Kant’s Children

Mika LaVaque-Manty
Department of Political Science
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045
mmanty@umich.edu

INTRODUCTION: THE AUTONOMY PROBLEM

One important idea in the 18th-century intellectual movement we like to call Enlightenment was that all humans have equal dignity by virtue of their autonomous agency. In Immanuel Kant’s representative formulation, to be an autonomous agent is to act on reasons you give yourself, as opposed to being the vehicle for some other force — your body’s urges, say, like an addict, or the will of someone else, like a slave. The idea is attractive, but one serious problem facing Enlightenment thinkers — at least them; perhaps us, too — was the question of how to reconcile their claim about people’s autonomous agency with empirical reality. To the Enlighteners’ eyes, many people neither enjoyed the respect their putative dignity warranted nor acted in ways that would have suggested they were meaningfully autonomous. If the 18th century was the age of Enlightenment, many people didn’t act their age. Kant called this people’s “immaturity.” Part of the problem was political in the institutional sense: absolutism, feudal vestiges and religious authoritarianism — often through well-intentioned paternalism — made it difficult for people to be autonomous. But Kant and others also thought ordinary people themselves were part of the problem: their immaturity was also “self-incurred.” This was a theoretical and practical dilemma. Imagine yourself in Enlighteners’ shoes: If another person’s autonomous agency is your goal, you had better be careful about what and how much you do for her. Or, as John Dewey put it, slightly more strongly, it’s a fact that “personality cannot be procured for any one, however degraded and feeble, by any one else, however wise and strong.” There is a real tension between paternalism and respect for autonomy. There is also a risk of elitism in concerning yourself with others’ autonomy. What a person does doesn’t tell you whether she chose to do it. Some people autonomously choose stupid actions and ends, or actions and ends that might look stupid to you.
The autonomy problem is particularly pressing for Kant. I explore one of the areas where he grapples with it, that is, in his discussions of the raising and educating of children. He isn’t the only modern thinker who sees a connection between the autonomy problem and children: far from it. Early modern thinkers hadn’t yet heard Ernst Haeckel’s claim that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, but it would have been a good metaphor for how many of them thought about individual psychology and historical anthropology. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had suggested that the anthropological process whereby humanity had developed — and been corrupted — was more or less recapitulated in every (male) individual during his formative years. And as Rousseau had explicitly spelled out in his hugely influential works, most importantly in Émile, it was through education that the corrupting processes could be stopped and autonomous agency fostered instead. There are always new generations to be brought up, and it doesn’t take much beyond ordinary common sense to realize that insofar as one wants to effect permanent change in prevailing attitudes, beliefs and types of personhood, childhood might be the place to start.

Kant famously had no children. Children and childhood do, however, figure in his works. First, Kant has a penchant for childhood-related metaphors. Among the most important are Unmündigkeit and Mündigkeit, which are variously translated as immaturity and maturity, minority and majority. How we should understand the terms forms a part of my argument. He also talks much of early-modern child-rearing implements like “leading strings” (Leitbände) and walkers (Gängelwagen). Given that Kant is a theorist for whom metaphors do far more work than examples, recurring metaphors are worth taking seriously. Second, real children were important for Kant, and he has interestingly radical things to say about childhood and the education of children. The education of children is both a metaphor and a concrete means in the solution of the autonomy problem.

Kant’s approach to education has two particular virtues. First, it emphasizes children’s embodied agency. This may be surprising since Kant’s conception of agency is so often taken to be excessively rational and cerebral. Second, Kant’s account shows how views in which children are not yet agents and at the same time automatically future agents are misguided. The view we get from Kant is exactly the opposite: children are agentic very early on, but their agency is not the same thing
as mature, rational adult agency. I argue, further, that there is no unique or
unequivocal kind of autonomy even for adults: autonomy comes in degrees and
kinds.  

This gives us a sense of how political rhetoric which attributes intrinsic dignity
to agents can deal with the empirical reality in which many people don’t act or
aren’t yet treated as if they had intrinsic dignity. It avoids both the explicit anti-
egalitarianism which many conservatives have historically advocated and the well-
intentioned paternalism and elitism that plague many Enlighteners and their
heirs. It’s a common view that Kant’s solution, too, flirts with paternalism: he
rejects the possibility of radical change from below and settles somewhat uneasily
on a gradual reform that comes from above but somehow isn’t paternalistic.

Whether or not Kant himself considered the solution I propose, there are
resources in his theory to approach the autonomy problem differently. If
autonomy comes in degrees and kinds, it is, first, an open question what those
degrees and kinds are. I argue, for example, that we can understand “citizenship” as
institutionalized civic autonomy, but Kant is explicit that civic autonomy is
different from moral autonomy. Kant’s discussion suggests it is also different from
what we might call social autonomy. That raises, second, a question about the
distinction between the different kinds: what are the grounds on which the
distinctions are maintained?

To answer that, I take the etymology of the concept of Mündigkeit seriously.
The term points to a person’s having a mouth (Mund) with which she can speak for
herself and consequently take responsibility for her actions: thinking for oneself is,
loosely, in the first instance “speaking for oneself.” Etymologies aren’t arguments,
and the discussion of children suggests that Kant doesn’t take the term literally. But
the key idea is that “speaking for oneself” depends on other people: whether I am
autonomous doesn’t just depend on how I think of myself, but also on how others
understand me, that is, what kind of status they ascribe me. Autonomy is, in this
sense, at least partly ascriptive: I am autonomous if someone ascribes self-
authorization to me. My actual cognitive ability to think may be a necessary
condition for such an ascription, but it isn’t a sufficient one. There is a complex
interrelation between acquiring the capacity for responsible agency and coming to
be recognized (in one’s closer and wider social environment) as capable of being responsible.\textsuperscript{10}

The way ascriptive autonomy amounts to a partial solution to the political autonomy problem is this: it opens up a space for politics. To use a currently vogue term, the idea helps create a conceptual \textit{agon} where controversial claims to authority and authorization are made and countered. Someone who is recognized as autonomous in one domain and denied such a recognition in another may challenge the denial, asking about its grounds. The challenge may succeed or it may fail; the matter is contingent but not, I argue below, arbitrary: it depends on intersubjectively valid \textit{reasons} and not just social or political power. In this sense, the idea of political contestation remains solidly Kantian.

