CHAPTER 9

The Concept of Humanity in Kant's Transcendental Philosophy

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Transcendental Philosophy as a Humanistic Philosophy?

Many of Kant's readers over the years, especially of late, have taken Kant to be one of the most paradigmatic philosophers of humanity. More specifically, Kant is portrayed as advocating a kind of "humanizing" of philosophy itself, with respect to its methodology and primary subject matter, its claims about what are to serve as philosophical "principles," and the resulting philosophical vision that follows from these principles. Concerning methodology and subject matter, the very first words of the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are "*human* reason," and Kant's strategy in this work is to use this reason to achieve a complete "self-cognition" in order to assess which of its "claims" can actually be justified

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(Axi).[1] Concerning philosophical principles, Kant's "fundamental propositions" (*Grundsätze*) in both his theoretical and his practical philosophy would seem to be derived from facts already in hand about human mental capacities: sensibility, understanding, and of course reason itself.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kant's "Copernican" shift to a focus on the nature of human subjectivity has been taken to have as its result a vision of philosophy presented wholly from the perspective of, and especially in light of the limits of, the human mind itself. Leading interpretations of Kant's theoretical philosophy, for example—especially of the significance of the principles that he takes to underwrite the ontology and epistemology involved in his transcendental idealism—emphasize his internalization of the subject matter of theoretical philosophy (nature) to show how this is to be reconceptualized and delimited to include only what is accessible from the specifically "human standpoint,"[2] rather than what is simply true per se, or "in itself." Similarly, leading interpretations of Kant's practical philosophy—especially of the principles which underwrite the deontology at the heart of Kant's account of ethics and politics, including what Kant himself calls the "principle of humanity" (*Prinzip der Menschheit*; see 4:430)—emphasize the way in which human beings themselves function as grounds for moral "worth," serving not just as "ends in themselves" but also as "the ultimate end of creation here on earth" (5:426). Both claims again seem indicative of Kant's intention to put forward a vision that contrasts not

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1 Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelten Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–); and Immanuel Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–). I will cite Kant's works according to the now standard format of using the "Academy Edition" volume and page numbers (see Kant, *The Cambridge Edition*) for all of Kant's works except the first *Critique*, which I will cite according to the B-edition pagination; I have usually followed the translations in Kant, *The Cambridge Edition*, though I have silently amended them at several points.

2 See Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Human Standpoint*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

just with appeals to divine commands but also with appeals to features of prehuman nature as what provides the ultimate basis for a theory of value.[3] Indeed, in his account of aesthetic value as well, Kant has been seen as providing the same sort of humanized grounding for the principles of beauty and sublimity, as Kant claims, strikingly, that it is in fact only humans who are capable of the feelings involved in judgments of beauty (such that no other animals and not even divine beings can enjoy these states; see 5:210), and, furthermore, that the "ideal" of what is beautiful can be found only in the "human figure" (5:235).[4] And many have heard similar notes in Kant's account of the grounds of politics, history, and even religion.

Despite these interpretive trends, however, there are other features of Kant's writings which put pressure on any simple "humanist" reading of Kant's position. Perhaps most notably, at key points Kant seems to indicate that the topic of being human provides, not the starting-point but the end-point or aim for philosophy, as a topic which gives an overarching focus and unity to philosophy itself. After noting that all of the interest that we have in philosophy can be brought under three questions—"What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?" (B832–33)—Kant then claims that these three questions themselves should give rise to, and help answer, a fourth—namely, "What is a human being?" ("Was ist der Mensch?" [11:429]; see 9:25).[5] Indeed, Kant's own career can seem to bear out just this perspective, in light of his efforts to bring the discipline of anthropology more squarely into the purview of philosophy itself, as one of the first philosophers to offer substantial lectures on the

3 See Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. B. Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

4 See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

5 See Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1929); Patrick Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

discipline, first as a topic within geography, and then as a separate course in its own right.[6]

The Problematic Status of the Concept—and Science(s)—of Being Human

Whether we grant only that the topic of humanity provides a point of focus for Kant's philosophy, or whether we take the concept of being human to play a more foundational role, many of Kant's readers have found the marked tendencies toward humanism to be responsible for what is most problematic about Kant's views. In light of his continual emphasis on the human mind and its capacities, Kant seems led to a position in which nature itself is reduced to something decidedly "subjective," and value is restricted in a decidedly "species-ist" fashion, limited only to what falls within or flows from the anthropocentric sphere. This has seemed both problematic in its own right but also in conflict with other equally basic tendencies in Kant's work which seem to pull in the exact opposite direction. Foremost among these is Kant's ambition to formulate a "critical" perspective on philosophy that would be properly "transcendental," insofar as it would be both "pure" in its subject matter and consist in concepts which were derivable (and principles which were demonstrable) "apriori." Insofar as Kant's philosophy is supposed to be "pure," it is not supposed to make use of any "empirical" concept, or one that involves sensation essentially (B74); insofar as it is supposed to focus only on "apriori" concepts, it is not supposed to concern itself with any concepts which are "taken from experience," and so "aposteriori" to it (4:265–66). But then, for the concept of being human to itself be a "fundamental concept" (*Grundbegriff*) of Kant's philosophy, and indeed for this concept to give rise to genuinely

6 Robert Loudon, *Kant's Human Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 121–22; see John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

"fundamental propositions" (*Grundsätze*), it would need to be a concept that is itself pure and of a priori origin.

