



## Chapter 1. Kant and Plato

For Kant, causality is a pure concept of the understanding (under "relation"); it is known a priori and, along with pure forms of intuition (space and time) and other pure concepts of the understanding, makes up for Kant's definition of human experience.

Look into Foucault's reasoning as to why Kant is the beginning of modern philosophy. Yes, Descartes does kick it off with "I think, therefore I am" but Kant develops in his Anthropology and Groundwork the basis of a metaphysical system that is relevant to this day. To my understanding, Foucault attributes this honor to Kant for his writing on how humans understand concepts as distinct from objects, allowing for an abstraction and synthesis beyond the sensible experience of the world.

So taking this: Foucault maintains that the great "turn" in modern philosophy occurs when, with Kant (though no doubt he is merely an example of something much broader and deeper), it

becomes possible to raise the question of whether ideas do in fact represent their objects Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't this insight basically what Plato's Allegory of the Cave about? Isn't this contrast between knowledge and "true reality" already expressed in Plato? Particularly the next sentence feels like it could apply just as well to Plato: In other words, ideas are no longer taken as the unproblematic vehicles of knowledge; it is now possible to think that knowledge might be (or have roots in) something other than representation. Plato argued that knowledge proceeded from the forms, and that representation was just a flickering illusion of the more permanent reality. This makes it look like Kant's reputation as the greatest philosopher since Plato is based on a continuation of Plato.

Kant is a figure unlike any other in the western tradition because there is quite literally no scholarly agreement about even the simplest details of his major work (the KdrV). You cannot get a consensus about even the broad strokes without going to the Prolegomena, and it remains controversial whether the Prolegomena stands in agreement with the KdrV. I think this is the source of his importance more than anything. In a kind of reversal of Heidegger, who turns every philosopher into himself, every philosopher turns Kant into themselves upon reading him. There is evidence for everything in the Kritik. Incidentally, for the academics out there, there are two fascinating articles about Kant's style in the Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress (1970), "On the Examination of Forms of Statement and Argument in Kant's Language" by Lenders and "On Genitive Sequences in Kant and Their Automatic Recognition" by Reichert.

The first paragraphs of "Critique of Pure Reason": Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind. It falls into this difficulty without any fault of its own. It begins with principles, which cannot be dispensed with in the field of experience, and the truth and sufficiency of which are, at the same time, insured by experience. With these principles it rises, in obedience to the laws of its own nature, to ever higher and more remote conditions. But it quickly discovers that, in this way, its labours must remain ever incomplete, because new questions never cease to present themselves; and thus it finds itself compelled to have recourse to principles which transcend the region of experience, while they are regarded by common sense without distrust. It thus falls into confusion and contradictions, from which it conjectures the presence of latent errors, which, however, it is unable to discover, because the principles it employs, transcending the limits of experience, cannot be tested by that criterion. The arena of these endless contests is called Metaphysic.

In theory, because he took philosophy into its next dimension, which was a stable form of metaphysics, allowing Schopenhauer to build on what he created. However, it's unclear that Plato himself was not aware of this, as were the ancient Hindus, so it could all be hype. Still, it's hard not to like Kant - despite his various hacks, an enigmatic persona in pursuit of a complete vision of reality.

Kant relaunched the revolution of sophisticated fundamentalism, where morality trumps any other wisdom (utter con artist sophistry). He is the Ayn Rand of his day. His brand of fundamental inflexibility helped foster a resurgence in bigotry/ racism/sectarian division ideology that still permeates legitimate dialogues. His work gave license to those that feared anything moving and need to kill it at all cost. He figured out a way to shut down any legitimate discussion of moral quandary situations. While Des' Cartes began to open up cracks into absolutes, Kant turned around and created a meme of devastating magnitude.

## **Chapter 2. Kant and Good Will**

First, a will is the part or aspect of a mind that is responsible for your voluntary actions. The will makes your body perform actions. It is also (but this is controversial) responsible for the plans you make. You might think that a good will is one that produces good effects (e.g., makes the world a better place). However, Kant identifies the morally good will by how it functions instead of by the effects it has. So, right off, we have a counterintuitive idea--the effects a will has make no difference to whether it is morally good.

A morally good will functions in the following way. It wills only those actions that are universally consistent. That is, it makes you act only according to rules that it would be consistent to imagine everyone following without any contradictions in their wills. By 'everyone', Kant means all rational entities. If it is impossible for everyone to follow a certain rule, then a morally good will would never make you act according to that rule. If it is possible for everyone to follow a certain rule, but doing so would make them will inconsistent things, then a morally good will would never make you act according to that rule.

