

IN WHAT SENSE IS THE KANTIAN RABBLE WILD?

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When Kant defines the people in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, he presents the rabble (*Pöbel*), insofar as it exempts itself from the common laws, as “the wild multitude within this people (*die wilde Menge in diesem Volk*)” (Anth, AA 07: 311.10–11).² The aim of this article is to answer a simple question: what does “wild multitude” mean in concrete terms? And more precisely, what does “wild” mean here? Kant’s reasons for referring in this way to what he considers a “part” of the people are surely related to the use of the word by his own readers. Therefore, it is important to investigate its meaning in his times, which I will do in a first moment. Since the section of the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* from which this formula is extracted does not add any enlightening elements leading to an answer, I will turn in a second moment to the article “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” and I will ask what it means to be a savage in the midst of the civilized people, using for this purpose the image of trees that grow stunted, crooked, and bent when they live apart from others. In a third moment, starting from the image of the people of devils in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, I ask myself about the links between being unreasonable and being wild. To answer it, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* becomes useful, both in its apology for sensibility and in the differentiation between being “endowed with the capacity of reason” and “being rational”. This detour will allow me to come back to the people of devils and to explain in what way the problem of the rabble as the “wild multitude” is not originally moral, but juridical and epistemic. A last section will explore the relations between ideal peoples with no rabble and empirical peoples with a rabble. I will then conclude over two different viewpoints on a scale going, first, from irrational animals to beings endowed with the capacity of reason and, finally, to rational human beings. The first viewpoint is diachronic and shows the scale as an ascending path to be accomplished by each individual and by the species. This is the normative and ideal perspective. The second viewpoint is synchronic and shows the same scale as a space of distribution and qualification of human beings living simultaneously in the world. This is the descriptive and empirical viewpoint.

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1. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE WILD IN THE MIDST OF THE CIVILIZED

Among the features of the rabble, there is the fact that it forms a “wild multitude” within the people. A brief philological survey is necessary if we are to understand what Kant’s contemporary readers mean by the word. Among different significations of “wild”, Adelung’s dictionary (ADELUNG, “Wild”, 2021) separates those related to the life of primitive societies and to the life of civilized societies (*gesitteten*). The former are composed of individuals who “do not have a continuous residence and whose primary and priority means of subsistence are not agriculture and animal husbandry (*keinen stätigen Aufenthalt haben, und denen die Cultur des Bodens und der Thiere nicht das erste und vornehmste Erhaltungsmittel ist*)”, while in the latter “wild” refers to the “rough and uncivil (*ungestümer und ungesitteter*)” individual. The first meaning is related to the pre- or proto-social spontaneity of life in nature: humans are wild insofar as they live “outside of close social relations (*außer der engern gesellschaftlichen Verbindung*)”; the second, to what happens “in the midst of civilized human beings (*gesitteten Menschen*)”: “wild” then means foreign “to moral culture (*moralischen Cultur*)”. Both meanings are thus formally attested in Kant’s time.

In an immediately later context reported by the Grimm brothers’ dictionary (GRIMM, “Wild”, 2021), “wild” means “wicked, cruel, dangerous, frightening, disturbing (*bösartig, grausam, gefährlich, furchtbar, unheimlich*)”, which on the whole gives the wild, individually and collectively considered, not so much the meaning of spontaneous as of aggressive. As for Adelung, “wild” also applies to the human “living in the state of nature (*im naturzustand lebend*)”. But, according to the Grimm brothers, it then carries “mostly the collateral meaning of unreasonable, raw, dangerous (*meist mit dem Nebensinn des unvernünftigen, rohen, gefährlichen*)”. This introduces the idea of aggressiveness into the state of nature, far beyond the idea of simple pre-social spontaneity. At the same time, it also brings the savage closer to the unreasonable, so that a semantic field opens up in which wild becomes associated with being poor in socialization, but also aggressive and unreasonable, both in the state of nature and in life in society.

The definition of the rabble as the wild part of the people indicates that this field is being formed at the end of the eighteenth century. Since the rabble is not wild in the state of nature, but within the people and as one of its parts, a question takes shape: what exactly can it mean to be wild among civilized beings? *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is not immediately instructive in this respect. However, an earlier writing serves here as an aid to the research. The “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, from 1784, treats the problem of the institution of the state in terms of leaving the savage condition and entering the civil constitution. It argues that human beings are driven to enter the “condition of coercion (*Zustand des Zwanges*)” (IaG, AA 08: 22.17–25) that society is – in which freedom is regulated by laws bound to an “irresistible force (*unwiderstehlicher Gewalt*)” – because they are “unable to live together in a state of wild freedom for very long (*sie in wilder Freiheit nicht lange neben einander bestehen können*)”. This means that, from the point of view of the *existence with others*, the state of savagery becomes unbearable in the long run, which is why it is necessary to leave it. But the problem lies not only in existence with others; it also affects

each singular existence, whose development, especially moral, is prevented by the wildness. A good example of this comes from the well-known image of human beings who grow up within the framework of the civil constitution, “just as trees in a forest, precisely by seeking to take air and light from all the others around them, compel each other to look for air and light above themselves and thus grow up straight and beautiful, while those that live apart from others and sprout their branches freely grow stunted, crooked, and bent.” (IaG, AA 08: 22.27–32.) The state of savages, Kant specifies further, is lawless (*gesetzlosen Zustände der Wilden*) (IaG, AA 08: 24.22–23) and dominated by “brutish freedom (*brutale Freiheit*)” (IaG, AA 08: 24.34) that plunges one and all into distress. The inevitable exit from this condition implies coercion, to which the savages finally submit and which makes them become civilized.

