

Kant's Anthropology of Hope and the Theodicy of Reason

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*Without human beings the whole of creation would be a
mere wasteland, existing in vain and without a final end.*

Immanuel Kant¹

*The secret of Kant's philosophy is the unthinkability of
despair.*

Theodor Adorno²

Introduction

In the conclusion of *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786), Immanuel Kant writes that “the thinking human being” (*der denkende Mensch*) feels “a sorrow” (*Kummer*) and “discontent with the providence that governs the course of the world on the whole” that is unknown to the thoughtless person. Such discontent can “even become a moral corruption” that causes the spectator of history to resign himself to the “troublesome road” that fate marks out for us.³ The spectator of the history of human events often falls into a resigned despair after questioning the goodness of the species and the moral promises of reason. One task of Kant's progressive account of history—articulated in such works as *CBH*, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*

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(1784), secs. 83–84 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), *Theory and Practice* (1793), *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), and *Conflict of the Faculties, Part Two* (1798)—is to make us “content with providence” so that we do not lose sight of our responsibility for moral improvement. This means confronting the despair of *der denkende Mensch*.

Kant is thus a thinker especially suitable for our times. It is no secret that a general sense of despair characterizes the tone of contemporary politics. The resurgent interest in Kant’s idea of progress testifies to this assertion, as several scholars in recent years have turned to Kant’s account of history to provide hope and meaning during the “crisis of liberalism” despite the fact that Kant’s idea of progress appears ancillary or underdeveloped.⁴ However, despite their merits, many recent interpretations overlook the rhetorical character of these writings and that their intended audience is the educated modern, corrupted by a certain understanding of scientific rationality. When we consider that these writings investigate the logic of despair at work in such an audience, we gain greater clarity into the political problem these writings address. Whereas many commentators either take Kant’s account of progress as a straightforward doctrine about the logic of history or treat it merely as a moral or political heuristic, this article argues that they are first and foremost rhetorical representations of his philosophical response to sorrow (*Kummer*) or despair (*Verzweiflung*); they offer a justification of reason that grounds the moral psychology of an ennobled liberalism. It is not in revitalizing progress as a doctrine where we can expect Kant to teach us but in recovering progress as a response to a philosophical and political problem.

Kant responds to a historical situation in which the goodness of reason had become questionable. The despair of *der denkende Mensch* is a manifestation of misology and misanthropy—it questions the goodness of the rational animal.⁵ Likewise, the tone of despair that pervades contemporary politics arises not simply because things are going badly but because we have lost a sense of the purpose of reason and have become confused about our place

in the nature of things. We can no longer answer the question, What is the human being for?⁶ The philosophical questioning of reason's goodness has political consequences insofar as it affects political culture.

For Kant, modern politics is inseparable from modern philosophy. Once modern philosophical rationalism enters the public realm, philosophy's role in politics changes because the political has fundamentally changed. The public defense of reason becomes one of philosophy's essential tasks in the conditions of scientific modernity.⁷ Kant's hope to make one content with providence (in this case, the given fact of being a rational animal) is central to his political philosophy. But what it means to make one content might not necessarily entail belief in the teleological structure of nature as much as fostering a general outlook of hope regarding the emergence of human reason and its moral demands. The justification of providence in these writings is better understood as a "theodicy of reason," to borrow a phrase from Richard Velkley.⁸ This theodicy provides an argument for the possibility of the goodness of reason by justifying the moral striving it commands.

This article develops a synoptic overview of Kant's philosophy of history. While Kant's thoughts on history changed in important ways throughout the 1780s and 1790s, the essential aim of these writings—to provide grounds for hope by affirming the goodness of human reason—remains the same. The article proceeds as follows: The first section discusses the cause of despair—namely, the incomprehensibility of human duality—as it appears in these writings, especially in *Idea*. The next section explores the role of hope in Kant's thought and how it addresses this problem of human unity. The article then turns to examine the logic of Kantian history and the content of the theodicy of reason, which grounds our permission to hope in the possibility of progress. The section that follows this examination fleshes out the political implications of this account by arguing that Kantian progress aims to ennoble modern politics. The conclusion returns to the question of the relevance of Kantian progress.

Despair and the Duality of the Human Being

This section explores the cause of despair as Kant diagnoses it in his historical writings. Kant's various writings on history take human reason's tendency toward despair as the starting point. In addition to the reflections on the sorrow of *der denkende Mensch*, one could include the gallows humor of the opening statement of *TPP*, his portrayal of Moses Mendelssohn's melancholic misanthropy in *Theory*, or the reference to the "glittering misery" of modern civilization in both *Idea* and sec. 83 of *CJ*.⁹ In each case, there is a sense in which the historical development of human reason not only lacks purpose but has led to human misery.

Most often Kant's account of the dissatisfaction with the moral shallowness and misery of modern civilization is read in light of his debts to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁰ As Jeffrey Church shows, for example, this particular debt to Rousseau can be traced back at least to Kant's anthropology lectures of the 1770s.¹¹ In these lectures, Kant claims there are two natural ends of human life that are in tension with each other: our desire for wholeness and our desire for perfection. Church identifies the former with the drive for self-preservation and the wish to "remain one with ourselves," while the latter is a drive for self-transcendence and the desire to continually improve our faculties. The conflict between these two ends and the inability to adjudicate between them leads to the "question of the value of human existence," which is, according to Church, the "primary question" for Kant.¹² The human is riven with internal conflict and has no sense of how this conflict contributes to anything but his own unhappiness. The cause of this conflict, however, is that the human is a rational animal. As an animal, the human desires the goods that accord with self-preservation, while our rationality, making us uneasy and anxious, compels the human to seek goods beyond human animality. While denying the ancient view that the natural end of reason is the contemplative life, Kant argues that the question of the value of human reason can be affirmed only through a proper understanding of the ends of reason.¹³ Kant's defense of reason entails the articulation of reason's moral legislation, which provides an end

that does not solve the tension between our natural desires but subordinates them to a greater authority.

While Kant's historical reflections of the 1780s and 1790s are informed by the precritical anthropology lectures insofar as they begin from the premise of "the worthlessness of natural human life," they put the issue more in terms of human duality as it comes to be understood by the critical account of reason.¹⁴ The view of the worthlessness of human life arises from a misunderstanding of reason's purpose and structure. Such a view fails to understand that there is an end of reason that transcends—and justifies—natural human life. In other words, a misunderstanding of what reason is underlies despair. This misunderstanding is caused by frustrations inherent to being the rational animal—of having no sense of how rationality fits together with animality. On the one hand, under a certain view of modern rationality, reason is instrumental; it is the "slave of the passions."¹⁵ In this view, rationality lacks a transcendent purpose, and we are no different than animals except that we are decidedly less happy and more cruel. Rationality makes the human animal worse than the beasts. On the other hand, a kind of misology emerges when the ideal posited by reason seems unobtainable because of the limitations of our finite, animal nature. This view does not necessarily deny the possibility of a greater purpose for reason, but it feels reason's longings for something transcendent to be burdensome.

