

Tricentenary of Immanuel Kant's Birth (1724-1804) Special Dossier Borders, Races, Gender and Labor in Kantian Philosophy

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ENG Abstract: The eight papers in the Special Dossier for the Tricentenary of Immanuel Kant's Birth (1724-1804) 'Borders, Races, Gender and Labor in Kantian Philosophy' reflect upon these issues and their presence in the Kantian legacy from a contemporary point of view. Other concepts and themes emerge as transversal threads linking these contributions, such as the feeling of respect, duties, rights, and the role that communities play or the ethical-juridical function of the social contract. Other philosophers and philosophical traditions take part in the discussions, such as Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Derrida, Foucault, Hannah Arendt, or Susan Moller Okin. The result is a wide perspective that invites us to return to Kantian texts.

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Summary: 1. Kant on Borders, Races, Gender and Labor. 2. If Kant were alive.

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1. Kant on Borders, Races, Gender and Labor

From an ideal and theoretical perspective, Kantian ethical, legal, political, and social philosophy displays strongly progressive principles, fostering the enlightened culture of emancipation, freedom, and essential human equality, thus jeopardizing the legitimacy of the architecture of the European aristocratic society that characterizes the absolutist monarchies of *Ancien régime* and their colonial empires. The moral-metaphysical principles, expounded in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), form a robust "lawful system of rights" and an extremely demanding "ethical system of virtues." Both systems enjoy relative independence, but their external and internal legislations converge and partly overlap by complying with the notions and procedures of rationality and universality.

However, from a non-ideal and applied perspective, Kantian explicit positions on social justice have somehow disappointed many generations of progressive scholars and political actors that believe Kant's treatment of several crucial issues reflects the inertia of history, namely the inertia of Prussian institutions and a Eurocentric *Zeitgeist*. This inertia belongs to a circumscribed, well-ordered historical-political context that resists and prevails against the vanguard of cultural critique. This is certainly the case when "reform" and "gradual evolution from within," i.e., undertaken by the sovereign holding executive power, are presented as the rational method of political and juridical development, instead of a revolutionary regime shift, carried out by the people, which, Kant argues, is always unjust and cannot involve the legislative power (*Metaphysics of Morals-DR*, § 49; AA 06: 321-322; *Conflict of Faculties*, AA 07: 87 and 92 note). In a fundamental way, Kant opposes Locke's and Rousseau's natural right of a people to rebel against an oppressive sovereign to recover freedom. Hence, he must assess the English (1639-51 and 1688), American (1775-83), and French (1789) Revolutions, which nevertheless express in different modes and degrees the actualization of people's freedom and autonomy, as deeply transgressive and illegitimate ventures, especially when they involve committing regicide, like the ones of Charles I of England (1649) and Louis XVI of France (1793).

For Kant, the sociopolitical system that is established by the rule of civil law must abide by the sacred principle of lawful continuity, stability, and security. Any interruption or breach of the continuous thread of statutory civil law entails a guilty fall into the lawless state of nature. Kant subscribes to the Hobbesian primal scenario of human natural history in which the first duty consists of quitting the state of nature (*exeundum e statu*

naturali), and consequently creating and preserving the lawful civil state through an original contract that is (virtually) universally willed by all without any contradiction, that is to say, without any particular interest mutilating or distorting the general interest. Despite its temporary and reversible character, a metamorphic interval (be it an instant of juridical-institutional vacuum) in the enforcement of positive law, as is the case during a revolutionary process, remains utterly condemnable. Indeed, Kant maintains, provoking such self-destructive regress from the civil order to the lawless vacuum of natural and general war of all against all constitutes the gravest crime that any citizen can commit. Kant does not trust in the creative and constructive spontaneity of natural law that always operates in any rational community, although he believes in the secret and quite paradoxical plan of Nature, or Providence (*Vorsehung*), that transforms the negative strength of wars and brute passions into the developmental dynamics of history, producing an increasingly peaceful and rational human civilization, gradually moving towards the Better through the infinite succession of generations.

