

# *Anthropologia transscendentalis.* Kant's theory of human nature

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## ABSTRACT

*In recent years mankind has greatly extended its knowledge of living things, in general, and of itself, in particular. Such a wide-ranging body of knowledge has consequently led to the need for a theory to encompass it, that is, a coherent framework in which to systematically arrange mankind's understanding of itself, not only with regard to its physical nature, but to its individuality and sociality as well. Such a theory would moreover provide the means to mediate between the various domains of scientific and technological enquiry, on the one hand, and the cultural dimensions of human society, on the other. Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Immanuel Kant strove to establish a discipline that was systematic, yet at the same time accessible. It was due to his efforts that philosophical anthropology was introduced into university curricula, to the benefit not only of philosophers, but of physicians and jurists as well. Kant's position is by no means prejudicial towards science. To the contrary, he was quite careful to appraise the impact of the sciences on the overall cognitive horizons of mankind and therefore on their potential to influence humankind's idea of itself. Clearly such a perspective is relevant to today's strongly felt need to reconcile modern neuroscience's revolutionary findings on the biological bases of the mind – of man's experience and behaviour – with the idea man needs of himself in order to orient his actions not only as individual but also as “citizen of the world” as well – something on which Kant worked with unremitting commitment throughout his entire research career. This article traces Kant's anthropological conception with regard to four specific issues: (1) its relation to science; (2) the relationship between empirical and transcendental in the speculative use and in practical use of reason; (3) the dialectic between what nature does and what human beings do, in the construction of humanity itself; (4) and finally about the character of the person and the character of the human species.*

### **Key words**

*Philosophy of science • Self-image • Human life • Kant*

## Introduction

No historical reconstruction has yet failed to recognise Kant's preeminent role in the founding of philosophical anthropology. Likewise, none has failed to add how he neglected to develop this anthropology and define its place within his overall philosophical system, hence eventually relegating it to a marginal existence – a sort of “Cinderella”, never to be reconciled with his transcendental conception. In this

view, Kant created something that he himself would not or could not see through to the end (Bohlken and Thies, 2009). There are, however, other, equally extreme theoretical interpretations, exemplified by Michel Foucault's, that regard anthropology as little more than a “reiterating” of Kant's critical philosophy (Foucault, 2010).

Although both such perspectives are similarly incomplete, they do call attention to a real problem in any critical interpretation of Kant's anthropologi-

cal doctrine. It is however possible to adopt various strategies to attempt to pin down the significance of his anthropology, on the one hand, and its relation to his transcendental conception, on the other. A first and perhaps most fruitful approach is to apply a “temporal” criterion: every winter semester for more than twenty years Kant unflinchingly ran a course on anthropology, which during the summer semester was replaced by his teaching geography. Another strategy would instead be, in a manner of speaking, “spatial”: the subject of anthropology appears in each and every one of the four sections into which the critical edition of Kant’s writings is divided. In all his published works, letters, notes and lessons, the anthropological question is brought up without fail, though addressed and treated within the framework of different issues. However, despite the wealth of insight they provide, neither of these strategies turns out to be entirely satisfactory, given the pervasiveness and persistence of the issue (Jacobs and Kain, 2003).

A decisive approach might instead be represented by taking Kant’s own interpretation of his philosophy seriously: while this nominally aims to answer epistemological and practical questions, as well as any doubts regarding their chances for success, what it actually does is to delineate a solution to the question: “what is man?” (LV, AA IX 25) [References to Kant’s works herein use the pagination of the Akademie edition (1900 ff.) with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) which is referred to by citing the page numbers of the original A and B version. Kant’s works are cited from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*]. Kant viewed this as the most interesting problem of all philosophy (Gerhardt, 2002). Indeed, in his *Lessons on anthropology*, Kant states that knowledge of humankind constitutes philosophy’s most difficult subject matter, hence the neglect it suffered until then. Kant ascribes the uniqueness of such knowledge to the fact that it must, by necessity, refer to itself: “The fault seems to lie not only in the difficulty of conducting this type of observation, but also in the bizarre conviction that we believe to know that which we have become accustomed to dealing with” (AV, AA XXV 7).

He was so convinced of the need to include in such reflections the very same perspective whence it sprang that he planned his pragmatic anthropol-

ogy according to the architectonic of the three *Critiques* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Just as in his other works, the first part of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) is devoted to the elements. The elements of the human being are his faculties: cognitive, volitive, and affective. The renowned second part, the *Doctrine of Method*, which deals with applying the previously defined elements, tackles the task of applying these specific elements – the faculties – to human being, expressed variously in the characters of the person, the genders (man and woman), races and peoples, and finally human species. While the character of a person lies in the rational dimension of man, considered as individuals, the subsequent two aspects concentrate on the empirical, those aspects that we now consider the subject matter of genders studies and cultural studies, respectively. The last facet instead regards the aspects of the human species such as civil society and political agency.

