

**Review of Luigi Filieri, Sofie Møller (Eds.): *Kant on Freedom and Human Nature*, New York, Routledge, 2024, 260 pp.
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It is hard to overestimate the importance of the relationship between nature and freedom in Kant's philosophy. This relationship shows Kant's growing concern with an issue of whose difficulty he becomes progressively aware throughout the publication of his main works, starting with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the one hand, the first *Critique* presents the system of the concepts and principles *a priori* by means of which pure understanding "prescribe[s] laws *a priori* [...] to nature as the sum total of all appearances", thus providing "the original ground of its necessary lawfulness" (KrV, B163–165). On the other hand, the *Critique of Practical Reason* shows that "the concept of freedom [...] constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason" (KpV, V: 3–4), thus imputing central importance to a concept of freedom that had been excluded from the theoretical framework of the first *Critique*, which conceived of nature in terms of strict mechanical necessity. Kant's awareness of the difficulty concerning the relationship between these two domains becomes explicit in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, whose aim is precisely to bridge the "incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible" (KU, V: 176–177).

However, there is a further issue. Namely, there is a particular being in which nature and freedom somehow coexist: the human being. On the one hand, the human being is an appearance and, as such, it is subject to the same necessary laws to which all appearances are subject. On the other, the human being is a free rational agent capable of acting in conformity with

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moral imperatives provided by its own pure reason, and in this capacity consists its freedom. Accordingly, human nature represents the unique case in which freedom and nature coexist. But several questions arise. How does this coexistence actually occur? How can freedom and nature be reconciled in human nature, if they seem to be mutually exclusive to the point of belonging to what Kant himself qualifies as two different “domain[s]”? More generally, and as Kant asks in the *Jäsche Logic*, “what is the human being?” (AA IX: 25).

The aim of *Kant on Freedom and Human Nature* is to answer such questions. However, as the editors note, Kant’s account of human nature is too vast and multifaceted to be reduced to a single domain, since it allows for considerations that are not only theoretical and moral but also aesthetic and anthropological. Epistemology, morals, aesthetic and anthropology are all specific perspectives from which Kant’s account of human nature can be considered; but none of them alone is sufficient to exhaust it. This is the reason why the question about human nature and, by extension, about the human being “can find a legitimate answer only by means of a comprehensive perspective able to account for the various ways in which the elements at stake combine” (p. 4). Moreover, and looking at the structure of the book, this is also the reason why the twelve essays it includes are divided into three parts, with the first concerning the legislation of the realm of freedom, the second concerning the legislation of the realm of nature, and the third concerning the attempt to bridge the gulf between these two realms. These parts are followed by a postscript in which Paul Guyer, with whose influential views on Kant several authors take issue, responds to his critics.

The first part opens with Allen Wood’s “Freedom Within Nature”. Wood moves from the *Canon of Pure Reason* to criticize the traditional view according to which Kant excludes freedom from an empirical world conceived of in terms of strict causal determinism and places it in the noumenal world. He distinguishes the metaphysical question about transcendental freedom from the empirical question about practical freedom, claiming that Kant conceives of freedom as pertaining not to a timeless noumenal subject but to the “empirical human self, located in a determinate series of events in space and time” (p. 23). Accordingly, Wood rejects a two-world interpretation of transcendental idealism and claims that “Kant’s

ethics is committed to treating our free actions as occurring entirely within the natural world” (p. 24), thus showing that, far from placing it in an unknowable noumenal realm, Kant places freedom precisely within nature.

Freedom is also the focus of Marcus Willaschek’s “Kant’s Answer to the Question “What Is the Human Being?””. Starting from the three questions of the *Canon* (“What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?” [KrV, A805/B833]), he focuses on the mentioned fourth question Kant adds in the *Jäsche Logic*, and on his claim that the former ultimately relate to the latter (AA IX: 25). Willaschek maintains that the importance of this question consists not in Kant’s theoretical and moral anthropocentrism but, rather, in his cosmopolitan concept of philosophy, according to which the essential ends of reason must be united in one final end. Focusing on the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Willaschek identifies this final end with the vocation of human beings as moral agents endowed with freedom. Accordingly, he shows that, far from being a “fixed, descriptive essence”, this freedom is primarily a “task and obligation” (p. 38) of human beings consisting of their “gradual moral improvement, individually and as a species” (p. 41). In this way, Willaschek highlights the normative and pragmatic nature of Kant’s account of human freedom.

