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Kant's Menschheit *and Its Interpretations*

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Abstract

This paper offers a contextual, textual and conceptual study of Kant's notion of humanity and its current interpretations. Its argument is directed against the interpretation of humanity as merely "the capacity to set oneself an end - any end whatsoever". Kant's sources, his usage of the word '*Menschheit*' and its conceptual functions suggest a more complex reading that includes not only individualist ('any end whatsoever'), but also collectivist, essentialist and personalist meanings. These four meanings are separated – and brought together – by insurmountable metaphysical divides between the phaenomenal and the noumenal, as well as between part and whole. The paper begins by a survey of recent interpretations, then proceeds to explicate the contextual background for Kant's concept, then draws attention to various use '*Menschheit*' finds in Kant's texts. The conclusion points at the potential Kant's substantial and complex notion of humanity has for enriching our understanding of many pressing issues of today.

Keywords: humanity, individualism, collectivism, essentialism, personalism

Humanity is to be treated always as an end, never merely as a means – this ubiquitous formula enjoys nearly universal acceptance across cultural, political, and other divides of today, yet the divides are as stark as ever. Much in these divides is due to diverging conceptions of humanity. This makes re-examining Kant's own use of the word a worthy

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philosophical enterprise. Without pretending to emerge with a definitive answer to what Kant took to be the main question of philosophy, one can still hope to foster understanding of its complexity and openness to views from different perspectives. The claim of this paper is that Kant accords humanity, or *Menschheit*, not one, but four meanings that are held apart – and together – by basic metaphysical tensions. These meanings define humanity from the perspectives of individualism, collectivism, essentialism, and personalism. They gain prominence in different contexts and so vary in importance for various readers of Kant pursuing varying agendas. None of these meanings can be neglected or reduced without severe theoretical and practical problems that extend far beyond philosophical studies. I will start by surveying current interpretations, then address the context of Kant's *Menschheit*, and then proceed to the evident and not so evident instances of Kant's use of the concept in his texts.

Current interpretations

The prevailing stance on the meaning of Kant's humanity in contemporary, i.e. post-Rawlsian, Anglophone Kantian literature is that of essentialism and individualism. Essentialism emphasizes that for Kant humanity is "a characteristic, or set of characteristics, of persons", "its distinguishing feature is said to be 'the power to set ends', and we are supposed to respect it even in those who make themselves unworthy of it" (Hill 1980, p. 85). 'Rational nature' is taken to be synonymous to 'humanity' (Korsgaard 1986, p. 184). A further difference emerges between those who take 'rational nature' to be instrumental or prudential, and those who put emphasis on morality. The first position is to say "when Kant says that the characteristic of humanity is the power to set an end, then, he is not merely referring to personality, [...] rather, he is referring to a more general capacity for choosing, desiring, or valuing ends [...] It is this capacity that the Formula of Humanity commands us never to treat as a mere means, but always as an end in itself" (Korsgaard 1986, p. 189). The second position is to say that humans are "rational beings who are capable of instrumental, of prudential, and above all of moral reason, and who are morally responsible for what they do" (Wood 2008, p. 95).

The idea that the choice of ends is the manifestation of freedom and that this freedom is to be respected unconditionally links this essentialist position to individualism: our humanity is "systematic union of ourselves as free agents who are ends in themselves and of the particular ends that we set for ourselves in the exercise of our freedom" (Guyer 2005, p. 6). I called this essentialist-individualist view 'post-Rawlsian', because it generally follows John Rawls's influential position that "a person may be regarded as a human life lived according to a plan", where a life plan is the actualization of our power to set ends relying on "principles of rational choice" and "deliberative rationality", providing for "even the most distant future and for our death" (Rawls 1999, pp. 358–60). Thus humanity is rational, free, and finite being, whose essence lies in rational planning and execution of limited individual existence.

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The exposition of the shortcomings of this conception *per se* are beyond our present topic, but these include the need to account for human beings variously deprived of the said power to set ends by nature or by nurture, including those at the beginning and the end of life, those who live (lived, will live) in non-Western, pre-modern societies of tradition, or those who simply prefer spontaneity to rational planning, which fails all too often. More importantly for our purposes, the emphasis on unconditional freedom of individual pursuits might prove too distant in both spirit and letter from Kant's moral metaphysics. Indeed, this is what some of the critics note, offering alternative readings of *Menschheit* that downplay the role of instrumental rationality. For instance, Kant's notion of good will becomes central to one such reading: "the humanity that should be treated as an end in itself is a properly ordered will, which gives priority to moral considerations over self-interest" (Dean 2006, p. 6; cf. Glasgow 2007). This essential characteristic of humanity is what Kant calls *Wille* and differentiates from the power of choice, or *Willkür*. While this voluntarist and moralistic interpretation differs from the rationalist readings, it is similarly essentialist: humanity is defined through a general property or a faculty, common to all humans.