In either case, despair arises from confusion regarding the duality of the human. Kant makes this clear in the introductory paragraphs of *Idea*. There he claims that "one cannot resist a certain disinclination/indignation [*Unwillens*]" when one surveys "the great stage of the world" and finds that "everything in large is woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction." This indignation results from a failure of ordinary reason to "know what concept [*Begriff*] to make of our species" with its "smug imaginings about its excellences."¹⁶ We are rational creatures who appear to transcend mere animality but often prove unworthy of our rational advantages in our unique folly. Likewise, in *CBH*, the theme of the essay, and the

cause of our discontent with providence, is the conflict between the human race as a “physical species” and as a “moral species”—or otherwise put, as the “history of nature” and the “history of freedom.”¹⁷ Hence, the question of the human being, which is framed teleologically in terms of the question of humanity’s purpose, comes to the surface most conspicuously when one attempts to think about the meaning of history, which at first glance appears directionless, without purpose, and seems to be a ceaseless series of contingent—and often violent—happenings.¹⁸ The history of the human being reveals an incongruous monster, made up of incompatible parts and competing urges.

The conflict between “mankind’s striving in regard to his moral vocation” and the “unswerving observation of the laws for his raw and animal state” causes friction both in how one hopes to carry out the affairs of practical life and in how one even conceives of the human being.¹⁹ For Kant, to have a concept (*Begriff*) of something means that one has a determinate cognition of that object. Human cognition cannot make the “human”—understood as rational animal—into a determinate concept of cognition. This is because of the incongruity of human duality, on the one hand, and the inability of human rationality to cognize freedom, on the other, given that determinate cognition, the product of the legislation of the understanding, applies only to the natural order and also because human freedom is inherently *indeterminate*. The human being can deny or suppress instinct for the sake of a higher moral principle.²⁰ The human has two masters—freedom and instinct—and follows neither one law nor the other with complete determination.

The spectator of history thus feels *Unville* not simply because of moral judgment on human folly but because he cannot make theoretical sense of the dual nature of humankind, as being between the animality of beasts and the transcendence of reason. There is thus no concept that can fully capture the human, and this inability to conceptualize the human appears to be a black mark on providence itself. As Kant states in *Idea*’s conclusion, so long as the “history of humankind” remains a “ceaseless objection against

[the highest wisdom],” we are always at risk of “turning our eyes from [the world] in disinclination/indignation [*Unwillen*]” and falling into “despair [*verzweifeln*] of ever encountering a completed rational aim in it.”²¹

The use of *Unwille* proves to be fruitful in understanding the psychology motivating despair. *Unwille* can mean quite literally a “nonwilling[ness],” and so a disinclination to act in or even think about the world. It can also mean indignation, and Kant’s account of the foolishness, vanity, and folly that gives rise to *Unwille* is cause enough to translate the term this way (as some do). One might say that indignation is the heart of despair. More concretely, the indignation at the apparent absence of a rational aim to creation, which is also a confusion about what kind of beings we are, leads to discontent. Indignant spectators demand an answer to the question of the purpose of human existence—and hence the purpose of creation as such—and when none is forthcoming, they turn away from the world. In this turning away, indignation hardens into misology and misanthropy—the hatred of reason and of the human being that embodies it—so that despair becomes not only sorrow at the world’s apparent purposelessness but also hostility toward the very capacity that seeks to make it intelligible.

Kant’s elucidation of the idea of a universal history offers a defense of the validity not just of what he called his “cherished idea” (*Lieblingsidee*) but of human reason as such. Kant asserts that if one understands history from the proper vantage point (*Absicht*), one can make sense of the fact that the rational animal exists at all. This vantage point is an end of a process projected into the future by which history can be understood as purposive. It is a hopeful account, and thus the defense of reason as it emerges historically depends on an argument that grounds reason’s right to believe that the arc of history bends toward justice. In addition to this narrative, however, I suggest that while Kant insists that one cannot make a concept of the human, one can “think” the human with the help of regulative ideas or reflective judgment. In other words, the perspective of hope responds to despair or sorrow of the spectator by helping one make sense of human duality.

Hope and the Unity of the Human Being

Before going further into an analysis of Kant's account of history, it will be helpful to consider how the concern for hope is central to Kant's critical system and how it responds to the problem of human duality. Like those on history, his critical writings are concerned with justifying reason (in the sense of both defending its goodness and grounding its legitimate uses; this latter concern is largely absent from the more popular reflections on history, given their more rhetorical character). Thus, even in the critical writings, hope occupies a central place. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), Kant states:

All *interest of my reason* (the speculative as well as the practical) is united in the following three questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What should I do?
3. What may I hope [*hoffen*]?

The first question is merely speculative. . . . The second question is practical. . . . The third question . . . is simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practical leads like a clue [*Leitfaden*] to a reply to the theoretical question.²²

To give an all-too-brief summary of the main contours of the critical system, Kant's answer to the first question is the phenomenal world of experience, or nature, which is governed by universal laws legislated by human cognition (or the faculty of the understanding). Accordingly, the concepts of concern for traditional metaphysics, which Kant argues are God, freedom, and immortality, cannot be known by theoretical reason, since they cannot possibly be experienced as objects in space and time. However, Kant's inquiry into the second question reveals the universal moral law: The condition of acting in accordance with moral law is freedom. Through the moral law, we have access to a principle distinct from the deterministic and mechanical account that

describes the phenomenal world.²³ From the concept of freedom, those other speculative ideas (God and immortality) gain “stability and objective reality, that is, their *possibility* is *proved* by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law.”²⁴

It is the conflict of these two perspectives that leads to the question of hope. As Kant asserts, the human ability to set ends makes him distinct among all other animals.²⁵ However, there is uncertainty regarding our capacity to realize the ends reason sets, as we are finite beings. In Kant's formulation, the human being is the “limited rational being” or the “finite thinking being.” The human being is not simply finite *and* rational; rather, human rationality is finite, discursive, and hence guided temporally by its “interests.” This combination makes us forward-looking but not forward-knowing beings. Our care for the future manifests in the feelings of hope, fear, or despair. All these orientations are attributable to the finite and limited character of a rationality that seeks some transcendence of its given conditions. The impulse to project ourselves into the future is a feature of our peculiar form of rationality.²⁶

In attempting to answer the third question, and so by seeking grounds for hope, Kant sheds remarkable light on what it means to be human. It is thus no surprise that in his *Jäsche Logic*, Kant makes a crucial addition to his three critical questions. He asks, What is the human being (*der Mensch*)?²⁷ Kant states that all four questions are “anthropology” insofar as “the first three questions relate to the last one.”²⁸ The three questions taken together make up the answer to the fourth anthropological question. Of the three, however, the third question of hope gets us furthest along in answering the question of what the human being is. More than the questions of knowledge and morality, the question of hope provides insight into the human being's uniquely composite character. It relates the other two questions, as two different ways of considering the world, to each other. The question of knowledge largely concerns the realm of nature, whereas the question of ethical action concerns the self-legislation of our transcendental freedom.