To tease the conception of ascriptive autonomy out of Kant’s writings on education, politics and anthropology is not to replace more familiar ways Kant is taken to think about autonomy. The idea of self-legislation which he begins to develop in section III of the \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals} and completes in the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason} is obviously more central in his moral theory. It is also possible that insofar as the textbook conception underwrites a robust theory of freedom and the ascriptive conception makes freedom more contingent, the two may end up in tension.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, I suggest that the ascriptive conception is an overlooked and under-appreciated part of Kant’s general thinking about human agency: greater attention to its theoretical promise can show, for example, why Jürgen Habermas’s critique of Kant’s theory of agency as too “monological” may be unfair.\textsuperscript{12}

\section*{ii CRITIQUE OF EDUCATION}

A person can have education and school-learning up to his neck and still be narrow-minded. Schools can corrupt much and make the person narrow-minded by insisting on authority, instead of letting him judge for himself. (VA 25:1040)

The \textit{locus classicus} for Kant’s view of the autonomy problem is his short 1784 essay “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” To many readers, Kant comes across as uneasy about how much and what kind of freedom it would be wise to offer at that particular historical moment. The essay emphasizes
people’s free use of their reason, but it is notoriously squeamish about other freedoms: Kant quotes a claim attributed to Frederick the Great, “Argue as much as you will, but obey!” (WE 8:41) That claim could have served as the slogan for enlightened absolutism and, in general, for paternalism. Further, Kant’s negative attitude in that essay and elsewhere toward revolution and other kinds of radical social change only makes that interpretation seem more likely.13

However, such an emphasis gives an incomplete and, at worst, misleading picture of Kant’s thinking about how Enlightenment would best come about. “What is Enlightenment?” is not a defense of paternalism; quite the contrary. This becomes clearer if we take a bit of a detour through the education of children.

It is significant that Kant explicitly rejects “slow reformism” and uses a rhetoric of a “speedy revolution” when it comes to changing education policies (APB 2:449). That rhetorical call comes in a pair of short essays — pamphlets, really — Kant wrote in 1776 in explicit support of an experimental school called the Philantropinum. I mean explicit support: at the end of the essay, there is information on how to buy subscriptions to the school from Kant (APB 2:449, 452). He continued to endorse the school and its ideas throughout his life: his very late Pädagogik, published in 1800, has several references to the school. It is therefore helpful to spend a moment of exploring this radical school.

Kant wasn’t the only one who was initially excited about the Philantropinum. It symbolized the hopes of some German Enlighteners, the Aufklärer, and it helped generate an entire movement, the Philantropinen.14 The movement emerged in the 1770s, when its founder Johann Bernhard Basedow opened the school in Dessau. The school was based on the educational ideas Basedow had outlined in a 1768 book-length pamphlet, “Vorstellung an Menschenfreunde” (“A Presentation to Friends of Humanity”).15 Basedow’s ideas, in turn, had been heavily influenced by the educational theories of John Locke and Rousseau, although — importantly — Basedow wasn’t just parroting Locke or Rousseau (even if he sometimes quotes both at great length). Basedow modified the earlier ideas in many ways.

There were three central and radical ideas in Basedow’s thinking. First, he saw education as a collective good which was in the state’s interest, and argued that therefore the state, not the church, should be in charge of it.16 Second, he argued for a common education, almost (though not fully) independent of social class (MB,
17). Finally, he and the *Philantropinum* in general were in favor of pedagogy we might call “child-centered”: learning was to resemble play and was to be on the child’s terms (MB, 42–47; EW, 259–260).

Basedow argued for the immediate establishment of experimental schools, a purpose the *Philantropinum* tried to fulfill. Although experimenting was important because it was impossible to know fully in advance what kinds of methods would work best, the following are some of the general principles he had in mind.

The first two stages of education — in the common “people’s school” (*Volksschule*) at the elementary level and still at the middle-school level — were aimed at practical living (VM, §§23, 39; MB, 17, 42). *Non scholae, sed vitae discimus*, as Seneca had put it: We learn for life, not for school. The practical was something everyone would need, regardless of one’s station in life and future plans. That wasn’t just an empirical observation, but in fact had its own causal efficacy: it *would* bring about a more egalitarian, republican state. Furthermore, as contemporary conservatives observed, lack of social differentiation would primarily serve to elevate the common classes, something the conservatives unsurprisingly opposed.  

It would, in their view, give commoners’ children skills that would make them uppity and demanding, at worst promoting revolution and at best leading to unhappy, frustrated commoners.

The practical was achieved through a set of key principles. The central notion was that learning, especially early learning in the *Volksschule*, was to be on the child’s terms. In general, all education should happen with means appropriate to the child’s developmental stage. This meant that early teaching should resemble play as much as possible. A full half of a child’s day in the *Volksschule* should be some kind of physical (*körperlich*) play or “work” (VM, §38). The subjects of the *Volksschule* were the same for all: reading, writing, arithmetic, *Realien* (history and elementary social and natural sciences), practical knowledge of nature and of the law. Rote memorization was absolutely banned; instead, children should learn through “real” remembering via playful exercises and practices (MB, 95–100). Basedow opposed physical punishment but thought physical education was important, both through simple gymnastic exercises and physical games (MB, 62–65).
In radical contrast to the practices of the day, Basedow thought religious education could only begin in middle-school when the child had developed a sufficient understanding to make real sense of it. Otherwise, the child’s proper understanding and thus real faith would be threatened or impeded. He outlined these ideas in eight lengthy pieces of advice to parents and educators (MB, 135–147). We can get a good sense of their logic from a letter Kant wrote to the director of the Philantropinum, in support of a friend’s son’s application to the school:

In matters of religion, the spirit of the Philantropin agrees perfectly with the boy’s father. He wishes that even the natural awareness of God (as the boy’s growth in age and understanding may gradually make him arrive at it) should not be aimed at devotional exercises directly but only after he has realized that these are valuable merely as a means of animating an effective conscience and a fear of God, so that one does one’s duties as though there were divinely commanded.

(C 10:192)

But although religious education should be postponed, it didn’t mean that moral development was unimportant. Proper moral development would simply be hindered by too early a religious education, especially if it took the form of religious memorization. Instead, moral education was to be based on experience and proceed through relaxed play as well as through instructive moral conversations (MB, 102–107).

