Dreaming that Sweet Dream: A Study of Kant's Anthropology of Hope

Nicholas Allen Anderson

A dissertation

submitted to the Faculty of

the department of Political Science

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

August 2022

© Copyright 2022 Nicholas Allen Anderson

Dreaming that Sweet Dream: A Study of Kant's Anthropology of Hope

Nicholas Allen Anderson

Advisor: Susan Meld Shell, Ph.D.

This study looks to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant to investigate the relationship between anthropology (i.e., an account of the human) and politics, and, in particular, to think through what sort of human being liberalism at its best (or most civic-minded) requires or seeks to form. Chapter II turns to Kant's idea of historical progress to draw out the link between his account of the human and his liberal republican politics. The role of hope, as a necessary product of our reason, proves to be central both to Kant's politics and to the question of human nature. For Kant, we are above all defined by our striving to remake the world.

Focusing primarily on the A Preface of the 1781 edition, Chapter III argues that the *Critique of Pure Reason* can be understood to be advancing a "transcendental anthropology" (which is distinct from Kant's later anthropology from a "pragmatic point of view") in that it seeks to provide "the conditions of the possibility" of human experience. The tension between freedom (or morality) and nature (or self-interest) emerges as the defining characteristic of human life. Chapter IV takes up Kant's attempt to bridge this "gulf" between freedom and nature in the third *Critique*, specifically by examining Kant's aesthetic theory to understand how the human being might be represented indeterminately through a regulative principle of reflective judgment. It argues that employing his aesthetic theory, Kant offers throughout his late writings symbolic or even poetic images that depict the human being's unity and the moral striving toward such unity.

Chapters V and VI consider two such images. The former returns to the question of progressive history. Now integrated into Kant's critical system through an "as if" postulation of reflective judgment, the idea of history encourages an "admiration" and gratitude for the natural order that counteracts the harmful moral and civic effects of reductive materialism. In Chapter V, however, we face Kant's less sanguine notion of "radical evil," an apparent obstacle to progress that emerges from within his own philosophy. And yet, I argue that one can understand radical evil as a symbol of Kant's striving human being by reading it in light of the aesthetic framework provided in the *CPJ*. In this way, the symbol of radical evil helps us make sense of the strife inherent in our moral experience and provides a noble, or even heroic, image of the human.

The conclusion raises the question of whether the idea of progress, and the anthropology underlying it, can still grip us today and, if not, whether liberalism can do without something like the sober hope Kant seeks to inspire. As Kant himself saw in 1789, hope, when unrestrained, becomes destructive of the world it aims to overcome. Even so, Kant reminds us of the inevitability of hope's role in human life and politics. Nonetheless, in light of the ambivalence of hope, and in the spirit of Kant's rational questioning, one might still wonder whether the end of reason is to remake the world.

Table of Contents

Note on Citations

Translations from Kant follow the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), with the exception of Kant's correspondences. Except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* (which is cited by the A edition of 1781 and/or the B edition of 1787), citations follow the standard Akademie pagination (volume: page number). A small number of passages have either been translated or modified by the author. Such passages are indicated in the notes to the text.

Abbreviated Titles of Kant's Works

Anth *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*

CBHH *Conjectural Beginnings of Human History*

CF *The Conflict of the Faculties*

CORR *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99* (trans. Arnulf Zweig. The University of Chicago Press. 1967).

CPJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*

CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*

CS *On the Common Saying: That Mau Be Correct in Theory, but Is of No Use in Practice*

FICJ The first, unpublished introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

GW *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Idea *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*

Logic *Lectures on Logic*

MM *Metaphysics of Morals*

MT *On the Miscarriage of Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*

OT *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?*

REFL *Reflections*

REL *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

Remarks Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime

QE *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*

TPP *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many professors and friends at Boston College. My education in the Department of Political Science has been far greater in scope and deeper into the heart of things than I could have ever hoped. Among the many friends I have had the pleasure to make at BC, I am especially grateful for the kindness, curiosity, and intelligence of Nathan Davis, John Loebs, and Adam Sliwowski. All three have helped me think through these difficult ideas and have, at one time or another, read with care drafts of these chapters. I am also grateful for two good friends from St. John's College, Zachary Calhoun and Omar Esparza, and all of our conversations throughout the years

My advisor, Susan Shell, has been a constant source of inspiration and guidance throughout my graduate career. I took her course on Kant's politics in the fall of 2017, my first semester as a graduate student, and have been trying to think deeply about Kant ever since. Susan embodies all the qualities of a serious scholar and a good person; she is a model of the sort of person I aspire to be. I have benefited immensely from her support in the project and from her always challenging yet encouraging comments. Paul Wilford has been an excellent committee member; he has served as a mentor, guiding me through the theoretical difficulties of a project of this magnitude and the practical challenges that arise in the world of academia. I am indebted to him in countless ways—he has helped me become a better thinker, a careful writer, and a more serious person. I am grateful for his constant faith in me both as a student and as a man of character. Above all, I am proud to call him a friend.

While I did not have the pleasure of taking a course with Ryan Hanley, I am grateful that he agreed to serve on the committee. He provided excellent comments and advice throughout the writing process and encouraged an attention to the scholarship that would have been otherwise lacking. In addition, he gave great practical advice that helped me complete the project in a timely fashion. Likewise, Samuel Stoner provided advice that helped me handle the overwhelming Kant scholarship and the technical details of the critical philosophy. I am grateful that he agreed to be an outside reader. More than his immense knowledge of Kant and the scholarship, he was a kind and encouraging voice that helped me believe in the worth of the project. Indeed, I have been fortunate to have a committee of four members who have been unusually kind and

supportive.

I am grateful as well to the other professors of political theory at Boston College, Robert C. Bartlett, Nasser Behnegar, David Dipasquale, and Christopher Kelly. All have contributed in one way or another to my education and helped equip me with the tools to become a thoughtful scholar of the history of political philosophy. I would especially like to thank Robert C. Bartlett and Christopher Kelly, for whom I have served as a teaching fellow. They have made me a better teacher and given me insight into the meaning of the vocation. There has been no shortage of models of the contemplative life at BC.

The administrative staff at Boston College, Shirley Gee and Sile Ni Scanlain, have always gone above and beyond in supporting me and all the graduate students in the Political Science Department. They do not simply make the practical and logistical matters of day-to-day life easier to manage, but they provide a warm and friendly environment, complete with fresh coffee and tea, that serves as the central nerve of the department. I am grateful for all their hard work, and I will miss our chats about all things—but especially those involving our mutual love of plants.

My siblings, Serena and Doug, have been constant sources of inspiration and friendship. I would not be the person I am without them, and they are not as lucky as I am insofar as they did not have the fortune of having such wonderful older siblings to guide them through childhood and adolescence. My nieces, Natalie and Thalia, reflect what is best in Serena and Doug and have been sources of joy in all of our lives. I suspect that Natalie does not know how her buoyant personality has continually lifted my spirits throughout the years. Of course, I am grateful to my parents, Lynda and Doug, to whom the dissertation is dedicated. They were my first models of morally serious and thoughtful people. I have learned from them the value of hard work, the pleasures of intellectual life, and the proper place of levity. Finally, I am grateful for Selene, who, more than anything, gives me hope for the future.

For my parents, Douglas and Lynda

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd;
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

-Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man, Epistle II*

Zu fragmentarisch ist Welt und Leben!
Ich will mich zum deutschen Professor begeben.
Der weiß das Leben zusammenzusetzen,
Und er macht ein verständlich System daraus;
mit seinen Nachtmützen und Schlafrockfetzen
Stopft er die Lücken des Weltenbaus.

-Heinrich Heine, *Buch der Liede* (“Die Heimkehr,” LVIII)

1.0 Introduction: Politics and Anthropology

1.1 The Regime and the Human Being

Foundational to any theory of politics is an account of the human being—his hopes and fears, virtues and vices, and the good he seeks. One can also say that the regime shapes the human being and that a specific human type is necessary to support a particular form of political order. In Book VIII of Plato's *Republic*, for example, Socrates clarifies his classification of regimes in terms of the human types they encourage, claiming that "it is necessary that there also be as many forms of human characters as there are forms of regimes."[1] Accordingly, the five regime types correspond to five forms of "private men." Where the love of honor inherent in aristocracy produces the public-minded, self-sacrificing citizen, the unrestrained pursuit of erotic desire undergirds the tyrant's rule and shapes warped souls guided primarily by the promise of pleasure and the fear of pain. This account is complicated, of course, by the fact that Socrates claims that one regime devolves into another (the freedom of democracy, for example, gives way to the tyrannical pursuit of pleasure). But such a complication points to the human's malleability and, thereby, a need for continued education; a regime can stave off decline for a time by reinforcing an understanding of the human being that best suits its virtues, counteracts its vices, and supports its ends.

Of course, Plato is not alone in recognizing the necessary relationship between anthropology and politics. In fact, the observation is so common and essential to serious political thought that it borders on being banal. One needs only to cast a glance over the history of political philosophy, from St. Augustine's account of original sin to Thomas

[1] Plato *Republic* 544c-544e.

Hobbes's description of the state of nature, or even to James Madison's discussion of political faction in *Federalist* 10, to see the inevitable entanglement of politics and anthropology. Anthropology (i.e., an account or *logos* of the human being) is necessary for any positive conception of political order or any science of politics.

And yet, in many contemporary discussions of the status and legitimacy of liberal democracy, such a basic insight, if not lost, is not properly considered. Prominent liberal theories often abstract from questions of the good, and thus from the question of what the human being is, in such a way that the practical result is a sort of relativism of "to each one's own" that seems ill-equipped to support an enduring regime.[2] Other thinkers question the status of the anthropological question altogether; however, such positions often result in disastrous and demeaning politics.[3] These positions overlook the fact that regardless of our avoidance of the anthropological question, whether this is due to misguided liberal commitments or methodological considerations, we will assume an image of man to be the case. The self-knowledge of any regime, and in particular our liberal regime, depends on making explicit its underlying claims about the human being, his responsibility to others, his place in nature, and his relation to God.

This study examines Immanuel Kant's insight into the nature of the human being and how this insight supports his lifelong commitments to liberal principles and his eventual turn to republican or "liberal republican" government. The purpose of such a study, beyond the author's own edification, is to try to understand what sort of human being liberal self-government at its best (or most civic-minded) requires and seeks to

[2] See John Rawls 1985 and his avoidance of metaphysical and universal claims. See Susan M. Shell 2009, 5-8 for a short critique of Rawls's version of autonomy in contrast to the Kantian notion.
[3] See in particular Michel Foucault's essay on Kant's *Enlightenment* essay (Foucault 2010). Consider also Martin Heidegger's many critiques of the anthropological question.

form. Such a study of Kant's thought not only sheds light on the very nature of the liberal regime but may indeed provide overlooked resources for its defense through a recovered anthropological insight.

1.2 The Limits of the Pragmatic Defense of Liberalism

The claim that liberalism requires justification hardly goes without saying. In recent years a literature of crisis has appeared, especially in the United States, that emphasizes the decline of liberalism.[4] The apparent reversals in the liberal international order, which have come after decades of success, the continuing erosion of trust in our most cherished institutions, the persistent presence of various forms of discrimination, and the continued rise of "deaths of despair" have caused many to doubt the possibility of progress that has long undergirded the liberal worldview. Francis Fukuyama, who once declared that the world was on the cusp of the universal presence of peaceful liberal democracies, has, in light of the reversal of the wave of democratization after the second world war, recently stated that the greatest threats to democracy are internal to democracies themselves.[5] The fact that the threats seem to be internal points to the possibility that the logic of liberalism is inconsistent and that after centuries of success and decades of unimagined prosperity, this inconsistency is coming to the surface.

In light of such observations, there has been increased support for the diagnosis that liberalism has mostly run its course. The most forceful and widely read book among

[4] By the term "liberalism," I mean several political and cultural ideas and institutions, such as an emphasis on individual rights, including the right to free speech, the right to own property, and freedom of religion or taken altogether what can broadly be called the "right to autonomy" (see Francis Fukuyama 2022, 2;); the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers (which Kant calls "republican" government); and equality before the law. Following both Fukuyama and John Gray, one could say that cultural liberalism often entails individualism, egalitarianism, universalist moral claims, and optimism or hopefulness regarding the spread of just institutions (see Fukuyama 2022, 1).

[5] Fukuyama 2022.

these recent critiques of liberalism is Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed*. Deneen expresses less surprise at the teetering state of liberalism and the faltering of progress than Fukuyama, arguing that the extreme success of liberalism in supporting an anthropology of human "autonomy" has led to liberalism's recent and predicted shortcomings. Modern liberalism makes us "both more individualist and more statist,"[6] disembeds us from relationships that once "made claims upon us,"[7] promotes an anti-culture that homogenizes the world, and has led to a "war with nature" that we are losing.[8] Accordingly, Deneen argues, there is a need for a "post-liberal" politics that emphasizes duty to the family, community, and nation over the whims and preferences of individual choice. What this post-liberal politics looks like remains inchoate and unformulated, at least in his book intended for a popular audience, and even falls back into a form of localism that reflects the very liberalism he hopes to overcome.[9] Regardless of Deneen's positive political visions, however, he is clear in his opinion that all forms of liberalism rest on a vision of autonomy that corrodes tradition and any community-oriented way of life.

Critiques from the left reflect Deneen's conservative diagnosis of the ills of contemporary society in many ways. They point to the excessive commercialism of contemporary society, the homogenization of culture, and the destruction of the environment as evidence of liberalism's failure. Where the right claims such things indicate the decadence of our current notions of liberty, the left places the fault in the corruption of our institutions. Yet the anti-liberal left often holds dear similar

[6] Deneen 2018, 17.
[7] Deneen 2018, 18.
[8] Deneen 2018, 14.
[9] Cf. Adrian Vermeule 2018 and his critique of Deneen on this score. Such a critique is all the more revealing in that it comes from the right.

commitments to those foundational to liberalism, most notably the right to autonomy and human equality. These notions, to be sure, are understood differently but, perhaps more importantly, the leftist critics of liberalism have little patience for the means necessary to secure the political existence of these notions. Under such a view, moderate reforms and the slow pace of procedural progress are tools implemented to maintain the power structures of the status quo. There is, to be fair, some truth in such claims but the insistence on destroying corrupt institutions or systems betrays excessive hopes in politics and human nature that seem sure to disappoint and cast those radicals into further despair. While a liberal defense against the anti-liberal right entails the claim that individual autonomy need not be corrosive to our sense of community, a liberal defense against the anti-liberal left must show the importance of enduring institutions—correcting injustices need not lead to violent and revolutionary means that are, more often than not, destructive of the freedom they seek to protect.

These critiques often hit the mark in their diagnosis of the excesses of contemporary liberalism, and they have found a persuasive power in their ability to give voice to the frustration and desperation of many people. To make matters worse, advocates of the current liberal regime often defend it on merely pragmatic grounds that are inadequate in responding to the deeper concerns and longings of the human soul.[10]

[10] Ronald Beiner makes a similar argument to the one I make here, namely that the defenders of liberalism must take up the metaphysical critiques of liberal democracy (particularly, Beiner argues, those of Nietzsche and Heidegger). Curiously, Beiner points to Max Weber and Sigmund Freud as two potential resources in defending a liberal outlook. Weber, for example, combines the nobility of Nietzschean striving with a commitment to rationalization and liberal values (Beiner 2018, 116-117). Yet the "steely eyed manly resolve" of Weber and Freud that Beiner recommends as a way of incorporating the Nietzschean critiques of egalitarianism into a liberal way of thinking seems to be already indebted to Kantian anthropology. As I argue in the study, Kant offers in a more thought out way than Weber or Freud (indeed, both are unrecognized *heirs* of Kant) a noble and heroic striving in the context of the "disenchantment" of modern rationalism. As I argue in Chapter 5, Kant even attempts a sort of "re-enchantment" of the world on rational grounds.

Take, for example, Fukuyama's recent intervention into the debate, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*.[11] In contrast to his earlier Hegelian-Kojèvian inspired "end of history" thesis, this work is a pragmatic defense of liberalism. He seems to argue that liberalism is simply the best the modern world can do, but it can hardly be defended on its own merits.[12] This might be considered an unfortunate departure from Fukuyama's metaphysical and anthropological defense of liberalism in his first work. While his original defense may have been overly romantic (at least from a Kantian perspective), this fact does not entail the conclusion that one should give up on providing a defense of liberalism that finds its grounds in first philosophy.

The willingness to engage in these deeper questions gives the opponents of liberalism a seductive gravity. The appeal of the anti-liberal right and left is found, above all, in the fact that their accounts of the human being respond to our deepest longings and hopes for political life and even appear to resolve them. And such anthropological accounts often go along with a romantic vision of one's role in reversing the degradation of society. They provide a heroic vision of life that vaults one above the quotidian demands of everyday responsibility. Such anthropological accounts, however, betray any appeals these post-liberal advocates make to realism; instead, they often reveal a combination of cynicism and hopefulness that, if not simply naïve, is dangerous to the prospect of decent politics.

---

[11] Fukuyama 2022.

[12] While he agrees that liberalism has moral justification, Fukuyama claims that "liberalism's most important selling point remains the pragmatic one," namely that it is the regime best suited to managing diversity (Fukuyama 2022, 8). As a reader of Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, for example, might respond, an expansive empire under an authoritarian rule might be able to manage the tensions inherent in diversity just as well. The point is that even Fukuyama's pragmatic defense takes place within the moral framework of the dignity of self-governance. I agree with Fukuyama's argument that liberalism must learn to moderate itself, but such moderation requires a more serious engagement with its moral commitments and anthropological premises.

Too often, however, the merely pragmatic defense of liberalism fails to offer a positive conception of citizenship or satisfying reasons for enduring the burdens of freedom with limitations (a healthy understanding of autonomy). Indeed, such things will never possess the romantic sheen of extremist politics, but there must be some room for a dignified striving beyond the economic sphere if liberalism can be shown to be worth defending. Any person who argues for the effectiveness of liberalism will fail if they continue to do so on a "post-metaphysical" or anti-universalist basis or if their theories cannot allow room for citizens to consider seriously the question of the good.[13]

In sum, those who seek to take up the cause of political moderation today must reconsider the foundations of our political order in light of the perceptive but ultimately misguided critiques of liberalism that have emerged recently. Critics of liberalism, whether from a Marxist or Foucauldian left or a Nietzschean or Schmittian right, often expose genuine faults in our current regime. But since these same critics fail to provide any plausible positive vision of politics, these critical diagnoses of liberalism often degenerate into politically reckless or merely performative acts of protest. Yet such irresponsible rhetoric is generally met with only uninspiring defenses of the goods of liberalism (such as individual rights, religious freedom, equality before the law, and a moderating influence on mass democracy). To those sympathetic to the anti-liberal critiques, defenders of liberalism often resemble the milquetoast strawmen their ideological enemies make them out to be. Contemporary liberalism's insistence on

[13] Despite claims to the contrary, Kantian universalism makes room, I would argue, for particularity and diversity. Kant recognizes and deeply appreciates the malleability of the human being, human language, and national customs. Admittedly, Kant, for the most part, limited his appreciation for such particularity in his lifetime to European nations; however, there still may be room for a broader, genuinely cosmopolitan way of thinking within the Kantian framework. See Huseyinzadegan 2019, 55-60 for a helpful discussion of Kant's Eurocentrism that is neither dismissive nor uncritical.

grounding political theory in anti-foundational or post-metaphysical arguments is at the root of such unpersuasive responses. Confident that the arc of history has revealed the truth of political life, many liberals become complacent and fail to take up the task of engaging with the most fundamental human questions. It is the contention of this study that Kant's political philosophy provides an invaluable resource in understanding the possible metaphysical and anthropological justifications of the liberal regime.

1.3 An Overview of Kant's Transcendental Anthropology

What makes Kant especially useful in thinking through the fate of liberal society is his well-documented confrontation with the thought of J.J. Rousseau and his engagement with the problems resulting from the cosmology of modern science. Kant saw, in other words, the dangers inherent in the modern project, and yet, despite his deep admiration for Rousseau, he remained dedicated to its charitable hopes. Aware of such problems like the tendency of advanced commercial societies to indulge in luxury, the question of reason's grounding and ends, the dehumanization concomitant with technological progress, and the challenge the infinite cosmos poses to human meaning, Kant, with his ambitious critical project, set himself the task of providing a new foundation for modern science and modern liberalism. Kant's aim is to show that there can be more to modern civilization than "glittering misery."[14]

Kant tries to ground, in particular, what can be called a "liberal republicanism," a form of government dedicated to the virtue and morality of its citizens in a world shaped by modern cosmology and mass social forces. Kant defines "republicanism," which he asserts is the only legitimate form of government, in terms of institutional structures that

[14] *CPJ* §83.

can best be characterized as liberal—in that it separates the legislative and executive parts of government.[15] And yet Kant, a great reader of both the Romans and Rousseau, would be aware of the more robust understandings of republicanism and its connotations with civic virtue. This appropriation of the term "republicanism" in a liberal context highlights the ambitious attempt to synthesize the "low" view of politics, often associated with the early modern thinkers like Machiavelli, Hobbes, or Locke, with a commitment to a stern morality and rigorous virtue that can sometimes make Kant seem like an ancient in the midst of modernity.[16] Kant's liberal republicanism follows, however, from the dual character of the human being that, I will argue, is the very essence of his metaphysical anthropology. Kantian liberal republicanism corresponds to an image of the human as a being that is both naturally self-interested and freely self-transcending.

Of course, Kant's accomplishments are certainly ambivalent: he has irrevocably altered the development of Western philosophy, politics, and our conception of subjectivity, and yet, considering the universal ambitions of his project, he was not entirely successful. And now, his monumental system often appears unapproachable, as if set in stone; or it is considered to be an obscuring system that we must overcome or "get behind."[17] While I do not want to attempt to make any final assessment on the ultimate validity of the Kantian project as a whole, I do believe that when approached in light of the questions and concerns that seemed to animate Kant himself, like those questions about the very nature of the human being, the possibility of reason's role as the guiding standard in life, or the potential for a moral politics, then the monumental system is imbued with a life not often credited to it. Moreover, given that contemporary concerns

[15] *TPP* 8:352
[16] Strauss 1965.
[17] See Benjamin 1998, 98; Heidegger 1973.

over the fate of liberalism echo so many of the problems to which Kant responds, it would seem that we are at a moment not only in which we can come to appreciate Kant more deeply, but which he can help us better understand.

Turning to a summary of Kant's "transcendental anthropology," it can be said that Kant's human being, on the one hand, abides in an empirical world, beholden to the laws of nature and caught in the web of efficient causality; on the other hand, he is a free and autonomous being, who can determine his own will and live in accordance with the self-legislated law of reason. The 19th-century German poet Heinrich Heine comically captures this tension within Kant's system and his human being with the contrast between Kant and his manservant, "Old Lampe." Kant, as critical philosopher or all-destroyer, "has stormed heaven and put the whole garrison to the edge of the sword," leaving lifeless God, immortality, and freedom.[18] Yet Heine insists that Kant is "not merely a great philosopher but a good man," and amid the wreckage of his destruction still feels the pangs of compassion.[19] And thus, Heine's Kant comes to the conclusion that "Old Lampe must have a God, otherwise the poor fellow can never be happy." In the throes of fellow feeling, Heine's Kant continues his reflections: "Now, man ought to be happy in this world; practical reason says so—well, I am quite willing that practical reason should also guarantee the existence of God."[20] This good-natured affection toward Old Lampe, according to Heine, is the origin of Kant's practical philosophy. For Heine, the tension inherent in the Kantian human being between freedom and nature is really due to the tension within Kant himself—of being someone who is both a "great philosopher" and a "good man."

[18] Heine 1986, 119.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

However, even though Heine rightly points to the tension at the heart of the Kantian system, I take issue with such an interpretation of Kant's thought—an interpretation that is not too uncommon.[21] Following the work of many other scholars, I contend that Kant's project is moral from its inception. But more than that, the positing of freedom speaks to our experience as finite rational beings; that is, the moral dimension of Kant's thought follows from his account of the human being and his analysis of the erotic longing for the unconditioned. Human freedom is not simply a postulation but follows from Kant's transcendental analysis of our experience.

There is no need for such blatant postulation. We are, in Kant's account, beings occupying two mutually exclusive realms—freedom and nature. But being caught as he is between incompatible perspectives, the human being cannot be cognized by any determinate category. That is, the human being cannot be defined or understood merely from the scientific perspective of mechanical causation *nor* by the abstract formulas of morality and freedom. Nevertheless, Kant attempts to provide an alternative means to reflect on the unity of the human being in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Kant's notion of "reflective judgment," exemplified in aesthetic and teleological judgment, allows us to discover indeterminate categories by which we can think these two perspectives together and represent or "think through" the wholeness of the human. Employing his theory of reflective judgment, Kant offers throughout his oeuvre poetic images that depict the human being's underlying unity and the moral striving toward such

[21] For example, Adorno and Horkheimer's famous critique of Kant follows Heine's account in its understanding of Kantian anthropology and abstracts from many of the features that would seem to make Kant's moral subject embedded in the world. On the other hand, Stanly Rosen's more conservative critique of Kant, in which he ultimately blames him for the rise of post-modernism, argues that Kant's project is a matter of rhetoric and will. This, too, takes up Kant's system only partially, as if Kant's whole project can be understood by the famous *What is Enlightenment?* essay.

unity in this world. The most important of these images for our socio-political life is the idea of historical progress, which always remains precariously dependent on our persistent attempts to close the gap between real and ideal.

This striving emblematic of Kantian anthropology provides the conditions for a form of ordinary heroism in the context of liberal politics. As Vittorio Hösle writes, "what is magnificent about Kant is not, as Heine thought, that in his ethics he comforted his servant Martin Lampe with God but rather that he raised every human being, including Lampe, to the level of a tragic hero."[22] While I agree that the constant striving to overcome one's natural inclinations entails a kind of heroism, I would not go so far as to say that Kant's human being is *tragic*.[23] There is, to be sure, a recognition that the asymptotic nature of the highest good and the limits of the pursuit of happiness fosters a sober resignation toward the fulfillment of our deepest longings. However, in contrast to later conceptions of political life that seek to make reason at home in the world, Kant affords us the resources to be at home with our homelessness.[24] There is comfort both in the pleasure of beauty and the admiration of nature's purposiveness; each experience gives a sense that we are in some profound, ungraspable way at home in the natural world—at least from the perspective of certain regulative principles of reflective judgment.

And there is, for Kant, always solace in the hope that we will constantly continue to find a way to prove the unity of our dual nature by means of our own effort. However, that we are beings that hope at all, namely that we are incomplete and yet can strive to

[22] Vittorio Hösle 2017, 62.
[23] For a discussion of the heroism of the Kantian agent, see Chapter 6.
[24] The post-Kantian German tradition, from Hegel to the Romantics to Marx, is often characterized by a dissatisfaction with the "Bad Infinity" of Kantian progress and an attempt to overcome it. Two notable exceptions are Schopenhauer's pessimistic resignation and Nietzsche's insistence on eternal willing.

overcome our incompleteness, reveals a dialectic between the human being's finitude (which entails a humble recognition of our limits) and the expansive, infinite longings of reason and our exalted place in nature as the self-legislating being (which leads to a prideful projection of our ambitions) that best captures the essence of the Kantian, and liberal, human being. Hence, the Kantian human being, and thereby Kantian politics, is reflected in the ambivalence of hope itself, which always depends on the potential for both success and failure and serves to remind us of our power and impotence. Hope is a symbol, too, of our dignity as the being that strives to live up to what it ought to be. Transcendental anthropology is, in essence, an anthropology of hope.

1.4 An Overview of the Chapters

The following chapters seek to give fuller expression to this account of the Kantian anthropology. They aim to articulate what seems to be the core insight of Kantian politics, namely, that the human being is, on the one hand, a moral agent capable of rational self-determination and, on the other hand, a needy (and therefore social) being whose finitude always entails the struggle of reason with itself. The study does not attempt to offer a comprehensive account of Kant's transcendental anthropology; such a task would likely require several volumes.[25] Instead, it seeks to look at key moments in the Kantian project in the hopes of better understanding the relationship between philosophical anthropology and political theory in general and Kantian anthropology and liberal republicanism in particular.

[25] It would also require a more thorough investigation of Kant's moral writings, especially the theory of autonomy, than offered in this study. My argument assumes a basic understanding of Kant's moral theory, and the central concepts of the good will, the categorical imperative, autonomy, duty, and virtue.

There is a second major theme of the study: Kant's cultural and poetic project. Such a project, which I argue is inseparable from the content of the anthropology, seeks to propagate Kant's understanding of the human. Insofar as a particular anthropology underlies a particular regime, then the tenets and characteristics of this anthropology must gain popular support. Kant's "poetic philosophy," or his mode of philosophical communication, in other words, responds to a practical problem which results from being a living member of a real political community. In sum, Kant's self-understanding as the founder of "the culture of human reason" is an important component of his account of the human being.

The next chapter provides a broad overview of Kant's philosophy of history, drawing primarily from Kant's 1784 work *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* and the later 1795 work *Toward Perpetual Peace*. In many ways, this chapter, and my reflections on Kantian history throughout the study, continue Dilek Huseyinzadegan's work on Kant's "nonideal" theory of politics.[26] Similarly, it adds to an understanding of what Günter Zöller calls Kant's "political anthropology."[27] It also aligns with the work of scholars like William Galston and Yirmiyahu Yovel in understanding history as a central part of Kant's critical project.[28] This chapter is indebted as well to Peter Fenves' interpretation of these two essays and his understanding of the Kantian human being as a "transitional" creature.[29] My interpretation of the historical essays differs most consequentially from these scholars in its emphasis on the role of hope in the anthropology that underlies the idea of progress. Kant professes a

[26] Huseyinzadegan 2019.
[27] Zöller 2011.
[28] Galston 1975; Yovel 1980.
[29] Fenves 1991 and 2003.

hopeful politics because we are necessarily anticipative beings due to the infinite self-projections of reason and the limitations of our finite embodiment.

After drawing out the outlines of Kant's idea of history and its implied anthropology, I turn to the basis of these ideas in the critical system. Through an interpretation of the images Kant uses to express the aims of his project, Chapter 3 presents a reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) as transcendental anthropology. By claiming that Kant is concerned, above all, with taming human reason's longing for the unconditioned, or the *metaphysica naturalis*, I follow scholars like Kristi Sweet, Richard Velkley, and Alfredo Ferrarin in my understanding of the motivating force of the critical project and its intertwined relation to Kant's reflections on practical life.[30] By reading the first *Critique* as an anthropology, I follow scholars like Patrick Frierson, who also understands Kant's critical system as a "transcendental anthropology," and Susan M. Shell, who draws out many of the anthropological implications of the first *Critique* and from whom I borrow the phrase "the anthropology of reason."[31] Further, the theme of Kant's self-understanding as a world-historical figure, as the founder of the culture of human reason, emerges in this chapter.

In Chapter 4 I turn to the third *Critique*, particularly the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment. The chapter seeks to understand two interrelated things: 1. How the human being's unity can be thought. 2. Kant's mode of philosophical communication. In other words, the chapter tackles the question of propagation. While Kant critiques rhetoric in the *CPJ*, as Scott R. Stroud points out in his study, Kant offers a more nuanced

[30] Sweet 2013; Velkley 1989; Ferrarin 2015.
[31] Frierson 2013; Shell 1980.

view on the importance of "rhetoric" or proper political speech.[32] I differ from Stroud in my focus on the problem of human unity and on the role of Kant's own rhetorical activity. Insofar as this and the following two chapters are concerned with the problem of human unity and the role of reflective judgment in thinking through such unity, it enters into the conversation that defines the work of scholars like Paul Guyer, Angelica Nuzzo, and Rachel Zuckert.[33] Further, in drawing out the connection between Kant's critical system, reflective judgment, and anthropology, this study touches on similar themes as the work of G. Felicitas Munzel.[34] However, by focusing on the problem of the symbolic propagation of the transcendental anthropology, my interpretation of reflective judgment and the question of human unity highlights the political and cultural implications of the third *Critique*.

Chapter 5 continues this discussion of the third *Critique* by turning to the Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment. Analyzing Kant's notion of purposiveness, in particular the "transcendental philosopher's" admiration of nature's apparent ends, I follow Samuel A. Stoner in highlighting the importance of the feeling of admiration [*Bewunderung*] in the third *Critique*.[35] Using this insight, I build on the work of Frederick C. Beiser, Omri Boehm, Paul Guyer, and John Zammitto in arguing that the third *Critique* is, in part, a response to the threat of Spinozism.[36] However, I place this claim in the context of the larger political and cultural project described in Chapters 3 and 4. Kant's theoretical response to the *Pantheismusstreit* entails a correction of modern

[32] Stroud 2014.
[33] Guyer 1993; Nuzzo 2008; Zuckert 2007.
[34] Munzel 1999. However, I am less focused than Munzel on Kant's "empirical" anthropology and the formation of one's individual character, and more focused on transcendental or metaphysical anthropology that can be drawn out of the three *Critiques*.
[35] Stoner 2019.
[36] See Beiser 1987; Boehm 2014; Guyer 2005; Zammito 1992.

"luxury." Kant's teleology is in keeping with his general skepticism about the possession of any knowledge of the ultimate reality of the world, and yet, the grounds of purposiveness in the "peculiarity of human cognition" provides a rational basis for hope.[37] By giving a hopeful interpretation of nature, Kant claims to be superior to Spinoza theoretically, insofar as he can better make sense of the phenomenon of human freedom while offering the grounds for a practical correction to the decadence of modern civilization, best diagnosed by Rousseau.

I then turn to the notion of "radical evil" in Chapter 6 to better understand how Kant communicates his transcendental anthropology by appropriating shared cultural images.[38] The chapter's main argument is that Kant's notion of radical evil can be understood as a regulative principle of reflective judgment that is represented symbolically and aesthetically. In this chapter, I follow the work of Samuel A. Stoner and Paul T. Wilford, who also read radical evil in this way; James DiCenso, who reads *Religion* in terms of "as if" judgments; and Pablo Muchnik, who sees radical evil as an essential part of what he calls Kant's "moral anthropology."[39] I differ from these works in my emphasis on the "poetic" and symbolic nature of radical evil. Accordingly, this interpretation aligns with Allen Wood's "symbolic" reading of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793); however, by emphasizing the aesthetic and poetic

[37] This emphasis on hope, it should be noted, makes the interpretation rely heavily on the self-legislation of human reason and the concomitant claim that the human being is the final end of nature. Hence, my understanding of Kantian teleology runs counter to Rachel Zuckert's attempt to read "purposiveness without a purpose," an aspect of aesthetic judgment, as representative of the whole of reflective judgment.

[38] While not a central theme of this study, there is a complicated relationship between Kant's anthropology and Christian anthropology. They are, in my view, distinct, and yet there is a reason other than mere convenience that Kant sees Christianity as the appropriate vehicle for propagating his image of the human. Some scholars take the view that Kant is "secularizing" Christianity (see, DiCenso 2012; Lilla 2007) while others view Kant's system as more genuinely theological (see Palmquist 2000 and 2015). My view is between these two positions but closer to the former camp than the latter. Ultimately, the status of Kant's Religion comes down to the character of Kant's God, a topic that is, quite frankly, still a mystery to me. And although the study approaches the subject, it does not have the space to address the issue in depth.

[39] Stoner and Wilford 2021; DiCenso 2012; Muchnik 2010.

aspects of radical evil, my interpretation does not attempt to explain the "paradox" of radical evil. Instead, it shows it to be representative of the paradox inherent in being a finite and embodied rational being.[40] In this way, my interpretation is closer to that of Richard Velkley or Gordon E. Michalson.[41] Contra scholars like Wood and Sharon Anderson-Gold, I read radical evil as inextirpable and a result of the constitution of human reason as such; its root is not social or political.[42] However, radical evil is, as many argue, a hopeful doctrine, but it is not *simply* hopeful since it reveals to us both the theoretical and practical limitations inherent in our being finite creatures. As a symbol that helps us make sense of this experience, radical evil is the ultimate expression of Kant's transcendental anthropology.

The conclusion takes up limitations to the Kantian project, discusses the possibility of its revival (at least in some key respects), and reconsiders the central place of hope in Kant's liberal anthropology. As an expression of a hopeful realism that characterizes many of the best—or at least most admirable—political actors, Kantian politics has been practiced more often than one would think, given the austere reputation of his ethics. Similarly, one can find examples of the Kantian art of communication (or something like it) throughout the last two and a half centuries. Accordingly, the Kantian legacy reaches beyond epistemology, metaphysics, and the explication of morality to the cultural basis of liberal politics. In short, the study contends that Kant can help illuminate who we are and what we might be.

[40] Wood 2020.
[41] Velkley 2014; Michalson 1990. Each of these writers emphasizes paradoxes inherent in *Religion* as a whole and radical evil in particular; however, Michalson is, at least on the surface, much less sympathetic towards Kant's position.
[42] Wood 2020; Anderson-Gold 2001.

2.0 Dreaming that Sweet Dream: An Introduction to Kant's Hopeful Politics

Abstract:

This chapter seeks to lay out the main characteristics of Kant's idea of historical progress: (1) its future-directed and *hopeful* orientation, (2) its effort to provide a justification (or theodicy) of nature and the human being, (3) its use as a heuristic to guide moral and political action, (4) its distinction between the unconscious and self-conscious stages of history—all of which lead, finally, to (5) its distinctive account and representation of human striving and human *hopefulness*. I argue that this philosophy of history provides the "anthropological" framework for Kant's liberal republicanism—an understanding of liberalism characterized by the moral project of striving to realize the highest good. The essay concludes by pointing to the grounds of history in Kant's critical philosophy; to secure the possibility of progress, Kant had to reinterpret the relationship between rationality and nature. By examining Kant's conception of progress, the chapter hopes to provide an argument that understands the origin of the idea of progress as a self-consciously rendered conception of the human being. Such a conception of the human and the corresponding account of moral life may help us think through the ethical and philosophical commitments of the current liberal order.

Es reden und träumen die Menschen viel
von bessern künftigen Tagen;
nach einem glücklichen, goldenen Ziel
sieht man sie rennen und jagen.
Die Welt wird alt und wird wieder jung,
doch der Mensch hofft immer Verbesserung.

-Friedrich Schiller[43]

[43] From Schiller's poem titled "Hope" [*Hoffung*]: "People talk and dream much /of better days to come; / after a happy, golden goal / one sees them run and hunt. / The world grows old and grows young again, / yet man always hopes for the better" (my translation).

2.1 Introduction

Kant's idea of history is a central, if not *the* central, concept of his political thought. While not all of his political writings deal explicitly with the concept of progress, they are all informed by it. Yet Kant's historical writings are not always held in the same esteem as his most groundbreaking philosophical works. Hannah Arendt, who constructed an interpretation of Kant's politics from his aesthetic theory, claimed that the historical and political writings "cannot compare in quality and depth with Kant's other writings; they certainly do not constitute a Fourth Critique."[44] It is indeed true that one cannot call these writings a Fourth Critique, but this is due more to methodological considerations than to the quality and depth of Kant's political writings.[45] These works contain, as I hope to show throughout the study, a necessary extension of Kant's critical system that explores how we should understand the political dimension of the human being in light of Kant's critical account of knowledge and morality.

This chapter argues that Kant's philosophy of history investigates the conditions of the possibility of a moral form of modern liberalism. Such a form of liberalism—or Kantian republicanism—is characterized by its sense of hope and commitment to an ideal. The remainder of the chapter develops a thematic and synoptic overview of the defining features of Kant's analysis of history: (1) its future-directed and *hopeful* orientation, (2) its effort to provide a justification (or theodicy) of nature and the human being, (3) its use as a heuristic to guide moral and political action, (4) its distinction

[44] Hannah Arendt 1998, 7.
[45] Arendt points to the "ironical tone" of *Toward Perpetual Peace* to support the claim that Kant did not take these works "too seriously." Yet the irony found in this work, and many other of Kant's historical writings, are essential to Kant's rhetorical purpose. By downplaying Kant's irony, Arendt misses crucial aspects of Kant's idea of history, such as its representation of the human being and the moral agent's relation to progress.

between the unconscious and self-conscious stages of history—all of which lead, finally, to (5) its distinctive account and representation of human striving, and once again, *hopefulness*. As we shall see, these five features of Kant's account of history illuminate Kant's philosophical anthropology and demonstrate the continued significance of Kant's political and historical writings—not just for those who wish to understand the intricacies of Kant's philosophy, but also for those who wish to understand the nature and promise of politics more generally.[46]

2.2 Kantian Hope and the Human Being

In order to understand Kant's account of progress, one must first recognize that hope is its most defining characteristic. This is, of course, not a surprise since progress is most often defined as the hope for a better future, whether it concerns technological or material advancement or the wish for a more just and fair society. The concern for hope is central, as well, to Kant's critical system. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787; hereafter *CPR*), Kant writes,

> All *interest of my reason* (the speculative as well as the practical) is united in the following three questions:
> 1. What can I know?
> 2. What should I do?
> 3. What may I hope?
>
> The first question is merely speculative […] The second question is practical […] The third question […] is simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the

[46] While Kant's thoughts on history changed during these two decades, most notably as he responded to the French Revolution, many of the principal features of his representation of history remained the same. For an analysis of the impact the French Revolution had on Kant's thought see, Susan Shell 2009, especially 163-209 and John Zammito 1992, 263-291. The most important change, as relating to this chapter, occurs in the late work *Conflict of the Faculties* (*CF*), where Kant claims to have knowledge of historical progress due to the phenomena of the "disinterested interest of the spectators of the French Revolution," who chose not to act out of a sense of morality (see, *CF*, 7:85-7:86). For the purposes of the argument of this chapter, however, it will not be necessary to take this development fully into account.

> practical leads like a clue [*Leitfaden*] to a reply to the theoretical question.[47]

To give an all too brief summary of the results of the first *Critique*, Kant's answer to the first question is the phenomenal world of experience, or nature, which is governed by universal laws that are legislated by human cognition (or the faculty of the understanding). Accordingly, the concepts of concern for traditional metaphysics, which Kant argues are God, freedom, and immortality, cannot be known via theoretical reason, since they cannot possibly be experienced as objects in space and time. However, Kant's inquiry into the second question reveals the universal moral law; the condition of acting in accordance with the moral law is freedom. Through this "fact of reason," we have access to a principle distinct from the deterministic and mechanical account that describes the phenomenal world.[48] From the concept of freedom, those other speculative ideas (God and immortality) gain "stability and objective reality, that is, their *possibility* is *proved* by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law."[49] Human beings are permitted to hope for—or have faith in—the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

As one of the traditional theological virtues—along with faith and charity—it is striking that hope appears as one of the questions that guides the interest of reason. What role does hope play in *philosophical* inquiry? Insofar as what we can hope for, according to Kant, is happiness defined as "the satisfaction of all of our inclinations," then hope appears to be the primary question regarding reason's interest.[50] It deals with the question of human happiness and thus the guiding question of philosophical inquiry. However,

[47] *CPR* A805/B833.
[48] *CPrR* 5:31.
[49] *CPrR* 5:4.
[50] *CPR* A806/B834.

happiness understood as the satisfaction of our inclinations, if it is even possible, is often contingent and dependent on chance; it takes its bearings by the phenomenal world of nature as we experience it. And yet Kant rephrases the third question as sequentially following from the second: "If I do what I should, what may I then hope?"[51] The question of hope is qualified and viewed from the perspective of the potential moral agent; hope does not simply concern itself with happiness as such but with the "worthiness to be happy." Kant thereby retains something of the moral dimension of hope that one would expect to find in Christianity. Hope, in this qualified sense, is not simply concerned with happiness but a certain understanding of the good life.

Taking a step back, however, it is helpful to note that hope is defined traditionally by at least two features: (1) by its opposition to two other passions, fear and despair,[52] (2) by its reference to some future state of affairs—either in this world or the next. Both of these features reveal that the question of hope springs from unique features of human experience. To put it perhaps too simply, we have hope (and we fear) because we do not know the future and yet we have a stake in what happens there. The human being is future directed and temporally oriented such that our concern for the future changes our bearing toward the present. Our actions are motivated by the future effects we expect them to have. To refer back to Kantian language, human reason and action are motivated by the "interests of reason;" reason, on Kant's account, strives to realize the ends it sets

[51] *CPR* A805/B834. Cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book One, 1097b 1-21.
[52] Both Machiavelli and Spinoza, for example, define hope in opposition to fear and point to the political use of these future-oriented passions (See, Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Ch. 10, 44; Preface to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*). Hobbes, on the other hand, writes, "*Appetite* with an opinion of attaining is called HOPE. The same, without such an opinion, DESPAIRE" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 6, 41). Kant seems more concerned with despair than fear as the opposition to hope, as discussed in section IV below.

for itself. In common experience, such striving is characterized by the hopeful orientation by which we often face the future.