The question of hope, as both theoretical and practical, begins by considering the historical and natural existence of the human as it relates to moral action but leads us into reflections on the possible unity of the human being.

The desire for hope arises from the same duality that causes *Unwille*, yet it opens a new perspective from which one can think “human being” as a unity. Kantian progress thus discloses an *anthropology of hope*—a standpoint from which humanity can be seen as morally purposive and reason as capable of self-redemption. This perspective quiets the indignation of the historical spectator and offers a speculative answer to the fourth critical question. To think the human being in terms of hope is to think the human in terms of his possible unity. It transcends the limits of the determinate cognition of the “concept,” requiring imagining reason’s reconciliation with itself in forms that exceed discursive knowledge.

Kant’s historical writings depend, in some sense, on the possibility that the human can be expressed by help of a regulative principle or through the proper employment of reflective judgment, a philosophical framework Kant works out in *CJ*.²⁹ These writings, though rigorously rational, have a poetic character in how they gesture toward a unity that can never be the object of knowledge but can be thought only through the plausible “as if” of philosophical narrative. In this sense, Kant’s anthropology of hope is both descriptive, as it reflects on the duality of the human, and normative, as it orients that duality toward a regulative ideal by which human unity can be contemplated.

To begin to see how hope helps us think human unity, it will be helpful to sketch out the content of hope. Human hope is oriented toward Kant’s idea of the highest good, which can be understood as the point where the worthiness to be happy (following the moral law) aligns with happiness itself, which is allotted according to the whims of nature or circumstance. In other words, the highest good is the conjunction of freedom and nature or virtue and happiness in such a way that virtue is the condition for happiness or, rather, that happiness exists in proportion to one’s virtue.³⁰ In the *Critique*

of *Practical Reason* (1788), Kant provides for the possibility of the highest good through support in our belief in God and the immortality of the soul.

Such theological supports do not excuse the moral subject from attempting to realize the highest good in this world. The highest good, understood historically, is a projection toward which an individual and community strives and that, in turn, binds the individual and community together. The highest good is an idea that reason projects and toward which the human species can progress. In other words, the human being, as the end-setting animal, contains in itself the source of the highest good. As an idea or ideal, the end of progress is a spontaneous projection of reason that does not correspond to anything in the empirical world.³¹ The projection of the idea of progress toward the highest good is rooted in reason's freedom and thereby differs from the theoretical ideas of traditional metaphysics. In this sense, such ideals are not "mere figments of the brain" but rather "provide an indispensable standard for reason."³² Because an idea of reason does not correspond to any object of possible knowledge, it is of practical use as a rule by which to measure one's conduct. As an idea of practical reason, the highest good serves as a regulative principle, a limit or end to be progressively approached. Indeed, in the *CPrR*, Kant claims that "it is a priori (morally) necessary to *produce the highest good through the freedom of the will*."³³ Accordingly, hope for the achievement of the highest good follows from the moral necessity to strive to produce it.

Since humanity's progress toward such an ideally just state of affairs is possible, as Kant argues, one cannot regard its postulation as merely a subject of idle thinking (or the hope for progress as a subject for wishful sentiments). Yet as dependent on an idea of reason, progress has a unique epistemic status. We can never know or prove that history is progressing, but can only suppose that it might be the case. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), regarding the particular ideal of eternal peace, Kant summarizes the ambiguity of such an asymptotic approach toward an ideal of reason: Eternal peace, the ultimate end of progressive history, is "indeed

an unachievable idea”; still, directing political regimes toward such an end so that they move toward a “continual *approximation* to [eternal peace]” is “not unachievable.”³⁴ Reason’s projection of an idea provides humanity with a goal that is not *altogether* unachievable, even if it is projected to an infinite point in the future.

However, progress is not altogether certain. Since the ground of the regulative idea is human freedom, one has a choice to act in accordance with this principle or not. Kant’s reading of history provides hope that our moral action can be efficacious in bringing about progress. It can be said that the moral agent hopes for something, in a Kantian sense, that the agent has the possibility of bringing into existence.³⁵ Hope for the future involves our choice to act morally and faith in the possibility that we can live up to the demands of reason. We are permitted to hope for progress on the condition that we strive to act in accordance with the demands of morality.

Hope articulates the possibility of human unity by projecting an ideal in which the highest good—itself a synthetic union of virtue and happiness—renders the human good thinkable as a unity. It envisions the human, not as already unified, but as capable of unification through the moral striving that makes one worthy of happiness, even when happiness seems opposed to reason’s law. From this perspective, hope transforms indignation at humankind’s apparent monstrosity—the seeming conflict between our rational vocation and our animal condition—into a recognition that reason’s ends may bear a purposive relation to nature’s finite sphere. The hopeful standpoint thus answers the question of human purpose without reducing reason to mere instrumentality: It allows us to see moral striving as meaningfully, if imperfectly, realizable within the conditions of finitude. Kant’s anthropology of hope, in this sense, regards the monstrosity of the rational animal not as a source of despair but as a mark of dignity and wonder.

The Logic of History and the Theodicy of Reason

From the standpoint of despair, mere permission to hope is not yet a reason to hope, nor does it suffice to answer the threat of

misology and misanthropy. One form of despair turns outward, toward creation, God, and nature, asking why there is something rather than nothing. The feeling of *Unville*, however, has as much to do with the spectator's recoiling from the misuse of reason and the sense of reason's self-alienation. This misology doubles back and becomes a misanthropy that doubts the worth of the human species, questioning whether this particular kind of being is deserving of love or respect. Kant illustrates the effects of such doubt in his remarks on Moses Mendelssohn, whom he portrays as a man whose enlightened faith in progress collapses into disillusionment when he realizes that humanity, oscillating endlessly between virtue and vice, seems to remain "at the same level of morality."³⁶ The danger of this outlook is that history appears not tragic but farcical—no longer "moving and instructive" but absurd.³⁷ To see human history as farce is to lose not only affection for humanity but also respect for it. In this sense, misanthropy arises from misology: What the misanthrope hates in humanity is not mere weakness but reason itself—the faculty that ennobles the rational animal but also debases humanity through its misuse.