Basedow was, as I said above, influential, but the most radical elements in his educational philosophy not only remained unrealized but were either toned down or reversed very quickly. Basedow’s 1893 editor Hermann Lorenz still laments that the educational ideals weren’t anywhere near being realized even in the late 19th-century Germany. Contemporary conservatives predictably ridiculed him, but even fellow Aufklärers took some distance from Basedowian ideas. Joachim Heinrich Campe, who had taught at the Dessau Philantropinum but who had severed relations with Basedow in 1777, edited in 1785–1792 a massive compendium called Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens ("General Revision of Common Schooling and Education"), which became the overall statement on education in the German Enlightenment. The Revisionswerk, as the compendium came to be called, defended the idea that all citizens (Bürger) should be educated, but
their education should be appropriate for the person’s estate and occupation. A contemporary, equally influential reform movement in Switzerland, spearheaded by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, also emphasized tailoring education to the pupils’ social status and likely future occupation.21

The enthusiasm about the Philantropinum Kant expresses in his letter and pamphlets may have cooled slightly over the years, but as late as in the Pädagogik he remains very positive about the school. This enthusiasm is a helpful backdrop for understanding why Kant might have found childhood-related metaphors important, and what those metaphors mean for him. Childhood is salient — and in fact politically salient — for him. And his embracing of anti-paternalism and respect for children on their own terms prepares us to interpret the metaphors also in anti-paternalist terms. I now turn to a pair of metaphors that pops up frequently in Kant’s works.

iii LEADING STRINGS AND WALKING CARTS

Among Kant’s frequent childhood-related metaphors, leading strings (Leitbande) and walking carts (Gängelwagen) are the most peculiar for readers today. In fact, that they are related to children at all isn’t always obvious. Contemporaries, however, wouldn’t have missed the connection.

Both the walking cart and leading strings were child-rearing devices commonly used in Europe from the middle ages well into modernity.22 Both were tools to help children learn to walk while their parents tried to balance children’s need for self-direction with concern for safety. One doesn’t have to be a parent to understand what a crucial watershed a child’s learning to walk is. It is particularly crucial in terms of its scale: the entire physical object, i.e., the child’s body, is now under control of her self-direction, in a way that allows her to move to new places and new heights. Her self-direction isn’t perfect, of course, nor is it very reflective. Because of that, learning to walk comes with numerous risks: the child may hurt herself in new ways and, in particular, the risks to her head from falling from new heights make things more dangerous. So the understandable dual pull on parents: walking has to be her activity, and so ultimately unaided, but, at the same time, she by definition does not yet have all the skills necessary to avoid the risks involved.

Gängelwagen is a child-sized version of what we know as a walker, commonly used these days by adults with disabilities and by the elderly. Leitbande are a kind of
harness or reins. There is a hierarchy of sorts between the two: the former allows for more freedom to the child than the latter. The Gängelwagen supports; Leitbande support and constrain. Sure, even the freedom of the Gängelwagen can be made illusory with a sufficiently strong indoctrination: if I really convince my child bad things are going to happen if he tries to let go, I don’t have to do anything physical to keep him from trying to walk without it. (If you are like me, you were terrified when your parents first took your training wheels off your bike.) But despite the slight difference between the devices, the purpose they served was the same. So also the metaphorical purposes: Kant uses the terms almost interchangeably, and once even a hybrid term, walking strings (Gängelbande, A 7:229).

In “What is Enlightenment?” both occur several times; the first instance is on the first page. Although Kant blames people themselves for their “immaturity” — it is a result of their laziness and cowardice — its maintenance is fostered by well-intentioned “guardians.” Here, child-related metaphors get mixed with animal images: “…after [the guardians] have made their domesticated animals dumb and carefully prevented these placid creatures from daring to take a single step without the walking cart (Gängelwagen) in which they have confined them, they then show them the danger that threatens them if they try to walk alone” (WE 8:35). Soon we also encounter Leitbande:

A revolution may well bring about a falling off of personal despotism and of avaricious or tyrannical oppression, but never a true reform in one’s way of thinking; instead new prejudices will serve just as well as old ones as the leading strings of the great unthinking masses. (WE 8:36)

As the passage makes clear, these leading strings are constraints on thinking. A revolution might remove explicit political unfreedoms and still leave people unable to think for themselves because they rely on the support of knee-jerk prejudices and other shortcuts.

In other contexts, the metaphors do more or less the very same work. In the Preface to the Critique of Pure Reason, Leitbande help make a point about the autonomy of reason: reason should not try to find its principles under nature’s guidance. Later in the first Critique, Kant notes that “examples are the Gängelwagen of the power of judgment, which he who lacks the natural talent for judgment can
never do without” (CPR B:174). In both cases, the need for the devices suggests a lack of cognitive autonomy. In the 1786 essay, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” Kant makes a similar point: the development of humankind will ultimately free humanity “from the Gängelwagen of instinct to the guidance (Leitung) of reason” (CBH 8:115).

Some commentators, most famously Hannah Arendt, have understood Kant to be approving of leading strings and walkers.24 But that is clearly a mistake. Only in two instances does Kant’s use of the metaphors suggest anything positive. Those two cases both have to do with religion. The leading strings of “holy tradition” and dogma (Kirchenglaube) may be historically necessary before humanity develops its capacities enough to move to pure rational, non-dogmatic and non-institutional religion, which is Kant’s ultimate goal.25 Without such constraints, insufficiently mature people might turn into fanatics. Even there, however, leading strings are only useful transitionally. By the time humanity reaches its “youth” — whenever that might be — leading strings risk turning “into fetter.”26

Given Kant’s sympathy toward Basedow’s educational ideas, we might indeed expect him to be critical of these devices. If we ask what he thought of real leading strings and walking carts, this becomes obvious. He thinks they are a bad idea, always.

The relevant place for such discussion is the Pädagogik. Even there, though, it isn’t at first glance obvious that he would find them noxious. The whole set of lectures is framed around the dilemma of the historical autonomy problem:

One of the greatest problems of education is how to combine subjection to legitimate constraint (den gesetzlichen Zwang) with one’s facility to exercise one’s freedom. For constraint is necessary! How do I cultivate freedom when there is constraint? I must accustom my pupil to put up with a constraint on his freedom and to direct him to use his freedom well. (P 9:453)

On its face, this solution suggests Kant wouldn’t have a problem with paternalistic constraints on freedom. But this is really just statement of the abstract principle Kant and most other liberals endorse: freedom, as opposed to license, is intelligible only against some constraints. This will become clear in the following paragraph of his text. The foremost principle is that
one must grant the child from its earliest childhood freedom in all
things (except where it might harm itself, as for example when it tries
to grab a knife), as long as this happens so it doesn’t impinge on
others’ freedom — for example, when the child screams or is too
boisterously cheerful, it begins to annoy others. (P 9:454)\(^27\)