The Kantian conception of borders, races, gender, and labor must be interpreted against the backdrop of his multiple standpoints and methods of inquiry, namely:

1. Critical metaphysics of morality configured by universal a priori principles, from which arises a wide philosophy of law (both ethical and juridical, the latter including natural and positive law, as well as private and public law, opening towards the law of peoples and cosmopolitan law),
2. Philosophy of history (both natural and political, built on the assumption that there are inner laws of development that bestow mechanic and teleological intelligibility to the whole system of nature and freedom), and
3. Physiological and pragmatic anthropology, descriptive and normative anthropology (presenting “human nature” both as unity and diversity, a creation of nature and an infinite “moral” task of self-creation, i.e., an essential and existential mode of being, epigenetically actualizing its powers of “becoming rational” as “*animal rationale*,” rather than “*animal rationale*,” in diverse ways according to the “*characteristica*” of races and peoples).

Borders, races, gender, and labor are four overlapping areas of practical philosophy where deeply contentious claims of values and states of affairs emerge and confront each other. They encompass dense tensions between being and ought to be, between theoretical, historical, and practical truth. Kantian a priori ideals often clash against empirical facticity whose contingencies appear to be a kind of preferred reality. In these realms, the exegesis of Kant’s thought must recognize a complex maze of ambiguities and ambivalences. On the one hand, it is important to carry out rigorous philological research and try to establish Kant’s textual positions with their various degrees of inner coherence and diachronic change. On the other hand, Kantian scholars may and must criticize Kant’s positions using Kant’s resources, fighting fire with fire, as it were. As a matter of fact, one may contend that the issues related to borders, races, gender, and labor are precisely the ones in which Kant’s historical and axiological embeddedness in the system of cultural prejudices of the moderately conservative enlightened German elite would demand a thorough examination. Here, Kant reveals a problematic lack of self-criticism where unchecked preferences jeopardize the efficacy of critical inferences. The words that Kant used to overcome Plato and save a “valuable” form of Platonism can also be applied to Kant himself: one may and must understand Kant better than he could understand himself, and judge his “material” preferences from the vantage point of his methodological scepticism and rational-practical commitment to the creation of an all-inclusive moral world of persons, a “kingdom of ends in themselves,” embracing dignity, equality, and freedom.

In the domain of borders, Kant acknowledges that from the perspective of natural law, there is an original equality in the right of acquisition of land, therefore an equal right of possession, occupation and use of land. However, occupation seems to justify the claim of possession, firstly in a provisional and uncertain manner under the state of nature, and then in a definitive and secure manner under the civil state (*Towards Perpetual Peace*, AA 08: 358; *Metaphysics of Morals-DR*, § 15, AA 06: 264). The lawful inequalities of land possession (and subsequent accumulation of wealth) seem to lack a proper critical consideration under a supra-judicial ideal of justice. The supposed lawfulness of the process of acquisition suspends the rational imperative of equality based on the common possession and the common need to inhabit and use fertile land. The civil state not only guarantees and reproduces the acquired property rights of individuals but also constitutes and preserves itself as a territorial entity that includes under its unity a system of citizens that are and must be independent, self-sufficient “proprietors” (or producers of property) in order to enjoy their full active citizenship as co-legislators (*Theory and Practice*, AA 08: 294-296; *Metaphysics of Morals-DR* § 46, AA 06: 313-315). The distributive or redistributive function of the state should have deserved more attention in order to compensate for the cumulative unequal impact of land ownership and paid labor, especially given the grave inequalities within the labor system of asymmetric relationships, which in modern Europe includes the economically crucial institution of African slavery, lacking also a properly critical treatment in Kant’s moral and political philosophy.

