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THE A PRIORI IN ETHICS: WHY DOES KANT WANT IT (AND DO WE NEED IT?)

Robert B. Loudon

Perhaps no philosophical concept in Kant's scheme has been less well understood than his concept of the a priori.

– Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*

Although Kant is well known for his core claim that the fundamental principle of morality must be a priori, he in fact subscribes to a much more radical version of this claim than many readers realize. On his view, morality remains a complete illusion unless and until we can show that it rests on an a priori principle: “that morality is no phantom of the brain [*kein Hirngespinnst*] [...] follows if the categorical imperative and with it the autonomy of the will, is true, and absolutely necessary as an *a priori* principle.” (GMS 4: 445). Indeed, it is his position that “all [*alle*] moral philosophy rests entirely [*gänzlich*] on its pure part” (GMS 4: 389); viz., its a priori part (KrVB 3), and that only the pure or a priori part belongs to “morals proper [*eigentlich Moral*]” (GMS 4: 388; KrV A 841-42/B 869-70). This latter claim has led some commentators to infer that the inclusion of “*practical anthropology*” or “the empirical part” (GMS 4: 388) within Kant's ethical theory is itself “problematic,” (ALLISON, 2011, p. 18, 66)¹ despite Kant's explicit claim elsewhere that “morality cannot exist [*nicht bestehen*] without anthropology” (V-Mo/Collins 27: 244). In making these strong assertions, Kant not only raises the hackles of empiricists in ethics who (as Mill notes at the beginning of *Utilitarianism*) deny that “the principles of morals are evident a priori” and assert that all moral questions “are questions of observation and experience” (MILL, 1998, p. 50), but in the eyes of many he seems to be <https://doi.org/10.36311/2020.978-85-7983-928-3.p157-172>

defending a lost cause. For it is no secret that many contemporary thinkers are “made queasy by the whole idea of the a priori.” (PEACOCKE, 2004, p. 505). Similarly, it is difficult to deny “the gloom which has enveloped the notion of a priori knowledge” in recent thought, and even some of those who “have tried to dispel the gloom” nevertheless still seek “to give the traditional doctrine the burial it deserves” (KITCHER, 1987, p. 207).

Meanwhile, even those who believe that the reports of the death of the a priori are greatly exaggerated often begin their resuscitation efforts by acknowledging that “the very idea of a *priori* epistemic justification has over the last century or so been the target of severe and relentless skepticism” (BONJOUR, 1998, p. 2).² In American philosophy, this skepticism is most often associated with Quine’s dictum that “no statement is immune to revision” (QUINE, 1987, p. 63), which has led many to conclude that “the very notion of a priori knowledge is philosophically misguided” (MOSEY, 1987, p. 1).³ And the vast majority of those contemporary philosophers who do reject Quine’s pronouncement by seeking to defend the a priori usually limit their efforts to carving out a modest role for the a priori within logic, mathematics and the mathematically oriented sciences.⁴ Contemporary efforts to show that *ethics* rests on the a priori in the radical sense that Kant subscribes to are not easy to find.⁵

Given all this, one might think it exceedingly quixotic to argue (as Allen Wood does) that Kant’s thesis “that ethics must be founded on an *a priori* principle of reason” is a “far more thoughtful and well-grounded” doctrine than critics realize (WOOD, 1999, p. xiv). But before we are in a position to assess this claim, we need to better understand Kant’s thesis. *Why* does he want the a priori in ethics, and *why* does he attach so much importance to it? In what follows, I will try to answer these questions in a way that does justice both to his convictions about the central importance of the a priori in ethics as well as to his belief that “the metaphysics of morals, or *metaphysica pura*, is only the first part of morals; the second part is *philosophia moralis applicata*, moral anthropology, to which the empirical principles belong. [...] Moral anthropology is morals applied to human beings” (V-Mo/Mron II 29: 599). Kantian ethical theory has both a pure and an impure part, and while the a priori and empirical parts should never be indiscriminately mixed with one another (GMS 4: 390), each part has a necessary and complementary role to play (GMS 4: 387, Refl 4993, 18: 54).⁶ All moral philosophy “needs [*bedarf*] anthropology for its *application* to human beings,” but it “must first be expounded independently of this as pure philosophy.” (GMS 4: 412).

