

BOOK REVIEWS

David Baumeister, *Kant on the Human Animal: Anthropology, Ethics, Race* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022 Pp. 176 ISBN: 9780810144682 (hbk) \$99.95

The topic of non-rational animals looms large in current Kant scholarship, with special focus on what ethical commitments we have towards them (e.g. Callanan and Allais 2020). But while these discussions acknowledge the non-rational animality inherent in human nature, this theme has thus far been underexplored. In *Kant on the Human Animal: Anthropology, Ethics, Race*, David Baumeister foregrounds human animality – sensibility, instinct, physiology, embodiment and reproductive capacities. By focusing on human animality, Baumeister brings out inherent tensions in Kant’s account of human nature. Despite our physical nature providing a necessary prop for the development of our rationality and morality, he contends it is often regarded as something that must be ‘peeled apart from reason, violently struggled against, stood upon, disciplined, and marked as subhuman or sub-rational’ (p. 119). This tension provides insight into Kant’s denial of ethical status to animals and support for dominating them. But, more importantly for Baumeister, it also clarifies that his comments on dominating and denying ethical status extends to those human groups Kant regards as more defined by their animality, specifically, women and Black and Indigenous American races.

Baumeister’s approach to these themes involves a deconstructive reading of Kant’s work that depends heavily on his lectures, remarks and more popular writings. The book has five chapters, each of which attempts to highlight a different tension between the animal and rational dimensions of human life: (1) the relationship between animals and humans; (2) the relationship between human animality, rationality and personality (i.e. moral nature) in Kant’s writings on morality; (3) the role of physiological anthropology in Kant; (4) the development of human animality in the teleological writings; and (5) Kant’s comments on animality and race. While each chapter is interesting and weighs in on a different debate, at its heart the earlier chapters each buttress Baumeister’s culminating thesis of the fifth chapter: Kant regards certain groups – especially Black and Indigenous American races – as possessing a greater predisposition towards animality and a weaker disposition towards personality. Baumeister contends this explains Kant’s deep racism, his excuse for colonialization and enslavement, and even his off-hand remarks about genocide. These all stem, Baumeister argues, from Kant’s assumption that European males – possessed with the greatest, most developed predisposition to personality – are superior to, and justified in violence and domination towards, non-Europeans.

The first chapter establishes the clear hierarchy Kant holds between humans and non-rational animals. While there are multiple places where Kant acknowledges the shared nature of both as living beings, Baumeister brings out how often these passages are paired with a claim of the superiority of humans because of their rationality. This extends to Kant’s denial of any moral status to living beings in general, instead

only permitting an indirect duty to not be cruel to animals lest we get into a habit of cruelty that extends towards other humans.

These same themes of the hierarchy of the rational over the animal is carried over to the second chapter, but the focus shifts to the non-rational aspects of human nature, especially the body. This chapter explores what Kant calls the 'natural conflict in this combined personality' of body and soul, especially the 'domination (*Herrschaft*) of the soul over the body' (Anth-Fried, 25: 476). The chapter surveys Kant's moral writings and demonstrates that, for Kant, our merely animal nature lacks intrinsic value; its importance stems solely from enabling one's rational and moral nature. The second half of the chapter extends this theme to show that human animality is an impediment to our moral personhood, something that must be fought against to ensure our development. For example, Kant writes in the third *Critique* that 'human nature does not of itself agree with the good, but rather does so only through violence (*Gewalt*), which reason does to sensibility' (*CPJ*, 5: 271; see also Anth-Fried, 25: 682). For Baumeister, these claims are evidence moral personhood is taken to involve not just a hierarchy over one's animal nature, but also a necessary domination of one's bodily, sensible nature to ensure it is not expressed in one's behaviour. He writes, 'The violent relation between animality and morality is not circumstantial or accidental, but necessary and inherent to the human being' (p. 45). This is not simply a disparagement of animality at the expense of reason; for Kant, reason is effectively in conflict with the body and must dominate it if moral personhood is to be possible.

The third and fourth chapter both turn to Kant's anthropological writings. The third focuses on Kant's comments on physiological anthropology, the study of the anatomical and biological nature of humans. Focusing on Kant's 1771 anonymous review of Moscati's thesis that humans are naturally quadrupedal, Baumeister shows how Kant moves from enthusiastic support of Moscati in his early comments to the contention in the 1798 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* that the issue of natural bipedalism is 'of no consequence' for human life (Anth, 7: 322). Baumeister uses this to demonstrate that Kant shows a greater willingness to conceive the insights on our anatomy as influencing our behaviour in early work but, over the decades, becomes increasingly dismissive of any insights from physiology for a pragmatic anthropology.

