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The Knowledge of the Human Being in Kant's Anthropology: Where Subject and Object cross Paths

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Abstract. Through reconstructing some of the methodologically distinctive features of Kant's anthropology, beyond its pragmatic characterization, the paper aims to provide some keys to situating this discipline with respect to the critical-transcendental project. This analysis outlines a particular kind of normativity connected to anthropological research, a normativity to be understood as a regularity that emerges from the observation of the dominant tendencies of human beings in their relationship with their fellow humans. From this derives a peculiar concept of «comparative universality», which underlies an a posteriori objectivity. This meaning of objectivity, admittedly weaker than that deduced a priori, is nevertheless capable of bringing out the need for concrete conditions—though not sufficient in themselves—for achieving the moralization of humankind, a goal that in Kant's view can only be realized in history by pointing towards a cosmopolitan horizon.

Keywords. Kant, anthropology, objectivity, ethics, teleology

1. Introduction

The present contribution aims primarily to discuss a problem that appears to be pervasively present in Kant's philosophy and more generally

in contemporary philosophical debate, although we will not be able to explore the latter here. The urgency of this question is exemplarily summarized by the intentionally ambiguous nature of the genitive in the quotation chosen for the title «The Knowledge *of* the Human Being» (Kant [1798a]: 231). Indeed, on the one hand, Kant constantly looks at thinking as the human being's characterizing activity, i.e., as the main expression of rationality that is the primary and indispensable point of reference of the philosophical activity. On the other hand, in the anthropological domain the thinking human being becomes a problem to her/himself, since she/he is taken up as the object of philosophical questioning. Kant recognises here the human being as the bearer of an original tension, but at the same time seems to assume this tension implicitly and unproblematically in the various parts of which his properly critical-transcendental thought is composed. Hence one can say—with A. Renaut's effective words—that Kant's anthropology is «nowhere and therefore everywhere» in his philosophy (Renaut [1997]: 57).

Therefore, an attempt will be made to smooth out this apparent contrast by highlighting the structural connection between Kant's critical project and his anthropology and by analysing the peculiar aspects of this complex and often hidden relationship.

Prior to the publication of Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology* in 1997 in volume 25 of the Academy edition, the possibility of any systematic relationship between the critical project and the anthropology had received little attention from interpreters, who tended to regard anthropology as a kind of casuistic collection of descriptions and reflections that are not systematically connected to critical philosophy.

This depended largely on the fact that any attempt to identify a clear epistemic status for anthropology clashed with the wide breadth of the gaze on the world disclosed by the anthropological perspective. In this respect, it seems to us that the methodological contours of this gaze can be effectively clarified if one considers how Kant treats two of the main points of his Copernican revolution when he deals with them on the anthropological plane.

The first element consists in the *normative nature* of reason, which, according to Kant, is the distinguishing feature of human beings (Kant [1798a]: 239). Since its object is the human being, anthropology places reason at the centre of its attention. Nevertheless, anthropological inquiry is a posteriori; it starts from the world in which reason displays its own normative nature. Consequently, the distinctive practice of anthropology is an observation targeted to the way in which reason manifests its own regularity in experience, that is, a kind of fundamental observation aimed at the rules of the *way of thinking* [*Denkungsart*].

This leads us to the second element whose anthropological approach helps us to shed light on the nature of this discipline, namely *objectivity*. For while the transcendental investigation delimits the scope of objectivity by means of

the universal laws a priori, in §3 we will see that in the anthropological field the objective validity of the norm must be achieved a posteriori, namely through the actual possibility of sharing its value *in concreto* with other subjects. It thus remains to be seen whether and to what extent this shareability can be linked to transcendental intersubjectivity.

We will try to show that, based on the relationship between normativity and objectivity from an anthropological perspective, we cannot solve the difficulties associated with the architectonic positioning of anthropology in Kant's system, but rather explain the reasons at the core of these difficulties.

2. Observation and Regularity

It is well-known that Kant's introduction of anthropology into the academic program dates to the early 1770s. As a textbook for his anthropological lectures, he used the section on *Empirical Psychology* from Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*.

This suggests an ideal transfer of tasks between psychology and anthropology, which coincides with the overcoming of scholastic metaphysics and which Kant clearly expresses in a lecture from the late 1770s on the *Philosophical Encyclopaedia*, where anthropology is defined as the science of the *empirical* treatment of «thinking nature» (AA 29: 11, 44)¹. In a letter to M. Herz from late 1773, Kant explains the idea underlying his introduction of anthropology in the university by describing it as a «theory of observation [*Beobachtungslehre*]» (AA 10: 146; see also Kant [1764]: 23).

