

## Philosophy in cosmic sense and human reason in Kant

Jessica Segesta<sup>1</sup>

Review of: Cicatello, Angelo, *Ragione umana e forma del mondo*. Saggi su Kant, Inschibboleth, Roma 2023, pp. 173, ISBN 8855293559

If there is one subject around which most of the events that characterize Kantian critical philosophy revolve, it is undoubtedly the human reason. It is therefore no coincidence that Kant began his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 with the expression “*menschliche Vernunft*”. However, despite the fact that human reason is the undisputed protagonist on the stage of critical philosophy, when we wonder about its actual meaning, we inevitably fall into a situation of embarrassment. This is because what binds the subject “reason” to the adjective “human” is a dynamic that is not at all peaceful, that reveals that pure rational thinking has its own nature, which cannot be completely framed within the specific dimension of a human rationality. It is precisely to this dynamic that Kant refers when, in the preface to the first edition of the *CPR*, he speaks of a particular fate of human reason, characterized by its inability to answer the questions posed by its own nature.

On the basis of these theoretical considerations, Angelo Cicatello’s essay aims to show us that the expression “human reason” acquires its full meaning only in the entire course of the critical project, which, according to Kant, coincides with the program of a philosophy, that in its “cosmic concept (*Weltbegriff*)”, substantiates an idea of cosmos that conforms to the principles of free action, in which the human subject has a central place, but is not the center. This is because the pure reason, the faculty that determines the freedom of our actions, is not an endowment inscribed in the physiological equipment of the human being, but is in itself «*un modo del vivere, uno scopo che dà forma al mondo in cui l’uomo conduce la propria esistenza*» (p. 27) of which every human being must make himself worthy, in the sense of its rightful executor, by actively working for the constitution of a cosmopolitical civil society. This means that the significance of the expression “human reason” is made explicit only at the end of a critical path that sees in Kant the conjunction of the theoretical and practical-moral reflection with the political-institutional consideration. Therefore, in the first chapter of the essay, the author wants to show us that, already in the theoretical field, the purpose of the Kantian critique is not at all reducible to the mere determination of the legitimacy space of the use of our superior cognitive faculty. Through a skillful analysis of some passages taken from the *Transcendental Dialectic* and the *Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, Angelo Cicatello shows us that in its “highest degree” the critical court recognizes that the unconditional does not simply represent a regulative principle of our knowledge, but «*uno scopo che la ragione coltiva in piena conformità alla propria natura di ragione*» (p. 42), which is as much related to the concrete exercise of our critical thinking as to the autonomous free dimension of our practical action.

In chapter 2, the author aims to bring the problematic relationship between “reason” and the attribute “human” into a sharper focus by examining the relationship between the disciplines that deal with them, namely the pure philosophy and the anthropology. More specifically, the author’s intention is here to clarify the sense in which anthropology, understood as an empirical science, can be a part of the transcendental project of a *Critique of pure reason*. Here Angelo Cicatello argues an interesting thesis, according to which the “hospitality” that anthropology finds in the territory of pure knowledge gives us a new point of view from which to look at its empirical cognitions: «*nella misura in cui dell’uomo indica la destinazione finale, la conoscenza razionale pura offre il punto di vista a partire da cui le cognizioni empiriche dell’antropologia possono dismettere il loro carattere frammentario e convergere verso un oggetto il più possibile vicino a quel che indichiamo con in concetto generale di ‘specie umana’*» (p. 72). Moreover, it is precisely to this notion that the Kantian idea of an anthropology as a *Generalkenntniß* would be addressed.

In chapter 3, the author shows us, through a close analysis of some passages taken from the Kantian lectures dating back to the second half of the 1770s, that this kind of anthropology does not appeal to a merely pragmatic

<sup>1</sup> Teaching assistant, University of Palermo.  
E-mail: [segesta.jessica10@gmail.com](mailto:segesta.jessica10@gmail.com)

conception of the world that focuses on the active figure of the human-citizen. This is because the critical turn and the project of a philosophy conceived as an architectonic science bring to bear a broader idea of the cosmos than that thought of and designed on a human scale. It is the idea of a normative-teleological design of reason *«che prefigura per la specie umana una finalità di cui l'uomo, in quanto ente razionale, è pienamente responsabile, tanto da poter scegliere di non aderirvi, ma della cui piena realizzazione, in quanto ente finito, non può essere indicato come l'esclusivo esecutore»* (p. 88). Of this rational design, which is linked to a specific conception of philosophy, the Kantian writings devoted to the cosmopolitan right and politics constitute an essential moment, insofar as they contribute to outlining the properly “human” horizon of rationality. The author gives us proof of this in chapter 4, providing us with concrete examples of how the political question of the realization of a cosmopolitical project of a civil society is in fact strictly linked to the non-natural definition of the concept of the “human species”. According to Kant, Ciatello argues, the individual’s belonging to a species is legitimated by his own capacity *«di istituire sulla terra in cui abita modalità di convivenza atte a favorire lo sviluppo della disposizione naturale all'uso della ragione»* (p. 116).

