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# Immanuel Kant, Reinhart Koselleck, and the Philosophy of History

At the end of his 1784 essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," Immanuel Kant writes that he offers his work as "only a thought [*Gedanke*] of that which a philosophical mind [*Kopf*] (which besides this would have to be very well versed in history [*geschichtskundig*]) could attempt from another standpoint [*Standpunkte*]."[1] The aim of his "idea of a world history," Kant says, is not at all to *displace* the writing of empirical history but merely to offer a "guiding thread" (*Leitfaden*), namely, that of a "cosmopolitan purpose," by which a plan can be perceived "even in the play of human freedom" that is exhibited in the aggregate of human actions we call history (*Geschichte*). Through his essay, Kant says, "we want to see if we will succeed in finding a guideline [*Leitfaden*] for such a history, and want then to leave it to nature to produce the man who is in a position to compose that history accordingly." Would it be too bold to think that Reinhart Koselleck may have been just such a man?

Kant's much-discussed "philosophy of history" (*Geschichtsphilosophie*) ends with this rather more sober view of a "philosophical history" (*philosophischen Geschichte*), a "guiding thread" offered primarily because it might be "useful" to mankind, just as the thread Ariadne gave to Theseus was primarily of use for him to find his way out of the labyrinth in which he found himself.[2] Indeed, Kant is circumspect even about the status of "teleology" in his philosophy of history: the titular "idea" is but a "guiding thread" that allows us to *exhibit* the otherwise senseless aggregate of human actions in such that a way that a plan might be

[1] Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zoller and Robert Louden, trans. Allen Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120. *Akademie Ausgabe* (*AA*) 8:130.

[2] This was the meaning of the German word *Leitfaden* as commonly used at Kant's tame: thus the Brothers Grimm write s.v. "leitfaden": "leitender, wegweisender faden. das wort, welches zunächst den bekannten faden der Ariadne bezeichnet, ist in den wörterbüchern vor Adelung nicht aufgeführt; da es aber Lessing bereits 1751 als gewöhnliches wort braucht (s. die stelle nachher), so musz es, als eine freie übertragung des *filum Ariadnaeum*, wol schon längere zeit gänge und gäbe gewesen sein. Seine beziehung zum labyrinth wird oft betont." See https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/leitfaden

seen, and thus a true progress, a "true reform in ways of thinking,"[3] true Enlightenment, might be possible. Even though "we are too shortsighted to see through to the secret mechanism" by which nature proceeds with "a plan or final aim [*Plan und Endabsicht*] even in the play of human freedom," Kant says, *assuming* a philosophical standpoint allows us to find "a guiding thread [*Leitfaden*] for exhibiting [*darzustellen*] an otherwise planless *aggregate* of human actions, at least in the large, as a *system*," and in particular one that "aims at the perfect civil union of the human species [*die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung*]."[4]

The role the philosopher assumes with respect to empirical history, for Kant, is then that of a searcher (*Forscher*) for such guiding threads. Like Theseus caught in the labyrinth, we must grasp the end of the thread and follow it on our way to freedom. This resonates with other remarks Kant makes about the ultimate purpose of philosophy and other sciences. As Kant made clear in his autobiographical writings, the philosopher is "far less useful than the common laborer" if his work could not "impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity." Although the philosopher, like the historian, is rightly a "researcher [*Forscher*] by inclination," the "thirst for cognition and the eager restlessness to proceed further in it" cannot alone "constitute the honor of humankind"; rather, the philosopher must (and, in the case of Kant, did, by reading Rousseau) "learn to honor human beings."[5] It is to such an end that philosophy of history is dedicated.

[3] In "What is Enlightenment?" Kant writes: "A revolution may well put an end [*Abfall*] to autocratic [*persönlichem*] despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression [*Bedrückung*], but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking [*niemals wahre Reform der Denkungsart zustande kommen*]. ... For enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is *freedom*." Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55.