Kant seeks to transform these outlooks by altering the vantage point from which human duality is judged. The *idea for a universal history* depends on an interpretation of nature that allows moral striving to appear as supported rather than thwarted by the natural order. In this view, human beings are not powerless before their moral intentions; nature itself seems to cooperate, however obliquely, in their realization. This interpretive shift converts a history of moral futility into a history of moral possibility. Kant's historical theodicy thus becomes a defense of the human being as a rational animal—a being whose apparent contradictions serve a purposive role within nature's larger design. In vindicating humanity, Kant's theodicy of reason also gestures toward a justification of creation itself. Returning to *Idea*, Kant claims that

[a philosophic history] will clear the way for (what, without presupposing a plan of nature [*Naturplan*], one cannot reasonably [*Grunde*] hope [*hoffen*] for) a comforting view

[*Aussicht*] of the future, one in which we represent from afar how the human species finally works its way up to the state where all the seeds nature has planted in it can be developed fully and in which the species' vocation here on earth can be fulfilled. Such a *justification/defense* of nature [*Rechtfertigung der Natur*]*—*or, better, of *providence**—*is no unimportant motive for adopting a particular perspective [*Gesichtspunkt*] in observing the world [*Weltbetrachtung*].³⁸

By reexamining history to find evidence that progress is possible for the human race, Kant provides the reflective spectator with evidence that supports the possibility that nature, and even providence, can be justified (*Rechtfertigung*).³⁹ Such justification aims to show not just that nature is not to blame for the human being's miserable condition but that nature positively supports the development of human reason.⁴⁰ Finding "ground" (*Grunde*) for hope requires more, however, than finding evidence to support the possibility of progress; it mandates the adoption of a new perspective for one's "world-viewing" (*Weltbetrachtung*).

This change in perspective is central to the "justification" (*Rechtfertigung*), a word that has connotations of a legal defense. The theodicy of reason is akin to putting reason on trial and demanding it account for itself. In this way, the historical theodicy echoes the "trial of reason" that structures the critical philosophy itself: a juridical drama in which reason must justify its own authority before the tribunal of reason, a motif that binds Kant's moral, theoretical, and historical writings into a single coherent enterprise. In *On the Miscarriage of Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1791), Kant makes the connection explicit. In addition to the use of *Rechtfertigung* and speaking of the "would-be advocate [*Sachwalter*] of God," Kant calls theodicy a "juridical process [*Rechtshandel*] instituted before the tribunal [*Gerichtshof*] of reason."⁴¹ The questioner of God is a sort of plaintiff, and Kant, as author of a theodicy, is an advocate of the "accused" (*angeklagten*) party, which in the case of the historical theodicy is human reason.

The task of the defense is not to prove the existence of God's goodness; it is to dispel the arguments against the counter-purposiveness of the world—to provide reasonable doubt of God's guilt.⁴² The prosecutors in the context of the historical theodicy are the reflective person and the misanthrope or what they personify.

Historical theodicy does not respond theoretically to the questions concerning the justification of reason but, like the limitations posed on theodicy in *MT*, offers a sort of "practical" theodicy.⁴³ According to *MT*, traditional (or "doctrinal") theodicies must fail as a consequence of the boundaries imposed on reason; yet Kant leaves open the possibility of an "authentic" (*authentische*) theodicy that interprets nature as having purposiveness that corresponds to the concept of a purposive will underlying creation. The seeker of justification is not permitted to know how such a will acts in nature, but such an authentic interpretation "gives meaning to the letter of [God's] creation."⁴⁴ The demands of practical reason guide an authentic theodicy. Whereas theodicy, strictly speaking, seeks to defend the "justice of God," Kant's historical theodicy seeks to defend nature's beneficence and support the actions of the moral agent. Kant's authentic historical theodicy acts as an "*interpretation* of nature"; it is a defense against the charge that the world is "counter-purposive" to reason's interests.⁴⁵

In defending the accused, which in the case of history is both nature and the human species, Kant supposes that there must be some logic that makes orderly the chaotic appearance of history. Kant seeks a vantage point that can provide a "guiding thread" (*Leitfaden*). This new vantage point from which to observe the world's course becomes the projected end of history, the highest good, toward which the guiding thread leads.⁴⁶ While individuals may act unpredictably and toward contrary ends, they often "unconsciously proceed toward an unknown common end."⁴⁷ The dual and indeterminate nature of the human being makes finding this guiding thread difficult. However, this indeterminacy of the human being, which makes a justification of reason necessary, is also the heart of Kant's defense of human reason.

Kant's search for a logic underlying human history that makes hope in progress feasible leads him to consider that the species proceeds according to an objective of nature. Nature's aim, in part, is to encourage in all creatures the development of their "natural capacities" (*Naturanlagen*) in conformity with their end.⁴⁸ In the case of human beings, we are encouraged to develop our "reason" (*Vernunft*), which seeks to "extend the rules and objectives of the use of all of its powers far beyond natural instinct."⁴⁹ Nature paradoxically tutors the faculty in human beings that transcends the instincts given to them by nature. Humans are pushed toward a state of freedom wherein they no longer need to rely on the laws of natural instinct but can act according to the laws of reason.

Nature encourages this development through two mechanisms: first, its stinginess, a mechanism of external nature; and second, "unsocial sociability," a mechanism internal to our own nature. Both mechanisms provide an interpretation of nature whereby something rational and good arises out of a process that appears chaotic or bad. They both rely on humankind's indeterminate status as dual beings driven by both natural instinct and reason.

First, nature encourages the species to develop its capacities through its seeming lack of benevolence. Nature is "not prodigal in the use of means to her ends" and declares that the human being should "bring [everything] out of himself completely [*gänzlich aus sich selbst herausbringen*]."⁵⁰ Nature's "delight in the greatest frugality" with respect to the human being tutors the human being in self-sufficiency.⁵¹ That we must rely on artifice for existence, in providing food, shelter, and clothing, shows the way in which we rely on a self-making activity even before the development of rationality. If the human being ever works himself up to "inner perfection in his way of thinking [*Denkungsart*] and thereby to happiness," then it is he alone who would "have the entire credit for it and would have only himself to thank."⁵² Nature is indeed "step-motherly" insofar as it provides the human not even with the means to keep warm nor with the proper tools for subsistence. Yet

being a good tutor, nature's miserliness aims at the human being's "rational self-esteem."

However, Kant claims that without further means of motivation, we would be content to stop short of developing our rational capacity and live the life of the "Arcadian shepherd, in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love."⁵³ This does not sound so bad, especially compared with Kant's insistence on the "glittering miseries" of civilization; yet such a life is not rational and would closely resemble, Kant argues, animal life. Kant's image of the Arcadian shepherd exemplifies the problem of history. Since the human being's purpose involves its "rational nature" (*vernünftige Natur*), there would be an "emptiness of creation" (*das Leere der Schöpfung*) if we remained in this state of Arcadian bliss. The Arcadian life—which calls to mind a nostalgic past that often accompanies Rousseauian critiques of civilization—is pleasurable, to be sure, but not for this reason a proper response to the sorrowing spectator. An image of the human life as best lived in Arcadia cannot think the concept of the human; it is more nostalgic than hopeful, taking pleasure, not the ends of reason, as the standard by which to judge the worth of human life. The promise of the possible absence of suffering cannot justify creation—there can be no theodicy on hedonistic grounds.⁵⁴ To think the Arcadian life as simply superior is to overlook the problems that beset reason by its very nature. It is to forget the *Memento Mori* of *Et in Arcadia ego*.