More often than not, our orientation toward the future is not entirely disinterested and rational. We relate to it by means of affectations or passions (hope, fear, despair), and yet our ability to project ourselves into the future is a mark of our rationality. As Kant will later assert, the human ability to set ends for himself makes him distinct among all other animals.[53] The question of hope points, then, to the composite nature of the human being. In Kant's formulation, the human being is the "limited rational being" or the "finite thinking being."[54] Our experience of hope (or fear or despair) for the future arises, then, because our rationality is finite and limited and yet seeks some transcendence of its given nature. The impulse to hope, to project ourselves into the future, is in other words a feature of the human being's peculiar form of rationality.[55] In short, we are hopeful, historical beings because we are sensible, embodied and yet rational beings. And our rationality, in turn, is guided by "interests" and "ends" because it is finite and discursive.

To summarize this section, the question of hope provides insight into the future directed orientation of reason, and seeking the grounds for the question of hope, in turn, sheds remarkable light on what it means to be human. It is no surprise, then, that in his late lectures on logic Kant makes a crucial addition to his three critical questions:

> The field of philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense can be brought down to the following questions:
> 1. What can I know?
> 2. What ought I to do?

[53] *CPJ* 5:427.
[54] Yirmiyahu Yovel helpfully summarizes the importance of these formulations: "We cannot be rational except through reason's finitude, just as the finitude must be attributed to us as creatures of reason from the outset" (Yovel 2018, 7). The human being is not simply finite *and* rational but rather human rationality is finite, discursive, and hence guided temporally by its "interest."
[55] See, *CPR* A50/B74.

3. What may I hope?
4. What is the human being [*Der Mensch*]?
   Metaphysics answers the first question, *morals* the second, *religion* the third, and *anthropology* the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one.[56]

The three questions taken together make up the answer to the fourth anthropological question. Of the three, however, the third question of hope gets us furthest along in answering the question of what the human being is. More than the questions of knowledge and morality, the question of hope provides insight into the uniquely composite character of the human being. It relates the other two questions, as two different ways of considering the world, to each other.[57] What follows is an interpretation of Kant's political thought and philosophical anthropology that takes as its point of entry the question of hope and the corresponding question of progress.[58] To understand Kant's question of hope, however, it is necessary to understand what it is that we should hope for.

2.3 The Highest Good and the Projection of an Idea

We are now in a position to take up an examination of the object of Kantian hope. Putting aside the psychological or anthropological origins of the question of hope, Kant's emphasis on *this-worldly* hope in his writings on historical progress continues a modern

[56] *Logic* 8:25.
[57] Peter Fenves provides insight into Kant's position on hope when he characterizes it as a mixture of "potential impotence" and the "greatest possible power." It is, he claims, "the outstanding feature of betweenness," or the characteristic that most defines the human being. Fenves 1991, 48.
[58] There is precedence for treating the historical works as an anthropology distinct from the anthropology presented from a pragmatic point of view; see, for example, Günter Zöller's discussion of Kant's "political anthropology" (Zöller 2011) or Dilek Huseyinzadegan's discussion of Kant's "nonideal theory of politics" (Huseyinzadegan 2019).

tradition that can be seen at least as early as Francis Bacon.[59] The effort to better the natural conditions of the human being through the advancement of scientific knowledge and technological progress is born out of a commitment to this-worldly hope. Kant makes his admiration for Bacon clear by choosing as an epigraph to the *CPR* a passage from Bacon's *New Organon* that understands philosophy to be in the service of "human utility and dignity."[60] Whatever one makes of the deeper philosophical place and meaning of hope in Kant's critical system, it is clear that he intends his philosophical project to support the welfare of humanity in this world.[61]

Kant's writings on this-worldly progress suggest that other-worldly hope alone—at least within the context of his critical system—is not sufficient in motivating moral action for all people. One reason for Kant's turn to this-worldly hope, then, seems to be due to the desire to influence political reform. Yet it is not the case that Christianity is without forms of this-worldly hope. Indeed, Kant's idea of progress can appear providential and depends on a teleological interpretation of nature that encourages, if not requires, one to conceive of a "wise author" of nature.[62] Following the implications of the Baconian revolution, however, Kant places the responsibility for moral progress in the hands of human beings and grounds it in human autonomy. We, and not God, are to be

[59] See Robert K. Faulkner 1993, 201-228, for a discussion of Bacon's own "politics of hope." Consider as well the following passage from Bacon: "That everything may be done with gentleness, I will proceed with my plan of preparing men's minds, of which preparation to *give hope is no unimportant part*. For without it the rest tends rather to make men sad, (by giving them a worse and a meaner opinion of things as they are than they now have, and making them more fully to feel and know the unhappiness of their own condition)" (Bacon, *The New Organon*, Section 92, my emphasis).

[60] *CPR* B ii.

[61] See Richard Velkley 1989 for an account of Kant's commitment to, and correction of, the early modern conceptions of philosophy and its "instrumental" understanding of reason. See also Richard Kennington 2004 for a discussion of early modern thought's commitment to humanitarianism and his striking claim that Kant was "the last philosopher to take Bacon seriously."

[62] In fact, Kant often uses the term providence to describe the course of history but with an altered meaning. While the theme of theodicy below touches upon the concept of providence, I deal with it more directly in Chapters 5 and 6, which take up Kant's accounts of teleology and religion.

the authors of history. Thus, some have suggested that the idea of progress is a secularized eschatology.[63] While this may be true to some extent, I would argue that at least in the case of Kant it largely misses the point. With the account of progress, Kant seeks to provide the conditions for a new way of conceiving politics, and in this pursuit, Kant reconceives of what the human being is.

The political goal of hope changes slightly from work to work, at least in formulation, and these changes seem as much due to the rhetorical aims of each work as to the development in Kant's thoughts on history. For example, in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784; hereafter *Idea*), history progresses toward the "universal cosmopolitan state," in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793; hereafter *Rel*), progress is understood in terms of the historical church's transformation into the "ethical community," and in *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795; hereafter *TPP*), history progresses toward a peaceful organization of a free federation of republican states.[64] The overarching guiding idea in each of these formulations, however, is Kant's conception of the "highest good."

Kant's idea of the highest good can be understood as the point where the worthiness to be happy (i.e., following the moral law) aligns with happiness itself, which in our current worldly state is allotted according to the whims of nature or

[63] For example, see Karl Löwith 1949 and Hans Jonas 1984. Their positions are, of course, much more complex than I am able to capture in a single sentence. Nor do I wish to state the relationship between the notions of progress and providence as an either/or dichotomy. By drawing a stark distinction between them, however, I do hope to make clear what is distinct about Kant's idea of progress.

[64] Where Kant seems resigned to an enlightened but autocratic rule in *Idea*, his thought turns more toward republican forms in the 1790s where he explicitly supports "republicanism," which resembles current liberal-democratic nation states. See Pauline Kleingeld 161-163 for a short but helpful description of this development.

circumstance.[65] In other words, the highest good is the conjunction of freedom and nature or virtue and happiness in such a way that virtue is the *condition* for happiness or rather that happiness exists in proportion to one's virtue.[66] In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant provides for the possibility of the highest good through support in our belief in God and the immortality of the soul. These postulations follow from facts that seem inherent in our condition as finite beings. As sensible beings, we are unable to achieve moral perfection in *this* world and thus unable to ever be completely worthy of happiness. Thus, we are permitted to have faith in the immortality of our souls. And given that happiness is to some degree dependent on the laws of nature, we could not believe in the highest good without faith that the laws of nature have an author.

Yet Kant's historical writings provide worldly solutions to these same problems. First, while moral perfection may not be possible in this world, moral improvement is. Second, as the next section of the chapter explores, Kant's idea of history gives us reason to hope that nature supports our moral projects. While the second *Critique* responds to concerns regarding the highest good as seen from the perspective of the individual, Kant's historical writings respond from the perspective of the political or social

[65] Kant's idea of history thus tackles an age-old problem, namely the incongruity between virtue and happiness. This is, of course, a prominent theme in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (see, 1095b 31-1096a 1) and in many of Plato's dialogues. But Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* might be the most fruitful place to compare Kant's concern for the disjunction between virtue and happiness with the classical understanding. The desire to overcome this disjunction is one of the main motives of Cyrus' expansion of the Persian empire, seen in his providential-like promise to reward virtue (see Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, Book Two, Chapter Two). Kant's idea of historical progress permits us to hope that such a conjunction is possible as a result of our own power. The ancient understanding appears to leave such things to chance (see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1331b 19-23).

[66] *CPR* A813/B841.

community.[67] The highest good, understood historically, is a projection toward which the community strives and which, in turn, binds the community together.

In its historical understanding, the highest good is an idea that reason projects toward which the human species can progress. In other words, the human being, as the end-setting animal, contains in itself the source of the highest good.[68] As an idea or ideal, the end of progress is a spontaneous projection of reason that does not correspond to anything in the empirical world.[69] That is, the projection of the idea of progress toward the highest good is rooted in reason's freedom and thereby differs from the theoretical ideas of traditional metaphysics. In this sense, it is a practical idea as much as a theoretical one. Progress toward the highest good, however, is not an illusion or the product of wishful thinking, as some critics of Kant might suggest. Kant states such ideals are not "mere figments of the brain," but rather they "provide an indispensable standard for reason."[70] Because this idea (or ideal) of reason does not correspond to any object of possible knowledge, it is of practical use as a rule by which to measure our

[67] Kate Moran argues that Kant changes his conception of the highest good from an account where the agent makes "countless individual moral decisions" to a more communal understanding of the highest good and moral decisions (Moran 2012, 21). While I agree with this reading, I would make no claims about whether Kant changes his mind, since it is not clear that his various accounts of the highest good are incompatible. In any case, the introduction of the this-worldly conception of the highest good makes the concept political and communal. That Kant finds other-worldly sources of hope on their own somehow insufficient follows from the fact that he continued to develop his philosophy of history.

[68] See *MM* 6:392.

[69] An "ideal" is an idea, a pure concept of reason that has no corresponding experience, that is instantiated in a determinate instance or particular symbol or person. To use Kant's own example, virtue is an idea but the "sage of the Stoics" is an ideal—a "human being who exists merely in thoughts" (*CPR*, A570/B598). The highest good is an idea, whereas the particular instances of the end of progress, eternal peace or a cosmopolitan whole, are ideals. For an example of the distinction between an idea and an ideal, see Allen W. Wood 2020, 116. For an explanation of the role positing plays in Kantian ideas, see Zachary Calhoun 2019, 82.

[70] *CPR* A570/B598. Cf. *CPrR* 5:113.

conduct. As an idea of practical reason, the highest good serves as a regulative principle, a limit or an end to be progressively approached.[71]

This future-oriented outlook has one other peculiarity when applied to the mundane, temporal world; namely, it involves hope for the human *species*. In the context of hoping for the highest good in this world, it is helpful to remember the finitude of the human being. Given that a person only has "three score and ten years" on this earth, one cannot hope to see the full fruits of one's moral or intellectual labor. There is the possibility of seeing some progress in one's lifetime, but by Kant's account, one will never live to see the completion of progress. The hope for humanity's progression toward the highest good, then, is a hope for the sake of the species and not necessarily for the sake of an individual's attainment of the highest good.

Since humanity's progress toward such an ideally just state of affairs is possible, as Kant argues, one cannot regard its postulation as merely a subject of idle thinking (or the hope for progress as a subject for wishful sentiments). Yet as dependent on an idea of reason, progress has a unique epistemic status. We can never know or prove that history is progressing, but rather only suppose that it might be the case. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797; hereafter *MM*), regarding the particular ideal of political progress toward eternal peace, Kant summarizes the ambiguity of such an asymptotic approach towards an ideal of reason: "eternal peace," the ultimate end of progressive history, is "indeed an unachievable idea;" still, directing political regimes toward such an end so that they move

[71] Kant's historical idea has another sense as well, namely viewing history as a totality or whole (in this way it is analogous to the "idea" of nature as being systematic totality). The idea of history depends on positing a guiding idea that serves as a regulative principle by which the historical phenomena become coherent.

toward a "continual *approximation* to [eternal peace] is "not unachievable."[72] Reason's projection of an idea provides humanity with a goal that is not *altogether* unachievable, even if it is projected to an infinite point in the future.

However, progress is not altogether certain. Since the ground of the regulative idea is human freedom, one has a choice to act in accordance with this principle or not. Kant's reading of history provides hope that our moral action can be efficacious in bringing about progress. It can be said that the moral agent hopes for something, in a Kantian sense, that he or she has the possibility of bringing into existence.[73] Hope for the future involves our choice to act morally, even if we must also have faith that nature supports our moral projects. Or rather, we are permitted to hope for progress on that condition that we strive to act in accordance with the demands of morality.

2.4 How Can We Have Hope?: History as the Justification of Nature

The most obvious and challenging obstacles to the possibility of progress are the ills of nature and human evil. What thoughtful person can reflect on the horrors of the 20th century alone without provoking some doubt regarding any possible goodness of the human race?[74] Thoughts such as these, Kant claims, are natural to the "reflective human

[72] *MM* 6:350.

[73] Hope is distinguished from a mere "wish" insofar as we can work to bring its object into existence (even if only gradually). In other words, hope is a choice, which Kant defines as "one's consciousness of the ability to bring about its object by one's action," opposed to a wish, which is "not joined with this consciousness [of the ability to bring about its object by one's action]" (Ibid).

[74] After the horrors of the Holocaust in particular, many thinkers have called the possibility of progress into question. Theodore Adorno, for example, famously claimed that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," thereby calling into doubt all positive, non-critical cultural projects. And the thought of Hans Jonas and Emile Fackenheim grapple not just with the possibility of progress but the possibility of philosophy after such a revelation of human evil. And yet, as Kleingeld writes, those defending Kant in the 21st century might "point to the ever more widespread endorsement of the principle of the equal moral status of all humans, to the establishment of the United Nations, to the abolition of slavery (at least in law), to the improvement of democracy and suffrage in many countries on earth, at least when compared with 18th century practices, and so on" to keep people from "succumbing to despair" (Kleingeld 2012, 175).

being" [*Der denkende Mensch*]. Writing in *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786; hereafter *CBHH*), Kant observes that such a reflective person feels "a sorrow, one which can even become a moral corruption, of which the thoughtless knows nothing, namely a discontent with the providence that governs the course of the world."[75] In considering the ills [*übel*] that "so much oppress humankind," the reflective observer is without (apparent) "hope for anything better."[76] Kant is not naïve and recognizes that if progress is not to be mere wishful thinking, there must be grounds for hope in the face of the rugged facts of life.

From the perspective of moral or political agency, there is the danger that the reflective spectator's discontent toward the course of the world metastasizes, forming passions that impede action. First, the sorrow of the spectator can easily give way to despair, a condition for inaction. Such despair leads as well to the asking of theoretical questions that reason cannot answer: Why would a good and omnipotent God create such a world full of woe? Can it truly be said that providence guides the world's course? Kant denies the possibility of a theoretical theodicy that would provide answers to these questions. The practical result of such a denial is the preservation of human autonomy—our ignorance of the ultimate fate of the world provides us with the possibility of acting morally for morality's sake. Yet not receiving an answer to these questions, the

---

While such developments are surely encouraging, their example will likely prove to be insufficient grounds for sustained hope. It is my aim, throughout the dissertation, to provide an argument for the theoretical basis of progress and its function in Kant's system as an image of the human being. Whether or not knowledge of progress is possible, it is helpful for (1) providing a heuristic by which to inform moral and political action and judgment and for (2) thinking through the anthropological question.

[75] *CBHH* 8:120-8:121.

[76] Ibid. Kant's use of the word "ill" here refers to what some might call "natural evil." The demand for justification here is a demand that the natural ills, hardship, disease, etc., that beset the human race be found to have some purpose. Kant's word for evil, *böse*, refers to "moral evil."

despairing person might be tempted to assume the inherent wickedness of the world and the futility of moral action.

The second danger arising from the spectator's grief is the problem of misanthropy. Whereas despair might take a more general orientation toward the world, God, and nature, misanthropy doubts the goodness of human beings and whether or not the species (or perhaps even individuals) are loveable. Kant describes the effects of such doubts when responding to Moses Mendelssohn, a man whose wishful progressive thinking Kant claims gave way to misanthropy on account of his realization that humanity vacillates between virtue and vice yet ultimately maintains "the same level of morality."[77] The danger of this view is that history appears "farcical" rather than tragic, which would at least be "moving and instructive" and has as its condition the nobility of the human being.[78] The understanding of human history as farce implies not only a lack of love for the human being but a lack of respect. The misanthrope looks down with contempt at his fellow human beings and calls into doubt the intentions behind any apparent moral action.

Historical progress does not respond theoretically to the questions concerning the justification of God and the world but offers a sort of "practical" theodicy.[79] According to *On the Miscarriage of Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1791; hereafter *MT*), traditional (or "doctrinal") theodicies must fail due to the boundaries imposed on reason; yet Kant leaves open the possibility of an "authentic" [*authentische*] theodicy that interprets nature in accordance with an idea of purposiveness that corresponds to the will of a good God.

[77] *CS* 8:308.
[78] Ibid., 8:308.
[79] For my reading of Kantian history as a form of theodicy or justification, I am indebted to Susan Neiman 2002 and Paul T. Wilford 2014.

The seeker of justification is not permitted to know how God acts in nature, but such an authentic interpretation "gives meaning to the letter of his creation."[80] An authentic theodicy is guided by the demands of practical reason. While theodicy, strictly speaking, seeks to defend the "justice of God," Kant's historical theodicy seeks to defend nature's beneficence and support the actions of the moral agent. Kant's authentic historical theodicy acts as an "*interpretation* of nature;" it is a defense against the charge that the world is "counter-purposive."[81]

The demand for theodicy is a form of putting God, nature, and the world on trial. Kant's word for justification [*Rechtfertigung*] has connotations of a legal defense, and *MT* makes this connection explicit. In addition to the use of *Rechtfertigung* and speaking of the "would be advocate [*Sachwalter*] of God," Kant calls theodicy a "juridical process [*Rechtshandel*] instituted before the tribunal [*Gerichtshof*] of reason."[82] The questioner of God is a sort of plaintiff and Kant, as author of a theodicy, is an advocate of the "accused" [*angeklagten*] party, which, in the case of the historical theodicy, is nature as much as it is God.[83] In *MT*, the task of the defense is not to prove the existence of God's goodness, but to dispel the arguments against the counter-purposiveness of the world—to provide reasonable doubt of God's innocence.[84] The prosecutors in the context of the historical theodicy are the reflective person and the misanthrope or what they personify, namely despair and hatred.

---

[80] *MT* 8:264.
[81] *MT* 8:264.
[82] *MT* 8:255.
[83] The legal language Kant uses when speaking of theodicy goes back to the *Book of Job*. The "adversary" [*Ha-satan*], who questions God into testing Job, derives his title from legal language. God is put on trial by the adversary who acts as a prosecutor. See Stephen Mitchell 1979, xi, 6.
[84] *MT* 8:256.

Kantian history provides, then, an interpretation of nature wherein our moral projects are supported—human beings are not powerless to act on their moral intentions. Yet this interpretation of nature is ultimately in the service of the defense of the human being. The interpretation of nature gives way to an interpretation of human nature, and thereby Kant's historical theodicy seeks also to defend the human species. The primary purpose of Kant's idea of historical progress is to justify the human species, and thereby justify the whole of creation. Returning to *Idea*, Kant claims that

> [A philosophic history] will clear the way for (what, without presupposing a plan of nature [*Naturplan*], one cannot reasonably [*Grunde*] hope [*hoffen*] for) a comforting view [*Aussicht*] of the future, one in which we represent from afar how the human species finally works its way up to the state where all the seeds nature has planted in it can be developed fully and in which the species' vocation here on earth can be fulfilled. Such a *justification/defense* of nature [*Rechtfertigung der Natur*]—or, better, of *providence*—is no unimportant motive for adopting a *particular perspective* [*Gesichtpunkt*] in observing the world [*Weltbetrachtung*].[85]

By reexamining history to find evidence that progress is possible for the human race, Kant provides the reflective spectator evidence in support of the possibility that nature, and even providence, can be justified [*Rechtfertigun*]. Such justification aims not only to show that nature is not to blame for the human being's miserable condition but instead that nature positively supports the development of human freedom.[86] Finding "grounds" [*Grunde*] for hope requires, however, not only finding evidence to support the possibility

[85] *Idea* 8:30 (Ninth Thesis).

[86] Kant uses this language of justification in other political and historical writings as well. He states in *CBHH* that a certain "picture of man's history" [*Darstelleung seiner Geschichte*] teaches us that we are not justified [*berechtigt*] in blaming "providence for the evil that oppresses him." As late as *TPP*, Kant writes: "Given that the human race never can be and never will be in a better condition, it seems impossible to be able to use a theodicy [*Theodizee*] to provide any justification [*gerechtfertigt*] whatsoever for creation, namely, that such a race of generally corrupt beings should have been put on earth." Kant remains consistent in the idea that such a justification requires a change in vantage point from which one views history.

of progress but the adoption of a new perspective for one's "world-viewing" [*Weltbetrachtung*].

In defending the accused, which in the case of history is both nature and the human species, Kant supposes that there must be some logic and perspective that makes orderly the chaotic appearance of history. Kant seeks a logic underlying history in terms of a "guiding thread" [*Leitfaden*], and the new vantage point from which to observe the course of the world becomes the projected end of history, the highest good, toward which the guiding thread leads.[87] While individuals may act unpredictably and toward contrary ends, following this guiding thread, they often "unconsciously proceed toward an unknown common end."[88] However, the dual nature of the human being makes finding this guiding thread difficult. Kant finds problematic the strife between the concerns of culture (or reason) and the existence of humanity as a physical species. Or, to use the language of *Idea*, human beings "proceed neither merely instinctually, like animals, nor yet according to a fixed plan, like rational citizens of the world."[89] This indeterminacy of the human being, which makes a justification necessary, stands as an obstacle to finding reason in history. Once again stressing the danger of misanthropy and using the language of spectatorship, Kant speaks of the hazy historical appearance the human being's dual nature causes.

> One cannot resist a certain indignation when one sees men's actions placed on the great world stage [*Weltbühne*] and finds that, despite some individuals' seeming wisdom, in the large everything is finally woven together from folly

[87] *Leitfaden* is the word Kant uses to describe the way in which the practical side of the question of hope "leads like a clue to a reply" to the theoretical aspects of the question. History, like the question of hope, is at once practical and theoretical. The practical considerations of history lead to a reply to the theoretical questions it raises about the nature of the human being. Contra, for example, Henry E. Allison 2009, who understands history as theoretical, I understand history for Kant to be "practical and theoretical at once."
[88] *Idea* 8:17.
[89] *Idea* 8:17.

> and childish vanity and often even childish malice and destructiveness.[90]

As a result of a pattern of history that seems only woven together by childish vanity, the philosopher cannot suppose that the *species* has thus far acted with a "rational end of its own;" instead, the "only point of departure" is to discover some "natural objective" [*Naturabsicht*] toward which history proceeds.[91]

2.5 The Mechanism of Progress

Kant's search for a logic underlying human history that would make feasible the hope in progress leads him to consider that the species proceeds according to an objective of nature. Nature's aim, in part, is to encourage in all creatures the development of their "natural capacities" [*Naturanlagen*] in conformity with their end.[92] In the case of the human being, we are encouraged to develop our reason [*Vernunft*], which seeks to "extend the rules and objectives of the use of all of its powers far beyond natural instinct."[93] Nature paradoxically tutors the faculty in the human being that transcends the instincts given to him by nature. The human being is pushed toward a state of freedom wherein he no longer needs to rely on the laws of natural instinct but rather acts according to the laws of reason.

Nature encourages this development through two mechanisms: first, its stinginess, a mechanism of external nature that answers to reflective person's feelings of despair; and second, "unsocial sociability," a mechanism internal to our own nature that answers

---

[90] *Idea* 8:18.
[91] *Idea* 8:18. In this same passage, Kant goes on to postulate that nature may someday produce a Kepler or Newton of history, i.e., someone who will explain the events of history according to universal laws.
[92] See *Idea*, Thesis One.
[93] *Idea* 8:18-8:19 (Second Thesis).

the charges of the misanthrope. Both mechanisms provide an interpretation of nature whereby something rational and good arises out of a process that appears chaotic or bad. They both rely on the human's indeterminate status as a dual being driven by both natural instinct and reason.

First, nature encourages the species to develop its capacities through its seeming lack of benevolence. Nature is "not prodigal in the use of means to her ends" and declares that the human being should "bring [everything] out of himself completely" [*gänzlich aus sich selbst herausbring*]."[94] Nature's "delight in the greatest frugality" with respect to the human being tutors the human being in self-sufficiency.[95] The fact that we must rely on artifice for existence, in providing food, shelter, and clothing, shows the way in which we rely on a sort of self-making activity even before the development of rationality. If the human being ever works himself up to "inner perfection in his way of thinking [*Denkungsart*] and thereby to happiness," then it is he alone who would "have the entire credit for it and would have only himself to thank."[96] Nature is indeed "step-motherly" insofar as it provides the human not even with the means to keep warm nor with the proper tools for subsistence. Yet being a good tutor, nature's miserliness aims at the human being's "rational *self-esteem*."

However, without further means of motivation, Kant claims that we would be content to stop short of developing our rational capacity and live the life of the "Arcadian shepherd, in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love."[97] This does not sound so bad, especially compared to Kant's insistence on the "glittering miseries" of civilization;

[94] *Idea* 8:19 (Third Thesis).
[95] *Idea* 8:20.
[96] *Idea* 8:20.
[97] *Idea* 8:21. *Fourth Thesis*.

yet such a life is not yet rational and would closely resemble, Kant argues, animal life. Since the human being's purpose involves its "rational nature," there would "remain a void" in creation if we remained in this state of Arcadian bliss.[98] "Unsocial sociability," [*ungesellige Geselligkeit*] the tension within human nature between the desire to enter into society and the resistance of society to individual desires, forces people to develop rational capacities for the sake of competitive gain.[99] The desire for honor, wealth, or power drives people away from the contented but lazy life of the Arcadian shepherd and motivates the movement from "barbarism to culture."[100] As the desires and modes of recognition within society become more sophisticated, people respond in more sophisticated or "civilized" ways. Through the force of unsocial sociability talents become developed, taste is cultivated, and the moral feeling developed.

Through a beneficial antagonism, the human race is driven to lay a path for the establishment of a "way of thinking [*Denkungsart*] that can in time convert the coarse, natural disposition for moral discrimination into definite practical principles, and thereby change a society driven together by necessity into a *moral whole*."[101] The irrational and often immoral antagonism between human beings sets the course for political progress and the natural, instinctual, and self-interested bonds of the political community are to be replaced by rational principles. In other words, Kant's interpretation of nature argues that humanity's competitive instincts, its envy, ambition, vanity, and *amour-propre* all prove to be essential to the rational, moral, and political development of the species. This

[98] Kant's justification of the history must defend, then, the turn toward greater "civilization."
[99] Many commentators locate the phrase's source in Montaigne's Essay, "Of Solitude." Montaigne writes: "There is nothing more unsociable than Man, and nothing more sociable: unsociable by his vice, sociable by his nature."
[100] *Idea* 8:21.
[101] *Idea* 8:21.

mechanism underlying the development of history vindicates the "wise creator," for in such a course we see a benevolent design and not "the hand of a malicious spirit who fiddled with the creator's masterful arrangement."[102]

The vindication of the wise creator, or the "step-motherly" ways of nature, or even the naturally detestable characteristics of the human being, provides grounds for a rational faith in the goodness of nature and the possible efficacy of our moral action. Kant responds to the despair of the reflective spectator and to the contempt of the misanthrope by shifting the perspective by which they see history. Rather than seeing nature as indifferent and humanity as vicious, as these things seem to us at first glance, Kant's interpretation of the course of human events provides evidence that history can be seen as a "realization of a hidden plan of nature."[103] Revealing the possibility of a guiding thread of nature permits us to hope.[104]

In addition to the courtroom analogy, Kant often draws a comparison between the course of human events and the regularity of the heavenly bodies. He provides content for hope by claiming we can both see order in past human events and predict the future course of progress, just as we are able to predict the cycles of the planets. Kant writes that "based on the premise that the universe has a systematic structure," we are permitted to

[102] *Idea* 8:22.
[103] *Idea* 8:27 (Eighth Thesis).
[104] In *TPP*, Kant refers not to "unsocial sociability" but to "nature's guarantee," a mechanism more explicitly informed by his teleological account of nature in the *CPJ*. However, like *Idea*, he presents an account of how antagonism is beneficial to human development. In particular, Kant discusses the paradoxical goodness of war (without, of course, endorsing it). War works toward the end of peace first by spreading the human race across the globe, thereby making use of all of the habitable, if at first inhospitable, land; and second, by forcing human beings into society for the pragmatic sake of mutual protection, which in turn leads to the (eventual) discovery of the modern state and republican constitutions. In an interesting way, Kant anticipates Charles Tilley's famous argument that "War made the state and the state made war" (see Tilley 1990). Moreover, Kant claims that the willingness of soldiers to subordinate natural instincts, whether that be fear of death or a desire for comfort, for the sake of a higher principle anticipates the mastery of natural inclinations that is necessary for following the moral law.

"justifiably conclude that such a cycle actually exists."[105] This analogy to the heavenly bodies helps draw out another aspect of Kantian history—it is a correction of our sight. The new perspective [*Gesichtpunkt*] provides a corrective on our natural but faulty vision of history. With the articulation of nature's plan, made possible by viewing it from this new vantage point, the spectator can see that the human race enters upon a new stage in history. Self-conscious of nature's plan, we can now act in accordance with the purpose of nature. Kant's articulation of history is thus not only descriptive but predictive; it looks not only into the past but sees into the future.

The account of the transition from an unconscious stage to a self-conscious stage of history is central to the moral and political effectiveness of Kant's account of history insofar as it encourages future (and present) action. At the "halfway point" of our rational and moral development, Kant insists that we can rely less on and less on the beneficence of nature. Having begun to make nature's plan conscious to ourselves, we take the fate of progress largely into our own hands. After orienting ourselves by telling a story about the world and history, we can work to bring our actions into alignment with it.

In sum, the various mechanisms underlying the course of human history provide grounds for the possibility of progress and makes hope feasible. At least, Kant's historical theodicy justifies human existence up to the point of his writing. In the transition from an unconscious stage of history to a newly self-conscious stage, there arises a new challenge to the orderly course of the world; namely, the species must now begin to transform its own actions so that they accord with the moral law. The progress of history is a moral project that remains incomplete (and must remain incomplete given its

[105] *Idea* 8:27.

asymptotic character).[106] Such a view of history shows that the ways of God, nature, and the human being would be justified completely only once history achieves its *telos*. Historical progress could be characterized, then, as the unfolding of theodicy in time—a not-yet-completed defense of the human and the world.

2.6 Kant's Aspirational Republicanism

We are now in a position to turn to the political effects and uses of Kant's philosophy of history. As a not-yet completed narrative of the human species, Kant's idea of progressive history provides a standard of political judgment and an understanding of the human being by which the political actor can seek to combine prudence with a strict adherence to the moral law. Such an account of progressive history provides the conditions for Kant's aspirational republicanism—or a form of liberalism in which moral striving is a chief feature.

Turning to the first point, the idea that Kant's notion of history serves as a sort of heuristic to guide political judgment and action is now well established, even if prominent detractors of this position remain.[107] The concrete political goals toward which Kant hopes history will provide a standard by which to judge one's current civic institutions. The institutional organizations sought in his historical writings appear to be identical to those of traditional liberal theory—hence it is for good reason that Kant is

[106] Yovel notes that for Kant: "[The universe] exists for the sake of the moral system that it has yet to become." Yovel 1980, 80. See also, Yovel 1980, 145n.

[107] For a supporter of this position, see Huseyinzadegan 2019 and her exposition of what she calls Kant's "nonideal theory of politics;" following her, I understand Kant's idea of history as a bridge between his "ideal practical philosophy," or his doctrine of right (*Recht*), and certain prudential and anthropological observations about the human being.

often classified as a liberal theorist.[108] The course of history moves toward a "universal civil society, administered in accord with right."[109] Such a society consists of an international federation of states, where each state possesses the "highest possible degree of *freedom under external laws* combined with the irresistible power, i.e., a perfectly *rightful civil constitution*."[110] Kant describes the attainment of this constitution as nature's "supreme task" set for "the human species," for it is only under such a constitution that "the highest attainable development of mankind's capacities can be achieved."[111] This "perfectly rightful civil constitution," as it is described in *Idea*, resembles a liberal state and, in *TPP*, Kant defines republicanism as the "political principle whereby executive power is separated from legislative power."[112] These powers must be separated and representative—that is, those in power govern the people on their behalf. All other governments, Kant contends, are despotic and "without form." Kant eventually puts forward a model of republican government, then, that incorporates more democratic processes, argues for the separation of powers, and understands government as representative.

Further, Kant's insistence on the positive political effects of unsocial tendencies—summarized politically in his famous statement that "the problem of organizing a nation" can be solved for "a people comprised of devils"—reflects the traditional liberal thought that self-interest can be channeled in such a way as to be

[108] See William Galston 1975; see also the example of John Rawls, whose "political liberalism" was influenced by his reading of Kant.
[109] *Idea* 8:22 (Fifth Thesis).
[110] *Idea* 8:22. Kant's italics.
[111] *Idea* 8:22. Later Kant refers to this federation of republican constitutions, the "universal cosmopolitan state," as "the womb in which all of the species' original capacities will be developed" (8:28).
[112] *TPP* 8:352.

compatible with lawfulness.[113] Kant indeed relies on the natural antagonism of human nature to bring humanity to the position where it can erect republican constitutions. Accordingly, the tension between the human being's selfish inclinations and reason that drives the underlying mechanism of history informs the political actor in any attempt to further progress. Faced with the "crooked wood" of human nature from which "nothing straight can be fashioned," the political actor's highest hopes from the realm of politics would be tempered and a prudence regarding the difficulties of politics encouraged.

Such prudence goes along with a hope in our desire to be good. Even the "homage" unjust nations and politicians pay to "the concept of right" testifies to the "moral aptitude to master the evil principle" and provides "hope that others will overcome it."[114] Kant argues, then, that when seen from a certain perspective, the fact that even the most self-interested political actions must justify themselves in moral language supports the notion that a desire to be moral lies dormant among us. In other words, even the "realistic" view of the self-seeking or the prudential but cynical politician points to our greater concern for morality. It is a testament to the novelty of Kant's political imagination that hope can be found in the all-too-common experience of hypocrisy.

Prudential politics, defined by Kant as the "art of using the mechanism [of nature] to govern men," must have as its "limiting condition" morality or "the concept of

[113] *TPP* 8:366. Cf. *Federalist* 10. As Kleingeld notes, Kant moves away from an emphasis on the "good will" of an authoritative figure in *Idea* toward more classically liberal notions of institutionalism. Kant even states the case for self-interest rightly understood more strongly than many other prominent liberals (Kleingeld 2012, 174-175). Still, despite this, even in *TPP* Kant maintains an aspirational and hopeful orientation toward the development of human morality.

[114] *TPP* 8: 355. Compare La Rochefoucauld's famous maxim: "Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue" (*Maxims*, 65).

right."[115] Kant's vision of progressive history provides the means of bringing together these seemingly incompatible principles. The *moral politician*, Kant's ideal of the political actor, interprets the "principles of political prudence" in light of morality and this requires, as Kant argues with an example of improving a state's constitution, the continuous approximation toward an idea of reason. Kant contrasts this figure with two others: (1) the "despotic moralist" who "violates the rules of political prudence" by "adopting or proposing premature measures;" (2) the moralizing politician, who violates the principle of morality on the pretext that human nature is not capable of improving.[116] What these two figures seem to lack, on Kant's account, is the proper form of hope. The despotic moralist is more wishful than hopeful, failing to see the stubbornness of human inclinations (or failing to judge a political situation properly), whereas the moralizing politician has no hope from politics and, instead, disregards the possibility of the attainment of rights and moral improvement.

In sum, the asymptotic character of history discloses a note of realism within Kantian politics and is best captured by Kant's appropriation in *TPP* of the Biblical command: "Be ye wise as serpents and innocent as doves."[117] Kant's account of history seeks to achieve this combination of serpentine wisdom and moral innocence by showing, on the one hand, the defects of human nature and its propensity to self-interested action while demonstrating, on the other hand, the progression toward a posited ideal supported by such natural mechanisms as unsocial sociability. Accordingly, Kant's view of history does not warrant the charge that it turns away from those low aspects of

[115] *TPP* 8:372.
[116] *TPP* 8:373. Kant also presents the *political moralist*, who "forges a morality to suit the statesman's advantage," but such a thing, according to Kant, is not even "thinkable" (8:372).
[117] *TPP* 8:370.

human nature with which the most sordid political operator is well-acquainted. Instead, it provides a standpoint from which these low aspects can be understood to contribute to a moral vision of politics that gives a fair hearing to the noblest aspirations of human nature.

A Kantian account of liberalism provides a framework in which to understand the independence and autonomy of each citizen as being bound up with a duty toward the moral law. The historical writings give a moral interpretation of liberal republicanism and provide the liberal citizen with a framework in which he or she can understand political life in terms of moral striving.[118] Kantian politics entails, then, an anthropology that understands the human in terms of the efforts to overcome its given conditions—as the creature that "brings everything out of itself" and posits another more moral world.[119] Kant's republicanism is aspirational in the sense that the republican model is itself an ideal to work towards, but also in the sense that only a society organized around the concept of individual rights can provide the proper framework for truly autonomous action.

Kant's insistence on progress might appear naïve or utopian or perhaps one might accuse it of doing political damage through its inability to recognize natural limits. Yet by emphasizing the difficulties facing humanity's progress, Kant's philosophy of history

[118] In *Idea*, at least, Kant himself is skeptical that even the articulation of the logic of history is complete insofar as he is writing an idea "for" a universal history instead of an idea "of" a universal history. While Kant might not be, as he claims in this work, the Newton of history to the extent that he does not provides universal laws of history akin to Newton's laws of motion, he is like Kepler, who detected that the seemingly chaotic motions of the planets can be understood to be moving in ellipses. Kant, like Kepler, detects order underlying the senseless phenomena without entirely articulating its underlying laws. In Chapter 5, I will address whether Kant later revaluated his skepticism regarding his own account of history.
[119] *Idea* 8:19. Quoted above. Kant's understanding of the human being as the positing, striving, self-overcoming being, is rooted in his understanding of the legislative function of reason. Zachary Calhoun gets to the core of Kant's anthropology when he writes, "To posit a world is, in short, to be a 'human being' in the Kantian sense of the term" (Calhoun 2019, 107).

makes way for the preservation of human autonomy when compared with other, more deterministic accounts of history. Through the insistence on the crookedness of human nature, Kant suggests the possibility of failure, and thereby the possibility of freedom. Kant's hope in progress, then, is the means of providing a middle ground between a total faith in providence (or some notion of a historical force) and the despair that comes from the perception that there is a lack of order in the world. In other words, the epistemological modesty of Kantian history guarantees neither knowledge of progress nor supports the supposition that history is a great farce but rather finds the means of preserving human dignity in our constant struggle to be moral.

2.7 Conclusion: Dreaming that Sweet Dream

We have seen that throughout the writings on history Kant employs the image of the spectator to communicate the idea that observer of history can change perspectives. The moral agent seeks to find in history evidence for the *feasibility* of progress, and thereby support the hopeful projections that human reason cannot help but make. The repeated use of the allusion to great astronomers captures Kant's point. Here, a passage from *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798; hereafter *CF*), a late work on history, stresses the point.

> If the course of human affairs seems so senseless [*widersinnisch*] to us, perhaps it lies in a poor/wrong/unlawful [*unrecht*] choice of position from which we regard it. Viewed from the earth, the planets sometimes move backwards, sometimes forward, and sometimes not at all. But if the standpoint selected is the sun, an act which only reason [*Vernunft*] can perform, according to the Copernican hypothesis, they move constantly in their regular course.[120]

[120] *CF* 7:84. Kleingeld notes that, in a sense, the moral agent as spectator approaches history with "a frank confirmation bias" that is "not a flaw but a feature of our perspective as moral agents" (Kleingeld 2012, 175).

Like Copernicus, Kant can understand the seemingly senseless and chaotic events of history in terms of a systematic pattern through an act of reason, namely the selection of a proper vantage point. The senseless perspective is a lawless [*unrecht*] perspective and reason's ability to change the standpoint from which the spectator views history is bound up with its status as the law-making faculty. History, then, as a collection of contingent particulars, can be understood as a totality only once one adopts a particular perspective or employs a heuristic device from which to unify those particulars into a particular story.

This emphasis on perspective points to deeper claims about the very nature of human rationality. Through an attempt to find order out of history, we are led to considerations of the human mind's relationship with the world. Kant's hopeful view of history reflects the intentional and deliberate shift of perspective made possible by his so-called "Copernican Revolution."[121] That is, the change in perspective that allows us to view history as progressive is rooted in a similar assertion of freedom and the radical spontaneity of human reason with which Kant begins his inquiry into the nature of human knowledge. From a reading of Kant's historical writings alone, nothing seems to compel us to understand history in light of a progression toward the highest good other than the political purpose of promoting moral action through a rhetoric of hope.[122] Why should we, given our freedom to determine our vantage point, choose *this* perspective? Certainly, it is not the only way to make sense of history.

To add to these difficulties, there is another perspective on the course of world events suggested by Kant. In the opening statement of *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he writes: "Whether this satirical inscription [i.e., Toward Perpetual Peace] on a certain

[121] *CPR* B xvi.
[122] See Stanley Rosen 1987, who argues that Kant's philosophical and political project is largely rhetorical.

Dutch shopkeeper's sign, on which a graveyard was painted, holds for *human beings* in general, or especially for heads of state who can never get enough of war, or perhaps only for philosophers who dream that sweet dream [*sußen Traum träumen*], is not for us to decide."[123] This passage reveals the ambiguity with which Kant treats the human race and, ultimately, the concept of progress. The mechanisms of history always point to a certain duality of the human being and the irrationalities of human action that make progress precarious. The "evil principle," as Kant refers to it, always endangers our nobler aspirations and indeed the world at large. At the same time, such evils and irrationalities provide the conditions of progress and the striving that constitutes the unique dignity of the human being. The logic of progress is ambiguous, and in a sense paradoxical, in that we strive to approach a state where we cannot truly arrive and yet, as Kant suggests, we cannot help but hope for; the sort of moral striving entailed in Kant's idea of history requires that we work to overcome the very conditions of our striving.

There is a, then, a profound sense of irony in "dreaming that sweet dream" of eternal peace or striving toward the realization of the highest good on earth. Failure is more likely than success and, at best, we merely approach a constantly deferred state of affairs. Before giving up completely on such a sweet dream, however, it is worth investigating Kantian progress more thoroughly. If Kant is indeed correct about the central role of hope in human life, then the paradoxes and risks of progress might be the price to pay for moral meaning. Getting to the roots of the progressive view of history requires considering the claims it assumes about the nature of the human being and, in particular, about the nature of reason such that it can choose the perspective from which it

[123] *TPP* 8:343.

views the world. It is with such a project in mind that we will now turn to Kant's critical project and what could be called his "transcendental anthropology."

3.0 Founding the Culture of Reason: *Metaphysica Naturalis* and the Politics of Kant's Transcendental Anthropology

Abstract:

This chapter interprets Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as being primarily concerned with explicating what can be called a "transcendental anthropology." That is, the first *Critique*, as a work that delineates the cognitive structure of the human being as such, provides an answer to the question—what is the human being? By looking to key images and metaphors that Kant employs in the A and B Prefaces and Introductions as well as in the opening of The Doctrine of Method, the chapter spells out the content of the transcendental anthropology and shows that Kant puts forth this novel understanding of the human in an attempt to prepare the transition to "the culture of reason." Indeed, the transcendental anthropology, often expressed through the use of political metaphors, has political and practical significance for Kant since it brings peace to "the battlefield of metaphysics" that underlies real world political and religious strife. Thus, the chapter argues that an examination of Kant's transcendental anthropology reveals the extent of his own ambitions and provides us insight into his self-understanding as a thinker of world-historical significance.

It is also not enough to know many other sciences, but rather [to have] self-knowledge of understanding and reason. *Anthropologia transcendentalis*.[124]

-Kant

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is Man.[125]

-Alexander Pope

[124] *Reflexion* 903, translation mine. "Es ist auch nicht genug, viel andre Wissenschaften zu wissen, sondern die Selbterkentnis des Verstandes und der Vernunft. *Anthropologia transcendentalis*."