Yet, while the observation that characterises the scholastic *empirical psychology* aims to achieve a truth in the context of a dogmatically understood metaphysics, the goal of Kant's anthropology is practical, and specifically pragmatic, i.e. it attempts to explain the subject's relationships to the world and to other fellow humans starting from the way these relationships can be grasped empirically (Kant [1798a]: 232).

Thus, Kant's clear distinction between his anthropology and traditional psychology relies negatively upon the rejection of the possibility of grasping the essence of the soul claimed by the latter. Furthermore, he positively introduces the feature that shapes his anthropology in an original sense, namely the concept of *character*, which in its deepest sense is understood as a *way of thinking* [*Denkungsart*].

It is indeed well-known that in the *Anthropological Characteristics* Kant defines «character purely and simply» as a «way of thinking [*Denkungsart*]» and distinguishes it as a moral disposition from the «*natural aptitude* or natural predisposition [*Naturanlage*]» and «*temperament* or sensibility [*Sinnesart*]», since the way of thinking does not show «what can be made of the human being», but

«what he is prepared to make of himself» (Kant [1798a]: 384). In a further elaboration of this idea, in the section *On Character as the Way of Thinking*, Kant adds: «But simply to have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason» (Kant [1798a]: 389-390).

Thus, if on the one hand the observational method of anthropology does not aim at eternal metaphysical truths, on the other hand it is anything but rhapsodic. On the contrary: Kant's aim is to establish the rules for human behaviour, and to do so he can only follow reason, as the essential ground of human actions. The goal of anthropological observation in the study of the empirical manifestation of character is therefore to identify the modalities that make it possible to trace the subject's behaviour back to firm rules. This both rational and empirical nature of character allows Kant's readers to understand the sense in which the *Characteristic* is to be regarded as the «doctrine of method» of anthropology (Kant [1798a]: 270).

As R. Brandt has aptly remarked, Kant's questioning of the human being does not deal with her/his *essence*, but rather investigates her/him in the dynamic constitution of her/his *existence* (Brandt [2007]: 13).

The normative structure of reason hence does not cease to be the guiding principle of observational investigation, since the observers have no other instruments at their disposal. The core difference with respect to the critical-transcendental investigation is that anthropology is interested in the subjective side of the rules insofar as they are empirically manifested (see e.g. Kant [1797]: 372, [1784-1785a]: 42, [1780ff]: 327; Refl 875, AA 15: 384).

In this respect, the *Anthropology* of 1798 confirms the empirical character of the observation of the inner sense that anthropology is concerned with: «Inner sense is not pure apperception, a consciousness of what the human being *does*, since this belongs to the faculty of thinking. Rather, it is a consciousness of what he *undergoes*, in so far as he is affected by the play of his own thoughts» (Kant [1798a]: 272).

An anthropology that observes the subject based on its faculties and actions as perceived through the inner sense cannot, of course, achieve the universality of the laws derived a priori on a transcendental plane; instead, it is rather characterized by what Kant in the first and third *Critique* defines as the «comparative universality» of the empirical rules obtained inductively (Kant [1781/1787]: 158, [1787]: 137; [1790]: 98).

This special meaning of the concept of *universality* can be claimed *in concreto* as long as it finds no exceptions to its own rule. Nevertheless, it cannot in principle exclude the possibility of exceptions, which the absolute generality of laws a priori can do. This becomes particularly clear in Reflection 4812 (mid-1770s): «Rules *a priori* are laws; *a posteriori* are never without exception» (AA

17: 736). In the published *Anthropology*, such a concept seems to lurk behind Kant's definition of anthropological cognition as «*General knowledge [Generalkenntniß]*»: the rules of this realisation are *general*, but not *universal* (Cf. Kant [1798a]: 232 and Frierson [2003]: 38-39).

The question thus arises as to what kind of objectivity the comparative universality of anthropology can produce, insofar as it is based on an empirically oriented observation of inner sense and aims to recognize the rules of human behaviour that crystallize in the character of the individual.

3. Subjectivity, Objectivity, Nobility

In order to grasp the essential features of the peculiar anthropological objectivity, we need to carefully scrutinize the way Kant considers the *I* since his lectures on metaphysics and anthropology. In the *Lectures on Metaphysics* of the 1770s, he distinguishes between two different meanings of the *I*: *in sensu latiori* and *in sensu stricto*. In the *Introductory Concepts to the Psychology of Metaphysik L_I* (mid-1770s), this distinction is characterised as follows: «This *I* is taken in a twofold sense: *I as human being*, and *I as intelligence*. *I as intelligence* am an *Object of inner sense only* [...] This intelligence, which is connected with the body and constitutes a human being, is called *soul*» (Kant [mid-1770s]: 44-45)². The *I as soul* is «determined by the body and stand with it in interaction [*commercio*]» (Kant [mid-1770s]: 45, cf. 73-74).