Still, humans "desire harmony" and must be willed into productive discord by nature.⁵⁵ We want the unity that the image of Arcadia seems to promise. Kant justifies the loss of the Arcadian life—if it ever truly existed—by showing that the Arcadian image has the same mistaken conception of reason as the despairing misanthrope or sorrowful misologist. He seeks to show us the goodness of leaving Arcadia behind. The first step in this demonstration is his introduction of "unsocial sociability" (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*), the tension within human nature between the desire to enter into society and the resistance of society to individual desires—or the tensions between individuals competing for limited resources—that forces people to develop rational capacities for the

sake of competitive gain.⁵⁶ The desire for honor, wealth, or power drives people away from the contented but lazy life of the Arcadian shepherd and motivates the movement from “barbarism to culture.”⁵⁷ As the desires and modes of recognition within society become more sophisticated, people respond in more sophisticated or civilized ways. Through the force of unsocial sociability, talents become developed, taste is cultivated, and moral feeling is evolved.

Through a beneficial antagonism, the human race is driven to lay a path for the establishment of a “way of thinking [*Denkungsart*] that can in time convert the coarse, natural disposition for moral discrimination into definite practical principles, and thereby change a society driven together by necessity into a *moral* whole.”⁵⁸ The irrational and often immoral antagonism between human beings sets the course for political progress; the natural, instinctual, and self-interested bonds of the political community are replaced by rational principles. In other words, Kant’s interpretation of nature argues that humanity’s competitive instincts, its envy, ambition, vanity, and *amour-propre* all prove to be essential to the rational, moral, and political development of the species. This mechanism underlying the development of history vindicates the “wise creator,” for in such a course we see a benevolent design and not “the hand of a malicious spirit who fiddled with the creator’s masterful arrangement.”⁵⁹

The benevolence is apparent, however, only if one is aware of the end of reason. The vindication of the wise creator, or the “step-motherly” ways of nature, or even the naturally detestable characteristics of the human being, provides grounds for a rational faith in the goodness of nature and the possible efficacy of our moral action. Rather than seeing nature as indifferent and humanity as vicious, as these things seem to us at first glance, Kant’s interpretation of the course of human events provides evidence that history can be seen as a “realization of a hidden plan of nature.”⁶⁰ This possibility of a guiding thread of nature permits us to hope.⁶¹

Kant often draws a comparison between the course of human events and the regularity of the heavenly bodies. He provides content for hope by claiming that we can both see order in past

human events and predict the future course of progress, just as we are able to predict the cycles of the planets. Kant writes that “based on the premise that the universe has a systematic structure,” we are permitted to “justifiably conclude that such a cycle actually exists.”⁶² This analogy to the heavenly bodies helps draw out another aspect of Kantian history—it is a correction of our sight. The new perspective (*Gesichtspunkt*) provides a corrective on our natural but faulty vision of history. With the articulation of nature’s plan, made possible by viewing it from this new vantage point, the spectator can see that the human race enters a new stage in history. Self-conscious of nature’s plan, we can now act in accordance with nature’s purpose—a purpose that aims to support the transcendental end of reason.⁶³

The account of the transition from an unconscious stage to a self-conscious stage of history is central to the moral and political effectiveness of Kant’s account of history insofar as it encourages future (and present) action. Kant insists that at the “halfway point” of our rational and moral development, we must rely less on the beneficence of nature. Having begun to make nature’s plan conscious to ourselves, we take the fate of progress largely into our own hands. After orienting ourselves by telling a story about human history and the history of reason, we can work to bring our actions into alignment with Kant’s hopeful narrative.

The various mechanisms underlying the course of human history provide grounds for the possibility of progress. At the very least, Kant’s historical theodicy justifies human existence up to the point of his writing. In the transition from an unconscious stage of history to a newly self-conscious stage, there arises a new challenge to the orderly course of the world—namely, the species must now begin to transform its own actions so that they accord with moral law. The progress of history is a moral project that remains incomplete (and must remain incomplete, given its asymptotic character). As Yirmiyahu Yovel notes, for Kant “[the universe] exists for the sake of the moral system that it has yet to become.”⁶⁴ Such a view of history shows that the ways of God, nature, and the human being would be justified completely only once history achieves its

telos. Historical progress could be characterized, then, as the unfolding of theodicy in time—a not-yet-completed defense of the place of human rationality in the world.

Kant's Ennobling of Modern Political Thought

We are now in a place to understand how Kant's attempt to address the philosophical problem of despair addresses the political problem of despair. The institutional arrangements that Kant argues best situate us to realize reason's regulative ideals are of a liberal character—a view he argues especially in his late writings. Kant has, to be sure, his illiberal or even reactionary moments, and Howard Williams goes so far as to say his liberalism is “qualified.” Williams writes, “In principle Kant is a liberal, but in practice he is often conservative and authoritarian.”⁶⁵ Williams has in mind such features as Kant's limiting of the voting franchise to propertied males or his arguments against revolution or violent resistance to the state, even under extreme conditions of tyranny. Whatever the worth of the arguments behind these positions, such moments can be made consistent with Kant's overall commitment to an understanding of political liberty that agrees with the basic principles of modern liberalism. The hopeful perspective that holds out the morality and prudence of slow reform over revolutionary actions allows one to understand these more conservative moments as an example of Kant's prudential politics, of adapting a commitment to universal moral principles to the contingencies of the time. Hence, Williams calls Kant's politics dualistic insofar as he favors liberal principles while defending the empirical state's gradual development toward a liberal ideal.⁶⁶ One could certainly argue whether Kant is a liberal in practice, but he is certainly a liberal in principle.⁶⁷

It is for good reason, then, that Kant is often classified as a liberal theorist. The course of history moves toward a “universal civil society, administered in accord with right,”⁶⁸ Kant has argued, and this argument became, as Manfred Kuehn writes, the civil religion of the modern West.⁶⁹ For Kant, such a society consists of an international federation of states, where each state possesses the

“highest possible degree of *freedom under external laws* combined with the irresistible power, that is, a perfectly *rightful civil constitution*.”⁷⁰ Kant describes the attainment of this constitution as nature’s “supreme task” set for “the human species,” for it is only under such a constitution that “the highest attainable development of mankind’s capacities can be achieved.”⁷¹ This “perfectly rightful civil constitution,” as it is described in *Idea*, resembles a liberal state. In addition, in *TPP* Kant defines republicanism as the “political principle whereby executive power is separated from legislative power.”⁷² These powers must be separated and representative—that is, those in power govern the people on their behalf. All other governments, Kant contends, are despotic and “without form.” Kant eventually puts forward a model of republican government that incorporates more democratic processes, argues for the separation of powers, and understands government as representative.⁷³