Kantian lexicons and dictionaries offer a wider variety of definitions, but the more detailed, the more eclectic they become. This is perhaps natural, since it is contrary to the task of a dictionary to strive for an overarching comprehensive interpretation inevitably compromising the task of lexically ordering what Kant actually wrote. To step outside of the Anglophone context and back in time for a moment, Rudolf Eisler's *Kant-Lexikon* defines humanity as "the pure essence [*Wesen*] of a human being, opposed to 'animality' ['*Tierheit*'] in her" (Eisler 1930, p. 352). *A Kant Dictionary* by Howard Caygill defines humanity in relation to communication and sociability following *Critique of Judgment* §60 as the "universal *feeling of sympathy*" and "faculty of being able to *communicate* universally one's inmost self", adding to this "independence of being constrained by another's choice" (Caygill 1995, p. 230). This definition resulted from conflation of Kant's two terms, *Humanität* and *Menschheit*. *The Kant Dictionary* by Lucas Thorpe notes the "vagueness" of Kant's concept of humanity and states that "Kant identifies the notion of humanity in the morally relevant sense with that of being a rational agent" (Thorpe 2015, p. 110). The recent and comprehensive *Kant-Lexikon* defines humanity as 1) the set of all human beings as species (*Gattung*), 2) the characteristic of human beings in the triade together with animality and personality (in *Religion*), 3) the capacity to cultivate oneself through setting ends. It also notes the importance of the distinction between *homo phaenomenon* and *homo noumenon* and the role *Menschheit* plays as the idea (of a being respecting the moral law) and the ideal (of humanity in its full completion) (Willaschek et al. 2015, p. 1522ff).

To sum up, essentialist and individualist interpretations of Kant's *Menschheit* dominate current scholarship, while the dictionaries offer a richer patchwork of references that remain to be systematized. The family of words that feature in the 'language-games' as relatives of *Menschheit* includes *Menschengattung*, *Menschenrace*, *Menschlichkeit*,

menschliche Natur, *homo noumenon*, *homo phaenomenon*, *Personlichkeit*, *Person*, *Vernünftigkeit*, *vernünftige Wesen/Natur*, *Sittlichkeit*, and *Würde*. *Menschheit* is translated into English as 'humanity', creating, as we saw, the possibility to conflate or confuse it with *Humanität*. For Kant, the latter is the affection of compassion (*compassibilitas*) that does not have a rational and moral significance, is empirical, and therefore not essential to humanity. *Menschheit* is contrasted to *Thierheit*, or animality (e.g. MS, AA 6:392; RGV, AA 6:26ff), and also to *Rohigkeit*, or crudeness (e.g. MS, AA 6:387; Anth, AA 7:323). The important difference is that animality is among the predispositions to good and needs to be groomed and directed by reason, while crudeness is something to be eradicated in the ascent to humanity. This configuration posits humanity as an effort or process rather than an essence or a substance, recreating the familiar ancient and medieval theme of moral struggle, downplayed among the modern interpretations that tend to acknowledge and accept humanity 'as is'.

Context

Let us proceed to examine some of the key influences shaping the meaning of Kant's *Menschheit*, starting with the most immediate ones and taking steps further back. The immediate origins of Kant's *Menschheit* lie in the discussions of *Auklärung*. It is evident even statistically: *Deutsches Textarchiv* shows a dramatic rise in the use of the word in print from ca. ten instances per one million tokens in 1750-60 to ca. seventy by 1770 and to 90 by the century's end, followed by a steep decline to 30 by 1810, from which it did not recover [1]. When looking into the content, one finds at its heart the debate started by Johann Joachim Spalding's *Reflections on the Destination of Man* (1748). This work became a bestseller and the manifesto of enlightened Protestantism, inspiring many attempts to give an updated account to humanity (Printy 2013). Spalding presented humanity as the progress of the soul towards the good, which could never be completed in earthly life and therefore pointed at soul's immortality. The question of human development quickly became central, focusing on the interrelation of individual and collective or social progress. Some investigations were preoccupied with the former, as exemplified by Moses Mendelssohn's *Phaedon, Or on the Immortality of the Soul* (1767). At the same time authors like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Thomas Abbt, and Johann Gottfried Herder were innovatively morphing the earlier concepts of *Bürgertum*, *Gemeinwesen* (commonwealth), *Gemeinde* (parish), and *Volk* in the idea of *Publikum* that emerges to enlighten itself and develop its humanity through public use of reason (Redekop 1999).