While the *I as a human being (in sensu latiori)* is exposed to changes that come from outside, the *I in the narrower sense* expresses the consciousness of the self to which all our representations are related (cf. Kant [1775-1776]: 53). This double meaning of the term *I* refers to the claim that we have a double personality, which has been argued since the first course on anthropology. Here Kant establishes the difference between the *I as «something substantial, simple and persisting»*, i.e. the soul, and the *I «as a human being»*, namely «as alterable» (Kant [1772-1773]: 19), which thus indicates an exposure to external changes: «Every human being has in himself a double personality, as it were, the *I as soul* and the *I as human being*» (Kant [1772-1773]: 19). The latter is the primary object of investigation in anthropology, which therefore considers human beings in terms of both the inner and outer sense.

In this regard, it should again be emphasised that Kant, both in the lectures on anthropology and in the published *Anthropology*, places the treatment of inner sense alongside that of the outer sense, «through which we perceive objects outside of ourselves» (Kant [1775-1776]: 65). It is particularly interesting that here the in-depth study of outer sense consists in analysing and classifying the five senses that humans are endowed with.

Without going into the more subtle or even less clear casuistic distinctions that emerge in the various lecture notes, our study of this topic can principally focus on the published *Anthropology*. Here Kant identifies three senses (touch, sight, and hearing) that are more objective than subjective, «that is, as empirical *intuitions* they contribute more to the *cognition* of the external object than they stir up the consciousness of the affected organ». Taste and smell are instead more subjective than objective, i.e. «the idea obtained from them is more a representation of enjoyment than of cognition of the external object» (Kant [1798a]: 265-266, see also e.g. Kant [1784-1785b]: 370-371).

Kant's insistence on the greater objectivity or subjectivity of one particular group of senses over another introduces a graduation into the distinction between subjective and objective that cannot be found in the transcendental perspective. Yet the anthropological classification relies not only upon degrees of objectivity or subjectivity, but is also characterized by a further, very special parameter, namely that of *nobility*. As one reads in *Friedländer* lecture-ù notes: «The more the human beings can share in them, the nobler are the senses» (Kant [1775-1776]: 68). Once again Kant alludes to graduation, but here he means it in the sense of the most general (though not universal a priori) rules that distinguish the anthropological investigation.

From this point of view, one could argue that the attribute «noble» refers to the possibility of one individual to «easily come to an agreement with others» (Kant [1798a]: 266), which characterises anthropological objectivity. However, the formulations of the lectures in this respect are quite ambiguous and do not allow for the establishment of a firm correspondence between objectivity as nobility in the sense of a posteriori shareability and a priori intersubjectivity in the transcendental sense³.

It is nevertheless meaningful that the topic of comparative universality and the discussion of the five senses return both in the third *Critique* and in the *Anthropology* precisely to show the limitedness of comparative anthropological universality as opposed to the absolute universality that characterizes the transcendental perspective. In the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant comes indeed to characterize this peculiar comparative universality at §7, after having drawn some examples from the five senses, in order to clarify that when speaking of something agreeable we are dealing with a meaning of *subjective* that means irreducibly *personal* (Kant [1790]: 97). The case of what merely pleases, is elucidated through the example of the skilful host, «who knows how to entertain his guests with agreeable things (of enjoyment through all the senses), so that they are all pleased». Therefore, the skilful host can be said to have taste, «but here the universality is understood only comparatively, and in this case there are only general [*generale*] rules (like all empirical rules are), not universal [*universale*] ones, the latter of which the judgment of taste about the beautiful ventures or claims» (Kant [1790]: 98).

This distinction is taken up again in the printed *Anthropology*, in the Annotation to the paragraph *On the feeling for the beautiful, that is, On the partly sensuous, partly intellectual pleasure in reflective intuition, or taste*, again through the example of the convivial situation: «The aesthetic taste of the host shows itself in his skill in choosing with universal validity, something which he cannot bring about through his own sense of taste, because his guests might choose other foods or drinks, each according to his own private sense. Therefore, he sets up his meeting with *variety*, so that everyone will find something that suits his sense, which yields a comparative universal validity» (Kant [1798a]: 338).

Thus, even beyond the subtleties and the sometimes-faltering formulations of the lectures, the anthropological discussion of the five senses gives us an important clue concerning Kant's diverse ways of dealing with objectivity: the projection of the cardinal structures of Kant's transcendental philosophy onto anthropology collides with the limitation that constitutes the essential approach of anthropology, namely an a posteriori observation that allows room for degrees of objectivity. Admittedly, this discipline often ends with the formulation of hypotheses which, like a photographic negative, correspond a posteriori to the results obtained a priori on the transcendental level, but at this latter level universality and necessity are gained, by definition, independently from any empirical component.