THE KANTIAN A PRIORI: A PRIMER

Let's start by reviewing some rudimentary features of the Kantian a priori.⁷ For Kant, a priori cognitions are distinguished from empirical cognitions. The latter are based on the experience of particular objects; the former are not. Empirical cognitions are due to external data ["they presuppose sensations" (Refl 3955, 17: 364)], while a priori cognitions are due rather to something internal – viz., the faculties of the rational subject who has the cognitions [they "have their ground in the constant nature of the [...] thinking power of the soul" (Refl 3957, 17: 364)]. However, "internal" here does not mean innate. Kant insists that "the *Critique* admits absolutely no implanted or innate [*anerschaffene oder angeborne*] representations. One and all, whether they belong to intuition or to concepts of the understanding, it considers them as *acquired* [*erworben*]" (ÜE 8: 221).⁸

Because empirical cognitions are dependent on external data, they are always limited in two fundamental respects. First, their modality is always one of contingency, never necessity. As Kant notes in the first *Critique*, "experience teaches us, to be sure, that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise" (KrV B 3). "Necessity cannot present itself in experience" (Refl 5294, 28: 145). Here he is following Hume (1975): "*That the sun will not rise to-morrow* is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, *that it will rise*" (HUME, 1975, p. 25-26). Empirical cognitions cannot give us knowledge of necessary truths.⁹ Second, empirical cognitions never have "true or strict [*wahre oder strenge*] but only assumed and comparative **universality**" (KrV B 3). The simple, unvarnished word "all" is never quite at home in empirical judgments. The most we are entitled to say is: "of the data we've seen *thus far*, they're all this way." As Kant puts it, "properly it must be said: as far as yet perceived, there is no exception to this or that rule" (KrV B 3-4). "All As are Bs – at least for the ones we've seen thus far."

Putting these two points together, Kant then remarks: "Necessity and strict universality are therefore sure signs [*sichere Kennzeichen*] of an a priori cognition, and also belong together inseparably" (KrV B 4). However, even though these two signs "belong together inseparably" (if A is necessarily B, then all As will also be Bs), Kant also points out that it is often easier to display the universality of an a priori cognition than its necessity. As he puts it,

But since in their use it is sometimes easier to show the empirical limitation in judgments than the contingency in them, or is often more plausible to show the unrestricted universality that we ascribe to a judgment than its necessity, it is advisable to employ separately these two criteria, each of which is in itself infallible [*unfehlbar*].

Surprisingly, as we'll see in the next section, Kant follows this strategy in his discussion of the a priori in ethics. Whereas one might expect the primary accent to be placed on the feature of necessity in judgments of fundamental moral principle ("Hier steh' ich, ich kann nicht anders") (LUTHER, 1521), Kant in fact talks more about their unrestricted universality, thus placing more weight on the second sure sign than on its inseparable partner.

"WORLDS UNNUMBER'D"¹⁰

In his attempt to show that morality rests on an a priori principle, Kant repeatedly draws attention to the two sure signs of a priori cognition, necessity and universality. Unexpectedly – particularly for those who view Kantian ethics as a type of humanism – his discussion of universality frequently involves the explicit claim that moral judgments hold not just for all humans but also for all intelligent extraterrestrials. Even odder is his claim that this strong extraterrestrial assumption is not controversial or radical in any way. Rather, Kant views it as an obvious hypothesis that everyone accepts: "Everyone must admit [*Jedermann muß eingestehen*] that a law, if it is to hold morally, [...] does not hold just for human beings only, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it; and so with all remaining actual moral laws" (GMS 4: 389). Indeed, later he states that the very concept of morality lacks reference and is completely false unless one grants its transhuman status, and he seems to regard this statement as a necessary truth: "unless one wants to refuse the concept of morality all truth and reference to some possible object, one cannot deny that its law is so extensive in its significance that it must hold not merely for human beings but for *all rational beings in general* [*alle vernünftige Wesen überhaupt*]" (GMS 4: 408; see also 410n., 412, 426, 431, 442). Morality applies to humans not because they are members of the biological species *Homo sapiens*, but only because humans belong to the larger and more important set of rational beings: "since morality serves as a law for us only insofar as we are *rational beings*, it must hold for all rational beings