How, then, can Kant's seeming appeal to given facts about human beings and their minds, to provide the principles for his philosophizing, be reconciled with his ambition to present a transcendental philosophy concerned with the "system" of "apriori concepts of objects in general" (A11), one which would merit the title of a "philosophy of pure, merely speculative reason" (A14/B28)? It is striking, in this regard, that—despite giving numerous "deductions" of several other key concepts (e.g., of space, time, substance, cause) as being of pure content and a priori origin—Kant does not anywhere in his *Critiques* explicitly identify a specifically pure concept of *being human* itself, nor does he demonstrate how it would be possible to acquire such a concept a priori. Correlative to this lack of a "metaphysical" deduction of a pure concept of being human (see B159), Kant also does not anywhere spell out a method for the "transcendental" deduction of the objective validity of the concept of being human, as he famously does for each of the concepts mentioned earlier, nor does he associate a particular body of scientific cognition a priori with the concept of being human—on the model, say, of the system of cognitions of the essence of space in geometry, or of time in chronometry.

What is more, Kant's actual remarks about the (then) current status of anthropology make it sound much closer to how he views chemistry and psychology (4:470–71), all grouped together not only in virtue of *not yet* being fully scientific enterprises but also in virtue of being endeavors for which scientific status might *never actually* be achievable. In contrast to the *sciences* of mathematics and natural physics, which systematically organize "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*) of their subject matter, anthropology is said to be only "a *doctrine* [*Lehre*] of *information* [*Kenntnis*] concerning the human being, systematically grasped" (7:119; my italics). Moreover, Kant emphasizes that "all such attempts to arrive at such a science [of humanity] with thoroughness encounter considerable difficulties that are inherent in human nature

itself" (7:120) and that these obstacles "make it very difficult for anthropology to rise to the rank of a formal science" (7:121).[7]

All of this would seem to stand as a straightforward obstacle to Kant nevertheless placing the concept of being human at the foundation of his own scientific system of philosophy. As if this weren't problematic enough, Kant has also been read as not only lacking a sufficiently "pure" concept of being human but as actively and illicitly drawing on the "impure," specifically *empirical*-psychological, investigation of human beings—despite his own suggestions to the contrary—in order to provide the "principles" for his own transcendental-philosophical claims. In the first *Critique*, for example, the form of our mental capacity for sensing ("sensibility") serves as the "principle" for our pure sensible concepts and grounds our cognition a priori of space and time (see B35–36); the form of our capacity for thinking and judging ("understanding") serves as the "principle" for the pure concepts of our understanding ("categories"; B106) and grounds our cognition a priori of nature; and the form of our capacity for reasoning and inferring serves as the "principle" for the pure concepts of reason ("ideas"; B378) and grounds (in a "regulative" fashion) our scientific investigation of nature. For many, this simply confirms the suspicion that all of the allegedly "pure" elements of Kant's philosophy actually seem to be drawn from the results of already existing observations on the nature and structure of the human mind and its capacities, accumulated and presented in the several decades prior by Wolff, Baumgarten, Tetens, and others, often explicitly under the heading of "empirical psychology."

To be sure, several authors after Kant (J. F. Fries, Herbart) simply embraced the idea that human psychology must serve as the starting

7 In his lectures, however, it is not clear that Kant is totally consistent on this point: "worldly cognition is thus just the same as cognition of the human being. When this observation of human beings (anthropography) is brought to a science, it is called 'anthropology,' and one attains to this science" (25:1435). See Rudolph Makkreel, "Kant on the Scientific Status of Psychology, Anthropology, and History," and Thomas Sturm, "Kant on Empirical Psychology," in *Kant and the Sciences*, ed. Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

point for any "critical" theoretical philosophy, and then set about to provide a more precise and more fully demonstrated empirical characterization of the human mind itself. More recently, leading interpreters have sought to highlight the extent to which the true significance of Kant's own philosophy as a whole—and perhaps even especially his practical philosophy—can only be understood from the context of his anthropological investigations, which thereby offer a corrective to readings which insist on emphasizing Kant's seeming ambitions toward the pure and the a priori.[8] Even so, many other post-Kantians have viewed this felt tension at the heart of Kant's project to be a sign, instead, of its ultimate incoherence, and have opted for a more wholesale rejection of this dimension of Kant's philosophy, arguing that philosophy cannot be thought of as ultimately grounded on human psychology at all, or else it will be unable to avoid falling into an inconsistent "psychologism" about its most basic concepts (of being, truth, goodness, value, and so on).[9]

Other post-Kantians have sought to explore a more conciliatory strategy—namely, to find in Kant, or construct on his behalf, a suitably pure (or "transcendental") concept of the human mind, a "transcendental" psychology,[10] or even more ambitiously, a pure or transcendental

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8 See Susan Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Tamar Schapiro, "Kantian Rigorism and Mitigating Circumstances," *Ethics* 117 (2006): 32–57; Robert Loudon, *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant's Defense of Common Moral Experience: A Phenomenological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*.

