

Denkungsart in Kant's Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View

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Patrick R. Frierson

Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, published in 1798 as one of the last works Kant published in his lifetime, was the culmination of over twenty-five years of lecture courses on the topic of “anthropology.” From his first lectures through his published *Anthropology*, Kant insists on the uniqueness of his anthropology’s “pragmatic” emphasis. In one early lecture, he emphasizes that in his course, “human beings are not studied in speculative terms, but [in] pragmatic [ones]” (LAn 25:470); and in his published work, he contrasts his own “knowledge of the human being, systematically formulated (anthropology) in a pragmatic point of view” from “physiological” ones (An 7:119). An important letter to his former student Marcus Herz, from the time that he first began developing his pragmatic anthropology, gives a sense of Kant’s goals:

This winter I am giving, for the second time, a lecture course on *Anthropologie*, a subject that I now intend to make into a proper academic discipline. But my plan is quite unique. I intend to use it to disclose the sources of all the sciences, the science of morality, of skill, of human intercourse, of the way to educate and govern human beings, and thus of everything that pertains to the practical. (C 10:145)

Later, in his personal notes, Kant reiterates this emphasis: “the historical kind of teaching is pragmatic, when it ... is not merely for the school, but also for the world or ethics” (Ak 16:804 [R3376]; cf. LAn 25:xv). As a course focused on human beings, Kant’s *Anthropology* draws heavily from his earlier (and continuing) lectures on empirical psychology, in which he discusses various faculties of the human soul. It also relates to Kant’s writings on human difference and human history, from his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1762

through his essays on history and race in the 1770s and 80s, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), and *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798). But from all of these observations about human beings, Kant narrows his focus to those that can be applied “for the world’s use,” and particularly for “the investigation of what *he* [the human being] as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (An 7:119).

Despite its importance to Kant, his pragmatic anthropology has only recently become an object of sustained study, and there is still no clear consensus about how to interpret his all-important claim that anthropology is *pragmatic*, particularly insofar as this involves human beings “as free-acting being[s]” (An 7:119). The relationship between this claim and the clearly *empirical* nature of anthropology is a particular challenge. While I have discussed these and related issues elsewhere, here I focus on laying out Kant’s general sense of “pragmatic” and then his specific treatment of humans’ “mode of thought,” or *Denkungsart*, a concept central to the empirical investigation of human freedom. In the end, a discussion of this concept provides answers to the questions of how anthropology studies human beings “as free” and, more generally, what Kant’s pragmatic anthropology *is*.

1. The many senses of “pragmatic” and the importance of freedom

Kant is famous for being “technical without being precise.”¹ In the case of his notion of “pragmatic” anthropology, we can give some precision to his imprecise technical lingo by defining five distinct senses of “pragmatic” in Kant’s works. Each of these senses reflects a way in which Kant sees “pragmatic anthropology” as dealing with “what the human being makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being,” but in different ways (An 7:119). “Pragmatic” can mean (1) non-scholastic, (2) non-physiological, (3) conducive to happiness, (4)

relevant to manipulating other people, and/or (5) relating to any practical concern(s). Inspired by Kant's frequent distinction between pure moral philosophy and his moral *anthropology*, one might also see "pragmatic anthropology" as the promised *moral* anthropology of the *Groundwork* (G 4:388) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (MM 6:217-18); but Kant nowhere identifies pragmatic with moral anthropology. Nonetheless, as Robert Louden puts it, "Moral anthropology is already potentially present within pragmatic anthropology";² there is room for moral anthropology as a subset of several of Kant's senses of pragmatic.³ Thus, after briefly explaining each sense of pragmatic and showing how it relates to anthropology, I argue that we should privilege the last and most general sense, that of relating to whatever is practical, and I show how this includes – but is not limited to – moral anthropology. Throughout, I emphasize how each sense involves taking the human being as a *free* being as its object.

1.1. Pragmatic vs. scholastic. Kant often distinguishes his *pragmatic* anthropology from what he calls "scholastic" (LAn 25:855) or "speculative" (LAn 25:855) knowledge.⁴ In one lecture, he colorfully describes scholastic anthropology as a "brooding science ... for the school, but ... not for common life" (LAn 25:853). Scholastic sciences are not "popular" in that they cannot "be grasped by common people," and "he who makes a scholastic use of his knowledge is a pedant" (LAn 25:853, see also 25:1209). Scholastic anthropology seeks for completeness and systematicity in its rules, while a pragmatic one emphasizes popularity and "gives no other explanations of the rules ... except those that can be observed by everyone" (LAn 25:854). Here "pragmatic" seems primarily to refer to the popularity and accessibility of Kant's anthropology, in opposition to the esoteric pedantry Kant associates with "scholastic" anthropologies that are merely "for the school" (e.g., Ak 16:804 [R3376]). His interest in *this* pragmatic discipline was

part of his more general concern with *Weltweisheit*, the worldly wisdom that students would need in order to succeed in the world. From “the beginning of [his] academic career,” he offered students a course in *Physical Geography* that among other things “considers the human being” and that aims to “make good their lack of *experience*” in the concrete matters of life (APL 2:312).