If we must put a name to Kant’s doctrine of human being, we could do worse than to call it his *Anthropologia transscendentalis* (Reflection 903, AA XV 394-395). Such a label expresses not only the interdisciplinary nature of Kant’s anthropology, but also his taking a non-empirical perspective, or in Kant’s own words, developing philosophy from a “a higher standpoint of anthropological observation” (Perpetual Peace, AA VIII 374), which can encompass the results of the empirical sciences – whether they be natural or cultural – and thereby evaluate and examine them within a sphere of communicative rationality able to hold human beings together (Albus et al., 2007).

## 1. Kant’s anthropology and the sciences

What is it that makes Kant’s anthropology so interesting today, despite our having just entered the 21st century? It is its capacity to capture the bonds joining knowledge of the world, the scientific method and our search for criteria to orientate our actions (Gallese et al., 2004). Indeed, Kant’s anthropology provides a theory within which to frame such dimensions in order to embrace science and its premises, without however submitting to its dictates. In fact, Kant managed to free anthropology from its former

paradigm, heavily laden as it was with theology, and instead set off to find the connecting elements between nature and freedom, while at the same time remaining open to the findings of the human sciences, whether they deal with nature, such as biology, or with culture. Although his doctrine shared the erstwhile ideal of a unitary system of knowledge, it advanced the need for renewal and therefore displays clear elements of a refounding and a break with tradition. Indeed, Newtonian science, with its incontestable results in the field of physics, made it inevitable that change come to the order of the entire patrimony of human experience and knowledge (Tononi, 2004). It is therefore safe to conclude that the ascendancy of Newtonian physics cast doubt simultaneously on both theological as well as philosophical knowledge. Kant, in part thanks to his “scientific” education at the hands of his teacher, Martin Knutzen (Kuehn, 2001; 2001a), was acutely aware of how the fate of metaphysics was tightly interwoven with that of science. So, first of all he set out to revise philosophical knowledge, so that it could hold the same claim to rigour as the sciences – an essential condition in order to establish a dialogue on equal terms. This is a requisite that dominated his thought and that emerges expressly each and every time he returned to the subject of a system of knowledge. Young Kant’s sensitivity to science re-emerges later in the “critical” Kant, who reformulated the design for his philosophy a number of times, through the question of whether mathematics, physics and metaphysics are possible *as* sciences. It is not by chance that this plan was taken up by a number of his contemporaries, especially in its *pars destruens*. Jacobi, for example, warned, in rather dramatic terms, of the absence of a theological grounding to Kant’s design, and went so far as to define the entire critical undertaking a subjectivist abyss. For his part, Mendelssohn, gave Kant the appellative “he who destroys all (*Alles Zermalmender*)” (of which Kant was not at all proud). Actually, by revising the very foundations of knowledge, Kant simply intended to ensure a certain congruity with the new scientific sensibility of his time. For such enterprise he found no other footing than mankind itself, judged and valued for what our capacities enable us to see empirically and argue rationally.

Despite the utmost attention Kant dedicated to his model of scientific knowledge, it is relevant to see

how he nonetheless did not view it as resolving the human questions, for which he believed further philosophical reflection was needed. Kant was, in fact, aware of the risks of the homologation and reductionism inherent in the technical-scientific model, but not to the point of renouncing the scientific explanation of the world that it provides. His consequent defence of the “interests” of humanity with respect to the all-engaging claims of the sciences arose through awareness that human products can also be turned against their own authors and become tools of oppression. His work on ethics as a dimension encompassing “the human element”, especially bears the marks of these efforts, which during the ’90s were ever more dedicated to the search for a theoretical paradigm able to articulate the complexity of human life and to account for not only feeling, but also the communicative dimension of existence. Also in these last years his work benefited greatly from exchanges with the newborn life sciences, which Kant keenly perceived as united to philosophy in their efforts to understand how the mind perceives, thinks and acts (Tononi and Koch, 2008).

One further indicator of Kant’s intent to develop philosophy without however ignoring what was occurring in other fields of knowledge is the fact that he chose precisely eminent figures in the history of science as references to gauge the corresponding progress of philosophy. Copernicus and his cosmological model, in particular, furnished the paradigm with which Kant tried to account for the novel elements in his own philosophy. The “Copernican revolution”, brought to philosophy by Kant, was characterised by the endeavour to set the human perspective at the very root of his own investigation (Longuenesse, 2005). Contrary to Sigmund Freud’s eventual conclusions, Kant did not consider the outcome of the Copernican theory as an affront to human ambitions to know and govern their own actions. Instead, he appreciated the theory’s ability to look at things in a new way, and uses this shift in perspective to introduce his theory of knowledge. The same holds for his tackling the task of accounting for life (Gerhardt, 2007). Once again, his reference point was science, in particular the figure of Newton. But this time his reference to the progress of the science serves to mark the boundaries between scientific knowledge and philosophical knowledge. According to Kant, in fact, there would never be a

“Newton of the blade of grass”, because the moment that one attempts to study the phenomenon of life, one cannot but resort to categories belonging to human rationality. This is the most profound sense of all researchers’ claim to autonomy, even with respect to their own knowledge (despite the fact that it is scientific knowledge).

