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Above All Things Human: *Bestimmung* in Salomo Friedlaender's *Kant for Children*

Abstract: Kant's commitment to universalism has been called into question since increasing attention has been paid to his work on race in the last 20 years. This worry can easily be applied to Kant's work on education: when Kant describes education as allowing humanity to fulfill its *Bestimmung* (vocation), scholars might reasonably conclude that such a claim only applies to certain racial groups. Yet Salomo Friedlaender claims that if Kant's moral theory is taught to children, "Every person is valued according to her morality and no longer, as in our crude days, according to 'race' or national and religious affiliation" (●30●). This interpretation of Kant might strike some contemporary Kant scholars as naïvely optimistic, but neo-Kantians were well aware of Kant's racial claims. By examining how neo-Kantians read Kant's work on race, I argue that Friedlaender's interpretation provides a way of reading an unracialized *Bestimmung* in the pedagogy.

In the introduction to *Kant for Children: Questions and Answers for the Teaching of Morality*, Salomo Friedlaender claims that if Kant's moral theory is taught to children, "[s]tate and society are happy. The value of life grows. Every person is valued according to her morality and no longer, as in our crude days, according to 'race' or national and religious affiliation" (●30●). This interpretation of Kant might strike some contemporary Kant scholars as naïvely optimistic. At worst, some might think Friedlaender is being willfully ignorant. Kant's commitment to universalism has been called into question since increasing attention has been paid to his work on race in the last 20 years. In the same year (1788) that Kant published the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he also published "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" in which he appears to endorse a racial hierarchy (Kleingeld 2011, 105). Contemporary readers of Kant naturally wonder whether his claim that all rational beings have moral dignity really applies to *all* rational beings. This worry can easily be applied to Kant's work on education. In the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant frequently contrasts education to "savagery," which some scholars have taken to be a thinly-veiled reference to non-whites.¹ In one unfortunate passage, Kant uses people from "savage nations" as an example, writing that they occupy "a certain raw state" where "the animal in this case has so to speak not yet developed the

¹ For a recent example, see Lu-Adler 2022. Erbel 2019 surveys some of these arguments.

humanity in itself” (Päd 9:442).² When Kant describes education as allowing humanity to fulfill its *Bestimmung* (vocation), scholars might reasonably conclude that this vocation is unavailable to so-called “savage” peoples (Päd 9:445).

In what follows, I try to support Friedlaender’s optimism. I read Friedlaender’s text in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century neo-Kantianism. By examining how neo-Kantians read Kant’s work on race, I argue that Friedlaender can provide a way of reading an unracialized *Bestimmung* in the pedagogy. Whether Kant himself would have accepted such a reading is unclear, but Friedlaender’s interpretation is both supported by some textual evidence and also opens up the possibility of a more attractive vision of *Bestimmung*.

I Prussian Education and the Enlightenment

Some historical background on education in Kant’s day helps illustrate how big a role education played in the Enlightenment. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Prussia was awash in educational reform. The animating spirit of the school reform movement was “popular enlightenment [*Volksaufklärung*],” which aimed to educate lower classes and the rural population (La Vopa 1980, 25). It would be a mistake to think that educational reform was always motivated purely by altruism. While the educated elite might have seen the value of schooling for schooling’s sake, the reforms were ultimately successful because they overlapped with state interests. The rural farmer, in the eyes of reformers, could become more economically productive if he were educated in the latest farming science (Gagliardo 1969, 92; La Vopa 1980, 26; Schleunes 1989, 13). Likewise, the Pietists and moralists were interested in improving the moral character of the peasantry and saw education as a way to shore up religious commitment (Gagliardo 1969, 94; La Vopa 1980, 26–27; Schleunes 1989, 13–14). Finally, education was seen as a tool for increasing the rural population’s sense of patriotism, which would bring about greater social cohesion and political stability (Gagliardo 1969, 95–96; Schleunes 1989, 15). Although Frederick William I instituted compulsory schooling, neither he nor Frederick II were particularly devoted to the cause of educational reform. Indeed, Frederick II, despite his image as the educated monarch, expressed concerns about overeducating the rural population because it might cause them to no longer be satisfied with their social station (Gagliardo 1969, 96–97; Schleunes 1989, 15–16). Frederick II ran hot and cold on education, and when reforms were made, it was usually be-

² All references to Kant are taken from the *Akademie-Ausgabe*. English translations are from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.

cause the reformers were able to capitalize on one of his “bursts of enthusiasm for schooling” (Schleunes 1989, 30). The reform era included multiple initiatives to bring about popular enlightenment, including the professionalization and systematic training of schoolteachers (La Vopa 1980, 29; Schleunes 1989, 76–77). By the 1830s, Prussia’s education system was seen as a model by education reformers in America, France, and England (Schleunes 1989, 1–3). Although many of the reforms did not become widespread until after Kant was dead, conversations about how education ought to be structured were of course happening in Kant’s lifetime.