[1] Deutsches Textarchiv. Grundlage für ein Referenzkorpus der neuhochdeutschen Sprache. Herausgegeben von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 2020. URL: http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/search/plot/?query='Menschheit'&mode=simple;window-simple=0&genres=0

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Needless to say that both strands found a prominent place in Kant's thought. Some of the questions that emerged in this great discussion are still with us: Who is the subject of history? Is it human individual, humankind, Nature, or God? Does the history have an end, and if so (this was generally agreed upon), what is this end? If history aims at perfection of particular individuals, how should we accept the impossibility to succeed at this during our short earthly life? Does this hint at the prospective afterlife, or this limitation is a mere tragic fact of our being? If the end of history is not an individual, but the humankind as a whole, can we optimistically hope for the success in attaining human perfection? In this world, or in the 'world to come'? On our own or with support by a transcendent force? What is the mode of operation or causation of this determination (*Bestimmung*) of humanity? (Zöller 2001)

Taking a step back in time and expanding the geographical scope of influences, one ought to acknowledge the French and the British enlighteners. Voltaire and Montesquieu provided templates for the study of history, however, their mechanism met problems in attempts to explain the apparent purposiveness of at least some of the processes and events in history. The German enlighteners introduced Leibniz-Wolffian teleology to resolve this tension (to create others), resonating in Kant's notion of humanity as end in itself. Scottish and English Enlightenment supplied another wealth of ideas. The translations of David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Fergusson, James Beattie, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, often provided by such notables as Sulzer and Lessing, gave an impetus to the development of popular philosophy that readily borrowed the empiricism, sentimentalism and skepticism of the Scots and the English (Klemme 2000). Here humanity emerges as the alliance of moral sentiment and common sense, fighting against the prejudices and 'enthusiasm'. As mentioned, Kant approached this philosophical outlook with criticism, while sympathizing with its cause.

In turn the French and the British Enlighteners reacted against – and also inevitably borrowed from and reworked – the Christian understanding of humanity and humaneness. In particular, Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners of Nations* reacted against Bossuet's St. Augustine-inspired *Discourse of Universal History*, and Herder's *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* recalled Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*. Turning again to *Deutsches Textarchiv*, one finds that prior to 1750s *Menschheit* had almost exclusive theological use, particularly in the discussion of relation of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ. Such is the meaning that *Menschheit* is given, for example, in Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Universal-Lexikon* (1731-1754) (Bd. 20, S. 794) and in Johann Christoph Adelung's *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch* (1774-1786) (S. 180). Quite tellingly of the trends, Adelung, who is writing two to three decades later than Zedler, also notes the meaning connected to duties of humanity and sociability – and the recent meaning of "the human race, especially with regard to its culture; a meaning introduced by some moderns, which, however, is contrary to all analogy as well as to the meaning of the derivational affix -heit" (Ibid.).

It is interesting to compare the dynamics of usage of the word '*Gottheit*' to that of '*Menschheit*'. There's an even more dramatic peak for '*Gottheit*' between 1710s with six instances per one million tokens to 1749 with one hundred and thirty three instances, followed by the drop to twenty five in the ensuing decade, also never to recover [2]. Looking at the two graphs from *Deutsches Textarchiv*, one is tempted to speculate that this succession of intense discussions of divinity and then humanity is a symptom of secularization, that somewhere around 1750, coinciding with Spalding's treatise and subsequent discussion, lies an important shift in public understanding of humanity from discussion of immortal soul to accepting human being in its complex and evolving earthly existence. Again, this shift and the tension it created is at the core of Kant's *Menschheit*.

Ancient meanings of humanity also made an impact on Kant's thinking. For example, Volker Gerhardt points at Cicero's *De Oficiis* freshly translated by Garve and absorbed by Kant in the times preceding his writing of the *Groundwork* as the chief source for *Menschheit* (and also *Humanität*) (Gerhardt 2009, p. 270). Kant's known taste for Horace and other classical authors also points at ancient meanings as sources.

Finally, although perhaps not exhaustively, the concept of humanity was charged with connotations that will towards the end of the century result in the emergence of the discipline of biology. The paths of "natural philosophy" as "explanation of the physical world in terms of general principles" and "natural history" as "description of all plants, animals, and minerals encountered in natural environment" crossed by 1750s, resulting in the paradigm of "vital materialism" (Zammito 2017, p. 1). Humanity found a central place in this natural history. The task of maintaining the achievements of mechanism while overcoming its shortcomings in explaining life led to the doctrine of 'living forces' (*vis viva*, *lebendigen Kräfte*), not incidentally the topic that attracted the attention of young Kant, to whom we finally turn.

