Kant, James, and Pragmatic Anthropology
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Abstract

In the essay I explore a way in which philosophical anthropology might inform ethics. My ambition is twofold: by investigating some themes in selected writings of Kant and James I shall bring to light a way of thinking moral reflection as instructed by a peculiar understanding of pragmatic anthropology often overlooked in the contemporary philosophical debate, showing at the same time a timely liaison (at once conceptual and historical) between these two authors over this particular theme. By surveying some themes running thought Kant’s Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View and James’s Principles of Psychology I argue for a picture of the entanglement of ethics and philosophical anthropology along pragmatist lines standing in opposition – and hence representing an alternative – to the foundational account of the entanglement defended by moral theory, broadly conceived. Instead of keeping morality pure from any human involvement or shaping it after a metaphysical picture of human beings, a pragmatist approach to moral reflection envisions a radical alternative: that is, conceiving moral thought as informed by an account of human beings neither as they are nor as they should be, but rather from the point of view of what they might make of themselves. This way of understanding philosophical anthropology brings to light a picture of ethics focused on what the self makes of herself through engaging in a certain relation with herself. In different but converging ways, Kant and James indicated a way in which this alternative option can be articulated.

Key Words: Ethics, Philosophical Anthropology, Pragmatism, Self-Cultivation, Kant, James