Later in the book, Kant spends several pages discussing the common methods of
teaching children to walk and thoroughly condemns both Gängelwagen and
Leibbande. Leibbande in particular he singles out for an attack; they are not only
useless, but they are “in particular very harmful (besonders sehr schädlich)” (P 9:461).
They can, in Kant’s view, cause permanent damage to the child’s upper body by
distorting and deforming the still soft bones in his or her ribcage. In general, such
“aids” (Hilfsmittel) teach children bad habits: children don’t learn to walk as steadily
on their own feet if they get used to being helped (ibid.). “It is best,” Kant says, “to let
the children crawl on the ground until they eventually start walking on their own”
(ibid.). He also thinks people have exaggerated worries about how hard children
fall. And, he suggests, letting them fall a few times teaches them better to move
lightly and to turn their bodies in ways that the fall is not damaging when they do.
(Ibid.) Furthermore, Kant wants to disabuse people of the particularly problematic
belief that children should never be allowed to fall forward because they will hurt
their faces that way. Quite the contrary, letting them fall forward, he thinks,
teaches them to use the most important “natural tool” they have: their hands (P
9:462).

That gets Kant to his overall point: the more “artificial tools” one uses in
teaching children, the more dependent they will remain on “instruments.” “In
general, it would be better if one used fewer instruments right from the start and
just let the children learn more things by themselves. That way, they would learn
things more thoroughly” (ibid.). Children’s free exercise of their bodies on their
own terms and at their own pace makes them stronger, teaches them independence
and gives them ownership of their actions and behavior. This is consistent with the
physical education that comes slightly later. Then, too, the “foremost is that the
child always help oneself” (P 9:466).

Kant’s counsel may strike even contemporary readers as pretty tough, and he
does certainly belong to the anti-coddling school. The account is, moreover,
explicitly gendered: Kant worries particularly about child-rearing that would make children effeminate (weichlich, P 9:463). It is obvious that his primary — but not sole — interest is in boys, and the worry about effeminacy suggests his whole idea of autonomy is, in many ways, gendered masculine. But it isn’t necessarily so gendered. The German for “a child” is in the grammatical neuter, and so the text is explicitly more gender-neutral than most English translations suggest. The gendered dimension, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.  

The discussion of the leading strings and walking carts yields some surprising intermediary conclusions. First, remember that Kant is not a Cartesian dualist: it is one of the central ideas of his philosophy that we are embodied, finite rational wills and not pure rational wills like angels or, perhaps, God. We are, to use his delightful metaphor, hybrids of angels and cattle (R 488, 15:211). Our wills are necessarily exercised through our embodiment and, in the first instance, literally via our bodies. Although Kant may be right in thinking that we fully learn about our agency through a discovery of choice, there is a more primitive and probably earlier discovery: it doesn’t take very high level of cognitive development for a child to realize she can do something with her body. This can happen even before any awareness of choice, intention, or will: we notice our bodies can bump into things even when they aren’t fully under our control. This is occasionally true of adults — when they are drunk, or preoccupied, or if they suffer from motor disorders — and generally true of infants and toddlers.

So even budding and inchoate awareness of what my body can and cannot do plays a role in my developing a sense of myself as an agent. Errors and failures are important for learning to understand the limits of that exercise, “for one cannot straightaway do all that one wants to do, without having first tried out and exercised one’s powers” (DV 6:477). This is true of all aspects of our agency, but again in the first instance, when we think of children, it is particularly true of physical abilities. So it makes sense, if we return to the Basedowian Volksschule, that half of a child’s day is spent on physical play and exercise: those are the ways in which the child can be self-directed on her own terms. And it makes sense that Kant approves of the Basedowian idea. Young children aren’t yet fully rational agents, but there is a way in which they can be self-directed on their own terms: there are some things in which they themselves can be the sources of their actions, and in
which it is only harmful to have their minds be under the direction of others. Leading strings for the child, like rote memorization or physical punishment for the Volksschüler, are an externally imposed form of immaturity. However well intentioned, they are, in the Kantian theory, a kind of tyranny.29

So if we assume that Kant’s metaphorical use of leading strings and walking carts reflects his thinking about the real instruments, we get a thoroughgoing rejection of paternalism as the putative solution to the autonomy problem. But it’s the nature of metaphors that they are not the real thing, and we should draw general conclusions with caution. Although children are in some ways agentic when they exercise their bodies in play, and although the exercise of one’s body—“gymnastics in the strict sense”—is a moral duty for all (DV, 6:445), Kant is not Hume or a proto-Foucault: reason, not the body or its desires, must be in control for action to count as autonomous. Autonomy still means thinking for oneself.

But the dynamism of children’s agency suggests there may be more than one way to understand what it means to think for oneself. I now explore that possibility. Kant’s rejection of paternalism only shows how not to solve the autonomy problem. It doesn’t say how it might be solved.

iv  MATURE KANTIANS

Unmündigkeit is the most important childhood-related metaphor in Kant’s social and political philosophy. “Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred Unmündigkeit” (WE 8:35), famously begins “What is Enlightenment?” The second sentence of the essay defines the term: it means the “inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another.” Despite the explicit definition, it is helpful to think about the meaning of the term and how we might best translate it into English.

Mary Gregor translates Unmündigkeit as ”minority,” Lewis White Beck as “tutelage,” Richard Nisbet as “immaturity.” Although the latter two make sense, they are not fully compatible with how Kant understood the term. First, in his handwritten notes on anthropology, Kant discusses three kinds of Unmündigkeit “under the tutelage” (unter Vormundschaft) of scholars, rulers, and one’s sex (R 1508, 15:822). So Unmündigkeit is related to tutelage, but it is not the same thing. Gregor’s “minority” best captures the general meaning of the term in German: it is a legal
concept. The context of "What is Enlightenment" is also, in important ways, a legal one: Kant’s essay addresses the putative authority of churches and the state to prescribe what and how the clergy could teach their congregations. But because Kant’s use is also metaphorical, on the one hand, and because his definition points to a capacity, on the other, there is more to be said. “Minority” and “immaturity” both capture some of what Kant has in mind.

At first glance, it looks as if “minority” is a normative or legal category and “immaturity” a descriptive one. Minority seems to point to a boundary separating what a person may do without the supervision or authorization of another. Immaturity, in turn, looks like what a person can do. But things get complicated fast. First, Kant says that people are unmündig even though they are no longer children: “nature has long since emancipated them from other people’s direction” (WE 8:35, my emphasis). And capacities themselves are not purely natural: you can read because somebody taught you; you can play the piano or use Microsoft Word because there are pianos and software engineers. There are all manner of background conditions for many personal capacities, and many of those are normative. Sexual maturity, for example, is in one sense purely natural: at some age, a person is capable of engaging in reproductive activity. Kant puts this boundary around fifteen years (A 7:325). But in civil society, a man “hardly can (kann...schwerlich)” reproduce and preserve his species before his twentieth year because he does not yet have the capacity (Vermögen) to support a wife and children as a citizen (ibid.). A stark distinction between normative “minority” and descriptive “immaturity” is unsustainable.