Menschheit **in Kant's texts**

What follows is a loosely chronological survey of Kant's usage of the word '*Menschheit*' and of its conceptual functions. Although it is to be expected that most instances of this key term have been thoroughly investigated, some deserve more recognition. Such is Kant's first use of the word in the '*Preface*' to his very first published work, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* (1749), where he writes:

> Prejudice is just what humans need; it promotes ease and self-esteem, two qualities one cannot get rid of without getting rid of humanity (GSK, AA 1:8f; in: Kant 2012);

[2] Deutsches Textarchiv. Grundlage für ein Referenzkorpus der neuhochdeutschen Sprache. Herausgegeben von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 2020. URL: http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/search/plot/?query='Gottheit'&mode=simple;window-simple=0&genres=0

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and, a few pages below:

> If we encounter obvious errors alongside the greatest discoveries, then this is not so much the fault of the human being as it is of humanity; and one would do humanity, in the person of men of learning, too much honor if one were to exempt it entirely from those errors (GSK, AA 1:12; in: Kant 2012).

The '*Preface*' is an example of light and ironic prose, characteristic of the popular works of the Enlightenment era and does not resemble Kant's later systematic critical expositions. However, some important observations can be made. One is the ironic connection of humanity and prejudices – a motive characteristic of the Enlightenment (Pocock 1997) – highlights as essential what Kant himself would later call 'empirical' side of humanity to make ingenious efforts to separate from the 'pure' one.

A more substantial observation concerns the recognizable 'in the person' framework. Obviously not being young Kant's invention, this phrase appears to be borrowed from elsewhere. The metaphors are known to direct and structure scientific thought (Kuhn 1993), and Kant's critical thought has been shown to rely on legal metaphors (Møller 2020), so it seems reasonable to suggest that his earliest conceptualization of *Menschheit* is adopted from law. Three further considerations seem to support this reading. First is the peculiar relation between plural and singular in this very first and in many other instances of the phrase. 'Men of learning' are taken as a collective person (*der Person der Gelehrten*), just as juridical persons often are. Secondly, the phrase 'in the person' or 'in one's own person' finds its most frequent use much later in the *Doctrine of Right* in legal context. Consider, for example, Kant's discussion of rights to things and against persons, followed by the injunction to respect humanity even in the person of the wrongdoer (MS, AA 6:361-363). Thirdly, it is precisely the context the word '*Person*' and the phrase '*in der Person*' are used very frequently at the time (aside from the already mentioned Christological contexts, as well as some medical questions, like doctor's visits in person), again as evidenced by *Deutsches Textarchiv*. For instance, this phrase is used in Gottfried Achenwall's seminal *Abriß der neuen Staatswissenschaft*, also published in 1749. So Kant's person means not merely thinking, but also acting, and not simply acting, but acting responsibly under law, or in civil condition, or, more generally, under the practical guidance of reason, as opposed to barbarous unlawful behavior. This underscores the opposition of *Menschheit* and *Rohigkeit* or *Wildheit* as being without person or legal form, and broadly follows the ancient tradition of seeing humanity as 'politicized animality'.

Already in this very first use of *Menschheit* there is important ambiguity: is humanity a set of all human beings, and personifying or representing it means belonging to this whole, or is it a set of features, essential to being human? Translations can aggravate this ambiguity: for example, Russian translations use the word 'chelovechestvo', which means 'all human beings' and in modern use resists other readings, whereas the English 'humanity' neatly reflects both these meanings, but, as already mentioned, invites an alien one, that of the sentimentalist *Humanität*.

A different view on humanity is offered in Kant's *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heavens* (1755). One aspect of this view is the comparison of humans and hypothetical other beings endowed with reason (NTH, AA 1:359f). A question informed by Kant's critical philosophy immediately arises: are we to treat these non-human beings as possessing humanity and hence also as ends? Since by hypothesis reason is the only similarity between our species, a positive answer is only possible on the premise that reason equals to or fully includes humanity, and a negative – on the premise that these are not equal. We will deal with this in more detail later, for now let us note that either answer involves essentialist speculations about (non)essential characteristics of humanity.