Kant’s own education prominently featured Pietist influence, in part thanks to the support of Frederick William I. When Frederick instituted compulsory education, he based the Prussian schools on Pietism’s pedagogical approach (Stoeffler 1973, 34; Schleunes 1989, 14–15; Kuehn 2001, 35; Munzel 2012, 18; Shell 2015, 278–279). That approach was shaped significantly by the work of August Hermann Francke, which Kant experienced first-hand during his youth at the *Collegium Fridericianum*. Francke’s influence on Prussian education was extensive. The school he established for poor children in Halle in 1695 eventually grew so large he had to split it into multiple, more specialized schools (Melton 1988, 35; Munzel 2012, 18). He was also responsible for founding the first teaching training institute in Central Europe (Melton 1988, 36). Francke emphasized the need to break the natural willfulness of children so that they could be more devoted servants to God (Melton 1988, 43; Kuehn 2001, 52–53; Shell 2015, 278).³ For Francke, outward obedience to authority was insufficient for good character; one also had to obey authority from an inner conviction (Melton 1988, 40). To achieve this, the curriculum of the *Collegium Fridericianum* focused on a heavy-handed form of self-discipline involving “*Bußkampf* [struggle of contrition]” that would eventually result in better obedience (Kuehn 2001, 53). Another key feature of Pietist pedagogy was a focus on a strong work ethic. In Francke’s classrooms, for example, hourglasses were installed to remind students that “work was an omnipresent duty” (Melton 1988, 41).

It may come as no surprise, having experienced Francke’s pedagogy first-hand, that Kant would find a much more favorable vision of education in Rousseau. Kant was far from the only figure influenced by Rousseau’s pedagogy. Most of the reformers in Prussia cited him as an influence. One of his most ardent followers was the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827). Pestalozzi was a household name in education reform circles, especially in Prussia, and was known for his educational fiction (Gagliardo 1969, 192). He was so taken with

³ Stoeffler, however, argues that this gloomy view of Francke has “hardly any basis in fact” (Stoeffler 1973, 28).

Emile that he tried to raise his own son according to its program (Schleunes 1989, 17). Pestalozzi's most influential work was his *Lienhard und Gertrud*, which was a fictional dialogue between two peasant parents meant to illustrate the virtues of education (Gagliardo 1969, 192–193). Another reformer was Friedrich Eberhard von Rochow (1734–1805), who was one of the founders of a private “model” school that instituted a progressive education program. Rochow, too, was inspired by Rousseau (Schleunes 1989, 26). His own 1772 education manual caught the attention of Karl Abraham von Zedlitz, one of Frederick II's ministers, who eventually used Rochow's pedagogical approach to reorganize some of Prussia's village schools (Gagliardo 1969, 100; Schleunes 1989, 27–29). Rochow's model school had frequent visits from reformers and government officials, including Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Des-sau, who would become the patron of Johann Bernard Basedow's (1724–1790) model school, the Philanthropinum (Schleunes 1989, 28). Basedow too was a follower of Rousseau's pedagogy and the Philanthropinum was of course the subject of two of Kant's short essays on education. I will return to these in a moment.

Not only did Kant live during a time of experimental education reform, Enlightenment philosophers took an interest in education as part of their commitment to Enlightenment ideals. Numerous essays on education were penned on the topic before and after Kant (Munzel 2003, 51). Among the most influential were, as previously mentioned, Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762) and also Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (between 1683 and 1689). There was also Lessing's *On the Education of the Human Race* (1777) and Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). While statesmen may not have been concerned about the enlightenment of the populace for their own sake, Enlightenment philosophers cared far more about this. As Munzel points out, the Enlightenment itself “in the self-conception of its proponents, was in its essence an enormous pedagogical project” (2012, vxii).

II Kant's Writings on Education

As Kuehn demonstrates, Kant was interested in education prior to his encounter with Rousseau's work in the 1760s, even though he does not write about it explicitly (Kuehn 2001, 227). Other than the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant writes about education directly only in two short essays in support of progressive schooling. They concern the Philanthropinum, Basedow's model school founded in 1774. Like Kant, Basedow worked as a private tutor before writing his dissertation, which was about education (Munzel 1999, 269). Basedow's early writings were influenced by Locke's work on education, and, again like Kant, he began to read Rousseau in the 1760s (Munzel 1999, 269–270). At its core, Basedow's pedagogy incorporated

play with work, experiential learning, and physical education (Munzel 1999, 271; Kuehn 2001, 227). Basedow's best-known work on pedagogy was the *Elementarwerk*, the first part of which Kant used in his first pedagogy lectures (Munzel 1999, 272).

Basedow's school was controversial. Kuehn provides a sample of the sort of critiques the Philanthropinum faced from, for example J.G. Schlosser, who writes: "Why do you castrate oxen and colts when you prepare them for the yoke and the cart, yet wish to develop the totality of human powers in men similarly condemned to the yoke and the cart?" (quoted in Kuehn 2001, 228). Views like Schlosser's were not uncommon: there was serious skepticism about the need to educate the rural population beyond what they needed for their lot. It is clear that, in supporting the Philanthropinum, Kant rejects this skepticism. He recommended Basedow's school to friends with children and helped raise money for the school (Munzel 1999, 266; Kuehn 2001, 228–229). In Kant's first essay from 1776, he praises Basedow as someone who has "committed himself to the welfare and the betterment of human beings" (AA 2:447). In the second essay from 1777, he makes the uncharacteristic claim that schools must be transformed, not by a "slow *reform*, but a swift *revolution*" (AA 2:249, emphasis original). He argues that it is only through education that "animal creatures are made into human beings," but that this is only possible through an "educational method" that is "wisely derived from nature itself and not slavishly copied from old habit and unexperienced ages" (AA 2:449). In both essays, Kant urges his philanthropist (*Menschenfreunde*) readers to offer support (including financial support) to Basedow's mission (AA 2:448; 2:449).