[125] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man: Epistle II*. Pope was one of Kant's favorite poets (see, Manfred Kuehn 2001, 77 and 422), and his *Essay on Man* captures the German *Aufklärung*'s concern with the "science of man"—a concern which gave rise to the "anthropological culture" of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

3.1 Introduction: Critique as Anthropology

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787; hereafter *CPR*) is a work characterized by transition. This theme of transition is not simply due to the fact that Kant's "Copernican" revolution makes possible an entirely new approach to the problem of knowledge, but also because the revolution in metaphysics is at the same time the theoretical foundation for humanity's self-government. The critique of reason establishes the grounds of human autonomy and thus effects a wholesale reversal in the source, origin, and ground of human morality. Indeed, Kant's approach to metaphysical questions is a radical break from the Western tradition's concern with nature as a standard of human action; in place of a natural standard, however understood, that is prior to human activity, Kant discovers in the free self-legislation of reason the grounds of a new standard. The revolutionary implications for morality (and by extension politics) of Kant's subject-oriented epistemology is noted by Kant and runs through the *CPR* as a minor leitmotif. The central feature of this practical theme, which will be the focus of this chapter, is Kant's belief that the *CPR* is foundational in the transition in the human being's self-understanding—a transition from immaturity to maturity or from ignorance to self-knowledge.[126]

As a work of self-knowledge, the *CPR* develops a distinct account of the human being and thereby grounds Kant's conception of political life and moral culture. As noted in Chapter 2, the three critical questions resolve into a fourth: what is the human

[126] See *QE*.

being?[127] The answer to this question could be said to be the critical system itself; or the critical system can be understood as the *anthropologia transcendentalis* that Kant mentions in a notable reflection composed in the late 1770s.[128] This transcendental anthropology should not be confused with the later anthropology from a "pragmatic view" but rather should be understood as a "transcendental" account of the finite rational being.[129] It both logically precedes and provides the framework for Kant's pragmatic and more conventionally understood anthropology.[130] Abstracting from all contingent aspects of the human being, it aims at a universal and therefore necessary account of the eidetic structure of the finite rational being. Kant's critical project sets out to delineate, in other

[127] *Logic* 8:25. In this same passage, Kant claims that the three critical questions are "the three fundamental questions of enduring philosophical significance" (Ibid.). Kant also repeats these series of questions in two other places, the May 4, 1793 letter to C.F. Stäudlin and *Pölitz* 28:533-34 (1790-1791). While the publication of these three references postdate the first *Critique*, they can still shed light on Kant's initial posing of the three critical questions, especially given that *Reflexion* 903, where Kant references the *anthropologia transcendentalis*, was written just prior to the composition of the first *Critique* (it is dated sometime between 1776 and 1778; see Tommasi 2018).

[128] *Refl* 903. See the epigraph at the beginning of the essay.

[129] Where much of the scholarship understands metaphysics and anthropology as separate areas of interest or "two fronts" (John H. Zammito 2002, 256), I argue that Kant's metaphysics *is* anthropology—albeit of an abstract kind. While I agree with John H. Zammito that the "critical Kant systematically subordinated anthropology to metaphysics," it is more accurate to say, I argue, that Kant subordinates "anthropology from a pragmatic view" to the "transcendental anthropology," which is inseparable from metaphysics (Zammito 2002, 3). I agree with Robert Louden that the question of the human being is present in some way in all of Kant's works. Louden uses this argument to justify looking at other works besides the anthropology lectures, which is the "most obvious place to look" for Kant's answer to the fourth critical question but not, I would argue, the first place one should look (Louden 2011). Strangely, Louden does not take into consideration, even in his introductory remarks, that the critical works might be foundational for understanding "Kant's human being." Alfredo Ferrarin claims, on the other hand, that "the transcendental anthropology has obviously nothing to do with the later pragmatic anthropology—but much with critical philosophy and metaphysics" (Ferrarin 2015, 64). While I agree with the second part of Ferrarin's claim, it is not clear to me that the transcendental anthropology has "obviously nothing to do with" pragmatic anthropology. What I hope to argue is that Kant's transcendental anthropology is inseparable from his pragmatic, practical, and political thought insofar as it provides the foundation on which these other areas depend. See also Stanley Rosen's claim that, "[i]t would not be going too far to say that Kant wishes to produce a new kind of human being" (Rosen 1987, 30).

[130] It should be noted that Kant begins his lectures on anthropology with a survey and recapitulation of the discoveries of the critical system, i.e., with a "facultative approach" (Zammito 2002, 294). This suggests an important continuity between the "two tracks" of metaphysics and anthropology that Zammito identifies. Michel Foucault argues, although to different ends than myself, that the *CPR* is "buried inside of the text of the *Anthropology*, serving as its framework" (Foucault 2008, 92).

words, the rational structures of the human being, his moral commitments, and ultimately the way in which he strives to be whole.

To claim that the first *Critique* provides the outlines for Kant's novel anthropology appears to run counter to its reputation as a work of dry epistemology in which Kant is concerned primarily with threading the needle between Hume's skepticism and Wolff's rationalism. In this view, the primary purpose of the critique of reason is to show what we can know and how we know it, giving modern science the confidence it needs to continue its advance. The *CPR*, however, does not only deal with what and how we can know but describes the internal organization of the human mind as such. It is intended to account for the conditions of the possibility of all human experience.[131] If the ultimate theme of critical philosophy is the question what is the human being, Kant's answer is finite or embodied reason; the systematization of this theme in Kant's work can be considered the "transcendental anthropology" of critical philosophy.[132]

The political and cultural significance of Kant's transcendental anthropology (i.e., metaphysics as anthropology) comes into focus when one considers the historical

[131] I follow Patrick R. Frierson in my use of the term "transcendental anthropology," especially as it refers to the "conditions of the possibility" of a given experience (see Frierson 2013, 13-14). I differ from Frierson primarily on the stress I place on the role the metaphysical predisposition and the striving for unity plays in Kant's understanding of the human. In this sense, I follow Kristi E. Sweet's analysis that the problem of the human's desire for the unconditioned is the heart of Kant's philosophy—both theoretical and practical (see Sweet 2013 21-35). I also attempt to flesh out the way in which Kant's critical anthropology relates to his political thought and ambitions; in this way, I follow Dilek Huseyinzadegan's work on Kant's "nonideal theory of politics," although my stress is more the Kantian anthropology implied in this theory than on the strictly political use of it (Huseyinzadegan 2019, 10-12).

[132] Martin Heidegger's lectures on Kant's philosophy supports the claim that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is at heart the basis of a new anthropology. For example, he writes: "The question as to the essence of metaphysics is the question concerning the unity of the basic faculties of the human 'mind.' The Kantian groundlaying yields [this conclusion]: the grounding of metaphysics is a questioning with a regard to the human being, i.e., anthropology" (Heidegger 1990, 144). The continuation with this understanding of Kantian metaphysics with *Being and Time* is striking. Indeed, the early Heidegger is perhaps indebted to interpreting Kant's critique as anthropology. Crucial to Heidegger's task of formulating an account of *Dasein* is his attempt to get "behind" the Kantian categories, and thus the modern human being, to a more original relationship between man and the world.

narrative of reason Kant presents in the first *Critique*. While a detailed consideration of this historical narrative will be a theme of the chapter, a broad preliminary summary will help orient the inquiry. Underlying the need for a critique of reason is that uniquely human quality that makes delineating the boundaries and limits of reason necessary—what Kant calls *metaphysica naturalis*. Reason's desire for the unconditioned truth or to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is the single feature that most defines the human being. The inability to satisfy this desire ultimately leads humanity either to assert limited perspectives that claim universality and, in the process, become partial, prejudicial, and ultimately violent or lead to a "crisis" of reason (the modern condition) in which the reflective person, confronted with equally compelling but contradictory accounts of the world and without means of adjudicating between them, descends into misology and misanthropy. Kant's "critique of reason," or the transcendental anthropology, provides both an account of the human's desire for the unconditioned as well as the means of limiting its destructive longings. Reason's longing for theoretical satisfaction is the experiential starting-point of Kant's attempt to provide a metaphysical framework that accommodates both modern science and moral freedom.

The success of Kant's enlightenment project depends on reason's self-knowledge of its intractable ignorance of absolutes and the consequent need to discipline the metaphysical impulse. The limits of knowledge (or knowledge of reason's limits), in turn, is discovered through the "transcendental" method of examining the conditions of the possibility of human cognition. This philosophical problem that motivates the inquiry only arises, however, because human reason asks questions it cannot answer. It is the very crisis of reason's failure that opens up the possibility of Kant's project of

determining the limits of reason; hence, as stressed by Kant in the historical essays, Kant's philosophy is an inflection point in the history of reason—a decisive moment of revolutionary transition.

In short, the first *Critique* is an essay in self-knowledge that begins its search for a "science of metaphysics" by turning first toward the structure of the being that asks the question about first things. On Kant's account, the analysis and critique of the metaphysical longing of human rationality brings to light a newly won self-knowledge of the human species that provides the foundation for the "culture of human reason."[133]

This chapter provides a reading of the "transcendental anthropology" presented in the *CPR* by attending to Kant's images and metaphors. While often characterized as a pedantic, dry, and needlessly complicated writer, Kant carefully chose images that capture his conception of the critical project and its historical significance. Such images and metaphors include the "peculiar fate" of reason (discussed in section two), the "battlefield" of metaphysics and the various political administrations of metaphysics (section three), the "Copernican" turn and the court of reason (section four), and the critical system as the Tower of Babel (section five). These images, both individually and in the aggregate, shed light on the rhetorical and pedagogical aims of Kant's project, thereby illustrating his understanding of philosophical communication (the theme of the next chapter).[134] Accordingly, a secondary thesis is expounded in this chapter, namely that Kant expresses his most important insights about the human being, the critical project, and his own place in the history of philosophy through literary language. By

[133] *CPR* A850/B878-A851/B879. Cf. *CPR* Bxxx.
[134] Many of these images are explicated thoroughly in the literature. For example, see Shell 1980 for an examination of the juridical metaphor; see also Ferrarin 2015, 25-103 for an explication of Kant's edifice image and biological metaphors.

attending to this careful use of language we not only grasp the content of Kant's anthropology, but garner insight into the political ambitions of the critical project and Kant's self-understanding as the founder of a new culture.

3.2 *Metaphysica Naturalis*: The Fate of Embodied Rationality

With the first sentence of the first edition of the *CPR*, Kant describes the "peculiar fate" [*das besondere Schicksal*] of reason as destined to be "burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss" but which it cannot answer since such questions "transcend every capacity of human reason."[135] These questions, Kant claims, are "given to [reason] as problems by the nature of reason itself."[136] Above all, Kant has in mind the three fundamental concerns of reason that he subsequently argues to be beyond the bounds of knowledge—freedom, immortality, and God. Human reason concerns itself with questions that it cannot answer but which appear inseparable from the question of a moral or good life. What it means to be human for Kant is inextricably interwoven with the thwarted desire to know precisely what our limited powers preclude us from knowing. This dissatisfaction inherent in reason's striving toward the unconditioned is the starting-point and primary feature of Kant's transcendental anthropology.[137]

Insofar as these questions cannot be dismissed, theoretical dissatisfaction remains a constitutive experience of the human being, and hence such dissatisfaction carries the necessity implied by fate. However, these questions must be at least tentatively answered

[135] *CPR* vii.
[136] Ibid.
[137] The question of the human being cannot be satisfactorily answered by appealing to a list of attributes that show the human being to be unique (see, for example, Louden 2011 xix-xxxvi). There is some underlying structure by which these unique phenomena are explained and united. The aim of this chapter is to show how the fundamental human experience of *metaphysica naturalis* opens up for Kant the structure of the human being as a finite rationality.

in order for a person or people to live well or even at all, which leads to the related political problem of adjudicating between different conceptions of the good. Insofar as those making claims concerning the good have no common court of appeal in which they can settle their differences, they are ineluctably driven to "appeal to heaven" and thus to engage in combat.[138] The theoretical dissatisfaction of human reason quickly leads to the "battlefield" of metaphysics, a metaphor Kant chooses to stress the violence inherent in the human being's natural, pre-critical, and pre-juridical situation.

In his introduction to the 1787 edition of the *CPR*, Kant describes this drive toward metaphysical questions as a "natural predisposition (*metaphysica naturalis*) of reason."[139] Repeating the sentiment of the opening statement of the "First Preface," Kant writes that the human being,

> without being moved by the mere vanity [*Eitelkeit*] of knowing it all, inexorably pushes on, driven by its own need [*eigenes Bedürfnis*] to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use; and thus, a certain sort of metaphysics has actually been present in all human beings [*allen Menschen*] as soon as reason [*Vernunft*] has extended itself to speculation in them, and it will always remain there.[140]

Kant begins his examination of the faculties of the human being with the observation of this fact regarding the nature of human speculation. Like the brute fact of the human being's freedom, the natural predisposition toward metaphysics (or the *metaphysica naturalis*) is an observable phenomenon—one brought to a crisis and thereby given a certain clarity by modern philosophy. In other words, Kant understands human reason as desiring the transcendence of all limited perspectives in the attainment of an

[138] Locke, *Second Treatise*, II. 87.
[139] *CPR* B21.
[140] Ibid.

unconditioned vantage point that it cannot ever attain; yet it cannot seem to find satisfaction without somehow possessing (or claiming to possess) this knowledge unconditioned by experience. In its unfulfilled need [*Bedürfnis*] and relentless drive to pursue the questions that cannot be answered by experience, the natural condition of reason is characterized by its lack of what it most desires. The natural condition of human reason is neediness. The psychological condition resulting from the inevitable failure of metaphysical questioning can be likened to the state of lack that defines the classical notion of philosophical *eros*.[141]

This natural predisposition toward metaphysics is both universal and enduring. Both as a characteristic of the species and as a persistent feature of each individual's life, the metaphysical impulse will "always remain."[142] Or, as Kant writes in the B Preface of the 1787 edition, metaphysics is "older than all other sciences, and would remain even if all the other sciences were swallowed up in an all-consuming barbarism."[143] The *metaphysica naturalis* names, then, an inherent potency (one that is actualized in different ways) of universal human reason. Wherever there are human beings, there will be an impulse toward metaphysical speculation.[144] To reiterate, this insight is the core of Kant's

[141] See Plato's *Symposium* 200e. Although Kant himself does not use the language of *eros*, his depiction of human reason as not only lacking the unconditioned vantage point but as desiring the absolute to the point of its own self-destruction is justification enough to use this language. Yirmiyahu Yovel writes, "the Kantian texts are studded with expressions that amount to a virtual *erotic glossary* of reason" (Yovel 1980, 16). See also, *CPR* A797/B825, where Kant claims that reason longs for a "self-subsistent systematic whole;" and *CPR* A850/B878 where Kant speaks of reason always returning to metaphysics "as to a beloved." Kant appears to agree with the Socratic position that the awareness that one is lacking—knowledge of ignorance—is a starting point for philosophic thought. Thus, Kant begins his great work of self-knowledge by stating the condition of philosophy itself, i.e., human reason's awareness that it desires a knowledge it lacks.

[142] *CPR* B21. See again, *CPR* A850/B878 where Kant states that reason will "always return" to metaphysics, emphasizing the perennial character of these "essential ends."

[143] *CPR* BXiv.

[144] Here we can begin to make out the beginnings of a possible Kantian anthropology of religion. Human beings, unable to find satisfactory answers to questions to those things needed to live practically or morally,

transcendental anthropology: the human longing for transcendence, the longing to know the whole or reason's quest for unity characterizes all thought and action. To be the rational animal, for Kant, means to be the animal aware of its incompleteness and of not being fully at home in the world.[145]

This peculiar status of human reason arises from its finitude and embodiment, as Kant famously refers to the human being both as a "finite thinking being" and as "a limited rational being." Yirmiyahu Yovel observes that each of these adjectives—finite or limited and thinking or rational—are "equally essential" to "Kant's theory of man."[146] As a result of its finitude, human understanding is discursive: it gains knowledge only through the mediation of universal concepts and step-by-step reasoning, whereas human intuition or sensibility, a consequence of the human's embodiment, is never intellectual and only grasps the *sensibilia* of sensory experience.[147] Only through the combination of the *spontaneity* of the understanding and the *receptive passivity* of the sensibility can cognition arise.[148] But cognition and knowledge are limited, as Kant hopes to establish, to the natural, sensible world.

The untutored human tendency to either conflate the sensibility and the understanding or to extend the immediacy of the sensibility to areas beyond experience, in flights of mysticism, or to extend the understanding toward an absolute vantage point, in a dogmatic pursuit of knowledge, are all too tempting to human beings hoping to make their way in the world with the help of supernatural or philosophical guidance. Either on

---

turn to religious narratives that either provide a tentative answer to such questions or symbolize our ignorance. Thus, a "certain sort" of metaphysics is always present in all human communities.

[145] *CPR* A viii.

[146] Yirmiyahu Yovel 2018, 7.

[147] See *CPR* A50/B74.

[148] *CPR* A52/B76.

account of an inability to remain in the uncomfortable state of perennial dissatisfaction and reach anything but "unavoidable contradictions" about the most fundamental things or from a prideful overestimation of reason's powers, human beings are unable to resist the temptation to claim supersensible knowledge of the world. Rival claims concerning what defines the human being, his relation to nature and God, or the content of the good become the source of innumerable conflicts in the world. Thus, the "battlefield of metaphysics," which in the relatively secure setting of the 18th century university might resemble "mock combat," finds its political corollary in such historical events as the Thirty Years' War.[149]

Kant's choice of the "court of reason" metaphor, which conveys the idea that the critique of reason will end the metaphysical Hobbesian state of nature, is not simply a way of communicating the various faulty and contradictory metaphysical opinions offered over the course of Western history.[150] The metaphor communicates the perennial political consequences caused by the most definitive feature of the human being, namely, the *metaphysica naturalis*. With the language of the "tribunal" or "court" Kant indicates the political implications of his critique. He seeks to provide the basis for a peaceful rational culture, solving the problem of the Hobbesian state of nature on a more fundamental level. The state of nature can only be truly escaped once there is proof of what can and cannot be rightfully or legally "possessed" in the metaphysical realm and once dogmatic claims of the good—whether mystical or scholastic—can be shown to be no more than specious assertions or unjust clams of possession.[151]

While the problems that follow from the *metaphysica naturalis* are perennial

[149] *CPR* Bxv.
[150] See *CPR* Axii-xiii, A740/B768, and A751/B779.
[151] *CPR* B xv.

problems, they take on a particular urgency under the luxurious conditions of modernity. Kant's critique of reason addresses not simply a problem of human nature as such but a modern crisis that has, by his account of history, much to do with the growing pains of humanity. There is, as we will see, a historical dimension to Kant's discovery of the solution of the spiritual homelessness caused by the *metaphysica naturalis*. Applying a Rousseauian insight, Kant sees that the cause of the crisis can at the same time become a solution and that reason can be self-correcting.[152] We will examine in the next section the peculiarly modern inflection of the problems arising from the *metaphysica naturalis*, turning our attention to what can be called Kant's political history of metaphysics, which comes to an inflection point in the modern crisis of reason and the dangers of dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism.[153]

3.3 From Dogmatic Despotism to Decadent Indifferentism: Kant's Political History of Metaphysics

Returning to the A Preface of the *CPR*, we find that after addressing what he will later call the *metaphysica naturalis*, Kant turns to the fallen state of metaphysics in modernity. He writes,

> There was a time when metaphysics was called the **queen** of all the sciences, and if the will be taken for the deed, it deserved this title of honor, on account of the preeminent importance of its object. Now, in accordance with the fashion of the age [*Modeton des Zeitalters*], the queen proves despised on all sides; and the matron, outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba: *Modo maxima rerum, tot*

[152] See Velkley 1989, 158-160.
[153] *CPR* A751/B779.

> *generis natisque potens—nunc trahor exul, inops*—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.[154]

Metaphysics was once honored but for the wrong reasons; the preeminence of its subject matter alone is not enough for metaphysics to be deserving of the title "queen of the sciences." There is some justification for its pitiable condition, which though lamentable may be understood as the deserved consequence of excessive pride. The fact that this primitive form of metaphysics is no longer powerful is, like the fall of any despotism for Kant, a positive development. However, the tendency to despise metaphysics in accordance with the "fashion of the age" overreaches because it does not properly take into account the metaphysical longings of the human being. As Kant will later say, "human nature cannot be indifferent" to the concerns of metaphysics.[155]

Kant's allusion to Hecuba underscores the incomprehensibility that befalls scholastic and dogmatic metaphysics in the context of modern skepticism. Hecuba, the Queen of Troy and wife of King Priam, was enslaved by the Achaeans after the fall of her city. There are at least two accounts of her fate. In one account, Hecuba frees herself from her enslavers and casts herself off a cliff. In another account, she descends into madness through the grief of losing her many children, acting and barking like a dog.[156] If we are to take the allusion seriously, neither one of these accounts foreshadows well the fate of a natural metaphysics. On the former account, metaphysics might be led toward a sort of suicide, the "euthanasia of reason," while the latter account suggests reason's descent into incomprehensibility and a proliferation of accounts that, like a

[154] *CPR* A viii-A ix. The line from Ovid translates as, "Greatest of all by race and birth, I now am cast out, powerless" (Ibid).
[155] *CPR* Ax.
[156] See, Dante *Inferno* XXX 13-20.

dog's barks, possess meanings unavailable to human beings.[157] Even if one does not consider the ultimate fate of Hecuba, the way she mourns for her children suggests another analogy.[158] Metaphysics, in its modern condition, is left to mourn for its offspring; it is powerless not only to rule, but to ensure the continuation of its progeny. That is, modern metaphysics according to Kant cannot adequately provide a firm basis for modern science or any compatible system of morality. Their ostensible independence is illusory—for Kant there are no self-subsisting sciences.

Despite the force of this allusion of Queen Hecuba, the political metaphor of metaphysical "administration" is the framing image of the *CPR*. One by which Kant reveals, perhaps prophetically, the history of reason. The following four paragraphs of the A Preface present a history of metaphysics that ends with Kant's discovery of the "only path left," the critical system.[159] Kant retraces the fall of metaphysics, from despotic ruler to forsaken queen in an anarchic state of nature to the revival of metaphysics in what I suggest is the republicanism of the critical system. Each "rule" of a prior metaphysics from dogmatism to indifferentism fails on two counts: 1. None can satisfy nor subdue the longings of the *metaphysica naturalis*. 2. All fail to provide grounds for metaphysical inquiry and thereby for political rule. These two standards are, of course, related and it is no accident that Kant chose a political metaphor to elucidate the history of metaphysics. Kant's political metaphor, in other words, is not strictly metaphorical.

Kant begins this political history of metaphysics with an account of the dissolution of despotic rule. He writes:

---

[157] *CPR* B434. It should be noted that the confusion of the proliferation of discordant speech will reappear in the Tower of Babel image.
[158] See, *Iliad* 24, 748-759, Euripides, *The Trojan Women*. See, Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 2, Scene 2. See also *CPR* A794/B822 for Kant's later allusion to Hecuba.
[159] *CPR* A Xii.

> In the beginning, under the administration of the **dogmatists**, her rule [*Herrschaft*] was **despotic** [*despotisch*]. Yet because her legislation still retained traces of ancient barbarism [*der alten Barbarei*], this rule gradually degenerated through internal wars into complete **anarchy** [*Anarchie*]; and the skeptics, a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil [*die allen beständigen Anbau des Bodens*], shattered civil unity from time to time.[160]

Connecting despotic rule to dogmatism, Kant points to the ordinary human desire to have the questions raised by the *metaphysica naturalis* resolved and settled. Like human beings in the state of nature, there is a natural desire for peace and security. However, despotism in the realm of metaphysics fails to provide a settled ground for these questions due to the "traces of ancient barbarism." It governs arbitrarily and without the rule of law.[161] Rebelling against an arbitrary and irrational (and thus presumably violent) rule, different factions arise providing new grounds for governance—i.e., in the metaphysical realm, new answers to the questions concerning the status of God, freedom, and immortality.

While the anarchy Kant describes could be conceived as being caused by the competing claims made by schools of rival dogmas, the nomadic skeptics present a threat of an altogether different kind. Avoiding establishing any grounds on which to approach metaphysical questions, skepticism provides an unstable basis for addressing the *metaphysica naturalis*. The skeptics' attitude toward "all permanent cultivation of the soil" fails to provide the necessary presuppositions or starting points from which one can

[160] *CPR* A iX.
[161] Governing without the rule of law is what I take Kant to mean by "ancient barbarism." Concerning the questions of metaphysics, such a rule without law is to make claims that subvert or overstep the rights of reason. It is a form of dogmatic metaphysics that relies on claims or presuppositions inaccessible to reason and thereby is founded upon arbitrary principles. That this seems to suggest a sort of primitive theocracy shows how closely related metaphysics is to politics

begin an investigation or establish a common arena for debate.[162] Hence, skepticism is unsatisfactory on two counts: it fails to provide an adequate response to the human being's desire for metaphysical questions and it fails to provide the basis of a true politics—no "culture" can develop because all culture depends on cultivation or settlement. Taking up theoretical positions hypothetically but ultimately claiming no standard of argument or action to exist is akin politically to being a patriot today and a traitor tomorrow. Not only, then, are there no *grounds* (in two senses of the word) for debate, even if there were the skeptics' unwillingness to commit to a cultivated way of life makes even a true school of skepticism impossible. In the terms of Kant's political history, there can be no civilization of skeptics.[163]

Continuing the political history of metaphysics, Kant turns back to the dogmatists who always unsuccessfully try to rebuild in the likeness of their original kingdom: "But since there were fortunately only a few of [the skeptics], they could not prevent the dogmatists from continually attempting to rebuild though never according to a plan unanimously accepted among themselves."[164] Again, Kant employs a metaphor that he returns to in the "Doctrine of Method," namely, the attempt to "build" according to a plan. Here, the dogmatists are unable to rebuild not because they see no value in "cultivation" but rather because they resemble those early men at the tower of Babel who have their language "confounded" so that "they may not understand each other's speech."[165] Unable to agree on an "unanimously accepted" plan, the new non-despotic dogmatists cannot solve the problem of conflicting accounts of the good. The attempts to

[162] For the importance of public debate in Kant's political philosophy, see *QE* and *TPP*. Cf. Arendt 1992, 26-27.
[163] See *CPR* A761/B789.
[164] *CPR* AiX.
[165] *Genesis* 11:7.

rebuild are never unified or in one place but rather are "scattered about the earth." It seems from such a state of affairs, only a condition of war could follow, where the rival dogmatists appeal not to the court of reason but to Heaven's judgment.

Kant continues and points to a modern development in the political history of metaphysics: "Once in recent times it even seemed as though an end would be put to all these controversies, and the lawfulness of all competing claims would be completely decided, through a certain **physiology** of the human understanding (by the famous Locke)."[166] By tracing the origins of metaphysics back to the senses, to "the rabble of common experience," Locke seems to have rendered metaphysics' right to rule suspicious. Yet the queen still "asserted her claims" because, as Kant adds, Locke's "**genealogy** was attributed to her falsely."[167] Falling back into the old "worm-eaten" polemics of dogmatism, but with a modern inflection due to the influence of Locke's democratic epistemology, a despairing historical sense casts its shadow over Europe.

> Now after all paths [*Wege*] (as we persuade ourselves) have been tried in vain, what rules [*herrscht*] is tedium and complete **indifferentism,** the mother of chaos and night in the sciences, but at the same time also the origin [*Ursprung*], or at least prelude [*Vorspiel*], of their incipient transformation and enlightenment [*Umschaffung und Aufklärung*], when through ill-applied effort they have become obscure, confused, and useless.[168]

Indifferentism is a radical form of skepticism unique to modernity in which all rational grounds for any philosophic or moral positon are denied. It is, on the one hand, a great threat to the pillars of modern European civilization. It threatens the status of any scientific progress and, with its lack of concern for the fundamental human questions, it

[166] *CPR* AiX.
[167] *CPR* AX.
[168] Ibid.

risks being transformed into nihilism. Without a direction toward which the sciences can be guided—that is, without an end of reason—the indifferentism of civilized Europe leads to a mistrust of speech in matters of metaphysics, morality, and politics more radical and thoroughgoing than the mistrust of speech found in ancient forms of skepticism. On the other hand, indifferentism provides the conditions for the transformation of the sciences through a change in our understanding of human reason (and thus the human being).

Hence, the moral decadence of modernity diagnosed so thoroughly by Rousseau finds its theoretical and metaphysical parallel in the danger of indifferentism, which appears alongside the softening effects of modern civilization and its "ripened **power of judgment**."[169] Indifferentism appears, then, to be a phenomenon unique to a modern scientific culture. It describes the moral psychology of a materialist perspective in which the world has become, to borrow an anachronistic term, disenchanted. Indeed, the very distrust of reason is a product of the "thoughtfulness" of the modern age.[170] As a new and modern phenomenon, it is distinct from ancient skepticism, insofar as along with its stingy epistemology it goes together with the effectual truth of modern science and its concomitant luxuries. However, like the descent of dogmatic despotism into barbarism, indifferentism arises from the perennial problem of *metaphysica naturalis*: encouraged by the ambitions and successes of the early enlightenment, the modern human being hopes to apply the universal mathematical method to metaphysics and discover knowledge beyond the sphere of experience. But when such hopes become unfulfilled, many of those who had cultivated their power of judgment are led, perhaps after a bout of despair, to

[169] *CPR* Axi.
[170] *CPR* Axi.

resignation or even contempt toward metaphysical questions. They turn toward a view of the world that seeks to expunge metaphysical assumptions from human reason. Under the influence of modern civilization's ripened judgment, the indifferentist turns his gaze toward the unsatisfactory nature of scholastic language and its seeming inability to offer anything but "illusory knowledge."[171]

Yet Kant maintains that one cannot remain indifferent toward the urge that compels reason to seek transcendence: "For it is pointless to affect **indifference** with respect to such inquiries, to whose object human nature [*menschlichen Natur*] **cannot** be **indifferent**." Nor can one even express themselves consistently as an indifferentist for "to the extent that they think anything at all, [they] always unavoidably fall back into metaphysical assertions."[172] The concerns of metaphysics, as perennial human concerns, always find a way back into the thought and language of those who would refuse its call. The natural longing of reason cannot be addressed by tactics of refusal to engage with our deepest questions. Further, the misology of the indifferentist betrays him; insofar as he must express himself to others, he has need of that tool which he so despises. His life as a finite being, a creature of need, makes the indifferentist dependent on others and the political community, and therefore on language and the common signs in which are embedded metaphysical presuppositions. There can be, for Kant, no coherent view of political life based on the anti-metaphysical stance of the indifferentist. His need to

[171] *CPR* Axi. Kant mentions that the indifferentists, conflating metaphysics with scholasticism, attempt to circumvent the human need for metaphysical questions by communicating in a "popular" style (Ibid. AX).
[172] *CPR* Axi. If there is a strict political parallel to the indifferentists, as in the case of dogmatism and skepticism, it would seem to be not a form of rule but a social or political type—in the most extreme case, the decadent, overly-cultivated *flâneur*. The proliferation of such a type, of course, has an ill-effect on civic health. The indifferentist worldview would have no need for the political virtues, yet insofar as the indifferentist needs civilization to support his lifestyle he is forced into making political, and thus for Kant, ultimately metaphysical claims. It would repay study, as well, to compare Kant's account of indifferentism to his account of skepticism, which can establish a way of life if not a culture.

communicate about the just and unjust, right and wrong, or virtue and vice implies an understanding of being—of nature and man and their relation.

Despite both the dangers and the inconsistencies of indifferentism, Kant is clear that this distinctly modern phenomenon provides the proper conditions for the critical project. The same "ripened power of judgment" that provides a necessary condition for the phenomenon of indifferentism reveals the need for a critique of reason, insofar as it fosters the inclination to attend carefully to language. More than that, however, the indifferentist's skepticism toward all available metaphysical claims reveals the barrenness of traditional metaphysics. Indifferentism as a phenomenon shows that all other paths are closed. Kant's age is the "genuine age of **criticism**" partly because it is an age in which indifferentism could arise; it is an age in which the grounds of any traditional or positive metaphysics seem to have been proven barren.

Kant stakes his superiority on his ability to see a new path beyond the impasses of the age. Thus, the unique skepticism brought forth by modern science opens up the possibility that "reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, that of self-knowledge [*Selbsterkenntnis*]."[173] The modern crisis of reason, in which indifferentism emerges as a threat, gives way to the possibility of reason's self-knowledge, and to the discovery of the critical project. Or, to employ another one of Kant's favorite metaphors, having reached its adolescence where the posture of indifferentism tempts haughty youthfulness which is drawn toward cynical yet naïve sophisms, humanity is ready to take up the responsibility of adulthood.[174]

---

[173] *CPR* Axi.

[174] Underlying what I have called this "political history of metaphysics" is a biological metaphor that Kant often employs to describe the history of the human race (both its moral and metaphysical history). Cf. Kant's use of the adulthood metaphor in *QE*. See also, Stanley Rosen's discussion and critique of this

In response to the anarchic, anti-politics of indifferentism, Kant introduces a new, primarily juridical metaphor—the tribunal or court of reason. Indifferentism is thus the "crisis" point that allows for the institution of "a court of justice [*Gerichtshof*], by which reason may secure its rightful claims [*gerechten Ansprüchen*] while dismissing all its groundless [*grundlose*] pretensions."[175] This "court of justice" is, Kant claims, the "**critique of pure reason** itself." Following, then, Kant's political metaphor to its conclusion, the critical system would appear to be a republic of metaphysics, governed by equal members through a debate that is structured by the rule of law. The court of reason establishes the lawful process by which one can come into possession of knowledge. It governs not by mere "decrees [*Machtsprüche*] but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws [*ewigen und unwandelbaren Gesetzen*]."[176] What rules is not the arbitrary will of a despot, but a law of reason before which all are equal.[177] With the critical project, Kant undergoes an act of outstanding alchemy and transfiguration: metaphysics as "queen" is transformed into metaphysics as the source of sovereignty. Indeed, we are all self-legislating members of the critical republic and the legitimacy of the critical system's governance is found in the consistency of reason.

Like many classical republics, however, there is a founder, a supreme legislator, that sets down or discovers the laws for the subsequent generations of citizens to

---

metaphor (Rosen 1987, 33-35). It is worth also referencing Book IV of Rousseau's *Emile* as the possible source of this metaphor for Kant. In *Emile* adolescence is described as a "moment of crisis" (originally a biological term) that even though it is "rather short" it has "far-reaching influences." (Rousseau 1979, 211).

[175] *CPR* Axii.

[176] Ibid.

[177] To extend the metaphor, where Kant's metaphysics inaugurates a sort of republicanism, Locke's "physiology of the understanding" would be a rule by the "common rabble," i.e., a democratic rule without law.

follow.[178] As the founder of the critical system and the discoverer of the "only path" left open, Kant understands himself as a sort of legislator, one who establishes a new way of thinking about the metaphysical problems that have plagued reason. Despite the seeming modesty that accompanies the work's technical jargon or the claim to have "denied knowledge in order to make room for faith," Kant states the end result of the *CPR* in terms that could not be considered anything but world-historical. For he claims that "there *cannot* be a single metaphysical problem that has not been solved" by the critique of reason.[179] Having solved these disputes, Kant can claim to have discovered the one true source of metaphysical legitimacy, thereby laying the basis for a unified and cosmopolitan culture. By getting to the deeper causes of human strife and turmoil, Kant hopes to be able to effect more radically the Hobbesian aim of finding solid grounds for civil unity.

Here, one might recall that the broader context for the story of Hecuba deals with the fall of Troy and the escaped hero who went on to found an empire with universal ambitions. Only after the collapse of the old city and the old edifice can a new empire be founded on new grounds that overshadows its predecessor in strength and endurance.[180] It

[178] *CPR* A xii; cf. A855/B883. It is fruitful, if entirely too speculative, to compare Kant's use of the "path" metaphor to Machiavelli's use of it in *The Prince*. For example, Machiavelli writes: "For since men almost always walk on paths beaten by others and proceed in their actions by imitation…a prudent man should always enter upon the paths beaten by great men" (Machiavelli 1998, VI, 22). Kant claims to have beaten a new path; that is, he is not merely a "prudent man" but a legislator of the highest kind. This account of Kant as legislator is complicated, of course, by the fact that he shows us all to be legislators of the moral law. See also *Social Contract* 2.7. (Rousseau 1978, 67-70) for Rousseau's account of the legislator, which seems to have been informed by Machiavelli and influenced Kant in turn.

[179] *CPR* A xiii. Emphasis mine. In the paragraph that follows, Kant shows his undervalued rhetorical skill with a great display of ironic wit. He claims that, while the reader may impute to him the charge of being immodest, the critical system is in actuality much more modest than those who pretend to "prove the simple nature of the **soul** or the necessity of the first **beginning of the world**," i.e., they stretch human cognition beyond its limits (*CPR* A Xiv). Indeed, Kant's critique is modest in that respect; one could characterize Kant's project, then, as one of immodest modesty.

[180] See *CPR* A794/B822. Quoting Virgil's Hecuba, Kant says to those who have doubts about the critical system after the resolution of the antinomies: *non defensoribus istis tempus eget* ("The time does not need

does not seem to be an overstatement of the ambitions of the critical project that Kant, whether he makes it explicit or not, hopes to be a founder of a new universal culture—a new Aeneas for a new Rome.[181]

To summarize, the human being's natural predisposition toward metaphysical speculation is one cause, Kant argues, of the modern crisis of reason. Such a crisis, however, seems to provide the necessary conditions for Kant's critical project, through which he claims to have "succeeded in removing all those errors that have so far put reason into dissension with itself."[182] In a sense, the specters of dogmatism, skepticism, and indifferentism provide the possibility of a critique of reason.[183] In the terms of his political history of metaphysics, the crisis of reason in modernity provides the conditions for the discovery of the "republicanism" of the critical system. Having discovered the limits and boundaries of reason, Kant founds a new political regime that puts an end to the anarchy of modern metaphysics by establishing a lawful and peaceful metaphysical order. Or, to

---

defenses"). In the *Aeneid*, Hecuba speaks this line to Priam as the Greeks are sacking Troy; her suggestion is that it is futile for Priam to act now. Kant flips the tone and meaning of the suggestion, making the phrase not one of defeat but victory. It is futile for those skeptics to attack the new citadel of reason, the critical system.

[181] If this statement appears to exaggerate Kant's ambitions, one could compare this to several estimations of the historical importance of the critical project. See Heine's notorious description of Kant as the "metaphysical Robespierre" (Heine 1986, 105-106). Marx's description of Kant as the "philosopher of the French Revolution;" Nietzsche's (critical) recognition of Kant as a figure of world historical importance; cf. Arendt 1992, 36; Rosen 1987; Shell 1996, 233-234. Or, perhaps, one can look to Kant himself. In his 1799 *Open Letter on Fichte's* Wissenschaftslehre*,* he writes: "The system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, *established forever*; it will be indispensable for the noblest ends of mankind in *all future ages*" (*Corr*, 254; emphasis mine).

[182] Ibid., A xii.

[183] Kant will return to this dual structure of history and the language of crisis throughout his works. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Kant's response to the crisis of "luxury." This language of crisis is part and parcel of a historical way of thinking. It is found in host of post-Kantian thinkers from Hegel to Marx to Oswald Spengler; it is even found in Leo Strauss's critique of historicism itself—see especially his diagnosis of "radical historicism" in the first chapter of *Natural Right and History*.

mix metaphors as Kant does, he provides a universal philosophical language that allows for the foundation of a new *polis*—i.e., the rebuilding of walls and towers and the permanent cultivation of soil. While evocative of the tremendous scope of Kant's philosophic project and its political implication, such metaphors are not to be taken simply as literary devices. Settling the disputes that have long plagued metaphysics is propaedeutic to delineating the necessary conditions for a lawful, peaceful, and cosmopolitan regime.

Given the stated aim of this chapter, namely to explicate Kant's conception of the human being, it is helpful to step back from textual exegesis and ask: how does Kant's political history of metaphysics and his effort to found something like a republic of reason relate to his transcendental anthropology? While the emphasis on political metaphors may seem to suggest that Kant understands the human being as primarily a "political animal," it is not my intention to turn Kant into Aristotle, even if the two thinkers might be more akin in their attention to the relation of *logos* (reason) and politics than is commonly supposed. Rather I want to stress that Kant does understand the human being as the *practical* animal; the ways in which people think and act are inseparable from their views, implicit or explicit, on the fundamental questions of metaphysics. The metaphysical restlessness of human beings is, as we have seen, driven by the practical question of how to live; even before Kant's turn to the priority of the practical, we see that metaphysical longing finds an outlet in moral and political life. To each metaphysical position—whether dogmatic or skeptic—there is a corresponding way of being in the world. This phenomenon reveals the self-directed character of the human being; the human being is free to act as he thinks best. We can see, then, in Kant's political

metaphor another aspect central to his anthropology—the self-legislation of the human being. The anarchy of rival metaphysics points to human freedom as the truth of the human being. But in order to derive order from freedom, freedom must be inherently lawful. For all his debt to Hobbes, freedom for Kant is more than the absence of constraint; true freedom possesses metaphysical legitimacy. In order to truly establish the "republic of reason" and its court, he must show that it has a basis and source of legitimacy in the nature of human reason. We turn next, then, to this source of legitimacy as expressed in the "Copernican turn" and reason's spontaneity.

3.4 The Copernican Hypothesis and the Legitimacy of the Court of Reason

In perhaps the most famous passage of the *CPR*, Kant states the foundation of his critical system in word historical language, namely, in terms of an analogy with the revolution of thought seen in the astronomy of Copernicus. As Copernicus revolutionized man's notion of himself in the universe, Kant will revolutionize the human being's way of thinking concerning the mind's relation to nature. While this passage is pregnant with epistemological significance, it is significant for understanding the basis of Kant's transcendental anthropology. Kant's Copernican hypothesis can be summarized as Kant's description of a new understanding of objectivity. Previously, it was assumed that man's knowledge must conform to the objects [*Gegenstände*] of his experience. Instead, Kant suggests that we should "once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition."[184] This way of proceeding mirrors "the first thoughts of Copernicus," who after being unable to explain

[184] *CPR* Bxvi.

the motions of the planets, "tried to see if he might not have greater success [*besser gelingen*] if he made the observer [*Zuschauer*] revolve and left the stars at rest."[185]

The Copernican revolution is in agreement with the modern scientific way of proceeding; it establishes a hypothesis and measures its validity in terms of its explanatory power or "success." The method of traditional metaphysics, which assumes that the deepest truths of nature are accessible to the human mind, has been futile. Rather, it would be better to examine nature—in this case the nature of human reason—on reason's own terms. Accordingly, Kant claims that "reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own."[186] Reason must approach nature with certain principles and designs in hand in order to gain knowledge. It can only learn from nature what it puts into it through its hypotheses, heuristics, and principles, "according to which alone the agreement among the appearances can count as laws."[187] Indeed, Kant's Copernican revolution is a "Copernican hypothesis."[188] The validity of the hypothesis will be measured by success of its results, namely its ability to provide resolutions to the problems of metaphysics—the problems put to human reason by human reason.

Method aside, there is a significant difference between what Copernicus achieved and what Kant hopes to establish. While Copernicus removes earth and hence the human from the center of the cosmos, Kant places human cognition at the center of experience and being. This revolutionary hypothesis assumes, then, that the human being is at the center of metaphysics and human understanding is the source of the concept of nature. That is, anthropology becomes the core of metaphysical speculation; in the case of the

[185] *CPR* Bxvi.
[186] *CPR* Bxiii.
[187] *CPR* Bxiii.
[188] See Shell 1980, 37-39; Rosen 1987, 24-27.

Critique of Pure Reason, something like an epistemological and transcendental anthropology—reason's inquiry into the nature and limits of reason—is the starting-point for resolving those questions of God, freedom, and immortality. Any hope of establishing a solid and secure "science of metaphysics" must be based on a proper understanding of the human being and the peculiar interplay between finite embodiment and universal reason. If Copernicus de-centered the human from cosmological speculation, denying that the human perspective is epistemically privileged, Kant declares a radical anthropocentrism that centers human reason in all inquiry and makes the rational subject the alpha and omega of philosophy—even when asking about God.

In the same passage where he discusses the Copernican hypothesis, Kant makes use of yet another striking image to convey reason's activity in the search for knowledge. In order to learn from nature, the aim is not to be instructed "like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say" but rather like "an appointed judge [*bestallten Richters*] who compels [*nötigt*] witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them."[189] The courtroom—perhaps the defining image of the first *Critique*—once again makes an appearance in the still early stage of the B Preface.[190] The judge or standard of truth in this metaphor, however, is not some notion of nature or Being or the revelation of a divinity but human reason. Whereas the traditional model places reason, the pupil, in the hands of the authority of nature, the teacher, Kant reverses this model and places the authority for the search for knowledge in human reason itself. The courtroom image in

[189] *CPR* Bxiii.

[190] In this same passage, Kant makes use of his famous "leading strings" image that is also found in the historical essays. Leading strings were a device used by coddling parents to teach their children to walk without the risk of falling. Throwing off our leading strings is thus a sign of our burgeoning maturity. Kant is, then, making use once again of the idea of the human species as biological individual, slowly but surely reaching adulthood. He often pairs this image with the image of reason understood as a courtroom.

this case underscores the notion of legitimacy in knowledge; there are certain rules and procedures that must be put in place in order to secure objective truths about nature. The *CPR* answers, in a sense, the political question of justice—the *quid juris*—by first addressing the legitimate employment of reason.[191] Once again, Kant stresses the sovereignty of reason.