I agree that there are issues here worth sorting out in the phil of action, but I think this kind of phrase just tossed out there introduces too many ambiguities to help the issue (especially as it pertains to clarifying Kant). Is the will to be identified as you and hence the thing that determines your bodily movements? Or are you your body and hence are determined to act by a part of

yourself, namely your will? I just don't think this issue helps the other issue. It's clear that, for Kant, your will doesn't compel you to act in the way that any other compulsion would, so that needs to be kept separate here. (You can bark about reasons being causes all day, but it's clearly different to talk about compulsions and causes, at least for Kant.) I think the better thing to say, at least to clarify Kant, is that your will, which isn't determined by anything except itself (i.e., its the only thing in nature that sets its own laws), determines your bodily movements; but that doesn't mean your will makes you move in various ways. In some sense you just are your will, which is why our moral judgments concern you and not simply some part of you.

I believe the good will is a product of the rational will. It stems from the marriage of practical reason and rational desire (e.g., the closest resemblance is probably prohairesis in Aristotle and the Stoics). If this move to combine reason and the will is successful, it would solve a number of problems for Kant.

The central problem for Kant is probably the Humean claim about the supremacy of desire over practical reason, which if true would undermine the possibility of a transcendental moral law, since desire is given by the caprice of nature rather than a higher, rational authority. (Admittedly, Hume's notion of desire is open to correction by the moral community, but it's difficult to see how this correction could be carried out without reason, which only seems to reinforce its importance). By joining reason and desire together, however, you don't get a strict division or antagonism between the two, but a thick moral concept. In other words, Kant appears to have tried to solve Hume's law (i.e., the is- ought problem and fact/value distinction), which claims that prescriptive or normative statements are functions of our desiring natures, and as such are independent from factual statements, which are functions of reason alone. But if there is indeed an interaction between reason and desire, as Kant thought, to the effect that reason commands desire, and desire obeys, then morality is vindicated by a non-arbitrary and universal moral authority: i.e., what is known to practical reason as a transcendental moral law.

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The good will is perhaps morally good without qualification on the grounds that its principles are founded on reason, which as said above lends them a kind of transcendental objectivity and thus moral legitimacy, and because the will is the only thing in nature capable of autonomy, which follows the Stoic and medieval notion of freedom and moral agency. Keeping with tradition, Kant used this second view to emphasize the arbitrariness of nature and fortune in the moral life. Hence, nothing can be properly called moral if it is not in the power of the individual. And since Kant didn't believe in causal determinism, that leaves the free will in the position of becoming good or evil, since only the will (or rational desire) can be influenced by good or evil principles. The part about the will being good "without qualification" means only without external validation, rather than without quality, value, etc. I think Kant simply means that the good is self-sufficient or complete unto itself; it doesn't depend on anything else to make it good.

### **Chapter 3. Kant , Moral Worth, Emotion, Love & Sympathy**

He argues that motivation by emotion is correct only by accident: it can just as easily lead people astray. If you do something because you love someone, you might do the right thing, but you might also do the wrong thing, like if you murder ten people to buy a fancy cake for your children because you love your children. What I don't understand is the implication that your actions are of more moral worth if you absolutely hate completing them than if you have cultivated your character to enjoy them? He doesn't say this. He just says that if you hate doing it then we can be pretty sure you're doing it for the right reasons. This doesn't mean your action has more moral worth than someone who does it for the right reason and who also enjoys it. Indeed he says we have a duty to cultivate our enjoyment of moral actions, because this makes it easier for us to act morally. We're not morally better merely by enjoying our right actions, though. You can't become a better person by becoming happier. You can only become a better person by doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Is the implication here that very few things have actual moral worth and that we as a society are too generous in attributing "moral rightness" to things? Nope! His general view is that it's hard to know our own motives, let alone the motives of others, so one ought not to be too judgmental. Also, I'm failing to understand the impact of this idea on the remainder of Kant's moral theory. Would there be any significant change if this aspect were to be removed, and acting in accordance with duty was given the same moral worth as acting from it? Yes, this would fundamentally destroy the entire moral framework, leaving effectively nothing. Kant's morality is fundamentally based on reason, not emotion, and every moral duty is derived from, dependent on, and in a sense equivalent to reason. Moral duty is the necessity of action from respect for the moral law (as opposed to the option you're suggesting, emotion), and the faculty to act in accordance with representation of the moral law is will. The good will is the only thing good without qualification, and the entire morality is built out of that notion of a good will, which is necessarily built on rationality.

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It has to do with his metaphysics of freedom. The moral action doesn't merely happen in accordance with the moral law, but because of the moral law, and that constitutes autonomy. First, consider that any ought implies can. If I ought to act in a certain way, it means I can act in such a way; and this can designates a choice; if I do the right thing by mere causal necessity, there is no freedom of choice, and therefore no moral worth. And Kant thinks we must view the sensible, natural world as determined by causal necessity. He argues as such in the Transcendental Logic of his "Critique of pure reason" for the purposes of validating natural science. Now, there is a part of human beings that is certainly sensible and natural; the part that appears to us in experience, such as our entire bodies and involuntarily inner states like emotions. This is the empirical character. It follows from Kant's naturalized causality that our empirical character undergoes change by causal necessity: every emotion, every affect and

bodily movement is actually the determination of a previous state.