Kant's faith in Basedow's model school was more than a passing fancy. His interest in education came not just from his lifelong experience as a tutor and lecturer, but as a believer in the goals of the Enlightenment.⁴ As Kuehn puts it:

Kant was committed to this great democratic ideal of the Enlightenment... Kant's engagement with the cause of education shows that he cared about his fellow citizens who were deprived of the knowledge of "higher things." He was not just a theoretician, as far as the Enlightenment was concerned, he was actively engaged in spreading it in Königsberg. (Kuehn 2001, 229)

Kant's only extended work on education is the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, published only one year before he died. It is worth briefly reviewing some of the controversy around this text. To date, we possess no original version of the manuscript in Kant's own hand. The earliest version of the text is the one compiled and published

⁴ Though Kuehn cites some evidence that lecturing did not exactly thrill Kant: he was required to teach pedagogy and he described lecturing as sitting "daily at the anvil of my lectern" (Kuehn 2012, 55).

by Friedrich Theodor Rink under the name *Über Pädagogik* in 1803 (Louden 2000, 33). According to his own account, Rink was Kant's former student and frequent dinner guest at his home (Stark 2015, 264). Apparently, Kant entrusted Rink with the lecture notes, but never edited them himself nor saw the draft (Shell 2015). Some scholars have raised doubts about how much of the work actually represents Kant's thoughts on education. Traugott Weisskopf has perhaps the most systematic treatment of this issue, arguing that the *Pedagogy* is a collection of fragments from Kant's lectures on ethics and anthropology as well as personal notes on Rousseau's *Emile* (Louden 2000, 34). Stark argues that the terminology used in the *Pedagogy* (e.g., *Pädagogik* [pedagogy], *pädagogisch* [pedagogical], *Pädagogen* [teacher], *Erziehungskunst* [art of education], *Erziehungslehre* [educational theory]) appears next to nowhere else in Kant's works (Stark 2015, 267). Readers of Kant will likely note that the text is, as Louden describes it, "extremely atypical and almost un-Kantian" (Louden 2000, 34). It is disorganized, contains many tangents, and its headings seem to be Rink's additions.

Despite the discrepancies, most Kant scholars are not convinced by the skeptical case. It is clear that Kant was interested in education in some form or another throughout his career. The material from the pedagogy lectures overlaps significantly with Kant's other writings (Louden 2000, 35). As Stark points out, there were educational reforms taking place in the late 1780s to early 1790s that affected Kant directly: the introduction of a high school graduate exam and the plans for a pedagogical seminar in Königsberg (Stark 2015, 275). These events give us reason to think that Kant might have seen a need for a work on pedagogy around the time he gave his notes to Rink. Even without the original notes, there is not a strong enough case to assume that Rink's manuscript is inauthentic.

Kant scholars have lamented that Kant's pedagogical work has not been as influential in education as those of many of his German counterparts. As the editor of the 1904 English translation of the lectures, Martin G. Brumbaugh, writes, "The educational doctrines of Hegel and Herbart have been fairly well reported to American educators. The educational doctrines of Immanuel Kant are practically unknown to the great teaching body of the United States" (Buchner 1904, x). Sticker and Bakhurst note that Kant is sometimes "regarded with suspicion by contemporary educational theorists," though it seems some of this skepticism may be built on a misreading (2021, 910). Kant's lack of influence is perhaps especially surprising, given that by the nineteenth century, the educational system in Prussia has captured the attention of American educational reformers. In 1836, Calvin Stowe delivered an address to the Convention of Teachers in Columbus, Ohio, arguing that the Prussian system could be applied to the United States. Stowe opens with the claim that the government of Prussia has "done more for the education of the whole people than has ever been done by any other government on earth"

(Stowe 1836, 17). Hegel, particularly in the American context, has been far more influential than Kant, though this may not be due to any defect in Kant's educational theory. It is likely due in large part to the fact that many of the most influential figures in American educational history were dyed-in-the-wool Hegelians from the St. Louis Movement (Poachman 1957; Good 2000). William Torrey Harris, one of the founders of the movement, served as the superintendent of St. Louis public schools from 1867 until 1880 and then as the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906 (Good 2000, 462–463). Susan Blow and Denton Snider, also Hegelians, spearheaded the kindergarten movement (Poachman 1957, 286; Good 2000, 463). It is no surprise, then, that Hegel has an outsized influence in education.

Despite the popularity of *Über Pädagogik* and despite his clear interest in education, Kant's work on pedagogy has received far less attention in Kant scholarship than much of his other work. This trend has now changed.⁵ More Kant scholars are turning to the *Lectures on Pedagogy* and to Kant's views about education to develop further insights into his philosophy as a whole. Friedlaender's *Kant for Children* can add a new dimension to this project, particularly regarding the relationship between education and human destiny (*Bestimmung*).

III Friedlaender's Reading of Kant

One of the most striking things about *Kant for Children* is how little, at least on the surface, it resembles Kant's own work on pedagogy. This is not to say that some of the core claims that appear in Kant's pedagogy are absent from Friedlaender's text, but while Kant's pedagogy lectures focus on early childhood, contain bits and pieces of anthropology, and offer (sometimes questionable) parenting advice, Friedlaender's work focuses primarily on the teaching of morality. As such, Friedlaender's starting point skips past the early stages of Kant's pedagogy. Like many of the educational reformers from his time period, Kant thinks education ought to take place in stages. Scholars have identified at least three in his work: nurture, discipline, and cultivation (Kuehn 2012, 56). Friedlaender's text focuses on the cultivation stage, which is where moral education occurs. Friedlaender notes that the text is for "mature youth" and that "the teacher should take over the teaching" in the case of younger children (●23–24●).