The root of Mündigkeit is Mund, mouth. The logic of the etymology from “mouth” to legal majority is similar to that of our Latinate concept of “responsibility”: it points to a person’s being able to respond to a charge or accusation, to take responsibility for her actions. What we have, then, in the legal concept is the idea that when a person can speak for herself, she ought to be held responsible. Mündigkeit is the normative recognition of this capacity. When you are mündig, you can speak for yourself, and when you are unmündig, someone else must answer for you: your parent, your guardian, or your husband, as the case may be.

But if a stark distinction between the normative and the descriptive is not available, it is not clear what exactly is being recognized. It cannot be some
unvarnished fact of the matter. Kant is aware of this. His most extensive discussion of *Unmündigkeit* comes in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. There, it is clear that there is a distinction between immaturity and minority, although not in any completely straightforward way.

The (natural or legal) inability of an otherwise healthy human being to use his own understanding in civil affairs is called *Unmündigkeit*. When this is based on the immaturity of age (*Unreife des Alters* — literally “unripeness”) it is called being under age (*Minderjährigkeit*) (minority [*Minorenmität*]). However, when it has to do with legal arrangements in light of civil affairs, it can be called *legal* or *civil Unmündigkeit*. (A 7:208–209, emphases Kant’s)

Here, minority is still a normative concept, but it is grounded in age-based capacities in the same commonsensical way Kant had in mind in “What is Enlightenment?” Human growth is like all natural growth: it brings about real development so that, at some point — even if the exact point is unclear — we can say that the person, like the organism, has reached its “ripeness.” The idea is so familiar that the German term “Reife,” like its cognates in many other languages, is no longer just metaphorical, but part of ordinary parlance about human development.

After the passage just quoted, Kant turns to examples. His tone is light and his examples are odd. First Kant says that women are legally immature. However, given “the nature of her sex,” a woman is so good at mouthing off (*nach der Natur ihres Geschlechts Mundwerks genug hat*) that she can represent her and her husband’s interests, even legally. So much so, in fact, that she might be called “over-mature” (*übermündig*). This is Kant’s jocular play with the etymology of the term: women can’t really defend their property rights legally (even though they may own property), he says, just as they can’t be drafted into military service. This peculiar combination of de facto capacity and de jure incapacity, Kant suggests, may nevertheless lead women to have quite a bit of domestic power: their sharp tongue makes them good at ordering at least their husbands around, but their legal immaturity also at the same time makes their husbands the guardians of the women’s honor. (A 7:209f) It’s a tiresome old joke to claim that women hold the
real power in a household, but the way Kant uses the joke gives us a purchase on
his views about different dimensions of maturity.

Part of what is going on here is simply a familiar attempt to naturalize
women’s legal subjection under their husbands’ guardianship. There is a tension
in Kant’s reasoning partly because he tends to believe that women are naturally
inferior to men while he also rejects the straightforward normativity of the
natural. That he holds such views of women is not surprising, nor is it surprising
that the beliefs lead him to semantic and intellectual confusions. The confusion is
fruitful for our analysis, though.

Consider Kant’s lectures on anthropology, where we also encounter this
promising confusion. Men regard women as immature, he says in lectures from
the winter term 1775–6, but the reason for this lies “in part (zum Theil)” in women’s
nature (VA 25:543). Kant thinks women are naturally good at instrumental
rationality, but require the support of “manly understanding” to set ends (ibid.).
The key here is that he doesn’t think women’s immaturity is completely natural.
Here is Kant lecturing on the same topic six years later:

There is also a minority (Minorenmität) on the basis of sex; certain
insights and affairs are quite beyond women’s sphere. Women are not
allowed (dürfen…nicht) to use their own reason, but instead must
subject themselves to someone else’s reason for discussions; when
something becomes public, they must trust someone else’s reason. In
children, immaturity is natural. We call such a trustee of a woman
her guardian. (VA 25:1046–7; my emphasis)

The syntax of the end of the second sentence is strange. Since the passage is from a
student’s lecture notes, we might assume the point after the semicolon is a
specification of the previous point, not a different point. That and the modality of
Kant’s verbs suggest Kant is not talking about what women naturally can or cannot
do, but of normative matters, of what women may do.

Kant does think women are, in many ways, mature. For example, he stresses
women’s ability to speak as evidence that they can indeed be regarded as mündig. 11
What was before a play with words now looks like a tautology, but it’s a tautology
with substance: insofar as we tie moral or legal responsibility to the literal ability to
respond, anyone who can respond meaningfully must be recognized as morally or
legally responsible, as an autonomous agent. For Kant, this idea is based on an important connection between speech and the ability to think: thinking is “speaking to ourselves” (A 7:192), and Kant clearly thinks human language use is a high form of agentic activity.

But women are also immature. That is, they as a matter of legal fact can’t think for themselves without the direction of another: whatever they say or whatever might go on in their minds simply does not count. Here, the “can’t” is a normative capacity in the same way that we might say “staff can’t vote at the faculty meetings”: it’s a matter of authorization. A staff member may raise his hand or say “aye,” but that would not count as voting in a situation where the authorization is missing. So it is a mistake to think that the “recognition” of someone’s Mündigkeit requires some prior non-normative fact which the recognition just “labels”; the recognition can establish that fact by itself. Unmündigkeit and Mündigkeit are contingent context-dependent categories, and in some contexts the question of whether you are mature depends on whether you count as mature.

v ASSCRIPTIVE AUTONOMY AND POLITICS

That autonomy comes in degrees and kinds and that it can depend on authorization is an underappreciated but distinctive feature in Kant’s theory of autonomy. I want to call the conception ascriptive autonomy: whether someone is autonomous depends on whether and on what terms we ascribe self-authorization to her.32 How such ascription goes is an open question, but it is not completely up for grabs; there are better and worse argumentative resources.