This series of determinations goes on indefinitely. You don't choose your emotions; they're the product of physiological impulses, which in turn are merely mechanical in nature. However, in the Transcendental Logic, Kant also tries to save the possibility of free will from what he calls the mechanism of nature (or, in the case of human behavior, heteronomy). He attempts to preserve a faculty of making a spontaneous choice, without external determination, in the human spirit. He does so by regarding free will as something that is intelligible in the human character, in contrast with the empirical. We can never experience freedom, but we can certainly think of ourselves and other rational beings as such. And by consciously trying to act out of pure reason which is expressed in the a priori moral law, we think of ourselves as practically free. pure practical reason -- -- This means that acting from emotion is not acting out of choice, but necessity. In order to perform a truly moral worth, one must act freely, and thus, from a priori (non-empirical) reasons.

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I understand that he doesn't disparage them entirely and that they can have worth, just not moral worth. What I don't understand is the implication that your actions are of more moral worth if you absolutely hate completing them than if you have cultivated your character to enjoy them? He doesn't say that if you hate doing something it would be of more moral worth than if you have a cultivated character and like it. He says it has moral worth if you would do it even if you hated it because it is your duty anyhow. Also Kant has no opposition to people cultivating their characters and we can even propose that this would be a moral imperative based on his account. So why does he think that your action has moral worth only if you would do it even against all inclination? That's because if you do it because of some inclination, you have acted in

conformity with duty only contingently. One day your inclination may change and then you would stop acting in conformity with duty. Is the implication here that very few things have actual moral worth and that we as a society are too generous in attributing "moral rightness" to things?

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Somehow yes. Kant believes we can never know whether some action had moral worth since we can never be sure of the motive (he argues for this in the beginning of GMS II). Would there be any significant change if this aspect were to be removed, and acting in accordance with duty was given the same moral worth as acting from it? That would destroy the whole project. The categorical imperative is precisely founded on the idea that your action must be guided solely by the moral imperative and hence categorically. If all actions in accordance with duty were thought as morally worthy then how could we get to the first formulation of the categorical imperative? Also the whole thing he wants to prove possible in GMS III is that we could assume that we have the ability to act contrary to all inclination.

"Kant confirms this by comparing motivation by duty with other sorts of motives, in particular, with motives of self-interest, self-preservation, sympathy and happiness. He argues that a dutiful action from any of these motives, however praiseworthy it may be, does not express a good will. Assuming an action has moral worth only if it expresses a good will, such actions have no genuine "moral worth." The conformity of one's action to duty in such cases is only related by accident to morality. For instance, if one is motivated by happiness alone, then had conditions not conspired to align one's duty with one's own happiness one would not have done one's duty. By contrast, were one to supplant any of these motivations with the motive of duty, the morality

of the action would then express one's determination to act dutifully out of respect for the moral law itself. Only then would the action have moral worth.

Kant's views in this regard have understandably been the subject of much controversy. Many object that we do not think better of actions done for the sake of duty than actions performed out of emotional concern or sympathy for others, especially those things we do for friends and family. Worse, moral worth appears to require not only that one's actions be motivated by duty, but also that no other motives, even love or friendship, cooperate. Yet Kant's defenders have argued that his point is not that we do not admire or praise motivating concerns other than duty, only that from the point of view of someone deliberating about what to do, these concerns are not decisive in the way that considerations of moral duty are. What is crucial in actions that express a good will is that in conforming to duty a perfectly virtuous person always would, and so ideally we should, recognize and be moved by the thought that our conformity is morally obligatory.

The motivational structure of the agent should be arranged so that she always treats considerations of duty as sufficient reasons for conforming to those requirements. In other words, we should have a firm commitment not to perform an action if it is morally forbidden and to perform an action if it is morally required. Having a good will, in this sense, is compatible with having feelings and emotions of various kinds, and even with aiming to cultivate some of them in order to counteract desires and inclinations that tempt us to immorality. Controversy persists, however, about whether Kant's claims about the motive of duty go beyond this basic point (Timmermann 2007; Herman 1993; Wood 1998; Baron 1995)."

## **Chapter 4. Kant , Reason & Universe**

But, my understanding is that all the important questions that determine what you might be referring to as "the difference between cultures"--different ideas about the existence or lack of God, what the world is, what humanity's role in it could possibly be-- stem from basic, inescapable problems of reason. My explanation that the world has no beginning or end, for instance, is trying to solve the same problem as the explanation that God created the world through his perfection, namely, that reason demands some kind of unconditioned way of thinking that things happen sequentially. I don't know if that makes any sense, but I think it's what you're asking about. From the way I've been piecing Kant together, the question is, how are different

cultural ways of thinking even possible? There must be something that makes us think about these things at all, before we start thinking about them in particular ways.

By "reason is universal", Kant doesn't mean everyone reasons well all the time about everything. He means that everyone possesses the capacity to reason and (in the case of practical reason) make reason motivate your actions. But human beings are animals as well as beings with the capacity for reason, and our beliefs and desires are often the result of a mixture of our capacity to reason and our desire to use reasons for things it isn't capable of accomplishing (such as proving the existence of God).