⁵ Munzel 1999 and Munzel 2012 have arguably had a significant influence on the rise of recent work in Kant's pedagogy. Roth and Surprenant edited a volume on Kant and education (2012), and most recently, the *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* did a special volume on Kant and education where Sticker and Bakhurst's article appears (2021).

As such, *Kant for Children* bears much more of a resemblance to the example of the moral catechism that appears in the Doctrine of the Methods of Ethics from the *Metaphysics of Morals* (MS 6:480–483).⁶ Like the catechism, Friedlaender’s text is a dialogue. The aim of both dialogues is the same: it is to allow the student to realize the power of her reason to follow the moral law in the face of temptations to the contrary. In Kant’s words, the pupil will ask herself the question: “what is it in you that can be trusted to enter into combat with all the forces of nature within you and around you and to conquer them if they come into conflict with your moral principles?” (MS 6:483). In Friedlaender’s words, “Free reason, morally compelling by itself, is just as powerful as blindly forced nature” (●26●). *Kant for Children* does depart from the catechism in at least one important respect. Kant’s imagined dialogue is one-sided on the part of the teacher. He suggests that the dialogue of the catechism cannot be properly “Socratic” because “the pupil has no idea what questions to ask” (MS 6:479).⁷ In Friedlaender’s imagined dialogue, the pupil speaks much more, even though it is still in response to the questions posed by the teacher.

Given the differences between Kant’s and Friedlaender’s work, it is natural to raise the question: what text is Friedlaender drawing on for *Kant for Children*? Since much of his understanding of Kant comes from Ernst Marcus, it is highly likely that he had at least some knowledge of Kant’s work on pedagogy.⁸ The lectures were available at the time of Friedlaender’s writing; *Über Pädagogik* was published in 1803. Although there is no clear paper trail for Friedlaender’s knowledge of Kant’s pedagogy, we need not dwell on this. I suggest that Friedlaender’s text is not best thought of as direct response to Kant’s work on education. It is, as I will argue, better read as a neo-Kantian project.

Friedlaender lives in the midst of what Beiser calls the “golden age of neo-Kantianism” from 1860–1914 (Beiser 2014, 1). Although much of the work of the neo-Kantians happened at the three major schools (the Marburg, the Southwestern, and the neo-Friesian), Beiser argues that there were a significant number of “outsiders” who contributed to shaping the movement (Beiser 2014, 2). Neo-Kantians worked on a variety of theoretical and practical problems in Kant’s philosophy. Contrary to common misperceptions of it as a group of cloistered scholarly acolytes, neo-Kantianism is a diverse philosophical school whose members were attentive to the intellectual and political crises of their time. During the mid-

6 At least one other neo-Kantian, Friedrich Paulsen, in his overview of Kant’s work, primarily discusses the moral catechism rather than the *Pädagogik*. The *Pädagogik* is referenced only in a footnote (Paulsen 1902, 373).

7 For a helpful discussion of the catechism and its method, see Morris 2021.

8 Many thanks to Bruce Krajewski for looking into this for me.

1860s until the early 1900s, many neo-Kantians were attempting to grapple with the popularity of Schopenhauer's pessimism (Beiser 2014, 398).⁹ Their reasons for attempting to actively resist the rise of Schopenhauer were to some extent political. Many neo-Kantians worried that pessimism could be weaponized as a way to prevent the masses from engaging in meaningful political action (Beiser 2014, 399). One of the core commitments of neo-Kantianism was "its faith in autonomy, the power of human beings to change their world" (Beiser 2014, 401).

The introduction to *Kant for Children* reflects this neo-Kantian pillar. Friedlaender refers to Kant's moral theory as "the moral multiplication table [*sittliche Einmaleins*]" (●26●). This analogy has two aspects. First, the theory rests not on feeling, but on rational proof. It has, as Friedlaender puts it, "the status of the rigorous sciences" (●26●). Second, the theory has a stability to it that allows it to function as a touchstone for the pupil. Once a student learns the multiplication table, she can consistently refer back to it, even when faced with more complex mathematical operations. Likewise, once the student has learned the moral law, it stabilizes and organizes her psychology. The student comes to realize that she need not be merely subject to nature's whims and that she is able to persist in acting morally, even when doing so incurs costs. It also helps her learn how to value herself as a human being rather than merely a part of nature. As Friedlaender puts it, "Reason, with its unbreakable laws, *humanizes*" (●26●, emphasis original).