[*alle vernünftige Wesen*] as well” (GMS 4: 447). Morality “must [...] be valid for all rational beings,” and it is “*only because of this*” that it is also valid “for every human will” (GMS 4: 425). As a result – and contrary to what one might think Kant means when he refers to “the idea of humanity as *an end in itself*” (GMS 4: 429) – it is not just human beings that have this exalted status but “every other rational being” as well (GMS 4: 429, cf. 428). Rather than refer to the second formula of the moral law as “*The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself*,” (WOOD, 1999, p. xx) it would thus be more accurate to call it “the formula of rational nature as end in itself.”

When contemporary authors defend the a priori, they do not feel compelled to refer to extraterrestrials to make their case. They argue that there are things we know independently of experience, but they don’t see a need to extend the “we” beyond the human. However, in the case of Kant his defense of the a priori in ethics dovetails with his own strong belief in extraterrestrials. As other have noted, Kant “regularly summoned inhabitants of other planets, inviting them over and over again in his discourse” (SZENDY, 2014)¹¹ throughout his writing career, and he was far from the only Enlightenment philosopher to do so. It has been estimated that “nearly half the leading intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discussed extraterrestrial life issues in their writings” (CROWE, 2008, p. xvii)¹² It is also worth noting that Kant’s summoning of intelligent extraterrestrials is much more prominent in his defense of the a priori in ethics than in his defense of the a priori in theoretical philosophy. For instance, the “we” who “are in possession of certain *a priori* cognitions” (KrV B 3, see also Kant’s reference to “human cognition” at B 4) in the Introduction to the first *Critique* is clearly a human we, not a rational being we. Historian Michael Crowe notes that in the *Groundwork* Kant “repeatedly describes his goal as being to formulate an ethics applicable not just to mankind, but also to all ‘rational beings’. One reason for his emphasis on ‘rational beings’ was no doubt his conviction that extraterrestrials fitting that category exist” (CROWE, 1999, p. 54, 2008, p. 150-151). I concur, and the above analysis of Kant’s discussion of the universality of moral judgment in the *Groundwork* is intended to support this claim. But in making room for extraterrestrials in his ethics, Kant is not just endorsing a popular Enlightenment claim concerning “What vary’d Being people ev’ry star.”¹³ In addition, and more fundamentally, he is expressing his conviction that morality stretches far beyond, and is far more important than, humans and the peculiarities of their world: “moral laws [...] hold for all rational beings regardless of differences [*alle vernünftige Wesen ohne Unterschied*]” (GMS 4: 442).

When Kant discusses necessity – the second “infallible” criterion (KrV B 4) of a priori cognition – within his defense of the need for pure ethics, extraterrestrials appear once again:

Empirical principles are not fit to be the foundation of moral laws at all. For the universality with which they are to hold for all rational beings regardless of differences – the unconditional practical necessity [*unbedingte praktische Nothwendigkeit*] that is thereby imposed upon them – vanishes if their ground is taken from the *particular arrangement of human nature*, or the contingent circumstances in which it is placed. (GMS 4: 442).