Because of his philosophy of mind. He thinks rationality is universal because of how the human mind works. It structures reality, reality doesn't structure the mind. He says that the mind has innate routines of organizing our experience, such as by experiencing things with temporal succession, or in terms of spatial relations.

Kant doesn't think that all humans are always rational. Kant doesn't think that we always reason correctly. Kant doesn't think that we all start with the same premises. But what Kant does think is that when we use our capacity of reason correctly we are sharing in something universal. In other words, it's true in all universes that:  $P \rightarrow Q$  Ergo,  $Q$ . So, wherever we are in the world, whatever country we're on, whatever culture we hail from, or even if we're a rational non-humans, we'd all agree with modus ponens. Kant believes that this is a universal law which we are all sharing in when we reason correctly. Modus ponens isn't something you can change if you think about it differently, or if you speak a different language or whatever. It's a thing 'out there' and we can 'tap into' it by using our faculty of reason. (But we can fail to tap into it if we reason wrongly of course.)

## **Chapter 5. Kant's Meaning by "Nature"**

For Kant the application of the law of causality to phenomena constitutes nature. Nature, consequently, is the world of determinateness and necessity as opposed to morality, which is the sphere of freedom.

It's (relatively) simple - Kant defines nature as the sum total of appearances. So for him, nature isn't really tied to things in themselves. It is the world that appears to us (which is, of course, still grounded in things in themselves.) Since we are to avoid all considerations about knowledge of noumena as a result of Hume's arguments.

Nature can be taken in the sense of "the world", which is the sum total of appearances, but that's not all. Nature can also be taken in its formal sense (as the complete system of natural laws) and in its teleological sense (as the complete system of purposes).

So nature refers to our appearances alone, that are somehow grounded by noumena whose existence I cannot have any reason to justify. So nature is a chimera in the definition, no? As for Hume, he is referenced in the Prolegomena such that it appears Kant is referring to his arguments as a starting point. I'm reading these in English though so perhaps I'm missing nuances better understood in his native German. Or I could just be totally misunderstanding all this, which seems most likely.

No, don't worry. You're reading it fine, and Kant does emphasise his debt to Hume especially in the Prolegomena. It's also the standard way of viewing his philosophy. I don't always subscribe to that way of viewing it, but that's not something you need to worry about at this stage. (If you're ever wondering in the future, though, Eric Watkins' *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* makes an excellent case for seeing Kant as less indebted to Hume and more to his German rationalist predecessors.) noumena whose existence I cannot have any reason to justify This is, I think, where your confusion stems from. Kant never says this. In fact, Kant wouldn't make the appearances/things-in-themselves\* distinction if he did not think there was good reason to believe there are things in themselves. We can know there must be things in themselves which ground the appearances. What we cannot have is any positive cognition of those things - i.e. we cannot cognise them as individual objects, or know what they are like. But we are absolutely

justified in believing that they exist.

## Chapter 6. Kant's Schematism

Really struggling with this portion of the text of the Critique of Pure Reason . I'm aware that other scholars have also struggled with it , both getting a grasp on : 1. What Kant is trying to do 2. How he is trying to do it 3. The role of the categories of understanding in that So far I can pick up the following : Kant is concerned with what makes universals / concepts attach to a set of particulars / intuitions . To use his example , what is it that makes a plate exemplify a the concept of a circle ? Surely that they are both round ( A137 ) - not my main question but surely this suffers the third man argument ( Parmenides ) • Then he makes a novel contribution to the problem of universals by saying that concepts are not really private mental images , contra Locke ( after all , the concept of a triangle needs to encompass scalar , equilateral and isosceles triangles , but no private mental image can do this ) . Instead , he proposes that concepts are schemas , or a special type of rule , which can be exemplified / illustrated by a private mental image

Then he talks a lot about the 12 categories of judgment , defining each in turn , and in the end defining them all in terms of special arrangements of experience in regard to time . This seems important because he's just spent the whole Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Deduction arguing that ( i ) the unique structure of ' inner experience ' or self consciousness is the structure of time , ( ii ) the self has this ( is this ? ) unique and amazing ability to synthesise multiple experiences / thoughts across time into one single consciousness - the transcendental unity of apperception .

Kant tries to provide the conditions of possible experience of any object in general. The idea behind the Kantian approach is that we are finite beings (Heidegger famously said in his *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* that the Kant's accomplishment was to introduce finitude in

philosophy), and we have what he calls a discursive intellect. A discursive intellect is opposed to a divine intellect. A divine intellect just has intuitions of how things are, immediately and truthfully. A discursive intellect does not have this gift. It is an intellect that needs to make judgments, obtain justification, express assertions in order to lay a claim upon how things are, and to do this it is dependent on being affected (*affiziert*, which in German has a kind of time-slice connotation) by external things. And for Kant this discursivity is an essentially normative enterprise. In pronouncing a judgment on an object we follow rules, we actively synthesize what we receive in the sphere of sensibility following certain rules. The synthesizing activity of the subject is what constitutes the possibility of saying something about the world.