Also highlighting the normative character of human freedom is Sophie Møller’s “What Is Humanity?”. Following Guyer’s reading of Kant’s ethics as teleologically oriented, Møller distinguishes between the moral concept of humanity and the empirical concept of humankind, presenting Kant’s notion of humanity as the “idea of an end-setting being, which not all members of humankind might live up to empirically” (p. 46). From this perspective, Møller shows how Kant conceives of human beings as capable of acting ethically insofar as they are capable of freely setting their own ends. By so doing, she highlights the normative character of humanity understood as an ideal and regulative “aim toward which human beings ought to strive” (p. 48).

The dialogue with Guyer becomes more critical in Heiner Klemme’s “Maximizing Freedom? Paul Guyer on the Value of Freedom and Reason in Kant”. Klemme focuses on two of Guyer’s main theses: i) that freedom is the supreme value of Kant’s moral philosophy, while reason is only a means to maximize it, and ii) that Kant’s ethics must be naturalized by discarding

transcendental freedom. Klemme argues against the first thesis by claiming that the supreme value of Kant's ethics is not freedom but reason, both because only reason constitutes "the norm to which the will must refer in order to be good will" (p. 65) and because the "end-in-itself thesis is a thesis about what reason is by its very nature" (p. 69). He also argues against Guyer's second thesis by claiming that naturalistic ethics cannot justify two central theses of Kant's ethics, namely the notion of 'one's own will' and the idea that, no matter its immoral actions, a human being can never be entirely deprived of its dignity. To preserve these two points, he argues, we cannot naturalize Kant's ethics; on the contrary, we must stick with his account of moral philosophy as grounded primarily on reason.

The last essay of the first part, Herlinde Pauer-Studer's "Putting Freedom First. Some Reflections on Paul Guyer's Interpretation of Kant's Moral Theory", aims to complete Guyer's reconstruction by showing how categorical imperatives are justified. Pauer-Studer does this by means of Kant's idea of a realm of ends, which in her view allows us to preserve our status as "autonomous and self-legislating agents" by providing "a normative reason to consent to the ethical principles that are constitutive of autonomy in the sphere of inner freedom" (p. 86). She hereby presents a constructivist account of Kant's moral theory.

The second part of the book opens with by Rolf-Peter Horstmann's "Kant on the Exhibition (*Darstellung*) of Infinite Magnitudes". Horstmann focuses on the alleged tension between the first *Critique*, where Kant's account of space and time seems to admit the possibility of given infinite magnitudes, and the third, where this possibility is explicitly denied by his account of the sublime. Focusing on the third *Critique*, Horstmann solves this tension by means of Kant's account of symbolic exhibition, which, although only indirectly and without providing them with objective validity, allows the representation of indemonstrable concepts of infinite magnitudes. Thus, Horstmann shows that the account of the third *Critique* does not contradict that of the first, thereby reaffirming the systematic unity of the three *Critiques*.

In his "The Problem of Intersubjectivity in Kant's Critical Philosophy", Konstantin Pollok examines three contexts in Kant's philosophy "where he invokes a second person, or somewhat weaker, other persons whose existence, even if only ideally, is necessary for the possibility

of certain types of judgments” (p. 117). Pollok focuses on the theoretical, aesthetic and moral domain, showing how different forms of intersubjectivity are required respectively by judgments of experience, judgments of taste and objectively valid maxims of actions. Thus, he shows that, although Kant does not provide an explicit theory of intersubjectivity, “the second perspective as a demand to transcend the idiosyncrasies of one’s ‘beloved self’ [...] is” nevertheless “at the heart of Kant’s philosophy” (p. 129).

The last essay of the second part, Gabriele Gava’s “Kant on Conviction and Persuasion”, deals with Kant’s account of taking-to-be-true. Gava focuses on two further forms of it that Kant provides in addition to his explicit distinction between opinion, belief and knowledge, namely conviction and persuasion. Distancing himself from other authoritative interpretations in secondary literature, Gava claims that conviction and persuasion must be understood as “operators that determine whether our taking-to-be-true is apt or inapt, depending on whether it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have” (p. 148). Thus, he shows not only that the distinction between conviction and persuasion is different from that between opinion, belief and knowledge, but also that his reading is compatible with both fallibilist and infallibilist interpretations of Kant’s account of knowledge.