Therefore, what marks an insurmountable difference between the two perspectives is the hypothetical and thus quantitative-inductive mode to which anthropology must confine itself, in contrast to the absolutely necessary universality resulting from the deductive approach that characterises critical philosophy.

This means that the objectivity with which anthropology is concerned, the degree of which can be measured, is aimed primarily at determining what an object of observation can be *as such*. Thus, when Kant, in his earliest lectures on anthropology, describes the senses that increase our knowledge as *objective*, he means those senses that allow us to identify as many elements as possible that could *hold as objects* for our cognitive faculty. In this context, *Objektivität* is therefore primarily understood as *Gegenständlichkeit*, i.e. as the property of that which from time-to-time lays before the subject's eyes and can thereby be observed.

4. Anthropology and Morality

The next step consists in broadening the methodological comparison between Kant's anthropological and critical-transcendental approaches to the moral realm.

In this direction, too, character as a *way of thinking* plays a key role, since—the definition of the *way of thinking* made clear—it expresses the self-legislative capacity through which the human being acquires the fullness of the conditions for acting autonomously.

This reminds us of Kant's moral reflection, e.g. at the point in the *Groundwork* where he refers to the empirical part of ethics as a «*practical anthropology*» (Kant [1785a]: 44; see also Kant [1797]: 372). Furthermore, in the same text he claims that «*talents of mind [...], as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution is therefore called character, is not good*» (Kant [1785a]: 49).

However, although other passages from the Lectures on Ethics and Anthropology seem to allow this interpretation⁴, R. Brandt warns against identifying pragmatic anthropology itself with the definition of the discipline, which Kant sometimes presents as a kind of integration of his moral philosophy (Brandt [1999]: 14-17).

Among the historical and systematic reasons that support his thesis, Brandt emphasises the notable absence of key anthropological concepts in the moral field and vice versa. In moral philosophy, the relevant passages refer to a *practical*, but never to a *pragmatic* anthropology. Conversely, the words *categorical* and *imperative* do not appear in the lecture notes nor in the printed *Anthropology*. These considerations lead Brandt to conclude that pragmatic anthropology cannot be regarded as the systematically required complementary piece of morality (Brandt [1999]: 16). This is also supported by the separation between the moral and pragmatic realms, which Kant makes clear in the *Groundwork*, insofar as he distinguishes between technical «*rules of skill*», pragmatic «*counsels of prudence*», and moral «*commands (laws) of morality*» (Kant [1785a]: 69).

However, these considerations presuppose a clear idea of what is meant by the adjective *pragmatic*. In this respect, N. Hinske points out that *pragmatic* is the safest meaning associated with anthropology, since Kant insists on contrasting this adjective with many others, such as *speculative*, *theoretical*, *scholastic* and, last but not least, *physiological* (Hinske [1966]: 424). Furthermore, A. Wood refers to the multi-layered meaning of the term *pragmatic*, which on the one hand contrasts with the adjectives *physiological* and *scholastic*, and on the other hand is considered a synonym for *useful* (Wood [2003]: 40-42). *Useful* here includes, in a very broad sense, technical, moral, and prudential knowledge; it is no coincidence that Kant repeatedly refers to anthropology as a doctrine of prudence⁵.

The adjective *pragmatic*, which contains all these elements, is therefore particularly suitable for characterising Kant's anthropology. It is a doctrine which, through empirical observation—which is not uninvolved, but integrated into its context—attempts to look at the human being from the point of view of action. This means looking at the mutual interactions between humans in a worldly context, in search of rules that they give to their own purposeful actions in this domain. Most importantly, these actions are freely determined, and this feature makes it clear that the anthropological perspective, although empirical, is not in opposition to human

freedom: «Lack of knowledge of human beings is the reason that morality and sermons, which are full of admonitions of which we never tire, have little effect. Morality must be combined with knowledge of humanity» (Kant [1775-1776]: 49; see also Kant [1797]: 372; see also Falduto-Klemme [2015]: 25).

The richness and complexity of this framework therefore do not seem to support Brandt's peremptory exclusion of a structural link between anthropology and morality, a link that at the same time does not reduce anthropology to a mere complement to ethics⁶.