1.2. Pragmatic vs. physiological. In these early contrasts between scholastic and pragmatic anthropology, Kant also hints at a distinction that he emphasizes more later, that between pragmatic and *physiological* anthropology.⁵ In his early lectures, he identifies the anthropology of Ernst Platner as “scholastic anthropology (LAn 25: 856) and associates this with the knowledge of the human being treated in “physiology” (LAn 25:855). In his published *Anthropology* nearly two decades later, he returns to this contrast between anthropology from “a physiological or a pragmatic point of view,” where

Physiological knowledge of the human being concerns the investigation of what *nature* makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what *he* as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself. – He who ponders natural phenomena, for example, what the causes of the faculty of memory may rest on, can speculate back and forth (like Descartes) over the traces of impressions remaining in the brain, but in doing so he must admit that in this play of his representations he is a mere observer and must let nature run its course, for he does not know the cranial nerves and fibers, nor does he understand how to put them to use for his purposes. Therefore all theoretical speculation about this is a pure waste of time. (An 7:119)

Platner's *Anthropology* had aimed to "study the body and mind together in terms of their mutual proportions, limitations, and relations."⁶ For Platner, this offered hope of a medical science of mind, one that would "explain given mental phenomena based on a theory of physiological prerequisites for mental phenomena."⁷ Kant's *Anthropology*, by contrast, rejects the methodological materialism implicit in these approaches in favor of an approach to human agency that emphasizes "us[ing] perceptions concerning what has been found to hinder or stimulate memory in order to enlarge it or make it agile" (An 7:119). While physiological anthropology looks at human beings as mere machines subject to natural influence, pragmatic anthropology sees them as free beings who use observation and experience for self-improvement.

In distinguishing pragmatic anthropology from scholastic and physiological anthropologies, Kant focuses on what his anthropology is *not*. But in both cases, the key to the contrast lies in the fact that pragmatic anthropology puts knowledge *to use*. Kant does not object to scholasticism for bringing human behavior and cognition under rules, but for bringing it under rules that are *irrelevant* to practical purposes (LAn 25:856). And he does not even object to physiological anthropology's methodological materialism in itself, but only to the "waste of time" involved in inquiries into physiological causes that one "does not understand how to put to use" (An 7:119). And this raises the question: what is pragmatic anthropology put to use *for*? And here there are at least three possible responses: for happiness, for influencing others, or for any practical concern whatsoever.

1.3. Pragmatic anthropology, prudence, and happiness. In his *Groundwork*, Kant distinguishes between pragmatic, technical, and moral imperatives: "The first kind of

imperatives might also be called technical (belonging to art), the second kind pragmatic (belonging to welfare), the third kind moral (belonging to free conduct as such, i.e., to morals)” (G 4:416-17). In his anthropology lectures, Kant makes similar distinctions between “skill” and “prudence” (e.g. LAn 24:1210) and between what is “pragmatic” because related to “prudence” and what is properly “moral” (e.g., LAn 25:855-56). Moreover, Kant’s *Anthropology* and related lectures are full of information conducive to living a happier life. While the *Groundwork* expresses despair over the possibility “imperatives of prudence” ever “presenting actions ... as practically necessary” because “the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate concept” (G 4:418, cf. CPrR 5:36), the *reason* for this indeterminacy is that “all of the elements that belong to happiness are without exception empirical, that is, they must be borrowed from experience” (G 4:418). In the *Groundwork*, Kant’s focus is justifying the moral law’s categorical demands, so he emphasizes the fragility of happiness, insisting that “it is impossible for the most insightful ... finite being to frame for himself a determinate concept of what he really wills here” and asking seemingly rhetorical questions such as “If he wills a long life, who will guarantee him that it would not be a long misery?” (G 4:418). But in his *Anthropology* and related lectures, Kant not only lays out general discussions of pleasure and pain, noting for instance that “pain must always precede every enjoyment” and “no enjoyment can immediately follow another,” but also gives specific advice about how best to promote lasting happiness (An 7:231). Thus while the *Groundwork* despairingly asks, “If he wills a great deal of cognition and insight, that might become only an eye all the more acute to show him ... ills that are now concealed” (G 4:418), the *Anthropology* carefully distinguishes cognitive powers and discusses the roles of various of these for promoting happiness. For example, after distinguishing “attention” from “abstraction,” Kant notes,

Many human beings are unhappy because they cannot abstract. The suitor could make a good marriage if only he could overlook a wart on his beloved's face, or a gap between her teeth. ... But this faculty of abstraction is a strength of mind that can only be acquired through practice. (An 7:131-32)

And after making a general (cognitive) point about the subjective experience of time passing, Kant puts this to practical use for promoting happiness:

the multitude of stages that mark the last part of life with various and different tasks will arouse in an old person the illusion of a longer-travelled lifetime than he would have believed according to the number of years, and filling our time by means of methodical, progressive occupations that lead to an important and intended end ... is the only sure means of becoming happy with one's life and, at the same time, weary of life. ... Hence the conclusion of such a life occurs with *contentment*. (An 7:234)

Kant ends the first major part of his *Anthropology* with specific accounts of “the highest physical good” and “the highest moral-physical good,” *both* of which, despite their use of the terms “good” and “moral,” are suggestions for how best to be *happy* given our human nature (An 7:276-77).⁸ Thus even as Thomas Sturm rightly points out that “Kant does not explicitly state what happiness might be and just how to achieve it,” he wrongly infers from this that “it is most doubtful that Kant intended the practical purpose of anthropology to be the teaching of general ‘personal prudence.’”⁹ Against the *Groundwork*'s apparent hopelessness about rules of prudence, Kant's anthropology provides practical – albeit empirical and limited – advice for living as happily as possible.

Importantly, and despite Kant's apparent contrast between “pragmatic” imperatives “belonging to welfare” and “moral” ones “belonging to free conduct” (G 4:416-17), both the

need for and possibility of a pragmatic anthropology to help discern prudential imperatives are due to humans' freedom. In his "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," Kant considers the emergence of human beings from a state of mere animality into true humanity. The first and most important step in this emergence was the transition from a condition in which "Instinct, that *voice of God* which all animals obey, ... guided the novice" (CB 8:111) to the emergence of "reason" and the "discover[y] in himself [of] a faculty of choosing for himself a way of living and not being bound to a single one, as other animals are" (CB 8:112). But this discovery was not unambiguously good from the standpoint of happiness. Echoing a point from the *Groundwork* (see G 4:395-96), Kant continues:

Yet upon the momentary delight that this marked superiority might have awakened in him, anxiety and fright must have followed right away, concerning how he ... should deal with this newly discovered faculty. He stood, as it were, on the brink of an abyss; for instead of the single objects of his desire to which instinct had up to now directed him, there opened up an infinity of them, and he did not know how to relate to the choice between them; and from this estate of freedom, once he had tasted it, it was nevertheless impossible for him to turn back again to that of servitude [to] instinct. (CB 8:112)

Pragmatic anthropology, as "the investigation of what [the human being] as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself" (An 7:119), directly addresses the problem posed by freedom for lasting happiness. No longer bound by instinct, we must figure out how to live life well on our own. A pragmatic anthropology that gives guidance about what constitutes true happiness and how best to achieve it can help us to pursue this natural end.

