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AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

Jeffrey Church's American Kant

Elisabeth Ellis
University of Otago

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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We might have thought that John Rawls gave us the definitive American version of Kantian political thought. Not so! The definitive American reading of Kant's political thought is Jeffrey Church's *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life*.

It is true that Rawls's political philosophy has a special affinity with the mood of American triumphalism that characterized the second half of the twentieth century. The later Rawls of *Political Liberalism* and *Law of Peoples* resonates with the peculiarly uncritical and ahistorical view of American-style liberal democracy in which exploitations domestic and global could be seen (when seen at all) as errors to be corrected by the operation of the public sphere and of governments accountable to a righteous people. But this mood, while distinctly American in its self-serving optimism, was nevertheless limited to the years between the end of World War II and the 2008 global financial crisis (at the latest). A more general Americanism would still include exceptionalism combined fruitfully if irrationally with an evangelical commitment to spreading the gospel of liberal capitalist democracy, but it is a thicker, more socially particular, less merely institutional view. This more general Americanism—observed by Tocqueville, celebrated more or less critically by commentators from Emerson to Dewey to Putnam to Sandel—embraces the civic foundation of political society. Both richer and more particular than its institutional and universalist counterpart, this version of the American

story aims to provide its adherents not only a relatively peaceful coexistence but a meaningful part in the collective life of the nation over the generations.

Jeffrey Church has retrieved a political philosophy of this second, richer, more general type from the parts of Kant's work that are often overlooked: from the pre-Critical work, from lectures to university students, and from his essays on history and anthropology. When we attend to Kant's whole corpus, Church argues, Kant's consistent attention to the problem of the meaning of life for unsociably social human beings comes into view. In an astonishingly learned and comprehensive rereading of Kant's work from the very early contributions to astronomy through the late political essays, Church reveals a pattern of Kantian concerns that we neglect—and that we have neglected—at our peril. Human beings cannot help but struggle between the pursuit of the ideals of perfection on the one hand and wholeness on the other. Our cultural efforts and attempts to civilize ourselves reflect this struggle, but we can find ultimate meaning as finite imperfect and yet moral beings only by participation in collective efforts to realize our natural vocations for autonomy. After showing us the bind Kant has diagnosed for us, Church demonstrates a Kantian way out by contributing to the multigenerational project of liberalism. While this might sound like a return to a thin Rawlsian view, Church's liberal Kantian project in fact comprehends human life as a whole, from lonely efforts at moral virtue to societal and cultural production through vast political collectives aiming to organize our relations with each other. "Kantian liberalism," Church writes, ". . . is at bottom an effort to address and govern the vulnerability of our embodiment, not an effort to ignore it."[1]

Church's Kant will strike as unfamiliar many people who think they know Kant's political philosophy. No one who reads this book will be able to dismiss the pre-Critical work or the social scientific essays as irrelevant to Kantian political philosophy, as so many, especially in the Anglophone world, have done up to now. However, it is also true that many who read this book and gain an appreciation of these relatively neglected parts of Kant's opus may continue

to prefer the better-known work, especially Kant's mature views as set out in the Doctrine of Right (*Rechtslehre)* and some of his political essays. I will have more to say about this in a moment. For now, let us think again about the fact that the interpretation on offer here is based on a retrieval of the relatively neglected pre-Critical Kant, from early essays and, especially, lectures. As was typical of teaching gigs in his time, Kant was paid per capita to give lectures to teenage university students. Any affinity between what attracts paying crowds of young Prussian men and what makes this book especially suited to the American reader can only be inferred, of course. But such an affinity might have to do with the pressure to deliver answers that make sense to a broad audience. The austere Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* who chastened us with the limits of possible knowledge is absent in this book and from most of its source material. In his stead we have an engaging, even popular account of how to heal our fractured human souls.

So how does this account of healing our fractured souls through commitment to the liberal project amount to a distinctly American take on Kant? To take the most obvious point first: Church provides us with present-day American examples illustrating the universal Kantian dynamic of tension between the dual human goals of perfection and wholeness. The worries about work-life balance, religious intolerance, growing polarization in society, the threat of populism, and so forth all have international instances, but the examples given here are from the American scene. Church writes, for example, that the "American public is divided in ways that we have not witnessed in a long while."[2]

More substantially, and this is where I think the Kant of the *Rechtslehre* pushes against the Kant we read here, Church's account of healing the fractured soul by contributing to the multi-generational project of progress toward freedom anchors its protagonists in time and place. On the one hand, we can find meaning as part of a universal human project that connects us forward and backward over time. But on the other hand, the scope of relationships relevant to these independence-promoting projects is limited to fellow citizens. The problems of perfection

versus wholeness rehearsed here are in fact of universal interest. They could, I think, provide the kind of value from moral-political activity that Church claims they would (defeating even the fear of death).[3] But in Church's telling, these projects, these relationships, never cross the border—we are talking about order within a sphere of domestic sovereignty, about the kind of self-determining political agency that Church's Kant calls "holy." It is not Church's fault that Kant's account of the exalted, meaning-giving status of domestic law is in tension with Kant's account of cosmopolitan right, but we miss this tension because Church focuses nearly exclusively on the former.

Because Kant's cosmopolitanism is mostly missing from a book centered on the early work (with a nice exception in a short discussion of Kant's racism and Eurocentrism), its readers cannot see how limited a view of justice is that asks only about relationships within national borders. At its heart, Kantian political autonomy seeks to order *all* our relationships rightly, not just those with our fellow citizens. For example, Kant's account of property rights in the *Rechtslehre* recognizes this when it notes that claiming a right to something really amounts to imposing a duty of non-interference on everyone, everywhere. Since we cannot ask everyone's permission before we claim something for ourselves, we ought to at least orient ourselves to what they would say if we could ask them.[4] Since everyone on Kant's spherical, water-covered earth is affected by these posited duties of non-interference, but only fellow subjects of domestic right can view themselves as giving the law respecting property rights to themselves, there is in Kant's system a fundamental difficulty with cross-border relationships.

Thus we can see that its uncritical attitude toward questions of right that transcend national borders makes Church's version of Kant's political philosophy quintessentially American. Most of the world's property is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority, many of whom reside in the United States: the only "omnilateral" will that would endorse the status quo in property rights is one tightly limited within national borders.

Similarly, the book is deaf to cross-border environmental injustices, focusing instead on decisions Americans can make for their collective liberal project (e.g., about the role of religion in public life, or about work-life balance, or about gene editing). But sustainability crises are not just another conflict-ridden domestic policy area. Church's Kant importantly focuses on the story of *homo sapiens*, on its collective liberal project, on the teleological development of the species toward, we hope, human freedom. You cannot conceive of the human story in the 2020s without the Anthropocene chapter. The consequences of our interference with the earth system and the subsequent alteration of the prospects of everything on Kant's *globus terraqueus* now and in the future are part of that story, challenging everything that Church and Kant value. There could hardly be a more serious threat to independence than our multiple crises of sustainability. Kant would never have ignored the way externalized costs radiate through our money and energy systems, leaving the independence of most people at the mercy of the arbitrary choice of the few. But the many are mostly offshore, or at least offstage, in this book.

Kant himself never came up with a satisfactory solution to the problem that a wrong anywhere affects us all everywhere, and so the three levels of right (national, international, and cosmopolitan) must interlock in order for any of them to succeed. But even if he had no good answer for it, Kant still viewed universal justice as a central problem for humanity. A complete Kantian liberalism would, I think, have to deny Church's inward-facing American liberals the right to a business as usual that subjects everyone else to their arbitrary choice.

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Kantian Perfectionists, Muslim Perfectionists, and Intelligent Devils

Nicholas Tampio
Fordham University

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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If you read conservative magazines, you will find a steady stream of articles arguing that progressive politics is a kind of religion.[5] Progressive politics tends to lack references to God, grace, salvation, Jesus, the Bible, or other Christian doctrines. But progressive politics infuses people's lives with meanings by situating their actions and beliefs in a war against forces of ignorance and oppression. One could deny that progressive politics is a religion and that progressives are merely being intelligent and rational. Think of the lawn signs that say that people in this house believe that science is real. But this intellectualist explanation does not seem to capture the depth of people's commitment to progressive causes, nor does it seem sufficient to mobilize a critical mass of people to address the populist threat. Jeffrey Church's *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* makes a compelling argument that Kant offers an account of the "vocation of humanity" (*Bestimmung des Menschen*) that may inspire a progressive politics to counteract the forces of nationalism, xenophobia, and right-wing populism.