9 This took at least two distinct forms: on the one hand a trend toward logical idealism, which sought to retain a "pure" grounding of philosophy, only now not in the human mind but instead in a purely logical realm of concepts and propositions "in themselves" (see Bolzano; eventually some strands in the neo-Kantians, along with Frege, Husserl); on the other hand a trend toward absolute idealism, which sought instead to give a genuinely philosophical grounding for anthropology itself not just in pure logic (in an "absolute idea" of philosophy) but also in the real historical development of "spirit" from mere nature, through humanity, and on to expressions of a spirit more "absolute" than that of humanity (see Schelling, Hegel).

10 See Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Wayne Waxman, *Kant's Anatomy of the Intelligent Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

concept of being human in general, a transcendental anthropology.[11] The attempt at a transcendental anthropology is more ambitious insofar as Kant, along with the tradition leading up to him, regularly takes the human being (i.e., the subject matter for anthropology) to include more than a set of merely psychological capacities (hence to be more than "the mind") and to include, more specifically, human physiology or embodiment. What a pure concept—or really any "pure" representation—of the specifically human *body* might look like is itself not altogether clear. Nor is it obvious how such a representation could be given to the mind a priori, independently of the (seemingly quite particular) experience (and specifically: sensation) of one's own body itself. In fact, as we will see, it is not actually clear that the case is much better for the possibility of a pure concept (or any pure representation) of the human *mind* and its capacities either. Yet without pure representations of either the human mind or human body, it is hard to see how any pure science of being human as such could even get off the ground (as Kant himself seemed to acknowledge)—let alone provide the principles for the rest of a pure transcendental philosophy.

The Definition of Being Human in Kant's Context: Baumgarten

In order to better appreciate why the concept of being human comes to have a problematic status within the interpretation of Kant's philosophy, we can look more closely at the manner in which the concept of being human, and anthropology as the correlative discipline which has the human being as its topic, is discussed in Kant's historical context, before turning to Kant's own remarks. In the textbook on metaphysics that Kant used for his own lectures, at the outset of a section entitled "rational psychology," Alexander Baumgarten defines "human being"

11 See Angelica Nuzzo, *Ideal Embodiment* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).

(*homo*) as possessing a specific kind of soul in a specific kind of interaction with a specific kind of body, all of which makes a human a species of "animal": "a *human soul* [*anima humana; eine menschliche Seele*] is a soul in the closest interaction [*commercio*] with a human body [*cum corpore humano*]. And since a soul with the body with which it is in the closest interaction constitutes an *animal* [*animal; Tier*], a human soul along with the body with which it is in the closest interaction constitutes the animal that we call *the human being* [*hominem; einem Menschen*]" (*Metaphysica* sec. 740).[12] The interaction with its body is manifested in the human soul's "capacity" to move the body in accordance with its "power for representing" (sec. 750); and since it not only can represent the position of its own body in relation to the universe more generally but can do so "distinctly," Baumgarten claims that the human soul doesn't just interact with its body but "understands" (*intelligit*) it, and is therefore a "spirit" (*spiritus*; sec. 754). On this basis, Baumgarten affirms the classical definition of the human being as "*rational* animal" (sec. 792). Other animals which lack "understanding" are said to also lack "personality," "reason," "will," and "freedom" (*libertas*) (sec. 795).

Along with these basic determinations of the concept of being human (being a rational soul or spirit (namely, person), being in commerce with a specific body, being an animal), Baumgarten then specifies several forms of "cognition" that can be directed at the human being, in light of its constituent parts: "the human being [*homo*] consists of a finite soul and a finite body (sec. 741, 743), and hence is internally alterable (sec. 740), as well as being a finite and contingent being (sec. 202, 257). Therefore, philosophical and mathematical cognition of the human being is possible (sec. 249), that is, philosophical *anthropology* and mathematical anthropology, or *anthropometry* [*anthropometria*], just as is empirical anthropology through experience. The complex of rules that are to be observed in cognizing the human being

12 Alexander Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 7th ed. (Impensis C. H. Hemmerde, 1779). I have mostly followed the English translation by Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

is *anthropognostics* [*anthropognosia*]" (*Metaphysica* sec. 747). Though Baumgarten himself doesn't use the terminology of "pure" (versus "empirical") here, he does suggest that the philosophical and mathematical ways of cognizing the human being will not derive "from experience." Precisely how philosophical anthropology and mathematical anthropometry are supposed to proceed—and in particular, whether they will be built up out of separate sciences of the human mind (psychology) and the human body (physiology), or whether these will instead be derived from a more unified treatment of the human being in general—is left here unspecified.[13]

The Ambiguity of "Being Human" in Kant's Transcendental Idealism: *Homo Phaenomenon* and *Homo Noumenon*

Kant's own 1798 *Anthropology* and the lecture transcripts from his anthropology courses make clear that he, too, accepts that the human being includes both specifically intellectual *mental* capacities and a living *corporeality* ("animality") and can therefore be read as taking on the basic contours of the traditional definition of being human.[14] Even so, we might suspect that his own conception of the significance of this traditional definition will be affected by the broader shift in his philosophy as a whole to an idealist metaphysics.