Kant’s insistence on the positive political effects of antisocial tendencies—summarized politically in his famous statement that “the problem of organizing a nation” can be solved for “a people comprised of devils”—reflects the traditional liberal thought that self-interest can be channeled to support lawfulness.⁷⁴ Kant relies on the natural antagonism of human nature to bring humanity to the position where it can erect republican constitutions. Accordingly, the tension between the human being’s selfish inclinations and reason that drives the underlying mechanism of history informs the political actor in any attempt to advance progress. Faced with the “crooked wood” of human nature from which “nothing straight can be fashioned,” the political actor’s highest hopes would be tempered and a prudence regarding the difficulties of politics encouraged.⁷⁵

Recent commentators on Kant’s idea of history have focused on the relationship between the requirements of morality and liberal politics or have argued that Kant’s philosophy of history, in which a regulative ideal of reason determines the interpretation of political events, can be used to inform political judgment. Dilek Huseynzadegan, for example, argues that Kantian history is a heuristic that guides political judgment and action.⁷⁶ However,

more than a useful heuristic, the historical essays provide a representation of the critical account of the human being—that is, the idea of progress presents Kant’s attempt to reflect on how transcendental freedom is embodied in the historical, contingent world. This view of Kantian progress highlights an overlooked dimension of the political utility of Kant’s philosophy of history. Kant’s anthropology of hope, as an account of the moral striving at the heart of human life, provides the ordinary citizen with the conditions for moral meaning. It bolsters faith in the world’s rationality and supports our hopes in the possibility of rational self-government.

Kantian history provides a standpoint from which the low aspects of human nature can be understood to contribute to a moral vision of politics that gives a fair hearing to our noblest aspirations. Contentment with the “course of human things as a whole” means fundamentally to believe that everyone has “a part to play that is both his own and well within his powers.”⁷⁷ Velkley contends that Kant reintroduces notions of the “noble and sacred” into modern political thought, giving the human something to look up to and pursue from the low but solid ground of instrumental self-interest.⁷⁸ It is not hard to see how Kant’s political idealism—which retains in the doctrine of unsocial sociability much of the anthropological viewpoint of early modernity—has influenced Western liberalism’s understanding of its place in the international order, the goals it ought to pursue, and how it ought to pursue them. In pursuing ideals, which have their grounding in the self-projection of reason, we find the purpose not just of the moral and political but of human life as such. As Church notes, the progress of human history provides a common project that serves civic life and provides purpose to our political projects; the moral end unifies our disparate natural ends, providing a sense of coherence and unity necessary for a meaningful life.⁷⁹

Part of what makes the pursuit of these noble aspirations meaningful is the way one must always contend with the limitations of our finite nature. That the purpose of human life is to strive to realize an end that it has a duty to achieve but can never fully or adequately bring into existence is certainly a hard burden to bear.

Some have even characterized it as heroic. Vittorio Hösle writes that “what is magnificent about Kant is that he raised every human being to the level of a tragic hero.”⁸⁰ Whether the Kantian human being can be said to be either a hero or a tragic figure depends on how one understands what it means to dwell in hope.⁸¹ But Hösle’s statement brings out how hope is not simply an overcoming of despair, for it retains an element of dissatisfaction with one’s condition insofar as it seeks to overcome the given. If indignation is the heart of despair, it might also be said that despair is the heart of hope.⁸² Still, Hösle’s assertion shows how hopeful moral striving is for Kant the condition of universal human dignity—that is, the dignity of moral and political life arises from the possibility of overcoming the conditions of our finite nature as we pursue the infinite ideals of reason. In this way, Kant transforms the indignation at human duality into an affirmation of the goodness of creation.

Kant’s anthropology of hope thus gives an interpretation of the foundational tenets of modern liberal political thought that helps one conceive of political life in terms of moral striving. The human being’s condition of deficiency means that humans hope to overcome the given conditions of their existence by becoming truly responsible for these conditions through the process of self-making. Kantian politics entails an anthropology that understands the human as the creature that “brings everything out of itself” and posits another more moral world.⁸³ As Zachary Calhoun writes, “To posit a world is, in short, to be a human being in the Kantian sense of the term.”⁸⁴ This understanding of reason’s task in the world, and the obstacles toward its realization, provides meaning to the moral agent by endowing the ordinary human life with something approaching heroic dignity.

In sum, Kant’s historical essays, taken together, present an answer to the fourth critical question that cannot simply be gathered from a reading of the critical works, even if this answer is qualified by the caveat that the unity of the human is thought in light of a regulative idea of reason or through the indeterminate activity of reflective judgment. It presents the human being as the not-yet-complete being, always striving to overcome the limitations

of its given existence. In this way, the concept of hopefulness helps us comprehend the moral drama of our struggle to realize our essence as rational beings. Accordingly, the practical account of history provides a guiding thread for the theoretical task of comprehending the human being and thus of providing a rational account of the whole. The highest aims of philosophy, Kant argues, are bound up with the question of hope.

Conclusion

This article has offered a way of interpreting Kant's writings on progress that shows their continued philosophical and political relevance. While a recent resurgence of interest in Kant's account of progress emphasizes its moral and political utility, few commentators reflect on the philosophical significance of Kant's historical writings and therefore underemphasize that Kant's defense of reason—in both its proper theoretical and practical employments—is at the heart of his political thought. It is a defense and account of reason that extends from the critical writings to his most public and rhetorical writings. Indeed, Kant's entire philosophical corpus, including his political thought, presents a theodicy of reason and thereby a justification of the meaning of human existence. The interpretation offered here thus contributes to the ongoing dialogue on Kant and liberalism by recovering in his philosophy of history a moral anthropology of hope that grounds liberal politics not in progress as fact but in the enduring task of sustaining faith in reason.

Understanding that this concern is the animating principle of Kant's thought helps us more fully appreciate his writings on historical progress. Kantian progress is not useful for us insofar as it provides us hope; rather, it is useful because it helps us understand the inherent tendencies toward despair that beset the rational animal and how these tendencies undermine political participation. These tendencies are heightened when one assumes, as Kant does, certain presuppositions inherent to the liberal anthropology regarding the natural ends of the human being and the neutral stance toward any possible account of the hierarchy of

goods. Human reason, as understood by the philosophy of early modernity, tends to question and do violence to itself, especially when confronted with its apparent disjunction with the natural world. Kant recognizes the self-undermining logic of modern political thought and attempts to provide a bulwark against its collapse. Contemporary defenders of liberalism can learn from Kant by understanding that the cause of the growing disaffection with liberalism is more often than not a dissatisfaction with its account of reason.

