

Essays on Kant's Anthropology

Edited by

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Introduction

Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain

No other issue in Kant's thought is as pervasive and persistent as that of human nature. Posed as the peculiarly Kantian question, "what is the human being?" (*Was ist der Mensch?*)¹, this may be the sole concern that appears consistently from Kant's earliest writings through the last. In Kant's lectures – on logic, metaphysics, ethics, and education – it is difficult to find a text completely free of anthropological observation. Reaching far beyond considerations of ethics and history, moreover, the question of human nature is also present in Kant's most "scientific" reflections. In the conclusion of *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* from 1755, a text principally dedicated to applying Newton's theory of attraction and repulsion toward understanding the emergence of the heavens, Kant closes with this comment:

It is not even properly known to us what the human being truly is now, although consciousness and the senses ought to instruct us of this; how much less will we be able to guess what he one day ought to become. Nevertheless, the human soul's desire for knowledge (*Wißbegierde*) snaps very desirously (*begierig*) at this object that lies so far from it and strives, in such obscure knowledge, to shed some light.²

The "critical" project that would take shape some twenty years later is partly an extension of this very concern. It is "the peculiar fate" of *human* reason, the way its aspirations and interests outstrip its powers, which motivates the famous critique of traditional metaphysics found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.³ Moreover, one of Kant's more

specific concerns in that work involved the status of human nature in relation to the emerging human sciences. In the eighteenth century, natural history borrowed experimental and taxonomic methods from the physical sciences of the previous century, methods that had little use for notions of the “soul” or for any substance other than a material one.⁴ Like many of his time, Kant believed that this approach posed a challenge to humanity’s unique place in the cosmos, threatening to leave humanity undifferentiated among the world of beings. Kant concluded that a solution to this problem could be found only by abstracting from anthropological observation. The doctrine of Transcendental Idealism is partly an attempt to articulate a doctrine of a self that is at once an object of empirical natural science and history, subject to the “mechanism of nature,” and also a rational being able to cognize the natural world and having a “vocation” that transcends nature.⁵ Similarly, in his mature moral theory, Kant held that one could identify the supreme principle of a pure moral philosophy only by abstracting from all specifically human characteristics. Thus, “a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology. . . .” Although, to be sure, this “metaphysics of morals cannot dispense with principles of application, and we shall often have to take as our object the particular *nature* of human beings, which is cognized only in experience, in order to *show* in it what can be inferred from universal moral principles.”⁶

Kant’s Lectures on Anthropology

Given the emphasis within the critical philosophy upon a “pure” and rather abstract characterization of the self, it is perhaps surprising that Kant simultaneously carried out a long-standing inquiry into empirical anthropology. In the winter semester of 1772–3 Kant first offered a lecture course on anthropology, a course he repeated every winter semester for the next twenty-three years. While Kant was not the first German academic to lecture under this title, he made clear from the first lectures that his course would consider the topic in quite a unique way. Although Kant chose as a last resort the “empirical psychology” section of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* as his textbook, he consciously broke with it and a tradition of German anthropology stretching back to the sixteenth century, a tradition that tended to conceive of

anthropology as a unified science of theology and physiology.⁷ Kant was explicit about giving up “the subtle and . . . eternally futile investigation into the manner in which the organs of the body are connected to thought,” in favor of a doctrine of empirical observation (*Beobachtungslehre*) without any admixture of metaphysics.⁸ Kant also stressed that, as an alternative to this tradition, his version of anthropology would have a *pragmatic* orientation. As he would later explain in the preface to his own textbook,

A systematic treatise comprising our knowledge of human beings (anthropology) can adopt either a *physiological* or a *pragmatic* perspective. – Physiological knowledge of the human being investigates what *nature* makes of him; pragmatic, what *the human being* as a free agent makes, or can and should make, of himself.⁹

Rather than offer a merely theoretical account of human affairs, useful only for theorizing in the schools, Kant intended to provide a “doctrine of prudence” (*Lehre der Klugheit*)¹⁰ toward which future citizens of the world could orient themselves. Following the lead of works such as Rousseau’s *Emile*, Kant aimed to provide observations of peoples and cultures useful for his auditors to get on in the world, to conduct commerce and politics with a greater understanding of human beings and of human relations.