1.4. Pragmatic anthropology and the use of others. While much of pragmatic anthropology specifies means towards happiness, Kant often invokes a narrower sense of “pragmatic.” In a footnote to a claim that “skill in the choice of means to one’s own greatest well-being can be called *prudence*,” which he identifies with what is “pragmatic,” Kant notes,

The word “prudence [*Klugheit*]” is taken in two senses: in the one it may bear the name of “knowledge of the world [*Weltklugheit*]”; in the other that of “private prudence.” The first is a human being’s skill in influencing others so as to use them for his own purposes. The second is the insight to unite all these purposes to his own enduring advantage. (G 4:416n)

The second sense of prudence is just that emphasis on promoting one’s own happiness on which §1.3 focused. But the first introduces a new emphasis on influencing others. Likewise, in his lectures, Kant explains that “every pragmatic instruction makes one prudent,” where “prudence is a proficiency or knowledge in ... using other human beings for one’s aims” (LAn 25:1210) and that the “practical knowledge of the human being [that] makes us prudent ... is a knowledge of ... how one human being has influence on another and can lead him according to his purpose” (LAn 25:855; see also LAn 25:471-72, 1436; LE 27:358). In his published *Anthropology*, he writes,

In an anthropology from a pragmatic point of view, however, the only thing that matters to us is to present the character of both [kinds of people], as they are now, in some examples, and, as far as possible, systematically; which makes it possible to judge what each can expect from the other and how each could use the other to his own advantage. (An 7:312)

This repeated reference to “his own advantage” (G 4:416n; An 7:312) might make it seem like prudence in the use of others is solely egoistic.¹⁰ But Kant makes clear elsewhere that even insofar as pragmatic anthropology is used to manipulate others, this need not be solely for selfish purposes. Precisely in the context of pointing out how anthropology helps one use others, Kant insists that “*morality* must be combined with knowledge of humanity” (LAn 25:472, emphasis added); and among “great uses” of anthropology, he explicitly indicates a use of others for moral ends, an “influence on morality and religion whereby one can give these duties the power of incentives through this knowledge” (LAn 25:1437). Pragmatic knowledge provides one with means of manipulating others; this can be put to use for one’s own personal advantage, but it can also be put to use for moral (or other) ends.

1.5. Pragmatic as practical. In the end, however, this influence over others is not and cannot be the *primary* use of anthropology. As Kant says in the *Groundwork* about his two senses of prudence, “The latter [prudence in promoting one’s overall wellbeing] is properly that to which the worth even of the former [skill in influencing others] is reduced” (G 4:416n). More generally, knowledge of the ends worthy of promoting must take precedence over the use of others to promote those ends. Given humans’ social nature and our dependence upon others, a pragmatic anthropology that teaches how to use others effectively will be an important part of promoting any ends. But – and here I turn to the final and, I think, best conception of “pragmatic” anthropology – this instruction will be only *part* of a broader study of everything about human nature that can help us discern the most important ends to pursue and effectively perfect and use ourselves and others towards that pursuit. Or, as Kant puts it in that early letter to Herz, pragmatic anthropology will “disclose the sources of *all* the sciences, the science of morality, of

skill, of human intercourse, of the way to educate and govern human beings, and thus of *everything that pertains to the practical*” (C 10:145, emphasis added). All knowledge of human beings that can be put to any sort of practical use can fit within pragmatic anthropology. Thus one finds guidance about how to perfect various human faculties like the senses (An 7:165) or memory (An 7:183-84), how to become happy (e.g., An 7:296), how to cultivate that character that is a precondition of a good will (e.g., An 7:294), and how to influence others (e.g., An 7:312).

Moreover, as the letter to Herz makes clear, the realm of the practical here includes, and even emphasizes, human *social* life, our social “intercourse” and mutual “molding and governing.” And Kant’s published *Anthropology* concludes with a strong emphasis on the social dimension of his pragmatic anthropology. The final section of the *Anthropology* – “The Character of the Species” – ends with call to “the human species” to “rise out of evil in constant progress towards the good ... by a progressive organization of citizens ... into and toward the species as a system that is cosmopolitically united” (An 7:333). In that sense, one might rightly see the pragmatic orientation of the anthropology as toward *social* self-improvement.¹¹

In the end, then, Kant’s pragmatic anthropology serves to present in popular and accessible ways the knowledge of human nature that will be needed by individuals and societies in order to achieve together all of the goals that make up both the perfection and happiness of the species. Because merely scholastic or physiological knowledge cannot serve these ends, he discusses physiological claims and the findings of speculative psychology only insofar as these have practical relevance. Empirical psychology, in that sense, “establishes its own domicile in a complete anthropology” (A849/B877). Moreover, because the determination of what will make humans happy is – by virtue of our freedom – a difficult problem requiring extensive reflection

on empirical claims about human psychology, pragmatic anthropology has an important emphasis on happiness. And because advancing our ends – particularly our social and cosmopolitan ends – requires cooperation with other free human beings, pragmatic anthropology emphasizes knowledge that we can put to use in social intercourse. But ultimately, because our vocation goes beyond merely happiness or even social cooperation, pragmatic anthropology truly treats *all* that “pertains to the practical” (C 10:146).