Yet there is another strand in this text that offers a new and non-essentialist naturalist perspective, in which humans are presented as embodied individuals. We are creatures who 'absorb sap like a plant', 'grow, reproduce its species, grow old and die'. 'Nerves and fluids of our brains' supply us with concepts, and organs provide our 'sensory sensations'. The 'tumult of the elements' maintains our 'machinery'. What differentiates us from other beings is the tension created by the presence of reason that is trying to 'elevate' its natural bodily container (NTH, AA 1:356). Here Kant is yearning, but we can separate his 'Baroque' laments of human transience and echoes of Neoplatonic denial of material body from his description of actual human nature. This description is influenced by Cartesian dualism and mechanism (Schönfeld and Thompson 2014). Equally evident, however, is the teleological role of reason that tries to direct material nature to its higher non-material ends, to unfold "complete evolution of [human] powers" (NTH, AA 1:356). In the critical philosophy this will evolve into the 'two-view' notion of humanity as being subject both to the laws of nature and the laws of freedom (e.g. KpV, AA 5:67-71). This human nature of 'nerves and fibers', emerged from initial material chaos through the process of natural causation and moved by emotions and desire for happiness, provides the basis for future development of Kant's empirical practical anthropology, explaining the side of humanity that is contingent, phaenomenal, often crooked, yet necessary for humanity and as such serves its good.

Menschheit makes its next appearance in Kant's works of 1760s and 1770s dealing with the development of predispositions through education (e.g. AP, AA 2:447f). The topics of education, formation and instruction as the only means available to humanity to obtain educators 'out of itself' and advance by their effort towards its highest end are prominent in Kant's critical works, notably in *Lectures on Pedagogy* of 1803. Here Kant explains, how "animal nature [*Thierheit*]" is changed into "human nature [*Menschheit*]" through discipline or training, and that "human species [*Menschengattung*] [...] bring out, little by little, humanity's entire predisposition [*ganze Naturanlage der Menschheit*] by means of its own effort" (Päd, AA 9:441; in: Kant 2007). It is worth noting that while *Thierheit* is indeed 'nature', *Menschheit* in this context hardly is, for the conflict between the two is the one between nature and freedom, as pedagogy for Kant is the chief means of establishing

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proper relation between the two and hence the solution to the problem of human development in history.

Let us now traverse the territory of pure moral metaphysics. *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1786) provides its initial statement and the most famous utterance of '*Menschheit*' in the second formula. First let us note again the dualist discrepancy between 'human nature' and 'pure' moral features of humanity as the bearer of freedom:

> For the purpose of achieving this [a priori proof of the existence of the categorical imperative] it is of the utmost importance to take warning that we must not let ourselves think of wanting to derive the reality of this principle from the ***special property of human nature***. For, duty is to be practical unconditional necessity of action and it must therefore hold for all rational beings (to which alone an imperative can apply at all) and *only because of this* be also a law for all human wills. On the other hand, what is derived from the **special natural constitution of humanity**- what is derived from certain feelings and propensities and even, if possible, from a special tendency that would be peculiar to human reason and would not have to hold necessarily for the will of every rational being - that can indeed yield a maxim for us but not a law (GMS, AA 4:425; in: Kant 1996b).

Essentialism begins to loom large in Kant's pure moral metaphysics: there are *a priori* features common to all or the same in all humans and define their humanity. Hypothetical reasonable non-humans also happen to possess such features: the categorical imperative is pronounced as "the principle of humanity *and* any reasonable nature", and "rational nature [*vernünftige Wesen* – which could be quite differently translated as 'reasonable being'] exists as an end in itself" (GMS, AA 4:429). Essentialism is notoriously problematic. For one thing, it has inherent tendency to reify the abstracted essential properties. It also has an inherent tendency to discriminate across people (and hypothetical other reasonable beings) on the basis of a certain standard of humanity. This tendency reared its head already during Enlightenment – for example in Christoph Meiners's racism. However – and this is no less obvious – some essential features have to be shared and recognized as definitive of humanity.

The reappearance of non-human humanity again raises the formal question: can we conceive of a set of beings that at the same time *are* and *are not* members of humanity? Kant's solution here is to invoke '*vernünftige Wesen*' as the essential common denominator. At this junction, as at many others, a lot will turn on the interpretation of Kantian reason as either an instrumental rational capacity, or as something more substantial, such as a higher faculty operating the ideas and prompting us, among other things, to seek the unconditioned and obey the moral law. The same applies to '*Wesen*' as either 'nature' or something that is not reducible to it. This is the junction where Kant's transcendentalism comes at odds with contemporary naturalism.