Church reconstructs Kant's philosophy to offer a third way between the political theories of the liberal John Rawls and the communitarian Michael Sandel. Rawls builds his political theory largely upon Kant's account of how the moral reasoning agent evaluates principles of volition in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Sandel argues that this proceduralist

account of moral reasoning neglects a human need to be in a supportive community with other people. According to Church, both Kant and Sandel misinterpret Kant and thus assume that his practical philosophy is a kind of moral mathematics that ignores the real need of human beings for families, friendships, social networks, and a narrative that situates one's life in a bigger story. By situating Kant's account of moral reasoning within a historical narrative of human progress from a state of "primitive innocence" to a state of "wise innocence," Church presents us with a Kant who gives us a reason to run for office, start a family, invent a medicine to save lives, and support political causes. Church's Kantian liberalism provides an account of the meaning of life, a project that Rawls eschews but that remains liberal and cosmopolitan, avoiding the dangers of communitarian tribalism.

One of the great accomplishments of Church's book is to show how Kant's pre-Critical writings fill in many of the pieces of his Critical masterpieces. For example, in the *Groundwork* (1785), Kant says that an imperfectly rational being could think of the universalization of egoism but not will such a world. The explanation, Church explains from a reading of Kant's 1775–76 Friedländer anthropology lectures, is that human beings have a natural desire for wholeness that includes finding a mate and having children. Kant also says in the *Groundwork* that a reasoning agent could think, but not will, a world in which people fail to perfect their own abilities. Again, the lecture notes contain part of the explanation: human beings have a natural desire for perfection and to earn the esteem and respect of other people.[6] Kant's *Groundwork* does not foreground its anthropological foundations, but Church's work shows that Kant's practical philosophy, read in its entirety, including the pre-Critical works, offers a vision that is naturalistic, teleological, and substantive.

A second impressive feature of Church's book is to show that Kant prepared the way for other philosophers of history who offered a secular account of what gives life meaning. For Kant, Herder, Hegel, Marx, and Mill, human life is nearly meaningless unless it is situated in "the grand story of humanity."[7] Church notes

that "the secular progression of humanity mirrors the Christian providential account."[8] Here, I wish that Church had connected his research on Nietzsche with his description of modern secular millenarianism. Modern progressives might say that their account differs profoundly from the Christian providential tradition because it involves humans following a self-given purpose. For Nietzsche, the doctrinal differences conceal a more profound agreement that history is justified by the ennobling of the ordinary person. I wish that Church had engaged more contemporary political theory that grapples with Nietzsche's critique of progressive politics.[9] Regardless, one of the chapters is entitled "Kant's Genealogy of Morality," so perhaps Church thinks that Kant offers a more compelling explanation of the moral trajectory of the modern world than does Nietzsche.

My comments will largely focus on the transition from the historical reconstruction of Kant's practical philosophy in the first two parts of the book to the third part that brings Kant into contemporary political theory debates. My question is about the proper orientation to people who do not share Kant's vision of the good life in its thick ethical sense nor in its thin political sense.

"The strategy of Kantian political liberalism is to generate an overlapping consensus on a thin principle of justice, that of equal independence."[10] According to Church, not everybody will agree on the definition of a good life, but most people do not want to be told what to do for arbitrary reasons. People want to go about their business unmolested unless the state has a compelling reason to stop them from harming other people. You do not have to be a comprehensive Kantian liberal to agree with his principle of right. Even "intelligent devils," Kant explains in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, see the value of a republican state that separates executive and legislative power and protects property and individual rights. The one thing that all reasonable people agree on, according to Church, is the principle of equal independence from the arbitrary will of others. "The protection of equal independence . . . means that angels must respect the rights of fellow community members to engage in legal yet immoral activity."[11]

Church considers how a wide array of constituencies in modern liberal societies could join an overlapping consensus with Kantian political liberals about the principle of equal independence. But these constituencies—including libertarians, natural law Catholics, and Habermasians—have all made peace with secular modernity. The more challenging exercise is to think how Kantian political liberals might engage religious fundamentalists who are lukewarm about the idea that politics means partnering with self-interested devils. To put my concern in a question: Can Church's Kantian political liberalism appeal to Muslim perfectionists, and if it cannot, what is the plan?

My example of a Muslim perfectionist, in this review essay, is Rached Ghannouchi, the Tunisian politician and political philosopher whose book *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State* may be the most influential twentieth-century Islamist account of the relationship between Islam and the state.[12]

In many respects, Ghannouchi agrees with Kantian political liberals that the state should protect individual and public rights. Ghannouchi wrote much of the book while in prison, and he criticizes tyrants who jail opponents, censor speech, and prevent the free exercise of religion. Ghannouchi says that Muslims should join people around the world who care about human rights, women's rights, free speech, the free exercise of religion, and democracy.

However, Ghannouchi expounds on the difference between Western and Islamic conceptions of freedom. Westerners do not differentiate permissible or impermissible exercises of freedom; for them, freedom qua freedom means doing what one wants without interference from the community or political authorities.[13] Despite lofty rhetoric of respect and dignity for the individual, Western notions of liberty encourage the wealthy and powerful to do what they desire without concern for anyone else. "In vain do the downtrodden and tormented people of the earth try to convince their executioners . . . to grant them mercy and a bit of justice in the name of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."[14]

Legally, yes, Ghannouchi concedes, freedom means permission to choose the right or the wrong. Without the power to choose,

individuals would not bear responsibility for their actions. However, Ghannouchi insists, it would be perverse to say that Muslims celebrate the freedom of individuals to choose the unlawful. No, what Muslims mean by freedom is "to exercise our responsibility in a positive way, fulfilling our duty in a spirit of obedience by following what is commanded and avoiding what is forbidden; and in so doing, we are worthy of the status of God's righteous vicegerents and friends on Earth."[15]

Church says that Kantian political liberalism can earn the support of intelligent devils. Ghannouchi is nowhere near as sanguine about people who follow "your baser desires and the temptations of Satan, which will then expose you to your Lord's wrath and unhappiness in this life and the next."[16] Ghannouchi is a Muslim perfectionist who thinks that the purpose of the state is to create the conditions for Muslims to live spiritually and materially in accordance with Islamic law, *sharia*.[17] Church contends that all reasonable people endorse the political principle of independence, but Ghannouchi replies that Islam rejects "both the idea of humanity's independence and its ability to do without God."[18] Ghannouchi has no interest in preserving the freedom of intelligent devils or partnering with them in politics over the long run.

Church is aware that people think he might be wanting to eat his cake and have it too by arguing that Kant provides distinct moral and political theories. Occasionally, however, Church makes it clear that Kant's political theory expresses and imparts a normative value—political autonomy—and that Kant's political theory will change people's moral character. "On Kant's view, the institutional structures of liberal society—the universalizing perspectives of the arts and sciences in culture, the disciplinary and ennobling effects of civilization, the education in rationalism of the public use of reason, and the political autonomy of citizenship—all assist our nature in becoming more moral."[19] Kant's institutional structures are the path to the spring of Enlightenment—which is to say, they are a kind of secular *sharia*.

At the end of the day, Kantian and Muslim perfectionists agree and disagree. They agree that the people as a body are the source

of the state's authority, that the ruler may not capriciously rule over a terrified populace, and that individuals have liberties that the state may not infringe upon. However, Kantian perfectionists want the state to nudge society in the direction of the Kingdom of Ends, and Muslim perfectionists want the state to create the conditions for the emergence of *sharia* society.

It strikes me that Church faces a choice. He may decide that Kantian moral perfectionism provides a compelling account of the meaning of life and that it is worth waging a battle of ideas against theocrats and populists who think that freedom means believing in and following God's commands. He may decide, like Robert S. Taylor, that Rawls made a mistake trying to water down Kant's doctrine to appeal to more people and that one should take up Kantian liberalism as a fighting creed.[20]

Alternatively, Church may think about how Kantians enact pluralist politics in ways that would have been hard for Kant to imagine in eighteenth-century Prussia. Pluralist politics means collaborating with political progressives today, aligning with conservative Christians tomorrow, and joining forces with moderate Islamists the day after. Many of us find meaning in politics, but pluralists discourage people from demonizing those who belong to a different party or religion. Citizens ought to listen to each other and find ways to join campaigns to address specific problems. In deeply pluralistic societies, the political assignment may be to negotiate compromises to collaborate on protean and temporary campaigns rather than demand agreement on the meaning of life or a political theory of justice.[21]

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Kant, Rawls, and Meaning

Robert S. Taylor
University of California, Davis

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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Rarely has a scholarly book been as timely as this one—or as well-argued, well-structured, and well-framed. As Jeffrey Church notes at both the beginning and the end of his book, liberalism is under sustained assault from the right and the left. On the right, ethnic and religious nationalists try to overthrow liberal commitments (both theoretical and practical) to racial and spiritual pluralism, claiming that such pluralism threatens social cohesion and valuable traditions. On the left, various strands of progressivism regard liberalism as complicit in the maintenance of racial and economic hierarchies and its adherents as a kind of intellectual bodyguard of domineering corporate elites and ethno-religious incumbents. The liberal order and the Enlightenment Project more widely have not been under such open, sustained, and damaging assault since the Cold War ended.