2. Empirical anthropology and the importance of *Denkungsart*

Kant’s anthropology is pragmatic in several distinct senses united under the banner of putting knowledge of human beings to *use*. In every sense, the notion of a “pragmatic” anthropology involves human beings as *free* beings who exercise control over their own destinies. But strikingly, the knowledge that Kant seeks to *put* to use is empirical, knowledge gained through “observation and experience” (LAn 25:7).¹² The whole “purpose of anthropology” is “to observe the human being ... and to organize human phenomena under rules” (LAn 25:472; see also LAn 25:856). When he remarks on the challenges to anthropology, he focuses on challenges to *observing oneself* (An 7:121; cf. Ak 15:660 [R1482]). And when he mentions anthropology elsewhere in his critical works – such as the “moral anthropology” that will complement his pure moral philosophy (G 4:388; MM 6:216-17) or the “anthropology” discussed in the first *Critique*, into which empirical psychology will eventually be absorbed (A484-89/B876-77) – it is consistently treated as something *empirical*. But the appeal to freedom seems inconsistent with any notion of anthropology as an *empirical* science that would treat human beings as objects of experience, given Kant’s commitment to strict causal determinism with respect to experience (A189/B232-34, A536/B564) and his commitment to a conception of transcendental freedom

that precludes such empirical determination (see A448/B476, A533-35/B562-64, A803/B831; CPrR 5:97). To make matters worse, Kant explicitly states in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* that there can be no empirical science of humans' mental states. And in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he seems to preclude the possibility of any science of empirical psychology by rejecting the application of the category of substance to the human soul.¹³ Despite these problems, however, Kant's pragmatic anthropology is best understood as a kind of empirical science.

Elsewhere, I have discussed and offered solutions for several problems that might arise with Kant's integration of an empirical science of human beings and a commitment to transcendental freedom. In *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy*,¹⁴ I addressed the problem of how empirical influences on moral development could be taken seriously within pragmatic anthropology given that human beings are always free to act from respect for the moral law; moral anthropology is an important part of combatting one's self-wrought radical evil and thereby expressing one's free commitment to good principles. In *Kant's Empirical Psychology*,¹⁵ I showed in more general terms how, for Kant, empirical investigation of human beings is compatible with transcendental freedom by virtue of his transcendental idealism, according to which the empirical character of every human action can be investigated "as with any investigation in the series of determining causes for a given natural effect" (A554/B582), but this empirical character is itself grounded in an intelligible character for which individuals can be held responsible. In that same book, I showed that Kant's claim that "empirical [psychology] can never become a science" (MFS 4:471) is based on a very narrow and technical notion of "strict science," and that systematic empirical investigations of human beings that would be recognizably "scientific" by today's standards are possible for Kant.¹⁶ And

I there also discussed several other particular problems that recent scholars have raised for Kant's prospects of empirically investigating human beings.¹⁷

In this short chapter, I want to focus on how an empirical anthropology can study human beings *as freely acting beings*. With respect to this issue, I focus on one particular concept within Kant's account of anthropology: the notion of character as "mode of thought [*Denkungsart*]." Kant's published *Anthropology*¹⁸ starts with a discussion of various faculties of soul – cognition, feeling, and desire – that tracks closely the empirical psychology sections of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, which Kant had used as a textbook for his own metaphysics and empirical psychology lectures. But the last third of the *Anthropology* shifts the focus of anthropology in a new direction, to what Kant calls "character." Some of this discussion draws from Kant's earlier work on various different human characteristics, such as different temperaments, "the character of the sexes," and "the character of the nations" (compare, e.g., An 7:286-91 and 303-21 with OBS 2:218-55). But arguably the most important and innovative part of the *Anthropology* is Kant's discussion of what he calls "character simply speaking [*Charakter schlechthin*]" (An 7:292). I have discussed the importance of *Charakter schlechthin* in other contexts, but I have not emphasized a point that Kant – and several commentators on his anthropology¹⁹ – emphasize: the strong connection between *Charakter schlechthin* and what Kant calls *Denkungsart*. Kant introduces the term *Denkungsart* explicitly in anthropology lectures in the mid-1770s (see, e.g., LAn 25:649, 821), and in his published *Anthropology* he defines it as equivalent to *Charakter schlechthin*, which he identifies with that character which "is the distinguishing mark of the human being as a rational being endowed with freedom" and which "indicates what he is prepared to make of himself" (An 7:285). These important echoes of Kant's initial definition of *pragmatic* anthropology as "the investigation of what *he* [the human being]

as free-acting being makes of himself” (An 7:119) strongly indicate the centrality of *Denkungsart* for Kant’s eventual pragmatic anthropology.²⁰

But the concept of *Denkungsart*, and particularly the way in which it is both indicative of human freedom and a proper object of anthropological investigation, is subject to some difficulties. *Denkungsart* is typically translated as “mode of thought” or “way of thinking,” and G. Felicitas Munzel, who has offered a particularly detailed defense of her translation,²¹ translates it as “conduct of thought.” None of these turns of phrase are particularly illuminating or even clear, and all of them overemphasize the cognitive dimension of *Denkungsart* at the expense of the volitional.²² For this chapter, I leave the term untranslated and focus on laying out several key features of Kant’s definition of it. I also make the case that there are two very different technical senses in which Kant uses the term: (1) as equivalent to “intelligible” as opposed to “empirical” character; and (2) as describing the empirical character of the higher faculty of desire insofar as this is governed by principles, as opposed to mere temperament or inclination. Getting clear on the distinction and relations between these two senses is essential for properly understanding the nature of Kant’s pragmatic anthropology.