For Kant now the question is to identify the conditions of possibility of this synthesizing activity (which for Kant is experience itself, there is no experience without synthetic a priori judgments). This is because in doing so he is trying to answer Humean skepticism about the necessity we seem to find in empirical judgments but that we cannot actually demonstrate. Hume noticed how the idea of necessity in a physical event was merely an addition we gave to the event, spurred by our customs in judging things to be thus-and-so. But apart from this custom, there was no real necessity to be recognized in empirical events or in the world at large. Kant tries to turn this insight on its head. He realizes that it is true that there is no necessary relation of cause and effect that we can observe in the empirical event considered as an empirical event. However, if we did not synthesize the event as having necessarily such features like for example causality we could not have experience of this event. The conditions of possibility of experiencing something rely essentially on the cognitive and normative structure of the discursive intellect who's experiencing stuff. This is what Kant means when he talks about something "transcendental". Something transcendental is what constitutes the conditions of possibility of something, in this case objects of experience.

Kant of course doesn't think that we simply command things to be thus-and-so by our own normative volition. We are dependent on things being presented to us in experience, so this element of sensitivity is a transcendental element of experience itself. Kant identifies space and time as the conditions of possibility of having objects for a discursive intellect. Everything else is epiphenomenal. In the *Transcendental Aesthetic* Kant argues that in order to have an encounter with objects, we need to be presented with stuff in our sensible faculties, and this presentation (*Darstellung*) cannot but be spatio-temporal. Space is the external sense, and time is the internal

sense of outer experience, internal because it refers always already to the transcendental subject (this has a role in the schematism chapter).

We now get to the categories. Starting from the Aristotelian table of judgments he devises the fundamental normative concepts which the synthesizing activity of the mind employs in order to have intelligible experience of what is presented in its sensible faculties. These categories are necessary normative concepts in order to have something one can express a judgment upon. Of course this means that the categories will be applied only to the raw material of sensible experience, i.e. spatio-temporal experience. Categories cannot be applied in a cognitive or epistemic sense to objects outside of their spatio-temporal conditions. The other comment in this thread seems to imply that the categories can be applied to objects considered outside of how we can experience them, but this is not true if this is intended in a cognitive sense, as aiming to express judgments and knowledge claims about how things are. Employment of categories to noumena can only have a regulative use, a general methodological direction which has no cognitive value in and for itself.

We now get to the most troublesome point of the Critique of Pure reason, i.e. the transcendental deduction of the categories. Kant deduced the categories from the table of judgments (and this is called the metaphysical deduction) but the problem is here to demonstrate that these categories do belong to the discursive subject and that they conform correctly to the objects they purport to synthesize. Kant has to justify the a priori application of categories to their objects. The transcendental deduction, the Kantian "Ich denke", tries to do this by proving that every cognitive representation of objects, in order to be a representation with a determinate content, an actual content of how things are in the world, must be related a priori to one and the same cognitive subject. This is the necessary unity of transcendental apperception, which is not an inner representation itself, or a collection of representations of the various moments of the subject, but the original unity from which the representations of objects are possible in the first place. The "I think" accompanies all of my representation. Without this cognitive, normative unity that makes up the discursive intellect, there would be no representation to speak of.

To understand a bit better what Kant is on about here one can refer to a passage in the very famous 1772 letter to Marcus Herz, where he lays down the ideas he wanted to answer while he was writing the critique: "I asked myself, namely: on what grounds rests the reference of what in us is called representation[Vorstellung] to the object [Gegenstand]? If the representation contains only the way in which the subject is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how the representation corresponds to the object, as an effect to its cause, and how this determination of our mind can represent something, i.e., how it can have an object. [...] Likewise, if that in us

which is called representation was active with regard to the object, i.e., if the object were produced by the representation itself (as one thinks of divine cognitions as the archetypes of things [Sachen]), then the conformity of the representations with the objects would also be able to be understood. [...] The pure concepts of the understanding must, therefore, not be abstracted from the sensation of the senses, nor must those concepts express the receptivity of representations through sense; but they must, to be sure, have their sources in the nature of the soul, though not insofar as they are produced by the object nor insofar as they bring forth the object itself." (Brief an Marcus Herz, Akademie Verlag Vol.X, p.130)

External objects are not blankly external to the human mind. To have objects of possible experience one has to take into account the way the object is both presented to the subject and constituted by the unity of the apperception via the employment of categories. The representations we form of objects could not be representations at all if they did not refer at all to the transcendental subject, who, with its categories, allows for experience of objects in the first place, by constituting objects in an intelligible manner. These are general conditions, they are valid for every object of possible experience. The representation (Vorstellungen) we form of objects do not arise entirely out of outer external experience, nor are they a one-sided imposition from the mind internalistically construed. This is in clear contrast with both Cartesianism - whose Clear and Distinct Perceptions were not an activity of synthesis, but an activity of scrutiny of the mind, whose powers allowed to identify in the empirical material what was fundamental to that object, see for example the Wax example in the Meditations which is a clear instance of the Cartesian way of understanding what a cognitive representation of an object is - as well as with Lockean empiricism - who maintained that we passively receive the impressions from outer objects and form ideas in accordance with what we receive.