Church's Kantian liberalism offers a forceful reply to these critiques, and one deserving of a wide audience. First, Kantian liberalism successfully "synthesizes the insights of perfectionist and anti-perfectionist liberals, comprehensive and political liberals, and moral and modus vivendi liberals," constructing an overlapping consensus among different liberal approaches by foregrounding the value of *independence*, the central value of Kant's political (as opposed to moral) philosophy.[22] Before liberals can reply to their opponents, Church appears to say, they must go some way toward resolving their intramural disputes, and Kantian liberalism, properly

understood, has the resources to do this. Such a liberalism possesses many insufficiently appreciated features that make it resilient against attacks from the left and especially the right. It offers a liberalism with meaning, one that sees independence and political right as transgenerational achievements to be diligently pursued by citizens united by this common purpose. But it does this by reconciling (without, to be sure, eliminating) two competing impulses in our species—namely, an impulse toward *culture* (perfection) and an impulse toward *civilization* (wholeness)—impulses that have to be tamed but kept in productive tension with each other within a superintending framework of right. Kantian liberalism offers a way for adherents of different versions of liberalism to reengage with each other and with meaning through politics; it offers independence with a moral point, without abandoning liberal principles. For Church, the cure to what ails contemporary liberalism is not a disengagement from our Enlightenment heritage but, rather, a more systematic engagement with it.

In addition to intervening powerfully in what can only be described as a world-historical debate, Church's book also engages systematically with Kant's anthropological writings, something that has been done before (e.g., the Jacobs and Kain edited volume), but never with such vigor and larger sense of purpose.[23] It also offers a very compelling response to various scholarly assaults on liberalism, both canonical (e.g., Sandel) and very recent (e.g., Deneen).[24] In short, this book is an original, compelling, and ambitious contribution to a series of vital literatures on Kant, liberalism, and meaning.

As much as I admire this book, I want to raise a few concerns about Church's treatment of Rawls. In the introduction, Church maintains that "neo-Kantian liberalism is static in its legalism, as it abstracts from the dynamic and pluralistic character of politics in liberalism. Rawls's theory, for example, presumes that contracting agents will come to one solution about constitutional matters, that justice is unitary and sovereign."[25] I believe both of these claims need to be qualified.

First, consider "one solution about constitutional matters." It would be a good idea for Church to review Rawls's discussion of the "four-stage sequence" in *A Theory of Justice* (sec. 31). The ideal constitution to realize principles of justice can and almost certainly will vary across societies and across time. One size does not fit all—for example, on the choice of liberal socialism versus property-owning democracy. (Part IV of *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* speaks to this issue too.) The point of raising the veil of ignorance just a little higher with each succeeding stage of the sequence (OP → constitutional → legislative → judicial/bureaucratic) is precisely to tailor these legal products dynamically and in an appropriately context-sensitive fashion.

Second, consider "justice is unitary." Even on this, Rawls's views evolved over time, especially after his so-called political turn. In "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," he even goes so far as to say the following: "There are many liberalisms and related views, and therefore many forms of public reason specified by a family of reasonable political conceptions. Of these, justice as fairness, whatever its merits, is but one."[26] Justice doesn't sound very unitary here.

Relatedly, throughout the book Church has a strong tendency to portray Rawls's theory as empty, formalistic, and legalistic—which is the way Kant's own work is often (unfairly) portrayed by *his* critics. Early on, Church says that "the liberal community is unique in its role in mediating the natural and moral ends of humanity," and he later says that "for Kant, the right and the good cannot be disentangled *as it is so often in neo-Kantians such as Rawls*."[27] But if we turn to section 86 in *Theory* (which is entitled, after all, "The Good of the Sense of Justice"), there is entanglement aplenty here. This is the section where Rawls knits together the various strands of his "congruence argument"—namely, that the "disposition to take up and be guided by the standpoint of justice accords with the individual's good." Rawls's argument here is all about "mediating the natural and moral ends of humanity," as Church puts it.

Without congruence, justice might start to seem like an alien imposition on our plans of life, which given our second moral

power (of rationality) are freely chosen expressions of our deepest ends, values, and commitments. How can something that appears merely to constrain our pursuit of the good actually accord with it and even be a part of it? Two components of Rawls's congruence argument are especially relevant here. First, once we recognize our nature as free, equal, and moral beings, we will also realize that acting from principles that express our nature is a form of self-realization and therefore a key component of any rational plan of life. Second, maintaining a just society not only allows us to exercise the "widest regulative excellences of which each is capable" (i.e., the skills of self-government), which according to Rawls's own Aristotelian principle is an intrinsic good, but also helps to "encourage the diverse internal life of associations in which individuals realize their more particular aims," which is a value of Humboldtian social union (see *Theory*, secs. 65 and 79). Hence, pursuing justice allows us to realize our natures, our capacities, and even our subjective ends and thereby to further our plans of life. Rawls describes happiness, however, as the "successful execution . . . of a rational plan of life drawn up under . . . favorable conditions"; therefore, justice can be not only good in itself but also a means to our own happiness.[28]

This concept of congruence might seem foreign to Kant's practical philosophy, which is Church's chief focus, but in fact Kant develops a strikingly similar notion himself in his second *Critique*. Kant's idea of the complete good, which is the architectonic objective end of pure practical reason, combines perfect virtue with a proportionate happiness for all finite rational beings.[29] Kant thus unites the supreme moral good, virtue—the highest expression of our pure practical reason—with the universal subjective good, happiness—the highest expression of our empirical practical reason, but he does so in a way that maintains the absolute priority of the former over the latter: virtue acts as "the supreme condition . . . of all our pursuit of happiness." We are thus assured that in our morally obligatory pursuit of the highest good, we will not have to abandon hopes for our own and others' happiness. Rawls takes great pride in his attempt at "overcoming the dualisms in Kant's

doctrine," including that between "reason and desire," our rational and sensuous selves, but Rawls's doctrine retains this particular dualism and seeks to transcend it in much the same way that Kant's does. Both men attempt philosophical reconciliation on a heroic scale, and in the course of doing so, both offer us liberalisms of meaning—that is, liberalisms "mediating the natural and moral ends of humanity"—just as Church desires and just as the West so desperately needs.

I could continue in this vein, but let's face it: Rawls's exegesis is a secondary concern for Church in this book, and I don't want to detract from my main point: this book is a superb contribution to the intellectual defense of liberal societies . . . and when the barbarians are at the gate, it's best not to quibble about the gate's color; rather, it's time to man the ramparts.

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Ethics and Politics in Kant's Liberalism

Peter J. Steinberger
Reed College

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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The virtues of Jeffrey Church's *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* are both evident and quite substantial. Indeed, the book is something of a *tour de force*. Church presents a dense and detailed account of a wide variety of Kant's writings, with a particular focus on pre-Critical materials with which many political theorists will be relatively unfamiliar. Those materials are various and challenging, ranging over a host of seemingly distinct topics and reflecting any number of evolving historical and intellectual contexts. Tackling such a body of work would perforce be a daunting endeavor for anyone. But Church's analysis is rooted in a deep knowledge of the relevant history, a serious engagement with appropriate philological issues, and an impressive philosophical sensibility. The book is a major contribution to our conversation concerning Kant's politics in particular and liberal political thought in general.

That contribution is in the service, moreover, of a striking—in fact, several striking—thesis. Church argues that Kant's liberalism is effectively sui generis, and importantly so. Far from simply reappropriating well-known materials of liberal thought characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Kant sought to reconcile—or perhaps sublate—a number of tensions inherent in canonical liberalism, including, inter alia, the apparent conflict

between perfectionist and anti-perfectionist theories, between the demands of individual freedom and those of social order, between the claims of what Church calls *culture* (independence or perfection) and those of *civilization* (wholeness). In so doing, Kantian political thought, according to Church, offers nothing less than a distinctive—and distinctively compelling—kind of liberalism that resists many if not most of the criticisms to which liberalism has been commonly subjected and provides thereby a concrete, substantive answer to perhaps the largest of all questions—namely, what really is, internal to the broad liberal paradigm, the meaning of life. On Church's interpretation, Kant's liberalism argues that the meaning of life is, for each of us, provided by contributing to the overall progress of humankind as it seeks both order and independence. And in this specific context, the ultimate exegetical argument of the book, if I understand it correctly, is that Kant's thought is more or less of a piece and that, in particular, the work of the Critical period is continuous with, deeply dependent on, and in some sense merely an elaboration of tendencies and commitments that we find in the pre-Critical material.

This is not an especially easy book. In pursuing his arguments, Church engages an extremely large, sometimes even bewildering array of topics and themes that are invariably germane and edifying but whose interconnections are not always self-evident. The text is wonderfully well written but also dense, and teasing out a coherent, mutually sustaining set of positions is likely to require some effort. Largely as a result of this, I myself am not now prepared to offer any confident criticisms; I am just not as clear about the arguments as I would like to be. I am prepared, however, to raise any number of serious questions, not at all doubting that Church would be able to answer those questions satisfactorily but doubtful of my ability to discover the answers on my own.

For present purposes, I would raise three sets of questions pertaining to, respectively, the notion of independence, the problem of teleological argument, and the larger question of the relationship between Kant's Critical and pre-Critical thought.