Friedlaender's notion of the moral multiplication table is not exactly consistent with Kant's own retelling of the catechism. For Kant, the pupil comes to realize the incomprehensibility of the source of morality. As Kant puts it, "the very incomprehensibility in this cognition of himself must produce an exaltation in his soul which only inspires it to hold its duty sacred, the more it is assailed" (MS 6:483). It is the marvel of the unknowable fact of reason that leads the pupil to be ever more committed to the moral law. For Friedlaender, it is the clarity of the moral law that leads the pupil to adhere to it. The moral law is "stable," "easy to teach," and "as valid as the proofs the teacher of counting uses for the multiplication table" (●26●).¹⁰ What Friedlaender refers to here is the clear division of human motivations: moral and non-moral. Either one "obeys a natural law or a law of reason that is morally imperative" (●26●). As such, motivations like "sensibility, convenience, usefulness, well-being and woe, happiness and unhappi-

⁹ Indeed, Friedlaender's dissertation was about Kant and Schopenhauer. Thanks to Bruce Krajewski for passing this information along to me.

¹⁰ One could read a bit of neo-Kantian positivist leanings into Friedlaender's comparison here. Beiser has a helpful discussion of the complicated relationship between the neo-Kantians and the positivists (Beiser 2014, 457–460).

ness” are totally separate from moral considerations (●56●). Friedlaender describes this as a “sharp distinction” that “puts into the students’ heads a moral enlightenment that later reaches into the political realm” (●27●).

Friedlaender sees a close connection between the moral law and law in politics. Indeed, he argues that if Kant’s moral theory were taught in schools, “after a few reason-governed generations” we would bring about “Kant’s *eternal peace*” (●24●, emphasis original). Reconstructing Friedlaender’s argument, he sees reason as morally impartial. Reason shows us clearly that “every rational being is equal to every other rational being” (●27●). Respect for the law of the nation-state springs from respect for the moral law. In the same way that the moral law allows us to rise above mere nature, the law of politics allows a people to rise above the state of war (●58●). Further, Friedlaender sees in Kant something that will allow people to stop seeing themselves primarily in terms of their ethnic or national identities. He chastises the “contempt for foreigners” as well as the “exaggerated love of one’s homeland” that schoolchildren in his day are exposed to (●29●). He laments that “in our crude days” people are valued “according to ‘race’ or national and religious affiliation” (●30●). Friedlaender goes so far as to claim that if Kant’s moral theory has been taught in schools, “the world war would probably not have flared up” (●30●).

Crucial to Friedlaender’s understanding of Kant is the claim that reason is what binds humans together and what makes them equals. Humans ought to value themselves as moral free reasoners rather than as members of a particular nation or group. In recognizing the connection between reason and the moral law, humans come to realize that, in not being bound by nature, their dignity is not tied to natural facts about them. With a likely reference to Nietzsche, he calls all claims of so-called racial, religious, or ethnic superiority the “peculiar arrogance of herd morality” (●59●). The knowledge of the value of humanity then translates into the political realm. It provides a moral justification for the state, which provides a standard for political legitimacy. As Friedlaender puts it, “general human rights spread through impartial legislation” (●28●). International peace follows as a result. Within the imagined dialogue, the pupil responds to the question “Isn’t general peace impossible” by saying, “A human being is *above* all things *human*, and only *secondarily* patriotic, German, French, etc.” (●42●, emphasis original). It is important for Friedlaender that educating children in Kant’s ethics is the first step to making these changes in the world. On his view, the emphasis on nationalism and ethnic pride that he saw in his own time was an hindrance to peace. As he puts it, “If one corrupts the *youth* by making undeniable *natural* diversity into an issue of ‘race’ and *essence*, one destroys the *future* of humankind” (●30●, emphasis original).

My aim here is not to argue that Friedlaender's reconstruction of the value of teaching Kant's ethics to children is realistic or correct – who knows whether teaching Kant would bring about world peace. Instead, I want to argue that Friedlaender's reading of Kant presents a counternarrative to some of the recent problems raised by Kant scholars regarding Kant's racist views. As Sticker and Bahkurst write, "Kant's racism, sexism and homophobia raise the question of whether someone who takes such views can still teach us something valuable about morality, human nature and education" (Sticker 2021, 917). Kant's writings on education are often intermixed with his anthropology and history, which is where his writings on race also appear. If education aims in part to develop the human being's predisposition, one might worry that Kant's views about human races taint any insights his work on education could provide.

IV Education and *Bestimmung*

In the pedagogy lectures, Kant claims that education has to "develop natural predispositions proportionally and to unfold humanity from its germs [*Keime*] and to make it happen that the human being reaches his vocation [*Bestimmung*]" (Päd 9:445). Some Kant scholars argue that such claims should be read against the backdrop of his remarks on different races. For example, Both Kleingeld (2011, 97) and Lu-Adler (2022, 269) argue that Kant believes only certain races (Western-European whites) are capable of developing their capacities in order to fulfill this vocation.¹¹ A particularly damning passage in the anthropology lectures states that only the white race "contains all the incentives and talents within itself" to develop its capacities (V-Anth/Mensch 25:1187). Add to this that Kant frequently talks about the vocation of humanity in species-level terms. For example, he repeatedly describes education as developing the "germs [*Keime*]" that lie within humanity (Päd 9:445). Unfortunately, "germs" also appear in his writings on race as the explanation for the variation of skin color among human beings (e. g., AA 2:434).¹² If Kant believes that certain races either have no capacities to develop or cannot develop the capacities they do have, it might appear as though the vocation of humanity at which education aims is reserved only for whites.

¹¹ For a rethinking of some of Kant's claims about barbarism, which are often taken as the contrast to the vocation of humanity meant for whites, see Erbel 2019.

¹² It is clear, however, that germs are not solely human nor are they clearly racialized. Kant often simply uses the term to denote a natural predisposition. In the same passage, Kant claims that birds possess different germs that allow those that live in cold climates to grow extra feathers.