## 2. The empirical and the transcendental in the speculative and practical use of reason

The development of an independent anthropological dimension stems from an awareness of the inadequacy of the mathematical method and the existence of a specific dialectics of reason, which takes on particular characteristics depending on its speculative or practical use, as well as from a call to the world (Ameriks, 2001). Although the empirical level is a constituent part of philosophical knowledge, its role in the two uses of reason must nonetheless be evaluated, just as it is equally necessary to assess the real application of scientific methods within philosophy. Although Kant never entertained any doubt as to the unity of the system of knowledge, he nevertheless regarded it as distorted by the indiscriminate imposition of scientific methods, specifically those of mathematics, to the field of philosophy. In his 1763 *The only possible argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God*, amongst the reasons cited for his departure from Wolff’s philosophy, he includes his musings on the methods applied and his refusal to adopt mathematical procedures in metaphysics. This was to remain a firm point in Kant’s speculations. And although he pointedly underlined, even admired, the results obtained by applying mathematics to the study of external objects, he would adamantly criticise any design to use such methods in philosophy: “The mania for method and the imitation of the mathematician, who advances with a sure step along a well-surfaced road, have occasioned a large number of such mishaps on the slippery round of metaphysics. These mishaps are constantly before one’s eyes, but there is little hope that people will be warned by them, or that they will learn to be more circumspect as a result” (Argument, II 71). He levelled a similar admonition at psychology, intended as the study of man’s

inner nature. In fact, in *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) he accuses psychology of lacking precision and not satisfying even minimum requirements. Mathematics is simply not applicable to the phenomena of the inner senses, “for in it the manifold of inner observation can be separated and recombined at will (but still less does another thinking subject suffer himself to be experimented upon to suit our purpose) and even observation by itself already changes and displaces the state of the observed object” (MAN, AA IV 471). However, while mathematics left much to be desired, another way to proceed in studying organic nature was to emerge, one which Kant formulated through reflections on a science that was gaining ground at the time: chemistry (Carrier, 2001).

In *Dialectic of pure practical reason* Kant ascertains that pure reason, in both its speculative and practical applications, is always liable to wind up in contradiction with itself. Such liability is insurmountable, because reason does not act alone, but must always count on the “cooperation” of the sensibility to realise its intent (CPracR, V 107). Just as in speculative use, where knowledge cannot ensue without the intuition of outer and inner senses, in practical use sensibility is also a constituent element of the practical realm. Here it turns out to be critical for translating moral principles into action: “Which no doubt still require a judgement sharpened by experience, partly to distinguish in what case they are applicable and partly to provide them with access to the will of the human being and efficacy for his fulfilment of them” (G, AA IV 389). At first glance, there may be a misguided urge to think that, given all the “care” that Kant devoted to isolating the morality principle and rendering it independent of empirical human nature (G, AA IV 388, 389, 410), it would be better to simply carry on without sensibility. Upon more careful consideration, however, it can be seen that not only is this not possible, because although the supreme principles of morality are not based on empiricism, they nevertheless remain influenced by them, in that they still contain traces of those concepts such as pleasure, pain, desires and inclinations, which they in fact neglect. Whether they are regarded as obstacles to be overcome, or as stimuli (though not as reasons) for moral action, they persist as a *negative* and, although not explicitly considered, somehow continue as hidden traces to draw back



into the zone of sensibility that which would instead preferably be left in the realm of autonomy and separateness. However, such a procedure would not even be desirable, because it would not capture the specificity of human nature. Only an explanation that starts out from “a higher standpoint of anthropological observation” (Perpetual Peace, AA VIII 374) can clearly reveal that we are dealing with a deceptive illusion, as Kant states in a rather preliminary way in *Critique of Practical Reason*: “For, the special determination of duties as human duties, with a view to classifying them, is possible only after the subject of this determination (the human being) is cognized as *he is really constituted*” (CPracR, V 8, italics mine). The *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason* then ends by establishing a situation of contrast of reason with itself, thereby doing nothing more than to sustain the “existential” nature of reason (Ciardone, 2001; Recki, 2006). Here Kant attempts not only to resolve the difficulty by reintroducing the contrast within man as something inevitable, but also as a positive constitutional trait, the only one truly able to govern genuine morality. On the other hand, this is not new: the *Transcendental doctrine of method* of the first *Critique* also comes to identical conclusions with regard to the success that reason can hope to attain in the well-foundedness of its own knowledge. While in the *Preface* Kant underlines the “existential” value of the matters addressed in the *Critique* (which are not merely scholarly disputes, as their resolution is crucial to the “interest of human beings” (B XXXII) (Weil, 1963; Gerhardt, 1998), it is in the *Transcendental doctrine of method* that Kant conspicuously makes the attempt to confer certainty on them. The conclusion of the *Critique of practical reason* aims to reconcile the affinities and differences between science and philosophy. Almost in a virtuoso game of counterpoint, it seeks to delimit the twofold use of reason with regard to the two types of cognition, to compare rational cognition “from concepts” and that “from the construction of concepts” (A 837/B 865). He moreover warns that the philosopher’s obligation to delimit the limits of reason must also apply to mathematicians, who would do well to use concepts without concerning themselves with verifying their origins, and this, only as long as they remain grounded in experience, not when venturing upon the uncertain terrain of pure concepts. The design he advances here, that is,