It goes without saying that Kant's thought, both political and ethical, is deeply concerned with the broad question of freedom. Presumably this, above all, is what makes Kant a liberal. But of course, freedom is or can be many different things, and how various conceptions of freedom play out in Church's account is a complicated story. On the one hand, he insists that the independence of the individual is the principal value that political endeavor does or should seek to achieve.[30] But while Church says a great deal about independence, it's not easy to find a clear-cut definition of it or how it relates to freedom, another notion that receives a great deal of attention here. Are independence and freedom to be understood as essentially synonyms? If so, why use two different words? Of course, the connotations of those two words seem, in many circumstances, to be quite different from each other. They don't seem to be saying quite the same thing, and thus one wonders how significant the difference is and what that tells us, in Church's account, about Kant's political thought.

But the problem becomes deeper than this when one considers that the notion of autonomy—or, at least, moral autonomy as opposed to political autonomy—receives rather little attention here.[31] The freedom of the will is not much discussed. In this connection, moreover, the question of Rousseau may be relevant. Church rightly emphasizes the enormous influence that Rousseau's writings had on Kant. But Church's focus is largely on the so-called anthropological materials, as adumbrated perhaps most famously in Rousseau's Second Discourse.[32] Yet, surely Rousseau's account in the *Social Contract* of the difference between natural and moral freedom—and of the very idea of freedom, properly understood, as a matter of acting according to principles that one has autonomously legislated to oneself—are absolutely central to an understanding Kant's larger philosophical project.[33] And here, then, we appear to lose sight of the question of how the Rousseau-Kant nexus might naturally evolve into something like the Hegelian idea that freedom and obedience, properly conceived, are not two different things to be reconciled with each other but are, rather,

pretty much the same thing. It's hardly odd to think that the second *Critique* offers some such argument.

Along these lines, Church resists a strictly "deontological approach" to Kantian political thought and appears to embrace, at least up to a point, a kind of "teleological account" associated with Guyer, among others.[34] But in the Kantian universe, the word *teleology* seems to be tricky. Indeed, it denotes, to my mind, no less than three quite different things. First, it describes any kind of progressive process (natural, social, intellectual) that tends, purely as a matter of fact, to move toward some end or goal. Thus, the human body as a biological organism tends to grow and mature in more or less well-defined ways; logical arguments unfold according to some set of directionally oriented rules; history itself is, on some accounts, a quasi-linear structure of social or collective progress. Entirely different from this, it seems, is the idea of teleology as a theory of moral justification. The fact, if it is a fact, that human history is a history of progress is largely unrelated to the argument that the ends justify the means. Such notions seem to reside in two entirely different realms of discourse. And different still is a third thing—namely, the idea that the epistemological and methodological principles of the *First Critique* are insufficient to account for the success of science and that to mechanical theories of cause and effect we must add reflective judgments of functional or teleological causation of a sort described in the latter parts of the *Third Critique*. We understand an organism only if we understand that the various organs have distinctive roles to play, even as categories of quality, quantity, relation, and modality are in themselves unable to account for those roles. Of these three senses of teleology, deontology stands as an alternative only to the second (i.e., as a matter of moral justification). Thus, simply to contrast a teleological approach to a deontological approach to Kant appears to elide or ignore an entire range of seemingly deep distinctions. To be sure, there seems to be nothing wrong with saying that Kant's anthropological thought, as a form of "naturalism," is teleologically oriented. Again, Kant does indeed seem to have believed that human progress is both possible and real and that this might well provide

a powerful account of the "meaning of life." But that seems somehow independent both of the question of moral right and wrong and of the very idea of an organism.

Of course, these questions raise, in turn, the larger issue of the relationship between the pre-Critical and Critical work. Kant famously understood himself to have, at one point, awakened from a slumber and to have embarked, thereby, on a new project—namely, the Critical project in its three basic stages, a change that he could, with a straight face, call Copernican in scope. By seeking to find a strong sense of continuity between the pre-Critical and Critical periods, Church seems to want to deemphasize the newness of that new project. It is an attractive and admirable line of inquiry. But one wonders what ultimately motivates it. Again, it's not easy to see why a Kantian naturalistic and anthropologically grounded theory of human government and social organization could not live side by side with a philosophically analytic theory of what we mean when we say of some X that it is has these or those properties, that it is morally good or morally justified, and that it is aesthetically pleasing or functionally useful. Why cannot two such different projects compose distinct parts of a complex, multifaceted, and wide-ranging intellectual biography? Perhaps more to the point, does the political theory need the ethics? Does the moral theory need the politics? These questions remain, for me, unclear.

What is clear, however, is that Church's excellent book forces us to encounter such issues in especially urgent and compelling ways. In this sense, the book is an inspiration. And it is inspiring in no small measure because of the scholarly excellence and high ambition that it represents.

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How Many Vocations? Rousseau, Evil, and the *Bestimmung des Menschen* in Kant

Michael Kryluk
University of Oslo

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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Does human nature have a purpose? If it does, how should this purpose affect the values and direction of not just individual human lives but also the organization of political communities and even the entire human species? In the Western philosophical tradition, versions of these questions are at least as old as Aristotle. But it may come as a surprise that a significant amount of material, most of it in the form of posthumously published notes and lectures, shows that Kant pursued a similar line of inquiry for a period of roughly thirty years, chiefly under the aegis of his class on anthropology. This is not the forbidding, all-crushing Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* but Kant the disciple of Rousseau wrestling with the problem of how to take human beings as they are and make them into what they ought to be. Although Kant's relationship to Rousseau has long been a topic of interest, the full story of his engagement with the Genevan, including its implications for his political theory, cannot be found in his principal writings but requires considerable reconstruction from ancillary sources. Despite the attention given to various dimensions of Kant's anthropology lectures in recent scholarship, the task of excavating his dialogue with Rousseau remains largely undone.

That Jeffrey Church uses the wealth of available documentation to systematically present Kant's Rousseauian conception of human nature and its consequences for politics in *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* thus makes his text a welcome contribution. Although he considers his book to be "less ambitious" than the work of predecessors like Susan M. Shell and Richard L. Velkley, the contrary is the case.[35] For Church not only offers a thorough account of Kant's Rousseauian anthropology (Part I) and its ramifications for understanding and assessing his mature political theory (Part II). He also makes the case that Kant's "pre-Critical Kantian liberalism" is uniquely positioned to resolve the maladies of current politics by addressing the "meaning deficit" in modern liberalism that feeds illiberal extremism (Part III).[36]

This program brings Church into numerous debates, and no single review could adequately comment on all of them. However, its contemporary outlook notwithstanding, Church's argument largely hinges on his original and well-argued analysis of Kant's Rousseau. Yet it is here, I submit, that complications arise. My general concern is the following: despite rightly framing Kant's philosophical conception of human nature as an "anthropodicy," in which a teleological doctrine of nature is rationally justified by moral freedom, Church underplays and at times misconstrues the interrelated themes of evil and providence at work in Kant's reception and interpretation of Rousseau.[37] Although such dusty theological concerns may seem inessential to Kant's political theory, it seems to me that a proper consideration of their role in his philosophical anthropology problematizes any depiction of Kant as a liberal. In what follows, then, I raise three points about Kant's Rousseauian anthropology and its consequences for Church's position.

Let's start with Kant's intellectual development and Church's account of the evolution of Kant's position on the purpose of human life during the pre-Critical period. Church argues that Kant was concerned with the problem of articulating a final human end as early as his *Universal Natural History* of 1755 (chapter 1) and that his stance on the matter was given a new, distinctly practical

orientation via Rousseau in the mid-1760s (chapter 2). This shift is mainly evidenced in the so-called *Remarks* that Kant wrote inside his personal copy of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and, to a lesser extent, the *Moral Philosophy Herder*, a lecture transcription. Church notes that Kant framed his newly Rousseauian conception of the teleological aim of human nature in terms of the popular discourse of the human vocation (*die Bestimmung des Menschen*), a topic introduced into German-language philosophy by Johann Joachim Spalding in 1748 and then later prominently debated by Thomas Abbt and Moses Mendelssohn (32–33). Church also points to Kant's 1759 essay on optimism and, later, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* as relevant to the development of Kant's views.[38]

Now, I fully agree with Church's procedure of turning to Kant's pre-Critical output to contextualize and flesh out the Rousseauian portrait of human nature that emerges in the mid-1760s and is then further elaborated in his lectures on anthropology and ethics starting in the mid-1770s. Still, while no single study of Kant's philosophy can be expected to cover everything, I do think that Church's cursory overview of the contours of the *Bestimmung des Menschen* debate and Kant's writings from between 1755 and the mid-1760s omits some crucial elements of his Rousseauian anthropology. The key indicator is AA 20:58–59 of the *Remarks*.[39] Here, Kant says that Rousseau has helped to justify the providence of creation by showing the lawful unity of human nature despite the appearance of disorder and meaninglessness. Kant connects this interpretation of Rousseau to his previous engagement with Leibniz's *Theodicy* and Pope's *Essay on Man*.[40] Both Leibniz and Pope are positioned alongside Rousseau (and Newton) as defenders of providence against skeptical objections, mostly notably Pierre Bayle's doubts about the ability of reason to solve the problem of evil and assign a final aim to human life.[41]

None of this is exactly lost on Church. He acknowledges the foregoing passage from the *Remarks* and discusses the topics of evil and providence in view of Kant's reading of Rousseau and his notion of the human vocation.[42] Yet these dimensions of Kant's

pre-Critical thought deserve more attention. Why? As the claim that Rousseau justifies providence suggests, Kant interpreted the Genevan through the lens of his preexisting interest in the philosophical challenge of answering the problem of evil via a rational vindication of the underlying goodness of creation. This colors Kant's treatment of the human vocation in ways that Church does not always fully appreciate, even if he is right to stress that Rousseau also fundamentally changes Kant's approach to the question of a final end for humanity.