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13 In the flow of the *Metaphysica*, at least, these remarks contrasting empirical and philosophical anthropology (and the definition of "human" as well) occur at the outset of a section entitled "rational psychology," which is itself said to "deduce its assertions from the concept of the soul," in contrast to "empirical psychology," which "deduces its assertions from its own experiences" (sec. 503), which might suggest that genuinely philosophical anthropology is properly thought of as a form of rational psychology. Compare Corey Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 2.

14 In a suggestive reformulation of the classical definition (namely, *animal rationale*) in the *Anthropology* itself, Kant might even seem to prioritize the animality of the human, in at least one respect: being human is not to be defined as being *always* or *already* a rational being but instead as being an animal that is capable of *becoming* rational—i.e., "an animal endowed with the capacity of reason [*als mit Vernunftfähigkeit begabtes Tier* (*animal rationabile*)]" such that it "can make out of itself a rational animal [*animal rationale*]" (7:321).

This is confirmed by the setting in which Kant finally takes up the topic of the human being more directly within the first *Critique*. This occurs quite late in the work, in the context of arguing for the necessity of accepting transcendental idealism about the immediate objects of sense ("appearances"), in order to achieve an acceptable solution to one of the Antinomies that arise when reason tries to infer from features of sensible objects what must be true of their conditions. The relevant (Third) Antinomy concerns a pair of inferences. One moves from the fact that a certain kind of causality is manifest in our experience ("empirical cognition," cognition based on sensation) of nature ("natural causality") to the conclusion that this is the *only* causality present in the world more generally (see B473). The other moves from the fact that a different kind of "spontaneous" causality ("freedom") is manifest in the *non*empirical consciousness ("pure apperception") of our own selves and our intellectual activity, to the conclusion that natural causality is *not* the only causality present in the world (see B574). Kant's resolution of this seeming contradiction is to deny that nature, considered as the object of our experience and our sensory intuitions, is identical with the world-whole. Nature, so understood, is constituted (in some sense) by sensory appearances which are merely representations in our mind and hence "ideal," whereas the world-whole would also include whatever real conditions there might be for appearances themselves, including our own mental activity, insofar as it gives rise (or at least seems to) to "inner" appearances (see B519).

It is here, in the context of a problem for reason, that Kant finally introduces the topic of "the human being." He notes how this being itself seems (even pre-philosophically) to have a problematic existence, insofar as it seems to occupy both the realm of nature and the realm of freedom, and hence seems to be both a sensible object (appearance)—a "phenomenon" in the world of sense—and a nonsensible or merely "intelligible object":

> The human being is one of the appearances in the world of sense, and to that extent also one of the natural causes whose causality

> must stand under empirical laws. As such he must accordingly also have an empirical character, just like all other natural things. . . . Yet the human being, who is otherwise acquainted with the whole of nature solely through sense, cognizes himself [*erkennt sich*] also through pure apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations which cannot be accounted at all among impressions of sense; he obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain capacities, he is a merely intelligible object, because the actions of this object cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility. We call these capacities understanding [*Verstand*] and reason [*Vernunft*]. (B574–5)

Kant's own resolution of this tension in our reasoning about our divergent consciousness of ourselves is in effect to uncover a bifurcation or an ambiguity in the very concept of the human being itself: as he puts it in his later 1796 *Metaphysics of Morals*, the term "human being" must actually be taken "in two different senses," depending on whether it is meant to refer to *homo phaenomenon* (namely, human in [or as] appearance) or *homo noumenon* (namely, human as intelligible object) (6:419). To reconstruct Kant's account of human being, then, we must first follow out each side of this division of senses, and then ask whether (and how) they can both apply to the same single being.

Homo Phaenomenon: The Human Being as "Extended" and as "Living"

Homo phaenomenon is defined, at least initially, first-personally—by way of the representations of "myself" as "I" *appear* to myself, as a sensible object. In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant tells us that this appearing can take two different forms: via the "*outer* intuitions" that I have of my body and its actions, as present in space, and then via the "*inner* intuitions" that represent my mind itself and its psychical activity as unfolding in time, intuitions which arise through a kind of

self-affection of my mind by its own activity (see B37). That I am an object to myself in outer intuition points to the manner in which the human being, by virtue of its body, belongs to *corporeal* nature more broadly; it possesses a location in corporeal space (is in the "place where I find myself"; see B38), and interacts mechanical-causally with other bodies, for example, by being moved to another location through impact. Yet in addition to belonging to the domain of "extended nature" (corporeality) in virtue of outer intuitions of its body in space, the human being also belongs to nature in virtue of the inner intuitions of its mind and its mental activity in time. More specifically, the human mind itself (hence the human being) belongs to the distinctly *psychical* side of nature, or "thinking nature" (*denkende Natur*; see 4:467).