[4] Kant, "Idea," 120. *AA* 8:130.

[5] "I myself am a researcher by inclination [*aus Niegung ein Forscher*]. I feel the entire thirst for cognition [*Erkentnis*] and the eager restlessness [*Unruhe*] to proceed further in it, as well as the satisfaction [*Zufriedenheit*] at every acquisition [*Erwerb*]. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of humankind [*die Ehre der Menschheit*], and I despised the rabble [*Pöbel*] who knows nothing. *Rousseau* has set me right [*hat mich zurecht gebracht*]. This blinding prejudice [*Vorzug*] vanishes, I learn to honor human beings [*die Menschen ehren*], and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer [*gemeinen Arbeiter*] if I did not believe that this consideration could impart a value [*Werth*] to all others in order to establish the rights

I can think of no one who better fulfilled Kant's hoped-for philosophical history in the twentieth century than Reinhart Koselleck — a true "philosophical mind" who is nonetheless "very well versed in history" (*sehr geschichtskundig*) if there ever was one. Consider how Koselleck describes his *Historik*: it "is not concerned with histories themselves, whose past, present, and perhaps future realities are thematized and investigated by historians," but rather "investigates the theoretically necessary parameters that make comprehensible why histories occur."[6] In this paper, I argue that at least in the sense Kant describes in his "Idea" essay, Koselleck writes a true *philosophy* of history, which is more than what Koselleck himself called his work: a *Wissenschaftstheorie*, a mere "theory of knowledge." As I go on to discuss, this argument contains a certain historical irony. Koselleck developed his work after the Second World War as an explicit response to what was in his view a politically catastrophic philosophy of history whose origin could be identified with Kant's "teleology" and which therefore refused the tradition of "philosophy of history." Yet ultimately, I argue, Koselleck can and should be read in *continuity* with Kant. In this paper, I identify and discuss three strands of Koselleck's continuity with Kant: (1) the project of philosophical history, outlined above; (2) the investigation of "conditions of possibility," echoed in Koselleck's "conditions of possible history"; and (3) the tradition of philosophical anthropology under which Kant ultimately saw all other philosophy being subsumed, a tradition that I will shortly demonstrate was not in fact terminated in the history of postwar philosophy but rather revived, albeit in a perhaps idiosyncratic form.

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of humanity [*die rechte der Menschheit herzustellen*]." Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 96. *AA* 20:44.

[6] Reinhart Koselleck, "*Historik* and Hermeneutics," in *Sediments of Time*, ed. and trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 43.

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has argued that Koselleck may be read as offering a "historical anthropology," a counterpart to Arendt's "political anthropology."[7] One way to understand these parallel historical-intellectual trajectories is to place them both in the broader problem-space of "negative anthropology." Stefanos Geroulanos has argued that this motif in intellectual history emerged with the translation and dissemination of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, most notably in France. To oversimplify, this debate centered around how to translate *Dasein*. In particular, Geroulanos has argued, the translation by Henri Corbin of *Dasein* as *réalité humaine* "serves in the French context as an emptying out of anthropological categories — rejecting that human reality is anything other than the there-ness of *Dasein*."[8] This debate culminated in the 1947 "Letter on Humanism," in which Heidegger himself took Sartre to task for "anthropologizing" *Dasein* in his existentialist interpretation of *Sein und Zeit*. In the "Letter," Heidegger takes pains to stress that *Dasein* is fundamentally not about *man* but about *Being*: "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being. Man loses nothing in this 'less'; rather, he gains in that he attains the truth of Being."[9] As Geroulanos puts it, after Heidegger's "Letter" "the human in man comes to mean less and less: we can only know what he is not, what others and other things are, what his approach to them can reveal."[10]

Geroulanos makes the argument that this debate itself (rather than Heidegger's or Sartre's particular positions within it) becomes a touchstone for a whole range of postwar thinkers variously related to Heidegger, including notably Karl Löwith, Hannah Arendt, Reinhart Koselleck, and Michel Foucault, by creating a new problem-space of "negative

[7] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," trans. Tom Lampert, *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 212–36. See now also Hoffmann, *Der Riss in der Zeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2023).

