

Reinhold, was only ‘ein DreiViertelskopf’, in other words that he only had three-quarters of a brain.

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Susan Meld Shell and Richard Velkley (eds), *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012

Pp. xv + 286

ISBN 978-0-521-76942-6 (hbk), £55.00

doi:10.1017/S136941541300023X

In the summer of 1763, Kant wrote the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, a text in which he considers the ‘finer’ kinds of feeling with respect to human qualities and temperaments, gender and national character. The *Observations* provides no substantive theory of beauty and sublimity; Kant’s expressed intention is to approach this topic ‘more with the eye of an observer than of the philosopher’ (Kant 2011: 13; 2: 207). As such, this text should be grouped with Kant’s anthropological writings, in which the method is descriptive and the aim pragmatic, rather than the philosophical discussion of aesthetic theory found in the *Critique of Judgement*.

When the *Observations* was published in 1764, Kant had a personal copy produced that included blank interleaved pages. The fragmentary notes written therein have come to be published separately as the *Remarks in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Kant does much more here than reflect on the *Observations*. In the *Remarks* we find his next thoughts, his developing views on practical philosophy and anthropology, his deepening engagement with Rousseau and other philosophers, and even intensely personal reflections on his own life as a scholar.

While the *Remarks* provide valuable insight into the development of Kant’s views at a pivotal moment of his intellectual life, the *Observations*, by contrast, can seem inconsequential, a playful work of belles-lettres written to appeal to the refined society of Kant’s day. Manfred Kuehn, in his biography of Kant, writes:

Much of the *Observations* must strike us as dated, as the expression of sentiments long since become passé. ... Some of his observations seem silly today, others are annoying, and still others touching. ... What we get is not so much heartfelt sentiments as the prejudices of an era. ... They must

be understood as signs of the time, not as Kant's own achievements. (Kuehn 2001: 142–3)

Nevertheless, both the *Observations* and the *Remarks* have received serious attention from Kant scholars in recent years. Capitalizing on this interest, Susan Meld Shell and Richard Velkley have recruited a distinguished group of scholars to produce original essays on these texts. The resulting collection in Cambridge's *Critical Guide* series not only solidifies the importance of the *Remarks* for understanding Kant's intellectual development but also, importantly, shows that the *Observations* contains substantive philosophical achievements on Kant's part that make it worthy of continued study.

Four of the essays in this collection focus primarily on the *Remarks*, and together they examine an important moment in the development of Kant's ideas about moral theory and philosophy in general. Paul Guyer discusses Kant's views on freedom in the *Remarks*, showing that Kant considered several conceptions of freedom and various strategies for connecting it with his emerging idea that moral principles must be universalizable. Reinhard Brandt shows how Kant experimented in the *Remarks* with criticizing the social order in ways more radical than that found in any of his published writings. John Zammito and Karl Ameriks both discuss Kant's intense self-scrutiny in the *Remarks* and, especially, his claim that he was 'set right' by Rousseau's criticism of science and other supposed achievements of modern intellectual life (Kant 2011: 96; 20: 44). Zammito shows that, while Kant accepts and even develops Rousseau's criticism, he also, unlike Rousseau, believes that science and philosophy can overcome their own decadence. Ameriks, in addressing the same theme, reflects on Kant's ideas about history and historical change in the *Remarks*. In particular, he discusses how Kant comes to see philosophy as a tool of criticism that can assist modern society's turn away from decadence by deflating the pretensions of human knowledge, defending the 'fundamental egalitarian value of "humility"', and demonstrating that human worth rests not in our intellectual ability but in our capacity to act morally (262). Altogether, these essays on the *Remarks* provide additional historical context that will help students of Kant appreciate the concerns and motivations behind his mature Critical works.

The essays that focus on the *Observations* show that, in spite of its popular style and lack of systematic rigour, this text does make substantive philosophical claims about moral theory and distinctive anthropological claims about aesthetics and national character.

Two essays describe how the *Observations* fits into the development of Kant's moral theory. Patrick Frierson shows that, in the *Observations*,

Kant holds the view that moral principles must express a generalized benevolence, that is, a concern for the well-being of others that extends to all others. Frierson provides a philosophical explanation for Kant's later rejection of this view and also discusses how this shift in Kant's thinking about the universality of moral principles may have been influenced by his reading of Hume, Smith and Rousseau. Robert Clewis discusses the distinction between true and false sublimity as found in the *Observations* and the *Remarks*. He argues that this anticipates an important distinction in Kant's moral theory between inward respect for the moral law and mere outward conformity to it. As such, Clewis shows that Kant's thoughts on sublimity in these early texts represent not so much an innovation in his thinking about the sublime as an important step in the development of his moral theory.