It is not exactly clear what Kant takes the relationship to be between these two kinds of nature. For one thing, Kant rejects the idea that the activity of the mind per se (thoughts, etc.) could ever be intuited out among the bodies in space that constitute "extended nature" (see A358). Yet though the mind and its activity therefore does not have any specific bodily location in corporeal space, Kant claims it does have a kind of "virtual presence" (*virtuelle Gegenwart*) in relation to its corresponding human body in particular (see 12:32). What is more, it is through this virtual presence that the mind stands in the relation to the body as what serves as "the principle of *life*" for the human body itself (5:278). Though the body is not wholly determined by the activity of the mind, it is or can be oriented and necessitated by the mind, with "spirit" (*Geist*) as Kant's name (echoing Baumgarten) for the "*animating* principle" of the human being as a whole (see 7:225).

As these last references to life suggest, Kant holds that the activity of the mind itself—both in and for itself, but also in relation to the body—is distinctively *non*mechanical. Life in general involves "the capacity to be the cause of the reality of objects by means of representations" (5:9n), and, more specifically, representations of an "end" for the relevant activity, which entails that the human qua living causes its effects teleologically (5:360). Strikingly, Kant holds that, considered

per se, "the mind for itself is entirely *life* (the principle of life itself)"—so much so, that to the extent that the life of the human being encounters "hindrances or promotions," these must come from "outside" the mind itself—more specifically, from "its connection with its body" (5:278). Kant acknowledges his sympathy with Epicurus's idea that, in general, for humans, not just the feelings of "pain" but also those of "gratification" ("well-being") arise paradigmatically when the mind is (or is not) able to realize its principles, or have them realized, in the body in particular—such that these states of pleasure and pain are quintessentially bodily or corporeal as well (5:331; 5:278). Whether or not every pleasure (or pain) involves the body per se, Kant does seem to affirm that it arises due to the "agreement" (or disagreement) with "the subjective conditions of life" (5:9n); in the third *Critique*, the "sensation of satisfaction" ("pleasure") is likewise said to relate specifically to the "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*; 5:204).

What complicates matters, at this point, is how Kant's discussion of life is supposed to interact with his idealism, and more specifically, whether Kant means to ascribe life only to the mind as it is "in itself" or also to the mind as appears in inner intuition, in the form of time. While Kant's exposition of natural-mechanical causality in the Second Analogy makes explicit reference to temporality (B233f), it is less clear that all causality involving time must itself be natural-mechanical—though Kant does claim that, insofar as the determining ground of someone's action "belongs to past time," the action itself cannot be counted as "within their control" (5:96; compare 6:49–50n).[15] Yet it would seem that life itself could be a determination of *homo phaenomenon* only if the causality distinctive of the human mind—whether in purely mental activity or in its causality ("commerce") in relation to the human body—could itself somehow factor into the way that the human being itself appears in inner (temporal)

15 For discussion, see Colin McLear, "On the Transcendental Freedom of the Intellect," *Ergo* 7, 2 (2020): 35–104.

or outer (spatial) intuition respectively. In the second part of the Third *Critique*, however, which provides Kant's most sustained discussion of life (and causality involving "purposiveness," more generally) "in" nature, Kant seems to restrict the application of the concept of purposiveness—and hence, that of life itself—to the context of judgment that is "reflective" upon our experience of nature, rather than "determining" (objectively valid) of nature itself (5:360). So understood, the concepts of life and purposiveness supply our "power of judgment," with means for beginning to order (classify, subsume) the objects of our experience (empirical cognition) into general kinds, under general laws and so on, when we "reflect" on our experiences (see 5:387). Crucially, we cannot give a demonstration or "proof" of their objective validity as determinations of the actual constitution of the phenomena in nature themselves (see 5:390).

Homo Noumenon: The Human Being as Psychological and Moral Person

Kant is more straightforward in his affirmation that the human being qua *homo noumenon* is living, insofar as the human mind itself includes "the faculty of desire," and Kant holds that life itself can be understood as "the faculty of a being to act in accordance with the laws of desire" (5:9n). Beyond mere desire and life, however, Kant also takes the human being qua *noumenon* to possess a faculty for the determination of desire itself according to principles of reason—what Kant calls the "practical use of reason," as concerned with "the determining grounds of the will" (5:15). For this reason, Kant ascribes to the human being causality through "freedom" in the specifically "practical" sense of the term (see B561–62).

As we have seen, Kant takes pure apperception (self-consciousness) to provide a nonsensory representation, and even cognition, of ourselves as intelligible objects, and to provide, more specifically, cognition of our faculty of reason itself, along with our faculty of understanding

(see again B574–75, quoted earlier). As Kant puts it elsewhere in the first *Critique*, pure apperception as consciousness of the understanding is consciousness of my mind's "self-activity" in "thinking" (see B130–32), an activity which itself is "free" in the sense of arising with "spontaneity" (B74–75). Consciousness of reason is consciousness of a more "absolute spontaneity" (5:99), one which consists in "freedom" not just in the "negative" sense of mere spontaneity, that is, that of being able to bring about effects independently of external causes, but in the "positive" sense of "autonomy," that is, being efficient according to laws which are "given" by reason itself (4:446–47).