[8] Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 336.

[9] Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. David Farrell Krell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 260.

[10] Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 18.

anthropology" within which tendencies like Koselleck's "historical anthropology" or Arendt's "political anthropology" might be developed. (Thus, we might further note that Löwith's *Menschen und Menschenwelt: Beiträge zur Anthropologie*, which began as his 1928 Habilitation completed under Heidegger's direction at Marburg, was influential for both Koselleck and Arendt.[11]) In their continued interest in philosophical anthropology, all these figures are in a sense reviving an old Kantian observation that the questions of the three critiques (What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?) can all be reckoned as anthropology, because they are all related to the question "What is the human being?"[12]

Koselleck, Arendt, and Foucault might seem like unlikely bedfellows, coming of age at different times and with very different personal trajectories. But their shared intellectual matrix, I am arguing, led them on distinct but parallel tracks: on the one hand to abjure anthropology as a project that might describe a universal essence, something like a common man, but on the other hand to return to anthropology in the sense that a certain kind of humanism, an interest in human beings rather than being *qua* being, continued to orient their philosophy. Indeed, in this vein we can note one more striking parallel between Koselleck, Arendt, and Foucault: all three have profound philosophical training, vocabulary, and knowledge, yet consciously reject the appellation of a "philosopher." In short, what these figures have in common is that they all abjure the philosophical tradition, yet their work clearly participates in two strands of classical German philosophy: that of Kant, and that of Heidegger. This is as true with respect to philosophical anthropology, I have been trying to show, as it is with the theory of knowledge (*Wissenschaftstheorie*) and philosophical history.

[11] See Karl Löwith, *Mensch und Menschenwelt: Beiträge zur Anthropologie*, ed. Klaus Stichweh, Kartonierte Sonderausgabe, Sämtliche Schriften, Band 1 (Berlin: J. B. Metzler, 2022).
[12] "The field of philosophy … can be reduced to the following questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? What is man? [*Was ist der Mensch?*] *Metaphysics* answers the first question, *morals* the second, *religion* the third, and *anthropology* the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one." Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 538., *AA* 9:25. The three first questions are also given in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)., A:805/B:833.

Koselleck, in particular, repeatedly emphasizes his self-conscious departure from the traditional German "philosophy of history." Instead, what he seeks to offer is a *Wissenschaftstheorie*, that is a *theory* rather than a *philosophy*, and one tied to the practice of a scientific discipline (a *Wissenschaft*), in this case history. Hoffmann notes that both Arendt and Koselleck had studied with Karl Jaspers and had as "a shared theoretical starting point Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*."[13] On the other hand, they both departed from Heidegger in stressing plurality as the basic condition for politics and for history, respectively. Furthermore, both began from concrete historical studies — Arendt of "the origins of totalitarianism" and Koselleck of the *Sattelzeit* — to diagnose problems that in turn prompted theoretical responses that transcended those particular historical circumstances. Thus, for instance, Koselleck wrote in the 1987 preface to the English edition of *Critique and Crisis* that "it is not merely historical problems that are being raised here, but questions which are challenging us to this day to search for an answer."[14] Similarly, Arendt wrote in the prologue to *The Human Condition* that what she proposes "is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing."[15]

Is this, then, not history but philosophy? Or is the raising of questions that speak "to this day" just what theory of any science, any discipline, any *Wissenchaft*, happens to do? Is Arendt a philosopher or a theorist of politics? Is Koselleck offering a philosophy of history, or "simply" a *Wissenschaftstheorie der Geschichte*? This latter seems to be the view Hoffmann wants to advance. He notes that "metaphysics" is not a topic of concern to either Arendt or Koselleck; therefore, to Hoffmann, philosophy is not what they are doing: "Arendt also had no interest in identifying a metaphysical human nature; she wanted to find categories

[13] Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," 224. See further Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[14] Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 4.
[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

that disclosed the 'human condition,' which itself structured the possibilities of the political — what Koselleck called the conditions of possible histories."[16] Yet, as I have already indicated above, such refusal of a "metaphysical human nature" is itself a move in philosophy, one we can clearly identify with (a certain reception of) Heidegger's *Being and Time*; and indeed the desire to find categories, to focus on conditions of possibility, is even more classically philosophical, since it is (as we will see later) at the core of Kant's project.