The contingent features of the external environment in which moral agents happen to reside – regardless of whether they belong to the class of human beings or to “the most sublime classes of rational creatures that inhabit Jupiter or Saturn” (NTH 1: 359) – cannot determine their moral principles. “For duty ought to be the practical unconditional necessity [*praktisch-unbedingte Nothwendigkeit*] of action; thus it must be valid for all rational beings” (GMS 4: 425). The “absolute necessity [*absolute Nothwendigkeit*]” (GMS 4: 389) that all moral laws carry with them cannot be found in empirical judgments. A priori cognitions do not depend on external data, so the particular environment in which moral agents happen to reside – ecological, cultural, religious, economic, legal, etc. – cannot determine their moral judgments. In short, the external environment is irrelevant as far as the fundamental principles of morality go. A genuine moral principle is independent of all contingent environmental influence, and “like a jewel, it . . . [will] still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in it self” (GMS 4: 394). As Kant remarks in his *Moral Mrongovius II* lecture on ethics: “Morality cannot be constructed out of empirical principles, for this yields, not absolute, but merely conditional necessity [*nicht absolute sondern blos bedingte Nothwendigkeit*]. Morality says, however, you must do it, without any condition or exception” (V-Mo/Mron II 29: 599). But here too, it is noteworthy that Kant, in his quest for *absolute Nothwendigkeit* in ethics, feels compelled to go into outer space. Why wouldn’t an earthbound necessity that merely applies to all humans be sufficient?

The absolute or unconditioned necessity associated with moral laws also links up with Kant’s famous distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Unless judgments about moral duty really are examples of a priori

cognition, there would be no absolute necessity attached to them, for we can't get this kind of necessity from empirical judgments. "The imperative of *morality* [...] is not hypothetical at all, and thus the objectively represented necessity cannot rely on any presupposition, as in the case of hypothetical imperatives" (GMS 4: 419). "Any presupposition" here refers not just to the possibility that agents might change their minds and no longer desire the end for which the required act is a necessary means ("if you want X, then you must do Y"), but also to any contingent feature of the external environment ("if the external environment has feature X, then act Y must be done"). The categorical command to do Y holds regardless of desires and regardless of the contingent features of the world in which the agent resides is placed.

DIGNITY, SUBLIMITY, AND THE A PRIORI

When Kant discusses the a priori in his theoretical writings, he emphasizes primarily the epistemological distinction between a priori and empirical cognitions. As noted earlier, empirical cognitions depend on external data, whereas a priori cognitions depend only on the rational faculties of the agents who have the cognitions. However, in his practical writings he uses this epistemological distinction to argue that, when viewed from a practical point of view, a priori principles are superior to empirical ones. For the former have a motivational efficacy that the latter lack. Within the moral field, it is agents who act from a priori principles in performing their duties that represent the correct model, not those who act from empirical principles. An a priori or pure principle is "a desideratum of the highest importance for the actual carrying out [*wirklichen Vollziehung*]" of one's duties (GMS 4: 410), and "each time one adds anything empirical to" a priori moral concepts "one takes away as much from their genuine influence and from the unlimited worth of actions" (GMS 4: 411).

Why is this so? Acting from empirical principles is a sign of dependence, whereas acting from a priori principles is a sign of independence. In the former case, one does what one does because of contingent empirical desires or contingent features in the world. And precisely because these external factors are contingent, they can't always be counted on. "Morals themselves remain subject to all sorts of corruption" (GMS 4: 390; cf. 405) when agents are motivated by empirical principles, because such principles rest on contingent

factors that cannot reliably produce good actions. But when agents act from a priori principles, their action is not determined by these contingent factors but simply by their own reason. Rational agents' realization that they are capable of acting independently of empirical contingencies partly explains the superior motivational efficacy of practical a priori principles.