For Kant, “anthropology” is not a study of other cultures in the sense of comparative “ethnography,” although as a pragmatic inquiry into the nature of human beings in general it does draw in part upon such works. Kant’s “sources” include not only travel accounts of distant regions, but also plays, poetry, histories, novels, physiology, and philosophical works. In the lectures on anthropology, one is as likely to encounter a reference to Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as to Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. Kant draws upon these sources to provide an empirical and useful account of the powers of the human mind in general and the vocation of the human race. Given these interests, one might refer to Kant’s anthropology as a “philosophical anthropology” were it not that such a phrase would strike Kant as an oxymoron, given his critical view that philosophy is an entirely rational and nonempirical enterprise, while anthropology is completely empirical.

Kant’s lectures on anthropology were his most popular academic offering, in terms of attendance, interest, and accessibility.¹¹ As Kant

noted, interest in the course came largely from his ability to draw salient examples from literature and ordinary life;¹² a number of extant reports describe the appeal that these held for their auditors.¹³ Kant lectured on anthropology every winter semester between 1772–3 and his retirement in 1796, making it also one of his most regular and enduring courses. Indeed, had Kant ceased philosophical work before 1781, the publication year of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he would have been known in his time principally as a minor philosophy professor who offered popular lectures on anthropology. Shortly after his retirement, Kant compiled his notes from his lectures into a “textbook,” published in 1798 under the title *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Yet, long before the publication of this text, interest in this course reached well beyond the students in Königsberg. By the late 1770s, Kant’s anthropological views were likely appreciated by a wide circle of intellectuals and statesmen in Berlin, including Moses Mendelssohn and the Minister of Education von Zedlitz.¹⁴ And by the late 1780s, several followers of the critical philosophy were seeking copies of student notebooks from Kant’s anthropology lectures.¹⁵

The Challenge of Kant’s Anthropology

Given the significance that anthropological questions had for Kant and his contemporaries and the enormous quantity of recent scholarship on Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy, one would expect a significant body of literature on Kant’s anthropology and its relevance to other aspects of his thought. Yet, since Benno Erdmann first introduced the topic for scholarship more than a century ago, Kant’s anthropology has remained remarkably neglected.¹⁶ This neglect is hardly surprising, since most of the student notes from Kant’s lectures on anthropology were first published in 1997, and, for most of the twentieth century, the political situation in Eastern Europe made widespread access to many of the students’ manuscripts extremely difficult. Part of this neglect is also due to the textbook that Kant had published in 1798. This work, which Kant compiled shortly after his retirement, lacks much of the refinement of his previously published works, leading some initial commentators to suggest that it betrays the age of its author.¹⁷ More importantly, however, the *Anthropology* and the course on which it was based contain a number of considerable

tensions with other aspects of Kant's thought, tensions that have left even sympathetic readers understandably puzzled about the status and place of anthropology in Kant's system and the relation of this to his other works. In the early stages of the German "Academy" edition of Kant's works, for example, editors Erich Adickes and Wilhelm Dilthey struggled with one another about where the *Anthropology* should be placed within Kant's *corpus*.¹⁸ As their correspondence reveals, this dispute was as much about differing views of what the work *is* as about its place in an edition of collected works.¹⁹