In spite of the fourteen years that separate the “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” from *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, at least two echoes of the former resonate in the latter. First, the rabble is called wild in that it exempts itself from the laws and lives without law. The text says it clearly: “The part that exempts itself from these laws (the wild multitude in this people) is called *rabble (der Theil, der sich von diesen Gesetzen ausnimmt (die wilde Menge in diesem Volk), heißt Pöbel)*” (Anth, AA 07: 311.10–11.) In 1784, Kant notes that in the state of savages there are no laws, which implies that no one can exempt from them. On the other hand, to exempt oneself from laws where they do exist is to act as if they did not exist. This is what the rabble does.

Secondly, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* shows “the savage (*der Wilde*)” as living in a “state of continuous warfare, by which he intends to keep others as far away from him as possible and to live scattered in the wilderness.” (Anth, AA 07: 268.21–25.) The idea of the savage as one who lives “outside of close social relations”, found in Adelung’s dictionary, is evident. Above all, the savage living in the wilderness immediately reminds us of what the “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” described as the trees that sprout their branches in freedom and isolation, and consequently “grow stunted, crooked, and bent.” These connections allow us to risk an interpretation. To be wild among the civilized means two things: to bring back something of the state of nature in the midst of a people who already know civil society and the law; and, by its illegality and brutality, to be the agent of this resurgence.

Clearly stated, it is not a matter of suggesting that the wild multitude drags along with it the whole of civil society, until dissolving it in the state of nature. This is a crucial difference from “On the Common Saying: That May Be True in Theory, But Is of No Use in Practice”, where it is a matter of annihilation of the constitution and return to anarchy (TP, AA 08: 302.*). Far from this juridical reductionism, which submits the positioning of the problem and its treatment to the law of all or nothing, the anthropological discourse enlarges the scope of analysis, being sensitive to the nuances of reality and its variations. Anthropology says that the people “constitutes a *whole (ein Ganzes ausmacht)*” (Anth, AA 07: 311.07) and one of its parts acknowledges the law and bends to it, but another part always evades it, thus preserving as actual, in the heart of the civilized people, a residue of the state of nature.

2. WILDNESS AS UNREASONABLENESS: EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE DISOBEDIENCE

Now, the philological investigation invites to formulate a second question. Keeping in mind the idea of a wild rabble within the people, the Grimm's allusion to the unreasonableness of the savages inevitably recalls another image, different from that of the trees. It is that of the people of devils in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. As one may recall, this 1795 text asserts that "establishing a state, as difficult as it may sound, is a problem that can be solved even for a people of devils (if only they possess understanding) (*das Problem der Staatserrichtung ist, so hart wie es auch klingt, selbst für ein Volk von Teufeln (wenn sie nur Verstand haben) auflösbar*)" (ZcF, AA 08: 366.15–16).

One may ask: since the people of devils are able to solve the problem, would they be more reasonable than the rabble, better able than it to judge correctly, in this case to judge about their own interests? Would they be less wild than it? To put it the other way around: would the rabble be wilder than the devils provided with understanding, perhaps because it would lack it? Does the Kantian definition of rabble suggest, or even assume, that the rabble is constituted by unreasonable beings or at least beings whose reasonableness could be questioned? No more than on the meaning of being wild in the midst of the civilized, the text of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* gives immediate answers on these points. Nevertheless, two passages of the book supply tools to deal with it.