one of broader reflections able to make the manifold kinds of knowledge about man converge in a single systematic vision (which he would bring to a successful completion in *The conflict of the faculties*), concludes with a prudent caution to keep the two fields clearly separated, given “mathematics and philosophy are two entirely different things, although they offer each other their hand in natural science, thus that the procedure of the one can never be imitated by that of the other” (A 726/B 754). The attempt to organise such knowledge led Kant not only to conduct sophisticated analyses in theoretical and practical philosophy, but also to the need to fill the gap that such progress inevitably produces. He dramatically expresses his perception of the need to make the realm of nature and the realm of freedom communicate in the third *Critique*. Of course, Kant continued nevertheless to affirm that there is “an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second” (CPJ, V 175-176). However, it must be clearly borne in mind that any denunciation of the existing abyss is worthwhile only if one intends to bridge such abyss by starting out with the theoretical use of reason: in this perspective, then, they are to remain two different worlds, and the former can have no influence on the latter. If instead one starts out from the world of the supersensible to end up in the realm of the sensible, an entirely different result presents itself: “yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom” (Ibid., italics mine). There is therefore a difference depending on the direction we take: in one case, it is impossible to go from descriptive statements (about what is) to prescriptive or normative statements (about what ought to be); whereas if we instead proceed from the normative dimension, we cannot attain any outcome other than seeing our intentions and designs realised in the

world of nature. From doing, one attains being; man's actions are effective in the world setting of nature and culture. This also establishes continuity between the two dimensions, making passage from one to the other possible with no solution of continuity. Such a framing attempt to account for a truly complex situation is clearly reflected in the intractability of the work in which Kant addresses it (which is precisely why this work has never been easy to interpret) (Recki, 2001; Guyer, 2005). Actually, it is instead the third *Critique* that provides the key to its interpretation, as it contains the final word on fundamental matters of the transcendental critique of rational subjectivity in light of the extensions afforded by feeling. Moreover, it also contains the discussion of organism, which by integrating the physicalist vision, contributes to delineating a complete theory of human life (Gerhardt, 2006). Although aiming to account for the findings of the life sciences, the third *Critique* returns to the speculative dimension – which in the meantime had revealed to be an inter-subjective dimension – to express the full significance of the unity of the system of nature and freedom: “one is compelled, against one's will, to look beyond the sensible and to seek the unifying point of all our faculties *a priori* in the supersensible: because no other way remains to make reason self-consistent” (CPJ, V 341).

The issue of common sense also provides a clear indication of the precise orientation of Kant's philosophical reflections, especially if we consider it in its anthropological expression. Kant dedicated an in-depth analysis to *sensus communis* in the third *Critique* (Arendt 1992). Already in the 1783 *Groundwork*, Kant, while expressing his perplexity over the penetrative capacity of philosophy, seems rather to refer to the immediate salience that some phenomena have in each and everyone's life. Indeed, this is a defining characteristic of reason in practical use: in Kant's words, “because in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is wholly dialectical” (G, AA IV 391). Kant reiterates this same concept again in *Critique of Practical Reason* with regard to the issue of freedom: considered psychologically, freedom presents no difficulty whatsoever; it is only the subsequent transcendental investigation that

sheds light on “its *indispensability* as a problematic concept in the complete use of speculative reason as well as its complete *incomprehensibility*” (CPracR, AA V 7). A bit further on, Kant then states that the voice of reason regarding the will is so clear, so impossible to cover, so distinct, even for the most ordinary of men (Ibid., AA V 35). And finally: “But if one asks: What, then, really is *pure* morality, by which as a touchstone one must test the moral content of every action? I must admit that only philosophers can make the decision of this question doubtful, for it is long since decided in common human reason, not indeed by abstract general formulae but by habitual use, like the difference between the right and the left hand” (Ibid., AA V 155). In short Kant seems to suggest that in all those cases lacking conceptual clarity, it is advisable to begin with observation of daily experience, and heed the salience conferred on mundane affairs by participating in them. In philosophy, the more abstruse matters appear to become, the more we need to return to concrete experience to get a firm grasp of the phenomenon.

