

Kant's Theory of Economics

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The volume published by Achim Brosch is very welcome in the field of international Kantian studies, as it covers an overt gap in this line of research. It claims that Kant delivers a valuable theory of economic relations, which identifies the main economic orders, agents and dynamics in German and European economy in 18th century, and further showcases the impact that these issues have in the moral and anthropological writings of this author, even if it has been usually neglected by Kant's interpreters. Although the author rebukes the tendency of the scholarship to despise the existence of a complex reflection in Kant on the crossing of empirical and normative traits in the making of economic life, he also acknowledges that some scholars (Pascoe 2015 and 2022, Allais 2014, Sánchez Madrid 2024, and Vrousalis 2022) have attempted, in recent years, to highlight the role that economy fulfils in Kant's moral and anthropological writings. It is worth noting from the outset that Brosch sketches Kant's account of economic orders and processes as an entangled field, as it develops in an empirical level ensuing the action of individual agents and interests, but also has to be controlled and ruled according to normative principles ensuing from the rational doctrine of right. I consider that the most outstanding merit of the book bears on its focus on the strains outspread between the empirical (and anthropological) and normative (both legal and moral) features of economic development in Kant's view, which makes of the publication a decidedly recommended reading for interpreters interested in this dimension of Kant's philosophy and its aftermath in the contemporary world.

After providing an introductory historical account that spotlights some milestones of the philosophical approach to economy relations and processes from Aristotle to Adam Smith, Brosch furnishes an accurate essay that sheds light on the central entities ruling economic life in Kant's time. It should be noted that the author prioritizes the depiction of historical contexts over the discussion of intersectional systematic injustices underpinning the bonds and actions stemming from feudal and protoliberal patterns spread in the 18th century Prussia. In this vein, the author also emphasizes that he adopts a "text immanent" methodology, which aims to work out a complete overview of Kant's theory of economy on the whole, mostly addressing a conceptual reconstruction of the ideological basis sustaining Kant's anthropological and moral accounts and analyses. Yet, in my view, the valuable research put together in this volume will encourage critical scholars of Kant's approach to the economic order to engage in fruitful dialogue with this essay. Thereby issues such as extreme poverty, economic dependence, and the role that racialized people and women fulfilled as workforce in Kant's time could kick off a stimulating conversation, conscious of the historical data delivered by Brosch, but also keen on the political enquiry that might arise with both a historical and critical scope.

As previously mentioned, the essay breaks down the key economic units that Kant tackles in his writings outlining the *house*, the *market* and the *state*, which are intended to conflate coordination and subordination, as the first ones are destined to lay down two complementary and concentric spheres and only the state raises the highest public authority able to control the pathologies that some loose sectors of the market and also the increasing "mania of possession" [*Habsucht*] among some subjects might bring about, menacing the organic development of the commonwealth. Brosch rightly hints to the value of "independence" [*Selbstständigkeit*] as the main requirement to be met by the owner and lord of a household —embodied in the legal standing of *sui iuris*—, which remains intertwined with the corresponding duties and burdens stemming from the participation in the spaces of the market and the state.

Yet this quite objective interpretation of Kant's account of the economic orders does not focus, as a principal goal, on the factual exclusion that such pattern entails for relevant sets of people, although the author mentions it in some pages and conveys awareness of the scope that this issue might have in a more critical reading of this aspect of Kant's philosophy. In fact, not only women, considered too immature to attain

economic and civil independence, even if the wealthy ones might outsource their assigned care tasks and consecrate to administer the domestic patrimony of her husbands, but the entire group of dependent workers seem very far from embodying the autonomy and independence required to be recognized as an active agent according to this economic outline. Even if such a discussion does not align—as mentioned—with the main intention of the author, he aptly states that Kant neither legitimates individual possession as an absolute claim, nor argues for an Aristotelian teleological economic order, which the cameralist agenda represented in his time. Yet such an awareness of the role that the state fulfils as a mediator intended to forestall excesses in any of the economic orders does not impede taking issue with Kant's treatment of the passive agents of his account of economical relations.

According to the structural aims of the volume, Brosch stresses the cooperative ties between the house and the market, which guarantee the maintenance and protection of increasing sets of people and thus help the citizenry to get rid of the paternalistic agenda of princes and monarchs in 18th century. In this vein, the author underscores the emancipatory potential of the spread of the market as a space allegedly ready to let the individual capacities and merits compete for everyone works “their way up” (RL § 46) to economically promote from a passive status to an active one. In this context, the author first broaches the bonds that the lord of the household establishes with his domestic servants through a “contract” signed by both, which makes that the lord delivers commands and protection and the servant assumes the obligation of providing a loyal service to grant the comfort of their boss. Naturally, such an unequal relation might evoke an interesting discussion on the domination underpinning such a labour contract, thus bringing to the fore the fact that racialized people, peasants and European women are the common target of the labour exploitation embedded in the need that especially wealthy households have of domestic service. The author of this volume possesses a historical and philological knowledge that optimally fits to contribute to the current discussion on the systematic injustices ingrained in Kant's account of labour relations (Basevich 2022; Huseynzadegan 2022).