Kant read Rousseau's "Letter on Providence," a response to Voltaire's "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster," in early 1760, not long after it was published.[43] In this piece, Rousseau restates the basic argument of the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* as a version of the freedom defense against the problem of evil. That is, Rousseau casts moral and (most) physical evil not, as Voltaire did, as evidence of the intractable irrationality and purposelessness of existence but instead as products of human freedom and perfectibility.[44] This is reiterated in the famous line that opens Book I of *Emile*, "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man," and is further developed in the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar" in Book IV.[45] Accordingly, for Kant, Rousseau justifies providence by showing that responsibility for the ills and imperfections of humanity lies not with nature, but with the radically self-transformative power of the human will. If the apparent lack of purpose in human life is a contingent product of freedom and not a permanent feature of human nature, then it is possible that the human being could have a final aim that is consistent with a rational, teleological universe. At the same time, the end of human life is not simply given by nature but must arise from the free, perfectible character that defines the species and has, so far, brought about widespread vice and suffering for humanity. That human freedom and self-perfection, even in the corrupted condition of civil society, retain the capacity to forge a moral purpose and so vindicate the general providence of creation is a central proposition of *Emile* expressed by the theodicean maxim "What is, is good."[46] Indeed, it is precisely

the fact that the human being is tasked with overcoming the vicissitudes of its freedom and choosing a final moral aim for itself that constitutes the exceptional dignity of its existence. For both Kant and Rousseau, the unconditional worth of the capacity for moral self-determination is the ultimate rebuttal to the skeptic's doubts about the purpose of human life raised by the problem of evil. The simplicity and contentment afforded to nonrational nature cannot measure up to the autonomous value of the human will, even if the latter entails greater evil and unhappiness than an existence without moral freedom.[47]

This brings me to my second major point, Church's configuration of the *Bestimmung des Menschen* in Kant. According to Church, there are three vocations of the human being for Kant, two natural and one moral. The two natural vocations are (1) the aim of wholeness or unity and (2) the aim of free, rational perfection.[48] Vocation (1) refers to our basic, animalistic need for belonging and community and is reflected in the desire for cooperation, procreation, and the trademark innocence and equality of the Rousseauian state of nature. By contrast, vocation (2) captures the natural yet distinctly human need for independence, status, and the cultivation of our rational talents and abilities. For Church's Kant, (1) and (2) conflict with each other, a tension at the core of human nature that drives advancements in the history of the species like the invention of the state. With the arrival of civil society, the vocation of wholeness evolves to generate artificial norms of honor and propriety (chapter 7), while the vocation of perfection sustains competition and progress in the arts and sciences (chapter 6). Despite its developmental function, the constant strife between the two natural vocations of the human being is an enduring source of aimlessness and unhappiness that can be resolved only by the achievement of (3) our highest moral vocation, an ongoing, species-level process of ethical improvement that also encompasses the political goal of an international federation of peaceful republics (chapter 8).

This tripartite scheme of human *Bestimmungen* employed by Church has many interpretive advantages. It neatly organizes

Kant's often-scattered comments on human nature in the lectures and his published writings. It also corresponds to other, related triads in Kant, such as three predispositions (*Anlagen*) found in the *Religion* and the three domains of culture, civilization, and morality outlined in the anthropology lectures and elsewhere.[49] Moreover, the conflict between the collective need for wholeness and the individualizing demand for perfection stressed by Church anticipates the famous description of the "unsocial sociability" of the human being in Kant's 1784 "Universal History" essay.[50] But I have my doubts about Church's reconstruction of Kant's take on the *Bestimmung des Menschen*.

First, there is the textual evidence. Although Church locates passages in which Kant refers to either the opposing vocations of animality and/or the two natural ends of nature and civil society, these comments fail to establish a threefold distinction between the human *teloi* of wholeness, perfection, and morality.[51] In other passages, Kant frames the issue of the human vocation dualistically in terms of the opposition between a natural and a moral *Bestimmung*.[52] Second, and more important, there is Church's claim that the human being is riven by the two antagonistic ends of wholeness and perfection *by nature*.[53] As such, Church says, Kant's conception of human nature demonstrates the "irrationality" of creation by showing that "the order of nature is imperfect" and that "nature made a mess of things" with humanity.[54] But framing the nature-civilization contradiction in this way runs counter to Kant's and Rousseau's focus on vindicating providence via a free will defense against the problem of evil. As I stressed earlier, it is not nature (or God) that is responsible for the evil and unhappiness brought about by the development of the human species but our own free perfectibility. This is why Kant, in his most important published statements on Rousseau, always points out that the human being is at fault for the vice and suffering that divides it from the goodness of nature. "The history of *nature* thus begins from good, for that is the *work of God*," Kant writes, paraphrasing *Emile*, "the history of *freedom* from evil, for it is *the work of the human being*."[55] While Church acknowledges this dimension of

Kant's anthropology and even quotes the passage from the preceding sentence, his claim that nature has irrationally or senselessly given humanity the two conflicting aims of wholeness and perfection undermines Kant's emphasis on the wholly free, self-made character of the species.[56] This is a straightforward consequence of the providential logic behind Kant's interpretation of Rousseau announced at AA 20:58–59. It explains why, even during the Critical period, Kant upholds reason's interest in showing how, despite appearances, human freedom conforms to and does not oppose the providential goodness of nature, albeit only as a regulative idea meant to reinforce the independently binding demands of morality.[57]

A final, two-pronged consideration: On the one hand, I think that Church's stridently liberal version of Kant is both more and less politically progressive than Kant himself. In terms of the first, Church argues that Kant's distinct, species-level view of the projected achievement of the human vocation involves a modern conception of the meaning of life defined by "our role in the story of humanity's progress," in which "[e]ach of us is part of this secular story" of collective moral improvement.[58] This reading of Kant's philosophy of history is, I think, overly sanguine. Although Kant says that every human being has a duty to advance the common project of moral progress for the species, he also claims (anticipating Hegel) that history uses individuals to accomplish aims they would not otherwise choose or agree to.[59] This cold, instrumental logic of Kant's idea of purposive history is sometimes described in rather brutal language. In the published *Anthropology*, Kant says that the austere moral education that providence exacts from humanity involves a host of hardships for individuals and could even bring the species to the point of extinction.[60] Likewise, Kant writes in an unpublished note that the advancement of the human race as a whole does not entail equal progress for all; "it may well be that some remain behind."[61] In my view, Church's discussions of Kant's views on women and race need to account for the decidedly illiberal and anti-individualistic perspective of Kant's philosophy of history.[62] For instance, if advancing the moral purpose of the

species does not require the kind of voluntary and personally meaningful contribution by each individual portrayed by Church, then it is far from clear that Kant holds that men and women ought to "recogniz[e] one another as equals in the pursuit of a higher vocation of humanity."[63]

On the other hand, while there are certainly conservative elements to Kant's philosophy, Church's Kant is unduly conservative on one important point. As Church argues, an upshot of his claim that "Kant's anthropology prevents any kind of complete harmony of our natures, because our nature is itself divided" is its compatibility with the anti-perfectionism of much conservative thought.[64] Similarly, Church uses his view of Kant's understanding of the fissures intrinsic to human nature to restrain criticisms of liberalism and capitalism. "[T]he root cause of" many of the ills of modern society stressed by contemporary leftists, as Church puts it, "is not liberal reason or freedom, but human nature itself."[65] Yet, as I have argued, Church's claim that there is an "inner contradiction in our nature between perfection and wholeness" is at odds with the core commitments of Kant's "anthropodicy," which is above all an account of the open-ended, fully self-determining power of human freedom.[66] As Kant puts it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the notion that human nature imposes fixed limits on our capacity for political progress is morally and metaphysically suspect, for practical perfection is an infinite process guided by *a priori* ideas that cannot be circumscribed in advance.[67] Whatever pessimism Kant expresses about human nature is ultimately outweighed by his faith, misplaced or not, in the rational ability of the species to freely remake itself in and through history. This is not about correcting the intractable flaws of nature but righting the free yet errant *perfectibilité* of humanity highlighted by Rousseau in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

To sum up, then, I have three questions to pose to Church. First, does Kant's account of the human vocation really represent a distinctly modern take on the meaning of life that breaks with traditional teleological concerns by focusing on the unique part that each individual has to play in a shared narrative of human

progress? And, if this is not the case, is Kant's anthropology actually a form of liberalism, or is it something stranger and harder to classify? If the latter, is Kant the best figure to turn to right now to address the crisis of liberalism?