Recourse to the world of life is not unjustified. Indeed, Kant made it the subject of explicit reflection, in which the experience and formulation of concepts are doubly bound to each other. Experience is not only the origin of the cognitive process, it is also its result. Traces of such circularity remain within our conceptualisations: “However exalted the application of our concepts, and however far up from sensibility we may abstract them, still they will always be appended to *image* representations, whose proper function is to make these concepts, which are not otherwise derived from experience, serviceable for *experiential use*” (Orient, VIII 133).

### 3. Man. A Joint Project

For Kant, Man is not an end result, but rather a particular work in progress, a project in whose execution nature surely participates, but also he himself, to produce that which today we call the idea of man, which ought not deviate from either the results of the sciences nor from the pre-scientific knowledge stemming from the world of experience (APV, AA VII 119). This is why, according to Kant, in order to capture this state of affairs any theory of human nature must be formulated bearing

in mind not only the descriptive level, but also that of action. Through his actions man not only intervenes in nature and society, but works on himself, as well, and obviously, not only in the empirically verifiable, but also in that which can be rationally and purposefully planned. Obviously, such theory cannot ignore the empirical dimension of human sensibility, which in fact Kant devotes particular attention to, as can be seen by the fact that he drew extensively from 18<sup>th</sup>-century psychology, though he was convinced it needed renewing. Thus, on the one hand, Kant advances *aesthetics* together with *logic* as necessary elements for cognition, and on the other, *feeling*, together with *knowledge* and *will*, thereby producing a complete taxonomy of the human faculties (APV, AA VII 127-282). Such reconsideration of sensibility was effected not only on the empirical level, but also the transcendental one (Nuzzo, 2009), thereby radically modifying 18<sup>th</sup>-century psychology, albeit at the price of repeated and sometimes unfinished attempts. Indeed, despite the extraordinary clarity with which he appraises the advance of scientific knowledge, in a certain sense Kant was its first victim, as he never managed to escape the spell of its influence. Clear testimony to this can be seen in the purist zeal with which he set about the work of building epistemological and ethical foundations. This initially drove him to exclude sentiment – the affective side of human nature – even to the point of leading many of his readers to the erroneous conviction that ethics can be resolved independent of all empirical knowledge, including psychological, historical, sociological and political (Wood and Schönecker, 2002). This is all the more extraordinary in light of the appreciation he had shown in his youth for the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of moral sentiments (Schmucker, 1961; Henrich, 1963).

The sciences and empirical knowledge that focus on observing what nature *makes* of human being, nevertheless fail to take into account the presence of attributes such as “morally good” and “morally bad”, which are also constituents of human nature. In order to be able to integrate the ethical dimension as well, the empirical one should be remodelled and made ready to encompass the “subjective first ground of the adoption of this or that maxim with respect to moral law” (Rel., AA VI 22). Moreover, as stated in *Anthropology*, we cannot limit our con-

sideration *solely* to that which man does, or in other words, we must not remain on the plane of purely empirical descriptions of his actions, but must scrutinise such actions with regard to their *possibility* and their *necessity*, and thereby broaden our perspective to include what man *can* and *should* make of himself (APV, AA VII 119; A 550/B 578). Thus, only when we look at the horizons of mankind’s possibilities and not limit our regard to empirical reality, that is to say, only when the investigation includes consideration of the full gamut of options inherent in man – as a being afforded the freedom to act – only then, in this most general perspective, can an anthropology be formulated that could positively and without contradictions address not only the empirical dimension, but also that of the intelligible, which harbours the moral principle. Thus, both dimensions contribute to the authentic human nature, which does not end on the descriptive level, but which includes the *possibilities* and *needs* directing behaviour, and therefore the plane of action. Therefore, formulating an anthropology requires “a higher standpoint of anthropological observation” (PP, AA VIII 374), as he states in *Toward Perpetual Peace* (with a clarity rarely found in Kant’s anthropological conceptions). Together with consideration of what man simply “makes”, such formulation also has to bear in mind what he “can make of himself” as well as what he “must make of himself” (APV, AA VII 119).

In response to the many occasions that anthropology, in its narrowest sense of empirical knowledge, was excluded from the search for the moral principle (G, AA IV 388, 389, 410), in *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant elaborates a complex theory of sensibility and intellect. Applied to human beings this theory is able to rectify the meaning of the word *anthropology* to adapt it for suitable inclusion in his moral reflections. In this 1788 work, Kant also mentions a peculiar characteristic of moral law: a “fact” that stems from it, but which is not visually perceivable, that is, a fact that does not belong to the realm of “visible” things, but rather concerns the “invisible” (Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven, AA I 355, Sömmering, AA XII, 30), and which therefore is beyond all the data of the perceptible world and therefore inexplicable by such data. Despite all these characteristics, which would seem to set it in contrast with the theoretical