Kant’s conception of citizenship has troubled many commentators, but it is helpful for understanding what I have said about autonomy.33 On my reading, citizenship is one kind of autonomy: we might call it institutionalized civic autonomy. For Kant, citizenship can have two kinds: active and passive. Both active and passive citizens are entitled to state protection and enjoy many other similar rights, but passive citizens cannot participate in politics. This is because passive citizens cannot be understood to have their will under their own control: “anyone whose preservation in existence (his being fed and protected) depends not on his management of his own business but on arrangements made by another (except the state). All these people lack civil personality and their existence is, as it were, only inherence” (RL 6:314). They lack the independence that would make it
meaningful to consult them in the matters of governance: their wills are not their own and they are already represented, the idea goes. Giving them a right of participation would in fact empower those who “control” their wills more than is appropriate.

Kant’s reasoning shouldn’t surprise us. It is consistent with the prevailing attitudes of the time — and of times after Kant — that insisted on property qualifications for voting. The specific categories of persons Kant regards as passive citizens is a bit more surprising. That women and children are passive citizens for him we would expect, given contemporary attitudes and norms. The category also includes servants, farmhands, and clerks. Generally, if you work for someone, your will isn’t your own, Kant’s logic goes.

We want to ask Kant this: why should my paid employment render my will not my own? There are two more specific questions: First, why, in general, should we think that one kind of dependency relation suffices to qualify my will as not my own, but not another? Shopkeepers and tailors, in Kant’s categories, are active citizens, but they too have a dependency relationship, on their customers. We could list some differences between the types of dependency: the principle Kant reaches for is whether someone owns the product of his labor before alienating it, but his slightly ad hoc casuistry gets confusing fast: barbers are different from wigmakers, even if I own the hair that I give the wigmaker; day laborers are different from craftsmen. But we might in both cases ask why. There may well be a skill difference between a day laborer whom I ask to landscape my yard and a craftsman whom I ask to fix my basement stairs, but the creation of an alienable object is less obvious. Kant says that it is, “I admit, somewhat difficult to determine what is required in order to be able to claim the rank of a human being who is his own master” (TP 8:296n). Second, if it indeed is the case that some kinds of dependency render a person’s will not her own — marriage for women, say, or some employment relations — then why not think the terms of those relationships problematic? If a marriage contract makes a woman’s property her husband’s, and the state has a property qualification for citizenship, it seems obvious we could criticize the marriage contract for making women non-autonomous: it’s the contract, not nature, that robs women of their autonomy.
Although Kant never countenances these specific objections, his categories of active and passive citizenship are dynamic. On the one hand, Kant may have believed that women’s passive citizenship is justified by women’s essential inferiority to men, but, on the other, he also acknowledges the categories are contingent, not just historically, but for any given person: “anyone can work his way up from this passive condition to an active one” (RL 6:315). The cheerful phrasing suggests a kind of American Dream where plucky individuals can pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but that is too strong a reading, given what Kant has said. The condition of any individual can change, and it depends in part on what the person does, but not just on that. It depends on the conditions in which the individual finds herself.

Here, then, is the practical usefulness of the idea of ascriptive autonomy. First, as we saw above, it makes autonomy context-dependent: you can count as autonomous in different ways in different contexts. For example, in the lecture on anthropology, Kant notes that scholars are unmündig in civic affairs (bürgerlichen Sachen) “because they can’t engage in” the affairs. We can read this in light of the famous argument of “What Is Enlightenment?” and think of the issue as a matter of both definition and authorization: First, in Kant’s terminology, “scholar” simply means a role in which one does not concern oneself with bürgerlichen Sachen. This interpretation assumes that bürgerliche Sache are instrumental, practical matters about the management of a specific society’s particular life. Second, this has a concrete political corollary: to be a citizen (Bürger) requires a kind of legal authorization from the state, and the authorization comes, as Kant argues in “What Is Enlightenment?” with constraints on what people may do or say. To be a citizen is to enjoy one kind of autonomy; to be a scholar is to enjoy another. That civic autonomy comes with specific constraints on the freedom of expression, for example, does not make it non-autonomy. Finally, the light tone with which Kant makes this point about scholars’ involvement in civic affairs suggests a third, seemingly humorous dimension: academics are famously inept in practical matters. Behind the humor is an important idea that is related to the main point: Kant is leery of philosopher kings and believes that engagement in civic affairs necessarily prevents one’s free use of reason.
The idea of ascriptive autonomy is politically promising and politically fraught. Kant is aware of this. Right after the jocular discussion of women’s autonomy in *Anthropology*, Kant returns to themes that echo, though oddly, “What is Enlightenment?” from more than fifteen years earlier.

But to make oneself immature, however degrading it might be, is nevertheless very comfortable. Naturally, leaders do not fail to notice this docility of the masses, and they take advantage of it (as it is difficult for the masses to unite themselves), especially since they know that letting people use their own understanding without the guidance (Leitung) of others is very dangerous, even deadly. State leaders call themselves the fathers of the country because they understand, better than their subjects themselves, how to make the subjects happy. The people, however, are condemned to a permanent immaturity with regard to their own good. (A 7:209).

If we took this at face value, it would seem inconsistent with the earlier essay, but it is quite clear from the discussion that Kant is being sarcastic. He particularly dislikes rulers calling themselves the fathers of their nations. In the next paragraph, he affects to praise clergy for their ability to keep the laity in permanent immaturity when it comes to matters of faith. He ends the passage by saying that the “mechanical management of people *mechanische Handabung der Menschen* is everywhere the most certain means for keeping legal order” (A 7:210).

The sarcasm makes it clear that Kant sees these as abuses of ascriptive autonomy. Although ascription cannot, in theory, depend on any specific will, its being a question of interpretation means in practice that actual human beings do the interpreting. The powerful — like the rulers and clergy of Kant’s example — often present themselves as legitimate interpreters. They (try to) make their power seem like authority, that is, a recognized, legitimate standing. But their claims often serve, altogether too conveniently, paternalistic and conservative desires about status quo and, worst of all, risk becoming permanent constraints. And so Kant urges us to be skeptical every time someone powerful calls another person immature. There is a principled reason: even though autonomy is ascriptive, it is still a matter of *reasons*, not of power.
But power and authority blur in the real world, and power can therefore mean that some persons are indeed made immature. If I have the power of interpretation in some context — because, say, educated men are thought to know what they are talking about — then my belief that you cannot be autonomous deprives you of autonomy. It’s not just whether you dare to think for yourself or complacently, lazily let me do your thinking for you. I can simply stipulate that you cannot think for yourself: children don’t know what is good for them (though they actually may); women can’t do math (though they actually can). If enough people believe me or share my way of thinking, then nothing that goes on in your mind can effectively counter that. In the handwritten remark which I mentioned above and in which Kant lists three types of ascriptive immaturity — under scholars, rulers, and one’s sex — he offers examples of the way the powerful carry this out. They do it through “Dress codes. Sumptuary law. The idea of the prince as the father of the people” (R 1508, 15:822). In other words, paternalistic meddling in people’s lives is a way of making children of citizens.