As for races and gender, Kant endorses a problematic set of hierarchical assumptions based on allegedly essential natural differences that place the intellectual powers of non-Europeans (and more strictly of non-German peoples) as well as women in a qualitatively lower level of development, which compromises their cognitive and moral capabilities, thus render legitimate their tutelage (*Of the different races*, AA 02: 429ff; *Determination of the concept of race*, AA 08: 91ff; *Anthropology*, AA 07: 303ff). The question remains, in Kantian scholarship, whether and how non-white people and women can really make progress toward the full actualization of their rationality. However, if the Kantian metaphysical foundations of morality and history,

broadly conceived, overcome any anthropological “*characteristica*” and propose a strictly universal and dynamic practical ideal for all possible rational beings, it is nevertheless true that such universal egalitarianism and developmental cosmopolitanism are not accurately translated into racial equality and gender equality. In a sense, Kant’s anthropology demonstrates the persistence of axiological preference and a biased assessment in favor of a natural white and male superiority. These racial and gender views are all the more disquieting when one compares and contrasts Kant with the contemporary voices of nascent feminism and abolitionism, such as Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft.

2. If Kant were alive

At the end of 1784 Kant published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* the paper ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’ from this moment on Kant couldn’t avoid the debate about the proper ends and tools for this Enlightenment and how his works could support it. It was then a task to explain how the State can promote education and to whom, although in this concern Kant apparently was not critical enough to consider individuals of other races and women as part of the process of illustration.

One of his most successful works in the moment of its publication was *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795) where the concept of cosmopolitanism is coined in the way we still argue about it. But the publication of both texts in 1784 and 1795 did not mean that Kant clarified his view about the political issues he puts into question. On the contrary, what we find is that he opens the debate not only about the concepts but also about the interpretation of his legacy. These significant papers are, perhaps just the compass to orient ourselves in his political thought, but shortcuts and detours in other publications could lead us to a no exit interpretation.

This special dossier aims to offer a panoramic view on contemporary philosophical issues from a Kantian perspective and, in that way, concepts coined and analysed in the 18th and 19th centuries by Kant and the Kantian tradition are used to read, comprehend and answer to contemporary social and political struggles. This is possible due to the modern source of these same issues. If Borders, Races, Gender and Labor have become outstanding problems to be tackled in the political scenario but also, and perhaps first of all, in the philosophical research, then we need to understand how, when and in which conditions they have appeared in the modern age. For that reason, this dossier is at the same time a genealogical exercise to comprehend our nowadays struggles and a hermeneutical effort to participate in the debates raised by these struggles.

The first paper by Selda Salman (Istanbul Kültür University), ‘Respect and Struggles for Recognition: Kant and Honneth’ introduces the moral and transcendental feeling of respect as problematized by Kant, and links it to the political social concept of the struggles for recognition. Honneth is ‘one of the pioneers of contemporary recognition theorists’ who, according to Salman, doesn’t succeed in recognising all the content of the concept of respect in Kant. For Honneth, assuming Hegel’s interpretation, the concept of respect in Kant hasn’t incorporated a historical and plural possibility of experience. It seems that Honneth has recognized afterwards Kant’s proposal for a future betterment, but still, he stands too close to the Hegelian critics on Kant. This analysis of the concept, or actually, the feeling of respect has been chosen by the editors to open the dossier due to its widespread presence in the struggles related to borders, gender and labor.

This first paper introduces the core problematic further developed in the second one ‘Three aspects of Kantian Autonomy: Independence, Self-Determination and Citizenship’ by Lucas Thorpe and Sun Demirli (Boğaziçi University). They focus on Kantian Autonomy as the ‘capacity for giving laws’ in and for a realm of ends, that means, in an intelligible republic. This conception of autonomy is the capacity for citizenship. In that way, both first papers are putting the attention in the way in which the subject acts taking into account others rationality. Only afterwards autonomy as self-determination and independence could appear in the moral subject. According to Thorpe and Demirli this conception could be rooted in Rousseau’s civil state moral freedom, although they highlight some significant differences between Kant and Rousseau related to the universal scope of Kantian autonomy principle.

