficiency of the active phlegmatic. But what to make of Kant’s contradicting his own contention that chemical blood mixture does not need to be known to authorize a certain temperamental designation, when the very impossibility of combination between temperaments is posited according to their chemical blood mixture? Further on in the section ‘The Character of the Peoples’, he oversteps the limits of pragmatic anthropology yet again when he claims that ethnic character innately lies in the blood mixture of the human being (222). Is Kant here not reorienting anthropology towards the physiological paradigm

which he repeatedly excludes from his pragmatic point of view? In contrast to such assumptions, however, when he considers how songbirds teach songs to their young Kant acknowledges that animals are capable of learning no less than humans, thereby suggesting that humans are perhaps not the only rational animals (227).

To conclude, let us point out that by ‘pragmatic’ anthropology Kant had in mind a rigorous science of moral motivation which would set down rules of prudence concerning the uses which could be made of other people to achieve one’s own ends, while defining what the freely acting human being can and should make of himself. To those familiar with the historical role which anthropologists and ethnographers played in the ruthless colonization of the non-Western world, this should make one shudder. It is also precisely from this point that Foucault ironically resumes the critical project, with his historical genealogies of the human sciences.

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