Fortunately, such attempts do not always succeed. The claims of people’s immaturity may be too implausible to take seriously. As history bears out, the plausibility of some ascription schemes can erode over time: it took a long time for the ideas of women’s capacity for full autonomous agency to win almost universal acceptance, but it has. The same is true for many other groups that were ideologically infantilized; just consider the racialist ideologies Europeans entertained about nonwhite peoples. The forms of racism and sexism that see nonwhite people and women as sorts of children are difficult to sustain in a world in which the United States’ Secretary of State is an African-American woman. One way of interpreting these histories is to see them as a set of challenges to types of ascription: women and nonwhite people rejected their own infantilization by pointing out the ways in which they could be autonomous and were in fact treated as capable of thinking for themselves even when the capacity was officially denied.97

The point isn’t that there is some unequivocal fact of the matter about whether someone really is or can be autonomous. Things are always, to some extent, ambiguous: power and authority unavoidably blur around the edges, and it’s an open question whether autonomy in one dimension is reasonable grounds
for ascribing autonomy in another. Consider the current controversies over sentencing juveniles as adults: what society is doing is debating about and searching for the relevant criteria for ascribing autonomy in these cases. There is no simple fact of the matter about the issue; the question is what facts are appropriate grounds for autonomy.

vi CONCLUSION

This view of autonomy seems like a radical departure from the conventional way of thinking about it in Kant’s philosophy. What I’ve said suggests Kant does hold at least the basic aspects of such a view. This is in part because it helps him think his way out of the autonomy problem. In a way, the solution is another clever Copernican revolution Kant enacts: in Copernican revolutions, the solution is to reverse your central assumptions about the problem at hand. Think of children again. They do have to be educated, and their education is by its very nature somewhat paternalistic, but it makes all the difference in the world whether you think the children you educate are not yet capable of “thinking for themselves” at all or whether you think they can think for themselves in some way, and then tailor your approach to them for that way. So too for the metaphorical children of the era of Enlightenment: it’s a question of how one should think of them — and how they should think of themselves. We might even read Kant’s tone in “What is Enlightenment?” not as a tinge of paternalism he can’t shed in spite of himself, but as a rhetorical astringent: by infantilizing people, he hopes to provoke a rejection of such an attribution of immaturity.

Here are the advantages of this conception of autonomy: First, because the conception acknowledges the existence of many kinds of autonomy, it can be an invitation to a political challenge. Why should women be legally immature if they can indeed speak for themselves and have the kind of domestic autonomy Kant ascribes to them? Second, although no person can alone decide she is autonomous in some particular dimension, neither can anyone else uncontestably deny it to her. People and laws and institutions might do it pro tanto, but such ascriptions can be challenged. You might appeal to your authority, but it is fair game for me to ask who made you the boss.

Finally, ascription has an important expressive component that hooks up the idea of autonomy with the other important Enlightenment value I mentioned at
the beginning of this paper, namely, a person’s dignity. When I ascribe autonomy to you, I treat you in a particular way: I respect you. The point is a conceptual one. Respect doesn’t follow from ascription of autonomy; the ascription expresses respect.
NOTES

1 Versions of this paper were presented at the Western Political Science Association and the American Political Science Association meetings. I am grateful for helpful comments and conversations along the way to Lisa Disch, Elisabeth Ellis, Don Herzog, Sharon Krause, Danielle LaVaque-Manty, Claire Rasmussen, Arlene Saxonhouse, Elizabeth Wingrove, Bernard Yack, and a wonderfully constructive anonymous reviewer.

2 I am very much in sympathy with James Schmidt, "What Enlightenment Project?" Political Theory 28, no. 6 (2000) and Sankar Muthu, Enlightenment against Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), regarding the semantic and substantive ambiguities in our use of the term “Enlightenment.” In this paper, I use the concept freely but specifically: by “Enlightenment,” I mean primarily the German 18th-century “Aufklärung,” i.e., the constellation of religiously tolerant, and politically reformist ideas in the latter half of the 18th century. By “Enlighteners,” I refer to the “Aufklärer,” i.e., people who were taken to be or who took themselves to be champions of the Enlightenment. For the purposes of my argument, even thinkers on the fringes of or in opposition to the Aufklärung can count. The early variety of German Romanticism — the Frühromantik — is an example. See Frederick C. Beiser, "Early Romanticism and the Aufklärung," in What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Frederick C. Beiser, "A Romantic Education: The Concept of Bildung in Early German Romanticism," in Philosophers on Education, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (London: Routledge, 1998).


4 Barbara Herman, "Training to Autonomy: Kant and the Question of Moral Education," in Philosophers on Education, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty
(London: Routledge, 1998) and Tamar Schapiro, "What Is a Child?" Ethics 109, no. 4 (1999), are two recent attempts by moral philosophers to pursue Kant’s discussion of children and education. I find both arguments compelling and echo them here, despite my different emphases.


6 I am grateful to Ian Proops for articulating this insight about metaphors. To be sure, examples do appear frequently in Kant’s work, and some are very important. But he clearly had misgivings about the use of examples; see his discussion of them in the Preface to the first edition of the first Critique. CPR A: xviii.

The following lists the abbreviations to Kant’s works I have used in the text. The two numbers in the textual references point to the volume and page number in the standard Akademie edition of Kants Gesammelte Schriften (Berlin: Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902–). In the case of the first Critique, the alphabet distinguishes between the first (A) and second (B) editions. My source for the German has been the electronic version provided in the PastMasters database, except in the case of the Vorlesungen über Anthropologie, where I have used the printed Akademie volumes 25:1 and 25:2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997). English translations, where I have used them, come from The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996–). I indicate the translator’s name after the entry below. The texts are listed in order of publication.

APB: "Aufsätze, das Philanthropin betreffend" ("Essays on the Philantropinum").

C: Correspondence (Trans. by Arnulf Zweig).

CPR: Critique of Pure Reason (Paul Guyer and Allen Wood).

WE: "An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’" (Mary Gregor).

G: Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals (Mary Gregor).
CBH: “Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte” (“Conjectural Beginning of Human History”).

TP: “On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It is of No Use in Practice” (Mary Gregor).

Rel.: Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason (Allen Wood and George di Giovanni).

RL: “Rechtslehre,” part I of the Metaphysics of Morals (Mary Gregor).