Four essays treat Kant's views in the *Observations* on the moral significance of various feelings. At this stage in his thinking, Kant claims that true virtue results from following principles that are 'not speculative rules but the consciousness of a feeling, ... the feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature' (Kant 2011: 24; 2: 217). This shows that the feeling of the beautiful and sublime plays an important role in the moral theory of the *Observations*. When it comes to sympathy, a feeling for honour, self-love and other feelings described as 'supplements for virtue', Kant's views are less clear (Kant 2011: 24; 2: 217). Corey Dyck argues that Kant's turn to these supplementary feelings represents an attempt to defend the moral theory of the *Observations* from the charge that it falls into the class of false theories that Baumgarten and Meier describe as chimerical. These feelings are meant to encourage us to perform 'beautiful actions' (Kant 2011: 24; 2: 217) that otherwise might be thought impossibly demanding; a view that, Dyck argues, Kant comes to reject as soon as the *Remarks*. Alix Cohen, by contrast, finds that Kant attributes a non-moral purpose to feelings of sympathy and honour. On her reading, Kant thinks they are nature's way of ensuring the survival of the human species independently of its morality. It is possible to read Rudolf Makkreel's essay as offering a way to reconcile these views. He argues that Kant distinguishes between crude and refined feelings of sympathy and honour. While crude feelings promote sociability – for example, a feeling for honour that seeks to please others – their more refined forms can have moral significance – a love of honour that respects the dignity of human nature. The same kind of distinction is also found in Kant's discussion of erotic attraction in the third section of the *Observations*, a topic which, in the collection as a whole, receives only a brief treatment in Cohen's essay. There Kant distinguishes between a 'healthy and coarse taste' that serves nature's 'great aim' of preserving the human species (Kant 2011: 42; 2: 235) and a 'finer taste' that

is attracted more towards moral qualities (Kant 2011: 43; 2: 236), even to the extent of ‘failing to attain the great final aim of nature’ (Kant 2011: 46; 2: 238). Perhaps further work on the *Observations* could build on the distinction Makkreel notes between the crude and the refined form of feelings like sympathy and honour, if only to provide a more complete account of all the feelings Kant discusses and the purposes he wants to attribute to them.

Makkreel goes on to suggest that Kant’s views on refined feelings in the *Observations* anticipate, in certain ways, his later claims in the *Metaphysics of Morals* regarding feelings we have a duty to cultivate. Felicitas Munzel, by contrast, argues that Kant’s broader views on moral education and, in particular, the education of self-interest change dramatically from those in the *Observations*. While Kant treats refined self-love as something benign or even admirable in the *Observations*, he later, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, argues that we must learn to restrict self-love, no matter how refined, and subordinate its demands to those of the moral law. Munzel argues that this change in Kant’s view can be seen, in part at least, as a response to a debate over pedagogy between Locke and Rousseau. Placed together, Makkreel’s and Munzel’s essays help to illuminate some of the complicated issues surrounding Kant’s views on moral education.

While Kant’s thoughts in the *Observations* on sympathy, honour and self-love are well covered in these essays, that feeling for which the book as a whole is named – the feeling of the beautiful and sublime – receives far less attention. Peter Fenves discusses this ‘finer’ feeling through a close reading of the first few lines of the *Observations*, but ultimately attends to a related feeling with which Kant is explicitly unconcerned, at least in this text, namely, ‘the inclination which is attached to lofty intellectual insights’ (Kant 2011: 14; 2: 208). It is unfortunate that none of the essays treat the feeling of the beautiful and sublime in any detail since, although the *Observations* does touch on many topics, it is, as the title suggests, a book about taste.

So, when Kant discusses national character in the *Observations*, for example, he explains that his ‘intention is not at all to portray the characters of the peoples in detail; [but only to] outline some features that express the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful in them’ (Kant 2011: 50; 2: 244n). That is to say, Kant is more interested in studying the differences in taste among the national characters than in providing a full account of all the qualities that might distinguish them. Robert Louden carefully compares Kant’s discussion of national character in the *Observations* with a treatment of this topic found in the earlier lectures on geography and finds that the *Observations* does represent new work by Kant in this area. But Louden is puzzled as to why Kant finds the feeling of the beautiful and the

sublime to be ‘the best gauge’ of national character (p. 210). I suggest that, in fact, Kant’s purpose here is not to provide the best account of national character, but to use this topic to draw our attention once again to a fact about taste that he insists upon throughout the *Observations*: its diversity. Whether in his discussion of human temperaments, gender or national character, Kant distinguishes the diverse tastes that correspond with the various species of these general kinds. Since he approaches this topic ‘with the eye of an observer’, Kant does not attempt to explain these differences in taste as the effect of differences in temperament, gender and national character, or vice versa. Instead, he seems content merely to describe how each of these diverse tastes, even when refined, is *partial* in important ways, expressing a preference for certain beautiful and sublime objects over others. As such, they are not wrong but only inadequate, each failing in its own way to appreciate the beauty and dignity of human nature as a whole. The pragmatic intent of the *Observations*, I take it, is to acquaint us with this diversity so that we might seek the ‘noble simplicity’ that is characteristic of the ‘proper taste for the beautiful and the noble’ (Kant 2011: 62; 2: 255). Kant seems to suggest that this is achieved not by abandoning the taste we have, but by cultivating it into a more cosmopolitan form. We should become ‘citizens of the world’, who find among the diversity of tastes the simple feeling that unites them all: the feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature that will serve as the foundation for true virtue (Kant 2011: 62; 2: 255).

That more might be said about certain topics in the *Observations* like gender or taste should not take anything away from Shell and Velkley’s collection. This volume contains cutting-edge work by distinguished scholars on a part of the Kantian corpus that, as these essays demonstrate, deserves further attention. It will be of most interest to those concerned with Kant’s intellectual development, especially with regard to his conception of philosophy, moral theory, aesthetics and anthropology. This collection serves as a good starting point for engaging with texts and issues, both interpretative and philosophical, on which there is certainly more work to be done.

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