

Immanuel Kant

Anthropology, History, and Education.

Edited by Robert B. Louden and Günter Zöllner.

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This addition to the Cambridge Kant collection brings together seventeen works by Kant that were published during a period of over thirty-nine years. From Kant's popular early essay, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), to the final work that was published on Kant's behalf during his life-time, *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803), this collection presents readers with a remarkably wide array of topics that are invaluable for contemporary Kant scholars. With only one exception (by Mary Gregor), all of the translations in this collection are new and have been undertaken specifically for this edition. In keeping with Cambridge's gold standard for accuracy and transparency, each of the translations strive to minimize interpretation and preserve literalness as much as possible. Unlike many English-language editions of these Kant pieces, this collection not only includes numerous notes that highlight translational ambiguities, but also provides us with all of the known annotations by Kant to these various works.

Despite the wide array of topics present in this volume, some thematic unity is discernible. The editors suggest that the central theme that links together these diverse essays is a focus on human nature (1). Kant scholars are no doubt familiar with Kant's repeated insistence that the most fundamental question of philosophy was: 'What is man?' (*Jäsche Logic* 9:25; cf. letter to Stäudlin of May 1793, 11:429; and *Metaphysik Pölitz* 28:533-4). During the thirty-nine year span in which these publications appeared Kant addressed this question from a variety of different perspectives. In addition to approaching the question indirectly in his wider known 'Critical' texts on pure and practical reason, Kant raised it much more directly in the works on anthropology, history and education assembled in this collection. Since Kant deemed the basic question of philosophical anthropology to be the fundamental question of philosophy, and since this volume contains Kant's most direct approaches to this question, this collection is clearly an indispensable resource for any serious reader of Kant's philosophy.

Of particular interest is the way in which many of these works serve to illuminate and challenge some of our common preconceptions about Kant's moral philosophy. Kant is often (mis)interpreted as a staunch universalist whose *a priori* rigidity did not sufficiently allow for flexibility, moral development, or even an appreciation for the many meaningful differences *among* human beings *in* their differing socio-cultural settings. Such an interpretation of Kant's ethics can only be considered true, however, if Kant's foundational works in moral philosophy are interpreted as the whole of his ethics rather than as a part. Kant himself explicitly stated in a number of places, including the preface to his *Grundlegung* (4:392), that his foundational works in ethics were intended solely to provide the supreme principle of morality for rational nature, and that his

subsequent publications would apply this *a priori* principle to human nature. The essays assembled in this collection present us with Kant's most direct and encompassing characterizations of human nature and are therefore essential reading for a deeper and more complete understanding of his moral philosophy.

A number of passages could be cited to show how the Kant found in these essays likely does not cohere with the Kant of our more familiar (and facile) characterizations of his ethics. For instance, many contemporary readers will likely be surprised to read Kant claim that moral autonomy is an arduous historical process (168-9, 111-12 and 116) and that education is the only means for cultivating and (hopefully) realizing a morally receptive disposition and consciousness (439). They might also be surprised to learn of Kant's account of the 'unsociable sociability' (111-14) that inescapably characterizes human nature. Kant thought that, unlike a pure rational being, human beings were simultaneously inclined both to live in society and to live as individuals. Kant claimed that this individualistic and self-centered drive is what first led human beings to develop latent rational faculties that were able to produce, for instance, pragmatic technologies and even weapons of war. However, as our reason developed out of this spontaneous and self-conceited urge to dominate and 'direct everything so as to get (our) own way' (111), human beings simultaneously began to develop a sense of humility that their own rationality was not special or unique. For Kant, a sense of respect for the rationality of human nature (should) ultimately motivate our moral compass in the world and thus lead us to search for a harmonious concord with other rational beings. This intriguing Kantian position on the genesis of moral consciousness, and its prospects for developmental progress, is no doubt at odds with many common readings of Kant today and likely explains why a leading Kant scholar has recently stated that 'it is too seldom appreciated that Kant...treats practical anthropology as a necessary part of ethics' (Allen Wood, *Kant*, 133).

Many contemporary readers might also find it interesting to read of Kant's apparent fascination with human diversity and cultural variation. Observations and speculations on the differences between, e.g., sex, race, age, physiology, culture, and geographical conditions are littered throughout these works (especially in his *Anthropology From A Pragmatic Point of View*). To take one example, Kant considers the question whether different human races constitute separate sub-species. He argues for the negative (84-5, 153), and even speculates as to how different races could have emerged from the same species: he suggests that it is likely owing to 'nature' having 'equipped her creatures' so as to best suit them to 'differences in climate or soil' (89). Although it is not always clear on what kind of evidence or data Kant bases such conclusions, the Kant whom we find in the *Anthropology* is hardly someone uninterested in human diversity or indifferent to how cultural forces and geographical conditions could contribute toward the evolutionary development of the human species.

Of course, none of this is to say that Kant's observations were correct or even palatable to our more socially conscious ears. By today's standards many of these essays clearly reveal Kant to be a sexist and a racist. Kant states that the range of a woman's moral capacities is limited (43, 50). Moreover, he speculates that certain human beings

(e.g., the ‘yellow Indian’ of the Americas) were ‘incapable of any culture’ (221). Thus, Kant must seemingly believe that only some (privileged) members of the human species are capable of realizing the highest end of human nature, viz. rational morality. This gives rise to interesting and instructive points of Kant interpretation. Was Kant so blinded by the prejudices of his time that he was unable properly to apply his own moral principles, or was there something intrinsically problematic about his moral principles such that they inevitably lead him to generate sexist and racist conclusions? In other words, what should come first in our evaluation of Kant’s moral thought: his principles of ethics or his own particular manner of applying those principles? If we believe that his application was incorrect, then this should at the very least give rise to questions concerning how we, today, could apply such principles more correctly.

The anthropological dimension of Kant’s thought is too often neglected. The essays assembled in this collection are essential reading for remedying this deficiency, and they will inevitably challenge us to (re)consider the merit of Kant’s account of the human position below the starry heavens above.

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