I) THE SENSES COMPARED TO THE COMMON PEOPLE AND TO THE RABBLE

In the section "On sensibility as opposed to understanding" (§§ 8-11), Kant makes an "apology for sensibility (*Apologie für die Sinnlichkeit*)" and argues in favor of the senses as "an advocate" would (Anth, AA 07: 143.33). Two parallels between the faculties of knowledge and the social structure are established. On the one hand, in order for the human being to have "in his power the use of all his faculties, in order to subject them to his *free choice* (...) it is required that *understanding* should rule without weakening sensibility (which in itself is rabble, because it does not think) (*die an sich Pöbel ist, weil sie nicht denkt*)" (Anth, AA 07: 144.03–07). On the other hand, "the senses (...) are like the common people (*gemeine Volk*) who, if they are not rabble (*Pöbel*) (*ignobile vulgus*), gladly submit to their superior, the understanding, but still want to be heard." (Anth, AA 07: 145.26–28.) From the outset, we note a contrast between these two formulas. The first one brings sensibility closer to the rabble – the former is epistemically inferior, the latter is socially inferior. Neither one nor the other *thinks*. In contrast, the second quote does not bring sensibility closer to the rabble, but to the common people. Like the senses, common people submit willingly to the force even if they want to be listened to, while the rabble does not submit. Thus, we move from the angle of *thought* (quotation 1) to that of *command* and *obedience* (quotation 2): as stated by the first line of paragraph §10, "*the senses do not have command over understanding*" (Anth, AA 07: 145.11). For our purpose, which is to identify more closely the outlines of the notion of the rabble as being wild, the combined effect of such comparisons teaches us that the rabble neither *thinks* nor *obeys*. We shall first examine

the dimension of thought as it emerges in the first quotation, and then we shall look at that of obedience.

The explicit association of the rabble with the absence of thought is linked to the comparison between the people and the senses. Perhaps paradoxically, everything happens as if the latter were themselves endowed with understanding and as if they made good use of it, realizing that they can gain more by submitting to the power of understanding than by evading it. This is what the “common people” do, so the parallel can be drawn. Now, we see a dilemma emerging here. Either the senses obey, in which case they contribute to the normal functioning of the epistemic institutions, so to speak, and are therefore comparable to the common people, or they adopt a kind of scatterbrained behavior resulting in a lack of respect for the superior faculty, which prevents the regular production of knowledge, and they become a rabble. Very quickly, one grasps that the dilemma is not entirely one, because one option is far more convenient than the other: the senses should *understand*, in the strong sense of the word, that obedience turns to their advantage. And if they do not understand it, it is because they lack understanding. The two important dimensions of the argument are cognition and obedience. As for morality, it plays no role (except, of course, in the judgment applied to the disobedient, depreciated as the *ignobile vulgus* of the people and of the senses). Therefore, to the wild character of the rabble written in full in section “The Character of the People”, the “Apology for Sensibility” adds two new determinations, disobedience towards force, and unreasonableness. In a word, it adds the unreasonableness of the disobedient. Suddenly, we grasp that the rabble, which is wild because it disobeys – it exempts itself from the laws and becomes lawless –, disobeys because it is unreasonable, which remind us of the definition of the word given by the Grimm brothers. This is the lesson to be learned: the difference between those who exempt themselves from the law, i.e. the rabble, and those who don’t, i.e. the nation (*Nation*), as stated at the very beginning of “The Character of the People”, can appear first as social and then as moral, but it turns out to be, perhaps fundamentally, epistemic, directly linked to a certain non-use of intellectual faculties.

Let us now come to the content of the second quotation. Just as the two behaviors of respecting and violating the law are in contrast inside the people, so also in the field of knowledge the senses can operate in two divergent ways, by submitting to the understanding, which is praiseworthy, or by disobeying it, which is blameworthy. The point of the comparison lies in the idea of obedience: when the senses bend to the rules of the understanding, even if they want to exchange with it, they are meritorious; if they do not conform to the power, they are worthy of reproach. The moral and epistemic aspects of the problem derive from this concern for obedience. Let us now see that while they are secondary, they are not unimportant.

In order to better grasp them it is useful, and perhaps unavoidable, to look at the image of the people of devils in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. On the moral side, this image reveals that it is not necessary to be good in order to obey. As Kant writes, the problem of “establishing a state, as difficult as it may sound”, does not require “the moral improvement of the human being (*die moralische Besserung der Menschen*)” (ZcF, AA 08: 366.24). And on the epistemic side, the image shows that having an understanding is a sufficient condition for establishing the state. A people

of wicked and selfish beings are capable of solving the difficulty of this establishment, provided that they think correctly. In other words, morality, or being virtuous, and epistemology, or using one's understanding well, are dissociated, and both are put in a subordinate position with respect to the primary concern, obedience in view of the establishment of institutions. If devils make good use of their faculties, knowing how to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of obeying and disobeying and what they have to lose and gain, they will obey, realizing that it is in their interest. If they don't obey, it is not because they are not good, but because they lack understanding or, although they have it, do not use it properly. Hence, the image shows the proximity between disobedience and the fact of not thinking correctly, i.e. being unreasonable, or even of being devoid of understanding, i.e. being irrational.

II) THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING REASON AND BEING RATIONAL

Still, the word irrational may not be the right one to designate rigorously the epistemic status of the disobedient human being. For the human being in his sound constitution possesses intellectual faculties. In this respect, an older writing deserves to be mentioned. In 1764, the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* argues that, as for “the human being in the state of nature [...] his needs always keep him close to experience and provide his sound understanding with such easy occupation that he hardly notices that he needs understanding for his actions.” (VKK, AA 02: 269.03–07.) In this perspective, as Katharina Kraus (2015, p. 2295) puts it, the human being uses his reason “only as a tool for the satisfaction of the needs corresponding to his animality”. While this already separates him from other animals, it does not yet make him human in the full sense. Natural life, life in the state of wildness, which has been shown to be that of a “state of continuous warfare” and (almost) non-existent social bonds, is however also that in which humans already distinguish themselves from irrational animals by their abilities, that remain nevertheless unused and even less developed.

