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Research Project:

***Mankind and Humanity in German Enlightenment Philosophy***

Recent international literature gives witness to a new trend in studies of the German Enlightenment: a vested interest in its unique philosophical anthropology. Much focus has been put on the relationship between the normative concept of humanity and the biological notion of mankind, which are often thought of as intimately intertwined. Enlightenment thinkers understand human nature as constituted by a fundamental *heterogeneity*: We are human beings in a moral *and* biological sense.

In this research project, I will examine how our human self-understanding was transformed from a predominantly theological conception of humans as *animal rationale* and *imago Dei* to a much more complex conception of humanity that builds on such a broad range of elements as historicity, progress, culture, morality, language, our social interdependence, higher emotions, and the controlling of impulses. All these specifically human aspects were usually not defined in regard to God or rationality, but primarily taken as ways in which we transcend our biological nature.

This new, predominantly philosophical interest even has an impact on the linguistic expressions. Most importantly for our purpose, we see this in how the German notion of "*Menschheit*," originally created as a translation of "*humanitas*," shifts in meaning between 1750 and 1800 from an obscure theological neologism to a widely used, collective notion signifying the historically developing whole of human beings.

The research project makes use of two approaches. Methodologically, it will thus focus on the development of German-language philosophy between 1750 and 1800 to substantiate my thesis of such a momentous semantic shift in the term "*Menschheit*." In particular, we will look at how this term becomes a critical theme in the philosophies of Forster, Herder, Humboldt, Iselin, Kant, Mendelssohn, Schiller, Schleiermacher, Tetens, and many lesser-known thinkers.

Conceptually, it will employ this historical basis in order to bring to the fore three crucial aspects in the Enlightenment debate about human nature that are of extraordinary importance:

1. Epistemic criteria for identifying humans: *Animal rationale* and *imago Dei* are *ontological* definitions that do not help at all in ascertaining whether a given being is human or animal. Rationality and the divine aspect in humans have to *exhibit themselves* in certain practices and in the form of human life for this to be possible.
2. The historicity of humanity: Genuine humanity is not a biological feature, but only possible within an ordered, historically grown society. Although human nature is not a given fact, we can (and are morally obliged to) realize ourselves as humans *in time*. History therefore, becomes a morally relevant attempt to understand the 'the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous'.
3. The normativity of social interdependence: Because we conceive humanity itself as a historical entity, we can consequently outline a *political* imperative directed at creating a society wherein we can realize our full potential humanity. It is not only the singular human person that is a bearer of rights. Rather humanity itself can have rights: e.g., we should treat humanity as a whole as an end and never only as a means.

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