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Response to Critics

Jeffrey Church
University of Houston

Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life
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The core aim of my book is to make a case that human nature should matter more to contemporary liberalism. A great deal of analysis in contemporary liberal theory abstracts from human nature, assuming our natures to be socially constructed or historically variable. To be sure, philosophers have developed thin theories about "primary goods" that all human beings can be expected to pursue in life, and about the "capabilities" that are necessary conditions for a flourishing human life. But few liberal theories today undertake a philosophical anthropology to understand how these goods and capacities emerge from the structure and ends of our nature. Theorists did not always abstract from human nature, of course. In fact, this abstraction is a relatively recent phenomenon. Plato examined the nature of the soul and its relationship to the city. Hobbes argued that human beings are non-political animals and fear is our fundamental human motivation. Hume and Smith greatly expanded the science of the passions and their relevance for our political and economic lives.

For these canonical thinkers, human nature provides a framework that motivates and constrains our political theorizing. By understanding human nature, we can discern the fundamental problems that politics is meant to solve and the passions and interests that it can draw on in solving those problems, as the mechanism of the "state of nature" makes clear. When we abstract from human nature, we can misunderstand what the core problems of politics are and what human powers exist (other than reason) that

can frustrate and facilitate our efforts. I suspect one of the reasons for the abstraction from human nature has been the abiding influence of Rousseau's critique of early modern political thought. On one reading, Rousseau challenges his predecessors like Hobbes and Locke for reading their own second nature back into nature itself. We should be skeptical, then, of efforts to draw on accounts of "human nature" as these efforts all are in effect ideological tools to support certain structures of power within contemporary society. We cannot reach back to an unchanging human nature, but human nature itself is constantly in motion, perfectible. Better to approach politics by "denaturing" human beings and constructing a general will in abstraction from natural inclinations.

I do not read Rousseau in this way, nor do I think Kant did. Instead, I think, Rousseau introduced a whole new way of conceiving of human nature as divided rather than unitary. We human beings are by nature like any other animal in our capacity to live in harmony with the rest of nature, to enjoy our wholeness in the form of the "sentiment of our existence." Yet we are essentially different from other animals in our capacity to transcend nature with our freedom, to upset harmonious orders and divide us against one another in our pursuit of perfectibility. In his early work, Kant drew on Rousseau's anthropology and argued that these two different ends—wholeness and perfection—represented two *Bestimmungen* (vocations or determinations) of our natures. In contrast to the ancients, who conceived of human beings as having a single *telos*, that of logos, for example, Rousseau and Kant identified two *teloi*. The trouble is that these ends come into tension and even outright contradiction with each other as civilization develops. The more we perfect our societies by perfecting our powers over the earth and over one another, the more division and inequality we find among one another, rather than wholeness.

Kant's anthropology is important because it helps us better understand the challenges any regime faces in pursuing justice. Human beings display "unsociable sociability," in Kant's famous phrase, a distillation of his early anthropological analysis of the tension between our desire for perfection and wholeness. At the

same time, this anthropology allows us to understand the motivation for adopting a higher human vocation or end, one that is self-given, since nature does not provide us with a path to escape our inner division. That higher, self-given vocation is for moral and juridical perfection, a vocation very familiar to readers of Kant. Our moral end resolves our inner division by providing some principled limit to our striving while also unifying us in a common moral project. Kant's anthropology provides us with a uniquely dynamic conception of human nature, at once perpetually divided while also pointing the way to its own resolution.

His anthropology is also critical to liberalism, which has been constantly bombarded by challenges over its history. Kant's account of human nature can help liberals understand why illiberal opponents on the left and right have long been appealing—namely, because they provide a higher illiberal calling to heal our divided souls—and thereby also shed light on how to combat these challenges—by embracing a distinctively liberal meaning for our lives.

I stress this fundamental aim of the book because it will help me respond to my insightful reviewers, who have diverse concerns. It is not that the reviewers overlook this aim. Rather, it is that they take issue with some of my other aims in the book, in some cases, I admit, quite rightly. But I argue in what follows that this core aim survives these criticisms. Namely, Kant's anthropology is a useful resource for defending contemporary liberalism and for understanding Kant's political theory more fully.

Liberalism and Human Nature

Three of the respondents focus on my application of Kant to contemporary liberalism: Lisa Ellis, Nick Tampio, and Bob Taylor.

Ellis argues that my Kantian liberalism focuses almost exclusively on domestic politics and right, overlooking cosmopolitan right. Ignoring cosmopolitan justice is a problem because there are international problems—such as environmental crises—that threaten the possibility of the Kantian liberalism I am discussing here.

I think Ellis is largely correct in her criticism. My book is mainly focused on justice in particular states, rather than cosmopolitan right. However, I think that my Kantian liberalism can be extended beyond the confines of particular states to cosmopolitan concerns. Indeed, the core aim of the book—to develop and apply Kant's anthropology—can provide some important insights for world politics.

In fact, just as liberal theory tends to abstract from human nature, cosmopolitan theories of justice tend to do so as well. Kant's anthropology can help inform cosmopolitanism by identifying some of the obstacles to justice. States, like individuals, will display conflicting ends of perfection and wholeness. States compete in military and economic superiority, in a constant arms race (both literal and metaphorical) to overcome others. At the same time, states seek to form regional partnerships and share international burdens of giving asylum to refugees, for example. The "unsociable sociability" of states can help us understand the dynamic and unstable character of international politics. But it also helps motivate states to accept international norms of justice that promise some reconciliation for their conflicting natural ends.

In the environmental domain, too, Kant's anthropology can help us understand our very different responses to climate change. Our "perfectionist" end drives some to embrace unlimited progress, to seek a technological fix to our problems. Our end of "wholeness" drives others to arrest and even roll back technological progress and embrace a simpler and more sustainable form of living. This conflict points to and calls for general principles of justice that can limit and reconcile both impulses.

Ellis rightly brings out the blind spots in my analysis. My hope is that I have sketched an anthropological foundation that can be applied to other domains I did not discuss.

Tampio argues that my Kantian liberalism is parochial in a different way. Namely, I do not explain how or to what degree forms of religiously inspired political doctrines can be incorporated within the Kantian perfectionism I sketch. Tampio states that I have a choice before me: either embrace a secular perfectionist

liberalism and exclude religious doctrine or water down the perfectionism in an effort to accommodate religious views.

I resist the proposed choice. In my view, Kantian liberalism can be perfectionist in some domains and anti-perfectionist and pluralist in other domains. For example, in matters of basic human rights, in which government coercion is centrally involved, liberals should be anti-perfectionist. Christians, Muslims, Kantians, all can come together to affirm basic human rights to speech, freedom of religion, procedural political and civic rights, and the like. The state should defend these rights, not on the basis of any particular comprehensive worldview, nor for the purpose of any particular good, but instead to leave it up to differing worldviews to affirm it from their own perspective, forming what Rawls calls an "overlapping consensus" about these rights. In this domain, Kantians can and should compromise with religious thinkers, and religious thinkers can and should compromise with Kantians. However, in the non-coercive or expressive functions of government, in which government can persuade and educate the people, the state can be more perfectionist. It can affirm particular comprehensive doctrines and advance particular views of the good. Here, Kantians and Islamic democrats would have more difficulty getting along, but since their basic rights are protected, they can remain loyal to the political community and instead compete to gain power over the expressive function of the state through the political process.

Developing this distinction adequately would require another book, I fear. However, more generally, Kant is well-suited to compromise precisely because his secular ideal does not, I think, at all resemble contemporary (often illiberal) progressivism. I consider his philosophy as a kind of "fighting centrism." He emphasizes the importance of history, tradition, and religion as the major civilizing institutions of civil society. He defends politeness and decorum as integral parts of a civilized society. All these institutions and norms conservatives, especially religious conservatives, can support. At the same time, Kant defends progress toward general human emancipation, but he understands this progress in moral rather than self-expressive terms, which again overlaps with religious believers. This

centrism results from the central point I have been making here, that of his anthropology. Our conflictual human nature requires, in Kant's view, slow and dynamic progress toward a higher aim. This slow, steady progress to morally improve our natures can find some purchase, I expect, among nonsecular audiences.