CF: The Conflict of the Faculties (Allen Wood and George di Giovanni).

A: Antropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht ("Anthropology in a Pragmatic Point of View").

P: Pädagogik ("Pedagogy").

R: Reflexionen (followed by a number); handwritten reflections published in vols. 15–19 of the Akademie edition.

VA: Vorlesungen über Anthropologie ("Lectures on Anthropology").

Post-Kantians — Romantics in particular — stress the political importance of education even more than Kant. Their focus is, however, on Bildung, which we might roughly translate as acculturation. Kant’s and my focus here is the more practical Erziehung. On the distinction and on the Romantics’ views on education, see Beiser, "A Romantic Education"; Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon Zur Politish-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1972); Raymond Geuss, "Kultur, Bildung, Geist," History and Theory 35, no. 2 (1996).

For a magisterial account of the emergence of conservatism in Germany in particular, see Klaus Epstein, The Genesis of German Conservatism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). In Epstein’s typology, “status quo conservatives” and “reactionaries” are explicit critics of egalitarianism.
Edmund Burke’s worries about equality are also explicit, but compare his tone in *Reflections* to conservatives’ popular pamphlets; see, e.g., Hannah More, *Village Politics: Addressed to the All the Mechanics, Journeymen, and Day Labourers in Great Britain* (Manchester: 1793); William Paley, *Reasons for Contentment; Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (Carlisle: F. Jollie, 1792). On the 18th-century British conservatism in general, see Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).


10 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helping me clarify this point.


13 For Kant’s views on revolution, see my Arguments and Fists. See also Korsgaard, "Taking the Law into Our Own Hands” and Ellis, Kant’s Politics, ch. 4.

14 For evidence of enthusiasm about the school and the movement, see, e.g., Christoph Martin Wieland, "Ueber Das Philantropinum in Dessau," Der Teutsche Merkur, no. 2. Vierteljahre (1775).

15 It might be worth noting here that the term Philantropinen does not have the connotation we now commonly associate with it, namely the financial support of worthy public causes. It did involve varying degrees of paternalism — though far less in Basedow’s case than in, say, slightly later Swiss variants. The key idea, however, is a general concern for humanity, and if a convenient term were available, the best translation would evoke a kind of hybrid between humanists and humanitarians.

16 Johann Bernhard Basedow, Vorstellung an Menschenfreunde, ed. Hermann Lorenz (Leipzig: Verlag von Richard Richter, 1893), §3. Hereafter, I will refer to the Vorstellung with the in-text parenthetical VM and then to the section number. MB will refer to his Methodenbuch and EW to Elementarwerke, both of which are in Basedow, Ausgewählte Schriften (Langenfalza: Hermann Beyer & Söhne, 1880) and to which the page numbers refer.

17 The conservative reaction is described in Epstein, The Genesis of German Conservatism, pp. 79–81.

18 “Einleitung” in Vorstellung an Menschenfreunde, p. 11.

19 See Epstein’s discussion of the conservative reaction in The Genesis of German Conservatism, pp. 79–81, as well as §III in the discussion of “Bildung” in Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, eds., Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, 511.

20 See Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, eds., Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, 513. The Revisionswerk is available in digital facsimile at the Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung, online at http://www.bbf.dipf.de/cgi-opac/catalog.pl?_digishow=x&zid=ad566.

22 For a fascinating discussion along the same lines, although in the context of 17th-century Netherlands, see Simon Schama, The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 486–96. Real leading strings make an appearance in George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss, metaphorical ones as late as in E. M. Forster’s Passage to India.

23 “‘They [17th-century scientific revolutionaries] comprehended that reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design; that it must take the lead with principles for its judgments according to constant laws and compel nature to answer its question, rather than letting nature guide its movements by keeping reason, as it were, in leading strings…’” (CPR B:xii)

24 See Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 76, where she thinks Kant’s point in the first Critique about examples being the Gängelwagen of the power of judgment is a positive one.

25 “‘The integuments with which the embryo is first formed into a human being must be laid aside if the latter is to see the light of day. The Leitband of holy tradition, with its appendages, its statutes and observances which in its time did good service become a bit by bit dispensable, yea, finally, when a human being enters upon his adolescence (Jünglingsalter), turn into fetter.’” (Rel. 6:121; see also Rel. 6:135n.) “If the government were to neglect that great means [i.e., of treating the Bible as if it is divine revelation] for establishing and administering civil order and peace and abandon it to frivolous hands, the audacity of those prodigies of strength who imagine they have already outgrown this Leitbande of dogma
(Kirchenglaubens) and express their raptures either in public churches devoted to theophilanthropy or in mysticism, with its lamp of private revelations, would soon make it regret its indulgence” (CF 7:65).

26 I am uneasy about George di Giovanni’s translation of jünglingsalter as “adolescence” because the concept arguably did not exist until the late 19th century. “Youth,” while more vague, would be better. The term is gendered: a Jüngling is a boy who is no longer a child but not quite yet a young man.

27 I use the impersonal and objectifying “it” to refer to “the child” in order to capture Kant’s gender-neutral language. The German “das Kind” is in the grammatical neuter.

28 Puberty and its differential effects on boys and girls (in Kant’s opinion) is clearly an important watershed in Pädagogik. On one reading, the point of Kantian education is to instill mechanisms of control for young men’s sexuality. This is the view in Claire Rasmussen, “Mature Subjects: Children and the Body Politic,” paper presented at the Western Political Science Association Meeting in 2004. I have discussed the strangely proto-feminist potential of Kant’s theory in Arguments and Fists, pp. 72–74.

29 Schapiro, "What Is a Child?" makes a similar argument about Kant’s view of children. See in particular pp. 735–6.


31 In addition to the passage I quoted from Anthropology, he mentions it also at VA 25:543. On women’s speech, see also VA 25:985.

The key texts for what I say here are §46 of RL, 6:313–5, and TP 8:294–7.

In addition to “What Is Enlightenment?” Kant discusses the issues of “scholarly” freedom in the late *Conflict of the Faculties*. On this issue, see Ellis, *Kant’s Politics*.

This is both conceptual and causal. See LaVaque-Manty, *Arguments and Fists*, p. 78.

For example, they show up in his lectures on anthropology in 1775–6 (VA 25:541) and in his handwritten remarks on anthropology (R 1508, 15:822).

Consider, for example, James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), which argues that the institution of slavery in the United States had two incompatible conceptions of the slaves: on the one hand, their humanity was denied; on the other, their orderly “management” required that slaveowners granted them capacities like moral responsibility.