In one sense, Kant made his intentions quite clear: he proposed a pragmatic empirical anthropology. The problem is, as commentators have noted, that it is not at all clear how these declared intentions fit with some central claims of his critical philosophy.²⁰ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, Kant insisted that an empirical anthropology must be physiological and must exclude freedom. With respect to the observable, empirical character of human beings, he wrote, "there is no freedom; and according to this character we can consider the human being solely by *observing*, and as happens in anthropology, by trying to investigate the moving causes of his actions physiologically."²¹ In other words, in the critical philosophy there seems to be no room for a consideration of the human being as a "free-acting being" in an empirical world governed by the "play of nature."²² The idea of such a pragmatic anthropology also seems to conflict with Kant's claim that anthropology must eschew metaphysical speculation. Moreover, it is unclear how the pragmatic anthropology is related to what Kant called, in the context of his moral philosophy, a "practical" or "moral anthropology": the application of pure moral philosophy to human beings,²³ or how it is consistent with the sharp distinction between pure and empirical investigations that his moral philosophy insisted upon.

Yet, while the ambiguities, tensions, and apparent contradictions present in Kant's conception of anthropology might explain its neglect, they simultaneously highlight its significance for a thorough understanding of Kant's thought in particular as well as its place in the broader philosophical and intellectual history of the emerging human sciences of which it is a part. They lead to numerous questions: How does the content of the lectures and *Anthropology* relate to Kant's declared intentions for the discipline? Does Kant offer a

coherent conception of anthropology, either as a discipline or as an element of a philosophical system? How would such a conception relate to the claims of the critical philosophy? Does the content of Kant's anthropology shed new light upon or require a reevaluation of any important aspects of Kant's theoretical or practical philosophy? In which respects does Kant break with his contemporaries' notions of anthropology? Might the tensions within Kant's anthropology teach us something about the origins and philosophical foundations of the modern human sciences?

Kant's anthropology is important, however, not only because of the questions it raises about Kant's philosophical system or the history of the human sciences. It is also important as an unambiguous counterpoint to the still prevalent view that, in Wilhelm Dilthey's words, "in the veins of the knowing subject, such as . . . Kant [has] construed him, flows not real blood but rather the thinned fluid of reason as pure thought activity."²⁴ Kant's anthropology lectures present the acting and knowing subject as fully constituted in human flesh and blood, with the specific virtues and foibles that make it properly human. This is an account that can and should be taken seriously in its own right.

The Occasion for This Collection

The publication in October 1997 of a critical edition of student notes stemming from Kant's anthropology course offers a unique opportunity to reexamine Kant's anthropology and address many of these important questions in a more adequate way. Edited by Reinhard Brandt and Werner Stark, the latest volume of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (the first in more than a decade) contains more than 1,500 pages of student notes drawn from seven different semesters of the anthropology course during its first seventeen years. Much of this material will soon appear in English in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* volume entitled *Lectures on Anthropology*, which will appear shortly after the series' new edition of Kant's work on *Anthropology, History, and Education*. In contrast to Kant's own published work of 1798, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, these lecture notes, most of which will be made available for the first time, capture Kant both at the height of his intellectual power and at numerous points throughout

the development of his philosophical thinking. This new material has the potential to advance significantly our understanding of Kant's conception of anthropology, its development, and the notoriously difficult relationship between it and the critical philosophy. This new material, however, presents several interpretive difficulties. Because the student notes are certainly not verbatim transcripts of Kant's lectures they must be read in the light of Kant's published works and other literary remains if they are to provide authentic insight into Kant's views. Given the problematic relationship pragmatic anthropology has to some of those other works, this is no easy task.

The language of Kant's lectures on anthropology, too, is quite foreign to that of the critical philosophy: in these lectures wit and playful observation are the dominant forms of expression. And the breadth of Kant's sources for these lectures is impressive: in these newly published lecture notes, Kant refers to nearly a thousand sources.²⁵ The interpretive tasks, then, are considerable. This English-language collection of essays is intended to serve as such an interpretive complement to the documentation of the German critical edition and the new volumes of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