As mentioned above, both Arendt and Foucault, despite their initial philosophical training, turned sharply away from philosophy in the immediate aftermath of World War II — at least in terms of their most famous published works.[17] Arendt turned to a sort of history-writing, or perhaps journalism, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1948. Foucault instead became seriously interested in psychiatry, but primarily in a historical sense, leading to his landmark first published book, *Folie et déraison* (later translated as *History of Madness*).[18] This was submitted as his primary thesis, but at that time the French system required in addition a "complementary thesis," which Foucault wrote in 1960: a translation of and commentary on Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. This was never published. In 1964, Foucault followed Canguilhem's advice in announcing a forthcoming study of his concerned with the "relationship between critical thinking and anthropological reflection."[19] This study never appeared as such; instead, Foucault's most important publication in the 1960s was *Les mots et les choses*, translated as *The Order of Things*. This marked the most "structuralist" turn of Foucault's career, in which he made famous Lévi-Strauss' earlier claim in *La pensée sauvage* that the task of the human sciences was now "not

[16] Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," 227.
[17] I am aware that these two thinkers belong to different generations, separated by twenty years, yet I think the Second World War nonetheless had a significant broader influence that marked their personal trajectories away from philosophy in similar ways.
[18] Whose publication history was remarkably troubled; thus Jean Khalfa notes in his introduction to the 2006 edition that "Foucault's *History of Madness* has yet to be read." Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[19] Quoted in the introduction by Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Frédéric Gros to Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, ed. and trans. Roberto Nigro, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 11.

to constitute man, but to dissolve him." This "dissolving" is what Stefanos Geroulanos has referred to as "negative anthropology," which historically speaking laid the groundwork for structuralism's development in French thought.[20] But Foucault's interrogation of the Kantian theme remained with him throughout his life, to return most famously in his late essay on Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" where it seems that Foucault does not so much reject as take up anew the old Kantian question of philosophical anthropology.[21] No longer is man to be dissolved into structures; rather, he is to be reckoned with as a thinker, an agent, and as a being conditioned by the historical predicament in which he finds himself.

Arendt finds herself in a similar predicament: for her, the human condition is basically one of plurality, that is difference by virtue of the irreducibly plural conditions in which one finds oneself born into. The human being is an actor, basically autonomous and capable of introducing something radically new into the world by virtue of that same "miracle of birth" (natality). Arendt never had a strong structuralist phase like Foucault did. Yet I would read *The Human Condition* (1956) as mirroring Foucault's "structuralist" phase as it emerges from the postwar intellectual matrix of existentialism and phenomenology. The human being is central, but Arendt does not want to be a humanist like her teacher accused Sartre of being. It is thus quite misguided to imagine that the titular "human condition" is for Arendt an existentialist ground of being (and much less might it refer to any universal human nature). Instead, like Foucault, Arendt wants to sidestep the issue. That is, Arendt absolutely refuses to pin down any "human condition" that might undergird politics. Rather, for Arendt, "plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."[22]

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[20] Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 336.
[21] On this topic see, for instance, Sabina F. Vaccarino Bremner, "Anthropology as Critique: Foucault, Kant and the Metacritical Tradition," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 336–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2019.1650250. Now see also James I. Porter, "Foucault, Kant, and Antiquity," *Representations* 165, no. 1 (February 1, 2024): 120–43, https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2024.165.5.120.
[22] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8.