I start, though, with some general characteristics of the anthropological concept of *Denkungsart*. Kant uses the term *Denkungsart* from his earliest published writings (UNH 1:235) and in a wide variety of contexts, but the uses most directly relevant to his *Anthropology* all tie the concept to one’s “character” and share four other key elements:

1. *Denkungsart* (mode of *thought*) is contrasted with *Sinnesart*, or “mode of sense.”
2. *Denkungsart* is linked with to human freedom.
3. Relatedly, it is something that human beings construct for ourselves; it is not given simply by nature.

4. It involves commitment to *principles* (and is thereby a characteristic of humans as *rational*).

The first three of these are already present in the quotations from the *Anthropology* given above (An 7:285; see also A551/B597; Rel 6:47; An 7:285, 292; Ak 15:396, 763, 865-6, 870; LAn 25:821). Kant makes the fourth explicit when he defines “character as *Denkungsart*” as “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” (An 7:292; see also LAn 25:438, 630, 651-52, 1175, 1384, 1386).

Once we see *Denkungsart* as having these four features, we might wonder how it could be an object of investigation within an empirical anthropology. To highlight this problem, but also to see how to make sense of an empirical *Denkungsart*, we need to distinguish between two related senses of “freedom” in Kant – empirical and transcendental²³ – and two corresponding senses of *Denkungsart*.

First, Kant explicitly uses the distinction between *Sinnesart* and *Denkungsart* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Religion* to distinguish between what he calls humans’ “intelligible character” and their “sensible” or “empirical character.” In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant emphasizes that “empirical character [*Sinnesart*]²⁴ ... is all precisely determined and necessary” but this “empirical character is once again determined in the intelligible character [*Denkungsart*]. We are not acquainted with the latter [*Denkungsart*] but it is indicated through appearances, which really give only the *Sinnesart* (the empirical character) for immediate cognition” (A551/B579, translation modified). Similarly, in *Religion*, Kant identifies a “revolution in *Denkungsart*” with that “revolution in disposition [*Gesinnung*]” whereby a human being becomes “virtuous according to the intelligible character (*virtus noumenon*)” This noumenal

virtue is evident only “for him who penetrates to the intelligible ground of the heart (the ground of all maxims of the power of choice), ... i.e. for God.” By contrast, “for the judgment of human beings, however, who can assess themselves and the strength of their maxims only by the upper hand they gain over the senses in time, the change is” evident only as a “gradual reformation in the *Sinnesart*” that can “be regarded as a gradual reformation of the ... perverted *Denkungsart*” (Rel 6:47-48, translation and order modified).

In these and similar contexts, the distinction between *Denkungsart* and *Sinnesart* is an application to human character of Kant’s metaphysical distinction between appearances (phenomena) and things in themselves (noumena).²⁵ As one’s “noumenal” character, *Denkungsart* is beyond the possibility of human experience, something to which only God has access. What human beings experience is *Sinnesart*; we at best imperfectly infer claims about *Denkungsart* from our empirical character. And this *Denkungsart* can and should be seen as transcendentally free (A551/B579). Thus for *Denkungsart* in *this* sense, “the formation of a *Denkungsart* ... is ... the act of an unmoved mover.”²⁶ However, just as appearances are appearances of things in themselves, in these passages, there is also a *grounding* relationship between *Denkungsart* and *Sinnesart*.²⁷ That is, one’s *Sinnesart* is “determined by” one’s *Denkungsart*, such that we can rightly (albeit fallibly) interpret moral reform in one’s empirical character as indicative of a revolution in one’s intelligible *Denkungsart*.

These two features of this concept of *Denkungsart* – that it is beyond the possibility of experience and that it grounds *Sinnesart* – make it particularly well-suited to describe humans’ transcendental freedom. Kant emphasizes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that “the thoroughgoing connection of all occurrences in the world of sense according to invariable natural laws is already confirmed ... and will suffer no violation” so that “the only question is whether, despite

this, ... freedom might not also take place” (A536/B564). And Kant develops the category of the “intelligible” as “that ... which is not itself appearance” precisely to make room for this (transcendental) freedom (A538/B566). Moreover, in order to play its roles as regulative idea within transcendental philosophy and as ground of moral responsibility in practical philosophy, it is essential that the transcendently free character of human beings be the ground of our observed behavior.²⁸

But these same two features of *Denkungsart* make it particularly *ill*-suited to be the object of pragmatic anthropology. To start with the second point, the notion that *Denkungsart* grounds *Sinnesart*, which is an essential feature of Kant’s account of intelligible and empirical characters, is inconsistent with Kant’s use of *Denkungsart* in his pragmatic anthropology. There, *Denkungsart* and *Sinnesart* are two distinct explanatory principles for describing human beings, neither explicable in terms of the other (An 7:285). Strikingly, insofar as Kant gives either any influence on the other, it is temperament, an aspect of *Sinnesart*, that influences character as *Denkungsart* (see An 7:290; LAn 25:1388). And with respect to the first point (that *Denkungsart* is not empirically knowable), I have argued extensively elsewhere that “character” in Kant’s anthropology refers to an empirically given form of the higher faculty of desire, subject to various empirical influences and even determining causes.²⁹ Thus, for example, Kant points out that “*the higher faculty is specifically composed and has its subjective laws, which precisely constitute the character*” (LAn 25:483) and discusses how the firmness of principles essential to *Denkungsart* is “brought about” or “produced” (*bewirkt*) by such influences as education (e.g., An 7:294; LAn 25:1172). But here it is worth adding that even in *Religion* and (obliquely) in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses the notion of *Denkungsart* in ways that are incompatible with seeing it as referring to one’s transcendently free intelligible character. Thus, for instance, in

Religion Kant discusses how “the predisposition to the good ... is cultivated and *gradually becomes a Denkungsart*” (Rel 6:48, translation modified, emphasis added); this emphasis on gradual change is consistent with the “gradual reform” of the empirical character, but not at all with the instant revolution of intelligible character on which Kant earlier insisted (see Rel 6:47). And Kant’s discussion of intelligible and empirical character in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is situated in the context of his claim that

every human being has an empirical character for his power of choice, which is nothing other than a certain causality of his reason, insofar as in its effects in appearance this reason exhibits a rule, in accordance with which one could derive the rational grounds and the actions themselves according to their kind and degree, and estimate the subjective principles of his power of choice. (A549/B577)

While Kant does not use the term *Denkungsart* to refer to these subjective principles of one’s power of choice, this description of the empirical character of choice corresponds precisely to the definitions of *Denkungsart* offered in his anthropology. But Kant emphasizes that unlike with that *Denkungsart* that is identical to intelligible character, for this empirical character of choice, “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” (A550/B578).