It is especially in relation to the two faculties of understanding and reason that Kant characterizes the human being qua *noumenon* as possessing "personality." In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant claims that the human being "can and should be represented in terms of his capacity for freedom, which is wholly supersensible, and so too merely in terms of his humanity, his personality independent of physical attributes (*homo noumenon*)" (6:239). As *homo phaenomenon,* the human being belongs to "the system of nature" and is represented as an "*animal rationale*," as "sharing" an existence with "the rest of the animals"; when "regarded" as *homo noumenon*, by contrast, in virtue of possessing understanding and being able "to set themselves ends" (i.e., possession of practical reason), the human being is thought of as "a *person*" and of "value" or "worth" that is "exalted" above all other animals (6:434).

Within this broad conception of personality, Kant distinguishes two aspects, depending upon whether it is the possession of understanding or the possession of reason which is being highlighted. Possession of understanding is essential, Kant thinks, for "*psychological* personality," which consists in "the ability to be conscious of one's identity in different conditions of one's existence"; by contrast, "*moral* personality," which consists in being responsible for "action" and capable of "imputation," requires the possession not just of understanding but of practical reason (6:223; compare 6:221).

Though considerable attention has been drawn to the status of human beings as moral persons—and, in particular, the way in which possession of reason entails that a human being "exists as an end in itself" (4:428)—Kant himself often emphasizes psychological personality as already a distinguishing mark of humanity. Kant's anthropology lectures, as well the published *Anthropology* itself, begin precisely with discussion of self-consciousness by way of the understanding as something special to human beings: "the fact that the human being can have the I in his representations elevates him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a *person,* and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person—that is, through rank and dignity an entirely different being from *things,* such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes" (7:127; see 25:1215).

The Problem of an Adequate Definition of Being Human

Having now clarified some of the key terms and distinctions that are involved in Kant's reconception of being human, especially in relation to his division of the human according to whether it is being understood qua *phaenomenon* (in relation to its appearances) or qua *noumenon* (as an intelligible object), we can now begin to return to the original tasks set out above—namely, the assessment of the extent to which it is right to say that the concept of the human being plays a foundational role for Kant's philosophy, such that it is "humanistic" in the sense spelled out earlier. As has now become evident, there is a wide range of determinations which are candidates to go into such a definition, some pertaining to the way in which humans appear to themselves in inner and outer sensory intuition, others pertaining to the way humans are acquainted with themselves more directly in pure apperception or self-consciousness. What we should consider, first of all, is whether these determinations, either in part or all taken together, are

actually sufficient to uniquely differentiate human beings from other kinds of being—before taking up the main question of the status that Kant accords to his own conception of the human being.

Considering the determinations individually, we can see that Kant does not believe that any one of them is unique to human beings. On the side of the human being qua sensible object, there is little hope for the possibility of either a merely spatial or temporal or a merely mechanical definition of *homo phaenomenon*. Contrary to Baumgarten's suggestion (noted earlier) of a distinctively "mathematical" cognition of human being itself, Kant does not identify any specific spatial configuration (shape) or temporal extent (duration) which would be sufficient to distinguish some sensible object as necessarily being human rather than some other kind of being.[16] Similarly, in his works on the metaphysical foundations of causality in nature, Kant does not attempt to present any set of physical behaviors describable in merely mechanical- (or "dynamical"-)causal terms that would suffice to identify the kind of activity and mutual interaction that is distinctive of the human being qua *phaenomenon*. For both of these reasons, the prospects for reconstructing a merely "phenomenal" definition of a human being, on Kant's behalf, does not look promising.

Matters might seem to improve slightly if we turn to the fact that humans are animals (souls animating bodies), since this feature at least differentiates humans from the rest of merely mechanical (inorganic) nature. Yet in Kant's discussions of the human, we do not find Kant much concerned to provide a merely biological or zoological specification (in terms, e.g., of facts about the human life-cycle, or facts about

16 Kant does discuss the idea of a general procedure ("schema") for producing a sensory representation (image) of various kinds of objects, including one for dogs as "four footed" (B180), though he does not claim here that the relevant schema would be sufficient for sensibly identifying all and only dogs. Kant also discusses what he calls "the aesthetic normal idea" of a species of animal which would serve as a "universal standard" for the "aesthetic judgment of every individual of this species" (5:233), which he extends to human beings, but here again the topic is not what is universally and necessarily true of all humans qua *phaenomena* but which shape is most perfect. Compare also Kant's discussion of physiognomy in his *Anthropology* (7:295–302).

distinctively human nourishment or reproduction, etc) which would be restricted to all and only human beings. Rather, as noted earlier, the main feature that Kant points to with respect to the animality of humanity is that the human being *transcends* mere animality. While it is true that the specifically human body is "animated" according to the mental capacities for understanding and reason, it is precisely the possession of these specific capacities that Kant sees as "elevating" humans above other "mere" animals. And though Kant's *Anthropology* does take up the question of the determination of the biological (namely, reproductive) behaviors of the human living body by understanding and reason (e.g., 7:303–11), it is made clear that such activity is not properly thought of as merely animal or natural but as a component of "culture" (7:303).