Moreover, this image emphasizes the stinginess of nature echoed in Kant's idea of history: nature holds her truths closely and therefore must take the stand as witness and be compelled to answer questions put to her by reason. The courtroom image conveys the continuity with the modern scientific project contained in the Copernican hypothesis. Nature must be compelled to give up her secrets by means of the activity of human rationality, i.e., new methods and experiments. But Kant is explicit that what reason finds in nature it put there. Accordingly, Kant also points to his alteration of this new tradition through his elevation of the inquiry into the bounds, limits, and ends of human reason. There is no doubt that the founders of modern science wrote about the limits of human reason and the character of human knowledge, but Kant elevates this inquiry to a new place in the modern scientific framework. While modern science replaces the idea of a natural order or hierarchy of beings found in ancient and medieval cosmology with the notion of universal laws of nature, Kant alters the principles of modern science by making a heretofore implicit claim explicit, namely that the legislator of these natural laws is human reason.[192] All phenomena are equal before the law, yet human reason, the

[191] *CPR* A84/B116.

[192] See Alexandre Koyré 1957, especially 3-4, for a description of the development from ancient contemplation to modern mastery. Kant appears to have understood the radical reorientation toward nature made possible by Bacon's method better than most. Kant's claim that the understanding prescribes "laws to nature" is a way of incorporating the Baconian method into the rational structure of the human being (*CPR* A127). The modern scientific method becomes inseparable from Kantian anthropology.

creator of the law, has a privileged position in the order of inquiry.[193] Accordingly, investigating the origin of these laws requires more than comprehending what counts as the criteria for knowledge, but grasping the purpose or end of the human being's legislation, which is always the human being himself.

With his introduction of the Copernican hypothesis and the concomitant image that points to the sovereignty of reason, Kant introduces an essential component of his anthropology: the spontaneity of human reason. The allusion to Copernicus is not simply a helpful and colorful image, but a shorthand proof of reason's power, freedom, and sovereignty. Reason need not take what is given to it on the terms on which it is given; rather, it can choose—or strive toward—a new perspective by which it can achieve a greater view. It is in part reason's freedom to choose a new perspective and to direct its own inquiries that establishes its authority and the legitimacy of its "court of justice." This relationship between the active and passive elements of reason, between spontaneity and the given manifold, gets to the heart of the significance of the Copernican hypothesis and its importance for Kant's transcendental anthropology.

The more fundamental activity of the faculty of the understanding further confirms the legitimacy of reason's court of justice. Through the imposition of its categories on the sensible manifold, the understanding spontaneously orders our experience. Underlying the categories, then, is the most fundamental activity of the understanding—synthesis. As discursive and not intuitive, the understanding does not grasp anything directly but unifies the particulars given by perception. This act of

[193] Another way of understanding the Copernican hypothesis is through the so-called "regressive argument" for the deduction of the categories of the understanding. This argument claims that the Copernican hypothesis provides *the conditions for the possibility* of a pure science. A pure science is possible only if the understanding legislates nature. See Yovel 2018, 47-51.

synthesis underlies all of our perception and thinking. It is that which most defines human cognition for, "among all representations **combination** [*Verbindung*] is the only one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity [*Selbsttätigkeit*]."[194] As an act of its self-activity, synthesis reveals the freedom of the subject. This self-activity indicative of the freedom of the subject is, in turn, related to that which stands at the origin of the understanding, namely self-consciousness.[195] The unity imposed on the objects of the manifold derives, Kant argues in one of the most complex and fraught sections of the *CPR*, from the "I think" that accompanies any representation. With this concept, known as the "transcendental unity of apperception," Kant argues that the unity of self-consciousness in fact unifies the diversity of the manifold, insofar as all of the phenomena encountered belong to the same subject, i.e., can accompany the same "I think."[196] Objective knowledge (i.e., knowledge of appearances or nature) is secured—becomes our rightful possession—through the spontaneous and self-constituting activity of the subject.[197]

While this summary is immensely compressed and passes over many of the complexities of Kant's argument, for the purpose of explaining Kant's transcendental anthropology what is important is both the radical isolation and freedom of the human subject. Our possession of knowledge, understood as the affinity between our judgments

---

[194] *CPR* B130.

[195] See *CPR* B134. Here Kant writes that "the synthetic unity of apperception," i.e., the "I think," is "the highest point one must affix all use of the understanding…indeed this faculty is the understanding itself."

[196] The "transcendental unity of apperception" is the key to the "Transcendental Deduction," which is Kant's argument for the validity of the categories. See *CPR* B132-B141. For helpful interpretations of Kant's difficult argument, see Yovel 2018, 45-51 and Longuenesse 2008.

[197] See Raoni Padui 2010 for a reading of the TUA in light of Giorgio Agamben's description of the paradoxes of sovereignty. Padui argues that Kant's foundation of the "law of reason" in the TUA is achieved through a sovereign "state of exception," and thus points to both the political reading inherent in Kant's critique and to the limits of the sovereign subject. As I argue in Chapter 6, Kant addresses the mysteries inherent in the origin of reason, or what is analyzed here the idea of the "state of exception," in his discussion of the inscrutability of radical evil.

and the objective world, finds its origins not in nature or God but in the *a priori* activity of synthesis. The fact that this synthesis depends for Kant on self-consciousness (the literal meaning of "apperception") points to the distinct character of the human being—as the part of nature that in some way transcends nature through a distancing awareness of its own activity. The human being transcends nature insofar as he legislates it through the use of the categories of the understanding. Such legislation requires that the human being possess some part of himself that is distanced from "nature" insofar as it is both distanced from the sensible manifold and the source of the categories.[198] The very act of observing nature depends on a separation from and a transcendence of mere nature.

Moreover, the ability to perceive our own consciousness underlies Kant's notion of moral freedom. We are free to deny our animal instinct for the sake of a moral end insofar as we are aware of ourselves as both natural and rational beings.[199] Accordingly, the self-consciousness at the root of human cognition is, at the same time, the root of Kant's conception of the radical freedom of the human being.[200]

Despite the radical character of the transcendental unity of apperception, both reason and the understanding are limited in that they cannot create the matter they investigate.[201] The identity of the subject makes possible the unity of the objective world; yet, the unity of the manifold, in turn, allows the subject to constitute itself and assert its identity. Human cognition is possible only when the passive and active elements are both present.[202] Accordingly, human cognition's dependence on the manifold presented by

---

[198] *CPR* B132.
[199] *CPR* A802/B830.
[200] See, *CBHH* 8:113-8:114 for another discussion of the connection between self-consciousness and freedom.
[201] *CPR* A719/B748.
[202] Hence, Kant's famous statement that "[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (*CPR* A51/B75-A52/B76).

sensibility conditions its spontaneous activity. In other words, the understanding has as the conditions of its activity the givenness of the world; and the faculty of reason depends, in turn, on the material provided to it by the understanding. At the same time, the spontaneity of human reason seeks a transcendence of the given; driven by the *metaphysica naturalis*, reason wants in a godlike manner both to create the matter given to it as well as impose the form on the manifold.[203]

Thus, the anthropological conflict that motivates the entire work, if not the critical system as a whole, is the tension between reason's desire for unconditioned knowledge and our existence as conditioned, limited beings of need. The court of reason is instituted to adjudicate between the claims that necessarily result from this inherent human tension. This adjudication of the court of reason is most clearly seen in Kant's handling of the antinomies of reason, which arise because of the tension between human cognition's spontaneity and passivity.[204] Constituted by two mutually exclusive but logically sound claims, Kant uses the antinomies to delineate the bounds of reason and mark its rightful possession. One side, the thesis, posits the totalizing claims of the dogmatist; it argues that the basis of our conditioned experience is an unconditioned first principle or cause. The antithesis, on the other hand, reflects the stance of empiricism and claims that no such unconditioned principle is accessible through our experience and thereby rejects it as a concept empty of meaning.[205]

---

[203] In Johann Fichte's appropriation of the Kantian system, he makes the understanding the productive source of the sensible manifold. Kant, of course, did not take kindly to Fichte's philosophy and urged him to "turn his fine literary gifts to the problem of applying the [*CPR*]" (*Corr*, 253), which points simultaneously to Kant's concern with propagating his philosophy.

[204] The antinomies take up the finitude or infinite nature of space and time, the existence or non-existence of simple parts, the conflict between spontaneity and determinism, and the existence or non-existence of a being that is absolute and necessary as a cause of the universe. The antinomies deal both explicitly and implicitly with the three topics most pressing to human reason—God, freedom, and immortality.

[205] *CPR* A466/B494.

Nowhere is this tension more directly reflected than in the third antinomy, which deals with the conflict between the two seemingly exclusive perspectives of modern science and morality. Our practical interest in morality requires that our will be free and unconditioned while the perspective of modern mechanistic science and its adherence to the principle of sufficient reason appears to deny this possibility by assigning to all human acts a chain of conditioning causes.

Relying on the image of the tribunal or court, Kant shows that reason makes a kind of legal case for both sides of the argument. Reason is plaintiff, witness, and judge. However, Kant throws both cases out on the grounds of illegitimacy; both thesis and antithesis make claims they had no right to make.[206] Kant resolves each antinomy by appealing to the distinction between thing-in-itself and appearances. The former, as unconditioned and unknowable, can still be acknowledged as a necessary idea that is justifiably posited to address the interests of reason. Things-in-themselves, however, are not objects of knowledge insofar as they cannot be represented by the lower faculties and cannot be objects at all. Appearances, on the other hand, are conditioned and knowable. All objective knowledge is knowledge of appearances, i.e., knowledge of something given. As conditioned phenomena, they can be pursued as a series without one needing to rely on an ultimate, unconditioned first cause.[207] Hence, the source of reason's conflicting claims is that it has confused appearances with thing-in-themselves, *phenomena* with *noumena*, or it collapses the difference between the conditioned object of experience and

[206] See Shell 1980, who shows that the legal language Kant employs is necessary for understanding his "deductions," which reveal to us the claims reason does and does not have a "right" to make.
[207] Consider *CPR* A509/B537, for a discussion of the infinite regress understood as a "regulative principle" that guides scientific research. Omri Boehm calls Kant's system, correctly I think, a "regulatory Spinozism" due to his demotion of the principle of sufficient reason to the status of a regulatory principle (Boehm 2014).

the unconditioned idea of reason.[208] In the case of the third antinomy, for example, both thesis and antithesis treat human freedom and spontaneity as something conditioned. Freedom becomes understood theoretically as transcendental—as unconditioned and unknowable.

The results of the antinomies prove to be morally salutary: they allow Kant to save morality from the spiritually narrowing perspective of modern materialism.[209] We are allowed to posit the existence of our freedom (as well as God and immortality) without being at odds with the discoveries of mechanistic science. In addition, the resolution of the antinomies serves as a support for the validity of the critical method and the Copernican hypothesis. By resolving the antinomy with the help of the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* (made possible by the Copernican hypothesis), Kant further saves reason from self-contradiction and thus philosophy from misology.

Moreover, the antinomies show that reason's theoretical ambitions cannot be fulfilled for such ambitions depend on the conflation of *phenomena* and *noumena*. The resolution of the antinomies spares reason from the annihilation that would result from its self-contradiction, but reason must live with the tension between its desire for the unconditioned and its inability to achieve such knowledge. The antinomies demonstrate, then, that reason cannot be satisfied theoretically while leaving open the possibility that some form of satisfaction can be found in the practical realm, where Kant will later assert that freedom is given as a brute fact.[210]

---

[208] See *CPR* A255/B310 for a description of the phenomena-noumena distinction. See also *CPR* A740/B768 for a summary of the result of the antinomies.

[209] I return to this theme in Chapter 5. It is not enough to *posit* freedom, God, and immortality, but there must be some rational grounds for faith. Kant finds the origin of such grounds in the experiences of purposiveness, beauty, and the sublime.

[210] *CPrR* 5:4-5:5.

All of the dualisms that characterize Kant's philosophy, *phenomena* and *noumena*, appearance and thing-in-itself, understanding and sensibility, understanding and reason, theoretical and practical, flow from the Copernican hypothesis and its novel understanding of objectivity. By arguing that the objective knowledge of nature, or knowledge of appearances, is the only possible form of knowledge available to human being, Kant destroys the traditional pretensions of metaphysics while revolutionizing the human being's place on earth.

While this new understanding of objectivity gives reason a sort of sovereignty over nature, and thereby grounding the "rights of reason," it also necessarily limits reason.[211] We can know only what we are given and what reason can shape; and yet the source of the given is inaccessible to theoretical thought. Nature is stingy not only in her provisions for man, but in her willingness to satisfy man's *metaphysica naturalis*. Through and through the human is a being of need characterized by his longings. The Copernican hypothesis provides the only satisfactory response, in Kant's eyes, to such longings of human nature. It shows the way in which the human being can respond to its thwarted desires in a spirited manner.[212] The hypothesis gives the human an opportunity to satisfy his desire for totality through his practical activity and his striving to create a moral whole; it grants him the opportunity to reshape nature in light of a regulative idea of reason and claim a satisfaction denied to us in our natural state. Above all, it allows the human being to assert his rights against nature by giving him the authority to do so as legislator of nature.

[211] Shell 1980.
[212] Cf. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1378b, 5-10. See also *Anth.* 7:269.

In sum, the republic of reason, in which reason acting as sovereign has instituted a court of justice, finds its psychological legitimacy in the human's claims against the stinginess of nature in regard to both his physical and moral or spiritual needs. The Copernican hypothesis—which is also likened to a court where judge examines a witness—enables the human to respond to his own needs, even if that means learning to limit our demands and hopes. Kant's spirited response to the human condition radicalizes the commitments of modern science to worldly affairs and the improvement of man's estate. At the same time, he provides what he believes to be the only way to be committed both to modern science and morality while remaining theoretically consistent. He does this, as we will see, by showing man to be the legislator of morality just as he is the legislator of nature. That is, he brings morality down from the heavens—from its supposed need have theological or natural foundations. Instead, practical and moral action finds its grounds in the human being and the freedom of reason.

3.5 Building a New Tower of Babel: Kant's Turn to the Practical

We turn now to what might be called the positive project of the first *Critique*, i.e., the Doctrine of Method. The claim that there is a positive element to Kant's "all-destroying" work might be contested, but Kant is clear that inquiry into the nature of human reason is propaedeutic. It clears the ground for a new culture of reason and opens up the new critical path. The Doctrine of Method is concerned with "the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason."[213] It establishes the blueprint for the architecture of a

[213] *CPR* A708/B736. The Doctrine of Method consists of "a *discipline*, a *canon*, an *architectonic*, and finally a *history* of pure reason" (Ibid). Each of these has its place in an inquiry into Kant's novel anthropology, however this section of the essay will draw mostly from the middle two sections. The reasons being that these sections deal most directly with Kant's "positive" project in the *CPR* and because

future system of reason, and delineates a whole into which all the concerns and needs of reason fit. Hence, Kant opens the Doctrine of Method by describing the whole critical project in terms of building an edifice [*Gebäude*]. The inquiry into each of the faculties, their powers and limits, is an accounting of the materials; the Doctrine of Method offers a blueprint that puts those materials to their fullest use.

The ambitions of the critical project's blueprint, however, seem somewhat stunted compared to the metaphysics of the past. He frames this ambition, however, in terms of the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. Metaphysically inclined human beings of the past had "in mind a tower that would reach the heavens," that is, they aspired to extend their knowledge to the realm of God; yet, "the supply of materials sufficed only for a dwelling that was just roomy enough for our business on the plane of experience and high enough to survey it."[214] Once again, Kant alludes to his history of metaphysics: thanks to the critical project, human cognition has been properly surveyed, its boundaries defined, and the human being can now reorient its focus from unanswerable questions toward earthly knowledge and practical action. Despite the audacity of human reason's claim to autonomy encapsulated in the Copernican turn, this freedom is sustainable only if tempered by a humility born of self-knowledge.

At this point in our examination of the critical system, however, it should be clear that what Kant is building is no bungalow. Heaven may be out of reach for the human being, but a transformation of our dwelling on earth is still possible. The "bold undertaking" of the past failed not simply due to a "lack of material" but because of a Babel-like "confusion of languages" [*die Sprachverwirrung*] that "divided the workers"

---

the chapter has already covered in a general way both the need to discipline reason and Kant's history of metaphysics.

[214] *CPR* A707/B735.

and "dispersed them throughout the world, leaving each to build on his own according to his own design [*Entwurfe*]."[215] Even though the critical edifice seems small, Kant's ambition is still considerable; for he hopes not only to "survey" the boundaries of experience but to cut through the confusion of languages by providing one universal philosophical language.

The end result of Kant's resolution of the antinomies is a humbling of reason (pride, after all, is the sin of Babel). The humiliation of the antinomies provides an education in the limits of our theoretical desires.[216] Such an education—or discipline—is the first step toward instituting a new metaphysical consensus. This new consensus depends, in turn, on a public use of reason. As equal and "free citizens" of the republic of reason, we all have a right to voice arguments about freedom, God, and immortality for the public judgment of others.[217] Now that Kant has instituted the court of reason, discussing such debates in public no longer poses a danger to the "common good."[218] What was once the battlefield of metaphysics now becomes "bloodless" entertainment, viewed from the "safe seat of critique" and "advantageous for [one's] insight."[219] As long as such spectacles remain bloodless, they serve a positive civic function. They expose the citizens to the arguments of dogmatism, skepticism, or indifferentism and remind them of the dangers of undisciplined reason. Having such debates in public serves, further, to educate the youth and to sharpen their critical reasoning.[220]

---

[215] *CPR* A707/B735.
[216] *CPR* A795/B823.
[217] *CPR* A739/B767.
[218] *CPR* A746/B774.
[219] *CPR* A747/B775.
[220] *CPR* A754/B782; *CPR* A744/B772.

There is, then, a continual need to humiliate theoretical reason for the sake of civil unity. The "compulsion" of reason to extend itself beyond its own rules poses a perennial danger to human beings. Kant sees that the propaedeutical work of the "discipline" of reason must, therefore, be taken up anew by each generation—for such is the "crooked wood" that we are made of. This continual need for discipline is in fact, however, a blessing in disguise because it encourages a constant revisiting of the grounds of the critical system that keeps it from becoming dogmatic.[221] Thus despite Kant's claim to resolve all metaphysical questioning, this passage indicates the difference between resolving philosophic problems to "reason's full satisfaction" and resolving a mathematical problem.[222] More than that, this continual questioning keeps the ground clear for practical life understood as "the only path that still remains to [pure reason]" if it hopes to draw near those "interests" for which it has an "unquenchable desire."[223] The practical realm remains as the only source of satisfaction left for the human being's desire for the whole or the unconditioned.[224]

In the terms of his Tower of Babel image, after showing the inability of humanity to reach the heavens, Kant redirects our attention to the earth and to the concerns and needs of *this* world. The Copernican hypothesis makes reason sovereign of the earth while giving up its claims to heaven. This is the practical effect of Kant's claim that he

[221] See *CPR* A735/B763.
[222] *CPR* Axii.
[223] *CPR* A796/B824.
[224] As Sweet notes, Kant's practical project is determined by reason's need for the unconditioned. Showing theoretical reason to be insufficient to satisfy the longing for the unconditioned, the turn to the practical becomes the arena where this longing becomes addressed. See Sweet 2013, 206-212. Or, as Ferrarin puts it, "reason's self-knowledge shows that it has ends that go beyond knowledge" (Ferrarin 2015, 67). The result, in other words, of theoretical reason's humiliation is the promotion of the status of practical reason as the source by which the needs of reason can be fulfilled.

denied knowledge in order to make room for faith.[225] The human being is now in a position to transform the worldly sphere in the hopes of addressing those needs of reason that nature leaves unfulfilled. It is the critique of reason that gives him the right and legitimacy to undertake such a project.

The hope, then, is that by building a worldly system that gives up any pretensions to know theoretically the most fundamental things Kant will inaugurate a new culture in which reason can have some form of satisfaction.[226] But how can Kant hope to successfully redirect the *metaphysica naturalis* toward fulfillment in the practical realm? If Kant's emphasis on the practical is not to be anything more than the postulation of an old moralizer, then his anthropology of reason must show that the structure of the human cognition itself points to the practical as the source of human meaning and fulfillment.

We find in the Tower of Babel image an observation about the structure of human reason that answers these charges, namely, that it is "by nature architectonic."[227] Human reason "considers all cognitions as belonging to a possible system" and the validity of any system rests in its self-consistency.[228] There is, then, an "architectonic interest of reason" that guides its building of an "edifice of cognitions"—one that establishes the human being's proper place on earth. This edifice of cognitions accounts for the seeming contradiction within human reason: not the contradictions resolved in the antinomies, but the tension that arises when reason yearns for that which it cannot have. Why are we,

---

[225] *CPR* Bxxx.
[226] See *CPR* A851/B879.
[227] *CPR* A474/B502. See Ferrarin 2015, 25-105 for a helpful reading of the first *Critique* that gives the architectonic need of reason a central place.
[228] *CPR* A474/B502. In this same passage, Kant states that empiricism lacks a "starting point" and thus cannot build "a completed edifice of cognitions." To be a committed empiricist one would have to deny all interests and needs of reason—one would have no foundation for practical action. Kant points to the impossibility of being a committed empiricist when he speaks of the "vacillation" between thesis and antithesis that would occur to an honest person with both theoretical and practical interests. See *CPR* A475/B503.

limited beings that we are, endowed with reason, and thereby with a faculty that makes us seek a transcendence of which we are incapable? In answering this question, Kant can once again make use of the building metaphor: reason is architectonic because it is guided by a teleological and end-directed impulse. Ideas of reason are not meant to be simply contemplated, but realized, and hence our satisfaction is not found in theoretical contemplation but practical action.

This practical core of reason, of course, needs explanation. It is in Kant's appropriation of the traditional notion of ideas where we find the resources to address the tension between unconditioned and conditioned that arises from the peculiar human predicament of being embodied rationality. As discussed in Chapter 2, the model of the Kantian idea is the "regulative principle" and his use of the term idea has both theoretical and practical applications.[229] An idea is a projection of reason that has no grounding in experience yet it retains validity as a goal to be systematically approached. As spontaneous projections of reason, ideas have their source not in theoretical knowledge or contemplation but in human freedom. Reason projects an idea in part to meet the demands of its architectonic interest—that is, to bring disparate experiences together into a systematic unity. The idea sets a "maximum" or a "limit" to which human activity or inquiry approaches. Hence, in the case of scientific inquiry, the idea of nature as a system in which all its forces are connected serves to guide the scientist's experiments. That is, some postulation about what might be discovered guides the process of discovery. But this use of ideas as necessary guides to natural inquiry is subordinate to those ideas that guide practical action.

[229] See Chapter 2, 28-30.

Accordingly, Kant's model of an idea, as he presents it, is the city in speech in Plato's *Republic*, which according to Kant presents the ideal constitution.[230] This idea is projected as an "archetype" in order to guide the "legislative constitution of human beings."[231] Every constitution fails to live up to this idea, yet it is no "chimera."[232] The idea serves to guide legislators in the hope that one can find a political arrangement that approaches the perfection of the ideal constitution.

Kant looks to Plato as the original source of the notion of the idea for two reasons: Plato recognized the non-empirical character of ideas and he recognized that the origin of ideas is human freedom. Plato recognize that ideas do not find their source in experience but rather make experience itself possible. The idea of "nature," for example, orders our cognitions such that it makes possible any human conceptualization of the physical world understood as a system; it brings the judgments of the understanding together into a coherent whole. In a similar way, the idea of the Platonic republic or human virtue structures any possible political or moral experience—for it is only in light of these ideas that "any judgment" is possible.[233] The idea understood as a regulative principle guides not only theoretical inquiry but practical action and moral judgment: ideas effect human affairs. The practical status of ideas understood as regulative principles have some theoretical validity insofar as they guide and structure our experience of the world.

[230] *CPR* A316/B373. Kant claims that the Platonic republic provides for "the greatest human freedom according to laws that permit the freedom of each to exist together with that of others."
[231] *CPR* A317/B374.
[232] *CPR* A315/B371. "Chimera" is word that Kant uses frequently to denote an illusion or fantasy. As Shell points out, the chimera was a "fire-breathing female monster, part lion, part serpent, and part goat" that was "slain by Bellerophon astride the winged horse Pegasus" (Shell 1996, 422n. 69). Kant's use of this image points to the interpretation of his self-understanding as a heroic, Aeneas-like figure in the realm of reason. He slays, in other words, the monstrous chimeras of the human mind.
[233] *CPR* A315/B371.

Human life, in other words, cannot be understood without reference to our ideas about life for the ideas we project determine the world we experience.

Thus, Kant's appropriation of the Platonic idea is possible because Plato recognized the practical origin of ideas, namely that it "rests on freedom."[234] This origin in human freedom shows where ideas have "true causality" [*wahrhafte Kausalität*] and become "efficient causes [*wirkende Ursachen*] (of actions and their objects)," that is, in morality.[235] Unable to prove the theoretical validity of the idea of human freedom, Kant still asserts its efficacy in the world—its "effectual truth." The proof of moral freedom by way of appeal to its efficient causality supports the claims of human self-direction and autonomy implicit in the Tower of Babel image. But more than that, it provides a reason to think that one's actions in the sensible world—the only one we have access to—might have some efficacy in changing the world. That is, it provides grounds for the hope that we can indeed work to make the world a more moral place.

The third critical question, the question of hope, proves to be necessary in Kant's redirection of the *metaphysica naturalis* toward practical reason. The theoretical longing for the unconditioned can be transformed into the practical hope of living in a more moral world. The regulative idea that guides such hope is the highest good, i.e., the proportionality between the worthiness to be happy (freedom) and happiness (nature). There are two main sources of hope in Kant's practical philosophy: 1. The hope for rewards from a benevolent and moral God in the afterlife 2. The hope in historical progress. While the former is a source of hope primarily for individual moral life, the latter is a hope for the species. The hope for progress is political and this-worldly; it is the

[234] *CPR* A315/B371. According to Kant, Plato extended his notion of ideas too far into "speculative cognitions," where ideas become dangerous, and "even to mathematics," where ideas are not needed.
[235] *CPR* A317/B374.

project described in the blueprint for the new Tower of Babel. Projected into the future as something to strive towards, the idea of the highest good provides the hope that the natural and sensible world can be transformed by human freedom, such that human reason can find satisfaction in *this* world. The hope for the transformation of the world by human hands is inherent in the modern scientific project, and hence Kant shows his project to be thoroughly modern. But by foregrounding moral progress Kant suggests that a true mastery of nature would be a mastery over our own sensible nature, where freedom rather than our natural inclinations guide us.

Kant's insistence on hope arises, then, not merely out of the recognition that we must redirect our metaphysical longings but from that spirited anger that arises when we come to the humiliating realization that such desires cannot be fulfilled. Our awareness of our own limitations fosters our desire to take things into our own hands and provide for ourselves the fulfillment that we long for. Such fulfillment is, ultimately, found in constructing a moral world. The irony of Kant's choice of the Tower of Babel image is not accidental; the modern project is prideful and knows itself to be so. The pride does not become hubris, however, because Kant always foregrounds the humiliation that accompanies our fate as limited beings. Accordingly, the fulfillment of the highest good here on earth (the completion of the Tower) is projected by reason out to an infinite future. Human pride arises from the continual but never finished overcoming of our limited conditions. In other words, Kantian hope could be said to be the combination of Promethean pride and Christian humility.[236]

[236] In a similar vein, the proper orientation toward the moral law is that of "self-esteem combined with humility" (*CPrR* 5:128).

Hope is thus central to Kant's transcendental anthropology.[237] Kant's turn to hope responds most directly to that which most defines the human being and the problem that begins the book—the longing of a conditioned being for the unconditioned. Our theoretical longings might not be satisfied, and are even humiliated, but our longing for the unconditioned is still at work in the world through the ideas of practical reason and, ultimately, the political and moral hopes placed in the idea of progress. Inherent in hope is a kind of longing, a looking forward to a not yet fulfilled state. Yet hope, rightly fostered, enables us to live peacefully in the state of tension that defines the human condition. Our present life might be rife with the moral tension between freedom and nature but we can experience some unity through the spirited hope for the highest good. In short, we are, due to our theoretical dissatisfactions, forward looking beings. Kant's redirection of the human being's erotic metaphysical impulse toward the hopeful legislation of the practical realm constitutes the normative core of his transcendental anthropology.

In sum, Kant's transcendental anthropology recognizes reason's desire for the unconditioned and redirects this desire to practice. Beginning with the frustrating fact that we are limited beings of need, and indeed stressing this fact to the point of theoretical reason's humiliation, Kant goes on to exalt the status of "the entire vocation

[237] Hope is central as well to Kant's epistemology, insofar as the "moral world" is an "intelligible world" and insofar as the projection of the highest good unifies the "edifice of cognitions" into a coherent system. Given that hope is both "theoretical and practical," it points as well to the possible unity of reason—to the bridge by which freedom and nature are connected. Only if nature and freedom can be brought together, even if through a projection of an idea into an infinite future, can the world be thought to be intelligible as a whole. A common reading of the critical questions is to read the third question exclusively in light of the second question, rephrasing it as: "if I do what I ought to do, then what may I hope for?" While reading the questions sequentially is necessary, one must also understand them as simultaneous. Keeping in mind that the question of hope is both theoretical and practical—that is, asking the question of hope has some bearing on how I *understand* the world—helps one gain a more comprehensive view of the critical questions.

[*Bestimmung*] of human beings."[238] The moral vocation of the human beings even justifies creation itself.[239] The transcendental anthropology, or the "anthropology of reason," indeed serves as a theodicy of reason. It justifies the peculiar but humiliating fate of the human and the bloody battles, both metaphysical and literal, to which his limited reason has led him by opening up a realm of activity in which the human being, and his reason, can find self-esteem. Such justification, supported by the history of reason that the critique of reason presents, shows us the path toward maturity, namely, the responsible use of our freedom and our mastery over nature—even if the work of becoming mature is renewed with every generation. Kant's transcendental anthropology does not resolve for us the problems inherent in the human condition. It simply gives us the moral resolve to recognize the necessity of living in constant tension, while giving us hope that tomorrow might be different.

3.6 Conclusion: Heaven and Law, Man's Monstrosity and Man's Unity

One of Kant's most influential readers, G.W.F. Hegel, notes in passing that the *Critique of Pure Reason* has a narrative quality.[240] Kant, he claims, narrates the story of the faculties—sensibility, understanding, and reason—in a "psychological" and "historical" manner. While the interpretation put forward in this chapter agrees with the notion that the *CPR* tells a story, it argues that the narration of the faculties is not its primary plot. Rather, the first *Critique* tells the story of the human being and that tension which most defines him—his status as a finite rational being. It tells the story of the *metaphysica naturalis*, the pitfalls both theoretical and political to which it has led the human race, and

[238] *CPR* A840/B868.
[239] *CPR* A815/B843-A816/B844.
[240] Hegel, *History of Philosophy, Vol. III*, 432-433.

finally Kant's taming and redirecting of the human being's "lust for knowledge," which is in fact a longing for the unconditioned.[241] Or, expressed in another idiom, the *CPR* tells the story of a warring world and the heroic legislator who brings peace.

There is, however, no resolution to Kant's story, insofar as it does not yet have an ending. We must live in the tension between conditioned and unconditioned, nature and freedom. In many of his writings after the first *Critique*, Kant provides a way for us to think through the human being's unity and provides us with some resources in which to make our moral striving bearable. Making use of his discovery of "reflective judgment," Kant understands that the human being is a category of its own—one that cannot be subsumed under any previously discovered and determinate universal if its wholeness is to be grasped. Given that the essence of the human being is rooted in freedom, something that transcends the boundaries of theoretical reason, no such determinate universal is discoverable. By turning to reflective judgment, we can get a grasp both on how one can think through the unity of the human being and how Kant can hope to propagate his transcendental anthropology, the source of his hopes for a rational and peaceful culture.

The ambitions of Kant's critical project depend on the success of his later representations of the human being, namely, that they adequately capture the human's unity and are evocative enough to be propagated widely. Kant's later discussions of history and religion continue to tell the story begun in the first *Critique* while using the resources of aesthetic and teleological judgment. These stories are foundational for Kant's liberal republicanism and the corresponding hopes for a culture of reason. They provide an understanding of the human being and his relation to nature as well as continue the story of Kant the founder of a new era in human history—the epoch of

[241] *CPR* A708/B736.

autonomy—who serves as a model for moral and practical action as well as political intervention.

However, the content of the transcendental anthropology, which seeks to establish a change in our way of thinking, is best summarized by the closing sentiment of the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence [*Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht*], the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*…The first view [*Anblick*] of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates [*vernichtet*] my importance as an animal creature…The second, on the contrary, infinitely [*unendlich*] raises my worth as an *intelligence* by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent [*unabhängiges*] of animality and even of the whole sensible world.[242]

This portrait captures Kant's human being and shows why one might consider him to be "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world."[243] He is made insignificant, on the one hand, by the vastness of the heavens, while shown his *infinite* worth, on the other hand, by the dignity and transcendence of the moral law. He is a monster made up of incompatible parts. But that both heaven and law are cause for "admiration and reverence" [*Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht*] points to the way in which we might think through the human being's wholeness and the unity of nature and freedom. At the very least, such

[242] C*PrR* 5:162. The spectator of the human being—that is that part of the human being which has the freedom to determine its own perspectives—is what is being described in this famous passage. Not only, then, do the aesthetic-like responses to the heaven and law pave the way for a reading of the third *Critique* but, more importantly, the status of the perspectival nature of human reason makes an analysis of the human capacity to change perspectives beneficial. This capacity is, in part, the theme of the third *Critique*. In conjunction with the capacity of the human to change perspectives, the fact that two perspectives dominate our understanding of the human being—one that annihilates and one that infinitely raises—calls the possibility into mind that there is a third perspective by which these seemingly mutually exclusive views can be brought together.

[243] Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, *Epistle II.*

admiration and reverence for both the magnitude of nature and the mysterious obscurity of freedom reveals the way in which the Kantian human being, and indeed the Kantian project, must be represented—as the peculiar mixture of humility and pride.

4.0 Philosophical and Political Communication in Kant's *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment*

Abstract:

Confronted with the problem of the disjunction between freedom and nature, on the one hand, and the practical problem of propagating the transcendental anthropology, on the other, Kant has recourse to his late discovery of reflective judgment. In its reading of critical sections of the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment, this chapter examines the role of this discovery in helping us think through human unity as an indeterminate category and, in particular, the roles that aesthetic judgment and Kant's account of artistic creation (or the "fine arts") play in representing such unity. The chapter pays particular attention to Kant's critique of rhetoric, his endorsement of a specific kind of philosophical communication, and his discussion of the "art of reciprocal communication," which highlights the political importance of both Kant's aesthetic analysis and his own poetic-philosophical activity. In short, it examines Kant's simultaneous attempt to think through the unity of the human being while communicating this indeterminate wholeness in his efforts to found a cosmopolitan culture of human reason.

The quest for truth is necessarily, if not in every respect, a common quest, a quest taking place through communication. The study of the literary question is therefore an important part of the study of what philosophy is. The literary question properly understood is the question of the relation between society and philosophy.

-Leo Strauss[244]

[244] Strauss 1964, 52.

4.1 Introduction

Kant's apparent antipathy for rhetoric is often noted both among Kant scholars and those who have even a passing familiarity with his writings. Even if one disregards his unfavorable critique of rhetoric in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790; hereafter *CPJ*), his reputation as an arcane and convoluted writer seems to suggest an indifference if not outright aversion to the art of communication.[245] However, this reputation belies the lucidity or even beauty that Kant's writing can often achieve. Both this reputation and his critique of the manipulative character of rhetoric distract many readers of the third *Critique* from his positive vision of philosophical and political communication.[246] Far from being indifferent toward the presentation of his ideas, I argue that in certain works, Kant writes in the mode of a "poetic-philosopher."[247] Indeed, such a mode of writing is a sign of his remarkable political ambition. Kant, a rational philosopher using the lessons of poetry, aspires to provide the means for propagating his critical and moral philosophy.[248]

However, given that Kant ends the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" (CAPJ) with the claim that "the true propaedeutic for the grounding of taste is the

[245] For example, Nietzsche writes: "Kant wanted to prove, in a way that would dumfound the common man, that the common man was right: that was the secret joke of this soul" (Nietzsche 1974, 207).

[246] One can add to these things the biographical detail that a position to be a professor of "poetry and rhetoric" was the first offer of regular academic employment for Kant.

[247] Although Kant does not use this term himself, it is appropriate, as I will argue, given the seeming use of his own aesthetic theory in the presentation of his historical and moral ideas. See Susan M. Shell 1996, 46-76 for a reading of *Universal Natural History* (1755) as an early attempt by Kant to present a 'poetic philosophy.' See Richard Velkley 2002 and 2002b for the central importance of aesthetics to Kant's philosophical and political thought; see Allen W. Wood 2020 for Kant's symbolic representation of moral ideas; see Stanley Rosen 1987, 19-49, for the importance of rhetoric for Kant's project and a critique of such rhetoric.

[248] As Shell writes, Kant hopes to both "complete the history of philosophy and inaugurate the true history of man." (Shell 1996, 233-234). See also Alfredo Ferrarin 2015, 11-12 and Velkley 1989, 167-168, for statements on Kant's remarkable ambition. This dual movement, closing an old past while opening a new future, provides insight into the philosophical and rhetorical structures of the thinkers that come after Kant (e.g., Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger). For Kant's commitment to founding a "culture of reason," see *CPR* A850/B879-A851/B880; *CPR* A855/B883. See also Rosen 1987, 31, and Yirmiyahu Yovel 2018, 1-3.

development of moral ideas and the cultivation of moral feeling," it appears that aesthetic taste alone cannot prepare the way for a rational and moral civilization.[249] Indeed, Kant claims that beauty is a "symbol" of morality, but this does not mean that beauty alone can make people good.[250] And yet, for Kant, taste can serve as a vehicle for education and a means of bringing the human species closer to genuine morality.[251] Throughout the CAPJ, Kant either indicates or makes explicit the political and civic roles of aesthetic taste. Through a reading of these political moments, we get an indication of Kant's use of aesthetic representation in the presentation of his ideas and his self-understanding as a thinker providing a common framework for a culture's understanding of the human being and moral life. Understanding the framework of Kant's mode of aesthetic representation, as it is presented in the CAPJ, is thus helpful in grasping his political project of providing the grounds for a moral liberalism and the transcendental anthropology underlying it.[252] Kant's aesthetic theory provides one part of the means by which one can reflect on the human being and his moral striving in a way in which the unity of nature and freedom—or of morality and mechanical causality—can be thought, if not cognized.[253]

---

[249] *CPJ* 5:356.

[250] As the biography of just about any modern artist will show, the profound appreciation for beauty does not translate to a good and moral life. Yet neither is beauty for Kant entirely free from the claims of morality in the way the epigones of the Romantic movement, those who claim the slogan *l'art pour l'art*, would suggest. Instead, the experience of beauty indirectly prepares the spectator for moral action through the formal similarity between judgments of taste and moral judgments. However, Kant does not reduce aesthetics to morality; both are for Kant autonomous, yet "very ambiguously" related (*CPJ* 5: 298).

[251] Cf. *CPJ* 5:298; *CPJ* 5:354. See Rachel Zuckert 2007, 381-382.

[252] See Velkley 2002, 93-109, for a discussion of the central place the striving for unity has in Kant's philosophy, and in the third *Critique* in particular. See also Angelica Nuzzo 2005 for a study of the place of the third *Critique* in unifying reason. Since the *CPJ* as a whole addresses the problem of the human being's unity, one also must consider the role of teleological judgment in bridging the gap between freedom and nature.

[253] The distinction between "cognition" and "thought" is rooted in the distinction between determinate judgment, that is a judgment where a particular is subsumed under a given universal, and reflective judgment, that is a judgment where the particular is given but the universal must be supplied through a reflective process of the imagination. The latter is "thought" but not cognition. The human being, understood not simply as a biological species (*Homo sapiens*), but as a being possessing moral freedom cannot be cognized with the help of any given or determinate category.

The examination of Kant's mode of philosophical and political expression will consist of three parts. First, in order to delineate the cognitive and formal elements of aesthetic representation the essay will consider Kant's related notions of "aesthetic ideas" and "genius" and compare them to his later discussion of "symbols." These terms allow us to grasp how Kant employs the cognitive aspects of his aesthetic theory, namely the peculiar status of "reflective judgment," for the sake of his philosophical and political projects, which depend on propagating the transcendental anthropology and representing the unity of human being. Moreover, inspired by the concept of "succession" [*Nachfolge*], we begin to see why Kant's aesthetic representation often takes the form of appropriating inherited traditional symbols and stories. Second, the essay attends to Kant's self-understanding as a sort of "poetic philosopher" by turning to Kant's discussion of his ideal form of political communication, which emerges in light of his critique of rhetoric and his high estimation of its rival, poetry. Finally, the essay draws out the civic implications of Kant's theory of taste by turning to §60 ("The Methodology of Taste") and his discussion of the "art of reciprocal communication."

4.2 Aesthetic Ideas and Symbols

Turning to §49 ("On the faculties of the mind that constitute genius") and considering aspects of Kant's account of the "beautiful arts" [*Schöne Kunst*], we begin to see how Kant can present the unity of the human being, and his "sublime moral vocation," through something resembling artistic creation. In this section, we are provided with the conceptual and formal apparatus with which to understand Kant's own representations of the human being. While §49 claims to be addressing the capacities that constitute

"genius," Kant turns first to the perspective of the spectator of a work of art. The spectator finds in a beautiful work of genius an "animating principle of the mind," or "spirit" [*Geist*].[254] This principle is nothing other than "the faculty for the presentation of **aesthetic ideas**."[255] Kant defines an aesthetic idea as a "representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., **concept**, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible."[256] When confronted with a beautiful work of art, the product of genius, the imagination represents or produces an aesthetic idea that allows for a sort of thinking that is free from the constraints of determinate cognition.

The imagination of the spectator, as "a productive cognitive faculty," creates "another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it."[257] Kant suggests that the productive imagination can extend itself into "that which steps beyond nature."[258] That is, it creates a nature in which we can sense the supersensible ideas of reason.[259] Thus, Kant claims that these "representations of the imagination" are rightfully called ideas:

> On the one hand because they at least strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas), which gives them the appearance of an objective reality; on the other hand, and indeed principally, because no concept can be fully adequate to them, as inner intuitions.[260]

[254] See Zammito 1992, 292-305, for the importance Kant's use of *Geist* in this passage.
[255] *CPJ* 5:314. See Samuel A. Stoner 2016 for an excellent reading of this section that emphasizes the "primacy of the spectator" in Kant's account of genius. Also see Henry E. Allison 2001, 271-273. The primacy of the spectator has at least two important consequences for Kant's account of genius: 1. It supports the claim that the genius does not self-consciously create his or her work, since the meaning of the work is found in the activity of the spectator's productive imagination. 2. It allows Kant to de-emphasize the genius understood as an exalted, aristocratic figure—something that gets lost in Romantic appropriations of Kant's aesthetic theory.
[256] *CPJ* 5:314.
[257] *CPJ* 5:314.
[258] *CPJ* 5:314.
[259] See Nuzzo 2008, 273.
[260] *CPJ* 5:314.

First, aesthetic ideas are like ideas of reason because they "strive" beyond the bounds of experience; this makes them uniquely suited for representing indefinite and non-experiential concepts. Second, reason shows aesthetic ideas to be the "counterpart" or "pendant" of ideas of reason. Whereas ideas of reasons are concepts "to which no intuition can be adequate," aesthetic ideas present such a wide field of associations that no concept can adequately capture it.[261]

If a concept is represented through the use of an aesthetic idea, it stimulates "thinking" and "enlarges the concept itself" because a "determinate concept can never grasp the content of an aesthetic idea."[262] Aesthetic ideas always point beyond the concept to which they are attached. They open the mind up to an "immeasurable field of related representations;" that is, aesthetic ideas, although always rooted in the presentation of a particular concept, expand the spectator's associations with that concept indefinitely. An aesthetic idea thus gives the "imagination an impetus to think more, although in an undeveloped way, than can be comprehended in a concept, and hence in a determinate linguistic expression."[263] To reiterate, an idea of reason cannot be cognized but it can be 'thought' with the help of an aesthetic presentation.[264]

---

[261] *CPJ* 5:314.
[262] *CPJ* 5:315.
[263] Ibid. There is much debate in the scholarship as to what makes the unique cognitive capacity of aesthetic experience possible. See Rudolf A. Makkreel 1990, 48-66, for an account of what he calls "aesthetic apprehension." Makkreel relies on Kant's account of the common sense, or what he calls "he transcendental sociability of common sense" (Makkreel 1990, 65). Zuckert contends that Makkreel does not answer the Kantian question: "how is aesthetic experience possible?" Her answer is that there is an *a priori* principle of purposiveness that structures the subject's judging activity (Zuckert 2007, 298-308). For the purposes of this essay, it is enough to understand that aesthetic experience and aesthetic ideas are unique cognitive experiences that can be put to political ends.
[264] As Allison writes, "aesthetic ideas involve striving toward transcendence or a gesturing to the supersensible," that is, "aesthetic ideas lead the mind of someone engages in the contemplation of beauty from something sensible to the super sensible (Allison 2001, 260). See also, Zuckert 2007, 300, for an account of the "striving" underlying aesthetic experience.