It is precisely on this point that a second passage of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* proves fruitful for thinking about the similarities and differences between the devils and the rabble. Thirty-four years after the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head*, the book distinguishes between being endowed with the capacity of reason and being rational. We read that the human being “has a character, which he himself creates, in so far as he is capable of perfecting himself according to ends that he himself adopts. By means of this the human being, as an animal endowed with the *capacity of reason* (*mit Vernunftfähigkeit begabtes Thier*) (*animal rationabile*), can make out of himself a *rational animal* (*vernünftiges Thier*) (*animal rationale*) (...).” (Anth, AA 07: 321.31–35.) Kant searched a lot before arriving at this phrasing, as shown by the considerable fluctuations in terminology that can be found in the manuscript of the book. In contrast to the printed version, the latter states that the human being, “as an animal endowed with reason (*mit Vernunft begabtes Thier*) (*animal rationabile*), can make of himself a rational animal (*vernünftigen Thier*) (*animal rationale*)” (Anth, AA 07: 394). In this version, instead of “*capacity of reason*” we simply read “reason”, as if this was not only a potentiality, but already an actuality. However, this version is itself already the result of a revision, since Kant

had previously written, and then crossed out, “rational (*vernünftiges*)” instead of “endowed with reason (*mit Vernunft begabtes*)”: the human being “as a rational (*vernünftiges*) an animal endowed with reason (*animal rationabile*) can make of himself a rational animal (*vernünftigen Thier*) (*animal rationale*) (...).” Finally, in a preliminary version of the same paragraph, later entirely crossed out in the manuscript, the formulation retained was: “The human being is conscious of himself not merely as a rational animal (*vernünftiges Tier*) (*animal rationabile*) that can reason, but also irrespective of his animality as a rational being (*Vernunftwesen*) (*animal rationale*).” (Anth, AA 07: 413.) These floats are to be taken as signs of a research in the making, as successive moments that lead to the passage eventually stated in the printed text of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

Now we come to the core of the sentence. The fact that he is “an animal endowed with the capacity of reason” is meaningful. Who endowed it? For *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, as for other texts of the author, the answer is only one: nature. But the sentence mentions an additional feature of the human being, the fact that he is an animal; and a distinctive animal, insofar as he is endowed with the capacity of reason. This differentiates him from “irrational (or simple) animals (*vernunftlosen (oder bloßen) Tieren*)” (KRAUS, 2015, p. 2295), which lack it. Indeed, the term “*die vernunftlosen Thiere*” is used as early as §1 of *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View* (Anth, AA 07: 127.08) to refer to irrational animals, thus distinct from humans. This natural difference, concerning what nature does, is physiological. Nevertheless, the sentence adds that the human being “has a character, which he himself creates”, which is a matter of pragmatics. The temporal and spatial coexistence of savages and civilized people thus proves that among humans, there are those who are merely endowed with the capacity of reason and those who actually become rational. The human race, being only “endowed with the capacity of reason” by nature, which by extension makes all its members naturally equal; being able, however, to become rational, which inevitably opens up the opposite possibility of never becoming it; is crossed by a twofold anthropological difference, *pragmatic* and *epistemic*: it depends on what humans *make* of themselves with regard to their *intellectual* faculties. In other words, the human species, which is equal by the natural fact that its members are endowed with the capacity of reason, is nevertheless crossed by a pragmatic difference, by definition non-natural, between those who use it and those who do not. This makes the human species single from the physiological point of view and double from the pragmatic. Considering only those who possess “an understanding that is in itself sound (without mental deficiency)” (Anth, AA 07: 208.29), it is not accurate to say that some humans lack intellectual faculties, in which case they would be simply animals, or, putting things differently, simple animals, not naturally complex. And it would be better to say that they do have them, but do not use them.

III) THE PROBLEM OF THE RABBLE IS NOT ORIGINALLY MORAL, BUT JURIDICAL, THEN EPISTEMIC

We only have made this detour in order to return to the possible links between the devils and the rabble, rationality and wildness. To consider a part of the people as wild is to affirm

that they exempt themselves from the laws because they do not think. For what matters to us, the pragmatic difference between making or not making use of one's intellectual faculties aggravates the case of the rabble. It don't think, although it could. In this way, the people of devils who use their understanding are wiser than the rabble and manage to solve the political problem. In other words, the rabble is wild, which the devils are not when their understanding is sound. This is the answer to the question raised earlier about who, between the people of devils and the rabble, is more reasonable and who is wilder – and whose wildness is an effect of its unreasonableness.