use of reason, this fact “points to a pure world of the understanding”. However, it does not merely indicate such world, rather it has us experience it, has us know its law. Such knowledge is not to be underestimated, because it reveals the reality of this world, which is cast in the mould of the perceptible world: “This law is to furnish the sensible world, as a *sensible nature* (in what concerns rational beings), with the form of a world of the understanding, that is, of a *supersensible nature*, though without infringing upon the mechanism of the former” (CPracR, AA V 43, italics mine). Through this solution Kant tries to reconcile nature and freedom and to work out a way to ensure their continuity. While on the one hand, Kant seems to cast and delineate the reasoning world after the physical one, on the other, it also seems that that physical world can be created only by beginning with the experience of freedom gained through ourselves. Kant seems to opt for a compatibilist solution: complete determination of the course of the world is compatible with human freedom. Instead, according to some authors, as his thesis is not marked by the contraposition between the spiritual sciences and the natural sciences (as would subsequently occur after the “*Methodenstreit*”), it encounters no difficulty in sustaining substantial continuity between nature and history, as can also be appreciated by the fact that Kant could conceive of a *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven*. It is however essential that continuity be established beginning with the experience that we have with ourselves and which we subsequently extend to the works of nature. The renowned approach in *Groundwork* attempted to translate such analogy into the way things work: firstly objects in nature, including man (“without infringing upon the mechanism of the former”) and then man as a rational and purposive agency:

“Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*” (G, AA IV 412).

Once again here we are faced with a perspective that considers the relationship between nature and will as one of continuity, defined as an enhance-

ment of its functioning: there is working according to laws, and working according to representations of laws. Such a framework is quite effective, as it establishes a relationship of coordination between nature and freedom. Rather than conceiving them as opposites, Kant posits the two causalities (that of nature, which necessarily produces effects, and that of freedom) in a relationship of analogy. Kant renders the substantial continuity between events of the world of the nature and human actions through the concept of “*Handlung*”. Such concept however was developed beginning with the experience that man has as author of certain actions. Gerhardt links such analogy to the linguistic techniques by which we refer to natural events as if they were subjective actions (Gerhardt, 1986; Krüger, 1992). Such argument is better understood when considered together with the *incipit* of *The Metaphysics of Morals* where Kant begins by stating that, “the *faculty of desire* is the faculty to be, by means of one’s representations, the cause of the objects of these representations. The faculty of a being to act in accordance with its representations is called *life*” (MM DV, AA VI 211). Thus, human life is seen to shape a level beyond that of an empirical nature, a level that unfolds beyond instinct and which announces *another nature*, one which proceeds from that first without any clear solution of continuity, because it is made of the very same fabric and follows analogous laws.

In his doctrine of genius, Kant gives a clear example of how we are to interpret this *other nature*. This other nature is the creation of human imagination: “The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, *another nature*, out of the material which the real one gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of association (which applies to the empirical use of that faculty), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature” (CPJ, AA V 314 italics mine).



#### 4. The character of the person and the character of the human species

In the second part of *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* (1798) Kant proposes a functional articulation of each of the different levels of human character. Temperament is something given to man at the outset, an aspect of his character on which he can have little influence in that it acts almost as a biological constraint. Beyond this, another facet to consider is “natural aptitude”, which concerns what a person “feels” with regard to others, the feelings that he immediately nurtures toward other people. Next, a certain “way of thinking” characterises each individual, a feature forged by the person himself (Munzel, 1999; Herman, 2007). The next two aspects of character regard the differences between men and women, which today would be considered the subject of gender studies, then those between different peoples, the focus of modern-day cultural studies. Lastly, he looks at the attributes particular to human species. The subject of Kant’s musings, man, cannot therefore be accused of being either denatured, simplified or abstract. Instead, he views man as so adaptable as to even contemplate a process of “perfection of the human being” (APV, AA VII 322) (Heilinger, 2010). Kant then examines cultural and geographical differences and their constitutive function in determining not only personal identity, but the identity of an entire people as well (Kant speaks of the character of peoples). Indeed, he defends the idea that such characteristics should always exist and argues against their levelling. However, the particular traits of all peoples are situated at a level accessible to reason, a level whence reason draws nourishment, and to which it returns in order to realise its intentions. It is not however to be considered the terrain for formulation of ethical and political principles. Instead, Kant views the foundation of ethics and politics as occurring not only independent of any theological burden, but also free of all cultural burdens. A similar thesis can be found underlying all the philosophical stances characterising modern cosmopolitanism (Nida-Rümelin, 2006).