Kant's two favorite terms for describing the superior motivational efficacy of practical a priori principles are the familiar ones of dignity (*Würde*) and sublimity (*Erhabenheit*). Again and again in the *Groundwork* he attributes a dignity and sublimity to agents who act from a priori principles that is not ascribable to those who merely act from empirical principles. An a priori practical principle "has an influence on the human heart so much more powerful [*so viel mächtiger*] than all incentives one can summon from the empirical field that reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, regards the latter with contempt, and little by little can master them" (GMS 4: 410-11). Rational agents who are able to act from a priori principles possess a dignity that is missing in creatures that act only from empirical principles, and Kant is not shy in stressing this difference. "Every rational being, as an end in itself," has a "dignity (prerogative) above all merely natural beings [*bloßen Naturwesen*]" (GMS 4: 438). All rational beings, to a certain extent and to varying degrees, are able to gain independence from the vicissitudes of nature and the environment. Regardless of their psychological make-ups and regardless of what their world is like, they have the ability to try to do the right thing.

Dignity – to have "unconditional, incomparable worth" (GMS 4: 436), and to be "infinitely above any price" (GMS 4: 435) – is applied properly only to rational beings (see GMS 4: 434, 439, 440) and to morality (GMS 4: 442). "Morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself. [...] Thus morality and humanity, in so far as it is capable of morality, is that which alone [*allein*] has dignity" (GMS 4: 435). But because "all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely *a priori* in reason" (GMS 4: 411), all a priori moral principles therefore also have dignity (GMS 4: 405, 411, 425, 442), while empirical principles lack dignity.

"Sublimity" and "dignity," at least as Kant uses them in the *Groundwork*, have roughly the same meaning. For instance, in the following two passages, the terms are joined together by the word "and" in the same phrase: 1) "the sublimity and inner dignity of the command in a duty" (GMS 4: 425), 2) "a certain sublimity

and *dignity* in a person who fulfills all his duties” (GMS 4: 440). The context of the first passage is Kant’s claim that the sublimity and dignity of a moral command are proved “all the more, the less subjective causes are in favor of it, and the more they are against it” (GMS 4: 425). He is not quite saying here (as Schiller was later to accuse him of saying)¹⁴ that acts have moral worth only if agents act against their inclinations, but he is certainly saying that the dignity and sublimity of rational agency are easier to detect in cases where conduct is not influenced by any contingent empirical factors. Similarly, in the second passage, Kant notes that we “represent to ourselves a certain sublimity and *dignity* in the person who fulfills all his duties” in virtue of the fact that this person himself legislates the moral law that he follows (GMS 4: 440). Practical a priori principles, in other words, are autonomous, while empirical principles are heteronomous. And autonomy, as Kant argues later, “is the sole principle of morals” (GMS 4: 440). In both passages, it is rational agents’ capacity to free themselves from the constraints of the empirical that give them dignity and sublimity. Similarly, in Kant’s more extensive discussion of the sublime in the third *Critique*, he notes that in experiencing the sublime “the mind is incited to abandon sensibility” (KU 5: 246; cf. 250) and that we thereby “become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us).” (KU 5: 264).¹⁵ “Dignity” and “sublimity,” when used by Kant in moral contexts, thus jointly refer to a claimed superiority over nature and the empirical realm. And it is the ability of rational beings to act on practical a priori principles that reveals their dignity and sublimity.

TWO NECESSARY AND COMPLEMENTARY PARTS

Let us return now to a question posed earlier: Why does Kant attach so much importance to the a priori in ethics? The answer that emerges from the previous discussion is that it is a manifestation of his belief in the fundamental importance, strength, and far-reaching extension of morality throughout the universe. Wherever rational agents exist – regardless of their internal physiology, biology, psychology; regardless of the external natural or cultural environments they reside in – fundamental moral principles will register with them. This is of course not to suggest that there exists universal agreement or consensus on moral matters, for often we do not even find this locally between individual members of the same families, local communities, and nations. But it is to acknowledge that

“reason alone can command validly for everyone” (WDO 8: 145), and “everyone” here clearly stretches far beyond the merely human. Without the a priori, ethics is not secure. It remains subject to multiple contingencies that weaken, erode, and “corrupt” (GMS 4: 390, 405) its presence. Without the a priori, morality has no paramount authority in practical deliberation.¹⁶ This is why we need it.