This use of *Denkungsart* may seem to compromise the notion that *Denkungsart* specifically refers to freedom, except that Kant has resources in *another* concept of freedom that fits perfectly with his anthropological use of *Denkungsart*. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes clear that “[t]he transcendental idea of freedom is far from constituting the whole content of the psychological concept of that name, which is for the most part empirical” (A448/B476).

Given that the psychological concept of freedom is “for the most part empirical,” one can carve out a concept of “empirical freedom,”³⁰ or what Kant often calls “comparative” or “psychological” freedom (see, e.g., CPrR 5:97; LM 28:267). Kant explains this sense of freedom in terms of the ability to govern oneself in accordance with concepts or reason or the intellect as opposed to mere inclination or sensations or stimuli. For example, in an early lecture on metaphysics, he explains,

Animals can be necessitated strictly through stimuli <*stricte per stimulus*>, but human beings only comparatively. ... One can be forced by sensuality to act contrary to the intellect, but one can also be forced by the intellect to act contrary to sensuality. The more a human being has power, by means of the higher power of choice, to suppress the lower power of choice, the freer he is. ... This practical freedom rests on independence of choice from necessitation by stimuli. ... [H]owever ... transcendental freedom ... will be spoken of in the Rational Psychology. (LM 28:256-57)

Kant makes explicit that this “psychological freedom ... is treated in empirical psychology” (LM 28:267). In keeping with his aforementioned claim that the “power of choice” and even “reason” has an empirical character, Kant can define a sort of empirical freedom that distinguishes human beings from other animals by virtue of humans’ capacity to regulate their actions not merely by stimuli but also by principles (or maxims) of reason. And in those cases, “the human being of principles, from whom one knows what to expect not from his instinct, for example, but from his will” – that is, from “a certain causality of his [practical] reason” (A549/B577) – “has a character” in the sense of *Denkungsart* (An 7:285). *Denkungsart* is thus a term describing humans’ *empirical* freedom, that capacity of human beings to act in ways that are determined by

the exercise of a capacity for reflective formation of practical principles and choices in the light of those principles.

On my reading, then, the concept of *Denkungsart* serves two very different purposes within Kant's philosophy. Within his transcendental philosophy, *Denkungsart* is used to refer to humans' intelligible character, the transcendently free ground of that empirical character which consists of the sum of all observable (or even empirically inferable) features of human life. We might call this "transcendental *Denkungsart*," to refer to the transcendental freedom that lies at its base. But within his pragmatic anthropology as such, the primary role of the concept of *Denkungsart* is to distinguish between two different kinds of *empirical* character of the faculty of desire. The lower faculty of desire is governed by our temperaments (and to a lesser extent our natural aptitudes). This determines what sorts of inclinations one will have and how one's inclinations and feelings operate at a pre-reflective level. The higher faculty of desire is governed by what we might call our "empirical *Denkungsart*," the principles one can observe or infer as having been adopted through processes of reflection and that in turn control our higher volitions.³¹ Because our higher faculty of desire – our "power of choice" – is reflective and governed by a reason (in the sense of a particular power with a particular empirical character), it is considered "free" in an empirical sense. But because even this reflection and reason are objects of empirical investigation, they are subject to the natural necessity of all appearances and thus not *transcendentally* free.

These two different purposes are not wholly disconnected, however. Kant's ground for ascribing human beings an intelligible character is our capacity for moral responsibility, a capacity Kant associates with yet another sense of freedom: practical freedom. Within the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is conflicted about the relation between practical and

transcendental freedom. On the one hand, he explicitly says that “it is this transcendental idea of freedom on which the practical concept of freedom is grounded” (A533/B561). On the other hand, when he says that “I will use the concept of freedom only in a practical sense and set aside ... the transcendental signification of the concept, which cannot be empirically presupposed as an explanatory ground of the appearances” (A801/B829) and emphasizes that “we cognize practical freedom through experience, as one of the natural causes” (A803/B831; see also LM 28:267); Kant implies that empirical freedom is sufficient for (or even identical to) practical freedom. Whatever ambivalence might be present within the *Critique of Pure Reason*, however, by the time of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant is quite clear that any attempt to ground ascriptions of moral responsibility or to defend moral laws of freedom on merely empirical freedom would be a “wretched subterfuge” (CPrR 5:97).