The sophisticated device of character which encompasses psychological, social, historical and cultural elements, and Kant’s tackling it at the levels of both analysis and practical application, are two reasons that the second part of the *Anthropology from*

*a pragmatic point of view* remain so interesting today. By making room for character, Kant shifts the primacy of action – no longer to be considered independent of the actor himself – to a device that does not act directly, but that mediates between natural, cultural and social influences. Such elements characterise both the structure of Kant’s agency and his political philosophy. These conceptions do however not arise late in Kant’s thought, but can rather be found at the very basis of his philosophy and strongly influenced his critical research (Höffe, 1999; Marini, 2007), as Kant himself reveals in a note added to the margin of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* between 1765 and 1766, just after its publication:

“I am myself by inclination an investigator. I feel a complete thirst for knowledge and an eager unrest to go further in it as well as satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I had contempt for the rabble who know nothing. *Rousseau* brought me around. This blinding superiority disappeared, I learned to honor human beings, and I would find myself far more useless than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart to all others a value in establishing the rights of humanity” (Rischmüller, 1991, p. 85, italics mine). Selection from the notes on the *Observations* (Ri 37-39).

In the 1798 *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* and his historical and political writings, Kant reflects on the meaning of “humanity.” If – Kant reasons – human beings need to belong to some civil society (APV, AA VII 330), then we must ask what the characteristics of such society are. In his anthropological-political reflections Kant makes room for the world of relationships between human beings, which represents the very fabric of every sphere of human activity and existence, thereby playing a central role not only in private life, but in public life as well. This world of interrelationships deepens the sphere of human existence and all its requisites, which stem from the concrete, emotional, cognitive and volitive experience each of us acquires. Thus, an inter-subjective structure of human reality emerges, in which our commitment to the world (in which

we are not to be merely spectators, but active participants) is a fundamental characteristic of the cosmopolitan citizen and at the same time the condition of belonging to it. Such belonging is not an excluding category, but an including one: in a manner of speaking, Kant's theory of the cosmopolitan citizen does away with the concept of "foreigner".

What is the history of such aspiring world citizens to be? How will they tell the tale of their own origins? Its narrative is not much different from the draft of a novel and must therefore make use of hypotheses and conjectures "in order to fill up gaps" (Conjectural Beginning of Human History, AA VIII 109) from one stage to the next and provide the information to anticipate future events. Its story will have to cope not only with the subjective experience, but also with the prospect, alienating at first sight, of the narrative of events "*in the large*" (Idea, AA VIII, 17). Here Kant is referring to the earliest population studies. Such a conception of cosmopolitanism should be understood as our rational purposive activity itself, and not naturalistically as the outcome of a process. Cosmopolitanism can be characterised as both the progressive emergence of a feeling of belonging of all individuals to an organic whole, which Kant calls the "commonwealth (*das gemeine Wesen*)" (On the common saying, AA VIII 291), and the creation of a cosmopolitan order, in which reason takes part, though it does not act according to any pre-arranged plan, "but reason itself does not operate instinctively, but rather needs attempts, practice and instruction" (Idea, AA VIII, 19).

In so malleable and precarious a situation, entrusted solely to human faculties and abilities and citizens' capacity to participate, cosmopolitanism can only take the form of an idea whose realization is so important for humanity because it seems to represent the only condition able to ensure the development of all human faculties. To reinforce this philosophical proposition, Kant applies the religious concept of millenarism. His philosophical chiliasm views the history of humankind as the realization of a hidden plan of nature, whose fulfilment is the creation of a "universal *cosmopolitan condition*, as the womb in which all original predispositions of the human species will be developed" (Idea, AA VIII, 28) (Cunico, 2001).

Throughout his entire thought on cosmopolitanism, Kant, besides relying on the strengths of the idea itself, also refers – in a sort of intimation of a happy

ending – to the role of nature, which for its part follows the dynamics of "antagonism" – something ever fundamental to both the natural and civil state – and thereby impels towards the realisation of the condition of world citizen. But while natural teleology acts as "guarantee" (PP, AA VIII, 360-368) for the philosophy of cosmopolitanism, it is sustained by the fact that expectations are well placed: in order for cosmopolitan practice to be exercised, the violence of nature must be replaced with the force of law. His thought is to culminate in the cosmopolitan law of *The Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right*, not however without his attempting to determine the range of action of consensus in civil society, the only element able to legitimatise the force of law. It is worthwhile underlining that Kant's proposal allows us to grasp how the development of cosmopolitanism does not lead to a severing of citizens from their cultural, social and political affiliations. Indeed, such separation does not appear insurmountable for two reasons. Firstly, adherence to ethical and political convictions inspired by universal principles only occurs by virtue of the specific *pathos* inherent in these ideas. Moreover, such separation does not even demand sacrificing one's own individual liberties in choosing the means to attain one's own happiness. Consensus, which legitimises the force of law, comes about on this level.

