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# A Companion to Moral Anthropology

Edited by  
Didier Fassin

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theory” and coauthored *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Blackwell, 1986) and *Meaning and Relevance* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). Both the epidemiology of representations and relevance theory have been influential and also controversial. Dan Sperber has edited *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2000) and coedited two books: *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate* (with David Premack and Ann James Premack; Oxford University Press, 1995), and *Experimental Pragmatics* (with Ira Noveck; Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

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# Introduction: Toward a Critical Moral Anthropology

*Didier Fassin*

*To deal usefully with the relationship between morality and the social sciences one must first realize that modern social science arose to a considerable extent in the process of emancipating itself from the traditional moral teachings.*

Albert Hirschman, "Morality and the Social Sciences: A Durable Tension," 1981

*If the moral domain corresponds to what people treat as the ultimate terms of their existence, of their lives together, of their fates, then moral concerns are concerns with the integrity of cultural life, with the nature, significance, potential, and viability of the life that culture makes possible and makes necessary.*

Steven Parish, *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City*, 1994

The attempt to coin the expression "moral anthropology" seems immediately and irremediably doomed from the start by its Kantian paternity. Indeed, it is often considered that the author of the *Metaphysics of Morals* invented this phrase to define his project of "applied moral philosophy" as an empirical counterpoint to his theoretical *metaphysica pura*: "Moral anthropology, he writes, is morality applied to human beings" (Louden 2003: 7). Although Kant never formulated a comprehensive description of this part of his practical philosophy – "the second part of morals," as he designates it – one can understand, through the lectures he gave, that it is definitely a normative enterprise which aims at contributing to the fulfillment of the moral laws he has characterized. In this sense, anthropology is a tool for the implementation of morals in relation to human beings. But it does not deal with individuals or cultures, as one would expect; rather, it concerns the "human species" as a whole and its accomplishment through moral progress. It is universalistic in essence.