## **Chapter 7. Kant vs. Aristotle**

In general Kant has a fairly complicated view about what makes a person good (or, in his term, virtuous). On this topic see Baxley's book Kant's Theory of Virtue. One reason it's complicated is because unlike Aristotle, Kant is really not interested in figuring out what the "best" person looks like or who a morally exemplary individual looks like. Kant is interested in what the right thing to do is, in every situation, and in most situations it honestly doesn't matter - most situations are not ones that require moral judgment. Kant's moral system evaluates maxims, not people, and it's central to Kant's thinking that nobody is morally perfect. If we were angels, we would always do the morally right thing all the time, but humans are imperfect beings (the famous quote is "from the crooked timber of humanity, nothing straight was ever made"). Morally exemplary people are

just people who manage to do their duty more often than most people, I guess.

Aristotle, meanwhile, is the exact opposite. He's all about character evaluation and making a summative judgment about someone's life as a whole. He's not trying to give you a formula that tells you how to act morally in various situations - he just wants to highlight good character traits. So in summary I think comparing the two in this way is not going to be very fruitful. You're going to miss the point of what Kant is saying by forcing him to compete with Aristotle on Aristotle's home turf, when in reality Kant's project is not Aristotle's.

## **Chapter 8. Kant versus Hume**

Hume's empiricism and skepticism seems in line with modern thought and scientific practice and I think he's still generally correct. He says we can never be sure of a cause because the only evidence we have of events is inductive and induction is never determinate: it only says this one time, X happened supposedly as a result of Y. You can build a case with more and more instances and we will over time become reasonably sure of y being the cause of x. What you end up with a series of likely probabilities (which fits nicely in quantum mechanics). Pragmatically we can say y causes x. Radical skepticism is wholly useless in everyday life apart from academic exercises and thought experiments. But I don't think that was Hume's goal in regard to causation - he's simply trying to point out the limitations of reason in a time where philosophers regarded human reasoning as the key to life, the universe, the self, and the source of all truth.

## **Chapter 9. Kant's Transcendental Idealism**

In the 18th Century, what has become known as the *empiricist* picture of knowledge took the mind to have a very specific relationship with the world. The mind, empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume thought, was largely passive, conforming to the world around it. Thus, for me to gain knowledge of the world is to have my mind shaped by the world as it interacts with my senses.

There is a problem with this, however. Gaining knowledge is a rule-governed enterprise. Our minds sort and categorize incoming information according to mental standards of some sort. However, if all knowledge is gained entirely passively from the world through the senses, then the rules or norms of thinking are also gained this way.

But this cannot be true. If the norms of thought are derived from sense experience, then we would have to judge whether the norms we learned were the right ones, whether they fit our experience. But in order to make such judgments, we must already possess a set of norms for thinking!

Thus, *the mind itself* must contribute at least one element to knowledge. The mind must therefore be, in part, *spontaneous* – that is, not merely determined by an outside force.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Copernican Turn

Immanuel Kant, an 18th-Century German philosopher, was dissatisfied with both the empiricists and the rationalists of his time – the former of which believed that *all knowledge was rooted in sensory experience*, the latter of which believed that *knowledge could come from inner reflection alone*.

He agreed with the empiricists that knowledge required some element given to us from sense experience. And he agreed with the rationalists that there could be knowledge that transcends sense experience, such as mathematical and moral knowledge. However, he disagreed that knowledge was simply a passive transaction between world and knower. Rather, Kant believed that the knower herself contributes a great deal to what she knows.

Consider the following rule of inference:

If P, then Q

P

—

Therefore, Q

I know that this rule is valid, but it seems unlikely that I have this knowledge as a result of various acts of sense perception. It isn't as though I saw many positive instances of it, then finally gathered enough evidence to conclude that it must be a valid inference rule. Instead, I know it is a valid inference rule simply by *reflecting on it*. Therefore, the normative *rules* for thinking are not given to me in experience; they are given *by me* through acts of spontaneity.

The upshot of this crucial Kantian insight is that the standard model of knowledge is backwards. When we know something, the world does not simply mold the mind. Instead, Kant believed, the world must "conform to" the mind. In other words, the world as we know it is always, in some way, *determined* by the way our minds work.