Taylor takes me to task for straw-manning Rawls. I appreciate Taylor's references to important parts of Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, in which Rawls is much closer to my Kant than I suggest. I find his comments and his references quite convincing. In retrospect, I wish I had incorporated Rawls's *Theory* into my analysis, which would have deepened my account of Kant's perfectionist liberalism and allowed me to clarify its distinctiveness more sharply. Instead, I focused on Rawls's later work *Political Liberalism*, which distinguishes more strongly between the right and the good. In his own work, Taylor argues that Rawls's earlier work succeeds over the later work precisely for the reasons I am arguing in this book, that it defends a perfectionist liberalism that arouses and satisfies our highest aspirations.

Rawls might be closer to Kant in his perfectionist liberalism than I suggest in the book, but I do think that Kant is still distinctive in his examination of our divided human nature. Indeed, Rawls has long been criticized for abstracting from human nature, for instance, in the context of his discussion about the Original Position from *Theory*. By contrast, Kant's anthropology frames and motivates his liberalism in my interpretation. It allows us to understand the enduring tensions that exist within any Original Position among human beings and indeed into liberal practice itself. In this way, I retreat to my central point—that the beginning of liberalism in our human nature is as important as the perfectionist end of liberalism we seek.

Kant and Human Nature

Two of the symposium participants question my interpretation of Kant: Peter Steinberger and Michael Kryluk.

Steinberger asks for clarification, first, about the related notions of freedom and independence, and he wonders about the

absence of moral freedom in my book. Since this is a book largely about Kant's anthropology and political theory, I sidestepped analysis of moral freedom in Kant, which has been treated extensively in the literature. My focus is the connection between Kant's view of our natural desire for freedom and our political independence. What is the relationship between these two concepts?

For Kant, alongside our "sociable" desire for wholeness and harmony with others, we have an "unsociable" desire to be free from others, not to be directed by their will. Kant remarks that the condition of slavery is most aversive to human beings, and we can see our natural desire for freedom even in young children who cry out for release from their parents' grasp. Kant conceives of this natural freedom as a "wild freedom," the freedom of "barbarians," freedom unconstrained by any law. It is an amoral form of freedom, a liberty that can be turned to good or ill.

By contrast, independence (*Unabhängigkeit*, in contrast to *Freiheit*) is a civil, not a natural, condition. If we are independent, we are unconstrained from the arbitrary will of others, as in the natural condition. But unlike in the natural condition, independence is constrained by and essentially dependent on right or law. I am independent only through law insofar as the law confers on me a certain civic status as an independent citizen and protects me in that capacity. In this way, I am independent from the wills of other individuals but dependent on the political community and its laws.

Rousseau provides the best context for this discussion. Rousseau envisioned the natural human being as existing in harmony with the rest of nature, but also displaying natural freedom. Natural human beings would resist enslavement at any cost. Even collective action projects, such as hunting a deer, would be difficult to carry out, since natural human beings would defect with their freedom and chase after a rabbit close by, endangering the whole project. However, as human beings enter into social and civil relationships with one another, we become dependent on one another for our status and economic well-being. This dependence frustrates our natural desire for freedom, as we must constantly bow and scrape

before our superiors to satisfy our needs. Rousseau's and Kant's solution to this social dependence is to create a condition of political dependence, in which the laws, not other individuals, provide the recognition for our status. The laws enable and protect our independence from one another and thereby satisfy our natural desire for freedom.

Steinberger then probes the relationship between Kant's anthropology—which is an empirical, a posteriori project—and his moral philosophy—which is a pure, *a priori* project. For example, Steinberger argues, Kant has a notion of teleology, but he deploys that concept in different epistemic domains. In his anthropology, human beings display teleology like any other organism. Kant's mature thinking about the regulative nature of teleological judgment appears in his third *Critique*. By contrast, there is quite a different kind of teleology at work in his moral philosophy, which points toward the Kingdom of Ends as the perfection of our moral character. This teleology is not regulative but constitutive. Steinberger objects to my importing of anthropological teleology into Kant's deontological ethics.

I agree with Steinberger that Kant conceives of his anthropological and moral projects as distinct epistemologically. At the same time, a number of Kant scholars have recently found inadequate the traditional way of describing Kant's ethics as deontological as opposed to consequentialist. In brief, for scholars such as Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Kant's moral philosophy is grounded not on formal principles but on substantive ends of reason, which the categorical imperative constrains and is in service to. Defending this change of perspective is well beyond the constraints of this symposium and even beyond the confines of my book. My point is that Kant's anthropology, with its grounding in the vocation of our natural humanity, can help us better appreciate the force of Guyer's and Wood's arguments about Kantian ethics, which is grounded in the vocation of our free humanity.

Steinberger concludes with a broader doubt about my effort to bridge the gap between Kant's anthropology and his ethical and political philosophy. What motivates my project? Why the effort to

naturalize what cannot be naturalized in Kant's metaphysics? Steinberger himself is a defender of metaphysics in politics, swimming against the current of much contemporary political philosophy, which tends to be skeptical of metaphysics. In part, my project speaks to this latter group. For many, Kant's moral philosophy is a nonstarter because of its supposedly outmoded metaphysical commitments. I aim to show that Kant's anthropology reveals a decidedly more naturalist Kant that can find a great deal more contemporary purchase. However, at the same time, Kant's anthropology is also compatible with the metaphysical Kant Steinberger admires. As I have mentioned, Kant's anthropology frames and motivates the ethical perspective causally without grounding it normatively. The motivational and justificatory projects belong to different domains, and so my focus on Kant's anthropology is compatible with different justificatory approaches to his ethics—naturalist and metaphysical. My book focuses centrally on Kant's view of human nature and aims only to suggest how that anthropology can inform normative debates, not settle them.

Of all the respondents, Kryluk challenges my account of Kant's anthropology, which is central to the book. He argues that I neglect a crucial feature of Kant's engagement with Rousseau in the early anthropology—namely, that Kant follows Rousseau in responding to the problem of evil and redeeming divine providence in his anthropological account. In my book, I indeed emphasize the problem of evil, that our divided natural soul entangles us in all manner of vice and unhappiness. But I do downplay Kant's account of providence and instead argue that we human beings have to redeem nature's errors, for nature is not going to do it for us. Kryluk argues that for Kant, following Rousseau, nature is good, and it is humanity that has introduced evil in the world. So is nature good for Kant, as Kryluk claims, or is it flawed for Kant, as I claim?

I do admit that there is some textual evidence to support Kryluk's point. The early anthropology, and indeed in some infamous passages in the *Groundwork*, Kant appeals to God's wise plan in constructing nature in the way he did. Like many interpreters,

I find such passages to be unsatisfying and implausible. For the all-destroying Kant of the first *Critique* to turn around and invoke providence in the *Groundwork* seems strange.

Another reason why I find the appeal to providence to be unsatisfying is that I do not read Kant's early anthropology—or even his late philosophy of history—as providing an account of humanity's necessary development. Of course, our development in history can be predicted according to the divided ends of our human nature. But that development is not necessary. For example, Kant holds that nature is indifferent to human life and can destroy us in an earthquake or plague. Moreover, the divided nature of humanity does not necessitate a moral awakening on the part of human beings to overcome and redeem the evils that we find ourselves in. Nature gives us the equipment for doing so. It divides us against ourselves and provides us with freedom to take leave of its error. But it does not assist us in making that step of redeeming evil. Nature's flaws cannot turn out to be hidden wisdom after all because the flaws do not fix themselves—they just provide humanity with the an obstacle and opportunity to fix them.

So how, then, to interpret the textual evidence that Kant seems committed to nature's goodness and wisdom? In the state of nature, human beings can satisfy our desires for wholeness and freedom because our societies are so simple and our needs are so few. Nature is good in this natural condition, and the evils that occur after this condition are the result of human freedom. At the same time, nature is not blameless. What else could God have expected in giving human beings freedom? That we would forever choose never to use it? The claim about natural providence, after all, presumes that we would make us of our freedom, that we would introduce all manner of evils into the world. But if God's providence assumes human beings will make use of our freedom in this way, then nature itself contains a flaw or division within it that inclines human beings in this direction.

But what should we make of the providential claim about nature? God may divide our nature, but for a wise purpose to allow us to develop in such a way that would have been impossible had

we had a unitary nature. Following Susan Shell, I think that Kant invokes providence in an unorthodox way, even though it sounds orthodox at first glance. The orthodox understanding of providence is that God and nature will heal our wounds for us. Yet for Kant, nature will not do this. Human beings must undertake this effort ourselves, indeed against the tendencies of nature. But if this is true, then we cannot attribute goodness and providence wholly to nature and God. We human beings must recognize the flaws in creation and set about fixing them ourselves. Once we do, only then will we redeem the natural order of which we are a part. Kant can still continue to use the term *providence* because of the necessity of the evils to our development, but it is a providence that is finally effected by humanity, not by God.

Interpreting Kant's view in this way leads in my view to more plausible political conclusions. As Kryluk points out, Kant sometimes appeals to nature's tendency to make use of inequality and other evils to advance humanity. His remarks about women and about race are notorious in their illiberal and racist character. However, nature's brutal ways would be a problem for my view only if Kant asked us to admire nature's wisdom, as Kryluk suggests. On the contrary, if we think of nature as flawed in its design as well as in its execution, we can escape the "brutal" illiberal perspective on history that Kryluk suggests. We can develop a moral perspective from which to criticize nature's "use" of women and non-white races, and we can correct nature's mistakes.