In the third paper of this dossier ‘In search of moral politics: Kant’s cosmopolitan right in state sovereignty crises’, Claudiu Martin (Universidad Complutense) discusses the intertwined relation among freedom, duties and rights and sets as a starting point that the authority of the State is the guarantor for the compatibility in the exercise of freedom of different subjects. The criterion of publicity is the thread linking the different interpretations of the concept of hospitality and those of civil disobedience. In this way Derrida, Bessone, Huseyinzadegan, Foucault or Hannah Arendt’s proposals are mentioned to explore ‘novel avenues for the right to uphold [the State] its principles’.

The two following papers address the concept of race in Kant and the problematic in the reception of it. Kant’s conception of race and his assertions are the reason for the open debate about implicit and explicit racism in Kant works. In ‘Kant’s Conception of Race and Contemporary Political Thought’, Alexey Salikov emphasizes how Kant as other thinkers of the Enlightenment need themselves to be enlightened, or, in the case of Kant, to be more critical with the sources of his information, explorers, settlers, missionaries, traders. The first part of the paper deals on the relation between political thought, cosmopolitanism and racial theory. The second section is a very interesting presentation of the contemporary controversy among Kantian scholars. The paper by Jelena Govedarica and Milica Smajević Roljić (University of Belgrade), ‘A Critical Assessment of the Kleingeld-Bernasconi Debate on Kant’s Racism’ takes part in this controversy. They consider that this debate fails in its premise because both, Kleingeld and Bernasconi consider Kant a racist in at least some part or the whole of his academical life. On the contrary they support the thesis that that was not the case. Firstly, because some of the texts quoted to explain Kant’s racism were student’s notes from Kant’s lectures and not published by him. Secondly, because some other texts quoted as evidence for this racist presentation of Kant

should be read not in a normative but in a descriptive way. In this way, this paper is not only a reflection upon the Kleingeld – Bernasconi Debate but also a contribution to maintain it alive.

The following two papers focus on the issue of gender from two original perspectives. In 'Cosmopolitanism, Feminism, and Duties to Self. A Kantian Approach', Sylvie Loriaux (Université Laval) handles the problematic that feminist struggles face when considering individual freedom and cultural diversity. How can feminism continue to report global and common injustices inflicted against women without slipping into imperialism due to the contemplation of freedom from a Western perspective? To avoid this paternalistic consideration Loriaux finds necessary to outline the distinction between non-oppression and autonomy. Kant's concept of 'rightful honor' in the *Introduction to the doctrine of right* makes possible to think a common interest in the feminist fights without taking the risk of turning the subject of these fights into a passive one, in so far as 'they are accountable to the humanity in [their] own person' (MM 6:270). This rightful honor guarantees the exclusion of any form of slavery, prostitution and presents the outstanding role of consent in relations. Without any doubt the use of this Kantian concept, 'rightful honor', offers a valuable tool to comprehend and act in feminist contemporary struggles.

Larissa Wallner (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main) dares to propose in 'Gerettet und diszipliniert. Zur Ambivalenz der Vernunft zwischen Zucht und Selbstbefreiung' a metaphilosophical and situational interpretation on Kant's reason. Posing the question 'whom does Kant speak to?' she explains her answer, 'not to us' and reflect from this point upon women situation in Kantian context. Reason is presented in Kant as a feminine subject, with a very similar characterisation to other women, they need to be disciplined and it is questionable their role in Enlightenment. This paper sets the task to go back to the whole critical and even precritical pages to explore again the sense of reason in Kant.

The last paper of the dossier 'The State's Duty to Support in Kant: Right Duty and Narrow Duty as a Necessary Condition for Tripartite Freedom' written by Juan Rivera González bases this State's Duty to support in the framework of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. The duty to support stems from the social contract as an essential element for laws of freedom.

With these eight papers new interpretations of Kantian texts and concepts are presented to help us understand and act in social and political contemporary scenarios and struggles. We think there is no better way to honour Kantian philosophical legacy in the Tricentenary of his Birth. As guest editors we thank the editorial board and its directors, Nuria Sánchez Madrid and Robert R. Aramayo for having given us the opportunity to gather these original and diverse papers under the general subject 'Borders, Races, Gender and Labor in Kantian Philosophy'.