In response to the extraordinary opportunity and challenge presented by this wealth of new material, we have invited a number of the leading philosophical commentators on Kant to reflect upon the relationship between Kant's anthropology and the theoretical, ethical, aesthetic, political, and historical dimensions of his philosophy. Although this volume is written by philosophers and particularly aimed at a philosophical audience with historical interests, it should also be of interest to cultural historians, historians of the human sciences, political theorists, and the range of humanists concerned with aesthetic theory (such as art historians and literature scholars). Given the significance of Kant's anthropology to each of these disciplines, a complete appropriation of this new material can only emerge from multiple- or inter-disciplinary work. We hope that this collection of essays will serve as an invitation for those with expertise in these other areas to engage this interesting new material as well, and contribute to this much-neglected area of Kant studies.

The essays in this volume tend to reflect one of two broad approaches. On the one hand, a number of the essays are concerned

with the systematic *relation* of anthropology to the critical philosophy – especially its relation to the claims of speculative knowledge and ethics. On the other hand, several of the essays focus on the anthropology as an important *source* for clarification about the content and development of Kant’s views on particular topics of interest.

The collection begins with a brief account by Werner Stark of his findings about the historical circumstances surrounding the note-taking, copying, and compilation process that generated the extant student notebooks. Stark then examines the origins and philosophical motivation for the anthropology course and what they reveal about its relation to Kant’s moral philosophy. Stark argues that Kant’s introduction of the separate course on anthropology was motivated by his adoption of a “pure” conception of moral philosophy and claims about the “dual nature” of human beings. Pointing to connections between the conception of “character” developed in the anthropology lectures of the 1770s and the developing moral philosophy of that period, Stark argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between anthropology and moral philosophy, which parallels the reciprocal relation between the empirical and intelligible character of the human being.

Allen Wood also argues for a mutually supportive relationship between anthropology and Kant’s ethical, social, and historical thought. Anthropology, he suggests, is concerned with “the empirical investigation of freedom,” an examination of human nature based upon the assumption that we are free. Despite Kant’s concerns about the unsatisfactory state of anthropology as a discipline and the inherent difficulties involved in the study of human beings, Wood points out, Kant argued for the distinctiveness of the human capacity for self-perfection and the collective historical task to which it gives rise. The centrality of Kant’s conception of human “unsociable sociability” reveals an Enlightenment conception of humanity that is social and historical, contrary to individualistic readings held by critics of Kant’s ethics.

In “The Second Part of Morals,” Robert Loudon argues that Kant’s anthropology lectures contain a distinctively *moral* anthropology, the complement to pure moral philosophy concerned with the application of morality to humans. These lectures contain moral messages concerning human hindrances to morality and the importance of judgment sharpened by experience, and the discussion of the “destiny of

the human species” provides a “moral map” of the human *telos* to situate our agency and identify the means necessary to our moral end. To the extent that the motive for and use of the anthropology is grounded in a moral imperative, Louden suggests, the lectures contribute to moral philosophy, even in the narrowest sense. While Kant’s execution of this task is “deeply flawed,” Louden concludes, it is an important part of the *Übergang* project of bridging nature and freedom.

In contrast to the first three essays that argue that anthropology and ethics are complementary and integral parts of Kant’s system, Reinhard Brandt’s essay suggests that the lack of a “guiding idea” anchoring the discipline of anthropology renders such an apparent connection with morality accidental. Brandt’s survey of the *Anthropology* and lectures leads to an interpretation of anthropology as an aggregate of three historical layers containing several points of contact with other aspects of Kant’s philosophy, but lacking a moral focus. Even the discussion of character, he argues, has a pragmatic rather than moral point. In a second section, Brandt contrasts Kant’s conception of the vocation or destiny of the human being with its rivals, suggesting that Kant’s focus on the destiny of the species, rather than the individual, and his emphasis upon the “invisible hand” of the inclination mechanism relies upon a Christian-Stoic teleology that can bring good out of evil. This theodicy, Brandt argues, is intended to show how moral good will result, perhaps in spite of individual choices.