At this point, we can draw a preliminary conclusion on the relationship between anthropology and the critical-transcendental project by referring to the famous Reflection 903, in which Kant defines «the egoist of science» as a Cyclops who

still needs an eye that makes him see his object from the point of view of other people. This is the basis of the humanity of the sciences, i.e., the affability of the judgement by which one subordinates himself to the judgement of others [...] The second eye is therefore that of the self-knowledge of human reason, without which we have no rough measure of the greatness of our knowledge. That gives the standard line of measurement. [...] Nor is it enough to know many other sciences, but the self-knowledge of understanding and reason. *Anthropologia transcendentalis*. (Refl. 903, AA 15: 395)

The importance of this reflection resides not so much on the fact that it explicitly connects anthropology with the transcendental—which is undoubtedly interesting, but too isolated in Kant's corpus to form the basis of a well-founded argument—but rather because it places, with unique clarity, the necessary retracing of all human cognition into a broader framework, which is precisely that of the human *latiore sensu*, where alone all cognitions can acquire their sense.

This realm of the human is firstly marked by reason, and this brings us back to the starting point of the paper: since reason is the characterising feature of the human being, the investigation on the nature of the human being, insofar as it is carried out by a human being, can only turn into an investigation of reason on itself.

Reason expresses itself through norms whose objectivity does not consist in a dogmatic apriorism, but in an a priori validity for rational beings, which can also be discovered (even if not deduced) through an a posteriori investigation. And this is precisely the second eye with which anthropology provides every instance of overspecialised knowledge: a constant and fundamental reminder of the need to share, i.e. to socialise, the validity of a judgement with other human beings as representatives of reason.

Of course, the *social* sharing inherent in anthropology has nothing to do with the intersubjectivity through which transcendental objectivity is constituted in the critical sphere. In anthropology, the rational subject is confronted with a multifaceted world, and anthropology—as a theory of observation—aims at grasping the complexity of the dynamics that result from the encounter between the sub-

ject and the world. After having observed these dynamics, the philosopher applying the anthropological method must be able to recognise them, which in Kant's eyes means bringing to light the rules that underlie them.

In the preface to the published *Anthropology* Kant writes that «the expressions “to know the world” and “to have the world” are rather far from each other in their meaning, since one only *understands* the play that one has watched, while the other has *participated* in it» (Kant [1798a]: 232). Commenting on this, H. Holzhey has aptly noted that we humans live in a world that is clearly not just our *place of stay* [*Aufenthaltsort*] but should be understood as a community (Holzhey [1970]: 309). S.B. Kim adds to this that each person has her/his own world [*eigene Welt*] and, depending on what this world looks like, she/he sets her/his own purpose, which she/he must realise by living or playing along with other people (Kim [1994]: 138, see also Jörissen [2002]: 184).

Thus, the anthropological consideration of the human being expresses her/his *being-in-the-world* as a rational individuality capable of moralising her/himself by making her/himself a person, i.e. by making her/his character a good character (Kant [1793a]: 76).

It is therefore necessary to broaden our view of the very world that we have often referred to as a background for the anthropological consideration of the individual. This can help us to better address the central question concerning the nature of the relationship between the anthropological enquiry and the critical-transcendental perspective.

5. *Nature and Providence in History*

It has sometimes been attempted to convey Kant's critical project through the metaphor of a prism, whose sides are represented by the three *Critiques* in their interdependence. What this metaphor does not address, however, is the question of how to define the space that is surrounded by the sides of this prism, namely, the space of human reason. For it must never be forgotten that the three sides are connected both by the triangle at the base and by the triangle at the top. Moving beyond the metaphor: What are the *concrete* approaches to human reason? An abstract consideration of the structures of reason that precedes any application? But only in application can we see these structures, which in itself remains a priori, fully unfolded, so that the question arises as to whether the answer lies in experience, which in this sense should be understood as the place where both the a priori cognitive structures and the practical maxims are translated into action.

The solution to this dilemma is only possible by looking at the human being in the free unfolding of the normativity that characterises her/his reason, which happens on the stage of history, the only place where the manifestation of a norm

and the freedom of this manifestation do not give rise to contradiction. This can be easily demonstrated by examining the two concepts of *nature* and *providence*, which Kant sometimes does not seem to distinguish clearly.

Already in the first lines of the *Idea* of 1784, Kant puts at stake the apparent chaos documented by the human actions that make up history (Kant [1784]: 108). He conceives of these actions as being inscribed in the phenomenal framework onto which reason, as we know from the first *Critique*, projects a teleological order that has the heuristic function of satisfying reason's own need for systematicity (cf. Kant [1781/1787]: 615-616).

Since this teleological system has no constitutive value and refers to the regulative idea of the «highest intelligence» (Kant [1781/1787]: 605-607), Kant does not formulate a hypothesis about the nature of this intelligence: as he writes in the first *Critique*: «it must not matter at all whether you say “God has wisely willed so” or “Nature has wisely so ordered it”» (Kant [1781/1787]: 620).