In recovering Kant's theodicy of reason as an anthropology of hope, this article reorients the study of Kant and liberalism toward the moral-psychological conditions of political life, suggesting that the endurance of liberal society depends less on faith in progress than on the disciplined maintenance of hope in the face of reason's limits. Any interpretation of Kant's political philosophy would benefit by taking as its point of entry the question of hope as it relates to the theodicy of reason or the problem of despair. It seems unlikely that turning to Kant's reflections on progress will restore some metaphysical-historical ideology of liberal progressivism—an ideology that seems to have failed—and yet, such reflections can instruct us in understanding the culture that asks the question of human purpose from the vantage point of despair. The idea of progress will continue to appear empty and dead if one overlooks the need that it sought to address. If one reads these works less as a doctrinal statement on history and more as poetic-philosophical works reflecting on the question of what it means to be human, one finds that they still have the power to encourage a better appreciation of the dignity and goodness of the rational animal.

Notes

1. *CJ* 5:442. Translations of Kant follow the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Citations follow the standard Akademie pagination (volume:page number), except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is cited by the A edition of 1781 and/or the B edition

of 1787. Abbreviations: *CPR*=*Critique of Pure Reason*; *CPrR*=*Critique of Practical Reason*; *CJ*=*Critique of Judgment*; *Idea*=*Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*; *QE*=*What Is Enlightenment?*; *Groundwork*=*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; *CBH*=*Conjectural Beginnings of Human History*; *Theory*=*Theory and Practice*; *MT*=*On the Miscarriage of Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*; *TPP*=*Toward Perpetual Peace*; *MM*=*Metaphysics of Morals*; *CF*=*Conflict of the Faculties*; *JL*=*Jäsche Logic*.

2. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum, 2007), 385.
3. *CBH* 8:120–8:121.
4. See Dilek Huseyinzađegan, *Kant's Nonideal Theory of Politics* (Northwestern University Press, 2019). Huseyinzađegan examines Kant's account of history as a still vibrant and flexible “nonideal” theory of politics. See also, Jeffrey Church, *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford University Press, 2022). Church turns to Kant's precritical anthropology lectures, in which he finds the nascent origins of Kantian progress, to provide a form of “meaningful liberalism.” See also Paul T. Wilford and Samuel A. Stoner, eds., *Kant and the Possibility of Progress: From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). This volume considers the development of Kantian progress before turning to criticisms and appropriations of this idea in post-Kantian thought.
5. See *Groundwork* 4:395–4:396 for Kant's account of how misology arises under the conditions of modern philosophy.
6. I take this formulation from Ant3n Barba-Kay, *A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 21.
7. In this claim, I build upon the argument in Nicholas A. Anderson, “A Preface to the *First Critique*: Reason's Desire and Kant's Political History of Metaphysics,” *Review of Politics* 87, no. 1 (2025): 1–25; see esp. 21–22.
8. Richard Velkley, *Being After Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 50, 52, 57. Velkley is not the only one to notice the dynamics behind the need to justify reason in Kant's thought. Theodor Adorno, e.g., claims that Kant was motivated by a “rescuing urge,” seeking to save reason from itself. Adorno claims that Kant's thought is “an attempted intervention in the dialectics of enlightenment, at the point where this dialectics terminates in the abolition of reason” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 385).
9. *TPP* 8:343; *Theory* 8:309; *Idea* 8:27; *CJ* 5:432.

10. See Richard Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); see also Church, *Meaning of Life*, 29–52.
11. Such concerns can be seen as early as Kant's *Remarks on the Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, written mostly in 1765. However, in the early anthropological period Kant first tries to work out a more systematic account of human history.
12. Church, *Meaning of Life*, 71.
13. See Church, *Meaning of Life*, 54–58, for an account of Kant's challenge to the contemplative life as the proper end of human life. Consider also his famous account of being “turned upright” by Rousseau. See also *CJ* sec. 86.
14. Church, *Meaning of Life*, 53.
15. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Dover, 2003), 295.
16. *Idea* 8:17–8:18
17. *CBH* 8:116.
18. *Idea* 8:27.
19. *CBH* 8:116n.
20. See Kant's claim at *Idea* 8:17 that human beings proceed neither “merely instinctually” nor yet completely rationally like “rational citizens of the world.” This is the immediate context for his description of the spectator's indignation. Consider also Theses 1–3 of *Idea*, where Kant shows that what is distinctive about the human species is its ability to transcend instinct and develop capacities indefinitely. The species itself is indeterminate insofar as one cannot know in advance what it will make of itself.
21. *Idea* 8:30.
22. *CPR* A805/B833.
23. *CPrR* 5:31.
24. *CPrR* 5:4. Kant's emphasis.
25. *CJ* 5:427.
26. See *CPR* A50/B74.
27. *JL* 8:25.
28. *JL* 8:25.
29. While fleshing out this argument goes beyond the scope of this article, I suggest that one key difference between the accounts of progress in the 1780s and 1790s is that through his articulation of reflective judgment, Kant has more philosophical resources to argue for the theoretical and speculative merits of his account of progress. The human being cannot be cognized conceptually through determinate judgment but can be thought and represented by the tools of reflective judgment—which

might include an aesthetic representation of the human through the use of an aesthetic idea. While Kant is better able to articulate this aesthetic possibility in the 1790s, it seems to be nascent in the historical writings of the 1780s, including *Idea*, but especially in the reimagining of *Genesis* in *CBH*.

30. *CPR* A813/B841.
31. An “ideal” is an idea, a pure concept of reason that has no corresponding experience, that is instantiated in a determinate instance or particular symbol or person. To use Kant’s own example, virtue is an idea, but the “sage of the Stoics” is an ideal—a “human being who exists merely in thoughts” (*CPR* A570/B598). The highest good is an idea, whereas the particular instances of the end of progress, eternal peace or a cosmopolitan whole, are ideals.
32. *CPR* A570/B598. Cf. *CPrR* 5:113.
33. *CPrR* 5:113. Kant’s emphasis.
34. *MM* 6:350. Kant’s emphasis.
35. Hope is distinguished from a mere “wish” insofar as we can work to bring its object into existence (even if only gradually). In other words, hope is a choice, which Kant defines as “one’s consciousness of the ability to bring about its object by one’s action,” opposed to a wish, which is “not joined with this consciousness [of the ability to bring about its object by one’s action]” (*MM* 6:350).
36. *Theory* 8:308.
37. *Theory* 8:308.
38. *Idea* 8:30 (Ninth Thesis). Kant’s emphasis.
39. In these writings, Kant often plays with the notion of providence and its distinction from progress. He speaks of providence, as in this quotation, while making the reader aware that to truly speak of it in an authoritative manner would surpass the limits of reason. In *TPP*, he compares speaking of providence to donning the “wings of Icarus,” whereas speaking of progress as rooted in a reflective judgment of the purposiveness of nature (as in secs. 83–84 of *CJ* or *TPP* 8:360–8:368) or as an interpretation of nature in accordance with a regulative principle of practical reason reflects the moderation of Daedalus (*TPP* 8:362).
40. Kant uses this language of justification in other political and historical writings as well. He states in *CBH* that a certain “picture of man’s history” (*Darstellung seiner Geschichte*) teaches us that we are not justified (*berechtigt*) in blaming “providence for the evil that oppresses him” (*CBH* 8:123). As late as *TPP*, Kant writes, “Given that the human race never can be and never will be in a better condition, it seems

impossible to be able to use a theodicy [*Theodizee*] to provide any justification [*gerechtfertigt*] whatsoever for creation, namely, that such a race of generally corrupt beings should have been put on earth" (*TPP* 8:380). Kant remains consistent in the idea that such a justification requires a change in vantage point from which one views history.