Brian Jacobs outlines three notions of anthropology in Kant’s work and then considers the lectures on anthropology collectively as the “proper academic discipline” that Kant had initially set out to make for them, and hence as a precursor to the contemporary human and social sciences. Kantian anthropology, Jacobs argues, shares not only basic elements of these disciplines but also some of their fundamental concerns. The problematic status of the *metaphysical* aspect of the inquiry, which appears most directly in Kant’s various conceptions of character, ought to be viewed as a first instance of a systematic inquiry into human behavior that cannot adequately account for the special status of its object.

In the first essay that concentrates upon the significance of the new material as a source for Kant’s views on particular topics, Paul Guyer

argues that the lectures give us new insight into the novelty of the “critique of taste” found in the *Critique of Judgment*. Perhaps surprisingly, the anthropology lectures from the mid-1770s reveal that Kant had already analyzed many of the distinctive features of aesthetic experience and judgment discussed later in the third *Critique*. Yet it is the anthropology lectures from 1788–9 that first characterize the harmony found in aesthetic experience and artistic creativity as a form of *freedom*. This account of the harmony, Guyer argues, is what facilitated the real novelty and *raison d’être* of the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment”: a treatment of artistic and natural beauty as “evidence of nature’s hospitality to freedom,” consistent with an emphasis upon the distinctiveness of aesthetic experience.

Howard Caygill contends that the anthropology lecture course played a significant role in the development of the epistemological theory of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In his early lectures on logic and metaphysics, Kant rejected, following Baumgarten and Meier, Wolffian dismissals of sensibility as a type of confused knowledge and he explored some complementary aspects of the sensible and intelligible contributions to cognition. This is still a long way, however, from the critical claim that synthetic *a priori* knowledge can come only from the synthesis of sensibility and understanding. It was only in the novel lecture course on anthropology, Caygill suggests, that Kant could find the space to reflect upon the nature of sensibility free of the disciplinary constraints of logic and metaphysics and develop these reflections into the critical conception of sensibility. The lectures on anthropology reveal that Kant’s “Apology for Sensibility” (a section title in the 1798 *Anthropology*) is a transformation of Baumgarten’s defense of aesthetics into an increasingly systematic defense of sensibility as distinctive type of intuition.

Susan Shell notices several significant changes in the conception of happiness found in Kant’s anthropology lectures of the 1770s and early 1780s and explores the origins and impact of such changes upon Kant’s moral and political thought more generally. In the lectures before 1777, she argues, Kant emphasized the pleasure involved in “feeling one’s life activity ‘as a whole’” and considered happiness to be achievable through virtue and self-control. This early conception also emphasized gratitude for a providential order and the role of

social conflict and the special contribution of women in promoting social progress. According to Shell, Kant's views changed significantly in the late 1770s, when he adopted Count Verri's idea that human life must involve more pain than pleasure because pain rather than the anticipation of pleasure is what moves us to act. By the early 1780s this change led Kant, she suggests, to a "critical" assessment of the attainability of happiness that is darker than Rousseau's; a theory of human progress that stresses political and racial factors rather than the sexual and aesthetic factors prevalent earlier; and an emphasis upon work, especially human effort toward moral perfection, as the only way to make life worth living.

Noting that one important, explicit objective of Kant's "pragmatic" anthropology is the doctrine of prudence that it embodies, Patrick Kain looks to the anthropology lectures as a source of clarification about Kant's conception of prudence and his broader theory of practical rationality. Kain argues that, on Kant's theory, prudence is the manifestation of a distinctive, nonmoral rational capacity concerned with one's own happiness or well-being. In conjunction with related texts, the anthropology lectures provide helpful clarification about the content of prudential reflection and, contrary to some recent interpretations of Kant's theory of practical reason, imply that the normative authority of prudence, while compatible with the supremacy of morality, is prior to and conceptually independent of moral norms.