It is in this sense that Kant is an *idealist*—mental structuring activity is necessary for and antecedent to the sensory world we perceive.<sup>2</sup> Kant's reversal of the traditional picture is what he calls his "Copernican revolution" in philosophy, because it is akin to Copernicus's proof that the solar system is heliocentric rather than geocentric.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), Kant tells us that knowledge has two sources: (1) the *receptive* faculty of sensibility (what we receive from the senses), and (2) the *spontaneous* faculty of the understanding (what the intellect does with what is received from

the senses). In order to have knowledge, then, Kant believes that we must *subsume* what is given by the senses under innate rules for thinking. What we know about is essentially related to how we are equipped to know the world.

## 2. Some Worries

One immediate concern about Kant's project is that it may lead to at least two vicious forms of skepticism. First, if what we can know is necessarily constrained by our spontaneous application of norms of thought, then is it possible that there are different norms of thought for different people? If so, which norms are correct, and how could we possibly know?<sup>4</sup>

A second skeptical worry is that Kant's picture entails that we cannot ever know the world *as it truly is*, but only as we are equipped to know it. Indeed, Kant himself states that we cannot know "things in themselves" (i.e., things that are not related to our way of thinking), but only things "as they appear to us." Many commentators take this to mean that all we can ever know are our internal representations of the world, but never the world itself.

## 3. A Kantian Reply

Despite these worries, Kant may have a way out.

First, Kant believes that we are universally equipped with the same basic rules for thinking. If he is correct then all properly functioning, e.g., not severely mentally handicapped, etc., human beings are capable of attaining the same knowledge about the world. To be entitled to this claim would take some argumentation that we do not have space for here, but one thing we can point out is that the basic rules of thought are just the rules of logic, and most philosophers will agree that the rules of logic are universally applicable.

Second, while it is tempting to read Kant to be claiming that we can only ever know our internal representations, Kant does state throughout the CPR that "appearances" are not *internal* to our minds. There are alternative, more charitable readings of what Kant is thinking. One such reading says that to know things "as they appear to us" is simply to know things that are apt to appear to us when we encounter them. The things that cannot appear to us, because experience of them is ruled out by the structure of the mind, are, as Kant says, "nothing to us." If so, then arguably we couldn't hope for a better understanding of reality than the one we already have, because reality *is* simply all the things that are apt to appear to us when we encounter them.

## Chapter 10. Reason and Faith in Kant

### The Three Main Questions of Philosophy

Like many a Kant story, ours begins in the Critique of Pure Reason (A: 1781/B: 1787) when Kant makes the claim that all "interest of my reason" is ultimately directed at answering the three cardinal questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?

### 3. What may I hope?

To emphasise the paramount importance of these questions, Kant notes that together they constitute the fundamental question of humanity: What is a Human Being?

Our very rational capacity is divided according to the first two questions. In speculative or theoretical use our reason is directed at determining what is or exists, in order to answer the first question by mapping out the landscape of all possible knowledge. Practical reason, in turn, is the same rational capacity directed at determining what ought to be, and it is tasked with answering the second question by determining the fundamental moral law that ought to direct all our action.

The third question, however, is a peculiar one. It can according to Kant only be answered when both the theoretical and the practical reason collaborate:

The third question [...] is simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical question [...]. For all hope concerns happiness, and with respect to the practical and the moral law [... it] finally comes down to the inference that something is [...] because something ought to happen [...].

Critique of Pure Reason, A 805–6/B 833–4.

Hope is bound both to knowledge and action – though we are not yet in position to see how it does so, or indeed, how faith enters the picture. Let us, then, wrap our sleeves and see whether Kant's answer to the first question might bring light to the matter.

#### Denying knowledge

In order to draw the boundaries of knowledge, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason was to ground scientific metaphysics: to develop and justify the correct scientific method for determining the truth of metaphysical propositions. In justifying metaphysics Kant comes to demarcate between scientific and pseudoscientific metaphysics, and, as it happens, several classical metaphysical concepts – chief among them the existence of God, freedom of will, and immortality of the soul – are exposed as pseudo-metaphysical.

The age-old philosophical quest for knowledge about these concepts was in vain, for we can, Kant claims, know nothing about them – not even if there may be such things as God, the soul, or freedom to begin with. They are mere illusions, Kant tells us, seducing us to venture and eventually lose ourselves beyond the boundaries of what can be known.

Think of a reflection behind the surface of the mirror. That the focal point appears behind the mirror is an optical illusion arising from us following the laws of perspective that otherwise serve us well: we trace these rays of light to their supposed point of origin beyond the surface and project the object there where it in reality could not originate. Similarly, Kant argues, the origin of the ideas of God, soul, and freedom lies in the very nature and laws of our reason, specifically in our quest to discover the unconditional grounds that justify everything else. Take for example a cause – any cause. As rational beings we know that it not only has effects but a further cause that brought it about. This in turn has yet another cause, and so our reason leads us ever further and further down the chain of causes. It comes, then, as a natural and rational assumption that there must somewhere be a first cause, something that anchors the chain of causes. But this, Kant argues, is nothing but an unavoidable rational illusion, and to project e.g. God beyond the world of experience as its ultimate ground is very much like projecting a mirror

image beyond its surface.

