**A Philosophical Defence of Misanthropy**

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1. **Preliminaries.**

Misanthropy, a neglected topic, has gained interest among philosophers (Cooper) and literary scholars (Gibson, Harris).

Most discussions (a) presuppose misanthropy-as-hatred account, (b) reject misanthropy as a path to violence (Shklar), a fuel of moral vices (Gerber), an ‘impossible doctrine’ (Gibson), or (c) conflate misanthropy with pessimism (Dienstag).

I want to show misanthropy is more complex, interesting, and compelling than this suggests.

1. **The conceptual core of misanthropy.**

I endorse and expand on Cooper’s account of M: *misanthropy is a negative critical verdict on the collective moral condition and performance of humankind* (elaborated in my work),

Comments: misanthropy, properly understood, is

1. a judgment or verdict
2. directed at something abstract and collective – humankind, humanity, human life
3. as suffused with diverse kinds of **failings** that are both **ubiquitous** and **entrenched**

**Failings** of many types, often organisable into clusters, whose intelligibility and salience will depend on the wider commitments of specific misanthropes.

Misanthropes may have **misanthropic narratives** about how we came to be like this, including retrospective and/or prospective stories about humankind’s moral development.

Ubiquity and entrenchment guard a misanthropic verdict against **confinement** **strategies**, which insist human failings are confined to (i) very bad people or (ii) very bad conditions.

A misanthrope is condemning humankind as it has come to be:

1. judgment is not directed at **individuals**: some vicious people may be exemplars of our collective failings; virtuous exemplars may invite appreciation because of their relative freedom from the failings of the world.
2. misanthropy need not involve a conception of **human nature** (Augustine; Kant radical evil; classical China). Anyway, our original/underlying moral condition is *irrelevant* to appraisal of our current condition (Rousseau on ‘natural/civilized man’ – cf. Bregman).
3. **Becoming and being a misanthrope.**

Double pluralism: there are many ways to become – and many ways of being – misanthropic.

**Aetiology** of misanthropy: ‘long, sad experience’ (Kant), loss of a generalised moral trust in people (Socrates), reflection and judgment (Cooper), ‘melancholic moods’ (Schopenhauer).

To become a misanthrope, misanthropic attitudes and convictions must become central to one’s outlook and orientation (Norlock).

**Misanthropic stances**: an organised structure of affects, cognitions, and behaviours through which a person tries to ‘live out’ their misanthropic appraisal of humankind (*contra* Svoboda).

Here are four main misanthropic stances, then first two named by Kant:

1. **Enemy**: for Kant, characterised affectively by *enmity* (ill-will + dislike), expressed in desires ‘to destroy the welfare of others’ and is thus ‘contemptible’.

Enemies might endorse, perform, or appreciate violent disruption of human life.

1. **Fugitive**: for Kant, characterised affectively by *fear* – of physical and moral risks of ongoing immersion in the corrupting human world, manifested in ‘flight’ away from the mainstream world into some protected refuge:

Several types of Fugitive flight:

1. **temporary** **escap**e (Trullinger on ‘virtuous solitary’)
2. **permanent** **self-exile**
3. **radical Fugitivism** – the ideal of *mokṣa* in Indian traditions

Problems with Kant’s account: (i) implausible affect-behaviour pairings and (ii) affective homogeneity of stances and (iii) the availability of other misanthropic stances (cf. Harris):

1. **Activist**: embraces **strategies of rectification**, collective actions aimed at the dramatic improvement of the collective moral condition of humankind (Kǒngzı).

Distinguish **hopeful** and **defiant** forms (Leopold/Norlock)

Distinguish kinds of **Radical Activism**: **extinctionism** and **transhumanism.**

1. **Quietist**: adopts **strategies of accommodation**, seeking to balancing discreet, gentle, ways of living in the world while avoiding more corrupting ‘entanglements’ (Zhuāngzǐ).

Each stance (i) admits of sub-variations and (ii) can be combined in various ways, and (iii) do not presuppose voluntarism about stances (Buddhism as radical-Fugitivism-cum-Quietism).

Some misanthropes inhabit a single stance (Cooper’s quietism), whereas others seem caught in painful oscillation between different stances: **the misanthropic predicament** (eg Norlock).

1. **Closing thoughts.**

Many possible connections to Christianity: soteriology, sin, Fall, redemption, *imago Dei*, and lucid apprehension of ‘the dynamics of sin and the deep network of its combined forces’ in human life as it has come to be (DeYoung). ‘Good news’ incorporates ‘the assumption of a human race in some serious need or lack or crisis, whether it is aware of it or not’ (Hart)

If this is right, misanthropy is more complex and more interesting than is generally supposed, with richer connections to Christianity than is currently realised.

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Kant’s remarks on misanthropy are found in his lectures on ethics, anthropology, and religion.