However, other aspects of Kant’s message are perhaps not so appealing. Telling humans and other rational beings in a post-Darwinian era that they are “superior to nature” (KU 5: 264) and “above all merely natural beings” (GMS 4: 438) is unlikely to win many converts. For it is widely accepted now that humans *are* part of nature, not distinct from it. Those biological creatures on earth as well as elsewhere who, in virtue of their cognitive capacities, are able to follow reason and judge autonomously¹⁷ owe this ability to nature. Their cognitive capacity is itself an outgrowth of nature. And even if humans or their extraterrestrial neighbors or the future descendants of either group do eventually succeed in creating thinking machines (the prospect of which Kant himself was resolutely skeptical),¹⁸ these artificial rational agents will themselves be creations of intelligent organic beings. So even the possibility of artificial intelligence is an outgrowth of nature. However, it is not necessary for Kantians to insist that rational beings are somehow distinct from and superior to nature. What is necessary is to articulate a plausible conception of autonomy and freedom within nature. For freedom itself is a requirement of rationality: “Reason must view itself as the author of its principles, independently of alien influences; consequently it must be regarded by itself as free” (GMS 4: 448). And on this point too it should not surprise us to see Kant once again making room for extraterrestrials: “*Freedom must be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational beings [...]* it is not enough to establish it from certain supposed experiences of human nature” (GMS 4: 447-48; see also V-Mo/Collins 27: 244).

So yes, we need the a priori in ethics. Without it ethics is constantly in danger of becoming a mere “phantom of the brain [*Hirngespinnst*]” (GMS 4: 445); its presence is forever subject to fleeting contingencies. But, contrary to what commentators often claim,¹⁹ it by no means follows that we don’t also need “the second part” of morals, “moral anthropology, to which the empirical principles belong” (V-Mo/Mron II 29: 599). Both parts play necessary and complementary roles, and this is true of all areas of philosophy except logic (GMS 4: 387; Refl 4993, 18: 54). The a priori aspect of ethics concerns only its core principle,

which, like a priori principles elsewhere has the form of a strictly universal and necessary proposition that is cognizable independently of empirical data. But after one grasps this core principle, much difficult thinking in the ethical arena is still required – thinking that necessarily requires empirical data. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere,²⁰ the second, empirical part of ethics addresses four fundamental tasks:

1) *Hindrances and Helps* – locating “the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder or help them in carrying out the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (MS 6: 217; cf. GMS 4: 389). In other words, what are the specific hindrances to virtue that are to be found in the human being? What makes morality particularly difficult for this specific kind of creature, and what aids to moral development can the anthropologist offer?

2) *Moral Weltkenntnis*: teaching humans how to see a world with moral features so that they are able to develop their power of judgment and apply a priori principles efficaciously (GMS 4: 389; KpV 5: 154). In the Prolegomena to *Anthropology Collins*, Kant refers explicitly to the lack of *Weltkenntnis* as the reason “that so many practical sciences have remained unfruitful. For example, moral philosophy. [...] But most moral philosophers and clergymen lack this knowledge of human nature” (V-Anth/Collins 25: 9). Filling this gap is a central rationale behind Kant’s anthropology course, because moral theory “needs anthropology for its *application* to human beings” (GMS 4: 412).

3) *Moral Education and Character Development*: “The human being can only become human through education” (Päd 9: 443, cf. 441), and humans must be “*educated* to the good” (Anth 7: 325). The grounding of character “is the first effort in moral education” (Päd 9: 481). One of Kant’s more radical claims concerning human nature is that it is not a given but rather something that must be self-produced by the species. We are not born as moral creatures; rather each human being needs “to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences” (Anth 7: 324).