At the same time, this precludes the argument that Kant is demonizing the rabble. To do so would consist not so much in accusing it of being wicked and selfish, as in attributing their misdeeds to a defect in morality. The problem posed by the rabble is not a moral one. First of all, it is a juridical problem, because the rabble exempts itself from the laws. And then, by determining it as the wild multitude within the people, the problem becomes at once one of aggression and brutality (of being close to life in nature) and an epistemological problem. So that instead of demonizing the rabble, Kant feralizes it, that is to say, deprives of judgment those who exempt themselves from law, and sends them back to the state of nature – one could also say that he “naturalizes” them. To be feralized is not only different from being demonized: in a sense, it is worse. For, faced with the challenge of establishing, maintaining and promoting life in society, it is better to be a devil who uses his understanding, than to be a savage, who hardly uses it.

Kant's likely preference, in this context, for reasonable devils over savages speaks eloquently of the chasm between the natural and the civil conditions and between savages and civilized. Another fact can be used to measure its depth. When Kant, in the last pages of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, sets out to present the “main features of the description of the human species' character” (Anth, AA 07: 330.03–04), he lists four connections of force with freedom and law that ensure the existence of civil legislation:

- “A. Law and freedom without force (anarchy).
- B. Law and force without freedom (despotism).
- C. Force without freedom and law (barbarism).
- D. Force with freedom and law (republic).” (Anth, AA 07: 330.30–31-331.01–02.)

As we can see, he does not add wildness (*Wildheit*). And this is obviously not because he does not know the word or the thing, well know at the time (ADELUNG, “Wildheit”, 2021). The proof is that he uses *Wildheit* elsewhere, notably in the remarks on education (Päd, AA 09: 442. 07, 09, 30; 444.15; 449.30; passim) and on anthropology (Refl, AA 15: 358.19; 603.24; 648.10; passim), but not in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. It is not either for lack of having condensed wildness in formulas that bring together the same three elements of law, freedom and force. According to Mrongovius' notes on Kant's lectures in anthropology, he identifies the formula “freedom without law and force” with “the

freedom of savages and nomads” (“*Freiheit ohne Gesetz und Gewalt ist die Freiheit der Wilden und Nomaden*”) (Mrongovius 129’ apud BRANDT, 1999, p. 502) and, according to the notes collected in “Menschenkunde”, “the freedom and the force without the law constitute the state of nature (*Die Freiheit und die Gewalt ohne das Gesetz machen den Naturzustand aus*)” (V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: Menschenkunde, 371). Moreover, it would be enough to recall the “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, which presents the state of nature in which the savage lives as a lawless state and, in the absence of any force, dominated by the brutish freedom of each individual, in order to synthesize its major features in the formula freedom-without-law-and-force (wildness). It is thus on purpose that *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* carefully keeps aside this fifth wild association. And for good reason: the list of the other four only concerns the existence of a civil legislation, which is precisely what the state of savages is opposed to. Therefore, it is an absence that relates to the depth of the abyss separating the natural from the civil and, in our example, the savages from the devils.

The fact that this wild connection is inadmissible from the standpoint of civil legislation, which Kant adopts at the end of the book, is in perfect harmony with the fact that it synthesizes an unreasonable situation. Wildness or the state of nature is not a fruit of reason and rather marks its ineffectiveness, since reason exists there only as a capacity or potentiality, not effectively. Kant links the rabble to this previous lower state of human development as soon as he “naturalizes” it. In contrast, intelligent devils, once they are committed to leaving the state of nature, can decide on the form of the constitution, which savages *within the constitution itself* are incapable of doing because they do not think. The outcome is that through the rabble’s self-exemption from the laws the inadmissible breaks through into the heart of the people. In other words, what is not admissible as a pure descriptive formula to be registered on the list above (wildness may be a state or a condition, but it is not a regime, unlike anarchy, despotism, barbarism and republic) is nevertheless adequate to describe a form of empirical existence of a part of the people.

The analysis carried out leads to the following conclusions. Nature has endowed the human being with capacities that open the way to the civil state or to the rationality of the constitution, leaving behind the state of the savages in which spontaneity and the absence of laws combine with aggressiveness and unreasonableness. Yet, within the framework of civil life, a part of the people preserves or reintroduces elements of the state of nature in the midst of the civilized state. Thus, a bridge is drawn between the rabble and the human endowed with the capacity for reason, but living in the state of nature: both are wild. Being “the wild multitude” of the people, the rabble carries with it something of the pre-social life into society. This preservation or reintroduction can therefore be described as the sign of an unreasonableness, sometimes latent, sometimes manifest, but always present within rationality. And since this is made by human beings and not by simple animals, it would be wrong to claim that savages in the civil state as in the state of nature do not have an understanding or that their understanding is not sound, but simply that they have it but do not use it. Therefore, one main idea becomes clear: the rabble as part of the people is called wild because it remains natural, therefore not reasonable. As the wild element of the people, the rabble is precisely the group of human beings who, although nature has endowed them with the faculties of reasoning and, worse for them,

although society provides them with the laws that protect them, thus showing them the path to follow, remain in natural spontaneity and do not enter the stage of rationality. Here lies the deep source of their disobedience and aggressiveness.