The discussion of pure a priori features essential to humanity continues in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). It is here that we find the definition that is central to the aforementioned post-Rawlsian treatments of humanity:

> The capacity to set oneself an end - any end whatsoever - is what characterizes humanity (as distinguished from animality). Hence there is also bound up with the end of humanity in our own person the rational will, and so the duty, to make ourselves worthy of humanity by culture in general, by procuring or promoting the capacity to realize all sorts of possible ends, so far as this is to be found in the human being himself. In other words, the human being has a duty to cultivate the crude predispositions of his nature, by which the animal is first raised into the human being. It is therefore a duty in itself (MS, AA 6:392; in: Kant 1996b).

This definition contains another important ambiguity. On the one hand, it is essentialist insofar as there is a capacity, namely the one to set oneself an end, or rational will, that is essential to being human, and our worth or dignity (and normativity they issue – see Korsgaard (1996)) rest on this capacity. On the other hand, there's the 'any end whatsoever' qualification that invites the individualist reading. This possibility is even more prominent in the English translation, where 'reasonable will' ('*Vernunftwille*', the word that here makes its sole appearance in Kant's works) becomes 'rational will'. Here again the question can be raised whether the word 'rationality' sufficiently captures the meaning of Kant's *Vernunft* without conflating reason with instrumental rationality or prudence (*Klugheit*). It could perhaps also be argued that the translation of Kant's "*uberhapt irgendeinen Zweck*" as "an end – any end whatsoever" places some extra emphasis on the arbitrariness of choice. Regardless of these matters of translation, if we single out this definition or even if we merely *begin* our exposition of Kant's thought with it, we can accentuate rational will as capacity to set and pursue individual ends, any end whatsoever, and willingly or unwillingly make it look more central or basic than humanity's other features – more than Kantian systemic worldview would tolerate. The capacity in question is essential to humanity, but humanity does not amount to this capacity.

Another distinction from the MS is that of *homo noumenon* and *homo phaenomenon*. Kant introduces it here to further develop the 'two-view' dualism of our supersensible capacity for freedom and physical determinism, mentioned above in relation to the second *Critique*. The capacity for freedom, i.e. to obedience to duty over natural inclinations, is called *homo noumenon* and is equated to personality (*Persönlichkeit*) and to humanity (*Menschheit*), while our subjective affectedness by physical attributes is called *homo phaenomenon* and is equated to human nature (*Mensch*) (MS, AA 6:239). It is also explicitly equated to 'rational nature' and contrasted to morally practical reason, thus giving textual evidence against equating *Menschheit* to mere rationality:

> In the system of nature, a human being (*homo phaenomenon*, *animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*). Although a human being has, in his understanding, something more than they can and can set himself ends, even this gives him only an *extrinsic* value for his usefulness (*pretium usus*)…

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> But a human being regarded as a *person*, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end it itself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world (MS, AA 6:434-5; in: Kant 1996b).

Note again the translation of '*vernünftige*' as 'rational', which seems particularly questionable immediately after *animal rationale*. To sum up, this framework of *noumenal-phaenomenal* instructs us to view ourselves as *both* natural bodies and as free beings. The apparent incompatibility of the two views is to be tolerated, as Kant explains in this passage and elsewhere, if we are to have a meaningful explanations of both natural and moral determinations of humanity.

Kant's use of 'person' ('*Person*') is ambiguous. Sometimes, as in the opening sections of MS where Kant is offering key definitions, it denotes a legal person, "a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him" and is explicitly differentiated from moral personality (*Persönlichkeit*) as subject to *moral* laws (MS, AA 6:223). This difference between *Person* and *Persönlichkeit* is crucial for Kant's big project of delineating the boundary between right and morality, which prompts one to take it as the view he is committed to. But he also uses '*Person*' in the moral sense, which seems to disregard the previously established definitions, as, for example, when he says that

> … a human being, regarded as a *person*, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth)… (MS, AA 6:434; in: Kant 1996b)

Given Kant's own earlier definitions, '*Persönlichkeit*' seems the more appropriate subject of this statement.

Kant addresses the composite structure of humanity in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), where he introduces the triade of animality (*Thierheit*), humanity (*Menschheit*), and personality (*Persönlichkeit*). He calls all three 'predispositions', emphasizing the developmental aspect of humanity, prominent also in his writings on history. Animality is "physical or merely *mechanical* self-love, i.e. a love for which reason is not required"; humanity is "self-love which is physical and yet *involves comparison* (for which reason is required); that is, only in comparison with others does one judge oneself happy or unhappy"; personality is "is the susceptibility to respect for the moral law *as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice*" (RGV, AA 6:26-7; in: Kant 1996a).