Arendt does not *dissolve* anthropology, but she does emphatically refuse any form of universal "man" in favor of an irreducible plurality of "men." The human sciences are redirected from an investigation of "human nature" to an inquiry into the categories that disclose the "human condition," which in turn make politics possible. The similarities with Kant, here too, run deep: even as they turn away from the subject both Arendt and Foucault turn back in on it to discover the conditions of possibility that structure thought and action. Nonetheless, it is (like Foucault) only in the 1970s that Arendt truly returns to Kant — in her case, to the third Critique, in order to find in aesthetic judgment a model for political judgments like that she found necessary to be given to Eichmann.[23]

For all these figures, as it was for Kant, their philosophical anthropology underpins their philosophy of history. Are humans just agents of some divine force? Do they make their own fates? For Heidegger's postwar interpreters (including Arendt, Foucault, Levinas, Löwith, and Levi-Strauss), a negative philosophical anthropology is a bulwark against totalitarian philosophies of history. This much could be said to be true about Koselleck, as well. As Hoffmann puts it:

> The common opponent here was the philosophy of history with its totalizing explanatory claims, which, according to both Koselleck and Arendt, had been transformed politically in the twentieth century into the totalitarian idea of history-making. Totalitarian rule and the ideological constructions of history that kept it in motion (but also the planning and feasibility ideology of the Western social sciences) sought to annul the concrete, reality-based experiences upon which the tradition of political theory had been grounded since antiquity; these attempts led both Arendt and Koselleck to investigate the metaphysical conditions of human existence and of history itself.[24]

But what exactly is going on here? What is it exactly that is being opposed, and in what way, when it comes to philosophy of history? Is the association of "teleology" with "totalitarianism" merely an *ad hominem* argument or does it carry philosophical weight, and if so what are the consequences for thought of this realization? As Löwith put it in *Meaning*

[23] See Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[24] Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," 233.

*in History*, we have come "at the end of the modern rope"; "it has worn too thin to give hopeful support."[25] What now? What can history offer us?

Koselleck dealt explicitly with these questions in his 1955 work *Critique and Crisis*. He wrote that "Today historical lessons can no longer be derived directly from history, but only indirectly through a theory of possible histories." No longer can history be the teacher of life (*historia magistra vitae*) in any direct sense. In this newly modern condition there is no hope of discovering lessons directly from history. Thus, the only "historical lessons" we could derive would be through a *theory of possible histories*. What does this theory look like?

> As soon as the structures of a historical epoch have been successfully identified in terms of their anthropological conditions, which can be derived from concrete individual cases, the results can make visible exemplary findings, which can also be related to our own present. For regardless of its uniqueness, a past epoch — investigated in terms of its structure — can contain moments of duration that still reach into the present day.[26]

This is not quite history and not quite philosophy: Koselleck calls it instead *Historik*. *Historik* takes a "historical epoch" and identifies its structures "in terms of their anthropological conditions." These results "can make visible exemplary findings, which can also be related to our own present." In short, Koselleck invents a new discipline — *Historik* — that can draw on history for lessons of some sort, but without tugging on the worn-out rope of modern history (*Historie*).

*Historik*, then, is in Koselleck's words neither history nor philosophy of history. What is it, then? What does a "doctrine of the conditions of possible histories" consist in? Koselleck's 1985 essay "Historik und Hermeneutik" gives greater specificity:

> As a theoretical science and in contrast to empirical *Historie*, the theory of history does not deal with individual histories themselves, whose past, present, and potential future realities are examined by historical fields of study. Rather, *Historik* is the theory of the conditions of possible histories. It asks about the theoretically discernible presuppositions that make conceivable why histories occur, how they unfold, and, likewise, how and why they must be

[25] Karl Löwith, *Meaning In History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 3.
[26] Reinhart Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Freiburg: Alber, 1959). Translated in Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," 235.