In this light, one might wonder whether, for Kant, it is really the faculties of understanding and reason that will not only supply the content for the idea of *homo noumenon* but will also suffice to uniquely differentiate human beings as such from all other beings. Yet though both faculties do distinguish humans from other animals as "persons," Kant's discussion of these faculties, as well as his discussion of personality itself, shows that he does not think that either these faculties or the status of personhood are unique to human beings.

Concerning specifically moral personality, Kant's writings and lectures on philosophical theology make clear that this concept is too wide to uniquely distinguish human beings, insofar as he takes it also to apply to God (see 28:1076, 28:1091). The same is true of concept of "rational being" (being with reason), as Kant's discussion in the *Groundwork* makes especially evident: time and again he cautions against restricting the basic principle of morality to what would "hold only for human beings, as if *other* rational beings did not have to heed it" (see 4:389; my italics). The same is true, finally, of the concept of freedom qua autonomy, insofar this too will apply to all other rational beings as well (4:447–48; including the divine being: see 28:1001, 1067).

Concerning psychological personality and the possession of an understanding, defined as the power for thinking and apperception, the prospects might initially seem to be somewhat better, insofar as God is said to not have the kind of self-consciousness that relates to *thinking* in particular (i.e., "discursive" self-consciousness). Kant specifically denies that God "thinks" (see 28:1017) and instead assigns the divine person an "intuitive" understanding (see B145; 5:406), which does not have to arrive at its representation by synthesizing a plurality of cases into a unity but rather intuits everything that is, all at once. But if the possession of a discursive understanding might thereby distinguish humans from at least from one kind of person (God), being of a "thinking nature" is nevertheless not something that Kant takes to be necessarily unique to humans. From the time of his early writings on universal history up through his Critical writings (see B521, 28:1082), Kant allows for the possibility of "inhabitants" of other planets besides the Earth who would, like humans, consist precisely of "thinking nature" (1:351–52) with "spiritual capacities" (1:359).[17]

Since neither the basic features which pertain to human qua *phaenomenon* nor those which pertain to humans qua *noumenon* suffice when considered on their own to distinguish humans from other beings, it would be natural to look for something more uniquely identifying about humans in the specific combination of the two sets of features that Kant assigns to the human case. This can seem to be closer to the route that the tradition has taken, in identifying humans as not merely rational but also animals, and Kant himself seems to follow this path in the *Religion*. Here Kant distinguishes being human from being a person in terms of a difference in kinds of "predispositions to *move* in certain directions" that collectively constitute the "determination

17 In fact, as Kant's remarks in the Paralogism might suggest that he could allow that the "thinking nature" that is "in" humans might itself turn out not to be itself specifically human: the indeterminate representation of the "I or he or *it (the thing)* which thinks" might refer to something in me, but not identical with me (in at least some sense of me); "nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x" (A404; my italics).

of the human being" (6:20). These involve not just a "predisposition to *personality*, as a rational and at the same time responsible being," but also a "predisposition to *animality*, as a living being," and it is only when these two predispositions come together that they constitute a "predisposition to the *humanity* of the human being, as a living and at the same time rational being" (6:26).

Though this generic addition to personality would also distinguish humans from the divine being,[18] here again Kant's acceptance of the possibility of "inhabitants" of other planets which nevertheless possess "thinking natures" shows that the concept of a rational being (person) that is also an animal is still not sufficiently precise enough to pick out all and only specifically human beings. If humans are not distinguished from these other "inhabitants" in terms of their understanding (or reason), it would seem to follow that they must be distinguished somehow in relation to their animality, or the means by which their mental capacities animate or are in commerce with a body—or, as he puts it in the early writings, in terms of "the material [*Stoff*] of the machine they inhabit" (1:359). Though he does not go on at length on this topic in the Critical writings, Kant does seem to affirm that what would distinguish these other intelligent animals would be their specific form of "sensibility" (see B59, B72).

Now, any appeal to sensibility as a specific difference could seem to have shifted our discussion back to what might differentiate humans qua *phaenomena* alone. Against this, however, one should note the difference between (1) sensibility per se, as a real capacity in the mind, capable of real activity, and (2) the effects that arise from the exercise of sensibility, that is, its representations (products), such as sensations and intuitions. What is more, not only must (1) sensibility per se must be distinguished from (2) any of its representations (including sensible

18 Kant consistently distinguishes God from any animal, though he accepts the traditional thought that God is "alive" (is "a living being"; see 28:1000), which again implies that there is nothing in the concept of a living being that forces it to apply only to the extended and embodied *phaenomena* in nature.

ones), so too must sensibility itself be distinguished from (3) the objects of its representations, understood as "appearances"—including the special case when the representations that sensibility produces are "inner sensations" of the workings of the mind itself. Keeping these distinctions in mind, we can see that the possession of (1) sensibility itself is a feature that actually pertains to humans qua *noumenon*, even if (3) the "appearances" that arise in and through the activity of sensibility (including the appearances of humans and their activity, i.e., *homo phaenomenon*) are what constitute the domain of the *phaenomena*. And, finally, if there are distinguishing facts about different forms that (1) sensibility (the capacity considered per se) can take, these, too, will be facts that sort beings, not in terms of how they "appear" in sensory representation, but how they are in actuality—even if these differences in forms are also manifest differentially in (2) their respective effects (sensations, intuitions) and (3) the respective "appearances" that arise in these qualitatively differentiated effects (e.g., as objects "in" space, as "in" time), once the sensibilities with diverging forms are "affected."[19]