And yet, Kant’s use of the concept of *Denkungsart* in his pragmatic anthropology brings with it the *evaluation* of others’ characters in moral or at least quasi-moral terms.³² Thus Kant explicitly calls *Charakter schlechthin* also one’s “moral character” (An 7:285) and claims that “character always has something worthy of respect about it” (LAn 25:823; see also LAn 25:1169). The moral and evaluative importance of character is based on an important *relationship* between the two sorts of *Denkungsart* discussed above. Transcendental *Denkungsart* is the *ground* of empirical *Denkungsart*. Importantly, when Kant establishes the reality of an intelligible character underlying humans’ empirical behavior, he does so on the basis of our ascriptions of moral responsibility: “the concept of an empirically unconditioned causality [that is, the concept of transcendental *Denkungsart*] is indeed theoretically empty ... but it is nevertheless possible and refers to an undetermined object; in place of that, however, the concept is given significance in the moral law and consequently in its practical reference” (CPrR

5:56). Put in terms of *Denkungsart*, Kant's point here is that the mere concept of *Denkungsart* as intelligible character is empty; this concept is given reality and content by a moral argument that shows that we must assume such an underlying intelligible character as the ground of any empirical character that we hold to be bound by moral obligations. We hold ourselves to be so bound, so we have a transcendental *Denkungsart*. But, strikingly, we do not hold ourselves to be morally obligated with respect to every feature of our empirical "character" in the broadest sense. In particular, we are *not* morally responsible for mere matters of temperament or mere natural endowments (see, e.g., G 4:398). That is to say that the empirical character for which we are responsible is precisely our (empirical) *Denkungsart*. And in that sense, even our *empirical Denkungsart* can be said to give "evidence" of practical freedom and to warrant praise and blame. Insofar as we *already* ground that empirical *Denkungsart* in a transcendental *Denkungsart*, the concept of *Denkungsart* as a whole picks out those features of ourselves for which are responsible.³³

Finally, it is important to remember that everything in Kant's pragmatic anthropology is designed to provide empirical knowledge about human beings *that can be put to use*. Part of putting such knowledge to use involves noting the *valuable* purposes to which it can be put. Thus when Kant notes, in a section on "Character as *Denkungsart*," that "character has an inner worth, and is beyond all price," he is exhorting his listeners to take the knowledge of how to cultivate and recognize character and put that knowledge to use to cultivate character in themselves and others (An 7:291-92, translation modified). And that is to say that Kant is seeking to affect the *Denkungsarts* of his hearers. On the one hand, this attempt to affect them depends upon Kant's conviction that, as a matter of empirical fact, it is possible for exhortation, instruction, and more generally education to "bring about this firmness and persistence in principles" (An 7:294). That

is, he trusts in his knowledge of the possible empirical influences on (empirical) *Denkungsart*. But he also addresses his hearers and readers as agents with transcendental freedom, calling on us to effect a revolution in our (transcendental) *Denkungsart*. For one listening to anthropology *pragmatically*, that is, as knowledge of human beings that can be put to use, information about human beings is not a mere catalog of empirical causes. Rather, such information provides one with *reasons* to act in particular ways. The fact, for example, that the fear of fashion undermines character because fashion is a “fleeting, changeable thing” gives rise to a maxim “to moderate our fear of offending against fashion” (An 7:294).

3. Conclusion: What is anthropology from a pragmatic point of view?

For Kant, anthropology is pragmatic in that it pertains to the whole of the practical; it is meant to be put to use. It is focused *on* human beings as free beings, and thus the study of (empirical) *Denkungsart* has a special and prominent place within it. This focus is partly justified by the fact that human beings must work together in society, and thus anthropology ends up being “pragmatic” in the sense of emphasizing human traits that allow “one human being [to have] influence on another and lead him” (LAn 25:855). The emphasis on *Denkungsart* is also justified by virtue of the special connection – in fact, the identity – between (empirical) *Denkungsart* and empirical freedom. And it is particularly justified given the importance of forming one’s (empirical) *Denkungsart*, given each human being’s status as a *transcendentally* free agent, one with a transcendental *Denkungsart* that is responsible for our empirical *Denkungsart*.

In the end, pragmatic anthropology is the use of empirical knowledge of human beings, rooted in general concepts that systematize inner sense experience but expanded through study of human behavior and motivation through observation, in order to develop means for pursuing

human goods in oneself and others. These goods are pursued *by* free beings who can put empirical knowledge to use, and they are the goods *of* free beings, capable of cognitive, affective, and volitional perfections distinctive of free beings (reason, aesthetic pleasure, the good will), but also aiming for other goods that are genuine goods for the finite, embodied, free beings that we are (e.g., rest after work, self-control against passions, good dinner parties, good memory, etc.). Of these goods, the formation and perfection of our *Denkungsart* is of preeminent importance, not only as the ground of our individual perfection but also for the gradual perfection of the species.

Notes

1. Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 78.
2. Robert B. Loudon, *Kant's Human Being: Essays on His Theory of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69.
3. There are other senses of “pragmatic” that one might add to my taxonomy, such as Thomas Sturm’s conception of pragmatic as “empirical knowledge of the conditions that hinder or encourage the shaping of our reason such that we attain the mode of thought of a cosmopolitan” (*Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* [Paderborn: Mentis, 2009], 523). I agree with Sturm that this is an important pragmatic goal in which Kant is interested, but reject the view that it exhausts the sense in which pragmatic anthropology is pragmatic. The cultivation of memory, for instance, need not be in the service of a greater cosmopolitan mode of thought in order to legitimately be part of pragmatic anthropology. In the end, I treat such narrower proposals for the scope of pragmatic the way I treat moral anthropology, as a legitimate *subset* of pragmatic anthropology as a whole.

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4. This sense of “pragmatic anthropology” is particularly emphasized by Holly Wilson and John Zammito, both of whom rightly relate it to *Weltweisheit* (worldly-wisdom) and a sympathy between Kant’s early anthropology and the budding *Popularphilosophie* movement in eighteenth-century Germany. See Holly L. Wilson, *Kant’s Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); and John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
 5. For an excellent discussion of Kant’s anthropology relative to that of Platner and other physiological anthropologists, see Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*.
 6. Quoted in Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, 76.
 7. *Ibid.*, 77.
 8. I discuss both of these in more detail in Patrick R. Frierson, *What Is the Human Being?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), ch. 5.
 9. Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, 501.
 10. Cf. Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, ch. 8, §8.
 11. For discussion, see Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, esp. chs. 7 and 8. Sturm also very nicely discusses an important passage from the *Groundwork* that defines “the proper meaning of the word *pragmatic*” in terms of “*provision* for the general welfare” (G 4:417n). This emphasis on “welfare [*Wohlfahrt*]” is consistent with the readings of pragmatic in terms of happiness, but the footnote here clearly broadens the relevant happiness from one’s own to that of society as a whole. Ultimately, though, it needs to be broadened even further, to include anything of practical relevance for happiness or any other good, for individuals or for society as a whole.