41. *MT* 8:255.
42. *MT* 8:256.
43. For my reading of Kantian history as a form of theodicy or justification, I am indebted to Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2002); and Paul T. Wilford, "A Look at Kantian Theodicy: Rational Faith and the Idea of History," *American Dialectic* 4, no. 2 (2014): 172–203.
44. *MT* 8:264.
45. *MT* 8:264. Kant's emphasis.
46. *Leitfaden* is the word Kant uses to describe the way in which the practical side of the question of hope "leads like a clue to a reply" to the theoretical aspects of the question. History, like the question of hope, is at once practical and theoretical.
47. *Idea* 8:17.
48. See *Idea*, First Thesis.
49. *Idea* 8:18–8:19 (Second Thesis).
50. *Idea* 8:19 (Third Thesis).
51. *Idea* 8:20.
52. *Idea* 8:20.
53. *Idea* 8:21 (Fourth Thesis).
54. The passage on the Arcadian shepherd anticipates Kant's arguments regarding the end of creation in secs. 84–86 of *CJ*. There Kant gives systematic arguments accounting for why freedom—and not happiness, contemplation, or pleasure—must be considered the end of the human, and thereby the end of creation.
55. *Idea* 8:21.
56. Many commentators locate the phrase's source in Montaigne's essay "Of Solitude." Montaigne writes, "There is nothing more unsociable than Man, and nothing more sociable: unsociable by his vice, sociable by his nature."
57. *Idea* 8:21.
58. *Idea* 8:21. Kant's emphasis.
59. *Idea* 8:22.
60. *Idea* 8:27 (Thesis Eight).

61. In *TPP*, Kant refers not to “unsocial sociability” but to “nature’s guarantee,” a mechanism more explicitly informed by his teleological account of nature in the *CJ*. However, like *Idea*, he presents an account of how antagonism is beneficial to human development. In particular, Kant discusses the paradoxical goodness of war. War works toward the end of peace, first, by spreading the human race across the globe, thereby making use of all of the habitable, if at first inhospitable, land; and second, by forcing human beings into society for the pragmatic sake of mutual protection, which in turn leads to the (eventual) discovery of the modern state and republican constitutions.
62. *Idea* 8:27.
63. Here the concluding image of the *Enlightenment* essay is instructive. Kant writes that “nature has unwrapped, from under this hard shell, the seed for which she cares most tenderly, namely the propensity and calling to *think* freely (*QE* 8:41; Kant’s emphasis). That is, nature has developed human reason to the point that it can understand nature’s purpose and begin to lead itself toward its final end.
64. Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton University Press, 1980), 80.
65. Howard Williams, *Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Basil Blackwell, 1983), 128.
66. Williams, *Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 128.
67. In reading Kant as a liberal, I follow such scholars as Church, Huseinzadegan, and Pauline Kleingeld.
68. *Idea* 8:22 (Thesis Five).
69. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 385.
70. *Idea* 8:22. Kant’s emphasis.
71. *Idea* 8:22. Later Kant refers to this federation of republican constitutions, the “universal cosmopolitan state,” as “the womb in which all of the species’ original capacities will be developed” (*Idea* 8:28).
72. *TPP* 8:352.
73. As Pauline Kleingeld notes, Kant moves away from an emphasis on the “good will” of an authoritative figure in *Idea* toward more classically liberal notions of institutionalism where he even states the case for self-interest rightly understood more strongly than many other prominent liberals. See Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 174–75.
74. *TPP* 8:366. It should be noted that the devils possess “understanding” but not reason. This is significant insofar as reason is bound up with moral

law and so the hopes and ideals springing from it. The constitutional framework in which ambition is made to counteract ambition is not sufficient to satisfy reason's practical needs.

75. *Idea* 8:23.

76. See Huseyin zadegan, *Kant's Nonideal Theory of Politics*, and her exposition of what she calls Kant's "nonideal theory of politics"; following her, I understand Kant's idea of history as a bridge between his "ideal practical philosophy," found in his doctrine of right (*Recht*), and certain prudential and anthropological observations about the human being. In some sense, her argument follows Williams in having a "dualistic" reading of Kant's politics.

77. *CBH* 8:123.

78. Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason*, 135.

79. See Church, *Meaning of Life*, esp. 72–94, for an account of "meaning" in Kant. While I agree with much of Church's excellent analysis—which has informed this essay—I argue that a transcendent source of morality and an account of reason's longings and hopes is necessary to provide an anthropology that can give human life, and liberal politics, meaning (to use Church's term). Church is wary of Kant's "questionable metaphysical premises," which seems to include arguments regarding the universal and transcendental status of the categorical imperative (12). However, it seems to me that only the anthropology of a postcritical Kant can provide the kind of meaning for moral and political life that Church seeks precisely because it better accounts for the end-setting and positing character of human reason. Church's account of Kant's anthropological morality as arising genealogically provides no standard by which to adjudicate between rival accounts of ethical action. Church's reading of Kant is not at odds with the critical Kant; rather, his precritical Kant is incorporated into the critical system through the writings on history, judgment, religion, and pragmatic anthropology. Any efforts to rehabilitate some form of doctrinal Kantianism to mount a defense of liberalism (which, to be clear, this essay is not trying to do) that does not begin with the account of reason as given in the critical writings seems destined to fail.

80. Vittorio Hösle, *A Short History of German Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 62.

81. The human situation would not be tragic if rational faith in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul can be justified. The relationship between Kant's account of progress and his theological commitments is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is clear that the anthropology

of hope inevitably leads to questions about the status of religion and the existence of a providential God. By contrast, morality commands without the promise of reward, and in this way the struggle at the heart of Kant's anthropology of hope helps us make sense of the experience whereby we must do what the law commands.

82. Andrew Chignell characterizes Kantian hopefulness as a "hopeful pessimism." See Andrew Chignell, "Hopeful Pessimism: The Kantian Mind at the End of All Things," in M. D. Eckel, T. Jardin, and A. Speight, eds., *Faith, Hope, Love: The Theological Virtues and Their Opposites* (Springer, 2022).
83. *Idea* 8:19. Quoted above.
84. Zachary Calhoun, "Kant on Positing: Being as Self-Determination," in *Review of Metaphysics* 73, no. 1 (Issue No. 289, September 2019).