The representation of an idea of reason through an aesthetic idea allows us "think" through certain concepts that we would otherwise be unable to access (such as the human being in his unity). It gives our natural desire to see beyond the bounds of sensibility an outlet, whereby we can speculate freely and "with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature."[265] It is important to note, however, that the philosophical significance is found in the spectator's ability to let her mind be "free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination."[266] Moreover, the aesthetic presentation of the ideas of reason has moral and practical significance through the ability to make moral ideas sensible. Hence, "the great king" expresses through his poetry the "cosmopolitan disposition," i.e., an idea of reason.[267]

Aesthetic ideas are, then, the *spirit*, the animating principle, by which a work of genius is separated from a simply elegant or more mundane work. However, by his own admission, Kant is not a genius.[268] Nor could he claim to be in the same spirit that he claims to be a critical philosopher. The genius is not in control of his gift: "**Genius** is the

---

[265] *CPJ* 5:314.
[266] *CPJ* 5:326.
[267] *CPJ* 5:316. Kant quotes Frederick the Great's poem as follows: "Let us depart from life without grumbling and without regretting anything, leaving the world behind us replete with good deeds. Thus does the sun, after it has completed its daily course, still spread a gentle light across the heavens; and the last rays that it sends forth into the sky are its last sighs for the well-being of the world." One would expect Kant's example of an aesthetic idea to be a passage from a great poet such as Homer or Shakespeare—or John Milton, whom Kant greatly admired. Frederick's poem seems more saccharine than beautiful, yet it is clear that Kant chose the poem partly for its moralism. Kant even changed a few words of the poem to draw out its moral implications. One wonders if, in addition to the clear moral message of the poem, Kant had any political reason for choosing a poem by Frederick, who died four years prior to the publication of the third *Critique*.
[268] In a reflection written just a few years before the composition of the *CPJ*, Kant writes: "To deal in a genius like way with deeply entangled philosophic questions: this honor I entirely forego. I only undertake to work on these in a school like way. If herein the labor, which requires steady industry and care, succeeds, then it remains to true genius…to bind to it the sublime impulse of spirit" (*Refl*, 15:435). This is a late view of Kant's conception of himself as lacking genius, but one that fits the fully worked out theory one finds in the third *Critique*. For an account of the evolution of his thoughts on genius, see Shell 1996, 229-234. As this paper argues, however, Kant does not consider himself a genius because the genius is not *self-conscious*, despite their role as the founders of a culture (think of Homer, Virgil, Dante, etc.). Kant, in a sense, is doing for the first time self-consciously (establishing the basis for a new way of thinking [*Denkungsart*]) what in the past has only been done naïvely.

inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) **through which** nature gives the rule to art."[269] In a sense, nature acts *through* the figure of the genius. His or her work is not a rational creation: genius is a vehicle for nature. The work of genius, which has a naïve untutored force that taste alone cannot determine, appears to the spectator to be almost as much a product of nature as of human will. Here, nature is not the dumb, mute nature subject to Newtonian laws but something supersensible. As such, the genius is not entirely carried away by something irrational, yet neither is its production understood rationally, scientifically, or self-consciously.

Thus, Kant claims, "[genius] cannot itself describe or indicate *scientifically* how it brings its product into being…and hence the author of a product that he owes to genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him."[270] In its radical individuality, genius is "entirely opposed to the spirit of imitation," which is necessary for both the scientific and critical enterprise.[271] The greatest scientist differs from the amateur only in degree. Newton "can make all the steps he had to take…intuitive not only to himself but also to everyone else."[272] On the other hand, the greatest artists cannot teach their art to anyone through a step-by-step process. The process by which they pass down their contributions to the tradition is called succession [*Nachfolge*]—instead of imitation [*Nachahmung*]. Through succession, a genius is "awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary."[273] The process of succession, then, frees genius from the constraints of merely following

[269] *CPJ* 5:307. Kant's emphasis.
[270] *CPJ* 5:308. Emphasis mine.
[271] *CPJ* 5:308.
[272] *CPJ* 5:309.
[273] *CPJ* 5:318.

traditional methods and allows it the freedom to produce an original work or artistic style. Indeed, succession enables the genius to contribute to a tradition by giving it a new direction.

However, the work of genius cannot be "original nonsense;" it must at the same time be "disciplined" by taste. Kant writes, "[t]here is no beautiful art in which something mechanical, which can be grasped and followed according to rules, and thus something **academically correct**, does not constitute the essential conditions of art."[274] The precedent of tradition ensures that one does not begin "entirely from the raw predisposition of his own nature." Instead, in emulating, but not imitating, those coming before them, geniuses are put "on the right path for seeking out the principles in themselves and thus for following their own, often better course."[275]

In sum, the genius combines taste and originality, tradition and innovation—or lawfulness and freedom. The genius has a respectful orientation toward tradition, learning from its most potent sources, and yet he seeks independence from tradition's authority. He does not seek such independence for the mere sake of breaking the rules but rather to create a new set of rules by which the genius of the future will be inspired.[276] In short, the genius works within a tradition while at the same time transcending that tradition.[277]

---

[274] *CPJ* 5:310.
[275] *CPJ* 5:283.
[276] Sanford Budick argues that Kant derives the concept of *Nachfolge* from reading Milton, and he deals with succession through his encounter with Milton's poetry. See Budick 2010, 253-300. One could also argue that Kant's intellectual encounter with Rousseau's writings encouraged him in a manner similar to the process of succession by compelling his turn to the practical.
[277] The concept of succession expands beyond artistic creation. Kant finds it in philosophical influence as well. In the first *Critique*, Kant makes the distinction between "historical" and "rational" cognition. Historical cognition is a form of imitation [*Nachahmung*] in which one memorizes a previous philosophical system but does not generate one's own philosophical thoughts. However, given Kant's commitment to promoting free reflection, there is a problem of succession in his own systematic philosophy. Kant appears to address this problem by turning to the notion of philosophy understood as an "archetype" of reason—a sort of model that one can approach but not actualize. Hence, one cannot learn "philosophy" but only "to philosophize" (*CPR*, A 836/B 865).

Hence, succession is a central notion in Kant's self-understanding, both as a philosopher and as a communicator of moral and political ideas. The ways in which Kant both works within the tradition and transcends it reflects the account of the genius's temporal link to tradition, as an emulator and one to be emulated. Kant's own process of succession is, it seems, more bold and ambitious than the examples given in his discussion of succession in §49. Kant seeks not mere artistic originality but, in a sense, to found a *new* tradition. His succession, then, is not merely artistic or philosophical but political and moral. At the same time, however, Kant's succession looks more modest since it often takes the form of appropriating inherited symbols in light of the elucidation of the principles of practical reason. His 'poetic' presentation of philosophical ideas often looks like textual exegesis, yet his interpretations paint inherited symbols in light of his practical theory and transcendental anthropology.[278]

Although aesthetic ideas and the corresponding notion of genius help clarify how Kant represents his own ideas, the clarification would seem to be incomplete without an understanding of the way in which poetic representations can be self-consciously created. Kant's discussion of "symbols" in §59 (On beauty as a symbol of morality") offers insight into the way in which Kant seeks to preserve a philosophic or scientific mode of communication that yet captures something of the genius's spirit.[279] Like the aesthetic

[278] Kant's short essay *Conjectural Beginnings of Human History* (1786) is an example of this sort of textual appropriation. In this work, he provides a reading of the early chapters of *Genesis* to support and draw out his idea of history and the human being. For what is now a classic interpretation of this essay, see Emil L. Fackenheim 1996. As Zammito suggests, even Kant's use of the term "sublime" is an example of Kantian succession. Drawing on a tradition from Longinus to Addison and Burke, Kant "redefines" and elevates" the idea of the sublime by "incorporating it within his system of transcendental philosophy" (Zammito 1992, 277).

[279] Although symbols and aesthetic ideas are not identical, they serve similar functions in Kant's representation of moral ideas. Compare, for example, Frederick the Great's poem that Kant cites as an example of an aesthetic idea (*CPJ* 5:315-5:316) with the image of the "despotic state" as a "hand mill" that he cites as an example of a symbol (*CPJ* 5:352). Although there is ambiguity in Kant's presentation of the

idea, the symbol represents a "concept only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate."[280] Where schemata make the concepts of the understanding intuitive, symbols provide an intuition to "which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate."[281] Through symbolic representation, one could represent rational ideas that go beyond the limits of sensible experience. And yet, the source of the symbol does not appear to depend on the gift of genius. Symbols are even a function of philosophical speech that one cannot help but use; here, Kant points to words like "ground," "depend," "flow," and "substance."

Still, symbolic representation performs a similar, albeit more guided, function as the aesthetic idea. Symbols allow one to grasp the "reality" of the "concepts of reason."[282] More specifically, a symbol is an "indirect presentation of a concept" achieved "by means of analogy in which the power of judgment performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere *rule of reflection* on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol."[283] Such a "rule for reflection" allows for "the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond."[284] Yet, the rule for reflection is provided by the author of the symbol itself. Where the aesthetic idea in part originates in the spectator's experience, due to the genius's lack of awareness of the source of his

---

differences between symbols and aesthetic idea, it can be claimed that both contain political and moral content and guide our thinking about moral ideas. The symbol uses an analogy rhetorically, but it is not yet a poetic representation. See Wood 2020, 6, for a brief but helpful discussion on the similarities between aesthetic ideas and symbols.

[280] *CPJ* 5:351.
[281] *CPJ* 5:351.
[282] *CPJ* 5:351.
[283] *CPJ* 5:352. My emphasis.
[284] *CPJ* 5:353.

spirit, the symbol is a thoughtful analogy that consciously imparts a rule for reflection. It does more to guide thinking than the free play encouraged by the aesthetic idea. In other words, the proper use of the symbol combines the ability of the aesthetic idea to represent ideas of reason with the "spirit of imitation" inherent in scientific communication.

In sum: both symbolic representations and aesthetic ideas provide a way to represent an idea that lacks either a determinate concept or a sensible intuition. While all of his works contain ample use of symbols and analogies, there are writings where Kant presents something like an aesthetic idea. He does so, paradoxically, in the guise of philosophical, theological, or historical analysis—making use of inherited images and stories. The philosophic significance of these forms of aesthetic representation is found in their ability to present ideas sensibly. Where the critical system splits the human being into two irreconcilable perspectives, such aesthetic representations aid us in thinking through the underlying unity of freedom and nature. The answer to the question, "what is the human being?," relies, then, not merely on rational concepts of the understanding but on aesthetic representations under the domain of reflective judgment.[285] The political significance of such aesthetic representations, as we will discover below, is found in their ability to provide a political community a shared moral language and a common understanding of the human being.

4.3 Philosophical Rhetoric: Orator, Poet, and the Good Man, Powerful in Speech

[285] Kant raises this question in his lectures on logic (see *Logic* 8:25). See Hannah Arendt 1992, 12-13 where she discusses this passage from Kant's logic. Her influential interpretation of Kant begins with Kant's anthropological considerations. Where her interpretation falls short, it seems to me, is her failure to take fully into account Kant's claims to system building. This is seen clearly in her unwillingness to take Kant's writings on history seriously (Arendt 1992, 7), and in her attempt to read Kant's notion of reflective judgment as something separable from the critical system. That is to say, her lectures on Kant do more to illuminate her own thought than Kant's.

While aesthetic ideas and symbols helps us understand how ideas of reason can be represented sensibly in a work of art or philosophy, it remains to be seen how these representations are embodied in the political community. In the sections after his discussion of genius, Kant presents the reader with descriptions of the art of poetry [*Dichkunst*] and the art of the orator; in contrast to these two figures, he provides an ideal for political communication—the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* ("good man, powerful in speech"). The novelty of this Kantian figure, who presents ideas of reason with the help of a "fruitful imagination" while respecting the autonomy of the spectator, comes to light in comparison with those other two figures, poet and orator. The "good man, powerful in speech" illuminates how aesthetic representations can be used in political rhetoric for the sake of furthering our moral commitments. As such, it sheds light on Kant's political project, especially those occasional pieces that respond to particular political historical circumstances.[286]

For Kant, poetry is not merely superior to rhetoric but claims "the highest rank" of all the arts.[287] Through its use of aesthetic ideas, it "expands the mind by setting the imagination free," giving a "fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully

[286] I have in mind such works that are either responding to some political event (*On Theory and Practice* [1793] responds in part to conservative critics of the French revolution and *Toward Perpetual Peace* [1795] was occasioned by the 1795 Treaty of Basel) or putting forth some policy proposal (*What is Enlightenment?* [1784] argues for the necessity of public speech in furthering the aims of enlightenment). While in this essay I blur the distinction between 'Kant as poetic philosopher' and 'Kant as politician,' since ultimately the former supports the latter, one could provide a distinction between his 'poetical' or 'anthropological' works from those works that seek more immediate political goals.

[287] *CPJ* 5:326. See Scott R. Stroud 2014, 14-27, for a reading of this passage that situates Kant's critique of rhetoric historically. Stroud argues that Kant overemphasizes his critique of rhetoric in response to Christian Garve's description and defense of the classical Ciceronian "art of persuasion" that, in Garve's view, privileged "social position, happiness as a motive, and honor" (Stroud, 16). Even without the helpful historical analysis provided by Stroud, it is clear that Kant views the classical teaching on the motives of the rhetorician as suspect. Hence, his effort in these passages is to reform rhetoric—albeit under a different name.

adequate." [288] But like the symbol, poetry can serve "as the schema of the supersensible."[289] It plays with illusion without "being deceitful;" it strengthens the mind but owes its "origin almost entirely to genius."[290] As an unconscious gift of nature, the genius's power of poetry is not deceitful; its purpose is the free play that occurs in the spectator's imagination. Accordingly, the poet has little concern for her own self-interest. At the very least, such self-interest is eclipsed in the work of a true genius.

In contrast, rhetoric, "insofar as by that is understood the art of persuasion," uses skill and "beautiful illusion" in speaking to exploit "the weakness of the people for one's own purposes."[291] The orator is guided by his self-interest and uses the illusions of poetic speech to persuade the spectators "before they can judge."[292] He thus steals from the audience its ability to follow the most sacred command of the Enlightenment—*Sapere Aude*, the daring to think for oneself.[293] Robbing the audience of its judgment, the orator thus robs its members of their freedom. Kant states that such an art is not fitting for either "the courtroom or the pulpit." This art of persuasion could never be used morally and legitimately because it treats persons only ever as mere means. And yet, because the orator never loses sight of his self-interest, he is aware of the source of his activity in a way the poet is not. The orator could, in principle, teach his art to students. Thus, where poetry is playful and honest but of mysterious origin, the art of rhetoric is deceitful, self-conscious, and rational.

---

[288] *CPJ* 5:326.
[289] *CPJ* 5:326.
[290] *CPJ* 5:327.
[291] *CPJ* 5:327.
[292] *CPJ* 5:327.
[293] See the opening paragraph of *QE*.

Kant puts forward an alternative that combines the unconscious honesty of the poet with the self-conscious rationality of the orator in an extensive footnote in §53. The footnote begins with Kant's confession that poetry gives him pure enjoyment, whereas reading the speech of "a Roman popular speaker or a contemporary speaker in parliament or the pulpit" is mixed with a disagreeable feeling.[294] Kant reiterates that rhetoric "understands how to move people, like machines" in a way detrimental to one's free judgment. Kant then turns to the supposed exemplars of rhetoric, the politicians of Greece and Rome, and in light of this reflection on them, he articulates an ideal of political speech.

> Further, both in Athens and in Rome it reached its highest level only at a time when the state was rushing toward its ruin [*Verderbeen*] and a truly patriotic way of thinking [*patriotische Denkungsart*] had been extinguished. He who has at his command, along with clear insight into the facts, language in all its richness and purity, and who, along with a fruitful imagination capable of presenting his ideas [*bei einer fruchtbaren zur Darstellung seiner Ideen tüchtigen Einbildungskraft*], feels a lively sympathy for the true good, is the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, the speaker without art but full of vigor, as **Cicero** would have him, though he did not himself always remain true to this ideal.[295]

The art of rhetoric, for Kant, is associated with the decadence of the city. This observation is not divergent from the classical view itself, even if it diverges from the later reception of classical rhetoric during Kant's time.[296] Proper political communication goes together with a "truly patriotic way of thinking"—with a way of thinking in which

---

[294] Note that Kant includes the "pulpit" among his list of self-interested orators. The rhetoric of the clergy, which rests on theological principles that are not rational according to Kant, robs the audience of the moral judgments in line with rational faith. These are themes Kant continues to develop in his next work, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793).

[295] *CPJ* 5:328n.

[296] See Socrates's critique of Pericles in Plato's *Gorgias* (515a-516d). See also, the Cleon-Diodotus episode in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* (3.37-3.50) for an example of the way the judgment an audience makes in the face of persuasive, self-serving reflection "must lose all weight for them in calm reflection" (*CPJ* 5:328n).

the whole has precedent over the part and the interest of the community over any individual's self-interest.

In contrast to the decadent orator, Kant presents the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. However, this speaker is not presented merely in distinction to the political rhetoric found in classical examples but in language that clarifies that he combines aspects of both the poet and the orator. He learns from the poetic arts (as does the orator) to command language in all of its "richness and purity," yet without the deception inherent in the orator's art. While he may not be blessed with the art of genius, "the good man, powerful in speech" combines clear insight of facts along with a rich use of imaginative language. The source of such speech is not the unscientific spirit of nature, found in the genius, but a self-conscious awareness of the human being's moral vocation. In other words, this ideal political orator combines the unconscious honesty of the poet with the self-conscious rationality of the orator. He "speaks without art," namely scientifically, but makes use of his "fertile imagination" to communicate supersensible ideas. In the language of symbolic representation, he combines insight into concepts that only reason can think with the proper exhibition of such ideas through analogy.

The ideal of the "speaker without art but full of vigor" provides insight into Kant's own task of seeking to combine the power of the genius's art with the self-awareness of the scientific mode of presentation. Kant speaks without art insofar as the source of his ideas cannot be considered to be genius (at least as it is described by Kant in his examination of artistic production) nor for the sake of mere self-interest (contra the orator's artful use of language). The "good man, powerful in speech," although an ideal,

shows the possibility of combing honest beauty with the self-awareness usually attending self-interest; that is, it suggests the paradoxical possibility of a self-conscious genius.

4.4 Kant's Art of Cosmopolitan Communication and His Poetic Particularism

In §60 ("The Methodology of Taste"), a section of the third *Critique* that is often overlooked, we find a discussion that illuminates Kant's thoughts on how his form of aesthetic communication can foster civic health. In this section, which is the appendix to CAPJ, Kant once again turns to the classical examples of Rome and Greece, not to draw attention to their political decadence but to hold them up as examples to be emulated. He turns to such examples because there can be no "method," Kant reiterates, in teaching works of genius but only a "manner (*modus*)" of thought. The title of the appendix is then somewhat misleading. Taste is dependent on an ideal or model that serves as a norm for the aspiring genius's autonomous production. Without such exemplars, the aspiring genius would begin from the "raw disposition" of his nature, and the culture of taste itself "would quickly fall back into barbarism and sink back into the crudity of its first attempts."[297] Central to the master's instruction of the apprentice is an "ideal" that the student must have "ever before his eyes."[298] Kant thus frames his discussion of the *humaniora* by recalling his thoughts on "succession" [*Nachfolge*] and by stressing indirectly that there can be no "methodology," properly speaking, of taste. With the "ideal" of the ancient republics, Kant points to his own political or communal succession.

[297] *CPJ* 5:283.
[298] *CPJ* 5:355. Holding the *humaniora* up as a source for exemplars, however, might seem strange in the context of his previous critique of classical rhetoric and its relation to the decadence of the city. The *studia humaniora*, however, is quite literally the study of humanity or the humane. In Kant's time, such a study extended beyond rhetoric to the literature and philosophy of Rome and Greece. It is related to the Enlightenment's attempt to revive classical education for the modern age. For a discussion of how the *humaniora* continues to shape the university system today, see Shell 2012, and especially see 194-196 for a detailed analysis of the origin of the subject.

The modern commercial republic will take its bearings by the spirit of the ancient republic—learning from its example while transcending it in its own originality.

Kant begins the next paragraph, then, by claiming that to create beautiful art, one must be familiar with the "culture [*Kultur*] of the mental powers" found in "those prior forms of knowledge [*Vorkentnisse*] that are called *humaniora*."[299] This "culture of mental powers" provides a model of humanity that Kant's Europe cannot do without. Accordingly, Kant defines the *humaniora* here not in terms of its subject matter within the university but rather in terms of its anthropological significance. The study of this culture of mental powers makes us more human.

> **Humanity** [*Humanität*] means on the one hand the universal **feeling of participation** [*Teilnemungsgefühl*] and on the other hand the capacity for being able to **communicate** one's inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals.[300]

What is at stake in preserving such high models of "humanity" is the possibility of maintaining human sociability. The cultivation of the mental forces together with sympathy and the ability to communicate one's particular experience free us from determination according to our inclinations alone—preserving the possibility that we can set ends beyond our sensible nature. Without such examples, we are threatened with the possibility of descending into a sort of civilized barbarism.

The sociability provided by these exemplars is illustrated by a political possibility, the unification of a people into a whole through reciprocal communication. Recalling his

[299] *CPJ* 5:355.
[300] *CPJ* 5:355.

encounter with Rousseau's writings, Kant suggests that the progress of the arts and sciences threatens this sort of unification.

> The age as well as the peoples [*Volk*] in which the vigorous drive towards the **lawful** sociability by means of which a people constitutes an enduring commonwealth wrestled with the great difficulties surrounding the difficult task of uniting freedom [*Freiheit*] (and thus also equality) with coercion [*Zwange*] (more from respect [*Achtung*] and subjection to duty than from fear).

Thus, Kant states the political problem that the ancient republics solved with an elegance unmatched by any succeeding epoch. In the words of Machiavelli, these republics reconciled the "few" who want to oppress with the "many" who want only not to be oppressed.[301] This "difficult task" of bringing together freedom and coercion and establishing an enduring polity (constituted by a people) was solved through a particular aesthetic culture. Kant continues,

> Such an age and such a people [*Volk*] had first of all to discover the art of reciprocal communication [*die Kunst der wechselseitigen Mitteilung*] of the ideas of the most educated part [*Teils*] with the cruder, to coordination of the breadth and refinement of the former with the natural simplicity and originality of the latter, and in this way to discover the mean between higher culture [*Kultur*] and contented nature [*Natur*] which constitutes the correct standard, not to be given by any universal rule, for taste as a universal human sense.[302]

The political success of the ancient republics arose from their discovery of the "art of reciprocal communication" that enabled these communities to combine the lawful

[301] Kant, like Machiavelli, is more sympathetic toward the many who, in Machiavelli's words, have a more "decent" desire. Kant's recognition that the "genius" of a political community is found in the *Volk* shows his republicanism to be the moral heir of Machiavelli's modern republicanism. While it is true that in Kant's the genius of *Volk* needs to be reined in by the "taste" of the elite class, the vitality and sense of spirited freedom found in any healthy community finds its basis for Kant in the many.
[302] *CPJ* 5:355-5:356.

refinement of the upper, aristocratic classes with the simplicity and originality of the lower, democratic classes. It is an instance, in the political realm, of the combination of the aristocratic sense of taste and the natural genius of the popular class. This combination allowed these republics to hit upon the "correct standard of taste," which allowed for the shared feeling between the classes that was the necessary condition of civic harmony.

The political health of the ancient republics was rooted, then, in an aesthetic culture that provided a common civic language. Such a civic and aesthetic language fostered lawful sociability or the necessary reconciliation of freedom and coercion, which constituted these peoples' strength and vitality. The *humaniora* is propaedeutic to the development of taste, for Kant, because it preserves for successive generations this art of reciprocal communication—that is, the possibility of the reconciliation between the high culture of the elites and the free-spiritedness of the popular class. Such a reconciliation between the classes is necessary for republican freedom and the sociability truly appropriate to free human beings.

More particularly, the *humaniora* preserves the spirit of free republics in the modern, commercial age and the ever-present threat of a homogenized culture. Kant thus continues by stating that a "later age"—presumably modern Europe—will be unable to dispense with the ancient republics as exemplars. This later age will,

> always be further away from nature, and ultimately, without having enduring examples of it, will hardly be in a position to form a concept of the happy union of the lawful constraint [*gesetzlichen Zwanges*] of the highest culture with the force [*Kraft*] and correctness of a free nature, feeling its own worth, in one and the same people [*Volke*].[303]

[303] *CPJ* 5:356.

Fearing the decadence of modern, commercial civilization and the decline of the natural freedom and originality of peoples, Kant shows here his concern with Rousseau's critique of the progress of the arts and sciences. The later, more technically advanced peoples will be "further away from nature" and hence unable to make use of the "force" of a "free nature." The rigid correctness of taste will remain, yet lacking the originality of the popular class, exercises in mere taste manifest in lifeless but technically proficient works or in the vain conceits of an "elite" class. Indeed, without an example of the harmonization of high culture and free nature within a single people, the cosmopolitan culture could very well destroy the spirit of freedom that finds its source initially in the popular class. Accordingly, once again following Rousseau, Kant fears that the modern cultivation of taste leads to a homogenous, cosmopolitan civilization alienated from the natural force and virtue found only in a particularized people. Such a victory of the "glittering misery" of modern civilization would undermine the spirit of freedom best preserved by peoples [*Volk*], and thus scientific and political progress ironically undermine the original purpose of the Enlightenment project.

Kant's claim that the *humaniora* provides a connection to what has been lost in the development and progress of the modern project is necessary for the success of his hopes of furthering enlightenment. The models within the *humaniora* provide the correct standard of taste that combines refinement and simplicity, lawfulness and freedom—or self-consciousness and innocence. As such, it is needed if one is to hope to foster communication between the classes in the modern age.[304] Recall, however, that this

[304] In a sense, §60 is Kant's response to Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert*; it contains his elucidation of the idea that certain arts can aid civic harmony. In contrast to Rousseau, however, Kant thinks that such civic harmony, aided by the arts, can co-exist with and provide support for scientific progress.

discussion is framed by Kant's reference to succession. Kant suggests, it seems, the eventual dispensability of the classical examples. In the next paragraph, he maintains—as referenced above—that the "true propaedeutic for the grounding of taste is the development of moral ideas."[305] In other words, it is only when the "moral ideas" are rendered sensible that taste becomes fully developed. Thus, Kant provides modern and Enlightenment grounds for taste. That is, the modern age possesses, thanks to Kant, something the ancient republics lacked—the moral law expressed in its purity.

The lessons learned from the *humaniora* are more political than moral. A serious study of the *humaniora* may not, in itself, make a people more moral; however, it remains a necessary model for civic communication. Further, sustaining civic culture and providing a moral education for future generations may require establishing the correct standard of taste within a commonwealth. That is, moral and aesthetic education are mutually reinforcing. Although, here too, the model of the ancient republic serves as an exemplar, something not to approach in the spirit of imitation but the spirit of succession [*Nachfolge*]. This raises the question, then, of whether a modern form of "reciprocal communication" might be invented or discovered—of whether there is a form of civic communication that rests on modern Enlightenment principles.

Kant might very well be pointing to what a new, modern model of the art of communication might look like in a footnote found in §65 ("Things, as natural ends, are organized beings") of the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment." Here, Kant refers to a "recently undertaken complete transformation of a great people into a state" [*Umbildung eines großen Volks zu einem Staat*].[306] This is likely a reference to the

[305] *CPJ* 5:356.
[306] *CPJ* 5:375n.

French Revolution, which was in its early stages while Kant was composing crucial parts of the third *Critique* in 1789.[307] One might argue that the French Revolution, in the days before the Terror, while undertaking a revolution for the sake of the rights of man, combined the coercion or compulsions of high culture with the force, originality, and even genius of a free nature.[308] In the case of the French people in the early days of the revolution, the modern republic is founded on a commitment to equality. Accordingly, in this same footnote, Kant declares that the biological term "organization" is "quite appropriately used for the institution of the magistracies, etc., and even of the *entire body politic*."[309] Contrary to the hierarchical structure of the ancient republic, where the high class communicates with the popular, crude part [*Teils*] of the republic, this new state consists of a "whole" where "each member [*Glied*] should certainly be not merely a means, but at the same time also an end [*Zweck*], and, insofar as it contributes to the possibility of the whole, its position and function should also be determined by the idea of the whole."[310] This "organization" resembles a republic more egalitarian than the classical models since each "member" is not simply a "part" but an end as well as a means with respect to the idea of the whole. (That is, returning to the biological metaphor, each member is both means and end in a self-subsisting whole, much like the organs of an animal or the parts of a plant.) The French Revolution might provide, in its early stage, a modern model of the art of reciprocal communication, where each member

[307] See John H. Zammito 1992, especially 330-334, for evidence that parts of the third *Critique* were composed with the early events of the French Revolution in mind. Some scholars, most notably Arendt, take Kant to be referring to the American revolution. While this is certainly plausible, it seems more likely that Kant is referring to the French revolution given the evidence cited by Zammito.
[308] In his late work, *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), Kant refers to the French people as "rich in spirit." They possess a sort of natural genius. Kant admits this spirited quality of the French people even after the Terror. Indeed, the Terror reveals the dangers of a vital and rich spirit uncultivated by the rigor of taste.
[309] *CPJ* 5:375n. Emphasis mine.
[310] *CPJ* 5:375n.

enters into a reciprocal self-determination with all other parts. Such a modern art of communication is not hierarchical and vertical, like the ancient models, but egalitarian and horizontal.

To reiterate, the classical humanities provide a model for the conditions of the correct standard of taste, namely, the combination of lawful refinement with free originality. The modern age might not, in the end, need to depend on such models—as Kant's allusions to the French Revolution suggest. Whether the early republic of the French Revolution is an appropriate model or not, it suggests the possibility that an art of reciprocal communication may be developed on the basis of modern principles and in modern languages.[311] Each modern nation should encourage a national art or literature that educates and disciplines the genius and free originality of a people. One consequence of the political project of the third *Critique*, then, would be an encouragement of the native genius of peoples consistent with cosmopolitan standards of taste, such that there is a proliferation of common civic languages. Yet this encouragement is a balancing act insofar as Kant seeks to preserve contingent and particular features of various peoples in a way consistent with universal norms. One crucial part of the project of harmonizing national arts with cosmopolitan taste would be to transform traditional models of taste, in the manner of succession, into a new standard that fits the modern world altered by the critical project.

Despite the seeming particularism inherent in the encouragement of national languages, literature, arts, and common civic symbols, Kant himself could be said to

[311] It is not insignificant, then, that the emergence of national arts and literature coincided with the rise of the modern nation-state. Given the expansive size of the modern nation-state, compared to the cities of the ancient republics, such a modern and liberal art of communication would need to rely more on a written rather than oral tradition. In this way, Kant anticipates some of the argument in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

supply a *cosmopolitan* art of communication—a form of communication that sets the standard, so to speak, for the particular, nationalistic versions of this art.[312] In his rhetorical role as a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, Kant attempts to provide a universal "civic" language and the basis for a broader aesthetic culture. Kant's own philosophical, political, and theological project seeks to provide something like the "art of reciprocal communication" for a modern liberal Europe. While each nation may have its particular form of communication fitting its natural genius, these forms of communication would not stray from the demands of taste or, more significantly, from universal moral principles and the anthropology laid down by Kantian philosophy.[313] Kant's self-understanding, then, approaches something like a sort of poetic-philosopher—or, to stress the paradox, a self-conscious genius—who seeks to provide a new model of emulation for a new culture of reason.

4.5 Conclusion

While this chapter has not examined the content of Kant's cosmopolitan civic language, it has sought to delineate the framework from which he attempts to enact his political and cultural project.[314] However, from the CAPJ alone, it would seem that Kant gives us an example of how nations can appropriate cultural models of the past in light of the modern

[312] The attempt to reconcile the claims of a particular nation with the universal claims of enlightenment become a theme of post-Kantian German philosophy. See Velkley 2021, 153-155. See also Karl Americks 2021, for a comparison of Kant's aesthetics with the political thought of Herder.

[313] Kant's last published writing is entitled, "Postscript to Christian Gottlieb Mielcke's *Lithuanian-German and German-Lithuanian dictionary*." In this short article, Kant argues for preserving the Lithuanian language from the onslaught of more cosmopolitan languages because, in its more natural origin, it is better "suited to the peculiarity of the [Lithuanian] people," which ultimately leads to better comprehension and thus more Enlightenment. The particularistic strain in Kant's thought is not merely for the sake of counteracting the worst tendencies of progress but is itself a means toward universal enlightenment.

[314] This project, I suggest, is taken up by Kant in his writings on the idea of progressive history (such as *TPP* and *CF*) and his reinterpretation of the Bible in *Religion*. For a reading of these works that approaches Kant in a literary manner, see Peter Fenves 2003.

commitment to human equality and the delineation of moral autonomy.[315] More than this, Kant gives specific indications of how he sees the presentation of his own ideas as distinct from both traditional examples and from the ideals or archetypes of the beautiful arts (orator, poet, genius). Kant provides the standard to which he holds himself, namely, the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* who combines the self-consciousness of the orator with the moral innocence of the poet. He makes plausible the civic importance of representing supersensible ideas sensibly.[316] In other words, a political community can be in harmony only when there is a common language and set of models that embody the ideals toward which it strives.

[315] As a possible example of Kant's aesthetic-civic project in the American context, one could turn to the "storybook" aesthetic theory of Albert Murray (1916-2013). Murray's writing on the "blues idiom" provides resources as well as historical evidence for thinking about how the aesthetic statement of a particular group, namely Black Americans, can take on political significance and become a universal statement of moral and existential worth. It would be no coincidence to any committed Kantian that the moral and political ideals Murray sees expressed in the blues idiom—despite their American and 20th century inflections—parallel Kant's own political commitments to equality and civic participation as well as Kant's characterization of moral experience as one of striving. See Murray 1996, 11-17.

[316] Kant can provide a resource, then, as we in the United States struggle with civic unity and as we collectively think about the way in which we represent the ideals of America and our troubled history.

5.0 Admiring Modernity's Nature: The Purposiveness of History as Kant's Correction of Luxury

Abstract:

This chapter presents a reading of the Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment, with an emphasis on §83. It argues that the account of history in §83 is central to the third *Critique*'s response to Kant's Rousseauian-inspired diagnosis of excessive "luxury" in modern civilization. This response, however, is by way of the circuitous route of Kant's response to the widespread philosophical debate of his time over the threat of Spinozist pantheism. Kant's emphasis on the "admiration" for nature's purposiveness serves as the point of departure for his response to the Spinozist or mechanistic view of nature. By examining the "conditions of the possibility" of admiration, Kant presents an account of nature that incorporates human freedom. Drawing on the analysis of Kant's art of communication in Chapter 4, I argue that the presentation of the purposiveness of history encourages an admiration for nature in the spectator of history in such a way that it counteracts the luxurious tendencies and harmful theoretical dispositions that Kant saw in modern thought and culture. The Kantian idea of history is guided by the twofold intention that seeks to foster gratitude for our place in the natural order and provide hope for the success of our moral endeavors.

If, in this time
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
Despair not of our nature, but retain
A more than Roman confidence, a faith
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
The blessing of my life, the gift is yours
Ye mountains, thine O Nature. Thou hast fed
My loft speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours I find
A never-failing principle of joy.

-William Wordsworth[317]

[317] William Wordsworth, *The Two-Part Prelude of 1799*, Second Part L. 486-495.

5.1 Introduction: Theoretical and Practical Luxury

Rousseau's inestimable influence on Kant is now taken as a matter of course. The often told but always pleasant anecdote of Kant being so enraptured with his reading of *Emile* that he missed his daily walk, which was so regular and punctual that the residents of Königsberg could set their clocks to the strolls of the *alles zermalmende*, attests to Kant's high estimation of Rousseau's thought. While many scholars have shown the several ways in which Kant is indebted to Rousseau, I want to focus on the area where Rousseau's influence is perhaps most strongly felt: Kant's concern with the decadent luxury of modern scientific civilization.[318] As early as his Rousseauian inspired *Remarks*, Kant critiques the extravagance of European society and echoes many of the observations found in Rousseau's *First Discourse* about the vanity inherent in the modern pursuit of commercial, aesthetic, and scientific culture.[319] These laments echo similar lines of thought developed by other thinkers in the so-called "luxury debates" of the 18th century, but Kant's attention to the negative political and moral consequences reflect his distinctive account of freedom. Throughout the critical period, from the "splendid misery" described in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), to the explicit discussion of Rousseau in *Conjectural Beginnings of Human History* (1786), to the discussion of the adverse effects society has on moral evil in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), Kant addresses the problem of modern luxury in the

[318] See, for example, Richard Velkely 1989 and 2013; Susan M. Shell and Richard Velkley 2013; Shell 2002; John Zammito 2002; Karl Americks 2012; Ryan P. Hanley 2017; Ernst Cassirer 1945. On the role of luxury in the Rousseau-Kant constellation, see Zammito 2012.

[319] For example, Kant writes: "The greatest part of [humanity] would adorn themselves with [science] not for any improvement of their understanding but only as a perversion of it, not to mention that for most of them science serves only as an instrument of vanity" (*Remarks* 20:34).

context of his systematic philosophy.[320] In some sense these works express discontent over the shortcomings of society as such, but there is a special criticism reserved for the risks inherent in a scientific civilization. There is a danger that certain commitments seemingly inherent in the modern scientific worldview can lead to a cultural extravagance that damages the foundations of civil order.

It is not clear if Kant ever developed the original analysis of civilizational decadence he gave in the 1760s, writing that "the corruption of our time can be boiled down to this, that no one demands to be content with himself, or also good, instead to appear so."[321] This desire to appear other than what one is would seem to be supported by a theoretical framework in which the meaning of morality is in question. In a sophisticated, cynical culture in which the ordinary person approaches everyday social dynamics like a grand Machiavellian strategist treats political intrigue, the root of its dysfunction may not be strictly political or cultural but might be due to an underlying worldview or way of thinking. Still, Kant retains his confidence in the prospects of human nature and offers in each of these works an account of the purposiveness of history that responds to the threats of luxury. The idea of progress [*Fortschritte*] justifies such luxury by showing how it gives way to a more self-reflective, "mature" age.[322]

The possibility of a specifically historical response to the ill-effects of scientific civilization is nowhere theorized with more speculative brilliance than at one of the peaks of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790; hereafter *CPJ*), namely, in the discussion

[320] *Idea* 8:26; *CBHH* 8:116; *Rel* 6:94-6:95. See also Kant's halcyon account of the "Arcadian Shepherd" in *Idea*; history must justify the fall from this idyllic state into the glittering misery of civilization (*Idea* 8:21).
[321] *Remarks* 20:84.
[322] As Velkley writes, "Rousseau makes Kant ware of the unprecedented crisis in the intellectual and moral life of Europe" in which "human life is burdened by luxury, vanity, and factitious desires" (Velkley 2013, 94). Whereas Rousseau did not think that this crisis was caused by "historically necessary processes," a part of the novelty of Kant's account of luxury is to cast this crisis in historical terms. See also the discussion of indifferentism in Chapter 3, 68-72.

of the progress of human history in §83 ("On the ultimate end of nature as a teleological system"). In this account, the luxury [*Luxus*] of civilization, defined as the moment "when the tendency to what is dispensable begins to destroy what is indispensable" that happens when the culture of an elite class spreads throughout society, is an ill that Kant hopes to justify and correct with the purposive account of nature.[323] As I will argue below, §83 even points to the way in which the third *Critique* can be read as a response to the Rousseauian problem of the excessive luxuriousness of modern civilization. By correcting our notions of taste in the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" (CAPJ) and by providing a basis for a more complete and satisfying contemplation of nature in the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment" (CTPJ), Kant combats the worst tendencies of modern scientific civilization while offering an account of nature compatible with the demands of moral life and liberal republican citizenship.

The spread of the culture of the cultivated elite, however, is not simply damaging to the civic and moral health of society due to its tendency to multiply vanities and frivolities, but because certain theoretical dispositions accompany the political and social effects of luxury that are damaging to a moral disposition. In Chapter 3, we saw Kant's concern with "indifferentism" and the radical skepticism of certain trends of thought common among Enlightenment thinkers; there, indifferentism appeared to be a metaphysical corollary to the luxury of modern civilization that at the same time opened up the possibility of Kant's critical project. In the intervening years between Kant's initial diagnosis of indifferentism and the publication of the third *Critique*, a new theoretical (and public) challenge emerged in the form of the *Pantheismusstreit*. Ignited by F.H. Jacobi's publication of his conversation with Gottfried Lessing, in which the latter

[323] *CPJ* 5:433.

admitted to being a Spinozist, the pantheism controversy raised doubts about the possibility of a philosophy that could indeed support "the rights of man" and common human morality. While there is some sense in which Jacobi's presentation of Spinozism is the opposite of indifferentism, since it is deeply concerned with metaphysical issues, its practical and ethical consequences seem to be the same. As a result of their metaphysical commitments, both positions undermine moral agency by casting doubt on rational freedom; however, as a more robust theoretical theory that captures the tendencies of scientific civilization in its attempt to understand everything in terms of mechanism, Spinozism provides a more serious target for Kant's theoretical volleys.[324]

Kant's response to Rousseau's political and cultural challenge is thus interwoven with his response to Spinoza's (or Jacobi's Spinoza's) theoretical position of universal determination. Against this backdrop, Kant presents in the CTPJ what he takes to be a superior concept of nature insofar as it accounts for the place of human contemplation and human freedom in a more adequate way than materialistic or overly-skeptical philosophical positions. Central to Kant's account of nature, then, are those experiences of nature that point beyond nature as mechanism and toward a view of nature's possible compatibility with human freedom—namely, admiration, beauty, and the sublime. The point of departure for Kant's response to the threats posed by Spinozism to human freedom is the account of the "transcendental philosopher's" admiration for the logical purposiveness of nature.

[324] Insofar as Kant's conception of nature in the first *Critique* reflects Spinoza's pantheism, there may be an initial reason for Kant to respond to Spinozism. In order for Kant to support morality, he must show that the mechanistic conception of nature is only *partial*; it does not account for freedom. Hence, Kant's response to Spinoza entails the assertion of the human being's dualism and then the reunification of freedom and nature. See *CPrR* 5:102, where Kant asserts that his philosophy would be Spinozist without the "transcendental" conceptions of space and time.

It is the contention of this chapter, which further develops arguments advanced in Chapter 3 about the relationship between metaphysical positions and political regimes, that Kant's response to the political effects of luxury rests on a prior philosophical critique of rival philosophical accounts of the natural world, in particular those accounts of nature exemplified by Spinozism.[325] An account of the natural world, like the modern cosmology of Spinozism, implies a corresponding anthropology.[326] In this way, Kant's account of the human being's place in nature, and the defense of the possibility of human unity, is an essential component of the transcendental anthropology—asking the fourth critical question entails answering how the human being relates to the cosmological context in which he finds himself. To be sure, Kant's account of nature is never divorced from his practical aims. By offering such an account of nature, Kant can place the "beautiful arts and sciences" on a more secure theoretical footing that bolsters the advancement of our rational and practical ends instead of serving as an obstacle to moral and civic life.[327] Thus, in defending a richer conception of nature that supports human striving, Kant also argues that philosophy can come to the defense of ordinary moral understanding.

[325] It should be noted that the Spinoza that Kant responds to is created by Jacobi's account of Lessing's Spinozism and those taking part in the pantheism controversy. Hence, my representation of Spinoza's position here is instead a representation of Jacobi's Spinoza. As John Zammito notes, "Spinozism was a *symbol* for two crucial issues of the age—modern scientific naturalism as uncompromising mechanism, and criticism of authority, both religious and civil" (Zammito 1992, 228). What is at stake, for Kant, is showing that philosophy can indeed leave room for faith and that it need not become reduced to the deterministic position that denies the possibility of free will and moral-political action—a position that seems to follow from the materialism of the modern scientific method. For a more thorough account of Kant's direct confrontation with Spinoza's thought, see Omri Boehm 2014.

[326] See Alexandre Koyré 1957 and Remi Brague 2003 for two accounts of how the revolutionary changes in cosmology changed the Western world's anthropological conceptions. As Brague puts it, any cosmology implies an anthropology insofar as it must explain "the presence in the world of a subject capable of experiencing it as such" (Brague 2003, 4-5).

[327] *CPJ* 5:433.

The argument begins in section two by showing how Kant understands the threat of Spinozism. Section three takes up Kant's theoretical response to Spinoza in the transcendental philosopher's feeling of admiration and the transcendental argument that explains its occurrence. By looking to this experience, Kant can argue for the rationality of purposiveness by grounding the "as if" judgments of reflection in the peculiarity of human cognition. Section four outlines Kant's account of history in §83, where Kant explicitly mentions the threat of luxury and presents his purposive account of nature. Section five takes up the "purposiveness of aesthetics," which is complemented in section six by Kant's account of the "aesthetics of purposiveness." Together these sections argue that the idea of history is a prominent example of Kant's art of communication. As practiced in §83 of the CPTJ, such an art is not a matter of mere rhetoric but puts forward an account of the human being's place in nature that, while not objective knowledge in the strict sense, is still rational. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the political and cultural consequences of Kant's hopeful attitude toward nature and history.