In chapter 5, the author shows us in more detail how the treatment of cosmopolitan law reveals key aspects of the complexity of the concept of human reason, without which it would be impossible to fully understand the significance of the political proposal that comes out in the latest Kantian writings. What emerges in the course of a dense and profound analysis of the texts – in particular the *Metaphysics of Morals* and the essay on *Perpetual Peace* – is the idea that within Kant’s cosmopolitan proposal there is a tension between two fundamental instances: the “right to visit” and the “right of residence”. The Kantian insistence on this distinction, as the author explains to us, *«caratterizza il senso in cui ciascun uomo può legittimamente riferire a se stesso il possesso della ragione, ovvero di quel territorio sul quale non possiamo fissare la nostra sede escludendone l'ingresso ad altri, senza con ciò perdere noi stessi il diritto di abitarvi»* (p. 141). In this sense, the Kantian concept of cosmopolitan right would become an emblematic expression *«di una ragione che non è semplicemente, naturalmente, data a tutti gli uomini in guisa di una comune dotazione antropologica, ma richiede di essere istituita sul terreno cosmopolitico dello scambio reciproco tra forme sociali differenti»* (p. 140), even though there is no human political institution that can concretely exhibit the normative-teleological design that is drawn up by a pure reason. Once again, then, the hallmark of the Kantian vision is the radical “disproportion” between the metaphysical aspirations of a pure reason and the limits within which the human subject can make use of them. And it is precisely on this disproportion, as the author shows us in the last part of his essay, that the Kantian project of a “metaphysical foundation” of ethics would be grafted. In Kant, the appeal to a principle of ethical conduct that applies to every finite being who is capable of a rational form of life *«risponde all'esigenza di un'etica che (...) trova nella metafisica, intesa in senso specifico come conoscenza razionale per semplice concetto, il termine cui riferire ogni pretesa di rigore normativo»* (p. 148). By grafting itself onto the territory of the metaphysical research, the Kantian ethics thus becomes the expression of an “autonomous reason” that is not determined by reference to any pre-established nature, was even the human one. And it is precisely because it does not appeal to the specifically human dimension of rationality, according to what the author, that Kantian ethics, understood in the broad sense of a practical philosophy that also includes the doctrine of right, *«può svolgere un suo ruolo decisivo per l'uomo, per la sua esistenza, per la sua destinazione»* (p. 159). It can do so because the prescription of perfectibility that it advocates directs knowledge that of the human beings concerns the possibility of rewriting the relationship with his natural dispositions, towards the realization of purposes that are not enrolled in his physiological endowment.

In open contrast to those interpretive positions that have more or less directly traced the Kantian critical project to the program of a philosophical knowledge of the human being, or, in more iconic terms, to that of a “fundamental anthropology”, Angelo Ciatello’s essay offers the guidelines of a new perspective from which to look at the critical philosophy in all its complexity. The author not only provides us with precious theoretical indications that can guide us in reading Kant’s philosophy, but he also offers us indispensable elements for avoiding the risk, present in many current interpretations of critical project, of falling into reductive hermeneutical attitudes that are incapable of seeing the overall meaning of the research that Kant presents under the name of “Critique of Reason” and especially the peculiar sense in which this research is linked to the human dimension of knowing and acting. Bringing into play questions that still animate the debate among the authors of the *Kant-Forschung*, such as that of the proper place of anthropology within the critical project, or that of the function of cosmopolitan right in the broader context of a political project of global peace, this essay is able to reveal to us the profound relevance of the Kantian theoretical proposal, not only with regard to those issues that are directly relevant to the scholars, but also with respect to crucial problems facing any civil society today. Of particular relevance and interest in this regard are the arguments presented by the author about the Kantian cosmopolitan right. By cleverly highlighting the elements of tension present in the cosmopolitical program, Angelo Ciatello shows us *how* the critical instances of Kantian philosophy can help us today, more than ever, to rethink issues such as the hospitality to foreigners and the immigration, avoiding the risk of adopting dogmatic positions in favor of an unconditional and unrestrained hospitality or, on the contrary, of a national sovereignty potentially violent and without scruples.