



Kant's Anthropology

HOLLY L. WILSON*

Louisiana State University in Alexandria, USA

Review of Louden, Robert, *Kant's Anthropology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 1-53, 9781108742283.

Robert Louden's short 53-page book is an excellent introduction to Kant's thinking on anthropology. It covers the origin, structure and key features, some contested issues, and the importance of the anthropology as a kind of philosophy that humanizes us. The book contains many significant quotes from Kant that help the reader grasp that anthropology was an important way Kant was doing philosophy. Louden gives a cursory overview of the origin of Kant's work on anthropology in the lectures he gave at Königsberg University. These lectures were very popular, and Kant came to think of anthropology as a kind of popular philosophy that appealed to the interests of everyone. The lecture transcriptions from his students and his announcement of lectures indicated that he considered his anthropology lectures and physical geography lectures to be *Weltkenntnis* (Cosmopolitan philosophy) which is meant for enlightenment for life and not just for the university.

Louden has championed the interpretation of the anthropology lectures and Kant's book, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, as containing a moral anthropology which provides the second empirical half of Kant's moral philosophy. He gives some examples of how Kant deals with "human only" norms that would not apply to just a rational being but only to the human being because its nature is both intelligible and sensible. Kant scholars such as Brandt and Stark (Brandt and Stark, 1997, pp. xlvi-vii, xlvi), as well as Zammito (Zammito, 2002, p. 301) deny that Kant ever produced this empirical moral

* Louisiana State University in Alexandria – hwilson@lsua.edu

anthropology so this is one of the contested points of scholarly interpretation. In support of his thesis, Loudon provides an example of the distinction between affects and passions in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Understanding the way the human being is, can be key to knowing how to apply the moral norms of the moral law to human beings. Human norms apply only to human beings because of their nature as sensible and intelligible.

The second contested scholarly issue is whether Kant provided the transcendental anthropology he mentions in Reflection 903 (Kant, 15: p. 395) and whether Kant provided a theory of human nature. Loudon summarizes the various positions that argue that Kant did not provide an answer to the question he posed: “What is the human being?” Loudon believes nonetheless that there is a wealth of information regarding human nature in the anthropology lectures and the book, but Kant does not appear to have reduced all philosophy to the question of “What is the human being?” as Kant suggests in a series of questions about the whole of philosophy. Some authors attempt to identify transcendental anthropology with the various critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and even the *Critique of Judgment*, but none succeeds conclusively in showing that this is what Kant meant by transcendental anthropology. Transcendental anthropology cannot also be identical with the pragmatic anthropology, since the anthropology is not *apriori*, but empirical.

Finally, Loudon addresses the question of the significance of the type of philosophy Kant was doing in his lectures and in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, that he published in 1798. Although some authors like Schleiermacher reviewed the published book as a “collection of trivialities” it does appear that Kant believed it was an important type of philosophy. Loudon evaluates the sexism and racism in the book and also in the writings surrounding his work on anthropology. There are very serious weaknesses in some of Kant’s empirical observations. Loudon covers the attempt by Kant scholars to explain that Kant developed away from his racist beliefs about non-Europeans over time, but Loudon does not think these attempts have shown that Kant did overcome his racist prejudices even though he clearly objected to colonialism. Kant’s views of women are also “riddled” with sexist prejudices.

One might wonder at this point if there is any value to the Kantian approach to anthropology. Loudon has an affirmative response. Pragmatic anthropology, nonetheless, as a type of philosophy can provide the “true eye” to what would otherwise be “cyclopic” philosophy. Kant distinguishes philosophy done in a style of scholastic philosophy and another style done as *Weltkenntnis*. Cosmopolitan philosophy has the value of supplying the second eye to scholastic philosophy giving it its dignity and inner worth. How does it do this? It is applying philosophy to the human being.

This short book gives a great introduction to the scholarship out there on Kant’s anthropology with some exceptions. Loudon does not cover the proposal by Wilson

(Wilson, 2006: pp. 61-92) that Kant does have a theory of human nature in his theory of the four natural predispositions. These predispositions are teleological and characterize human nature in a way that preserves human freedom and the possibility of moral action.

Bibliography

Brandt, Reinhard and Werner Stark (1997). "Einleitung," in *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. Berlin: De Gruyter, vii-clii (= vol. 25 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*).

Wilson, Holly L. (2006). *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Zammito, John H. (2002). *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