3. EMPIRICAL OBSTACLES TO THE REALIZATION OF THE IDEAL

However, one last feature still deserves to be analyzed, in which the uniqueness of the anthropological pragmatological approach becomes visible. It concerns the difference between the ideal and the empirical people. The use of the argument of the devils is also significant in this perspective. Indeed, until now they had one crucial characteristic in common with the rabble: both seek to *exempt* themselves from the laws, which is the verb used each time by Kant, *sich ausnehmen* (ZeF, AA 08: 19; Anth, AA 07: 311.10). However, they differ for a no less important reason: the rabble do indeed exempt itself, while the devils are all secretly inclined to exempt themselves, but by virtue of their good sense and the constitution, their private bad convictions do not affect their public behavior. This was known. Now, a new dissimilarity arises: the devils form an ideal people, because they “require universal laws for their preservation (*allgemeine Gesetze für ihre Erhaltung verlangen*)” (ZeF, AA 08: 366.17–18) and, in so doing, they establish the civil or even the republican constitution. Remarkable here is the absence of any allusion to a possible rabble or wild multitude among them. This is maybe the reason why some translations, although the German states *Volk* and not *Nation*, use “nation of devils” instead of “people of devils”, since the nation is composed by those who, within the people, recognize themselves as united into a civil whole and respect its laws (Anth, AA 07: 311.08-11). In fact, the people of devils behaves here as a nation, not as people internally divided between the nation of good citizens and the wild rabble. Moreover, it is known that the Kantian argument dispenses with “a state of *angels* (*Staat von Engeln*)” (ZeF, AA 08: 366.04-06), although “many assert” that this would be required to establish and preserve a republican constitution, “because human beings would be incapable of a constitution of such a sublime nature, given their selfish inclinations.” The argument is supposed to refer implicitly to Rousseau (NIESEN, EBERL, 2011, p. 364-365), who states in the Social Contract: “If there were a people of gods, it would govern itself democratically. So perfect a government is not suited to men.” (ROUSSEAU, 2012, p. 215.) Now, unlike what one might think, opposing a people of devils to a state of angels or to a people of gods does not change the plan of the debate, because to two ideal peoples Kant only adds another equally ideal people, not a real one. This is perfectly understandable: it is a question of thinking of a people which, not knowing the internal division, remain a whole, which is only conceivable in the perspective of the ideal, not in that of the empirical – this is one of the lessons of the “Character of the People”. Thus, the people of angels, which are ideal because fully virtuous, inaccessible to dissent, are replaced in *Toward Perpetual Peace* by another ideal people, in the sense that any conflict they might experience in the public space is immediately converted into a contribution to the regular functioning of society and, hence, turns to the benefit of the latter. In other words, in *Toward Perpetual Peace* the criticism launched against the argument of the state of angels serves to leave the field of the virtue, but

not to move to that of the empirical. Quite differently, *Anthropology from the pragmatic point of view* takes into consideration this empirical level, even though it still keeps the ideal level as a kind of reminiscence, as we see in the very definition of the people: “This multitude...”, ideal level, “or even the part of it”, empirical level, “that recognizes itself as united into a civil whole through common ancestry, is called *nation* (*gens*).” (Anth, AA 07: 311.05-08.) We then say that *Anthropology from the pragmatic point of view* mentions both levels, while it quickly replaces the ideal with the empirical. Simultaneously, one understands that “ideal” is not synonymous of angelic or of devilish; it is synonymous of free of conflict. The ideal is what makes a whole, also through the epistemic dimension of the self-recognition as united. Unlike the people of demons and the state of angels, who know no rabble; and unlike the senses, in the parallel mentioned above between the faculties of knowledge and the social structure, the empirical people as it is pragmatically conceived is the only one to pose the problem of wildness within the constitution.

The analysis of the wild character of the rabble has been well advanced. Nevertheless, it is not closed. One aspect in particular, which has emerged during the analytical inquiry, deserves to be carefully considered. When it is written that the rabble is wild insofar as it excepts itself from the laws, Kant’s coherence comes back to our mind. Fourteen years earlier, the “Idea of a universal history” affirmed that the savage is the one who lives in a “lawless condition” (IaG, AA 08: 24.22–23). The intriguing aspect is this: what does it mean, for the reader of the time, to be “lawless”? Answering the question requires again a philological approach. Adelung’s dictionary reminds us that the word has two meanings, a positive and a negative one: “God is lawless, because he has no supreme master. Through the Fall, humans wanted to become lawless. The supreme force within the community is lawless, it is not subject to human laws.” (ADELUNG, “Gesetzlos”, 2021.) The links to the theological and the political are obvious. The theological content comes first: God is lawless. Nevertheless, this statement shows indirectly in what sense humans live under the law: they have a lord, or even two, God and the sovereign. In principle, the latter should have a lord, God. However, as supreme ruler above the community, he is himself lawless in relation to it. From then on, the interweaving of the theological and the political becomes explicit or, perhaps better, the political appears to be described on the basis of what has been said beforehand about God from the theological point of view. Finally, humans have wanted to exempt themselves from the law, but, one might add, they have never completely succeeded. Rather, when they left Eden, they began the history of a complex relationship, made up of tensions and transitions, between submission to the law and attempts to exempt themselves from it. Thus, the humans under the law or, in pragmatic terms, the members of the nation, move between the two extremes of the lawless above them (God and the ruler) and the lawless below them (the rabble). Just as humans excluded themselves from paradise by original sin, so the savages in the city exclude themselves from the quality of a citizen by exempting themselves from the laws. Above them, the sovereign appears as a kind of God on earth.