The third and last part of the book begins with Reed Winegar’s “Why Is There Something, Rather than Nothing? Kant on the Final End of Creation”. Winegar confronts the different answers provided by both the Leibnizian tradition (especially Baumgarten) and Kant to the question of the final end of creation, and he does so by focusing on the possibility and value of our knowledge of God. While Leibnizians claim that we can know that God exists and that such knowledge is fundamental for our appreciation of his perfections, Kant holds not only that we cannot prove God’s existence, but also that our knowledge of him would be something negative, since it would undermine our ability to act morally. Accordingly, Winegar shows that, for Kant, the final end of creation is not God’s celebration, as claimed by Leibnizians, but rather “human beings under moral laws”, which moreover shows that in Kant’s view “the ultimate calling of our life is a call to action, rather than contemplation” (p. 169).

The question of the meaning of human life is also addressed in Rachel Zuckert's "Kant's Philosophy of History, as Response to Existential Despair". Starting from Kant's reading of Rousseau's criticism of historical progress, Zuckert interprets Kant's philosophy of history as his answer to the "'existential' despair" (p. 173) deriving from the suffering that human beings must face and the seemingly unintelligibility of human striving. Accordingly, in her view Kant's philosophy of history must not be conceived of as a regulative idea aimed at guiding empirical investigations, nor as a postulate of practical reason aimed at supporting our actions but, rather, as "merely reflective judgment, which allows us to interpret – to describe and make sense of – experienced conflict and suffering" (p. 174), thus helping us to understand human existence.

The last two essays concern a comparison between Kant and Mendelssohn. In her "Mendelssohn and Kant on Human Progress. A Neo-Stoic Debate", Melissa Merritt takes up the question of human progress starting with Mendelssohn's abderitism, i.e. the view that humankind does not progress throughout history but rather oscillates between fixed limits. Focusing on the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* and the *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Merritt reconstructs the Stoic background of Kant's arguments by showing that his theses in both works presuppose "a providential teleology rooted in the Stoic tradition" (p. 194). Thus, since this Stoic background lies at the heart of Kant's arguments and criticism of abderitism, Merritt shows that Mendelssohn's and Kant's divergent positions on human progress reflect "competing views about the philosophical import of Stoicism for German Enlightenment thought" (p. 191).

The last essay, Anne Pollok's "Aesthetic Subjectivity in Ugly Matters. A Comparison Between Kant and Mendelssohn", aims to discuss Guyer's view that, in aesthetics, Mendelssohn's subjective perfectionism is similar to Kant's subjective purposiveness. To do so, Pollok provides a detailed examination of Mendelssohn's aesthetics focused especially on the ugly and considers the different meanings the two philosophers attach to aesthetic play. Accordingly, Pollok shows the difference between them by showing that, while Mendelssohn's aesthetics ultimately focuses on the "perfection of us as the persons perceiving and appreciating perfection", Kant insists on the "formal feature of the principles of aesthetic judgment,

rather than the perfection, subjective or otherwise, of the perceiving subject” (pp. 226–227).

Finally, in the postscript, Paul Guyer replies to observations and criticisms.

By considering different perspectives belonging to different domains of philosophy, *Kant on Freedom and Human Nature* succeeds in providing a comprehensive account of Kant’s views on these two issues. The essays it includes are rather heterogeneous, since they consider different topics ranging from the relationship between freedom and nature to the meaning and normative character of Kant’s account of humanity, and including further topics such as intersubjectivity, the different forms of taking-to-be-true and human progress. This heterogeneity is also reflected in the Kantian works examined, which include not only the three *Critiques* but also several other texts belonging to both theoretical and moral philosophy, anthropology, aesthetics and philosophy of history. However, this heterogeneity does not lead, to use a Kantian word, to a mere aggregate of contributions on mutually unrelated issues. On the contrary, and despite their specificities, the essays in this volume can clearly be divided into the three main domains (the legislation of the realm of freedom, that of the realm of nature and the attempt to provide a bridge between them) that are addressed in the index of the book and which, as the essays themselves show, are not isolated areas of Kant’s philosophy but are essentially intertwined.

It is precisely in virtue of this capacity to show the connections between these different areas of Kant’s philosophy that *Kant on Freedom and Human Nature* succeeds in reconstructing Kant’s view on the matter while at the same time respecting its complexity and richness, thus reaffirming the central importance of the concepts of freedom and (human) nature within Kant’s philosophy.

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