This reading of Kant is obviously in conflict with the decidedly unracialized interpretation we find in Friedlaender's text. It is unlikely that Friedlaender simply did not know about Kant's work on race. Neo-Kantians who pre-date Friedlaender knew it: Jürgen Meyer cites Kant's work on race to argue against Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (Beiser 2014, 339). Friedrich Paulsen includes both Kant's 1775 and 1785 race essays in his discussion of Kant's anthropology (Paulsen 1902, 297). I will return to Meyer and Paulsen in a moment, but it is important to note that not only does Friedlaender omit any of Kant's references to race, he sees in Kant an *antidote* to the very thinking that contemporary scholars attribute to Kant. On Friedlaender's reading, Kant's work quite clearly entails that humans do not rank themselves along racial or ethnic lines. Some contemporary Kant scholars agree with Friedlaender that Kant's views are properly universalist and conclude that Kant's racism is simply inconsistent with his considered view.¹³ Perhaps Friedlaender's reading of Kant is simply an earlier version of these types of arguments. In what follows, I want to try a different tactic. I will work backwards from the neo-Kantian reception of Kant's work and from Friedlaender's reading to see if there is any way to find support for optimism in rehabilitating Kant's pedagogy.

Let me begin with the neo-Kantian context. Friedlaender's unracialized vision of Kant's work is consistent with at least two of his predecessors: Paulsen and Meyer. Paulsen's interpretation of Kant's anthropology takes seriously the divide between the "metaphysics of morals" and the "physics of morals" (Paulsen 1902, 296). Kant's writings on race belong squarely within the physics of morals alongside natural science, anthropology, psychology, and history. All of these disciplines "consider man purely as a natural product, just in the same way a zoologist considers any other species of animal" (Paulsen 1902, 297). Their goal is to investigate "the uniform connection of given facts according to the laws of causality" (Paulsen 1902, 298). But none of this should be taken into consideration in the metaphysics of morals. As Paulsen puts it, "the moral law is completely unconcerned with life and particular circumstances" (Paulsen 1902, 296). On this reading, there is no meaningful connection between the physics of morals and the metaphysics of morals. Even if Kant argues that race is hereditary or even that there is a racial hierarchy, these conclusions consider human beings only as a "natural product." They would describe (obviously wrongly) natural tendencies that might contribute to our overall understanding of natural laws, but nothing more. One can of course

13 Kleingeld has a helpful review of this literature (Kleingeld 2011, 94).

dispute Paulsen's reading, but he is emphasizing Kant's own repeated insistence that morality should be divorced from the empirical (AA 4:411–412; 6:468–469).¹⁴

In his criticisms of Darwin, Meyer cites Kant's "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race" as a warning against too much speculation regarding mankind's past (Beiser 2014, 339–440). Meyer reads the 1785 essay not as an actual attempt to speculate about race, but as an illustration of how easy it is to speculate about the origin of races, given that we have no actual experience to guide us. What Meyer seems to take seriously are the places where Kant expresses epistemic caution in his discussions of race.¹⁵ For instance, in "Of the Different Races of Human Beings," Kant describes his upcoming course as "more of a useful entertainment than a laborious business," which will "contain something for the understanding, but more like a game ... than a deep inquiry" (AA 2:429). Likewise, in "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race," Kant introduces the essay by saying that he will only be concerned with the concept of race, "provided there are any in the human species" (AA 8:91). Here Kant expresses doubt that there may even be different races of humans. He describes the "explanation of the origin of the actually existing races" as "only a subsidiary work, which one can treat as one wishes" (AA 8:91). Kant of course does think that race is somehow hereditary, even though no particular race belongs "to the essence of the species" (AA 8:96). He calls it an "awkward undertaking" where the "freedom to form hypotheses is so unrestricted that ... every one follows his own head in such cases" (AA 8:96). Toward the end of the essay, Kant writes that "there is little comfort for philosophy in artificially constructing hypotheses" and that his reasoning about the origin of races is only good for "repaying [his opponent's] play of hypotheses with one that is at least equally plausible" (AA 8:104).¹⁶

Granted, these moments of epistemic humility are sandwiched between claims about the different races that are presented with certainty and authority. Even if Meyer is ultimately wrong about how cautious Kant really is, he seems to be reading the essays on race in concert with Kant's other speculative works. Both the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" and the "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" are written during roughly the same time as the essays on race. One could argue that they follow the same structure as the essays on

¹⁴ Dean has a contemporary articulation of this point as it relates to education (Dean 2012, 142–150).

¹⁵ Meyer's use of these essays is consistent with his wider interpretation of Kant's critical project, evidence of which can be seen in his 1856 monograph *Zum Streit über Leib und Seele*. Beiser shows some of the weaknesses of Meyer's reading (Beiser 2014, 334–336).

¹⁶ We should note that Kant's essays on race are informed by his disagreement with Johann Gottfried Herder and Georg Forster. See Kleingeld 2009 and Erbel 2019 for more detail.

race: a gesture at epistemic caution followed by an attempt to form plausible speculations. In the “Idea” essay, Kant claims that the philosopher is presented with a tension. Despite, “wisdom appearing now and then in individual cases,” it nevertheless seems as though “everything in the large is woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction” (Idee 8:18). There is, on Kant’s view, nothing else for the philosopher to do but “try whether he can discover an aim of nature in this nonsensical course of things human” (Idee 8:18). Similarly, in “Conjectural Beginnings,” we see language that echoes that of “Different Races.” Kant explains that his conjectural history is “only a movement of the power of the imagination, accompanying reason and indulged in for the recreation and health of the mind, but not for a serious business” (Idee 8:109). The history he tells is constructed “on the wings of the power of imagination, though not without a guiding thread attached by reason onto experience” (Idee 8:110).