Although the consideration of teleology is significantly developed in the transition from the first to the third *Critique*, the reasons for favouring the concept of *nature* over *providence* (which is clearly implied in the reference to God) in the study of the mundane order remain almost unchanged. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, indeed, the consideration of the teleological principle internal to nature has an analogical character, i.e. such a principle allows us to consider nature *as if* it had been teleologically designed by a higher intelligence, but without demanding the admission of an actual transcendent causality (cf. e.g. Kant [1790]: 254-255).

If we bear in mind that the *Idea* represents a theoretical-speculative model, then it immediately becomes clear that Kant's conception of the term *nature* in 1784 is to be read precisely in a teleological and regulative sense. This holds for the sense in which human *natural* predispositions [*Naturanlagen*] have to be understood, as well as for the «teleological doctrine of *nature*» (Kant [1784]: 109). Through these expressions Kant means a nature, which «*has willed that the human being should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of himself, and participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct through his own reason*» (Kant [1784]: 110). As a consequence, philosophical activity itself, as an expression of the human character, i.e. reason, has the duty to promote a speculation that recognises and promotes moralisation as the goal of humanity (Kant [1784]: 118).

The (regulative) idea according to which our freedom *can* unfold in nature allows us, despite contingent limitations, to present as a system what would otherwise appear as a purposeless aggregate of things, namely human actions. At the same time, the problematic nature of history lies precisely in the fact that the objects onto which theoretical reason projects a teleologically orientated order

are not phenomena among others, but those human actions in which a freedom is expressed that is incompatible with any mechanical necessity. Now, it is understandable that here we are not dealing with a nature that is deterministically pointing towards a predetermined goal, but with an order that *can* be rationalised and is thus *potentially* in harmony with the freedom of rational beings.

This becomes particularly clear in the last lines of the *Idea*, where Kant refers to the «consoling prospect», «in which the human species is represented in the remote distance as finally working itself upward toward the condition in which all germs nature has placed in it can be fully developed and its vocation here on earth can be fulfilled» (Kant [1784]: 119). Immediately afterwards, Kant affirms that in this context it would be more correct to speak of providence rather than nature (*ibidem*).

This should not be taken as an *en passant* remark, since Kant repeatedly uses *providence* alongside *nature* or, as here, even states that he prefers the former term to the latter. Nevertheless, the term *nature* is used more frequently than *providence*. Take, for example, the essay *On the Common Saying*:

For only from nature, or rather from *providence* (since supreme wisdom is required for the complete fulfilment of this end), can we expect an outcome that is directed to the whole and from it to the parts, whereas people in their *schemes* set out only from the parts and may well remain with them, and may be able to reach the whole, as something too great for them, in their ideas but not in their influence, especially since, with their mutually adverse schemes, they would hardly unite for it by their own free resolution. (Kant [1793b]: 307)

In this moral context, Kant is not referring to a providence that alludes to an otherworldly dimension, but to the need for the unconditional totality that human beings can only strive for within the regulative horizon that is opened up to them by their own reason, without the powers of their limited understanding allowing them to achieve it. Here, as at the end of the *Idea*, providence is thus configured as nature from the point of view of the human moralisation path, which leads human beings to overcome individual limits in the direction of a ‘*civil constitution*’ and then a ‘*cosmopolitan constitution*’ (*ibidem*).

Providence should therefore always be read in connection with Kant’s regulative conception of nature, but with the crucial difference that in this case it is about the possibility of determining the conditions for the realisation of morality on earth. Such a realisation proceeds from human freedom, which cannot be neglected in favour of an intervention breaking through the natural order.

It is indeed «not in the nature of the human being to relinquish his power by choice», and only «in pressing circumstances», that is, based on the awareness of one’s own powerlessness, «it can be considered an expression not unbefitting the moral wishes and hopes of people», to expect the conditions for the realisation of one’s own moralisation from a providence conceived in this way (Kant [1793b]: 308).

P. Kleingeld suggests that Kant basically uses the term *nature* when he means the order that reason projects onto the phenomenal dimension in its theoretical use, while *providence* denotes the cause of this order, which the moral side of reason must postulate when it implies the conditions for the possibility of moral action in the world. But Kleingeld herself warns against a simplistic division of the areas between the two terms (Kleingeld [2001]: 218)⁷.