5.2 Scientific Nature and the Gullet of Purposeless Chaos

It is beyond the scope of the chapter to recount the historical events surrounding the *Pantheismusstreit*; however, a general outline of the philosophical positions held by the main contestants engaged in the strife helps to clarify the theoretical questions at stake as well as their theological and political implications. In 1785, Jacobi published a discussion he had with Lessing before his death in 1781 in which Lessing admitted to being a follower of Spinoza. In the context of the pantheism controversy, the Spinozist position is one in which nature and God are one, there is nothing beyond or transcendent of nature,

and all notions of or changes suffered by particular beings are determined by a prior chain of efficient causality.[328] The far reaching implications of this thesis is reflected in the belief that there is no freedom but only necessity and no good other than what appetite happens to desire at a given moment.[329] The further belief, affirmed by both Lessing and Jacobi, is that all philosophical thought culminates in Spinozism. As Lessing states in Jacobi's dialogue, "there is no philosophy other than the philosophy of Spinoza."[330] Both thinkers agreed that the end of reason is Spinozism, but whereas Jacobi's Lessing saw such a position as the apogee of enlightenment, Jacobi thought it to be the definitive condemnation of the modern philosophical project. What was needed to overcome Spinozism, according to Jacobi, was a *salto mortale* (mortal leap) into the religion of revelation.

If Lessing, the standard-bearer in the public imagination of the German *Aufklärung*, was a Spinozist, then Jacobi's claim that philosophy culminates in "nihilism" (a term Jacobi coined) gains support through the mere example of such a great figure openly confessing his metaphysically reductionist opinions.[331] Whether or not his fellow participants in the *Pantheismusstreit* agreed with Jacobi's solution, many saw that he brought into focus the problems inherent in Enlightenment rationalism. And while the dispute began as a disagreement over the nature of Lessing's true character and commitments, it soon turned into a debate over the nature of philosophy and the

[328] For example, in his published dialogue with Lessing, which set the terms of the debate, Jacobi says of Spinoza's position: "the objection that an infinite series of effects is impossible is self-refuting, because every series, if it is not to arise out of nothing, must be absolutely infinite (Jacobi, "Recollections of conversations with Lessing in July and August 1780," 245). Earlier in the conversation Jacobi identified the spirit of Spinozism as the adherence to the principle that "nothing arises out of nothing," a formulation for the principle of sufficient reason (PSR).
[329] Spinoza, *Ethics*, III.
[330] Jacobi, "Recollections," 244.
[331] As Lessing says to Jacobi, "I see you would like to have a free will. I have no desire for a free will" (Jacobi, "Recollections," 246).

possibility of whether human reason is capable of discovering an order in nature conducive to human flourishing. Moses Mendelssohn defended philosophy against Jacobi's charges by invoking the existence of an intuitive common sense that grounds our access to the traditional objects of metaphysics (in self-conscious opposition to Kant, whose critical system he attacked, famously dubbing him the *alles zermalmende*). Others, like Thomas Wizenmann, sided with Jacobi's leap of faith, arguing for the impossibility of any conception of a rational religion. The choices seemed to be between a rationality that can neither ground itself nor make room for the possibility of human freedom, an ungrounded leap into a faith of reason that posits for us the possibility that our cognitive faculties have access to an intelligible reality, or a turn to the "religion of revelation" that entails an abandonment of the aspirations of the rational Enlightenment.

Such responses were, of course, not satisfactory for Kant. Mendelssohn's position falls into the danger of dogmatic metaphysics, while Jacobi's position encourages a sort of enthusiasm dangerous to rationality and human autonomy. After being encouraged to enter the debate by friends and perhaps prodded to do so by Jacobi, Kant published *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* (1786) in which he introduces new thoughts on teleology and the "needs of reason."[332] While this work marks Kant's first *explicit* entrance into the *Pantheismusstreit*, it is clear that he had been concerned with some of the underlying philosophical problems at least since the publication of the first *Critique*. The task of Kant's critical project, in part, is to preserve the possibility of human freedom and dignity while securing the fruits of Enlightenment rationalism. Hence, as others have

[332] Manfred Kuehn gives a compelling biographical account of Kant's involvement in the controversy. See Kuehn 2001, 305-311. As Kuehn relates it, Kant was encouraged by Johann Biester, the editor of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to intervene. For an equally compelling and more thorough account, see Zammito 1992, 228-247.

suggested, Spinoza is a sometimes named but largely unnamed target of Kant's critical system.[333] Kant's dualistic rationalism that at the same time supposes an underlying unity is an attempt preserve the possibility of freedom without jettisoning the explanatory benefits of the principle of sufficient reason.

Indeed, the *CPR* presents an account of nature congruent with the presuppositions of modern rationalism. Nature, as the phenomenal world, is governed by necessity, by mechanical and Newtonian laws that provide an account of the motion of bodies in terms of efficient causes. Yet by Kant's own account, even in the *CPR*, this modern scientific view of nature—while able to be exploited to yield "objective knowledge" and mastery over the world—is only partial.[334] It cannot explain the human being, that creature which is most unique about creation, and therefore it does not offer an adequate account of the whole or totality of nature. The fact of human freedom—and it is a given fact for Kant—cannot be explained in accordance with the mechanical laws of motion, which necessarily presupposes an unending chain of causes as the condition of their explanatory power. Kant's famous intent to deny knowledge to make room for faith does not apply solely to matters of practice, but pertains to our theoretical understanding as well. The knowledge Kant denies, in the case of Spinoza's materialism, is only partial and incomplete. Without understanding the practical dimension of reason's activity, one cannot fully think through the human being and, if human freedom is more than mere illusion, one cannot claim to

[333] See Boehm 2014. Boehm reads Kant's antinomies in the first *Critique* as a response to Spinozism and its reliance on the PSR. Kant's system is, Boehm argues, a "regulatory Spinozism" in which the PSR is not a constitutive but a regulative principle. Kant agrees, then, with part of Jacobi's claim regarding the Spinozist consequences of philosophy—that is, philosophy understood as the total application of the PSR. Spinozism, Kant claims, is the "true consequence of dogmatic metaphysics" (*Lectures on Metaphysics*, 28:706). Kant's position is not to show that Jacobi is wrong about Spinoza, but to present the possibility of an alternative rationalistic, modern philosophy.

[334] That is, objective knowledge in the sense that Kant uses the term, i.e., the knowledge of the realm of nature as legislated by the categories of the understanding.

comprehend the whole—whether that be God or nature or their unity. In this case, the Spinozist rationalist's knowledge of nature is not only partial insofar as it does not adequately account for the experience of the being that seeks to know but it does not recognize itself, on Kant's account, as being only partial.[335]

It should be stressed, however, that Kant's response to these positions, whether held by sophisticated followers of Spinoza or vulgar materialists, is not to assert the primacy of certain epistemically privileged experiences, like Mendelssohn's assertion of common sense, but rather to introduce a new method that aims to account for the grounds of these experiences. The transcendental method, which seeks to uncover the conditions of the possibility of certain facts or experiences (like whether *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible), gives Kant the ability to treat certain fundamental human experiences, like freedom, hope, or the erotic longing for the unconditioned, with something other than suspicion. There is, to speak anachronistically, something like a phenomenological basis to Kant's investigations. To borrow Swift's evocative formula, with the critical system Kant does not attempt to "spin and spit wholly from himself" but rather grounds the self-knowledge of reason in the examination of universal longing, hopes, and fears.[336] The possibility of human flourishing (and philosophy) depends on our willingness to examine with charity our psychological experience as moral agents.

Late in the third *Critique*, in the midst of speculations regarding the course of human history and the guiding hand of God, Kant warns us that what he sees as the

[335] It seems to me that one must read Kant this way if he is not to be understood as Heine's account portrays him. In that account, the Kantian moral system is not much different than a Nietzschean assertion of will to power. If, on the other hand, denying knowledge to make room for faith is also for the sake of a more comprehensive image of the whole insofar as it includes the experience of human freedom, then Kant's practical system is not a rhetorical and willful assertion (contra Rosen or Heine), but a genuine account of the human being and his place in the whole.
[336] Jonathan Swift, *Battle of the Books*.

alternative to his system is precisely the position toward philosophy advanced by Jacobi and his Lessing.[337] Even someone of such outstanding character as Spinoza, the exemplary "righteous man" who believes neither in God, a future life, nor the purposiveness of nature, would find the obstacles to morality insurmountable. Here, I quote Kant at length:

> [The righteous man's] effort is limited; and from nature he can, to be sure, expect some contingent assistance here and there, but never a lawlike agreement with in accordance with constant rules with the ends to act in behalf of which he still feels himself bound and impelled. Deceit, violence, and envy will always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable, and benevolent; and the righteous ones beside himself that he will still encounter will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, which pays no attention to that, to all the ills [*Übeln*] of poverty, diseases, and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth, and will always remain thus until one wide grave [*ein weites Grab*] devours [*verschlingt*] them all together (whether honest or dishonest, it makes no difference here) and flings them, who were capable of having *believed* [*glauben*] *themselves* to be the final end of creation [*Endzweck der Schöpfung zu sein*], back into the gullet [*den Schlund*] of the purposeless chaos of matter [*zwecklose Chaos der Materie*] from which they were drawn.[338]

With no clear place for human striving, the Spinozist or mechanistic view of nature, when seen from the perspective of morality, is imagined as a giant all-devouring mouth. The righteous man finds himself constantly in a sort of primordial war of all against all, doomed to perpetual conflict with his fellow men and all of nature. With such an image of nature, why should one do anything other than follow the path of least resistance?

[337] It should be noted that the alliances of the pantheism controversy were constantly shifting. As Zammito notes, by the end of 1789 Kant and Jacobi were allies against the "deism of Herder's *Gott*." Despite the intricacies of the various positions and alliances, what matters for the purpose of this chapter is Kant's "extreme pressure to dissociate himself from Spinozism" (Zammito 1992, 247). See also Paul Guyer 2005 for an account of Kant's attempts to distinguish himself from Spinoza in the third *Critique* and the late *Opus Postumum*.

[338] *CPJ* 5:452. My emphasis.

Would the moral vocation be anything other than a siren call to naïve fools with a penchant for Sisyphean struggle?[339] Kant's response to the threat of Spinozism or modern rationalism (broadly speaking) consists in showing how accounting for certain human experiences provide us with a rationally superior account of the whole that at the same time grounds the significance of human reason.

The purely mechanistic or the Spinozist account of nature leads to the conclusion that there can be no grounds for human value and dignity. The Kantian moral law, which reason wills, depends on the Kantian dualism that posits freedom as something transcendent and teleological. Reason wills a good separate from human desire, and thus the truly human good is (at least in part) non-accidental and non-contingent, universally valid for all rational beings. And so, Kant rebukes those thinkers like Spinoza for encouraging a view of morality that threatens human dignity and may even undermine civil order. Yet if Kant's response to the threats of Spinozism is to have any psychological purchase, it must show how the postulated positive good is rational and therefore how the dualism of the critical system can be conceived as emerging from an underlying unity.

But, as Jacobi famously quipped, without the Kantian "thing-in-itself" he could not enter the critical system, but with the thing-in-itself he could not remain in it.[340] This remark captures the problem of disunity that plagues Kant's system until the third *Critique*. Without any notion of underlying unity, the Kantian dualism of reason and

[339] If these things are reminiscent of a later German thinker, it did not go unnoticed. Nietzsche claimed that Spinoza was his precursor and that, like him, Spinoza denies "the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world order, the unegoistic, and evil." Nietzsche's "lonesomeness," he claims, is now due to Spinoza a "twosomeness" (Nietzsche, 1954, 92). It would be going too far to say that Kant anticipated Nietzsche, although it seems clear from this lengthy passage that he was aware of those dangerous facets of Spinoza's thought that Nietzsche found exhilarating.

[340] Kuehn 2001, 327.

nature leaves morality susceptible to the claims that it is nothing more than an edifying rhetoric, if not willful self-deception. Hence, the notion that the human being is capable of believing himself to be the final end of creation must be grounded in certain human experiences that makes the postulation of such belief plausible and rational. Merely asserted belief is an insufficient bulwark against the lurking suspicion that the grounds of all substance is really the gullet of the purposeless chaos of matter.

The discovery of the possibility of such unity is found in Kant's analysis of those human experiences that offer an intimation of something higher—namely, the feelings of admiration for nature's purposiveness, beauty, and the sublime. Far from being overly-abstract, formalistic, or preaching the inaccessibility of the givenness of nature, Kant begins his response to Spinozism and the threat of a pantheistic nihilism by examining the conditions of the possibility of our most significant experiences of being in the world. Like the examination of the *metaphysica naturalis* in the first *Critique*, Kant's third *Critique* takes as its starting-point something like a phenomenological account of a given experience and moves from there to a transcendental examination of the conditions of the possibility of that experience. The third *Critique* is an examination of the conditions of the possibility of the feeling of harmony between freedom and nature.

In sum, Kant's account of purposiveness responds to the threat to human dignity posed by the scientific framework of early modernity and its cosmology—a challenge best represented by the symbol of Spinozism. Yet, as noted, this threat is grounded on theoretical suppositions that according to Kant can provide only a partial account of the human being and nature. Finding a place in modern cosmology and modern nature for human freedom provides Kant not only with a practical response to "Spinozism" but with

a more comprehensive image of the human being and his place in the world. Although such an idea remains a regulative ideal, it incorporates a quantitatively and qualitatively more expansive range of phenomena. Though ultimate verification of this metaphysical account of the whole and humanity's place within the whole remains beyond the ken of finite human reason, it is nonetheless a rationally satisfying and rigorous view of nature according to the standard of *Tithenai ta phainomena*, which remains an indispensable criterion for metaphysical judgment.[341]

And such an image of the human's place in nature is necessary to support the moral life of the human being and the requisite civic fabric to sustain Kant's republican ideals. If there is to be a republicanism on modern grounds and in harmony with the modern scientific project and its concomitant technological progress, then there must be room for freedom in the final comprehensive account of nature. That is, the schizophrenic relationship between freedom (or reason) and nature must somehow be resolved or, at the very least, reframed so as to be an endurable tension—lest humanity be condemned to insufferable diremption. We turn, then, to the admiration of nature's purposiveness and the hope it inspires in our moral prospects.

5.3 *Bewunderung* and *Zweckmäßigkeit*: The Peculiarity of Human Cognition

Kant's account of "purposiveness" [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] can rightfully be called the guiding thread of the third *Critique*. As the principle of judgment (if not a legislative one), it is the evident link connecting the seemingly disparate topics of aesthetics and teleology. Less often noticed is the crucial role the feeling of admiration [*Bewunderung*] plays in the *CPJ*. And yet it is the feeling of admiration for nature that marks the point of departure

[341] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b2-7.

for Kant's reflections on purposiveness. This section examines the concept of purposiveness and the response of admiration it elicits. As a product of the peculiarity of human cognition, this response begins to ground Kant's claims regarding the unity of freedom and nature. The experiences of admiration related to nature's purposiveness constitute part of the argument against the view of nature put forward by Spinozist rationalism.

The notion that the feeling of admiration plays such an integral role in Kant's response to the specter of pantheism might at first seem far-fetched to the reader of the third *Critique*. Although Kant's treatments of admiration are brief in length, admiration proves to be a leitmotif that appears at revealing points in the text.[342] The first of which is Kant's mention of the "transcendental philosopher," his only use of the term, in the First Introduction.[343] Kant writes,

> If nature showed us nothing more than this logical purposiveness, we would indeed already have cause to admire [*bewundern*] it for this, since we cannot suggest any ground for this in accordance with the general laws of the understanding; only hardly anyone other than a transcendental philosopher [*Transcendental-Philosoph*] would be capable of this admiration [*Bewunderung*], and even he would not be able to name any determinate case where this purposiveness proved itself *in concreto*, but would have to think of it only in general.[344]

The proper activity of the transcendental philosopher consists of the admiration of the purposiveness of nature. It is striking that this is the only mention Kant makes of the

[342] For helping me notice the large role the transcendental philosopher's admiration plays in the third *Critique*, I am indebted to Samuel A. Stoner's 2019 article.
[343] While the First Introduction (hereafter FICJ) was not published with the rest of the work when it first appeared, Kant did not reject the draft because it failed to capture his thought. In a letter to his student Jakob Sigismund Beck, Kant wrote that he rejected the original introduction "solely on account of its disproportionate extensiveness" but that it still has much "to contribute to a fuller understanding of the concept of the purposiveness of nature" (*Letter 549*, 11:394-396, quoted from Guyer 2000, xlii).
[344] *CPJ* 20:216.

transcendental philosopher, especially considering that Kant aims to prepare philosophy to become transcendental philosophy. Perhaps more striking, especially given the egalitarian thrust of Kant's moral teaching, is the suggestion of a qualitative distinction between the transcendental philosopher and the ordinary human being. In the ability to admire the logical purposiveness of nature, the transcendental philosopher is unique; this distinction, I will suggest below, sheds light on Kant's communicative project in the *CPJ*.

Before examining the object of the transcendental philosopher's admiration, I will turn to the feeling of admiration itself. In §62 ("On the objective purposiveness which is merely formal, in distinction to that which is material") of the *CPJ*, Kant begins the "Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment" with one of his most extensive accounts of admiration. He reiterates that admiration relates to the purposiveness of nature and that which "seems intentionally arranged for our use, but which nevertheless seems to pertain originally to the essence of things, without any regard to our use."[345] It is in this section that Kant offers a definition of admiration and relates it to the feeling of astonishment.

> Now **astonishment** [*Verwunderung*] is a mental shock at the incompatibility of a representation and the rule that is given through it with the principles already grounded in the mind, which thus produces a doubt as to whether one has seen or judged correctly; but **admiration** [*Bewunderung*] is an astonishment that continually recurs despite the disappearance of this doubt.[346]

Astonishment is, then, a "mental shock" that calls our confidence in our judgment or perception into question, while admiration is a continually recurring astonishment, a persistent wonder at the nature of things. Defining admiration in terms of astonishment,

[345] *CPJ* 5:363.
[346] *CPJ* 5:365.

Kant highlights a certain experience of nature that induces one to further reflection, even as the initial perplexity of astonishment dissipates.

The logical purposiveness of nature, it should be noted, is an example of "reflective judging." Hence, in the case of the transcendental philosopher, admiration is not a product of the understanding's legislation of nature but follows from the experience of the failures or limits of this legislation (i.e., it begins in a "mental shock"). Reflective judgment begins not, like determinate judgment, from universals (or general concepts) under which it subsumes particulars but rather generates a universal from experiences with particulars for which no determinate concept is readily available. It allows us to derive general concepts from experience that we can then apply to later experiences for the sake of greater understanding.[347] If we understand admiration in light of reflective judgment, then admiration is the subject's affect when the mind is struck by an experience of astonishment and notices a phenomenon that does not seem subsumable under a known or determinate concept. Noticing, for example, that a biological entity seems to be arranged with a final end in mind or that an entire ecosystem seems arranged for the sake of maintaining a perfect delicate harmony might produce an experience in the transcendental philosopher that cannot be captured adequately by mechanistic laws alone. Finding determinate cognition inadequate for the description of such an experience, he

[347] Empirical concept formation, aesthetic judgment, and teleological judgment are all forms of reflective judging. Paul Guyer notes that there are five objects of reflective judging in the third *Critique*: 1. Objects of *beauty*. 2. Experiences of nature that cause the *sublime*. 3. Natural organisms or *organizations*. 4. The system of empirical scientific *concepts*. 5. The whole of *nature* itself (Guyer 2005, 293-294). I would add a sixth object—the *human being*, especially considering that the theme of the work is the possible unity of freedom and nature. Although, in all fairness, unlike the other five topics, the human being is not an explicit object of analysis.

turns to reflective judgment, which posits for itself something like a law to make sense of the experience.[348]

The activity of reflective judging in our experience of admiration not only encourages further thinking on things as they seem to appear to us, it also points to the consideration of an underlying unity of freedom and nature. The definition of admiration given in the *CPJ* follows Kant's discussion of ancient geometry. Ancient philosophers took to geometry for the sake of the concepts themselves; these philosophers were not bogged down "by the questions of limited minds" but rather they "delighted in a purposiveness in the essence of things."[349] And yet the development of geometry turns out to have had great use; the utility of such concepts for human purposes reveals another kind of purposiveness with respect to humanity's practical and technical capabilities. While explicating analytic geometrical concepts, ancient philosophers marveled that these concepts at the same time had such fitting empirical applications that it seemed as if the harmony between mathematics and empirical reality was "possible by means of an end expressly aimed at it."[350] This admiration for the nature, in the case of Plato and others, "gradually rose to enthusiasm" as mathematics seemed to reveal the thinker's "intellectual communion with the origin of all things."[351]

This case of the ancient mathematicians and philosophers is instructive in the philosophical significance of admiration. Admiration, Kant argues, is "an entirely natural effect of that purposiveness observed in the essence of things (as appearances)" that due to its inexplicability (the astonishment inherent in admiration) "enlarges the mind,

[348] Kant asserts that reflective judgment is characterized by its own sort of freedom called "heautonomy" in which judgment prescribes "a law to itself for reflection on nature" (*CPJ* 5:185-186).
[349] *CPJ* 5:363.
[350] *CPJ* 5:364.
[351] *CPJ* 5:363.

allowing it, as it were, to suspect something lying beyond those sensible representations, in which, although unknown to us, the ultimate ground of that accord could be found."[352] We are encouraged by our admiration of nature to reflect further and to attempt to think through the possible grounds of the accord between our cognition and nature. Unlike the wonder of the ancient philosophers, however, Kant stresses that we can only ever "suspect" an unknown ground of such harmony. Yet the tendency of admiration to "enlarge the mind" and foster further reflection is at the same time evidence for the position that there must be room in an account of nature for the spectator and admirer of nature. Kant argues that we cannot help but look beyond nature in our admiration of nature.

This is not to argue that admiration is an experience that gives us access to the deepest foundations of the essence of things. Instead, it points us to the purposiveness of nature which, in turn, points out beyond itself to the possibility of a supersensible substrate. However, it does this by referring ourselves back to the peculiarity of our own cognition such that we can experience nature in the disposition of admiration. Hence, the "transcendental" philosopher is led by the feeling of admiration to examine the conditions of the possibility of the purposiveness of nature in particular and human cognition in general.

What, then, is admirable about nature's apparent purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*]? What does it reveal about the character of human cognition? In order to clarify the idea of *Zweckmäßigkeit*, we will begin, like Kant in the CTPJ, by turning to the mystery of the organism, which Kant argues shows the limits of a purely mechanistic concept of nature.

---

[352] *CPJ* 5:365.

As the account of admiration may already make clear, when Kant claims that an organism—and eventually the whole of nature—is purposive, he refers not to any property inherent in the object itself but rather to the relationship between the object and our faculty of cognition. Purposiveness is a critical regulative principle, a reflective judgment that the subject makes to guide its investigations of certain objects. It is utilized only as a way of guiding our investigations into nature on the analogy of human artifice without attributing teleological causality to nature directly. We can think of nature as something more than mechanism without crediting nature with an underlying cause or intelligence that acts intentionally— a claim extending beyond reason's bounds and encouraging enthusiasm.

When we approach nature with the concept of its purposiveness in hand, we are returning in some way to the pre-scientific view of nature that scientific description itself cannot fully explain; that is, purposiveness takes into account the object as it *seems* to be. The eye, for example, looked at from the perspective of pure mechanical causation alone, might have been formed in an infinite variety of ways—just as the sand on the beach is the way we encounter it due to an immense variety of causes. But the eye cannot be adequately understood by the human power of judgment, unlike the geological formation of grains of sand on a beach, without the notion that the eye has some function to perform—without the consideration that the eye is made to see. This is to say that something like an eye, the parts of plants and animals, must have some reference to the whole of which it is a member.[353]

[353] Some commentators (Pauline Kleingeld 1999, Guyer 2005) call into question the viability of Kant's biological reflections after the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. Although it seems to me that Darwin's theory of natural selection does not refute Kant's biological reflections, I will not argue that point here. I will point out that many thinkers after Darwin argue for human reason's need for a teleological

The part-whole relation operative in our judgments of natural organizations accounts for one of the primary differences between teleological judgments of purposiveness and aesthetic judgments of beauty. Whereas the latter are "pure," the former, by contrast, are always mixed with what is "empirical" and given.[354] Experience of what is given through the sensibility leads us to the judgment of what is purposive and what is not. Whenever an object is seen as "lawful" such that the cause of the object is understood to be based on the idea of the effect, then what we encounter is something acting in accordance with a kind of law of purposiveness. Such a "natural end" [*Naturzwecke*] is "both cause and effect of itself" in such a way that it cannot be connected with the "concept of nature" as legislated by the understanding and yet can "be conceived without contradiction but cannot be comprehended."[355] Kant claims that the natural end is cause and effect of itself in at least three ways: 1. It is self-generating as a species. 2. It generates itself as an individual through growth. 3. The parts of a natural end are reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the other parts, i.e., the parts are able to exist only in relation to a whole.[356] There is, then, some universal standard—though not determinate—under which natural ends or "organized beings" [*organisierte Wesen*] must meet in order to be judged purposively.[357]

---

framework (see especially Hans Jonas 1966), and the question of teleology remains, as always, an open question.

[354] *CPJ* 20:243, 5:193.

[355] *CPJ* 5:371.

[356] *CPJ* 5:373. Kant lists as an example the grafting of a leaf onto a tree. He then comments on the "self-help of nature" in "these creatures" (presumably trees) when "chance defects or obstacles" force an anomalous growth. Such a phenomenon is among "the most wonderful [*wundersamsten*] properties of organized creatures" (Ibid. 5:372). That is, in the midst of his teleological investigations, Kant stops to admire natural processes.

[357] *CPJ* 5:372. For Kant, organized beings, or organizations, are anything that we would consider biological life. Kant distinguishes between "life" and organization by appealing to self-consciousness. Only a being that has a "feeling for life," like the human, is properly considered life.

Yet the natural end or the organization is given to us by nature—its existence is contingent and could be otherwise. Further, it could be otherwise in such a way that it need not conform to the idea of purposiveness and thus influence human judgment.[358] From the perspective of the "blind mechanism of nature," there is no *a priori* reason why any organization or natural end needs to appear as it is given.[359] As such, the causality of the natural end or the organization is described by Kant as "the lawfulness of the contingent" [*Gesetzlichkeit des Zufälligen*].[360] Writing in the FICJ, Kant claims that the purposiveness of nature is "objectively contingent [*Zufälligen*] but subjectively (for our faculty of cognition) necessary lawfulness [*Gesetzlichkeit*]." [361] The lawfulness of purposiveness employs an alternative notion of causality that is lawful and necessary (for otherwise it could not be considered *causality*) and yet contingent and particular. However, the lawfulness is only subjective—its necessity and universality being derived from the structure of human cognition as such. The lawfulness of the contingent harmonizes the old formula "nature does nothing in vain" with the "necessity of the blind mechanism of nature," i.e., the perspective that understands the movements of bodies in terms of efficient causes alone.[362]

This alternative causality is best understood in terms of an analogy with human art, insofar as in both the case of human art and natural organizations the parts and the

[358] *CPJ* 5:370.
[359] *CPJ* 5:377.
[360] *CPJ* 5:404.
[361] *FICJ* 20:243.
[362] *CPJ* 5:377. Paul Guyer argues that Kant's emphasis on contingency is crucial in his response to Spinoza, since "Spinozism eliminates any recognition of contingency in our objects of either knowledge or action" (Guyer 2005, 303). Finding contingency in nature has significance for Kant's conception of moral life. As Guyer argues, a contingency that coexists with lawfulness shows that moral action is possible in accordance with the laws of nature but that success is guaranteed only by "the rigor and vigor of our own efforts" (Guyer 2005, 305). The account of history below largely accords with this view.

whole are in a reciprocally supporting relationship.[363] Yet Kant suggests that this is not entirely accurate because one says "far too little about nature and its capacity" if one takes this view. Such a view separates the cause (the artist) from the effect (the art) in a way that fails to take into account the self-subsisting character of generation and metabolism. Another analog is that of "life," and yet Kant insists that this goes too far insofar as it endows matter "with a property" (i.e., soul) that "contradicts its essence." While appearing to human subjectivity as purposive, nature cannot be thought to contain within it a directing intelligence. It is here, however, that the causality of the lawfulness of the contingent transforms the problem that it sets out to solve, namely, the dogmatic debate over whether nature is mechanistic or purposive. Instead of being stuck in the *aporia* of the teleological antinomy, Kant makes use of the seemingly contradictory notion of lawful contingency to point to the boundaries of reason and the mysterious grounds of nature. Seeing nature as exclusively mechanistic or purposive fails to take into account, like the position of Kant's many other antinomies, the true predicament—if not mystery—of embodied rationality. The human being is the perspectival being; we cannot help but look at ourselves, and nature, from conflicting but equally valid perspectives.

The concept of nature understood from the perspective of teleology, however, is explained by a slightly different notion of purposiveness. There are two modes of purposive judgment—internal (strong) and external (weak). Just as experience forces us to consider the organism as a natural end operating by an alternative notion of causality, Kant claims that "experience leads our power of judgment to the concept of an objective

[363] That is, the artist or craftsman has a representation of the whole that determines the place and function of the parts; the parts make up a reciprocal relationship with the other parts and the idea of the whole. There is a key *dis-analogy* between human organizations and natural organizations: the latter are *self-subsisting*.

and material purposiveness, i.e., to the concept of an end of nature."[364] When we consider nature as a whole we are lead to consider it as a self-sustaining system operating for the sake of an "end." This external mode of teleological judgment can be understood to be ecological or environmental. It considers the parts of nature and how they seem to fit into a coherent and harmonious whole.

With this in mind, Kant invites the reader to consider how "an admirable confluence of so many relations in nature" appears to converge for the sake of one end.[365] One of his favorite examples, which he echoes in later writings, is the existence of human life in the Arctic circle.[366] There is a contingency to such an existence—one does not see "why human beings have to live there at all." Yet nature seems to have arranged things just right so human life can be possible there; the example points to the possibility that nature is a whole to which its various parts belong as members.[367] Kant notes that in "cold lands the snow protects the seed from frost; it facilitates communication among humans (by means of sleds); the Laplanders find animals there that bring about communication (reindeer) which find adequate nourishment in a sparse moss."[368] But Kant insists that it would be "presumptuous and ill-considered" to expect that nature is acting for the sake of being useful for "certain miserable creatures," especially considering that strife among human beings likely forced these people to "such inhospitable regions."[369]

---

[364] *CPJ* 5:365.
[365] *CPJ* 5:369.
[366] See *TPP* 8:363.
[367] Kant distinguishes between "parts" [*Teils*] and "members" [*Gleid*]. A member is a part with a purpose that exists in a self-subsisting relationship with the other members of a whole.
[368] *CPJ* 5:369.
[369] Ibid. Kant points here to the "unsocial sociability" of human nature, developed in §83, that connects his natural philosophy and idea of history.

To reiterate, in making purposive judgments about nature, the human cannot help but think that a supreme understanding guides the world or to posit an underlying ground in which nature and freedom are unified.[370] However, this tendency can be supported since the concept of a natural end—whether internal or external—is regulative and not constitutive. The judgment regarding nature's purposiveness vacillates, as Kant does in his example, between wonder at the "admirable confluence of events" that seem to be arranged just so and the disdain at the "presumptuous and ill-considered" thoughts of a miserable creature that thinks nature would arrange things for its sake. And yet even as Kant limits purposive judgment to the status of a reflective and regulatory principle that can be used for our scientific investigations into nature, purposiveness still retains its relation to that experience that points beyond nature to the supersensible.

Kant's account of the lawfulness of contingency points us back to the consideration of the deeper meaning and significance of admiration. From the examination of purposiveness, it could be said that admiration is an experience of nature that is both pre-scientific and yet dependent on the legislation of the understanding that makes scientific reason possible insofar as the root of admiration is a perceived deviance from ordinary and determinate judgment. It is the "necessity of that which is purposive and so constituted *as if* it were intentionally arranged for our use" but which nevertheless encounters us in its contingency "without any regard for our use" that is the ground for our "great admiration."[371] Such admiration is emblematic of the human's mode of discursive cognition. Kant argues that we are led, by the very structure of our thought, to

[370] As Guyer notes, Kant does not seem to view the purposiveness or whole of nature as simply optional; instead, as a regulative principle that finds its origins in reason, it is indispensable both for scientific investigation and practical life (Guyer 2005, 327-328).
[371] *CPJ* 5:363-5:364. Emphasis mine.

posit the unity of freedom and nature and to interpret nature in light of its support of freedom.

At the same time, the peculiarity [*eigentümlichen*] of our cognition makes possible those distinctly human qualities that constitute our dignity.[372] In contrast to a non-discursive mode of cognition, like the idea of an "absolutely necessary being" or the *intellectus archetypus* that Kant posits in §77, our "image-dependent understanding (*intellectus ectyous*)" must distinguish between "the possibility and the actuality of things."[373] The *intellectus archetypus* does not distinguish between "the possible and the actual" but rather because its understanding is intuitive it has no objects except for what is actual.[374] Kant notes that the distinction between possibility and actuality is not, then, a property of the things-themselves but arises from human subjectivity. Because of the heterogeneity of the faculties, the understanding can think a thing without having a corresponding intuition; it can also, of course, imagine to itself that a given intuition is otherwise than it is.

Whereas the *intellectus archetypus* intuits "the whole" as having "no contingency in the connection of the parts," the human being conceives of the whole—or the system of nature—on the analogy of human artifice. That is, the artificer "chose" to make our world a certain way; it could have been other than it is. Such a conception of the world makes human choice possible. Human *freedom* depends on the human's ability to act to make the world other than it is, and moral *responsibility* depends on being able to have acted otherwise. In this way, the human being's moral dignity is reflective of its

[372] That is, the "peculiar constitution of [our] cognitive faculties" [*der eigentümlichen Beschaffenheit meiner Erkenntnisvermögen*] (*CPJ* 5:397).
[373] *CPJ* 5:408, 5:402.
[374] See *CPJ* 5:402.

discursive cognition. Thus, the admiration for nature's purposiveness that leads to the positing of the unity of freedom and nature can also account for the human being's moral experience as striving. In other words, what provides us with our unique dignity, namely our status as moral beings, at the same time points us to the possibility of an underlying unity of freedom and nature.

It is, then, the very "peculiarity of human judgment," exemplified by the transcendental philosopher's admiration toward nature, that leads to the supposition of human unity. The fact that due to the structure of human thought itself, we cannot help but posit (rationally) a supersensible substrate provides Kant with his most stable grounds regarding the necessarily hopeful dimension of human existence. Not only is Kant's human being a hopeful being due to the projecting structure of reason, but Kant provides a faith in nature's support of reason that grounds hope for the eventual unity of freedom and nature in this world.

5.4 History and Nature's Purpose: An Account of §83

We now turn to Kant's account of human history in §83 of the *CPJ*. As in the historical essays explored in Chapter 2, the progress of human history appears as the domain in which freedom and nature are shown to be working toward the same purpose—the development of human freedom and the human being's moral capabilities. The image of nature as a tutor of human freedom returns and is integrated into the Kantian system through the apparatus of teleological judgment. It is not *merely* that history is a sort of hermeneutics of nature wherein the development of human rationality over time is interpreted from a heuristically chosen vantage point, but rather that nature, conceived

as *a purposive whole* that takes into account the fact of human freedom, can only be adequately thought through in light of an "ultimate" and a "final" end. The need of practical reason, to be sure, determines the vantage point from which we view the purposiveness of history, but now this vantage point is grounded in the structure of cognition and emerges from the transcendental philosopher's theoretical speculations about nature. What began as an exploration into the conditions of admiration ends with a more rigorous defense of hope in the progress of history. In the process of representing the grounds of this hope, I argue that Kant attunes the spectator of history to something like the admiration characteristic of the transcendental philosopher.

The account of history in §83 begins with Kant's claim that nature as a purposive system cannot be understood without an end toward which the whole is directed. Experience points us, Kant suggests, to such an end in nature, but the proper end of nature is not taken up by Kant until he turns to the question of human history in the "Appendix" of the CTPJ (i.e., the "Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment"). Without an ultimate end, the system of nature, even in its beauty, would be meaningless. It has no end in itself by which it can justify its ceaseless activity. Kant claims that even "the most common understanding cannot reject the judgment" that no matter how great the "artistry" of nature arranges purposive beings into a greater system, without human beings it would all "exist for nothing."[375] Without the human, "the whole of creation" would be a "mere desert existing in vain without a final end."[376] From the perspective of purposiveness, the human being justifies nature and provides it with an ultimate end toward which it is organized.

[375] *CPJ* 5:442.
[376] *CPJ* 5:442.

Kant makes clear that it is not the human being's theoretical contemplation that serves as the final end of nature. Kant argues that such contemplation can lead to a consideration of the world in which there is no final end and, in this case, "no value would emerge from the fact that [things] are cognized."[377] The justification of nature in terms of contemplation assumes but does not prove that contemplation is the final end. What good is it that a part of nature becomes self-conscious and then understands nature if creation is then understood to be void of meaning—a mere wasteland? Without an underlying order that supports and gives meaning to the human endeavor for wisdom, knowledge for the sake of itself can indeed be pleasurable but cannot be understood to be the highest form of human life.

Nor can happiness—or the maximizing of pleasure—be understood to be the final end of creation. Apart from the general human experience that misery always outweighs happiness, Kant argues that the hedonistic point of view (broadly speaking) assumes but cannot prove its status as final end.[378] There is no reason why the human being "should exist at all" if mere sensible pleasure is the end which justifies the whole of creation. As Kant often argues in his moral writings, happiness and pleasure are contingent and not related to a human being's worthiness to be happy; human happiness is at the whims and mercy of nature.[379] Nor is it clear why, if the human being's happiness is the final and ultimate end of creation, that nature would be organized in such a way to promote suffering and pain more than happiness and pleasure.

It is, however, "the faculty of desire," i.e., the choice-making faculty, that shows how the human being justifies creation. In order to justify nature, the human being cannot

[377] *CPJ* 5:442. This point foreshadows Kant's later critique of Spinoza.
[378] See *CPJ* 5:436n for Kant's claim that suffering always outweighs pleasure.
[379] See *GW* 4:388-4:390.

be merely "dependent on nature (through sensible impulses)," as he is in the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, "the value of existence" does not rest on what the human being "receives and enjoys" but rather on "what he alone can give to himself, and which consists in what he does, in how and in accordance with which principles he acts, not as a link in nature but in the **freedom** of his faculty of desire."[380] The human being transcends creation (and his natural, sensible state) by pursuing an end beyond nature in order to justify nature. Kant states that a "final end" needs "no other conditions of its possibility.[381] The human being's freedom, his ability to choose between ends, justifies nature understood as a system because contained in the genesis of human freedom is the discovery of the moral law and the good will—that which has for Kant unconditioned and absolute value in an otherwise conditioned and contingent world.

Such a moral justification of nature is due in part to the human's peculiar form of discursive rationality. It is only because the human being is a combination of sensibility and understanding, contingency and lawfulness, or desire and reason that the possibility of freedom, understood as freely submitting to the moral law, can arise. As "the only being on earth who forms a concept of ends for himself" the human being is the "ultimate end of the creation here on earth" because his reason and moral freedom "can make a system of ends out of an aggregate of purposively formed things."[382] The good will gives human existence its "absolute value" and, in turn, provides the existence of the world with the final or ultimate end that makes an otherwise meaningless and empty aggregate into an organized system.

---

[380] *CPJ* 5:443. Kant's emphasis.
[381] *CPJ* 5:433.
[382] *CPJ* 5:346.

Kant claims that this conclusion, namely that "only as a moral being" can the human be "the final end of creation," is in "complete agreement with the commonest judgment of healthy human reason."[383] Yet the observer of human history cannot help but fall prey to a melancholic contemplation at what seems to be the fate of human nature.[384] As Kant writes in §83, the "natural predispositions" of the human being brings about "plagues that he invents for himself," like oppression and war, such that the human being appears to work toward the "destruction of his own species."[385] Indeed, the human being is "the titular lord of nature" only insofar as he makes himself aware of his unique capability to set an end that can be "sufficient for itself independently of nature."[386] Nature cannot force the human being to come to the "understanding and will" necessary to posit moral ends. This would not only undermine the moral agency of the human being but would fail to provide an end sufficiently independent of nature. What nature can do, Kant argues, is push human beings toward the condition in which the rational capacity of the human reaches the point where it is mature enough to set moral ends. Only the production of "culture" [*Kultur*] can be understood to be the end that the purposiveness of nature brings about.

Developing his earlier account of "unsocial sociability," Kant provides in §83 a picture of human history that shows human vice to be for the sake of the production of culture. All along, nature has been promoting the necessary conditions for a genuinely moral culture through which humanity will strive toward its final end. Here, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of culture that nature seeks to promote: the "culture of

[383] *CPJ* 5:443.
[384] See *CBHH* 8:120-8:121.
[385] *CPJ* 5:430.
[386] *CPJ* 5:430.

skill" [*Geschicklichkeit*] and the "culture of training (discipline)" [*Kultur der Zucht (Disziplin)*]. The former is positive culture insofar as it consists of social or political practices that increase our "aptitude for the promotion of ends in general."[387] It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a moral culture, since it cannot promote "the will in the determination and choice of its ends."[388] The culture of skill provides humanity with means by which it can achieve its ends but does not enhance our capacity to determine the will toward moral purposes. The culture of discipline "consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires" that is inherent in our natural animalistic instinct and exacerbated by the tendency to luxury found in the culture of skill.[389] It refers to activities by which we can overcome the temptations of our sensibility and our inherently self-interested unsociability while becoming more receptive to our moral reason.

From the teleological perspective, the culture of skill serves as a justification of social ills such as inequality, ambition, greed, and war. From these social ills arises an inequality and class antagonism that, in the end, helps bring forth nature's purpose—civil society. The majority of people provide "the necessities of life" for the few who use their leisure to "cultivate the less necessary elements of culture, science and art." The culture of the elites tends to grow and be taken on by larger parts of the democratic class. The spread of this culture implies, for Kant, the spread of luxury [*Luxus*] (i.e., "when the tendency to what is dispensable begins to destroy what is indispensable") and "calamities grow equally great on both sides." The many are kept down with violence and force,

[387] *CPJ* 5:431.
[388] *CPJ* 5:431.
[389] *CPJ* 5:432.

while the few become infected with a "dissatisfaction from within."[390] This "splendid misery" [*glänzende Elend*], Kant asserts, is necessarily tied up with the natural predisposition of the human race. The inequality in the state of luxury, harmful to both the many and the few, ends in a compromise where "the abuse of reciprocally conflicting freedom is opposed by a lawful power in a whole."[391] The many and the few receive the guarantee of state protection from their antagonists and become able to meet one another peacefully, if contentiously, in the sphere of civil society. We are encouraged to see the origin of civil society and the liberal republican state, in which individual rights are protected, as the result of the mechanism of nature. Only such a civil society is appropriate for the "greatest development of the natural predispositions."[392]

Civil society, in turn, needs a "cosmopolitan whole, i.e., a system of all states that are at risk of detrimentally affecting each other," for its maintenance, since otherwise, an external antagonism that threatens its existence faces each state."[393] However, the threat of war and even war itself might, like the internal class antagonism, be a form of misery that supports a greater end by encouraging states to enter into lawful relations. This stage of human history, however, has not been reached, and Kant gives us some reason to hope that nature is guiding us toward a lawfulness that coexists with the "freedom of the states."[394]

While the civil and cosmopolitan conditions are necessary components of the culture of skill, they alone do not constitute the entire end of nature. Where in the earlier

[390] *CPJ* 5:432.
[391] *CPJ* 5:432.
[392] *CPJ* 5:432.
[393] *CPJ* 5:432.
[394] It is a muted hope since Kant claims that "the hope for a peaceful state of happiness among nations recedes ever further" (*CPJ* 5:433). What we can hope for is the conditions for future peace, namely, a lawfulness together with a freedom of the states.

writings on history Kant focuses primarily on political development, there is an added emphasis in the *CPJ* on culture. Luxury returns later in the account given in §83, not as a driver of political inequality but as a symptom of a sick society that at the same time is indicative of the moral potential inherent in human nature. There is, Kant asserts, "no denying the preponderance of evil showered upon us by the refinement of taste" and by "indulgence in the sciences as nourishment for vanity."[395] And yet, these ills points to nature's effort at "an education [*Ausbildung*] to make us receptive to higher ends than nature itself can afford."[396] Nature indulges us with sensible pleasures that at the same time make us receptive to our higher calling. Judgments of taste, as both disinterested and lawful, prepare us to make moral judgments that must abstract from the inclination of sensibility. This is one sense in which "beauty is a symbol of the morally good."[397] The "beautiful arts and sciences" provide, then, a "universally communicable pleasure and an elegance" that do not make human beings better but instead prepares them for that "sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power" by reducing the "tyranny of sensible tendencies."[398] In this way, the mere existence of our capacity to experience beauty attests to nature's beneficence toward the human being and its educative role in promoting his final end.