Kant scholars will likely recognize something familiar in the epistemic caution combined with imaginative speculation in these essays. It is precisely this sort of thinking that is paired with regulative ideas.¹⁷ Indeed, it is no accident that the “Idea” essay has the term in the title. The primary text we point to in order to explain regulative ideas is the first *Critique*. In the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant introduces the three transcendental ideas: the soul, the world-whole, and God (KrV A335/B392). Ideas are, however, not limited to these three. There is also the idea of a just constitution (KrV A316–317/B372–374), the ideas of pure earth, water, and air (KrV A646/B674), and the idea of a fundamental power (KrV A649/B677). I have argued elsewhere that there is an idea of justice (Thomason 2020, 86–90). Roughly, ideas are guides that “reason makes for itself” in order to organize its thinking about something that goes beyond the realm of experience (MS 6:487). As Rohlf puts it, practical ideas “represent states of affairs that do not exist, but ought to exist and which we aim to realize through our actions,” while theoretical ideas “represent imaginary focal points ... that help us achieve a more extensive and interconnected system of scientific knowledge” (Rohlf 2010, 203). Central to Kant’s notion of an idea is its regulative purpose (KrV A644/B672): ideas help direct or guide our thinking so that we can better systemize our knowledge without making claims beyond what we can actually know. Like the transcendental ideas, the other ideas of reason are also not meant to support conclusive determinations. Our idea of God, for example, helps us make sense of our thinking about God, but we are not licensed to conclude from it that God exists and that we can know His nature.

¹⁷ I am using the term “thinking” in a broad colloquial sense rather than a technical sense.

What is the point of the regulative ideas? Kant argues that they are meant to help reason in its quest to bring a systematic unity to our knowledge. In the case of history and our observations of the natural world, reason operates in its “hypothetical use,” which is to bring “unity into particular cognitions as far as possible and thereby approximating the rule to universality” (KrV A647/B675).¹⁸ If we follow Kant’s reasoning in the first *Critique*, the point of attempting to find an end or purpose in human history, for example, is not to actually prove it exists. Instead, we look for it “for the benefit of reason, namely for setting up certain principles for the many rules with which experience may furnish us and ... bring systematic unity to cognition” (KrV A649/B678). Regarding natural science, Kant gives the notions of species, genera, and families in biology as another example of precisely this kind of attempt at systematic unity (KrV A652/B680). Kant suggests that these biological classifications are not the product of nature actually sorting itself out into neat categories: we cannot definitively conclude that species and genera are actually out there in the world. Despite this, humans cannot, in trying to understand the natural world and make sense of our observations, treat those categories as mere products of our imagination. Natural entities appear to us to possess genuine differences and similarities in a way that admits of classification. So, as reasoners, we attempt to find some principled way to explain why animals and plants seem to fall into distinct classes. If, with Meyer, we take seriously Kant’s words of caution in the race and history essays, we end up with a less authoritative interpretation of their claims.¹⁹ As Sanford argues, Kant’s work on race may be an attempt to engage in just this kind of speculative systematicity (Sanford 2018, 969–970).

My aim here is not to defend any of Kant’s claims about race nor is it to minimize or dismiss the degrading comments he makes about non-white races. Rather it is to show that Meyer’s use of the essays on race is not totally unsupported. If the essays on race and the essays on history can be read in view of reason in its hypothetical use, then Meyer has grounds to take seriously Kant’s claims about epistemic caution. Further, and closer to my purposes here, these arguments give us reason to think that Friedlaender may not be wrong to read in Kant’s pedagogy a vision of *Bestimmung* divorced from any racialized view of human beings.

Similar to the essays on history and race, Kant’s pedagogy relies on an “idea of education” (Munzel 2012, 189). The idea of education, like the other ideas of reason, is “nothing other than the concept of a perfection which is not yet to be found in

¹⁸ Both Kleingeld (2008, 525) and Allison (2009, 24) argue that the “Idea” in the title is a theoretical rather than a practical idea.

¹⁹ I have been aided in this section by reading Kleingeld 2008, Allison 2009, Ameriks 2009, and Kuehn 2009.

experience” (Päd 9:444). Kant explicitly compares it to one of the other regulative ideas, namely “a perfect republic governed by the rules of justice” (Päd 9:444). The idea of education seems more likely to be a practical rather than theoretical idea. Again, recalling Rohlf’s definition, practical ideas “represent states of affairs that do not exist, but ought to exist and which we aim to realize through our actions” (Rohlf 2010, 203). The idea of education is a guiding vision: it is not something that actually exists, but something we look to in order to organize or orient our thinking and our actions.