As a counterexample, one can refer to the section *On the Guarantee of Perpetual Peace* in the essay *Toward Perpetual Peace*, where Kant employs the term *nature* several times, although he clearly examines the question of progress from a moral and legal point of view (Kant [1795]: 331-337). There is thus an apparent asymmetry whereby *providence* would only occur in the moral realm and not in the theoretical one, and *nature* could be legitimately used in both contexts. Indeed, as previously mentioned, on the one hand it is clear that the regulative sense of teleology projected onto nature by theoretical reason is intended to satisfy the need for systematicity of reason itself, and therefore does not require an actual reliance on the transcendent. On the other hand, Kant argues that the standpoint of the moral agent, insofar as it is based on the noumenal dimension of freedom, must postulate a transcendent cause of the mundane order, thereby alluding to the need to use the concept of providence.

In the texts mentioned above, however, which are concerned with the possibility of a human's moralisation in this world, the reference to this providence is *added* to nature, but providence here does not look away from nature. This results in a conception of providence as a way of understanding nature as a *possible* development of the original human predispositions (Kant [1798a]: 423-424). Lacking proofs for the impossibility of moral progress in the world (Kant [1793b]: 306), it is legitimate and even our duty to work toward promoting the conditions for moralisation based on our own predispositions, i.e. our own *Bestimmung* or, in anthropological terms, our own character as human beings (Kant [1786]: 172-175).

As Kant makes clear in the *Conflict of the Faculties*, individuals have no choice but to follow a «negative wisdom» by making war – the main obstacle to morality – gradually disappear. Here he contends that the hope for a positive human progress can only be expected on the condition of «a wisdom from above (which bears the name of providence if it is invisible to us)» (Kant [1798b]: 308). With this expression he means the voice of supra-individual reason, which implies moving beyond the perspective of the individual towards legal-political institutions, even though, as we shall see, these institutions in turn have an ideally provisional function, whose target is on the achievement of a cosmopolitan society.

In this framework, then, anthropology cannot be the foundation of the prism on whose sides the three faces represented by the *Critiques* are grafted, because its investigation is not rooted in the a priori dimension proper to transcendental

domain. Nor can it descend from above, like a sort of fundamental anthropology that claims to *disclose* the essence of the human being.

Thus, the task pursued by anthropology ultimately consists in providing the overspecialised scholar (the Cyclops) with a second eye, which can now be better identified as a *discipline* in the Kantian sense of the word. Such a *discipline* means a guide for the only possible protagonist of the moralisation path, namely the human *species*. Indeed, while the individual grasps the necessary openness towards this path as a desideratum, in her/his attempt to achieve it, she/he comes up against the limits of her/his own finitude (see Kant [1798a]: 425-429).

6. *Final Remarks: Normativity and Teleology*

At this point we can perhaps recognise a critical reappropriation of anthropology, where the genitive is to be understood in the objective sense: namely, the critical philosophy that reappropriates anthropology without distorting it whatsoever.

This is articulated in two steps. The first is the gradual establishment of the pragmatic orientation in the science of the human being that calls for a cosmopolitan knowledge, which replaces the idea of a world order as a unified background for the knowledge of nature and human being. This closely resembles the meaning of Kant's distinction between *to know the world* and *to have the world*.

As previously mentioned, however, Kant's reflections go far beyond the pragmatic approach of the 1798 text, and the second transition is made possible precisely through criticism. For on the one hand, the results of the critique of reason finally seal an investigation of the human being released from the dogmatic image of a given world order. On the other hand, the critical turn and the project of a philosophy that perceives itself as an architectural science of human's transcendental structures lead to an idea of the totality, in which anthropological research finds a specific place.

This place can be understood precisely as the result of a normative and teleological path. Indeed, since the worldly order holds as a necessary (but still insufficient) scenario for the development of human predispositions, we need the secularised providence described in the previous section. Such a providence enables us to look at history as a process along which cosmopolitan law, lacking the coercive force of state law, can establish itself as a natural tendency of the human species. Here the whole distance between the objectivity of the natural sciences [*Naturwissenschaften*] and that of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]-in the Diltheyan sense of the terms-can be aptly assessed. For on the one hand, history, as the quintessential representative of the human sciences, cannot aspire to the absolute objectivity achieved at the level of the natural sciences. But on the other hand, this weakness of the human sciences can be seen as a strength precisely from an anthropological perspective, because it claims that any approach

to the knowledge of natural objects, even the most methodologically rigorous, is unavoidably mediated by human action.

In this way, the necessity of a «history a priori» (Kant [1798b]: 297) can be recognised in the form of the mentioned secularised providence, and conceived of without any contradiction to nature: this gives way to the widening of the horizon of human moralisation. Yet this relies upon the anthropological analysis which lets human action be considered as an expression of that freedom which distinguishes humans from every other animal on earth. Kant emphasises this role of anthropology in the service of «a history of humanity in the whole of its vocation» in his answer to K.L. Reinhold's critique to his review of Herder's *Ideen*. The grounds for a human history, capable of expressing the whole human vocation may «be sought neither in metaphysics nor in the cabinet of natural history specimens», but rather «solely in his [human] actions, which reveal his character» (Kant [1785b]: 134).