In *Toward Perpetual Peace*, cosmopolitan law brings about a true innovation: it admits rights for man independent of one's citizenship or belonging to a state. The interpretations of number of Kantian scholars, including Gerhardt (1995), have underscored the explosive nature of this article in the historical-cultural context of the Age of Enlightenment, even as far as speaking of a "censure of colonialism". Kant's denouncing the inhumanity of colonialism can now invoke cosmopolitan law, which is no longer limited to formulating an agenda for peace in the political world order, but defines the instruments for combating violations of the rights of humanity. Human rights are principles that in order to be politically implemented and defended against any abuse, have to be converted into positive rights. Cosmopolitan law is in fact a translation of the humanitarian appeal that Kant so vigorously made:

"A violation of right on *one* place of the earth is felt in *all*" (PP, AA VIII 360), and promptly

translated into juridical necessity, hence “the idea of a cosmopolitan right is no fantastic and exaggerate way of representing right; it is, instead, a supplement to the unwritten code of the right of a state and the right of nations necessary for the sake of any public rights of human beings and so for perpetual peace” (Ibid.).

Kant does not however neglect the difficulties which such a call for universal application of human rights faces with regard to the concrete, effective plurality observable in fundamental moral convictions. He was instead so acutely aware of them, that he positioned such plurality as guardians against the despotic claims of sovereigns: when the process of widening and permeabilization of national borders is not the product of global dynamics – nowadays we would say that it is not a bottom-up process – encounters the obstacle of religious and linguistic differences. In the *First supplement on the guarantee of perpetual peace* he regards such differences as the means through which nature checks the hegemonic designs of tyrants:

“It [nature] makes use of two means to prevent peoples from intermingling and to separate them: differences of *languages* and of *religion*, which do bring with them the propensity to mutual hatred and pretexts for war but yet, with increasing culture and gradual approach of human beings to greater agreement in principles, leads to understanding in a peace that is produced and secured, not as in such despotism (in the graveyard of freedom), by means of a weakening of all forces, but by means of their equilibrium in liveliest competition” (PP, AA VIII, 367).

It should however be emphasised that cosmopolitan law does not focus on the *land*, but on the *relationship* that is inevitably created between human beings, in “a community of possible physical *interaction* (*commercium*), that is, in a thoroughgoing relation of each to all the others of *offering to engage in commerce* with any other, and each has a right to make this attempt without the other being authorized to behave toward it as an enemy because he has made this attempt” (MM DR, AA VI 352). What is at play here is not humanity’s well-known sociability, but a more “biological” rooting of human relation-

ships. Indeed, Kant invokes empathy throughout the entire anthropology, one particularly telling example being: “If we are to put our trust in someone, no matter how highly he comes recommended to us, it is a natural impulse to first look him in the face, particularly in the eyes, in order to find out what we can expect from him” (APV, AA VII 296).

The attitude toward violations of human rights and cosmopolitan law rely on globalising dynamics: its evolution inevitably leads to a geopolitical order. The role of cosmopolitan law is revealed through the correspondence existing between the foundation of states and peace accords. Just as people must be supplied with a civil constitution in order to live according to ordered juridical relationships, so must states respect a cosmopolitan constitution, if the conditions necessary for a general peace are to be attained. While cosmopolitan law has to be based upon the force of law, it must nevertheless be borne in mind that such force stems from the consensus of the citizens, which is to be decided upon each time as needed using the touchstone of legitimacy: “if a public law is so constituted that a whole people *could not possibly* give its consent to it (as e.g., that a certain class of *subjects* should have the hereditary privilege of *ruling rank*), it is unjust” (On Common Saying, AA VIII 297), and such consensus cannot be achieved by violent means, but only through liberty of opinion and freedom of the press: “Thus *freedom of the pen* [...] is the sole palladium of the people’s rights” (On Common Saying, AA VIII 304).

Kant creates the instruments that should enable democratic action, which society also practices on itself at the international level. However, he also deserves credit for clarifying just how crucial is it to actively endeavour to establish the preconditions and work tools necessary to facilitate and make possible and facilitate the application of principles. Without a confrontation between conflicting interests and painstaking negotiations it is difficult to arrive at consensus. It was clear, even to Kant, that we cannot hope to decree more than this, and that we must rather strive to reach, in practice, the desired outcome defined by theory. In fact, in concluding his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* he chose what reads almost as a prologue for history:

“The character of the species, as it is known from the experience of all ages and by all peoples, is

this: that, taken collectively (the human race as one whole), it is a multitude of persons, existing successively and side by side, who cannot *do without* being together peacefully and yet cannot *avoid* constantly being objectionable to one another. Consequently, they feel destined by nature to [develop], through mutual compulsion under laws that come from themselves, into a *cosmopolitan society (cosmopolitismus)* that is constantly threatened by disunion but generally progresses toward a coalition. In itself it is an unattainable idea but not a constitutive principle (the principle of anticipating lasting peace amid the most vigorous actions and reactions of human beings). Rather, it is only a regulative principle: to pursue this diligently as the destiny of the human race, not without grounded supposition of a natural tendency toward it". (APV, AA VII 331).

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