This use of *Menschheit* poses a problem, because it is not consistent with how Kant uses it in his writings on pure moral metaphysics. Particularly, *Menschheit* of RGV could not have become the end in itself of the second formula of the categorical imperative. The condition for its being an end in itself is in its possessing inherent worth or dignity (*Würde*), which is granted by autonomy of the will (GMS, AA 4:433). But Kant's RGV

Menschheit as '*rational* being' is not characterized by autonomy and, therefore, does not have inherent dignity: "from the fact that a being has reason does not at all follow that … this reason contains a faculty of determining the power of choice unconditionally, and hence to be "practical" on its own", i.e. regardless of being heteronomously motivated by inclinations (RGV, AA 6:26fn).

Kant seems to even out this notion of *Menschheit* on the following pages. Namely, he writes that personality is "the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually" (RGV, AA 6:28). This establishes connection to humanity of pure moral metaphysics and to the idea that moral personality or *homo noumenon* is what grants humanity its dignity and status of an end in itself. The dominant interpretation of humanity as being equal to rational capacity to choose any end whatsoever, which at first seemed to find direct support in RGV definitions, in fact here, too, meets textual and conceptual resistance.

Let us turn to yet another side of Kant's *Menschheit*, namely its historicity, announced in early writings and developed in 1780s and 1790s. Here arguably two features become central, most explicitly connected in the '*Second Proposition*' of *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784):

> *In the human being* (as the only rational creature on earth) *those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual* (*IaG, AA 8:18; in:* Kant 2007).

In Conjectural Beginning of Human History (1786) Kant goes to say that

> this course, which for the species is a *progress* from worse toward better, is not the same for the individual (MAM, AA 8:115; in: Kant 2007).

The first feature of humanity here is its familiar role of a predisposition to future developed state. The second, and new, feature is that the subject of this development is human species as a whole, and human individuals are mere passing moments in this development. Kant does not go as far as calling individuals means to the end of the development of the species (this, he admits elsewhere, would amount to contradiction – EF, AA 8:362fn), still he infuses humanity with enough collectivism to problematize the just discussed idea that humanity is moral personality in each human being.

If we chose to pronounce this an insurmountable contradiction in Kant's system and opt for the holistic and antagonistic meaning of humanity, this would point us towards a holistic reading of humanity as the historical process, say, in a metaphysical sense of the dialectical unfolding of the absolute, or in a naturalist sense of the clash between social groups pursuing group interests. One of the problems that this move creates is that it requires us to part with human dignity. Dignity is not ascribable to species or metaphysical absolute or social groups and classes; it is a property of a single individual being's personality, even if we acknowledge, as we should, such personality's dependence on social relations and

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circumstances and its underdeveloped condition at any particular moment. It is the property of "humanity, which the human being must respect in his own person and personal vocation, and which he **strives to achieve**" (RGV, AA 6:183; in: Kant 1996a). This striving, according to Kant, is happening on the level or in the domain of personality, after this personality undergoes or perhaps even actualizes from mere potentiality in the 'change of heart' described in *Religion* (RGV, AA 6:62-78) and mentioned in the enlightenment essay (WA, AA 8:36, 41), or in resolution to place duty above happiness as explained in *Groundwork*, or to regard personalist *homo noumenon* above the individualist *homo phaenomenon*.

Conclusion: a scheme

Let us now summarize this contextual and textual survey of Kant's usage and meanings of *Menschheit*. These form four groups along the two crossing breaches. First is the breach between nature and freedom, the phaenomenal and the noumenal, animality and personality. We saw that Kant used the word *Menschheit* to refer to both sides of this divide. If we take humanity to mean human *nature*, the product of processes in 'rough matter' of 'fluids and tissues', immanent to natural world, an intermediary result of evolution, rich in predispositions to its future developments – like in Kant's *Universal Natural History*, but ignoring his mentioning God as a homage to outdated Theism – then we would get a naturalist outlook. If we limit ourselves to pure moral metaphysics, the result would be non-naturalist.

Second, there's a tension running across both realms, contraposing the individual and the species, as well as personality and essence. It is the opposition of pluralism and monism. Let us assume the naturalistic stance. Here, if we find chief significance in Kant's explanation of prudential reasoning and his view that humans are autonomous beings with ends – whatever ends they choose, – we get an individualistic reading of Kant, neatly falling into the context of contemporary agenda of liberation and supporting it with Kant's authority. But this, however important, is not the only and even not the central meaning of Kant's humanity. We have entered the age when the exhaustion of environment due to the explosion of individualistic appetites and technical capabilities of *homo phaenomenon* has become obvious. An unrestrained race for happiness, amplified by rational self-love and competitiveness, has placed human rational animals worryingly close to bringing about the 'unnatural' end of all things. The view of humanity as a plain capacity for rational choice of any end whatsoever has become unsustainable. In these conditions acknowledging greater complexity in Kant's notion of humanity is timely.