Indeed, the allure of beauty points to the way in which the luxury of modern civilization might be corrected. A greater appreciation for the beauty of nature that avoids the idealization of beauty present in indulgent taste might better discipline human beings so they become receptive to the moral law. Much stands in the way of "the education for

[395] *CPJ* 5:433.
[396] *CPJ* 5:433.
[397] *CPJ* §59.
[398] *CPJ* 5:433.

our higher vocation" [*der Ausbildung zu unserer höheren Bestimmung*], but a vibrant and healthy aesthetic culture can be understood as a way in which humanity can work with nature in the promotion of their final end. This thesis sheds light on Kant's project in the third *Critique* as a whole. Through the promotion of the proper appreciation of beautiful things, Kant can contribute to the continuation of nature's education of discipline, whereby the human being becomes open to the final end that justifies nature.

5.5 Nature's Education: The Purposiveness of Aesthetics

The final paragraph of §83 encourages us to reconsider Kant's aesthetics *in light* of the purposiveness of teleology presented in the CTPJ. Similarly, it raises the possibility that the experiences of the beautiful and the sublime, like that of admiration, may play an important part in Kant's response to the Spinozism presented by Jacobi. Such experiences are, for Kant, reasons to suppose nature's purposiveness because they indicate the role of nature's education of human sensibility. It is not enough that we happen to notice that nature can be judged to be purposive; the significance of *feeling* that things might be arranged for our sake, a feeling best prompted by beauty, not only encourages further reflection on the whole but, like the feeling of freedom, makes us aware that there is more to the world than we can comprehend. Such reflections on the mere existence of beauty bring us to be grateful for the beneficence of nature.

> We may consider it as a favor [*Gunst*] that nature has done for us that in addition to usefulness it has so richly distributed beauty and charms, and we can love [*lieben*] it on that account, just as we regard it with respect [*Achtung*] because of its immeasurability [*Unermeßlichkeit*], and we can feel ourselves to be ennobled in this contemplation [*uns selbst in dieser Betrachtung veredelt fühlen*]—just *as if*

> nature had erected and decorated its magnificent stage precisely with this intention.[399]

Self-reflection on the experience of the beautiful leads us to the reflective admiration of the grounds, and possible intention, of nature. It raises the possibility that nature has arranged things for our sake and encourages the contemplation of nature in a spirit of gratitude. Beauty is a favor, unasked for and freely given, that highlights the rationality of the "as if" supposition of nature's purposiveness. It is not my aim to tackle Kant's discussion of judgments of taste in detail but to point to the experience of beauty only insofar as it illuminates Kant's view on the relation between the human being and the apparent purposiveness of nature. Not only does beauty serve as an essential component in nature's education of humanity, but the seeming intention behind nature to adorn itself for our sake allows us to "love" nature. While Kant's project largely endorses the modern scientific pursuit of the mastery over nature, the third *Critique* carves out a space for love, admiration, and even piety in what would otherwise seem to be a cold and indifferent conception of nature.

Of course, beauty alone does not make up the entirety of Kant's aesthetic theory. Beauty reflects the harmony within the human faculties of cognition, the parts of nature, and nature as a system, while the sublime points to the human being's role as the end of nature, as that "ennobled" part of nature that transcends nature. Hence, confronted with the immeasurability of nature, we approach nature not just in a disposition of admiration but one of reverence. That is, the immeasurability of nature along with the impression that we are, for some reason, favored by nature gives rise not only to our respect [*Achtung*] of nature but to our own ennoblement in the awareness of the transcendence of

[399] *CPJ* 5:380. My emphasis.

our moral vocation. Even the experience of the sublime can be understood as a part of nature's education, although it is not, like beauty, dependent on the feeling of purposiveness.

The experience of the sublime points to the moral vocation and its transcendence of the system of nature—of those "higher ends than nature itself can afford."[400] The sublime appears at first as an almost painful experience as it seems to confront the imagination with its own limits, violently stretching its power.[401] During the experience of the sublime, Kant writes that "the imagination reaches its maximum and, in the effort to extend it, sinks back into itself, but is thereby transported into an emotionally moving satisfaction."[402] It is the overwhelming power of nature, in the case of the dynamical sublime, or the incomprehensibility of the infinite, in the case of the mathematical sublime, that at first seems to be the cause of this violence.[403] Yet one realizes that it is reason that compels the imagination to stretch itself in an attempt to unite the natural sensible world under one idea, into a whole or complete system.[404] In the search for such an idea, the imagination strains itself to comprehend something supersensible (the grounds *or* end of nature) and reason forces it to realize that its power is inadequate "for

[400] There is an important connection between the experience of sublimity and respect for the moral law (*CPJ* 5:262-5:263). Further, Kant claims that the sublime best represents the moral law (*CPJ* 5:271).
[401] The most notable classical example of the sublime is Lucretius' description of witnessing a shipwreck from a safe distance (*On the Nature of Things* Book Two, 1-19). The pleasure for Lucretius, however, comes from the calculation that "it is sweet to observe those evils which you lack yourself." This, of course, stands in stark contrast to Kant's claim that the pleasure stems from the respect for our moral vocation. Kant agrees with Lucretius on the point that one must be at a safe distance from the object of sublimity. If one is in danger, then fear overpowers aesthetic appreciation.
[402] *CPJ*, 5:252.
[403] The Swiss Alps that the Herr de Saussure describes (see §29) would be an example of the dynamical sublime. The infinity of the universe contemplated by modern man would be an example of the mathematical sublime.
[404] *CPJ* 5:256.

the attainment of an idea."[405] This feeling of inadequacy fosters a respect for the ideas of reason that are "laws for us."[406]

Through the "violence" done to the imagination, the incomparable significance of the laws of reason reveals itself. It makes the spectator feel the part of nature that cannot be subsumed under the one idea that would otherwise bring the natural sensible world under a unified cognition. Human freedom—whether in its theoretical or practical legislation—cannot be captured by the imagination's violent stretching toward the contemplation of the whole. Nature's overwhelming power or magnitude reveals the human being to be the part of nature that understands nature as a systematic whole and justifies it in the autonomous setting of ends. This experience of the sublime makes the superiority of the human being over nature *felt*. As Kant writes, "the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation…which as it were makes intuitable the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility."[407] In short, the sublime makes us feel the force of our final end that completes the system of nature. The experience of the sublimity of nature proves to buttress the assertion of the rationality of the purposiveness of human history.

Like the dialectic between humility and pride that characterizes so much of Kant's conception of the human being, the complementary feelings of the beauty and the sublime point to the twofold way we relate to nature as the part of nature that transcends nature. It is nature's beauty and sublimity that make us receptive to the possibility that its

---

[405] *CPJ* 5:257.
[406] *CPJ* 5:257. As Robert Clewis points out, the "laws of reason" that the sublime leads us to respect need not be the moral laws of practical reason. The mathematical sublime, for example, helps us respect "the demand that every appearance that can be given to us be comprehended in an intuition of the whole" (Clewis 2009, 73). The dynamical sublime and what Clewis calls the moral sublime lead to our respect of the moral vocation. On this point, also see Guyer 2005, 293 n.18.
[407] *CPJ* 5:257.

apparent purposiveness holds special meaning for humanity's place in creation. Such experiences are, moreover, crucial in Kant's arguments against Spinozism and the cosmology implied in the scientific method. These experiences serve as a potent reminder of the partiality of any account of the whole that does not account for human freedom and human reflection. At the same time, beauty and the sublime play educative functions in the political progress described in Kant's account of history. Beauty loosens the yoke of sensibility by preparing us to make moral judgments, while the sublime ennobles us by making us aware of the final end beyond nature that justifies nature as a system. The purposiveness of Kant's aesthetics might provide a further clue to what he intends to achieve with his new presentation of history in the midst of speculations on what seem to be biological and ecological concerns. It suggests that we ought to consider the account of purposiveness from the perspective of aesthetics.

5.6 Kant's Education: History and the Art of Communication

Where the admiration for the purposiveness of nature felt in the wonders of mathematics and biology might be accessible only by a few (like the transcendental philosopher) beauty is common to all who have judgment and the sublime is available to any who hears the call of the moral law. Our experience of the beautiful and the sublime can foster the reflective admiration characteristic of the transcendental philosopher and, thereby, render a form of philosophical wonder toward the purposiveness of nature available to all. This democratizing of philosophic wonder may require, however, the propaedeutic work of a philosophical communicator, the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, who has already been compelled to think through the grounds of nature and freedom through his

examination of his own admiration. Working in such a spirit, Kant attempts with his representation of human history to weave hope from these peculiar experiences of nature.

While the development of culture is evidently understood from the perspective of teleological judgment, there is also an *aesthetic* dimension to the presentation of history. In light of the account of the culture of discipline and beauty's role in the education of humanity, it appears that Kant is engaged in his own pedagogical project. The idea of the purposiveness of history itself encourages the discipline of one's sensible inclinations necessary for the moral project. Kant's account of history in §83 is an attempt, then, to change our way of thinking and make the human conscious of its place in nature and history. The account of the history of culture has aesthetic resonances that point to the sublimity of humanity's moral vocation.

The sublimity of human history emerges most forcefully in the final lines of §83; however, something like the awe necessary for the experience of the sublime can be seen throughout the section. In presenting the history of the awful actions of human beings, Kant, at the same time, shows us the immense alchemical power of nature insofar as good is wrought from evil. Much of the evil or the "ill [*Übel*] that is visited upon us" finds its source not in natural disasters (like the Lisbon earthquake) but in human selfishness. To describe the negative effects of innate human animality, Kant twice uses the word ill [*Übel*] rather than the word he will use for evil [*Böse*] just a few years later in his discussion of radical evil. This is in keeping with the natural or teleological perspective of the account of history presented here, as opposed to the moral or anthropological perspective of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. The ill of human selfishness is in some sense a product of nature, "visited upon us," and against which we

must contend and is not, in this account, deserving of its own separate category. It is nature, both external and internal, that the human struggles against throughout the development of morality.

A litany of evils is surely not enough to prove that Kant's account of the process of history is in itself sublime. However, in the last line of the section, Kant uses language reminiscent of the same feeling of exaltation. It is the ill and evil of history that "calls forth, strengthens, and steels the powers of the soul [*Seele*] not to be subjected to those, and allows us to *feel* [*fühlen*] an aptitude for higher ends, which lie hidden in us."[408] As the reader is faced with Kant's account of natural and human obstacles to the fulfillment of the moral vocation, there is at the same time an inkling of the dignity of our moral vocation that the sublime can bring about. Our sensible inclinations, presented as a tyrant over our reason, show the magnitude of the power of nature within us. Such a power, if not infinite, certainly appears greater than the powers of the human being, especially in the context of the accounts of ills presented in §83, a list to which one's own reflections on history can only add. It would seem that our moral hopes can only be dashed in the face of such an account of history. Yet the immensity—and even terror—at the power of the ill nature within us calls forth the dignity of moral striving in the face of such a power.[409]

Kant's account of human history, as a teleological account of the development of culture, is thus a beautiful representation of the sublime struggle contained in the human being's moral vocation. That this image is grounded in Kant's more theoretical

[408] *CPJ* 5:433-5:434. My emphasis.
[409] The sublimity of §83 appears to be closer to the dynamical sublime than the mathematical sublime, insofar as it is nature's power and not magnitude that appears to confront the human's moral striving. If Clewis is correct, however, it might indeed be one of the most prominent examples of the "moral sublime."

discussion of the use of teleological judgment for the purpose of advancing the sciences, highlights the extent to which Kant can be conceived here as the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* who, as we saw in Chapter 4, combines the self-awareness of the scientific mode of presentation with the honest beauty of poetry. Combining the language of a "fruitful imagination" in the representation of the purposiveness of the ills of history with a clear insight of facts insofar as the purposiveness of history is grounded in the peculiarities of human cognition, Kant's history offers an account of human unity that gives one reason to be hopeful. It provides an image of the Kantian human being itself—as the creature caught between two realms and engaged in a sublime struggle to be what it ought to be. Such an account of the human being is intended to help one recognize the moral struggle at the heart of human existence, to feel the unconditioned "higher end," and, Kant claims, find the sober hope that reason can indeed be sovereign over the nature within us.[410] This struggle toward the fulfillment of the moral law provides the species with a source of dignity that arises from the claim that we are somehow the final end of nature. The sublime recognition of human dignity, in turn, prepares the way for respect for the moral law (just as judgments of taste prepare the way for moral judgments).

When taught to see nature as purposive and ensured that this perspective of purposiveness is rational, the spectator of history becomes a pupil of and participant in the education of discipline. Accordingly, Kant's purposive account of history advances nature's education and, in this sense, Kant's presentation of history exemplifies the art of cosmopolitan communication: it provides an account of the human being's place in nature that is both rational and morally encouraging and, thereby, helps fend off the

[410] Kant's account of history is not, then, as many critics claim, "deterministic" (see Elisabeth Ellis 2008, Emil Fackenheim 1998). Instead, once made self-conscious about the development of history, progress as a moral struggle is always at stake and always a product of human freedom.

deleterious effects of the luxuries of modern civilization. Indeed, the sophisticate's love of beauty can be employed as a means to correct some of the worst tendencies of modern civilization. And by his own example, Kant shows how aesthetic feelings can be used to encourage our commitments to morality and our resolve to act. Moreover, as a kind of cosmological image, reinforced theoretically in the "as if" suppositions of purposive judgment, the comprehensive character of the idea of history has the merit of being able to address the cause of luxury at its root.

Confronted by this representation of the development of human history, a beautiful exhibition of the sublimity of human nature, the response may well be that of admiration. The feeling of the transcendental philosopher's admiration for nature can, through the work of Kant's poetic transformation, become widespread. The moral spectator of history can learn to admire the purposiveness of nature in its support of freedom. History understood in this way encourages the spectator to reflect on the human's place in the whole of things and even disposes one to approach step-motherly nature in a spirit of gratitude. Such gratitude is an antidote to the vulgar cynicism of the unreflective, but it is also an invitation to deeper philosophical thought for those seeking to understand the human being and his place in the nature of things. It opens up the prospect that there might be more things in heaven and earth than are contained within the limits of reason. There is, then, something like a rational piety or even an appreciation of the sacred encouraged by Kant's teleological view of nature that reveals a greater openness to the whole than what can be accounted for in the rationalistic understanding of Spinoza and his followers. Or, as Kant will later write in the *Anthropology* (1798), admiration is "a kind of sacred awe at seeing the abyss of the supersensible [*Abgrund des*

Übersinnlichen] opening before one's feet."[411] The spectator of history feels a "sacred awe" toward the utter mysteriousness of the grounds (or groundlessness) of nature, which at the same time encourages wonder and gratitude toward the fact that things happen to be arranged just so.

5.7 Conclusion: "As If" Politics

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* responds to both the theoretical and practical decadence that Kant sees in modern civilization by providing arguments for the rationality of faith and hope. As a result of the composition of our own cognition, Kant argues that we cannot help but approach nature *as if* it were organized for the sake of promoting the development of our freedom. Our free and moral action, in turn, justifies nature as a *system*, providing it with an end toward which it works. The purposiveness of nature, to be clear, is no more than a regulative principle of reflective judgment—a rational supposition or "as if." Despite the grandeur of viewing nature *as if* it were purposively supporting our moral ends, Kant's insistence on such a view's status as a regulative principle of reflective judgment adds a dose of sober skepticism to his historical concoction. Yet Kant insists that without the support of teleology, the "righteous man" who "reveres the law," faces a miserable and meaningless existence if he holds on to the purely mechanistic view of nature. If the human being can "believe themselves to be the final end of creation," a belief that is both rational and justified, then human life can be understood to be more than a contingent, accidental organization of matter in an otherwise purposeless universe.

[411] *Anth* 7:261.

Indeed, Kantian hope depends on his success transforming the disenchanted nature of mathematical physics into a fitting habitation for the human—in showing the nature of modernity to be worthy of admiration, love, and respect. Such a project can be understood as the establishment of a form of piety consistent with the mechanistic cosmology of the modern scientific method. Treating nature through the "as if" supposition certainly encourages practical action, as we are heartened by nature's apparent support of our freedom, but it also provides a more encompassing theoretical position. Purposiveness, of course, aids biological and natural understanding in its use as a regulative principle of reflective judgment, but it also provides us with an account of human unity and shows how human freedom can be thought to be a part of nature. It incorporates the part of nature that understands and transcends nature into an account of the whole. Such an account, to be sure, is not *knowledge* of the whole. It is, however, an image of the world that we can think through, if not to complete theoretical satisfaction, then in moments of contemplation where speculation and admiration operate in tandem to expand the horizon of thought.

Returning to the practical effects of the "as if" supposition, the hope in human unity—both that there is an underlying supersensible unity and that unity can be approached in this world through historical striving—is the essential anthropological claim supporting Kant's political thought. Kant's hopeful politics is driven by the tension within human nature that although the human may be the acquisitive animal, he is also the self-legislative animal. Hence, Kant's late liberal republicanism, which focuses on juridical rights and not moral duties, external and not internal freedom, separation of powers and not the enlightened benevolence of a wise despot, slow reform and not

revolution, is the mode of political order best suited for the human being's struggle to rule himself in accordance with the sovereignty of reason. It is also the regime that best combines the prideful aspirations of Kant's historical project with his sober awareness of human limitations. While ultimately encouraging the belief in our ability to make political progress, the presentation of history foregrounds the ills and evils to which we are all susceptible. Political stability requires a recognition of the precarious position of all human institutions.

Kantian anthropology recognizes that the lofty hopes for self-mastery and self-governance may need the support of the cosmological belief that the human being in his moral capacity is the final end of creation. In providing rational grounds for this belief, the presentation of history is an example of the cosmopolitan art of communication that provides the moral, if not cosmological, framework that would set the terms of civic discussion in modern liberal republics. To speak less precisely but not misleadingly, the idea of historical progress can be thought of as the foundational myth (one that is still rational) of the "culture of human reason."[412]

[412] *CPR* A851/B879. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 982b 18-20.

6.0 A Complaint as Old as History: Radical Evil and Kant's Transcendental Anthropology

Abstract:

At first glance, Kant's notion of an ineradicable and innate evil seems at odds with his optimistic ideas regarding historical progress. However, this chapter analyzes Kant's paradoxical presentation of radical evil in light of the principle of reflective judgment and the aesthetic categories found in the third *Critique*. It argues that radical evil and the idea of progress are complementary and together can be understood to be "symbolic" representations of Kant's transcendental anthropology. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how Kant's image of the human being supports his commitment to liberal republican government.

Nothing in heaven or earth is more important than the moment in which a man—any man—makes himself good or bad. And whenever a man makes such a decision, the universe, so to speak, holds its breath.

- Emil L. Fackenheim[413]

[413] Emil L. Fackenheim 1998, 33.

6.1 Introduction: The Scandal of Radical Evil

Just a few months after its publication in the spring of 1793, Goethe had already reached what was, in his mind, a damning judgment of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793; hereafter *Rel*). In a letter to Herder, Goethe proclaims:

> Kant required a long lifetime to purify his philosophical mantle of many impurities and prejudices. And now he has wantonly tainted it with the shameful stain of radical evil in order that Christians too might be attracted to kiss its hem.[414]

Even Friedrich Schiller, a thinker much more sympathetic to Kant and an advocate of the critical system, declared that he found Kant's notion that "the human heart has propensity to evil" to be "scandalous."[415] Both poets take issue with Kant's account of radical evil due to the impression that it introduces a pre-modern notion of Augustinian original sin, broadly speaking, into a philosophical system that was taken to be the greatest achievement of the German Enlightenment. Kant, in their view, was coming dangerously close to abandoning the principles of rational enlightenment and its support of moral dignity, political freedom, and the cherished idea of human perfectibility.

Kant, for his part, considered *Religion* to be a hopeful work, claiming in a letter to C.F. Stäudlin that it provides an answer to the third question of critical philosophy (what may I hope for?).[416] Yet at first glance, one cannot help wondering with Goethe and Schiller how the notion of an innate, universal, and ineradicable evil [*böse*] can be made consistent with Kant's idea of moral progress. Many of Kant's other contemporaries, however, saw the doctrine of radical evil as heretical and dangerous to the orthodoxies of the time. Making matters worse, these others were people wielding the power of the state.

[414] Letter from Goethe to Herder, June 7 1793, quoted in Fackenheim 1998.
[415] Letter from Schiller to Körner.
[416] Kant, Letter to C.F. Stäudlin, May 4, 1793 (*Corr*, 205).

Johann Christoph Wöllner, a member of the Rosicrucian Order and the minister of ecclesiastical affairs, accused Kant on behalf of Frederick II of impieties that reflect the Athenian charges against Socrates:

> Our most high person has long observed with great displeasure how you misuse your philosophy to distort and negatively evaluate many of the cardinal and basic teachings of the Holy Scripture and Christianity […] We expected better things of you as you yourself must realize, how irresponsibly you have acted against your duty as a teacher of the youth against our paternal purpose.[417]

While Kant was not charged and killed via hemlock, these troubles did stand in the way of his freedom to publish more works on religion. In any case, it can be said that in some sense, both Goethe and Wöllner agree on the point that Kant was working within Christianity to promote his own philosophical ends. Nor are they not entirely wrong about the idea that Kant wants, in Goethe's words, Christians to "kiss the hem" of his "philosophical mantle." Kant himself, in the same letter to Stäudlin, claimed that he wanted to present openly and "while concealing nothing" that a "possible union of Christianity with the purest practical reason is possible." The question of whether this entails a forsaking of enlightenment principles, or a heretical and dangerous undermining of Christianity, or something in between has surrounded discussion of Kant's *Religion* ever since the original scandal of the 1790s.[418]

---

[417] Letter from Wöllner to Kant, October 1, 1794, quoted from Kuehn 2001, 379.

[418] Many scholars, such as Allen Wood (2020) and Sharon Anderson-Gold (2001), indeed argue that radical evil is ultimately a hopeful doctrine. These scholars would agree, as well, that Kant is not "staining his philosopher's mantle" but rather rationalizing Christianity. On this point, see Wood 2020. Some scholars, like Joël Madore (2001) or Gordon Michalson (1990), take a more pessimistic approach and, while not claiming that radical evil makes way for Christian orthodoxy, they certainly present it as a challenge to the idea of progress. Michalson especially calls into question Kant's attempt to "rationalize religion" and argues that he is led to paradoxes that reason cannot solve. Some, like Emil Fackenheim, agree that Kant intends radical evil to be a hopeful account of human agency but wonders whether its ultimate dependence on historical progress undermines its supposed support of human freedom.

While I agree with the scholars who argue that radical evil is ultimately a *hopeful* doctrine consistent with his ideas regarding human progress, such hope is not without Kant's sober, if not ironically cynical, qualifications. Hope, for Kant, always contains a hint of dissatisfaction toward the fact that we are beings that need hope at all. If the moral law is enough incentive on its own, as Kant makes clear with the very first sentence of *Religion*, then why is it that "an end proceeds from morality" and that such an end "cannot possibly be a matter of indifference to reason?"[419] In other words, this question asks why hopefulness, as Kant argues, is constitutive of the human being.

The chapter argues that radical evil and the corresponding idea of historical progress provide a development of Kant's articulation of the fourth critical question (what is the human being?). With radical evil, Kant presents a poetic or symbolic image of the embodied rational being who must always project an end that he cannot attain—an image that portrays the human as the being who is not yet what he ought to be.[420] In sum, I argue that radical evil provides us not only with the conditions of hope, as other have discussed, but with an image of the human being as a necessarily hopeful and morally striving creature. However, the condition of such hope is the human being's incompleteness and the perennial dissatisfaction that accompanies the longing for wholeness.

Hence, radical evil provides a crucial piece of Kant's transcendental anthropology, but its importance to Kantian anthropology is best understood when *Religion* is read in

[419] That sentence reads: "So far as morality is based on the conception of the human being as one who is free but who also, just because of that, binds himself through his reason to unconditional laws, it is in need neither if the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other than the law itself" (*Rel* 6:5).

[420] The poets Schiller and Goethe ironically fail to attend, then, to the poetic and symbolic qualities of radical evil.

light of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790; hereafter *CPJ*). That is, the presentation of radical evil furthers Kant's aesthetic and cultural project discussed in previous chapters. After laying out the main features of Kant's paradoxical account of radical evil in section two, the chapter argues that radical evil is best understood as a principle of reflective judgment in section three.[421] Section four argues that this reflective judgment is represented with an aesthetic symbol and builds upon chapter three's discussion of Kant's role as a philosophical communicator. Section five discusses the relation between the pessimism of radical evil and Kant's hopeful cultural project. The chapter concludes with a short reflection on the relationship between Kant's transcendental anthropology and its role in supporting civic life.

6.2 The Paradox of Radical Evil

In addition to the theological and philosophical controversies surrounding Kant's introduction of radical evil into his moral philosophy, his presentation of it in Part One of *Religion* ("Concerning the indwelling of the evil principle alongside the good") has caused much confusion and scholarly debate. The source of this confusion is Kant's commitment to a doctrine of evil that understands a person's character as if they have performed an "intelligible deed" that can be seen as being both free and unfree. In the following sections, I will suggest that Kant's presentation of the root of evil is paradoxical because it is a reflective judgment (considered from the perspective of practical reason) and symbolically presents the mysterious grounds of human freedom.

[421] The order of composition of Kant's works makes reading *Religion* more plausible in light of the *CPJ*. Part One of *Religion*, written in 1791, was one of the first pieces composed after the publication of the third *Critique*. The only piece written between the two works was another theological piece, *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*. See Kuehn 2001, 361-366.

First, however, I will outline the presentation of radical evil itself.

It is important to clarify that radical evil is not limited to some grand satanic evil that arises only in the most perverse people or in apocalyptic circumstances. Rather, Kant notes that the claim that "the world lieth in evil" is "a complaint as old as history."[422] It is a form of immorality inherent in the condition of being human insofar as we are both rational—and thus capable of following the moral law—and sensible, and therefore bombarded by temptations. A person is evil when he subordinates the incentives of the moral law to other, non-moral incentives; or, when "he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it."[423] Or, to use the language of the second *Critique*, a person is evil when he subordinates the demands of duty to the desire for happiness.

The biblical notion of original sin is the traditional account of the ubiquity of human evil that Kant combats and modifies. There are striking similarities between the two accounts. Original sin is universal, innate (because it is inherited from our ancestors), and ineradicable (except with the grace of God). Kant claims that radical evil, too, is universal, innate, and ineradicable, but he rejects the traditional Christian arguments for these qualities. "The human being," Kant asserts, "must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil."[424] According to this principle, radical evil is inherent and universal because we all have chosen it, but also ineradicable. We must continually combat the evil principle while hoping for God's assistance—although it is unknowable on Kant's account whether or not this is necessary or whether or not we have been blessed with God's grace.

[422] *Rel* 6:19.
[423] *Rel* 6:32.
[424] *Rel* 6:44.

But why would Kant insist that radical evil is ineradicable when such a claim seems to undermine, as Goethe and Schiller suggest, his commitment to freedom? To begin to answer this question, it is important to see that the cause of this moral deviation is not as simple as falling into temptation (although that may be how we experience any particular act of immorality), but a corrupt tendency of thought. Kant argues that radical evil arises from a particular disposition or "mind's attitude" [*Gesinnung*] that "always, from [one's] youth on" influences one's particular actions and choices.[425] The disposition of one's way of thinking, in turn, is determined by one's "supreme maxim." One's supreme maxim can either be moral, in which case one's sensuous inclinations are subordinated to the moral law, or it can be evil, in which case the moral law is subordinated to the maxim of the satisfaction of our inclinations.

As the basis of one's *Gesinnung*, the supreme maxim always precedes all particular choices and actions. From this claim, Kant argues that the choice of our supreme maxim is different in kind from any particular choice we make in day-to-day life. No conscious action can change our disposition or our supreme maxim since the supreme maxim already determines any other instances of action. Yet freedom is a condition of morality, so according to Kant, we must be responsible for the choice of our supreme maxim. This leads Kant to suppose that each one of us makes a decisive and free choice that grounds and conditions all of our other choices. However, the *Gesinnung* is a supersensible characteristic that the individual has as a member of the human species; it shows that by one's maxim one "expresses at the same time the character of his species." The choice of one's supreme maxim, then, is represented as taking place at the very grounds of

[425] *Rel* 6:25. For a helpful discussion of the notion of *Gesinnung*, and its distinction from and relation to one's way of thinking [*Denkungsart*], see G. Felicitas Munzel 1999, especially 57-70.

subjectivity and, indeed, seems to occur in something like the noumenal realm since it is "not acquired in time." This decisive choice hides behind our conscious awareness and determines all of our particular, phenomenal choices

Kant represents the dual character of our morality with the language of the "deed" [*Tat*], of which there are two meanings. In the first and more fundamental meaning, a deed is the "formal ground of every deed;" when evil, it is analogous to *peccatum originarium* (original sin), and is an "intelligible deed, cognizable from reason alone apart from any temporal condition."[426] The intelligible deed determines the choice of our supreme maxim and thus determines the second kind of phenomenal deed, understood as "vice." This second deed, analogous to *peccatum derivativum*, is sensible, empirical, given in time, and "resists the law materially" (where the intelligible deed does so formally).[427] The intelligible deed accounts for the choice of our supreme maxim and thus our *Gesinnung* and character and, ultimately, the phenomenal deeds or any particular choices we make.

In this account of the intelligible deed, the paradoxes of radical evil come to the surface. Even though the choice of our supreme maxim is a free one, Kant insists that we all *necessarily* choose an evil maxim that subordinates the moral law to our individual inclinations. The propensity to radical evil is universal and necessary, even for the best of us, as it is "woven into human nature."[428] Kant even claims that there is an *a priori* formal proof that there "must be such a corrupt propensity [*Anlage*] rooted in the human being."[429] He spares us from such a proof, however, by pointing to the "multitude of

[426] *Rel* 6:31.
[427] *Rel* 6:31.
[428] *Rel* 6:30.
[429] *Rel* 6:32.

woeful examples that the experience of human *deeds* parades before us."[430] The fact of a "*radical* innate *evil* in human nature" cannot be inferred from the concept of the human being, because then this quality would be necessary and not a result of our freedom, and yet we must presuppose that it is "entwined with humanity itself, as it were, rooted in it."[431] We are responsible, in other words, for choosing that which is inherent and necessarily part of our nature as embodied rational beings.

The trouble of the intelligible deed is magnified when one applies its logic to our ability to be responsible for any *particular* choice. If our disposition is already always determined by our intelligible deed, then we cannot have acted otherwise when confronted with any particular choice or action. These actions are determined by an underlying choice that takes place outside of experience and of which we are never entirely conscious. On the other hand, freedom is a condition of morality, and such freedom must be assumed when one deals with any choice. Kant's claim that humans have the freedom to choose between good and evil on the level of the supreme maxim leads him to deny that they have the freedom to choose between moral and immoral on the level of conscious experience.

The difficulties of the account of radical evil do not stop with the intelligible deed but continue with Kant's insistence that we must constantly struggle against our inclinations for the sake of the moral vocation. Not only does radical evil "corrupt the ground of all maxims," but it is "not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims—something that could not take place if the subjective

[430] *Rel* 6:32-6:33. Kant's emphasis.
[431] *Rel* 6:32.

supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted."[432] However, Kant notes that it must "be possible to overcome [*überwiegen*] this evil, for it is found in the human being acting freely."[433] By locating the source of radical evil in our freedom, Kant hopes to provide us with the hope that we can overcome it through our own moral action. This overcoming of the evil maxim requires "a *revolution* in the disposition of the human being" such that "a 'new man' can come about only through a kind of rebirth."[434] Kant presents the possibility of a conversion moment in which one engages in an act of self-transformation and self-making. Yet no particular choice, already determined by our comportment of mind, can cause the "revolution in the heart" necessary for the change in our supreme maxim. Accordingly, our hope of overcoming radical evil is rooted in a belief that God will grant us grace if we only make ourselves worthy of it and "pleasing to God" by striving to act virtuously. But it remains a question of how we enact this inner revolution when we have always already chosen evil. Nor can we know if we have achieved a revolution of the heart, and thus we continue to view moral life in terms of a struggle. Even the good human being is always "exposed to the assaults of the evil principle."[435]

In sum, radical evil is inextirpable, but it must be possible to overcome it; it is inherent in human nature, yet it is brought upon ourselves since, as a natural propensity, it "*may* be represented as not being such: it can rather be thought of (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if evil) as *brought* by the human being upon himself."[436] Radical evil cannot be overcome by our effort alone and yet we must hope to begin to overcome it by our

[432] *Rel* 6:37.
[433] *Rel* 6:37.
[434] *Rel* 6:47.
[435] *Rel* 6:93.
[436] *Rel* 6:29. Kant's emphasis.

own virtue. We are responsible for our character through an intelligible deed that determines all particular actions, yet we are responsible for any single choice.

Many bookshelves would buckle under the weight of the various commentaries trying to resolve the *aporia* present in radical evil. Most do so by underemphasizing one of its essential characteristics, like its necessity, universality, or its character of being ineradicable. It seems to me that the paradoxical presentation of radical evil is intentional. It reflects the mystery of the origin of human freedom and the paradox of the human being understood as the finite rational being. The problem of thinking through the human as subject—and its status as a subject that is also an object—is already expressed by Kant in the first *Critique*, most directly in his discussion of the transcendental unity of apperception. There the unifying "transcendental ego," which underlies the understanding's legislation of nature, always eludes our ability to grasp it, just as evil—as an act of intelligible freedom—hides behind reason as "an invisible enemy."[437] Radical evil expresses the inscrutable mystery of rationality and freedom and its embodiment in a being that feels other pulls. As Kant expresses it, reason's ability to become "master over all the inclinations striking against it through the mere idea of law is absolutely inexplicable; hence it is also incomprehensible how the senses could have the ability to become master over a reason which commands with such authority."[438]

The paradox of radical evil points to the limits of determinate cognition and any attempt to make a comprehensible concept of the human being from the partial perspective of either freedom or nature. As I will argue below, the intelligible deed at the heart of radical evil cannot be represented nor cognized through rational concepts alone.

[437] *Rel* 6:57. See *CPR* A127-A128.
[438] *Rel* 6:59n.

Still, it might be thought through as a regulative principle that makes use of reflective and not determinate judgment and therefore need not rely on a determinant concept. The paradoxical representation of radical evil leads one to consider the possibility of a non-conceptual and symbolic understanding of evil and, ultimately, the human being.

6.3 Radical Evil and Reflective Judgment

As we have seen, Kant has various dichotomies with which to express this division inherent to human existence—such as freedom and nature, subject and object, phenomena and noumena, understanding and reason, theory and practice, *Tiermensch* (animal human being) and *moralischer Mensch* (moral human being).[439] Because of the human being's peculiar status as an embodied and finite rational being, he exists within the tension of two valid yet mutually exclusive perspectives. Bringing together these two perspectives under a third determinate concept is, for Kant, an impossible task.

In order to think through the unity of the human being, Kant has recourse to reflective judgment. We have seen in the previous chapter that Kant turns to teleological and biological ideas to support the rational supposition that the human being—or the separate domains of freedom and nature—are unified in the supersensible substrate. Postulating the supersensible substrate grounds the hope that the human being's struggle for unity through the progressive developments of history is possible. While Kant gives us grounds to hope for progress, the division that progress seeks to overcome remains embedded within each individual. In this account of progress, our confrontation with the sensuous or

[439] It should be noted that these divisions overlap but do not simply correspond. Each of these dialectical pairs offers insight into the division of the human being seen from different perspectives.

self-interested impulses within us stands as an obstacle to Kant's more optimistic articulations of progress and human wholeness. And yet even equipped with the best rationalizations of our immoral actions, Kant would suggest that the demand of the moral law continues to make itself felt.

The paradoxical presentation of radical evil not only points to the problem of how to think about the human being as a whole but reveals the obscurity of our moral motivations. Such motivations are obscure in part because we cannot fathom the grounds of our freedom. Yet we know the reality of freedom as a condition of the moral law without having cognition or "insight" [*einzusehen*] into the speculative or theoretical status of freedom.[440] It is this thing, freedom, with obscure origins that makes the greatest demands on us and serves to guide us in what Kant insists is the "entire vocation of human beings," namely to strive toward the highest good where happiness is distributed in exact proportion to our worthiness to be happy (morality). As an idea of reason, the highest good does not rest on any "empirical principles," but instead it is "*a priori* (morally necessary) *to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will*."[441] Reason demands that the human species works to make progress toward the highest good.

This demand that we strive to produce the highest good in this world is opposed by the limitations of our finitude. Radical evil is a reflection on those things that confront the human being's efforts to actualize reason's demands. As early as *Idea* (1784), Kant stresses the limitations of human nature. In that work, the unsocial and immoral characteristics of humanity are viewed purposively and understood to contribute unconsciously to the development of the species. Contrary to this view, Kant insists in

[440] *CPrR*, 5:4.
[441] *CPrR*, 5:113. Kant's emphasis. See the account of the highest good in Chapter 2, 25-31.

Part Three of *Religion* that human beings "mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil" by virtue of simply being in each other's presence.[442] Radical evil, then, is a perennial and constant threat that does not contribute incidentally to moral progress. It is a tendency within human nature that we must struggle against to fulfill the demands of practical reason.

Much like the way Kant begins the first *Critique* with the experience of the "peculiar fate" of human reason and from that experience thinks through the conditions of the possibility of the being that experiences unrequited metaphysical longing, Kant's investigative strategy in *Religion* begins with the human experience of moral life as one of a constant struggle against evil. It seeks to provide an account of the conditions of such a moral experience. That the presence of evil is a "complaint as old as history" attests to the fact that people have always struggled to be good. More to the point, Kant begins the work with a statement of this struggle, made from the limited perspective of morality. From this perspective, the human being needs no other incentive than the "law itself" and it is "the human being's own fault if such a need is found in him."[443] The human being struggles to be moral on the basis of the incentives inherent on the moral law alone and seeks, in addition, ends beyond the law.

Accordingly, I suggest that Kant's doctrine of radical evil serves as an account of the conditions of the possibility of human moral experience. As such, it plays an important role in the development of Kant's transcendental anthropology. Where the *CPR* explains the experience of the *metaphysica naturalis* by analyzing human cognition and making the distinction between sensibility, understanding, and reason, *Religion* provides

[442] *Rel* 6:93.
[443] *Rel* 6:4.

a *reflective* account of the human being as a whole such that it can explain the human experience of moral striving. In other words, I follow those who suggest that radical evil is a regulative principle of reflective judgment that Kant makes to think through our experience as subjective ethical agents.[444] Hence, the claim is not that each person is radically evil, and this is consistent with the fact that we cannot know the grounds of free action or experience the atemporality of the intelligible deed, but that we must approach each individual person *as if* he or she has chosen an evil supreme maxim.

Throughout *Religion*, Kant points to the connection between this work and his development of reflective judgment in the third *Critique*. One example is his use of the word "radical." Kant derives the word 'radical' from the Latin *radix,* meaning root, and reiterates in an important footnote our inability to make "comprehensible" without analogy (and therefore the schematism of reflective judgment) the purposiveness of organic life.[445] Such a connection, of course, can be considered as no more than a clue indicating Kant's use of reflective judgment. A better indication of Kant's appeal to reflective judgment is his claim that,

> If in the inscrutable field of the supernatural there is something more than [reason] can bring to the understanding, which may however be necessary to make up for its moral impotence, reason even counts on this something being made available to the good will even if

[444] Here, I follow Samuel A. Stoner and Paul T. Wilford 2021, who argue that the supreme maxim grounding all particular choices is a reflective judgment that provides a "transcendental" argument for moral struggle; I build in this interpretation in my greater emphasis on the intelligible deed and my argument for radical evil as aesthetic symbol below; Allen Wood 2020, 4-9 especially, reads radical evil symbolically and so in light of the aesthetic categories of the *CPJ*. This reading implies that radical evil is something like a reflective judgment since he downplays the possibility of a formal proof and emphasizes the claim that it aids morality but is not necessary for it. See also Ryan S. Kemp 2011, who also reads radical evil as "an anthropological notion" posited by reflective judgment, and Joël Madore 2011, who considers this possibility but ultimately rejects it because he claims this reading would mean that ideas are postulating the existence of evil when, he argues, that already evil exists prior to any such postulation. I differ in that I read evil as a postulation of judgment that helps us understand a prior experience, namely moral strife.

[445] *Rel* 6:65n.

> uncognized, with a faith which we might call *reflective*, since the *dogmatic* faith which announces itself to be a *knowledge* appears to reason dishonest.[446]

Since the human being is confronted with obstacles to his obedience to the moral law, and with reason being "conscious of its impotence to satisfy its moral needs," one is permitted to make use of a "reflective faith" to postulate a regulative principle that makes up for reason's moral impotence while remaining within the strictures of the critical system. The permission given by reason to appeal to reflective faith is due, in part, to the temptation in reason to "extend itself to extravagant ideas which might make up for [its impotence], though it is not suited to this enlarged domain."[447] Where reason reaches the bounds of its cognition and "touches upon transcendent questions," and yet still finds itself in need of certain moral supports, it is permitted to posit a reflective principle that helps us think through those concepts that cannot be cognized.[448]

Radical evil interpreted as a regulative principle of reflective judgment accounts for its universality, necessity, and ineradicablity.[449] We proceed *as if* this is a necessary trait of the human being (and as if there *is* a formal proof that Kant claims to have but does not provide), and this supposition guides us in our attempt to make sense of our moral recalcitrance. That it is a supposition of this sort is further confirmed by Kant's assertion that radical evil has not yet been proven.[450] Indeed, without this judgment, it would be difficult to answer Kant's opening question in the first preface—namely, why do human beings need purposes? (Or, why do we need religion at all?) Noting what

[446] *Rel* 6:52. Kant's emphasis.
[447] *Rel* 6:52.
[448] *Rel* 6:52.
[449] See Stoner and Wilford 2021 for the argument that because radical evil is a regulative principle, its universality, necessity, and ineradicablity is not at odds with human freedom.
[450] *Rel* 6:25.

seems to be an empirical anthropological observation, Kant claims that a good human being is only made good through "incessant laboring and becoming."[451] Further, by positing not only its universality and necessity but also its ineradicablity, radical evil explains why even after what would seem to be a moment of radical self-transformation, moral life is a continual battle against self-interested and sensuous impulses.

In short, radical evil as reflective judgment helps us think through the condition of being a creature that determines its own end and the precariousness of such self-determination. More directly than the account of the progress of history, which is always oriented toward the unification of freedom and nature at the end of history, radical evil forces us to confront the human being as he is now—as an incomplete being in need of direction. Nevertheless, radical evil gestures toward the tenuous unity of contingency and necessity that we already happen to be, even if it cannot be articulated theoretically or by use of determinate concepts. Radical evil is an expression of the paradox that is already contained in the formulation of the human as the finite rational being.

6.4 Radical Evil and Kant's Philosophical Communication

In thinking through the plausibility of the claim that radical evil, as posited by reflective judgment, represents the conditions of the possibility of the human being and his moral striving, it is helpful to recall our earlier analysis of Kant's mode of communication as presented in the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Taste." The content of radical evil, I suggest, cannot be separated from its form of expression. Making use of that analysis, I will highlight three ways in which the presentation of radical evil is an example of Kant's mode of reflective philosophical communication:

[451] *Rel* 6:48.

1. Radical evil can be understood as a symbol.
2. Religion follows a process similar to "succession" [*Nachfolge*] in which traditional symbols become modified.
3. Radical evil and *Religion* as a whole provide an example of "reciprocal communication" by which Kant hopes to promulgate the values underlying his hopes for a cosmopolitan culture of reason.

By examining how radical evil is a kind of aesthetic image or symbol that communicates Kant's anthropology, the political consequences of *Religion*, and its reflective faith, come to light.

6.4.1 Intelligible Deed as Symbol

We will consider radical evil as the central example of Kant's reinterpretation of historical Christianity, although *Religion* reworks many other Christian notions such as grace, providence, miracles, Heaven and Hell, and the Church. These other notions follow from the anthropological assumptions inherent in radical evil, just as many of these doctrines in the various Christian traditions follow from the anthropological assumptions inherent in original sin. Radical evil, as a regulative principle of reflective judgment, is represented symbolically and aesthetically. As a symbol, radical evil can be said to provide moral content and help us in "schematizing" a supersensible idea. There is already some precedence in the scholarship for reading *Religion* symbolically.[452] Radical evil understood as an aesthetic idea presents us with an image of the human being's unity, allowing us to reflect on the peculiarity of finite rationality.