Conclusion: From Humanist Foundations to Aspirations

Kant's appeal to our being rational animals with a specific form of animality—that is, in possession of a specific form of sensibility (one that results in spatial representation of what is outside us, and temporal representation of what is in us)—thus seems to be one particularly

19 With this in mind, we might now wonder whether the fact of possessing this kind of sensibility would *on its own* be sufficient to distinguish a specifically *human form of animality* after all, even independently from its connection to the understanding or reason. Against this, it is worth noting that just as Kant does not restrict understanding and reason to humans, he does not seem to restrict the spatial and temporal form of sensibility to humans either. In his scattered remarks on the mental lives of nonhuman animals, Kant seems to ascribe (at least) outer intuitions to animals, and seems to suggest that they are spatially arranged; compare Sacha Golob, "What Do Animals See?," in *Kant on Animals,* ed. J. Callanan and L. Allais (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 66–88.

promising, if complicated, way of distinguishing human beings from whatever other rational animals there are or might be—and ex hypothesi from whatever other nonanimal rational beings (the divine) there are or might be, as well as from whatever nonrational animals with the same forms of sensibility there might be. Various other candidate concepts we have considered—being extended, being alive, being a "psychological" person, being in possession of a discursive understanding, being a "moral" person, being in possession of reason, being autonomous—have all turned out to be concepts whose definitions do not restrict their application exclusively to human beings. What we should now consider, in conclusion, are the two worries noted at the outset—namely, whether the resulting conception of being human is something which presupposes specifically "empirical" content, and whether this conception of the human is in fact meant to function as a premise or foundation in Kant's system, as "humanistic" interpretations have suggested.

Concerning the former question, though the information Kant uses to articulate his definition of being human includes reference not just to those facts about understanding and reason which are given in "pure apperception" but also about sensibility itself, the main issue here, in Kant's own terms, is whether the relevant facts about sensibility itself can also be "given" nonempirically, by way of some kind of "pure" representation. In fact, one of the key advances that Kant takes his own analysis of sensibility (in the Aesthetic) to have over previous psychologies is precisely his foregrounding of the possibility, and actuality, of a "pure intuition" which would (sensibly) represent the form of sensibility itself, in abstraction from whatever else (namely, sensations) might arise once it is "affected" (B34–35). The consciousness of this pure intuition would itself be "pure" and could thus serve as a ground for the formation of the "pure" concept of the form of sensibility, which could then be used (along with the concepts of the faculties of understanding and reason) in the course of constructing a "pure" definition of the human being.

While this clears the way for Kant to have at his disposal what he himself would consider a nonempirical concept of the human being, it is less evident—turning to the second question—that Kant has any intention of taking up such a concept as the point of departure, as a basis or foundation, for his philosophy. Rather, as we ourselves have seen, this conception of the human is quite complex and goes a good deal beyond the common definition of *animal rationale*; in fact, it is one whose proper exposition in fact incorporates components of Kant's "idealist" metaphysics, including his understanding of the division between *phaenomena* and *noumena*. Even if this idealism itself is articulated in reference to certain facts about mental capacities (including sensibility), the articulation of the divided nature of the being whose capacities these are—that is, the human being itself—in turn seems to make essential use of the idealism itself.

But then, rather than taking the concept of the human being to play a *foundational* role for the Kant's Critical philosophy, we might instead reorient our sense of Kant's relation to this concept in the following manner: away from seeing the concept of the human being as something already known, sharply conceptually delimited, and capable of serving as a principle of explanation, and toward seeing the proper definition of the concept of the human being as setting a problem, as something to be sought after, as a, or perhaps the, key *goal* of philosophy. In general, Kant thinks that philosophy, unlike mathematics, cannot start with definitions of its subject matter but can only arrive at them after considerable analytical work (see B758). As we have noted, Kant himself expresses worries about whether a pure "science" of the domain specified by this concept (a "pure anthropology") could ever even be possible, even if he takes the "idea" of such a scientific unity to guide our inquiry into and reasoning about being human, in order to make progress in coming to systematically organize the information we acquire about what we are.[20]

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20 See Katharina Kraus, "The Soul as the 'Guiding Idea' of Psychology: Kant on Scientific Psychology, Systematicity, and the Idea of the Soul," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 71 (2018): 77–88.

Actually knowing what we are, as human beings—knowing what kind of being it is who can unite both personality and animality, both intelligence and sensibility, both freedom and nature—will thus remain, for Kant, the ongoing "task" (*Aufgabe*) for philosophy. If not yet in possession of a comprehensive answer, philosophy must be continually oriented toward the "solution" of what we have seen earlier Kant himself identifies (at 11:429 and 9:25) as the single question that systematically unites the other three central philosophical interests (what can I know? what ought I to do? what may I hope for?)—namely, *What is a human being?*