We can now go back to the “Idea of a Universal History” and notice how it distinctly presents this figure of the lawless ruler and unfolds its difficulties. We already know that the association of law and freedom is not enough in order to get out of the state of savages, and an

“irresistible force” must be added to it. This is the object of the Fifth Proposition. This being the case, the problem of entering the civil constitution will not be solved as long as the question of this supreme force, which escapes human laws, will not itself have been settled. This is the heart of the Sixth Proposition, with which Adelung’s definition of *gesetzlos* has a surprising affinity. Indeed, Kant states that “a supreme authority of public justice (...) will always abuse his freedom if he has no one above him who can enforce his compliance with the laws (*ein Oberhaupt der öffentlichen Gerechtigkeit (...) wird immer seine Freiheit mißbrauchen, wenn er keinen über sich hat, der nach den Gesetzen über ihn Gewalt ausübt*)” (IaG, 08: 2215-20), which we can easily compare with Adelung’s phrasing, printed some years later: “The supreme force within the community is lawless, it is not subject to human laws (*Die höchste Gewalt im gemeinen Wesen ist gesetzlos, ist keinen menschlichen Gesetzen unterworfen*)”. In contrast with the Fifth Proposition, where humans within the framework of the civil constitution are compared to trees that “grow up straight and beautiful” because they stand side by side, in the Sixth the ruler exists alone above the community and, therefore, resembles the trees “that live apart from others and sprout their branches freely”. One knows the effects of deformation that this entails, reinforced by the image of the “wood of which human being is made”, so crooked that “nothing entirely straight can be fashioned” from it (IaG, 08: 23:22-24). Perhaps one would believe with Luc Ferry that there is a “fundamental ambiguity” between the ideas of the straight wood and the crooked wood. As he puts it: “It is at this point that the fundamental ambiguity of Kantian thought of history appears in all clarity, the Sixth Proposition of the 1784 essay contradicting almost term by term the Fifth.” (FERRY, 1984, p. 151.) How does he recognize the ambiguity? By the fact that, in the Fifth Proposition, “the ‘wood of which man is made’” appears, in the metaphor of trees, “perfectly susceptible of going from ‘crooked’ to ‘straight’, provided however that it is situated in a ‘refuge’”; whereas, in the Sixth, we find “the affirmation that human freedom makes the realization of a just society ‘impossible’, ‘the wood of which man is made’ being ‘so crooked that nothing entirely straight can be fashioned from it!’” But this is hardly the case, since the Fifth Proposition is about humans considered as equals, growing in mutual constraint, whereas the Sixth Proposition is about the unequal relationship between several human beings and their ruler. This one is alone above the other human beings who are his subjects. And as he is not constrained by peers he does not have, he can barely remain straight. In the first case, the constraints come from the other elements of the whole, from the other humans; in the second, they come only from the rulers of other peoples. It is not surprising that in Kant’s text the problem immediately appears to be linked to the relations between states, each of which has its own ruler – this is the subject matter of the Seventh Proposition. To sum up, when the human being grows in the refuge or the precinct of civil constitution, near his equals and united with them in a stable framework, he develops harmoniously. Separated from the others, he grows twisted and bent. This principle is valid both for the savage in the state of nature and for the lone ruler above all others, two lawless extremes. No one will deny that Kant expresses, from two different perspectives, the same double idea: life in civil society is beneficial, the solitude of lawless freedom is harmful. This remains true for individuals as well as for multitudes; for civilized people as well as for lawless savages; for individuals living among equals as well as for people like the sovereign, having no equals and living without law.

When applied to the anthropological discourse on people, this reasoning leads to the following conclusion: for the development of life in common, it is better to be a wild human in the city or inside the refuge than a wild one outside. In the first case, the savage is surrounded by the law of the community which will be able, for example, to educate him, to dissuade him, to punish him, while in the second case he will live without law among a multitude deprived itself of law, in the state of the greatest hardship (IaG, AA 08: 22.23). In other words, existing in the midst of civilized individuals, he will be lawless within a framework that is already legal. But living in the state of nature, he will be lawless in the midst of a multitude that is itself lawless, where no progress has yet been made. One can thus say that one of the roles of the community, perhaps even of the nation and its ruler, is to “reduce still further” “the element of naturalness” (BALIBAR, 2000, p. 110.) which remains in the people and constitutes an empirical obstacle to the realization of the ideal.