There are two main aspects regarding the idea of education in Kant’s text: *Bildung* (formation) and *Bestimmung* (vocation or destiny).²⁰ *Bildung* is the activity we are engaged in when we undertake education. It requires us to “think of ourselves as *subjects under way*” (Munzel 2012, 215, emphasis original). *Bildung* is expressed in Kant’s famous claim that “human beings can only become human through education. He is nothing except what education makes out of him. It must be noted that the human being is educated only by human beings, human beings who likewise have been educated” (Päd 4:443). Education is self-made in two senses. First, it is clearly in line with Kant’s claims that the point of anthropology (and the other disciplines in the physics of morals) is to understand what “a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (Anth 7:119). We are creatures who are not purely instinctual and we can cultivate our natural gifts in ways that we can direct. Second, education is a strictly human enterprise. It is a collective effort that humans must bootstrap themselves and others into. There is no stone tablet or grand plan for education that will be handed down to us from on high. Humans have to take it on, define it, and craft its aims for themselves and with each other.

Bestimmung gives *Bildung* something to aim for – it gives the whole enterprise of education something toward which to orient itself. Kant seems to argue that education requires some of the same systematizing that we find regarding theoretical ideas, for example, in the history essays. He writes, “The mechanism in the art of education must be transformed into a science [*Wissenschaft*], otherwise it will never become a coherent endeavor; and one generation might tear down what another has already built up” (Päd 9:447). We must, on Kant’s view, see education not as an isolated task, but rather as part of the larger story about the cultivation of humanity. It is not the sort of thing that can be accomplished in one generation; we should rather assume that our efforts in education can progress toward something in the future. This “something” is the *Bestimmung* of humanity. The reason we need to think of education as having a coherent plan is, as Kuehn puts it: “If

20 My reading here is drawn from Munzel 2012, 213–225.

there is a plan, there is hope" (2009, 69). This hope is similar to the hope Kant articulates in the "Idea" essay – that all our human strivings, though they appear irrational, childish, and destructive, are more than so much pointless groping in the dark.

If *Bildung* and *Bestimmung* are self-made, humans collectively have some influence over how we conceive them. We are therefore tasked with collectively envisioning what the aim of education should be. How does Friedlaender envision mankind's *Bestimmung*? First and foremost, it is one guided and organized by reason and the moral law. As Munzel puts it, we ought to see our "mental life as something more and something other than a mere instrument in the service of what are otherwise natural, instinctual processes" (Munzel 2012, 204). Clearly Friedlaender accepts the sharp distinction between the physics of morals and the metaphysics of morals like the one we find in Paulsen. He writes that "human beings are morally obliged not to act as if they were subject *only* to nature's urges ... we are by nature only pitiable parasites of the earth" (●26●, emphasis original). Friedlaender takes the divide between the physics of morals and the metaphysics of morals to provide human beings with the obligation to adopt a view of themselves as above their natural features. As such, the purity of reason and moral law should be the defining feature of education. Realizing that reason allows us to be more than "pitiable parasites" opens up the possibility and the hope that we can make something of ourselves.

Kant's talk of a "raw," "crude," or "savage" people would thus, on Friedlaender's reading, not apply to particular races. Instead, it would apply to anyone who merely submits to their natural existence. Friedlaender writes "The specter of lawless, wild freedom is driven off from our souls as soon as, instead of the embers of natural desire, reason's light ignites in them" (●24●). If this is right, we are also obligated precisely not to define our worth (or anyone else's) by our ethnic, national, racial, or religious identities. These, for Friedlaender, belong in the physics of morals. They are natural rather than moral features of ourselves. As Friedlaender writes, "An overheated and exaggerated love of one's homeland ... is indecent and excessive in its immorality ... Go with Kant here! Show your moral honor!" (●29●). We ought to see ourselves as a community of rational equals. In adopting this view of ourselves, we therefore orient the goals of education toward a collective moral self-cultivation. For Friedlaender, any attempt to claim that one should cultivate oneself along racial or ethnic lines or that collective self-cultivation is equivalent to *volks*-cultivation is to wrongly elevate natural features above moral ones.

Reading Friedlaender as naïve or optimistic obscures the fact that he may be self-consciously drawing on Kant's own conception of the normative force of regulative ideas. Recall that practical ideas do not merely orient our thinking; they

also orient our conduct (KrV A328/B385). As such, we are not free to dismiss or downplay them as unrealistic. It is in adopting them as an orientation that we make their realization possible. Since we have to bootstrap ourselves into education, we have to shoulder a certain faith that we can accomplish its aims. Kant is clear that individuals cannot by themselves bring it about that humans eventually embody their *Bestimmung*: “not individuals, but rather the human species, will get there” (Päd 9:445). Friedlaender clearly accepts the idea that we have a shared obligation to believe that education can bring about world peace. He chastises those “irresponsible simpletons” who doubt the possibility of peace through the moral law because they make “world peace impossible” through their “immoral doubt” (●29●). Friedlaender believes that a *Bestimmung* built on rational equality is the solution to ongoing warfare and conflict. Teaching Kant’s moral theory to children, on Friedlaender’s view, solidifies their sense of themselves as first and foremost free rational wills. They must be “above all things human, and only secondarily patriotic, German, French, etc.” (●42●, emphasis original). It is only through the end of aggression between nation-states that we can reach peace. Without nationalism or racial identity to provide support of aggression against “others” or “foreigners,” the impetus for war begins to fade as generations go by. For Friedlaender, we have an obligation to *not* conceptualize ourselves or the *Bestimmung* of humanity as racialized. To do so would be to treat our moral value in merely natural terms and to turn our backs on the promise of peace.

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