4) *The Moral Destiny (Bestimmung) of the Human Species*: providing humans with a moral map that describes both the long-term goal of humanity’s efforts and the major steps by means of which this goal is to be reached. Here the task is both to discover an aim “in this nonsensical

course of things human” (IaG 8: 18) and to trace our “true steps from crudity toward culture” (IaG 8: 21). Ultimately, this moral map charts a route toward the realization of our species’ predisposition toward “cosmopolitical unity,” a goal that “even with all the wars, [...] gradually in the course of political matters wins the upper hand over the selfish predispositions of people” (Anth 7: 412).²¹

Clearly, empirical knowledge is necessary for each of these four fundamental tasks. The a priori alone, even if it does enable us to prove that morality is not an illusion (GMS 4: 445), is not going to get us there. And while Kant discusses these four empirical tasks with reference to only *one* specific species of rational being; viz., *Homo sapiens*, this is because we have no empirical “knowledge of *non-terrestrial* rational beings” (Anth 7: 321, see also V-Anth/Busolt 25: 1437). However, there will necessarily be an analogue of this anthropological project for each species of rational being. Species-specific empirical knowledge is needed whenever and wherever a priori practical principles are applied to real-life situations.

Finally, the traditional picture of Kant as the philosopher who defends the necessity and importance of the a priori in all areas of human thought needs to be altered for a second fundamental reason. For his own conception of philosophy in the “cosmopolitan sense” (Log 9: 23, cf. V-Met-L2/Pölitz 28: 532) includes a strong empirical, anthropological dimension. This is a “worldly concept” of philosophy that includes reference to “the final ends of human reason” (Log 9: 23), and to know the ends of this particular species’ reasoning requires empirical knowledge. Furthermore, on Kant’s view it is only this worldly, cosmopolitan conception of philosophy that “gives philosophy *dignity*, i.e., an absolute worth” (Log 9: 23), and that also “gives worth to all the other sciences” (V-Met-L2/Pölitz 28: 532, cf. Log 9: 24). The “eye of true philosophy” (Anth 7: 227, cf. Log 9: 45) thus has both a priori and empirical components, and it is only when both constituents are granted their rightful place that philosophy in the Kantian sense can fulfill its mission.²²

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NOTAS / NOTES

- ¹ See also n. 19, below. For a counterargument, see Louden (2011).
- ² As his title indicates, Bonjour mounts a defense of the *a priori*. But conspicuously absent in his defense is any discussion of the need for the *a priori* in ethics.
- ³ See also Robert Hanna's "Concluding Un-Quinean Postscript," which responds to the Quinean-influenced skeptic who believes that "the very idea of the *a priori* is incoherent and untenable." (HANNA, 2001, p. 281).