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12. This is from his very first lecture on anthropology, but the same point is reiterated in his published *Anthropology* (An 7:119, 321) and in the constant reference to experience in support of general points in both later lectures (e.g., LAn 25:1416) and his published *Anthropology* (e.g., An 7:324).
13. See Kenneth Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Corey W. Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
14. Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
15. Patrick R. Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 9-18.
16. *Ibid.*, 18-27. See also Frierson, *What Is the Human Being?* 46-49.
17. Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, 27-43.
18. For a nice discussion of changes in the anthropology lectures leading up to this structure in the published *Anthropology*, see Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*.
19. See especially Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*; and G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character: The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
20. See too LAn 25:1367, where Kant claims that "As the first part of the anthropology contains the physiology of the human being and thus, as it were, the elements out of which the human being is composed, so the practical part of anthropology is the one that teaches us how human beings are constituted in their voluntary actions." The implication here is that anthropology only really becomes pragmatic as opposed to physiological when we get to its second part, which

deals with character. This does not quite correspond to the actual content of the anthropology (even in these lectures), but it does show how central Kant considers character as *Denkungsart* within his pragmatic anthropology as whole.

21. Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character*, xv-xvii.

22. Kant often uses *Denkungsart* in a way that primarily refers to one's way of thinking in theoretical rather than practical contexts (see, e.g., Axi note; C 10:269). In these contexts, the same distinctions I will raise below in the specifically practical contexts arise. Thus Kant's reference to "our age's way of thinking" (Axi note) involves a specifically historical conception of *Denkungsart*, and also one embodying a sort of responsibility-holding, in that Kant purports in the rest of that note to *justify* this way of thinking. But his claim to Herz that "one cannot expect a *Denkungsart* to be suddenly led off the beaten track into one that has heretofore been totally unused" and that thus one must take "time" in order "to stay that *Denkungsart* little by little in its previous path and finally to turn it into the opposite direction by means of gradual impressions" treats human *Denkungsart* as an orientation of reason, to be sure, but one that susceptible of empirical study, prediction, and even control through empirical influences (C 10:269, translation modified).

23. At the end of this section, I bring up a third sense of freedom – "practical" – and discuss how it relates to both empirical and transcendental freedom.

24. Here *Sinnesart* and *Denkungsart* are not the German terms translated as "empirical" and "intelligible" character. Rather, *Kant* is identifying the German terms *Sinnesart* and *Denkungsart* with *empirische* and *intelligibelen Charackter* respectively.

25. For a more general discussion of this distinction, see chapters 3-5 in this volume.

26. Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, 480. Here I quote from Sturm, but only to disagree partly with him. Sturm rightly agrees with Emil L. Fackenheim (“Kant’s Concept of History,” *Kant-Studien* 48, nos. 1-4 [Jan. 1957], 381-98) that, in his properly anthropological and historical works, the formation of *Denkungsart* is “not the act of an unmoved mover” (emphasis added). My point here is that there is another usage of *Denkungsart* according to which human *Denkungsart* – as the term referring to our intelligible character – must be seen as the activity of an unmoved mover, that is, of a transcendently free cause. My overall purpose is to bring out a distinction between different sorts of *Denkungsart*, a distinction Sturm did not make.

27. For discussion of the grounding relationship between appearances and things in themselves, see Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

28. See Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*; Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*; and Patrick Frierson, “Two Standpoints and the Problem of Moral Anthropology,” in *Kant’s Moral Metaphysics: God, Freedom, and Immortality*, ed. Benjamin J. Bruxvoort Lipscomb and James Krueger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 83-110.

29. See esp. Frierson, *Kant’s Empirical Psychology*, ch. 2.

30. Cf. Lewis White Beck, “Five Concepts of Freedom in Kant,” in *Stephan Körner – Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction*, ed. Jan T. J. Szednicki (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), 35-36.

31. Here I am ignoring two important complications to this picture: the possibility of a sort of qualified *Denkungsart* whereby one acts on the basis of principles adopted through some process of reflection, but where this reflection is ultimately not a stable and fixed part of one’s character; and the rarity of character (and hence *Denkungsart*) in the strict sense that requires consistency

and stability. For further discussion of these complications, see Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, esp. chs. 2 and 7.

32. Unlike Sturm, I do not see “the concept’s primary function” as being “to evaluate persons and their actions,” and I certainly disagree (as does Sturm) that “*Sinnesart* is descriptive and explanatory while *Denkungsart* fulfills a purely normative function” (Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, 421). The concept of *Denkungsart* plays an important descriptive and explanatory function, in that for one with *Denkungsart*, we “know what to expect from his will [that is, their practical principles], not from his instinct” (An 7:285). But more importantly, as noted in §1, it plays a role in an account of human beings that allow for the sort of prediction and mutual influence that will make possible the achieving of our ends, both individual and collective, both hedonic and moral. Nonetheless, Kant often does emphasize that we appraise human beings in terms of their observed *Denkungsart*.

33. I should make two points here. First, strictly speaking, Kant takes us to be responsible for our empirical *Denkungsart* or lack thereof. Insofar as we fail to have a consistent set of principles on the basis of which we act, we are responsible for that failure. Second, I would just note the irony that on this account, what Kant calls (empirical) *Denkungsart* in his anthropological works turns out to be exactly identical to what he calls *Sinnesart* in transcendental contexts. Nonetheless, he does – and it makes sense for him to – use the term *Denkungsart* in these two different but related ways for different purposes.