> examined, represented, or narrated. *Historik* thus aims at grasping the double-sided nature of each history, encompassing both a cluster of events and its representation.[27]

Not only does *Historik* offer lessons, which *Historie* in the modern age cannot, but it offers in particular a "theory of the conditions of possible histories." In this sense, Koselleck is participating in a philosophical tradition we have already seen, to which Kant and Heidegger belong. This tradition refuses metaphysics as traditionally understood. In this case, "history" cannot be approached directly as an object about which knowledge can be produced. Instead, philosophical or theoretical work must investigate the *conditions of possibility* for such knowledge.

In the Kantian case, these conditions of possibility are the categories that structure human reason. As Kant puts it in the A preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, what his critique has accomplished is only to "display the sources and conditions of its possibility" because it "needed to clear and level a ground that was completely overgrown [*einen ganz verwachsenen Boden zu reinigen und zu ebenen nötig hatte*]" (A xxi). This ground must be adequately prepared for any progress in science or metaphysics to occur.[28] Indeed, for Kant, as we have already seen in the essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," just *exhibiting* these conditions sufficiently lays the ground for progress: if we can "determine the domain [*Umfang*] and the boundaries [*Grenzen*] of our reason, … all the questions that pure reason lays before us … must therefore be able to be solved [*aufgelöset*] and their validity or nullity [*Gültigkeit oder Nichtigkeit*] must be able to be comprehended [*begriffen*]" (A763/B791). Establish the boundaries of metaphysics through a critique of pure reason, and true progress in all human domains is made possible.

Elsewhere in the first Critique, Kant makes the point that these *boundaries* (*Grenze*), which establish a positive division between two domains, are to be distinguished from *limits*

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[27] Koselleck, "*Historik* and Hermeneutics," 43.

[28] My reading of Kant on this point has been influenced by Karin de Boer and Stephen Howard, "A Ground Completely Overgrown: Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 358–77, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2018.1450218.

(*Schranke*), which merely negate a single domain.[29] In establishing the conditions of possibility, Kant does not seek to merely trace out limits, which would be only of negative utility, but rather to refer to the boundaries of knowledge because that is precisely what makes *Wissenschaft* a task within which progress *can* be made. As Kant says in the "Doctrine of Method":

> Our reason is not like an indeterminably extended plane [*Ebene*], the limits [*Schranken*] of which one can cognize only in general, but must rather be compared with a sphere, the radius of which can be found out from the curvature of an arc on its surface (from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which its content and its boundary [*Grenze*] can also be ascertained with certainty. Outside this sphere (field of experience) nothing is an object [*Objekt*] for it; indeed even questions about such supposed objects [*Gegenstände*] concern only subjective principles of a thoroughgoing determination of the relations that can obtain among the concepts of understanding [*Verstandesbegriffen*] inside of this sphere. (A762/B790)

Kant sees his role, then, as a researcher (*Forscher*) into the nature and boundaries of this "sphere of reason," a task that has far more than merely negative utility. Rather, Kant says, the critique of pure reason in fact offers a "better groundwork" (*bessere Grundlegung*) for "progress" (*Fortgang*) in reason (A763/B791).

On this point, consider one last example from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant illustrates the need for boundaries with one of his most vivid metaphors:

> The light dove, in free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels [*im freien Fluge die Luft teilt, deren Widerstand sie fühlt*], could get the idea [*Vorstellung*] that it could do even better in airless space [*Luftleeren Raum*]. Likewise, Plato abandoned the world of the senses because it posed so many hindrances for the understanding, and dared to go beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of pure understanding [*in den leeren Raum des reinen Verstandes*]. He did not notice that he made no headway by his efforts, for he had no resistance, no support, as it were, by which he could stiffen himself, and to which he could apply his powers [*seine Kräfte*] in order to get his understanding off the ground. It is, however, a customary fate of human reason [*ein gewöhnliches Schicksal der menschlichen Vernunft*] in speculation to finish its edifice [*Gebäude*] as early as possible and only then to investigate whether the ground has been adequately prepared for it [*ob auch der Grund dazu gut geleget sei*]. (A5/B9)

[29] This distinction is usefully elaborated in Stephen Howard, "Kant on Limits, Boundaries, and the Positive Function of Ideas," *European Journal of Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2022): 64–78, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12652.