The fourth chapter provides a welcome respite from the first three, as here Baumeister turns to Kant's repeated suggestion that animality may play a more positive role in human life. These passages are more limited, largely occurring in places where the teleological development of human nature is at issue, such as Kant's texts on history, religion and education. Baumeister's central text is *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone*, where Kant identifies three predispositions underlying human nature: animality, humanity and personality. In these texts, the predisposition to animality plays an essential role in the self-preservation, reproduction and socialization of humans. These are necessary features of human life that are never transcended or even fought against; instead, their relation to our rational nature is 'non-conflictual, if not congruous' (p. 76). As such, Baumeister argues Kant, in contrast to other texts, suggests animality has an intrinsic goodness which must be reconcilable with reason and the moral law if all are to achieve their perfection. Whereas the

second chapter often suggests an inherent viciousness in human animality, Baumeister points out that Kant holds that the bad habits of animality – ‘the savagery of nature . . . the bestial vices of gluttony, lust, and wild lawlessness’ (*Rel*, 6: 26–7) – are not intrinsic to animality at all. They instead only come from allowing animality to dominate the other predispositions, rather than growing alongside them in an orderly way. In these passages, Baumeister notes, disciplining animality is not violence or repression as much as the other predisposition’s development equally limiting each other’s expression. As Kant notes in discussing the importance of education, ‘a tree which stands in the middle of the forest grows straight towards the sun and air above it, because the trees next to it offer opposition’ (*Ped*, 9: 448). This reveals a deep ambivalence – perhaps incoherence – in Kant: animality is seen as playing an essential role in helping along the destiny of our species, but it is also seen as an impediment to realizing our moral personhood.

But this chapter also introduces the theme that will dominate chapter 5. Kant regards some groups as being more defined by their animality, where this predisposition is seen as outweighing humanity or personality. This is visible especially in his discussion of women: ‘One can only come to the characterization of [the female] sex if one uses as one’s principle not what we *make* our end, but what *nature’s end* was in establishing womankind’ (*Anth*, 7: 305). This shows that Kant’s comments that persons are characterized by their autonomy and treated as ends in themselves tacitly only refers to men. For Kant, women are instead characterized by nature’s ends: the reproduction of the species. Baumeister takes this to suggest this is evidence that their animality – specifically their role in reproduction – is their most characteristic predisposition; rationality and personality are not essential to their nature.

The final chapter extends this theme to Kant’s claims about race. The evidence Baumeister marshals is more indirect here; Kant never specifically talks about the predisposition to animality in regard to races. However, Kant does speak extensively of ‘germs’ and ‘predispositions’ as determining the physical nature of the different races. Moreover, and against his scepticism of physiological anthropology, Kant often discusses germs and predispositions in the Black and Indigenous American races as not just determining their physical nature, but also as explaining features of their behaviour. For example, in his 1775 essay on race, Kant argues that the humid climate of Africa ‘results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple, but who, given the abundant provision of his mother land, is lazy, soft and trifling’ (*CHR*, 2: 438). The result is that non-Europeans – and Black and Indigenous American races in particular – ‘come to be defined by their animality, which is the most developed part of themselves. Affect-driven, possessing heightened senses of sight and smell, fleshy, at times carefree, soft yet strong, servile, childlike’ (p. 116). Baumeister concludes that Kant’s seemingly dismissive view of physiological anthropology for explaining behaviour in the *Anthropology* is only half-hearted; in reality, he still allows physiology some explanatory purchase regarding the ‘savagery, lust, and wild lawlessness’ he ascribes to non-Europeans, and especially Indigenous Americans and the Black races.

Baumeister shows that his reading clarifies how some of Kant’s most reprehensible claims are in line with his commitment that some groups have an overwhelming predisposition to animality, and thus are incapable of autonomy and responsibility. For example, Kant contends, ‘the Negro can be disciplined and cultivated (*disciplinirt und*

cultivirt), but can never really become civilized (*civilisirt*). He falls of himself into savagery (*Wildheit*)' (Refl, 15: 878). For Kant, this justifies the disrespect, domination and even eradication of those groups which cannot participate in the moral perfection of the species. This suggests these views are not just isolated bigotry; they stem from deeper philosophical commitments in Kant about physiological prerequisites of autonomy and his conviction that these prerequisites are not equally distributed in humans.

The conclusion contends that our contemporary understanding of humanity – and, with it, race – has been shaped by Kant's work. As Baumeister notes, Kant's work has sometimes been taken as the origin of our contemporary concept of race (Bernasconi 2001; see also Eigen and Larrimore 2006), and Baumeister suggests Kant's treatment of Black and Indigenous American races as especially animalistic still infects our contemporary understanding of race. But the discussion of how Kant still pervades contemporary thought is largely relegated to endnotes and suggested other readings. The text would be improved by spelling out, rather than merely gesturing at, how these themes are still present and what role they continue to play in shaping our views. The last chapter especially feels like a missed opportunity to lay out how Kant's view of animality – and its tension with humanity – is still operative in contemporary thought.

The book manages to cover a lot of material in a short, engaging read. It has a common style among deconstructionists, with the feel of an engaging public speaker providing a series of short, self-contained lectures. There are aspects of this style that can be tedious: lots of italics and rhetorical questions, as well as overly literal, repetitive translations of questionable value: 'The term *Bedenklichkeit*, translated here as "consequence", could also be translated more literally as "thinkableness", "concernableness", or "considerableness". For something to have no *Bedenklichkeit*, then, is for it to contain nothing worth thinking about it, nothing of real concern, nothing worthy of consideration' (p. 62). While this is acceptable and even provocative in a lecture, it is somewhat gratuitous in print. But this is a minor stylistic quibble, one that likely will go unnoticed for those more comfortable with continental-style writing.

The takeaway is an impressive, compelling book that provides a persuasive case that animality, often ignored in Kant's work, should instead be treated as a major theme precisely because of its deep implications for Kant's conception of human nature and its moral development.

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