All concepts need a corresponding intuition for their "reality" to be demonstrated or felt. he pure concepts of the understanding—the categories which order our experience of the world—can be schematized because they are provided with "a corresponding

[452] See Wood 2020, 117-124. However, he does not provide a detailed reading of radical evil as a symbol but instead applies this framework to Kant's later discussion of "the son of God." See also Velkley 2014.

intuition given *a priori*.""[453] The understanding works in concert with the sensibility to make its categories concrete, intuitable, and real. On the other hand, the concepts of reason can be provided with no sensible intuition. Here, the "power of judgment" operates in a way analogous to the schematism of the understanding and provides, through the means of a symbol, "the form of reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept [of reason]."[454] A symbol provides an analogy, using ready at hand empirical intuitions, to represent an idea of reason. In this process, judgment performs "a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule for reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object."[455] The symbol provides only a formal rule that guides our reflection.[456]

For Kant, symbols are indispensable for philosophical thinking. Language is full of symbols, like ground, depend, flow, and substance, that transpose "the reflection on one object of intuition to another quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond."[457] Aesthetic ideas, like symbols, encourage reflection on ideas of reason that are otherwise out of our grasp by giving "the imagination impetus to think more, although in an undeveloped way, than can be comprehended in a concept,

[453] *CPJ* 5:351.
[454] *CPJ* 5:351.
[455] *CPJ* 352.
[456] Kant's example of a symbol is helpful here. He writes: "Thus a monarchical state is represented by a body with a soul if it is ruled in accordance with laws internal to the people, but by a mere machine (like a handmill) if it is ruled by a single absolute will, but in both cases, it is represented only **symbolically**. For between a despotic state and a handmill, there is, of course, no similarity, but there is one between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality" (*CPJ* 352.). Body with soul or handmill, if well chosen, provide us with the proper means of making concrete what are otherwise abstract concepts.
[457] *CPJ*, 5:352-5:353. As this list indicates, these symbols need not be aesthetic, by which I mean beautiful and pleasing, to fulfill their function of making supersensible ideas sensible. For example, in *Religion,* Kant refers to the need to make organisms intelligible through the supposition of an intelligent artificer of nature. As a regulative principle of reflective judgment, it is not clear that the symbol of the artificer serves an aesthetic function.

and hence in a determinate linguistic expression."[458] They are, Kant claims, the "pendant" or sensible counterpart of ideas of reason since they are inexhaustible just as the ideas of reason are indeterminable by ordinary cognition. Aesthetic ideas are, Kant makes clear, products of genius, and yet their ability to represent supersensible ideas makes them useful for thinking about the ways in which radical evil represents a supersensible idea sensibly.

As a symbol, radical evil depends to some extent on the inherited tradition surrounding original sin and the attempt to understand the story of Adam and Eve symbolically. But this reinterpretation occurs only once Kant establishes the symbol at the heart of radical evil, namely, the intelligible deed. Turning to the practically significant word "deed," Kant provides a formal rule for reflection that guides our thinking about our responsibility for the fact that moral life is a constant struggle. We are responsible for this struggle because we are bound to follow the categorical imperative and, even for beings in our sensible condition, ought implies can. Nevertheless, our self-interested motivations and sensuous nature keep us from simply following the moral law. But, as the free and responsible being, the human "must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is." As an end-setting and self-making being, the human is responsible for the conditions of his existence even as these conditions are given to him through an act of creation or due to mere contingency. Radical evil provides a way of thinking through how the human can be responsible for the conditions that make his moral experience one of struggle by transposing the concept of a deed (an action for which we are responsible) to the noumenal realm that grounds our subjective experience. It provokes the imagination to think through, but not cognize, the conditions of subjective moral

[458] *CPJ* 5:315.

experience, which depends on our status as a composite being somehow conceived in terms of both freedom and necessity.

In sum, the intelligible deed describes our responsibility for something that must at the same time remain mysterious, namely our constitution as contingent yet necessary beings. The intelligible deed serves as an aesthetic schematism of the indeterminate concept "human being." As something simultaneously inextirpable and able to be overcome, as something atemporal and yet sensible, the duality of the moral deed helps us think through on the level of reflective judgment the paradoxes present in human autonomy. This symbolic presentation of the root of moral evil encourages, then, a reflection on the possible unity of the human being that mirrors, even as it complicates, the admiration of nature's purposiveness presented in the third *Critique*.

6.4.2 *Radical Evil and Inherited Tradition*

The reflective faith's use of inherited Christian symbols recalls Kant's discussion of the genius's relation to the tradition. We are reminded that the genius operates through a process of succession [*Nachfolge*] by which he inherits the tradition while transforming it. This process is necessary for the transference of artistic culture since there are no technical or scientific rules by which one can learn to become a genius, which is always endowed with something intangible and unteachable. Accordingly, the genius learns from great works of art from the past through a process of "emulation," as opposed to mere imitation, and by reconfiguring the materials of an inherited tradition creates a "new rule" or standard of judgment.

While Kant cannot be said to be following the process of succession, since his status as a genius is at best ambiguous, the notion provides insight into the way he

modifies and reinterprets inherited religious symbols to communicate his moral anthropology. To be sure, such a process accords with the stated aim of *Religion* to explore the hypothesis of whether there is "unity" between "reason and Scripture."[459] Accordingly, Kant claims to start from "some alleged revelation and abstracting from the pure religion of reason to hold fragments of this revelation up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to some pure *rational system* of religion."[460] In this same passage, Kant uses the image of two concentric circles to represent the relationship between revealed or historical religion and philosophy. The wider circle represents revealed religion, while the narrower circle represents the limits of the critical philosopher. The core of historical religion has at its heart the pure and moral teaching of the "religion of reason," but only when the inherited images are interpreted in light of the postulates of practical reason. This image serves as Kant's interpretive guide as he transforms scriptural images into symbolic representations of the autonomous human being.

It is helpful to compare Kant's use of religious symbols to his description of Greek and Roman philosophers who interpreted their pagan religions for the sake of morally beneficial doctrines. Kant writes,

> They knew in the end how to interpret even the coarsest polytheism as just a symbolic representation of the properties of the one divine being; and to invest all sorts of depraved actions, and even the wild yet beautiful fancies of their poets, with a mystical meaning that brought popular faith (which it would never have been advisable to destroy, for the result might perhaps have been an atheism even more dangerous to the state) close to a moral doctrine intelligible to all human beings.[461]

[459] *Rel* 6:12 (Second Preface).
[460] *Rel* 6:12.
[461] *Rel* 6:111.

Indeed, Kant asserts that all types of faith have always been treated in this way, and "rational and thoughtful teachers" gradually bring particular religions in agreement with the "universal principles of moral faith."[462] In addition to the pagan philosophers, Kant mentions certain reformers within Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity who make use of "highly forced interpretations" to direct popular religion to "ends undoubtedly good and necessary to every human being."[463] These reformers were safe from the fury of the adherents of popular faith, Kant assures us, because they lay bare the "predisposition to moral religion [that] lay hidden in human reason."[464]

Kant engages, then, in a kind of political succession by emulating these past religious reformers. Just as they reinterpreted their historical religions for the sake of a morally beneficial doctrine, so too does Kant interpret Christianity, and its doctrine of original sin with respect to radical evil, to further the ends of the universal moral law. Like the artistic genius, Kant works within a tradition while seeking to transform it and give it a new direction. Yet where the artist does so on Kant's account unconsciously, Kant, emulating the previous theological-political reformers, does so with full awareness that he is attempting to steer a tradition toward a new anthropological and religious understanding. The political aim of *Religion* becomes, then, inseparable from its aesthetic presentation. As the passage above makes clear, popular faith has a political function in upholding the state, and yet the desire to reform religion reveals Kant's hope that once changed, it can further the moral development of humanity. The aim, then, is not simply

[462] *Rel* 6:111.
[463] *Rel* 6:111.
[464] *Rel* 6:111.

to reinterpret historical religion so that it aligns with the moral law but to provide new symbols for a culture's self-understanding.

6.4.3 *Radical Evil and Aesthetic-Civic Culture*

Such symbolic representations as radical evil are necessary for the form of philosophical communication that Kant hopes to practice (in contrast to mere rhetoric). The purpose of this communication is to encourage the spectator to reflect freely in a way that is consistent with Kant's definition of enlightenment.[465] While possessing moral content, Kant's symbol of radical evil is not meant to be mere moral propaganda but to encourage the free and even pleasant reflection on the grounds of human freedom. At the same time, it is clear that Kant hopes his symbolic representations of the human being, generally speaking, will lead to a gradual moral reform of religion and politics.

By reconfiguring the inherited traditions of popular Christianity so that they are better suited to communicating his new image of the human being, Kant provides a concrete example of what I have called his "cosmopolitan civic language."[466] Making use of a common set of stories, images, and symbols, the transformation of religious symbols serves to communicate what Kant takes to be universal moral principles and the

[465] "1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accord with oneself" (*CPJ* 5:294).

[466] While Kant seeks to reform the Christianity of his time due partly to its popularity, he also understands the Christian religion as being the most conducive to communicating the practical ideas of reason. This opinion, in turn, is due partly to the aspirations to universality inherent in Christianity and partly to the content of the religion itself, especially the (now transformed) doctrine of original sin. There were many attempts to continue Kant's efforts to rationalize Christianity and to apply this process to other religions, particularly Judaism. See, for example, Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*, published ten years before *Religion*. Kant's *Religion* inspired, among other things, the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, considered to be one of the founders of "liberal theology." For an account of the intellectual history of these movements, see Mark Lilla 2007. What role even other non-Christian expressions of the same religion of reason would have in a political community devoted to pursuing the realization of the ethical community is ambiguous. Kant's harsh treatment of Judaism in *Religion* points to the fact that this hypothetical is already an admittedly ideal notion.

anthropology discovered by the critical philosophy. In this way, Kant's philosophical communication attempts to provide the foundational images for the "culture of reason."

But only after the discovery and explication of the moral law could Kant take on the role of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (good man, powerful in speech), since the philosophical art of communication requires an awareness of the "true good." This discovery makes his mode of communication superior to those theological-political reformers he emulates (both pagan and Christian) and makes him, on this account, the world-historical figure he so often suggests himself to be.[467] Using Kant's own image, the philosophical communicator (or poetic philosopher) is like Hercules, who "becomes *Musagetes* only after subduing monsters, a labor which those good sisters [the Muses] shrink back in fear and trembling."[468] Thus, the philosophical communicator only calls sensibility into play when there is a conceptual need, and when virtue precedes this call—for those "same attendants of the *Venus Urania* become wanton sisters…as soon as they meddle in the business of determining duties and try to provide incentives for them."[469] Before the discovery of this mode of communication, Kant argues that historical religion is not symbolic but idolatrous and so not enlightened but superstitious.[470]

6.5 Radical Evil and History

However much radical evil can be said to offer an image of the human being and the mysterious grounds of human freedom, it is not complete, especially in its political and

[467] See Chapter 3, 72-74 and Chapter 4, 124-126.
[468] *Rel* 6:23n. Here, it is helpful to remember that among the *Musae* there is not only poetry but also history.
[469] Ibid. Hence, this reinforces the point that aesthetic pleasure on its own cannot make us moral but rather serves to communicate otherwise inexhaustible ideas.
[470] In the *Anthropology,* Kant writes: "It is *enlightenment* to distinguish the symbolic from the intellectual, the temporarily useful and necessary *shell* from the thing itself. For otherwise an *ideal* (of pure reason) is mistaken for an *idol*, and the final end is missed" (*Anth* 7:192).

social function, without the idea and regulative heuristic of historical progress. Indeed, radical evil sets the stage for Kant's treatment of progress in the second half of *Religion*, but it also modifies his earlier accounts of progress in *Idea*, *Conjectural Beginnings of Human History*, and the *CPJ*. Part One and Two of *Religion* can be understood to represent the possibility of individual moral progress and the struggles of the subjective agent to live up to the rigors of the moral law. Part Three and Four treat the possibility of collective and communal moral progress in a way that reveals politics to be, for Kant, a necessarily hopeful endeavor. Yet the perennial permanence of radical evil underscores the sober aspects of Kant's earlier accounts of progress, namely the impossibility that it can ever be completed. While this account of progress arises from Kant's anthropological and metaphysical commitments, they inform Kant's understanding of the mechanisms and limits of political life.

Due to its insistence that we judge everyone to be morally evil, *Religion* contains the bleakest and most despairing account of the doctrine of moral progress. Like some of Kant's other accounts of history, nature is shown in *Religion* to have a mechanism that destroys universal monarchies, and a statement of unsociable sociability appears—for malignant inclinations assails one's nature "as soon as he is among human beings;" however, the natural mechanism that destroys universal monarchies is not shown to lead to a cosmopolitan federation of states nor is this version of unsocial sociability shown to further the moral ends of the species.[471] Rather, as social and political animals, human beings necessarily "corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil."[472]

[471] *Rel* 6:94.
[472] *Rel* 6:94.

Thus, where Kant's other accounts of history show a relative optimism regarding the development of enlightened political regimes, *Religion* casts doubt on the ability of politics to settle the problem of evil. Kant gives an account from the movement of the "juridical state of nature," where no person follows laws common and public, to a 'juridico-civil (political) state" where people are joined together under "public juridical laws (which are all coercive laws)."[473] Yet the juridico-political community is not yet the ethical community and exists in the "ethical state of nature." Because the ability to overcome radical evil through a moral revolution of the heart depends on our freedom, we all have a "right to remain in [the ethical state of nature]."[474] The inner, subjective conditions of morality—proper thinking and willing—cannot be legislated by the state. Here, one can see that a liberal republicanism that secures the freedom from certain evils but does not attempt to legislate for a free and moral autonomy is the political order best suited to Kantian anthropology and the inward freedom required for his morality. Such a regime protects the juridical rights of each individual, and may even tutor the citizens in autonomy through an emphasis on some form of self-government, but a juridco-state cannot provide a "common goal of goodness."[475]

The ethical state of nature is not a war of all against all but a state in which "the good principle, which resides in each human being, is incessantly attacked by the evil which is found in him as well."[476] In this way, Kant's earlier claims that the "cosmopolitan whole" is the halfway point of human history is echoed in this later account of the civil-state providing the necessary but insufficient conditions for moral

[473] *Rel* 6:95.
[474] *Rel* 6:95.
[475] *Rel* 6:97.
[476] *Rel* 6:97.

progress. The perennial presence of radical evil throws the stability of any regime into doubt, as each generation must begin this battle anew, and in the context of the state, the threat is not only individual morality but the manifestation of evil in public life.[477] Radical evil does not make room for a political solution and even magnifies the dangers of social and communal life. No institutional framework can guarantee the victory of the good principle over the evil for, as Kant will later assert, "the problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is soluble even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding)."[478] Yet this pessimism is accompanied by Kant's account of the purposiveness of reason. Despite the obstacles to progress, reason demands that we "seek the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all."[479]

While the political solution to radical evil may be insufficient, Kant's aesthetic-cultural project promotes the end of practical reason more effectively. By making use of Kant's aesthetic mode of communication, this cultural project fosters the moral revolution, a change in one's "way of thinking" [*Denkungsart*] or, using the language of radical evil, one's disposition of mind [*Gesinnung*], through the cultivation of the moral feeling. Such a project can be construed as being a part of the "culture of discipline" in the *CPJ* (as opposed to the "culture of skill") that "consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires" for the sake of promoting the end of reason.[480] Only by effecting a revolution of what is deepest in us—our choice of a supreme maxim that occurs behind our subjective self-conscious awareness—can a cultural reform occur such

[477] *Rel* 6:97.
[478] *TPP* 8:366.
[479] *Rel* 6:98.
[480] *CPJ* 5:432.

that the ethical state becomes possible.[481] The symbolic reinterpretation of Christianity provides the cultural and institutional framework (i.e. by its ability to propagate the universal moral law and its corresponding anthropology) that might make possible the transition toward the ethical community. At the very least, Kant's moral-aesthetic (or civic-aesthetic) education provides grounds for the hope in progress.

Central to the cultural project is the aesthetic presentation of moral ideas, discussed in the section above, that makes the spectator of these ideas receptive to the moral law within him. How it achieves this is related to the theoretical content of history. That is, the image of history seeks to effect what it represents—the transition to a more moral culture. In this view, radical evil is a complement to the purposive account of history, not simply a hindrance. Due to the innate moral evil, the human being has a "deficiency which is in principle inseparable from the existence of temporal being, never to be able to become quite fully what he has in mind."[482] (To use the language of the third *Critique*, the human being is the only being that projects ends for himself, but this makes him a perennially incomplete and indeterminate being.) The human being's condition of deficiency means that he hopes to overcome the given conditions of his existence by becoming truly responsible for these conditions through the process of self-making. That is, in the moral language of radical evil, the human hopes that in striving to affect a moral revolution his innate goodness will conquer the evil predisposition.

And there is no excuse, according to Kant, for not trying. Even though "the sublime, never fully attainable idea of an ethical community is greatly scaled down by human hands" and "to found a moral people" can only be the work of God, Kant insists

[481] Here "culture" in its symbolic relation to the cultivation of soil corresponds to the metaphor of "radical" as root.
[482] *Rel* 6:67n.

that "each must so conduct himself *as if* everything depended on him."[483] Making what may be another reflective supposition, Kant places the burden of history—and humanity's self-making—on the individual agent.

In this sense, Kant's cultural reformation aims to imbue the ordinary person with a sort of heroic stature. By struggling against the evil principle each person carries the weight of history. Such a burden awakens in the spectator of history the awareness of the sublimity of the human being's moral vocation, particularly in the ability to strive to lift himself above the self-interested inclinations and evil of his nature. While not able to persuade or determine another's moral development, since one's moral action must always result from one's own freedom, Kant's aesthetic images remind the spectator of the mysterious sublimity of human reason's ability to determine itself. As Kant puts it,

> What is this in us (one can ask oneself) in virtue of which we, beings ever dependent on nature through so many needs, are at the same time elevated so far above it in the idea of the original predisposition (in us) that we would hold the whole of nature as nothing, and ourselves unworthy of existence, were we to pursue the enjoyment of nature—though this alone can make life desirable—in defiance of a law which our reason commands us compellingly, without however either promising or threatening anything thereby?[484]

Even the human being of "the most ordinary ability," Kant claims, "must feel the force of this question deeply within himself." For the "very incomprehensibility" of reason's legislation of the moral law must "have an effect on the mind even to the point of exaltation." It is in this way that the historical struggle against radical evil ultimately

[483] *Rel* 6:100-6:101. Emphasis mine.
[484] *Rel* 6:49.

reveals the good predisposition within us, "proclaiming as it does a divine origin."[485] Kant's aesthetic presentation of history represents what it seeks to affect—the gradual progress and victory of the good principle over the evil—by awakening in us admiration for the sublimity of the moral vocation. At the same time, it aids our reflections on the incomprehensible wholeness of the finite rational being.

And yet, with the continued emphasis on the ineradicable and inscrutable nature of radical evil, Kant points to the limits of politics, progress, and even this cultural project. Radical evil reveals that progress is always precarious, but this fact is the condition both for human freedom and its sublimity. Still, the human being is finite and incomplete and, regardless of all his moral striving, he can only hope for the realization of the ethical community on earth if he has faith that it is somehow guaranteed by the very grounds of creation. Indeed, despite the moral and civic functions of Kant's practical interpretation of Christianity, we are reminded that "morality inevitably leads to religion."[486]

6.6 Conclusion: Striving and Homecoming

Perhaps what certain advocates of the German Enlightenment found scandalous about radical evil is its expression of a philosophical anthropology that claims that the human can find no rest in this life. *Pace* the romantic aspirations of Schiller to find a way for the human to be at home in the world, Kant argues that the human longing for wholeness can at best only be partially fulfilled. We can think through our unity with the help of symbolic representations and aesthetic experience, but we can never achieve a theoretically satisfying vantage point by which we can form a determinate concept of the

[485] *Rel* 6:49.
[486] *Rel* 6:5.

human nor is the idea of the highest good "fully attainable," except perhaps at a moment at the end of history infinitely projected into the future. Goethe, for his part, would later present one of the greatest portraits of human striving in the history of Western literature. The story of Faust's striving and redemption, however, constitutes a critique of the continual restlessness that the Kantian anthropology not only describes but endorses. "Everything," Goethe laments, "is being transcended continually in thought as well as action."[487] Such restless striving for Kant is not simply a mark of the modern age but a constitutive feature of human experience—whether it is expressed in the longing inherent in the *metaphysica naturalis* or the moral striving toward the highest good.

What Kant's poetic accounts of radical evil and historical progress offer is a hopeful and even heroic account of this striving. We, as citizens of liberal democracies, would benefit from revisiting this heroic anthropology.[488] Even if we choose to disregard some of its features or reject it altogether, Kant's image of the human is indispensable for thinking through what sort of human being republican and liberal government at its best requires. Kant's so-called "ideal theory" of politics, presented in the *Rechtslehre*, limits itself to the statement of juridical rights, and yet in works like *Religion*, Kant describes the necessary cultural basis underlying the doctrine of rights and successful self-governance. Supporting his more formal political and legal writings, then, is an image of the human being that informs the self-understanding of a culture and guides its moral aspirations.

[487] Letter from Goethe to Zelter, quoted from Karl Löwith (1966), 156-157.
[488] This seems especially true given recent interest in the restlessness inherent in modern life and its exacerbation by modern technology and other social factors. See, for example, Benjamin Storey and Jenna Storey 2021.

Since Kant, it has been a question whether we need religion in order to communicate such ideas or if there can be a *simply* poetic and aesthetic basis for a common civic culture and a shared conception of the human being. As Nietzsche would later observe, Kant's destruction of traditional metaphysics calls for something creative to fill its place.

> A religion would be created if a man *awakened belief* in a mystical edifice that he built in a vacuum, i.e., if the belief met an extraordinary need. It is *unlikely* that this will ever happen again after the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the other hand, I can imagine an entirely new kind of *philosopher-artist* who would fill the gap with a *work of art*, with aesthetic value.[489]

To some extent, Kant is already such a "philosopher-artist" or perhaps a poetic philosopher, who self-consciously creates (or reconfigures) images for the foundation of a new moral and civic culture. Kant's hopes for the success of any cultural and aesthetic project, to be sure, are always tempered by a humble awareness of the limits of any political solution to the problems inherent in human nature. At the same time, it is hard not to feel some uplift in Kant's aesthetic representation of the human being and his "eternal task."[490] The exalted yet humbling status as the one incomplete being in the nature of things disposes man to regard the obstacles to morality in terms of a noble struggle to realize his role as the end of creation. Indeed, such a view is surely the stuff of heroism as man always looks forward to the next adventure of moral life, even though the price of such adventure is the perennial delay of homecoming.

[489] Nietzsche 2009, 205-206.
[490] Benjamin 1994, 97-98.

7.0 Concluding Remarks: The Necessity of Hope

In its transcendental efforts, therefore, reason cannot look ahead so confidently, as if the path it is on leads quite directly to its goal, and it must not count boldly on the premises that ground it as if it were unnecessary for it frequently to look back.

-Kant[491]

What is *essential* in Kant's thought must be preserved.

-Walter Benjamin[492]

Kant's philosophy provides valuable resources for those who want to think through the conditions of the possibility of a moral, or ennobling, liberalism. The Kantian anthropology offers an account of the human being such that the ordinary person can be endowed, if aided by the proper way of thinking, with a sort of heroism, not only making possible a politics that leaves room for moral virtue but one that provides resources that address the spiritual vacuum that would otherwise seem to be at the heart of liberalism. Inspired by Rousseau's diagnosis of and prescriptions for the ill-health of the modern world, Kant attempts to raise modern politics from its low but solid ground without losing the insights gained from that perspective. This attempt continues to be both instructive and admirable. The result is the hopeful realism of Kantian politics or a model of political thought and action that combines prudence with moral virtue—the cleverness of the serpent with the innocence of the dove.

It is, of course, natural to ask: is such a Kantian politics viable today? When one considers the fragmentation caused by mass media, the rise of polarization not only in the United States but throughout the liberal world, the decline of participation in religion, or even something as seemingly innocuous as the inaccessibility of "high" art to the

[491] *CPR* A735/B764.

[492] Walter Benjamin, who considered writing his dissertation on the Kantian philosophy of history, wrote this statement in a letter to Gershom Scholem, dated October 22, 1917 (Benjamin, 1994, 97).

ordinary citizen, the possibility of a common anthropology and some shared set of moral commitments seems doubtful. One possible cause of these phenomena is a crisis of reflective judgment or loss of *sensus communis*; whatever aesthetic taste, historical framework, religious understanding, or shared anthropology that had been holding Western-style liberalism together seems to be falling apart. It is a question, to be sure, if such a common liberal anthropology or sense of shared moral commitments ever truly existed.[493] However, while not perfect, there are examples throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in America[494] and abroad[495] of the sort of political culture and healthy liberal nationalism that Kant seeks to foster. This is not even to mention the concrete legacies of Kant's political thought, like the rise in international federations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, or even NATO,[496] and the language surrounding universal human rights, which seems to be an enduring legacy and proof of Kant's cosmopolitan

[493] For a relatively parochial example, given Kant's cosmopolitan ambitions, see Samuel Goldman 2021 for a critique of the quest to define a uniquely American identity.

[494] I would argue that statesmen like Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. embody the Kantian true politician, and provide examples of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. For example, consider Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. He recasts the history of American slavery and the nation's suffering in terms of the will of a providential God. This historical will can only be "supposed" (or regulatively postulated) due to the limitations of political speech and human knowledge. The speech as a whole seeks to put the nation in a frame of mind that allows it to "strive on." MLK similarly uses a reframing of American history to support the hope that "the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice." Further, he often locates the dignity of the human being, and that of Black Americans in particular, in the striving for justice. Admittedly, a Christian anthropology informs MLK's thought, and yet, one might find in his speeches, as in Lincoln's, the use of religion within the boundaries of mere reason. In any case, both acted and spoke in a way that the language of hope and striving toward the realization of America's promised ideals determined the American self-understanding for generations to follow.

[495] The proliferation of national literatures and the collection of folk tales in Europe in the 19th century are examples of the "art of reciprocal communication." Works like the *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Elias Lönnrot's compiling of traditional oral stories into the Finnish *Kalevala*, or even Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* are all examples of attempts to combine the spirit and originality of the *Volk* with the demands of a cultivated, cosmopolitan taste. Or, as discussed in footnote 315 in Chapter 4, Albert Murray's writings can be used to show that the jazz or blues idiom can be understood as an American example of the art of reciprocal communication that models the virtues of American democracy (i.e., collaboration and improvisation reflect the healthy balance between duty to the larger community and American-style individualism). In this Kantian light, one could also consider the American novels and stories of Mark Twain, Herman Melville, or Ralph Ellison.

[496] One can certainly quarrel with both the effectiveness of these institutions and the extent to which they are Kantian.

art of communication. Finding and clarifying such examples may be essential in restoring faith in the higher aspirations of liberalism and in pointing the way toward a newfound style of reciprocal communication.

In addition to these more practical challenges facing the Kantian project, there is the philosophical critique from within the tradition of liberal thought itself that claims a "Bad Infinity" [*schlechte Unendlichkeit*] burdens the Kantian anthropology of hope.[497] Can ceaseless infinite striving (or at least the individual's striving until death), however hopeful, truly allow us to endure the lack of complete fulfillment of our deepest longings?[498] While Hegel's critique of this position is complex and would require much more space to address properly, I will only suggest the possibility here that Kant's philosophy of history may prove more useful than Hegel's precisely because the ultimate object of our hope is infinitely projected into the future. Indeed, it might simply be the case that human existence is defined by the fact that we find ourselves confronted with demands that we can never completely fulfill but which continues to be authoritative for us. The Kantian response, in this case, would be that the Hegelian state of universal recognition or something like the Marxist stateless utopia are overly romantic insofar as they seek to solve the intractable problems inherent in human existence. As necessarily longing and hopeful creatures, we are forever denied the homecoming promised by later conceptions of universal history.

---

[497] This is not to mention the critiques of Kant that come from outside the liberal tradition or from the perspective of revealed religion, such as those levied by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. While responding to such critiques is beyond the scope of this study, I hope that the reader can anticipate how Kant (or my interpretation of Kant) might respond to anti-liberal, existentialist, post-metaphysical, or religious critiques.

[498] The Kantian (and post-Kantian) notion of *ought* implies, Hegel argues, a Bad Infinity. Writing of both Fichte and Kant, Hegel claims that "the attainment of [the real unity of subject and object] is sent further and further back into the bad, sensuous infinitude" (Hegel, *History of Philosophy, Vol. III*, 499). See also the brief discussion of Goethe's *Faust* at the end of Chapter 6, 204-205.

But putting these questions aside, one can argue that from the perspective of practical action, and despite any notion of Bad Infinity, Kantian history has the advantage of being open to the future in a way that encourages the caution necessary for the responsibility inherent in human freedom and promotes, when coupled with the awareness of the radicality of our finitude, the possibility of political prudence. There is no pressure to provide a proper ending to history's story—whether that ending exists in the realm of ideas and awaits its full embodiment in the modern nation-state or must be actualized through global revolution. The flexibility in Kant's political and historical thought is due to the fact that a regulative principle determines his notion of history and, consequentially, it is burdened less by ontological claims that extend beyond the limits of reason (or the skepticism of thoughtful citizens). The ever-expanding horizon of the regulative principle of reflective judgment that gives shape to our historical understanding enables Kantian historical striving to preserve the indeterminacy of human action, reinforcing the responsibility of the moral agent and leaving space for the rhetorical demands of the true politician, who must wring out hope from the arc of history.

In sum, the extent to which the Kantian idea of progress, and the anthropology it implies, can be renewed is unclear. To the ears of many people, the idea of rational moral progress, when made explicit, rings of naiveté. And yet, it is certain that we have not entirely freed ourselves from an implicit faith in progress or an optimistic belief in human nature. Even more unclear is the question of whether political communities as such and the individuals that constitute them can do without the hope that things might at some

point get better. On this point, Kant's insights into the self-projecting nature of human reason lend credence to his politics.

Accordingly, whether or not we can do away with the Kantian idea of historical progress, liberal anthropology depends upon the type of sober hope constitutive of Kantian striving. Perhaps it is possible to communicate this striving inherent in Kantian anthropology, or what Walter Benjamin calls the "eternal task" (and that which seems essential to Kant's thought), without relying on the idea of moral historical progress. However, the post-Kantian attempts to assert the importance of human striving without the Kantian critical, moral, and teleological framework have proven more often than not shallow, dangerous, or inadequate to the demands of modern political life.[499] The eternal task of infinite striving without the Kantian apparatus of nature's purposiveness or the call of the moral law easily becomes a futile matter of mere will. Hence, the thought of many post-Kantian thinkers transforms the human being from hero to tragic hero.[500] The Kantian hopes of setting a high-minded politics on the low grounds of modern political anthropology depend, then, upon finding a basis for the dignity of human freedom in the indifferent and mechanistic cosmos described by modern science.

Due, then, to both its political usefulness and its philosophical seriousness in its response to a problem that continues to haunt us, it would be a mistake to dismiss the

[499] I have in mind various understandings of existentialism, from Camus's account of Sisyphus to the resoluteness of *Dasein* in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, as well as the ideal of the clear-eyed courage of the social scientist present in the thought of Weber and Freud. One could include Nietzsche's peculiar form of hopeful striving. Of course, in the context of this study, this claim about the ultimate limitations of these post-Kantian thinkers is unsupported. However, I hope this study lays the groundwork for a fruitful future reconsideration of the post-Kantian anthropologies and legacies.

[500] Then again, Kant defines laughter as "an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing" (*CPJ* 5:332). Perhaps, the Kantian (and even the post-Kantian) human being is better thought of in relation to certain comic heroes, a questing Don Quixote rather than suffering Sisyphus. In any case, laughter might complement Kantian hopefulness (e.g., see *CPJ* 5:334) or it might be an alternative response, other than hope or despair, to human dividedness. See Fenves 2003, especially 171-174, for an interesting exploration of the theme of laughter in Kant.

Kantian idea of progress too quickly. Kant's anthropology of hope remains a still living alternative for those who seek to confront the challenges that face modern politics and the underlying question of human value in a world increasingly determined by our scientific and technological advances. With his insistence on the fundamental role of morality and freedom in making sense of our experience, Kant paints not only a fuller picture of the human being but attunes us to the wonders of reason's embodiment in the natural order. Such an effort endows the modern individual with purpose and dignity and reorients the modern state to ends greater than peace and security.

If nothing else, this study has shown that approaching the idea of progress with serious care is necessary in thinking through the possibility of balancing the conflicting commitments of modernity—most notably, the charitable concern for human dignity and the confidence in a scientific materialism that erodes the human being's once exalted place in creation. Kant forces us to ask whether any political community, even rights-based liberalism, can survive without a greater sanction than that of consent and leads us to consider where that sanction might come from in an age of scientific reason. And even though a Kantian liberal republicanism is undoubtedly not a panacea for the ills of contemporary liberalism, we would do well to learn from his moral yet shrewd approach to politics and reanimate the questions that inspired him.

Chief among these questions is the third critical question of hope—for this question raises the concern with the character of our good, prompts reflections on our place in the greater whole of nature, and forces us to consider the charitable impulses at the heart of philosophical thinking. (Indeed, it is remarkable that figures like Kant have given us such treasures at all.) More than this, however, Kant shows us that the question

of hope is necessary if we desire to know ourselves. Only a being such as we are, burdened by finitude and blessed with rationality, has the sort of longing for unity and wholeness that leads to the emergence of hope. Like the ambivalent role of hope in the myth of Pandora, our awareness that we are beings that hope at all leads us to reflect on our own ambivalent status as a creature of dual dwellings, inhabitants of both *is* and *ought*. And the persistent hope for our greatest good is a sign of both the ill and good fortune to be placed between beasts and gods—a reminder that although we are imperfect creatures, we can come to know our limits and yet strive to remake ourselves in the image of the divine reason within us. Such an account of the human being depends, of course, on Kant's commitment to the claim that the end of reason is found in the moral striving to remake and transcend the world. However, despite the zetetic frustrations inherent in philosophical speculation, perhaps one must still wonder whether the end of reason is not something else altogether.

Bibliography

Works by Kant:

Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?," 11-22, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View," 227-429, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

———. "The Conflict of the Faculties," 233-328, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," 160-175, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

———. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000.

———. "Critique of Practical Reason," 139-271, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998.

———. "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 43-108, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," 107-120, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

———. "Jäsche Logic,"521-630 in *Lectures on Logic*, trans. J. Michael Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992.

———. *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Karl Americks and Steve Naragon Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2013.

———. "The Metaphysics of Morals," 353-604, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in

practice," 273-310, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

———. *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99*, trans. Arnulf Zweig. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1967.

———. "Selections from the Notes on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime," 1-25, in *Notes and Fragments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005.

———. "Toward Perpetual Peace," 311-352, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

Works by Others:

Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.

Allison, Henry E. "Teleology and History in Kant: The Critical Foundations of Kant's Philosophy of History," 24-45, in *Kant's Idea for a Universal History: A Critical Guide*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Americks, Karl. "History, Progress, and Autonomy: Kant, Herder, and After," 137-151, in *Kant and the Possibility of Progress: From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties*, ed. Paul T. Wilford and Samuel A. Stoner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2021.

———. *Kant's Elliptical Path*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2012.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso Books. 2006.

Anderson-Gold, Sharon. *Unnecessary Evil: History and Moral Progress in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 2001.

Arendt, Hannah. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992.

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs. Santa Fe: Green Lion Press. 1999.

———. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2011.

———. *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2013.

———. *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2021.

Bacon, Francis. *Selected Philosophical Works*, ed. Rose-Mary Sargent. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. 1999.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gershom Sholem and Theodor Adorno, trans. M.R. and E.M. Jacobson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1994.

Beiner, Ronald. *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2018.

Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1987.

Boehm, Omri. *Kant's Critique of Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2014.

The Book of Job, trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 1979.

Brague, Remi. *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2003.

Budick, Sanford. *Kant and Milton*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2010.

Calhoun, Zachary. "Kant on Positing: Being as Self-Determination" in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Volume 73, Number 1. Issue No. 289. September 2019.

Cassirer, Ernst. *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe: Two Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1945.

Clewis, Robert. *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009.

Dante. *Inferno*, ed. John D. Sinclair. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1961.

Deneen, Patrick. *Why Liberalism Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2018.

DiCenso, James J. *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012.

Eldridge, Richard. *Images of History: Kant, Benjamin, Freedom, and the Human Subject*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2016.

Ellis, Elisabeth. *Provisional Politics: Kantian Arguments in Policy Context*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2008.

Euripides. "The Trojan Women" in *Euripides III*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2013.

Fackenheim, Emil L. *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity*, ed. John Burbidge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.1996.

———. "Abraham and the Kantians," 31-78, in *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*. Jason Aronson, Inc. 1994.

Faulkner, Robert K. *Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 1993.

Fenves, Peter. Fenves, Peter. *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World History in Kant*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1991.

———. *Late Kant: Towards Another Law of the Earth*. New York: Routledge Press. 2003.

Ferrarin, Alfredo. *The Powers of Pure Reason: Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2015.

———. *Thinking and the I: Hegel and the Critique of Kant*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 2019.

Foucault, Michelle. *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2008.

———. "What is Enlightenment?," 32-50, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Vintage Books. 2010.

Frierson, Patrick. *What is the Human Being?: Kant's Questions*. London: Routledge. 2013.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press. 2006.

———. *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 2022.

Galston, William. *Kant and the Problem of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1975.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust I & II*, trans. Stuart Atkins. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1984.

Goldman, Samuel. *After Nationalism: Being American in an Age of Division*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press. 2021.

Guyer, Paul. *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005.

———. "Editor's Introduction," xiii-lii, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer and trans. Guyer and Eric Mathews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000.

Hanley, Ryan P. "Rethinking Kant's Debt to Rousseau," 380-404, in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*. Volume 99. Issue 4. 2017

Heidegger, Martin. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft. Indianapolis: Indiana Press. 1990.

———. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1962.

Heine, Heinrich. *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, trans. John Snodgrass. Trübner and Co. 1986.

Hegel, G.W.F. *History of Philosophy, Vol. III*., trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. The Project Gutenberg. 2018. (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/58169/58169-h/58169-h.htm).

Henrich, Dieter. *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1992.

———. *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2003.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1991.

Homer. *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1951.

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press. 2002.

Hösle, Vittorio. *A Short History of German Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2013.

Huseyinzadegan, Dilek. *Kant's Nonideal Theory of Politics*. Evanston: Northwestern

University
Press. 2019.

Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich. "Recollection of conversations with Lessing in July and August 1780," 241-254, in Lessing's *Philosophical and Theological Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005.

Jonas, Hans. *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1984.

———. "Philosophical Aspects of Darwinism," 38-58, in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1966.

Kemp, Ryan. "The Contingency of Evil: Rethinking the Problem of Universal Evil in Kant's *Religion*, 100-123, in *Rethinking Kant: Volume 3*, ed. Oliver Thorndike. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2011.

Kennington, Richard. *On Modern Origins: Essays in Early Modern Philosophy*. Lanham: Lexington Books. 2004.

Kleingeld, Pauline. *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012.

———. "Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Jan. 1999, Vol. 16, No.1. 59-80.

Koyré, Alexandre. *From Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press. 1957.

Kuehn, Manfred. *Kant: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.

La Rochefoucauld. *Maxims*, trans. Leonard Tancock. New York: Penguin Books. 1959.

Lilla, Mark. *Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. New York Vintage Books. 2007.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1975.

———. *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1960.

Longuenesse, Béatrice. "Kant's 'I Think' Versus Descartes' 'I Am a Thing That Thinks,'" 9-31, in *Kant and the Early Moderns.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008

Louden, Robert B. *Kant's Human Being: Essays in his Theory of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011.

Löwith Karl. *Meaning in History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985.

———. *Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1966.

Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Walter Englert. Newburyport: Focus Philosophical Library. 2003.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1998.

Madore, Joël. *Difficult Freedom and Radical Evil in Kant*. London: Continuum Books. 2011.

Makkreel, Rudolf. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1994.

Michalson, Gordon E. *Fallen Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990.

Moran, Kate. *Community and Progress in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press. 2012.

Muchnik, Pablo. *Kant's Theory of Evil: An Essay on the Dangers of Self-love and the Aprioricity of History*. Washington D.C.: Lexington Books. 2009.

Munzel, G. Felicitas. *Kant on Moral Character: The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1999.

Murray, Albert. *The Blue Devils of Nada: A Contemporary American Approach to Aesthetic Statement*. New York: Vintage Books. 1996.

Neiman, Susan. *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2002.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books. 1974.

———. "Postcard to Overbeck," 92, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kauffman. New York: The Viking Press Inc. 1954.

———, ed. Raymond Guess and Alexander Nehamas. *Writings from the Early Notebooks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009.

Nuzzo, Angelica. *Kant and the Unity of Reason*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press. 2005.

———. *Ideal Embodiment: Kant's Theory of Sensibility*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2008

O'Neill, Onora. *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989.

Padui, Raoni. *Homo Kantius*: Sovereign Subject and Bare Thing in *Philosophy Today*. Summer 2010.

Palmquist, Stephen. *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's* Religion Within the Boundaries of Bare Reason. New York: Wiley Publishers. 2015.

———. *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume 2 of Kant's "System of Perspectives."* New York: Routledge Publishing. 2000.

Pippin, Robert B. *Modernity as a Philosophical Problem*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc. 1999.

Plato. *Gorgias*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1998.

———. *Republic*, trans, Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books. 1968.

———. *Symposium*, trans. Avi Sharon. Newburyport: Focus Philosophical Library. 1998.

Pope, Alexander. *An Essay on Man and Other Poems*. Mineola: Dover Thrift Editions. 1994.

Rawls, John. "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," 223-251, in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer, 1985).

Rosen, Stanley. "Transcendental Ambiguity: The Rhetoric of the Enlightenment," 19-49, in *Hermeneutics as Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1987.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books. 1979.

———. *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. and trans. Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc. 1964.

———. "Letter to D'Alembert on the Theater" in *Politics and the Arts*, trans. Allan Bloom. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1968.

———. *On the Social Contract*, ed. Roger D. Masters and trans. Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, inc. 1978.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins. London: The Arden Shakespeare. 1982.

Shell, Susan Meld. *The Rights of Reason: A Study of Kant's Philosophy and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1980.

———. *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1996.

———. *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2009.

———. "Kant as Propagator: Reflections on *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*," 455-468, in *Eighteenth Century Studies*. Vol. 35. No. 3. 2002.

———. "Nachschrift eines Freundes: Kant on Language, Friendship, and the Concept of a People," 88-117, in *Kantian Review*. Volume 15-1. 2010.

Shell, Susan M. and Velkley, Richard (eds.). *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*, trans. Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2018.

———. *The Theological-Political Treatise*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. 2001.

Stoner, Samuel A. "Kant on the Philosopher's Proper Activity: From Legislation to Admiration," 95-113, in *Epoché*, Volume 24, Issue 1, (Fall 2019).

———. "On the Primacy of the Spectator in Kant's Account of Genius," 87-116, in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 70.1. 2016.

Stoner, Samuel and Wilford, Paul T. "Reflective Judgment and Radical Evil in Kant's *Religion*." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (2021).

Storey, Benjamin and Storey, Jenna. *Why We are Restless: On the Modern Quest for Contentment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2021.

Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. Chicago; The University of Chicago Press. 1964.

———. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1965.

Stroud, Scott R. *Kant and the Promise of Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania University Press. 2014.

Sweet, Kristi E. *Kant on Practical Life: From Duty to History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2013.

Swift, Jonathan. "The Battle of the Books" in *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008.

Thucydides. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1996.

Tilley, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 1990.

Tommasi, Francesco Valerio, ed. *Der Zyklop in der Wissenschaft: Kant und die* anthropologia transcendentalis. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. 2018.

Velkley, Richard L. *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2002.

———. "Culture and the Limits of Practical Reason in Kant's *Religion*," 233-249, in *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Gordan Michalson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014.

———. *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1989.

———. "Masks of Mastery: Richard Kennington on Modern Origins." in *Political Science Reviewer*. Fall, 2002b, Vol.31, No.1.

———. "Language, Embodiment, and the Supersensuous in Fichte's *Address to the German Nation*, 153-164, in *Kant and the Possibility of Progress: From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties*, ed. Paul T. Wilford and Samuel A. Stoner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2021.

———. "Transcending Nature, Unifying Reason: On Kant's Debt to Rousseau," 89-106, in *Kant on Moral Autonomy*, ed. Oliver Sensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2013.

Wood, Allen. *Kant and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020.

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1971.

Wilford, Paul T. "A Look at Kantian Theodicy: Rational Faith and the Idea of History."

American Dialectic, Vol.4, No. 2, 2014 (172-203).

Xenophon. *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2001.

Yovel, Yirimiahu. *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1980.

———. *Kant's Philosophical Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2018.

Zammito, John. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992.

———. *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2002.

———. "The Pursuit of Science as Decadence in Kant's Remarks in "Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," 234-246, in *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide*, ed. Susan Shell and Richard Velkley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012.

Zöller, Gunter. "Kant's Political Anthropology." *Kant Yearbook: Kant and German Idealism* 3, no. 1 (2011): 131-162.

Zuckert, Rachel. *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.