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Brian Jacobs

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Patrick Kain

Notes

1. For the instances of Kant's usage of this phrase, see Jacobs, "Kantian Character and the Problem of a Science of Humanity," in this volume.
2. Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (*Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*), *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (formerly the Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften), 29 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–) (1: 366). Apart from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, all references to Kant are to the volume and page number of this "Akademie-Ausgabe." References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions.
3. *Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to the first edition, A vii.
4. This approach was promoted, above all, by the French taxonomist Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707–88). *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1749).
5. *Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to the second edition, B xxviii, xxix, xxxii. This suggestion is born out in the sections devoted to the Paralogisms and the Third Antinomy. In the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant suggests that one of the two most important criticisms of the first edition of the first *Critique* was that concerning his doctrine of the self – how we can be on the one hand a free noumenon, on the other a determined empirical phenomenon (5: 6).
6. *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6: 217. Cf. *Groundwork*, 4:388–9; "Moral Mrongovius II," 29: 599.
7. Marate Linden, *Untersuchungen zum Anthropologiebegriff des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), 2. The humanist Otto Casmann, for example, in his work *Psychologia anthropologica; sive Animae humanae doctrina* (1594), suggests that anthropology is the "doctrine of human nature," whereby the latter "is an essence participating in the dual nature of the world, the spiritual and the corporal, that are bound together in unity." As the title of Casmann's work suggests, "anthropology" was a term with contemporary currency that Kant chose to appropriate for his own, rather different, purposes.
8. Kant, letter to Marcus Herz, toward the end of 1773 (10: 145–6).
9. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, preface (7: 119).

10. Kant uses this term frequently in the anthropology lectures but seldom in the major published works. Cf. Friedlaender 25: 471, Mrongovius 25: 1210; also *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 800 / B 828.
11. On enrollment in the Anthropology course, see Stark, "Historical Notes and Interpretive Questions about Kant's Lectures on Anthropology," in this volume.
12. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, preface (7: 121), Letter to Herz (10: 146).
13. Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann, for example, reports that Kant's anthropology lectures were "an extremely pleasant instruction" that commanded the most attendance of all of Kant's lectures. Ludwig Ernst Borowski, Andreas Christoph Wasianski, and Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant: Ein lebensbild*, 2nd ed. (Halle: Hugo Peter, 1907), 125. Cf. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 204–5.
14. Their likely familiarity would have come via copies of student notes and / or Herz's lectures in Berlin. See 25: lv; 10: 224, 236, 244–6. Minister von Zedlitz was particularly interested in Kant's lectures on physical geography.
15. 25: lvi; 10: 485–6, 11: 170, 498, 508.
16. See editor's introduction in Immanuel Kant, *Reflexionen Kants zur kritischen Philosophie*, ed. Benno Erdmann and Norbert Hinske (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann, 1992 [original, 1882–4]). Until quite recently, there were only a few notable exceptions, including Frederick Van de Pitte, Monika Firla, Norbert Hinske, and Richard Velkley.
17. Upon its publication, for example, Goethe viewed the book with some distance, suggesting that Kant had succumbed to prejudice in his increasing years: "In spite of the excellence, sharp wit, and magnificence which our old teacher always retains, it seems to me that [the book] is in many places limited [*borniert*] and in still more illiberal." Goethe to C. G. Voigt, December 19, 1798, cited in Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, 6th ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980 [original 1798, 1800]).
18. Their correspondence on this question appears in Gerhard Lehmann, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Interpretation der Philosophie Kants* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 13–26.
19. Holly Lyn Wilson, "Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology and its Relationship to Critical Philosophy," Dissertation (Ann Arbor: Pennsylvania State University, 1989), 24–33.
20. See, for example, Mary Gregor, "Translator's Introduction," in Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), ix.
21. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 550 / B 578.
22. Cf. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 7: 120.
23. *Groundwork*, 4: 388–9; "Moral Mrongovius II," 29: 599. (An idea that has puzzled commentators in its own right.)