- ⁴ See, e.g., the papers in *New Essays on the A Priori*, ed. Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke (2000). None of the contributors discusses a place for the a priori in ethics. Similarly, the Index in the recent collection, *The A Priori in Philosophy*, ed. Albert Casullo and Joshua C. Thurow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) contains no entries under “ethics” or “morality.” Bonjour’s “defense of pure reason” (see n.2) also does not mention the place of pure reason in ethics.
- ⁵ Peacocke is a notable exception. He begins his “Moral Rationalism” by stating: “Basic moral principles are known to us a priori. I will be arguing for this claim” (499), adding later that his thesis “is in the spirit of, indeed is a formulation of, Kant’s claim that ‘all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part’” (501). Michael Smith (2004, p. 379), in “Ethics and the A Priori: A Modern Parable,” argues that “we have a decisive reason to favour cognitivism over non-cognitivism,” and this “essay also gives the book its title” (13). However, the kind of naturalistic cognitivism he defends is very distant from Kant’s position. For Smith defends a dispositional theory of value, according to which normative reasons are idealized desires (see 9). But part of Kant’s basic aim in defending the a priori in ethics is to reject completely all desire-based accounts of ethics.
- ⁶ For related discussion, see Robert B. Louden (2013).
- ⁷ In the following discussion I am indebted both to Paul Guyer (2006, p. 45-46) and Wood (1999, p. 55-60). For a more detailed discussion of the Kantian a priori, see Hanna (2001, esp. p. 234-280).
- ⁸ And yet Kant asserts a few sentences later that “there must indeed be a ground for it in the subject, however, which makes it possible that these representations can arise in this and no other manner, and be related to objects which are not yet given, and this ground at least is *innate* [angeboren]” (ÜE 8: 221-22). So he’s not as far from innatism as he initially claims. He subscribes to what Hanna calls “*capacity innateness*, by which I mean that what is innate is not a mental representation but instead a mental faculty or power for generating representations according to rules” (HANNA, 2001, p. 32).
- ⁹ In recent years Saul Kripke has challenged this claim, arguing that statements about natural kinds such as “Water is H₂O” are necessary *yet a posteriori*. See Kripke (1980, esp. p. 128-29, 35, 160). For Kantian arguments against the necessary a posteriori, see Georges Dicker (2004, p. 10), Hanna (2006, Ch. 3) and Hanna (2015, Ch. 4).
- ¹⁰ Thro’ worlds unnumber’d tho’ the God be known,
 ’Tis ours to trace him only in our own.
 He, who thro’ vast immensity can pierce,
 See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
 Observe how system into system runs,
 What other planets circle other suns,
 What vary’d Being people ev’ry star,
 May tell why Heav’n has made us as we are. Alexander Pope (2008, p. 197). *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, lines 21-28. Pope was one of Kant’s favorite poets, and Kant cites this poem six times in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (see 1: 241, 259, 318, 349, 360, 365).
- ¹¹ See also my review of Szendy’s book in *Philosophy in Review* 34 (2014): 339-41.
- ¹² See also Michael J. Crowe (1999, p. 547).
- ¹³ Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, l. 27 (see n. 10, above). As Kant remarks in his *Universal Natural History*, “most of the planets are certainly inhabited [gewiß gewohnt]” (NTH 1: 354, see also 352).
- ¹⁴ For discussion, see Marcia Baron (2002); and Robert B. Louden (2011, p. 44-45).
- ¹⁵ For related discussion, see Robert B. Louden (2000) and Louden (2011, p. 25-37). See also Robert R. Clewis (2012).
- ¹⁶ For related discussion, see my essay, “Are Moral Considerations Underlying?” in Sebastian Schleidigen (ed.), *Should We Always Act Morally? New Essays on Overridingness*. Marburg: Tectum, 2012. p. 117-38.
- ¹⁷ “The power to judge autonomously – that is, freely (according to principles of thought in general) – is called reason” (SF 7: 27).
- ¹⁸ Kant holds that humans and other organic beings are qualitatively different than machines. E.g., at the end of *What is Enlightenment?* he asserts that government must “treat the human being, *who is now more than a machine*, in keeping with his dignity” (WA 8: 42). And in the third *Critique* he claims that humans and other organic creatures are “not a mere machine, for that has only a **motive** power, while the organized being possesses in itself a **formative** power” (KU 5: 374).

- ¹⁹ As noted earlier (n.1, above), Allison asserts that including practical anthropology within Kant's ethical theory is "problematic." Similarly, Patricia Kitcher (2001, p. 250) claims that "Kant did not believe that anthropological investigations were necessary for moral action", and Thomas Hill and Arnulf Zweig (2002, p. 180) claim that anthropology's "significance for Kant's general ethical theory may be quite limited."
- ²⁰ See, e.g., "Applying Kant's ethics: the role of anthropology (2014).
- ²¹ For related discussion, see Robert B. Louden, (2014) *Cosmopolitical Unity: the final destiny of the human species*.
- ²² This last paragraph borrows some points from the conclusion to my "Anthropology," in *The Kantian Mind*, eds. Sorin Baiasu and Mark Timmons (Routledge, forthcoming). Thanks also to Robert Hanna for his helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.