We can prefer another naturalistic option and embrace the monist or holist or, yet another name, collectivist view expressed in Kant's works on natural history: individuals are means to the development or evolution of the species. We can proceed further and envision humanity as a means to other, trans- or post-human, species, and so on. This naturalistic holism (along with his scientific, and particularly cosmological, achievements) is, for

example, what earned Kant a place in Soviet pantheon as one of the important precursors to Marxism. But overemphasizing the whole and negating the part is theoretically and, as the end of Soviet Union has shown, practically ineffectual. On the other hand, in the age that is often called Anthropocene the human species is in many respects justifiably taken as one collective actor. We share collective responsibility for the natural environment and for other species. From another perspective our time is often seen as the 'post-genomic age', also underscoring the biological and informational unity of humans as the bearers of human genome. This newly acknowledged unity raises many ethical issues regarding the upcoming 'genetic transparency', problematizing consent, privacy, and other individualist values and principles. We are also subject to the same diseases that in extreme cases put us in the state of exception, in which individual rights are compromised in the name of the whole. All these and many other facts and trends require our awareness of our collective being, and this is also accounted for in Kant's humanity.

Tension also exists on the other side of the natural-supersensible divide. Here humanity could be taken to mean a universal essence or a particular personality. We could conceptualize humanity as the set of essential characteristics, such as autonomy, i.e. rationality and freedom under one moral law. But if we take humanity *only* as transcendental subject, *homo noumenon*, 'a person independent of all physical properties', then we depart on the questionable path of alienation of humanity from particular human beings. In view of the imperfection of actual humans, humanity so understood has been and can again become the inspiration for inhumane deeds done in the name of perfection or correction. Although Kant himself is sometimes taken to have travelled a long way towards essentialism and moral rigorism, he never lost sight of his other meanings of humanity. His explicit and repeated criticism of paternalism, his dedicated support for education and enlightenment aimed at bringing about maturity in non-coercive ways, and his generally favorable view of individual happiness precludes one from an excessively essentialist reading of his humanity.

Finally, we could take humanity as pertaining to particular personalities (moral persons) as unique beings irreducible to natural individuals or to species or to abstract properties. This is a bold ontological move that parts with naturalism and struggles to meet the standards of scientific rationality. However, there's enough textual and conceptual evidence to conclude that personalist meaning is present in Kant's discussion of humanity as personal moral being. Kant's personalism has not received as much recognition and interpretative attention as his individualism, collectivism, or essentialism. However, today's powers have technologically excelled in utilizing the latter three to treat humanity as means in the 'mechanism of nature', and personalist meaning of humanity is crucial to justify and secure its status of an end in itself.

A normal definition of a concept provides essential characteristics, which form a positive meaning. In some special cases, the characteristics may be negative; for example, apophatic theology claims this method. But it is unlikely that in an ordinary situation one

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would be satisfied with a definition of a concept that contains contradictions. Something cannot be defined as both A and not-A. A famous exception is the wave-particle duality of quantum entities, for this very feature perceived by scientific rationality as a paradox and a challenge. Kant's concept of *Menschheit*, as this analysis shows, is similarly paradoxical in combining fundamentally opposite and seemingly mutually exclusive characteristics. Humanity is simultaneously one and many; it is a set of essential universal features and is essentially individual, concrete, unique, free to create its essence; it belongs to natural and non-natural ontologies and can be described plausibly and comprehensively in terms of either.

Kant's actual use of the concept of humanity resists straightforward interpretations, such as 'humanity is freedom', or 'the capacity to set any end whatsoever', or 'good will', or 'rationality', or 'the crooked timber', or any other apparently non-contradictory, unambiguous and short definition. Paradox is the price to be paid here for gaining insight into complexity and for putting that complexity together. The price for a reductive notion of humanity at the 'hard core' of a philosophical program and its related practical agenda is far greater: poor heuristics leading to oppression and harmful failures. Moreover, it is the metaphysical tension that allows to align and relate the meanings of humanity rather than merely enumerate them in a disconnected lexical order. The definition of Kant's *Menschheit* is formed not by conjunction, but by contradiction. Often a definition completes an inquiry and signals the removal of the problem. But in the case of humanity, on the contrary, it points at the depth and complexity of the problem. Perhaps further exegetical and conceptual work can be done to dissolve or sublate this tension, but it is also possible that humanity will retain its exceptional status as a mystery, central to many problems and issues.

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