To get understanding off the ground (*um den Verstand von der Stelle zu bringen*) we need something to gain traction against. Reason might suffer the delusion, like the dove, that a space without resistance, e.g. a pure delineation of limits, would best suit its "free flight." But air is necessary, not just to breathe, but for the dove to beat its wings against. Truly free flight comes not from the absence of resistance but from the support resistance provides. What the bird needs is an atmosphere with an enclosing boundary, not a *tabula rasa* with only the most spare of limits. It is only with something "by which he could stiffen himself," then, that the philosopher-scientist could get his understanding off the ground and into the air, too. This "something" can be identified both with the conditions of possibility that lay the groundwork for any possible metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and with the "guiding thread" (*Leitfaden*) that the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" offers.

Koselleck's investigation into the conditions of possible histories follows a similar rubric as Kant's delineation of "conditions of possibility." Koselleck's *Historik* "is not concerned with histories themselves, whose past, present, and perhaps future realities are thematized and investigated by historians," but rather "investigates the theoretically necessary parameters that make comprehensible why histories occur."[30] For Koselleck, *Historik* examines the presuppositions that make conceivable why histories occur and how they unfold and are represented. What I hope to have shown is how Kant also offers an investigation of the conditions of the subject at hand, by investigating its boundaries, that is the conditions that make it possible. This is one deep sense in which Koselleck can and should be read in *continuity* with Kant, even as he self-consciously claims a break. Not only does Koselleck's philosophical history resemble that explicitly called for in Kant's "Idea" essay, discussed above, but in fact their theoretical investigations of "conditions of possibility" also echo each other.

[30] Koselleck, "*Historik* and Hermeneutics," 43.

However, as mentioned above, Koselleck's *Historik* draws equally, if not more so, on a different, third part of Kant's project: philosophical anthropology. Koselleck himself in an interview says quite confidently that anthropology is at least one half of his project: "the concept of anthropology actually designates the vision for a theoretical program rather than this program's full, empirical realization, for even the formal anthropological categories I have developed are always in need of empirical realization if they are to be translated into a theory of history."[31] Here we see Koselleck's insistence that despite using the language of Kantian philosophy, his approach differs markedly from philosophy of history in being basically empirically oriented, that is turning to the objects of history themselves for their material rather than employing a strictly philosophical, i.e. transcendental, method. As discussed above, Koselleck develops a *historical* anthropology that refuses to answer the traditional question of philosophical anthropology ("what is the human being?") yet nonetheless can be located within the larger history of philosophy.

In particular, Koselleck develops his historical anthropology by focusing on "structures of repetition." The human being is placed between two extremes:

> If everything always repeated itself identically, there would be no change and no surprise—either in love or in politics, either in the economy or anywhere else. Gaping boredom would spread.
>
> If, in contrast, if everything were new or innovative, humankind would fall into a black hole from one day to the next, helpless and bare of all orientation.
>
> These logically constraining propositions alone teach us that neither the category of duration, which is evidenced by the repetition of the same, nor the category of diachronically aligned singular events (no matter whether these are viewed from a progressive or historicist perspective) are sufficient on their own for interpreting human histories. The historical nature of the human being, or, put in terms of the theory of knowledge [*wissenschaftstheoretisch*], historical anthropology, is located between these two poles of our thought experiment, between constant repeatability and durable innovation. The question then is how we can analyze and represent the sediments and mixtures of both repetition and innovation.[32]

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[31] Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time*, ed. and trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 252.
[32] Ibid., 160.