In this sense, the anthropological *way of thinking* expresses reason not as something innate that develops independently of our will, but as a predisposition that requires our free choice in order to direct our actions towards rational ends. In other words, anthropology allows us to find sufficient elements in the empirical course of human existence to maintain that our actions *can* be traced back to an a priori normativity, thus fostering a legitimate hope of achieving our ultimate end.

Yet this is not just about a hope that is intended to reassure us. Rather, hope has a deeper meaning in the structure of our reason. Consider the second section of the *Canon of Pure Reason*, devoted to the *Ideal of the highest good as a determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason*. Here Kant refers to the famous three questions «What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?», and defines the question concerning hope as «simultaneous practical and theoretical» (Kant [1781/1787]: 677). This can be understood in the sense that «all hope concerns happiness» (*ibidem*). However, it could also be read with respect to the relationship between practical-pragmatic law and moral law: the former «advises us what to do if we want to partake of happiness», whereas the latter «commands how we should behave in order even to be worthy of happiness» (*ibidem*).

Such an investigation into the *determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason*, in which hope plays a central role, is further systematised in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*. Here Kant contrasts a «scholastic concept» of philosophy, which is incapable of grasping the moral goals of humanity, with his own «cosmopolitan concept [*Weltbegriff*] (*conceptus cosmicus*)», whereby philosophy is understood as «the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)» (Kant [1781/1787]: 694-695)⁸. The philosopher who follows the *conceptus cosmicus* is «the legislator of human reason» (Kant [1781/1787]: 695) and, as such, has only «two objects,

nature and freedom» (*ibidem*). According to the *conceptus cosmicus*, systematic philosophy therefore aims «to bring together the theoretical and the practical in the legislation of human reason» (Deligiorgi [2017]: 690), but Kant specifies that such a pattern lies «only in the idea» (Kant [1781/1787]: 695).

As can be seen, philosophy in the *conceptus cosmicus* alludes directly to the role of hope. Indeed, history becomes the natural framework in which the «essential end» can be reached. Consequently, the possibility that nature and freedom can «ultimately» converge in «a single philosophical system» requires an enquiry into the conceivability of the way to attain these ends in history (cf. Kant [1781/1787]: 695).

Certainly, this research employs the tools of anthropology and has history as its own testing ground, but its a posteriori nature does not allow it to prescribe any content. Thus, anthropology can only set the stage for the effective application of the transcendently determined *laws* of reason to the empirical situations in the dimension of the mundane. This step should enable the philosopher to «exhibiting an otherwise planless *aggregate* of human actions, at least in the large, as a *system*» (Kant [1784]: 118).

Here the critical reappropriation of the anthropological perspective is accomplished as a vehicle for the construction of a historical horizon, in which the human being's ultimate purposes can be recognised as *achievable goals* only for humanity as a species. Here, then, the «mechanism of nature» is revealed, which anthropology outlines in its concrete mode of operation by providing reason with tendential *rules* concerning empirical paths, to be incessantly walked, in order for reason to affirm itself in history.

As we mentioned at the end of the previous section, if this goal were reached, what has proven to be necessary based on anthropological observations, namely the external coercion of state law, would also become superfluous, since «all the machines that served as scaffolding must gradually fall away when the edifice of reason is erected» (Refl. 1415, AA 15: 616).

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Notes

- 1 In case the quoted Kantian text is not translated into English, we provide the volume and page indications of the Academy edition.
- 2 See also the passages in which the soul is defined as an «object of inner sense» (e.g. Kant [1781/1787]: 698; *Philosophische Enzyklopädie*, AA 29: 39; Refl 4863, AA 18: 13; Refl 6315, AA 18: 619).
- 3 For a summary of these oscillations see Lorini (2023: 63).
- 4 See, e.g., Kant [1784-1785a]: 42, [1784-1785b]: 345, and *Moral/Mrongovius I*, 27: 1398.
- 5 See e.g. Kant [1775-1776]: 47-48, [1784-1785b]: 344. Cf. Wilson (2016). On the relationship between the *pragmatic* and the doctrine of prudence, see Kant [1781/1787]: 677-678.
- 6 In recent decades, an important reappraisal of the structural relationship between Kant's anthropology and ethics has been proposed by R.B. Louden (e.g. 2000).
- 7 See also Kleingeld (2005: 122-125).
- 8 See also Kant (1789: 300), where the contrast is between philosophy „*in sensu scholastico*” and „*in sensu cosmopolitico*”.