CONCLUSION: TWO DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE SCALE OF RATIONALITY

This brings us to the last feature to be considered here. Something like the degrees of a scale emerges from this reasoning. They appear especially in the differentiation between being endowed with reason and being rational, by which Kant *de facto* deprives the savage of the use of intellectual powers while recognizing his capacity for it, since nature has endowed him with it. Here are three degrees. At the bottom, the simple animal has neither capacity nor power of reason. In the middle, the wild human has the capacity, but does not actualize it as long as he remains wild. Above, the civilized human actualizes it, for becoming civilized is the expression of becoming rational in society or as a collective. As long as they do not make use of the reason that nature has endowed them with and do not become rational, savages remain incomplete in their very human condition and thus occupy a lower level of the scale. Above the animals, to whom the adjective “lawless” does not apply, the unreasonable savages are lawless and therefore inferior to the reasonable civilized. Angels and devils do not belong to this animal scale, because they are ideal beings that only serve to think juridically a situation that is itself already reasonable. Rather, they are to be thought of within a scale of morality, in which there are not only degrees to which one can rise, but also capacities that make it possible for some to rise higher than others, for example angels to rise higher than humans. Devils, since they are deprived of moral abilities, do not have the means to enter the positive side of the scale and always remain inferior to angels. Like animals lacking the capacity for reason, who for this reason find themselves on the negative side of the scale of rationality, devils are situated on the negative side of the scale of morality. This is exactly why Kant has recourse to them: establishing the constitution is precisely not a moral problem.

Now, as soon as the scale of rationality is established, we can perceive it from two entirely different and, to a certain extent, divergent perspectives. Let us first take the diachronic standpoint. Everything happens here as if the degrees were like steps to be taken successively, with an ideal orientation: from beings endowed with the capacity of reason, humans would become, by a continuous reduction of the “element of naturalness” in them, reasonable beings,

and then they would work to become moral. If this interpretation is correct, progress up the scale, more than the scale itself, is linked to what the human being “makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (Anth. AA 07: 119.13-14), within a typical pragmatic approach: humans have to create for themselves a reasonable character, starting from a capacity of reason that they are naturally endowed with. This progression, according to which they would ideally move from one degree to another on the scale, would take place consecutively. The same thing holds for the exit from the state of nature and the entry into the civil constitution: first, one leaves the former and becomes civilized, accepting to obey the law and the force, and then one works to become moral. Devils are able to overcome the first difficulty, because morality is not required, but they cannot solve the second. Therefore, the steps to be taken can be understood as degrees of the development of humanity in time.

However, from a synchronic point of view, which disregards the movement in time, the degrees no longer appear in their progression, but rather in their simultaneity. In “The Character of the People”, the most disturbing thing is not the state of nature that would remain on the horizon, as a threat always haunting society. The relationship between the outdated state of nature and the present society is less troubling than the presence of the wild-natural among the civilized, at the same time and in the same space. So that thinking in terms of stages, which unfolds in an ideal diachrony, can certainly be useful for a juridical approach, but is hardly suitable for anthropology. Because of its attraction for the empirical, the latter recognizes the coexistence of different degrees. Therefore, thinking in terms of steps or stages in human progress is not enough; the pragmatic anthropology of the people leads to a consideration of the synchronic scale. The fact that both perspectives, that of the succession of stages and that of the simultaneity of levels, are likely to have legitimized historical practices of domination, as critical race studies have pointed out (MCCARTHY, 2009), makes the subject all the more compelling today.

ABSTRACT: When Kant defines the people in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, he presents the rabble as “the wild multitude”. This article aims to explore what is meant here concretely by “wild”. It starts by investigating the meaning of the word in Kant’s times, before it asks what it means to be a savage in the midst of the civilized people. In a third moment, I explore the links between being unreasonable and being wild, and I argue that the problem of “the wild multitude” is not originally moral, but juridical and epistemic. A last section will explore the relations between ideal peoples with no rabble and empirical peoples with a rabble. I will then conclude over two different viewpoints on a scale going, first, from irrational animals to beings endowed with the capacity of reason and, finally, to rational human beings.

KEYWORDS: Anthropology, people, rabble, savage, wild

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– IaG = *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (AA08). Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective. Transl. by D.L. Colclasure. In: Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*. KLEINGELD, P. (Ed.). New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006

– Päd = *Pädagogik* (AA09)

– Refl = *Reflexion* (AA15)

– TP = *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis* (AA08)

– V-Anth/Mensch = Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1781/1782 Menschenkunde, Petersburg (AA25)

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NOTES

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2 The translation used in this article is Robert J. Louden's. All the translations can be slightly modified.

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