This seems to offer Koselleck's most developed or final statement on his "historical anthropology." The human being is historical in nature. This seems to be an empirical fact for Koselleck. Put in terms of the theory of knowledge, this empirical fact has to be located between two poles of a thought experiment: "constant repeatability," that there is nothing new but merely an iteration of the same; and "durable innovation," that the human being is capable of introducing something new which can subsequently be made to endure. To be historical is to be between these poles. Thus, for Koselleck the human being as an empirical organism can only exist between the two extremes of constant repeatability and durable invention.

This is a response to the basic question of philosophical anthropology, as present in Arendt and Kant as it is in Koselleck: what might it mean to both admit the historical conditionedness of human existence and to affirm the creative capacity of human beings to overcome themselves and their past? What does freedom in service of life mean in relation to history? This is the sense of historical anthropology that Koselleck most deeply addresses: understood systematically, scientifically, "from the point of view of the theory of knowledge [*wissenschaftstheoretisch*]," the human being is neither unconditioned, completely prone to forget, and thus as carefree as cows, nor so burdened with "constant repeatability" that it is unable to act. Structures of repetition do not imprison man, but nor can they be simply surpassed.

Consider one last time the "structures of a historical epoch" that Koselleck had already described in *Critique and Crisis* — those "exemplary findings" of a past epoch which when made visible "can contain moments of duration that still reach into the present day." Here it might be worth remembering another deep source of inspiration for Koselleck: Fernand Braudel. What was so compelling about Braudel's work, as with the *Annales* school more generally, was how they were able to uncover layers of history that are more faithful to,

say, the ordinary experience of life in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean than traditional "great man" histories. Such a history "in the service of pure knowledge" would be an *histoire événementelle*: that is, a history of monumental events, of key figures, that tells us little or nothing about the ordinary illiterate shepherd tending his flocks on a mountainside in Palestine. By contrast, Koselleck in his *Zeitschichten* is chiefly inspired by Braudel's *moyenne* and *longue durée*: the geological/environmental, biological, socioeconomic, and linguistic structures that frame but do not determine human action. From these *Zeitschichten* Koselleck does not develop a full-on negative anthropology such as we would recognize from the French structuralists (e.g. Lévi-Strauss and Foucault of *The Order of Things*): the human being is not "dissolved" into structures of language or sediments of time. Yet the human being is not isolated as a "great man" who is only meaningful in relation to the monumental events he shapes with his will, either. Instead, the structures of repetition identified with the sediments of time maintain a strong grip on historical reality. The peasant on the mountainside can be treated both historically and philosophically with great respect as the subject of knowledge. Koselleck's historical anthropology offers a philosophically rich yet empirically grounded philosophical history.

What I hope to have shown in this paper are three ways in which Reinhart Koselleck can and should be read in continuity with Kant, despite his own protestations to the contrary. In particular, I have discussed (1) the historical development of philosophical anthropology, in which Koselleck's trajectory parallels that of Foucault and Arendt, particularly in their common response to Heidegger via the motif of "negative anthropology"; (2) the investigation of "conditions of possibility," which in Koselleck's hands actually does not depart that much from the Kantian notion; and (3) how both these threads tie back to Kant's own conception of "philosophical history" or "philosophy of history" as advanced in his essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim." The irony, of course, is that

Koselleck self-consciously offers a critical response to Kant; and yet the nature of critique is such that a critique of Kant necessarily uses the critical tools Kant himself helped hone. This need not, and should not, disappoint us. Instead, I hope what I have argued can be taken first as an intellectual-historical contribution to the history of philosophy of history, and second an example in humility, where it is not quite ever as easy as we might expect to exorcise the ghosts of our past. It is hard for me to imagine a more suitable candidate, in the end, than Koselleck to fulfill that aim that Kant had outlined at the end of his 1784 essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," which offers itself as "only a thought of that which a philosophical mind (which besides this would have to be very well versed in history) could attempt from another standpoint."[33]

[33] Kant, "Idea," 120. *AA* 8:130.

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