However, Kryluk argues that my interpretation of Kant as conceiving of human nature as ineradicably divided makes him more conservative than Kant really is. It seems rather un-Kantian to assume that human beings can never improve our natures and overcome our basic flaws. If this were true, it would make historical progress meaningless. Indeed, I do think that for Kant, our natures are ineradicably divided, as he famously describes humanity as displaying "radical evil" in his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*. We human beings cannot, after all, escape our bodies and so cannot take leave of our natures. However, this fact does not mean that we cannot make progress toward moral and political

perfection. We can, for example, develop virtue, which involves the reshaping of our given nature in accordance with a self-given character. History, then, is the story of our endless reshaping of nature in accordance with moral principles. The ultimate goal is the perfect governance over our divided nature; but even in that distant future, our nature still remains divided, since we cannot escape our biology—it is just that we have employed our freedom to create a lasting moral and political peace.

Let me conclude by thanking the participants in this symposium for their excellent comments, and especially to Nick Tampio for organizing it. It is extremely gratifying to have very thoughtful scholars engage with my work and push me to rethink and reframe matters at a fundamental level. If academic books had second editions, I surely would revise my presentation in light of their concerns. Instead, I will carry these comments with me into the next project.

Notes

1. Jeffrey Church, *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 268. Hereafter cited as KLML.
2. Church, *KLML*, 263.
3. Church, *KLML*, 220.
4. For an interesting new discussion of this matter, see Jakob Huber, *Kant's Grounded Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
5. See Jim DeMint, "Progressive Politics Is the Left's New Religion," *Washington Examiner*, September 24, 2019; Tripp Parker, "The New Religion of the Woke Left Is a Faith without Atonement," *The Federalist*, June 30, 2020.
6. Church, *KLML*, 50–51.
7. Church, *KLML*, 98.
8. Church, *KLML*, 97.
9. William E. Connolly has written at length about how Nietzschean genealogy problematizes the efforts of secularists such as Kant to set the rules of the game by which all other existential faiths interact. See, e.g., William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), chap. 7, "A Critique of Pure Politics."
10. Church, *KLML*, 232.
11. Church, *KLML*, 246.

12. Rached Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, trans. David L. Johnston (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 8.
13. Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms*, 38.
14. Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms*, 40.
15. Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms*, 44.
16. Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms*, 44.
17. Andrew F March, "What Is 'Muslim' about Tunisia's 'Muslim Democrats'?," *Middle East Brief*, no. 142 (May 2021): 3.
18. Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms*, 50.
19. Church, *KLML*, 247.
20. Robert S. Taylor, *Reconstructing Rawls: The Kantian Foundations of Justice as Fairness* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012).
21. One concrete controversy I have in mind is the question of whether Muslims have a right to remove their children from modern sexuality education classes. For militant liberals, the answer is no. For pluralists, the answer may be that secularists should exercise a certain humility and generosity toward conservative religious ways of life. See J. Mark Halstead and Katarzyna Lewicka, "Should Homosexuality Be Taught as an Acceptable Alternative Lifestyle? A Muslim Perspective," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 28, no. 1 (1998): 49–64.
22. Church, *KLML*, 350.
23. Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain, *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
24. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
25. Church, *KLML*, 4
26. John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reasons Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64, no. 3 (1997): 773–74.
27. Church, *KLML*, 17, 199. Emphasis added.
28. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 359.
29. Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 228–29.
30. Church, *KLML*, 46–47.
31. Church, *KLML*, 172.
32. Church, *KLML*, 51.
33. See the famous essay by Ernst Cassirer in *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1945]).

34. Church, *KLML*, 91; Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Also, Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
35. Church, *KLML*, 9.
36. Church, *KLML*, 268, 18.
37. Church, *KLML*, 48. For a fuller statement of my view on these matters, see "Reflection 6593: Kant's Rousseau and the Vocation of the Human Being," *Kant-Studien* 114, no. 4 (December 2023): 728–58.
38. Church, *KLML*, 35, 56–57, 284n13.
39. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter, 1900–). I will follow the standard convention of citing this edition of Kant's works, which is often referred to as the *Akademie Ausgabe* (abbreviated AA). An exception is the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which I use the A (1781) and B (1787) edition pagination. Citations that include an R refer to the system of numbered reflections (*Reflexionen*) used to catalogue Kant's unpublished notes in AA volumes 14 through 19.
40. In addition to his 1759 "Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism," which defends Leibniz's *Theodicy*, Kant appears to have drafted material for a different piece on the topic for the 1755 Prussian Academy of Sciences essay competition, in which he favors Pope over Leibniz (AA 17:229–39). Moreover, Kant penned three essays on earthquakes in the wake of the 1755 Lisbon disaster, which brought renewed urgency to the themes of evil, providence, and human meaning (AA 1:417–72). Church does not mention Pope's *Essay* in his book, which is a noteworthy oversight, given its impact on Kant's anthropological thought as early as the *Universal Natural History*.
41. For instance, by claiming to have answered "the objection of Alfonso and Manes" via his interpretation of Rousseau, Kant presents himself as following in the footsteps of the *Theodicy*, even if his strictly practical justification of providence is meant to overcome the limitations of Leibniz's position. The Alfonso reference can be found at *Theodicy* II, §§193–94, while the mention of Manes alludes to Bayle's appeal to Manichaeism in his skeptical arguments against divine providence in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Bayle's position occasioned the *Theodicy*.
42. Church, *KLML*, 35, 40–41, 47–48, 94–98.
43. See J. G. Hamann, *Briefwechsel. Zweiter Band: 1760–1769* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1956), 9. Cf. AA 10:30.
44. "I see everywhere that the ills to which nature subjects us are far less cruel than those we add to them. . . . I do not see that one can seek

the source of moral evil other than in man free, perfected, thereby corrupted." Rousseau, *Collected Writings, Volume 3*, ed. Roger Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 111, 109.

45. Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 37, 266–313.
46. Rousseau, *Emile*, 371, 383. Pope's version in the *Essay on Man* is "Whatever is, is RIGHT" (Epistle I, 294; Epistle IV, 145, 394). Kant alludes to the latter at AA 20:59.
47. These ideas are expressed as follows by the Savoyard Vicar: "To complain about God's not preventing man from doing evil is to complain about His having given him an excellent nature, about His having put in man's actions the morality which ennobles them, about His having given him the right to virtue." *Emile*, 281. See also the account of virtue at 444–45, where it is stressed that moral worth consists in conscious self-mastery over artificial passions and not, as many may wrongly understand Rousseau, wholly unreflective natural innocence.
48. Church, *KLML*, 35–45.
49. Church, *KLML*, 49–50, 100–106.
50. Church, *KLML*, 46.
51. Church, *KLML*, 35, 119. The passages Church locates are R 1523, AA 15:895; 25:682, and AA 27:467.
52. See AA 8:115–18; cf. 27:233–35.
53. Church, *KLML*, 125, 148.
54. Church, *KLML*, 83, 64, 47. At p. 64, Church is quoting from R 6590 (AA 19:98), but Kant's sentence is a conditional statement: "*If* the righteous man is unhappy and the vicious man is happy, then not human beings but the order of nature is imperfect" (emphasis added). But it is an abiding concern of Kant's to justify reason's demand that happiness and moral worth will one day align with each other, in accordance with the idea of a teleological system of nature. As such, the order of nature is not imperfect because of humanity.
55. AA 8:115. Translation by Allen W. Wood in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also AA 7:326.
56. Church, *KLML*, 40–41, 97, 49. Church makes statements that seem to better cohere with my view. Nature, he says in one passage, "propels our natural inclination for freedom beyond nature itself for satisfaction" (72). Similarly, he says that nature "gives us freedom to overcome" the current contradictions of human existence (78). Yet, Church also writes

that nature has made an "error" with humanity (78). My point is that a consistent stance on teleology and the problem of evil demands that the "error" is fully ours and not at all nature's. Otherwise, we revert to the terrain of Bayle's skepticism: if a provident creator (or nature) could foresee that human beings would abuse their freedom, then would it not have been better for us to be denied free will? Both Kant and Rousseau block this line of objection by emphasizing the unconditional value of freedom and the possibility of moral self-determination that comes with it, even if human freedom in fact does more evil than good at this stage of our development.

57. See, e.g., AA 8:30, though this theme runs throughout the "Universal History" essay of 1784.
58. Church, *KLML*, 97.
59. AA 8:309.
60. AA 7:328.
61. R 1471a, AA 15:650.
62. Church, *KLML*, 78–82, 106–14.
63. Church, *KLML*, 82.
64. Church, *KLML*, 265.
65. Church, *KLML*, 253.
66. Church, *KLML*, 125, 48.
67. A 316–17/B 373–74; cf. AA 8:65.