It has to be mentioned that the author addresses, in a specific section, the role of women in Kant's analysis of the system of economic structures. Brosch addresses Kant's attention to the case of privileged wealthy women (85-87), able to outsource the reproductive and domestic labour—an issue largely parsed out in Pascoe (2015 and 2022)—, which may outshine the passive civil status and exploitation suffered by peasant and poor women. Nevertheless, I consider how the author inspects the gendered account of virtues that Kant delivers in his anthropological writings very helpful. According to it men are viewed as agents intended to acquire material resources to set up and maintain a household, while privileged women alone are allowed to partake in the rule of the household as chief of the domestic service and rulers of a prudent domestic administration. Even if Brosch does not take issue with the patriarchal inspiration of the passages displaying such a gendered view of economic roles, he puts in value the fact that Kant acknowledges that women fulfil a specific role in the social reproduction of the commonwealth, focusing on the maintenance of families and households. Yet it would be advisable to shed also light on the alleged emancipatory potential of such a claim, insofar as the outsourcing of caregiving and childrearing tasks entails a hinted chasm between wealthy 18th century women and those who were worst-off. As some Kant scholars claimed in last years, to discuss the structural injustice embedded in Kant's view of reproductive economy opens up a promising avenue of research for making some features of Kant's anthropological descriptions more consistent with the a priori tenets of his legal and political philosophy.

Beyond the potential discussions that may arise bearing on Kant's blindness towards social domination ingrained in the construction of domestic economy, the book displays a helpful analysis of the subjectivity and practical horizon of businessmen and traders, as key agents of the economic markets. In this vein, Brosch casts light on Kant's attention to the intertwinement of private and world prudence in the behaviour of successful traders, insofar as he views these subjects as a key piece to set up a network of markets independent from the order of households. In this context, the author suggests understanding the market in Kant's view as a necessary actor to guarantee welfare in a nation, and formulates the dynamics between the domestic order and the products and labour market in the terms of a dialectic between freedom and nature. Thus traders and businessmen are expected to follow basic ethical norms for fulfilling a functional role in the commonwealth and obtaining success in their professional performances. Brosch puts together passages from Kant's *Doctrine of Right*, *Lectures on Ethics*, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* and the *Lectures on Anthropology*, to provide a detailed overview of the subjective attitude and objective behaviour of this economic agent, covering a gap in Kant's scholarship, which has largely neglected the insertion of traders, merchants and sellers in the commonwealth. Moreover, the book inspects the ambiguous and risky relation with money that these agents engage in, casting light on the “police” that the state has to display to prevent deep crises in the market development, which might, for instance, bring about extreme poverty (115-117). As a symptom of the social risks that money entails, Brosch mentions a passage where Kant states that this means to buy and sell everything only allows one to have beliefs, impeding the adoption of any firm knowledge. As money helps to display an abstract market, Kant praises its emancipatory power, even if he simultaneously highlights its capacity to trigger an unruly desire—a *mania*—to accumulate it without any teleological target (200). Thus, Kant suggests that economic accumulation ought to have, as guidelines, the values of personal discipline and collective responsibility.

Another dimension explored in the volume hints to the right to commerce, which is directly linked to the aim of unfolding a global market, coherent with the tenets of cosmopolitan right. It is a matter of fact that Kant relates the establishment of trade relations with the spread of peace, in the wake of the “doux commerce” theorized by Montesquieu, even if progressively he undertakes a criticism of colonial abuses (155-157). Even if Brosch acknowledges Kant's racist remarks that exclude non-European human groups from economic

development, he disavows that the ideal of a global market would mostly stoke the exploitation of underdeveloped countries rich in natural resources. In the last chapters of the book Brosch examines Kant's misgivings against paternalism in the economic field, as he understands that welfare should stem from the actions and decisions of individuals, not from the higher decision that a national state takes on their behalf. Moreover, as a flipside of this claim, the author also casts light on the civil responsibility that the ruler should show with regard to outcast people, issuing a poverty relief agenda. In this vein, the author labels Kant's attitude towards this ideal commitment of the state as an "instrumentalization ethically complemented" (251), as the highest ruler follows the general interest of the commonwealth and thus aims to guarantee its conservation.

In my view the main outcome of this valuable book bears on its capacity to accurately break down Kant's complex understanding of the elements that integrate it, outlining that the household and the market bring about a welfare that the state in itself would not be able to produce. Thus, as Brosch declares at the end of the volume, hinting to a well-known passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, moral philosophy would be blind without receiving the input of economy, while economy would be empty without the support of moral philosophy. Yet the household and the market, as empirical entities, are deprived of the normative force stemming from the state, which is intended to counteract extreme inequalities arising from social emergencies as poverty unleash in the social realm (302-305). In fact, the competition of capacities and merits entails, in Kant's view, risks to the social order and blatant injustices. Yet he does not overlook luxury, welfare and spread of trade as chances to foster civil progress (289-293), whose associated pathologies should be eschewed taking a statist normative standpoint to assess economic development.

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