Now, crucially, Kant does not simply say: we cannot know whether there is God, therefore we must be content with faith. For with his mirror analogy he does not merely deny knowledge of the supernatural concepts of God, freedom, and immortality, but that these would even be objects of possible knowledge to begin with: by the very nature of the idea of God, its object is not something that we even should try to know. If the mirror shows a vase behind its surface, and if I understand how mirrors work, would it not be miss the point completely to ask whether there really happens to be a vase there behind the mirror? Maybe by some luck there is, but that would have nothing to do with the mirror. Similarly, Kant's point is that if we understand how these ideas of pure reason arise in the first place, we should see that asking whether their objects in fact exist is in some profound way the wrong question.

Thus we come to the first hidden clue in the quote in question: the word deny, which is a perhaps unfortunate translation of a tricky German concept: *aufheben*. (You may recognise it as one of the central concepts of Hegel's logic.) The term means something like to cancel, to annul, to remove, or to suspend – in a concrete sense it means lifting something up. With it Kant does not merely want to say that we do not know e.g. whether God exists or not but that we should remove – *aufheben* – the very question from the sphere of knowledge. That is, to treat it as an issue of What can I know to begin with is to misunderstand the very idea of God.

While the fact that we cannot know God, freedom, or immortality obviously explains why Kant would deny knowledge of them, it does not yet explain why he has to make room for faith in them. For this, we need to consult Kant's views about the second question.

What is, in the service of what ought to be done

While Kant may have banished these concepts from metaphysics, he did not cast them out altogether. For as we learn in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), they will receive their proper role not in metaphysics but in support of ethics, as so-called postulates of pure practical reason, i.e. assumptions that we as rational beings are forced to make in order to act as moral beings.

According to Kant, the moral law known as the categorical imperative states that there are things that we absolutely ought to do. But we can only be obligated to do something if we are free to do that something: we cannot be obligated to cancel gravity because it is impossible. Only if we are free to choose does it make sense to say that we ought to choose this rather than that. So Kant sets down his first postulate, namely that of freedom. Since – if we grant him this – we have moral duties, we must assume that we are free, for otherwise this duty would make no sense.

Thus Kant's denial of knowledge of God, free will, and the soul – i.e. their removal from the domain of speculative reason – allows him to reinstate them through practical reason, through what ought to be. We get the following sentence right before the quote in question:

Thus I cannot even assume God, freedom and immortality for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously deprive speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights; because in order to attain such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, and which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an object of experience [i.e. God, freedom, and immortality], then they would always actually transform it into an appearance [...].

Critique of Pure Reason, B xxix–xxx.

It is this re-instantiation of the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality through the devices of practical reason that explains why we need to make room for them. Kant first removes God, freedom, and immortality from the sphere of the first cardinal question and, with the help of practical reason and its answer to the second question, moves them in the sphere of the third. They are not something we know but something that we hope for. We hope – indeed must hope according to Kant – that we are free, that there is God, and that our soul is immortal, for if we do not, we fail to be moral agents. That is, our reason postulates theoretically that God, freedom, and the soul exist because our practical reason states that something ought to be.

Knowledge and faith

To see why Kant had to deny knowledge to make room for faith, and how faith factors in hope, we need to understand what knowledge and faith are. In this it is of paramount importance to recognise, first, that for Kant faith or belief (*Glauben*) is not a degree of knowledge but something different from it, and second, that restricting knowledge leaves room for faith because true faith can only survive in the absence of knowledge. (It is worth pointing out that German makes no distinction between faith and belief – for both *Glaube* is used. Thus when Kant speaks of faith, we must not take it solely in the religious sense, for his term encompasses both religious and non-religious belief. This is important because the quote in question applies also to freedom, which is not a religious term.)

Kant distinguishes between opinion, belief/faith, and knowledge:

- I have an opinion if I take my judgment to be true while conscious of both the subjective and objective insufficiency of my grounds for doing so.
- Belief, in turn, is subjectively but not objectively sufficiently grounded.
- Knowledge, finally, is both subjectively and objectively sufficiently grounded.

Subjective sufficiency Kant also calls conviction, objective sufficiency certainty. (Note that Kant does not understand belief in the same way contemporary epistemic logic treats it: belief in this sense is not a constituent of knowledge – as in justified true belief. This role in Kant is played by holding-to-be-true (*Fürwahrhalten*), and opinion, belief, and knowledge are varieties or modes of holding-to-be-true. But I digress. See: **Toni Kannisto's answer to Did Kant ever write about epistemic logic in any way or form?**)

Now, if the sphere of knowledge were in no way even in principle restricted, there could be no faith proper. All belief would at best be incomplete knowledge that could, in time, be remedied. True belief, distinct from incomplete knowledge, is only possible according to Kant when we have subjective conviction while simultaneously recognising the objective insufficiency of our

grounds. That is, and herein lies the crux: true faith in God, freedom, and the soul is only possible with the certainty that we cannot know whether there is a God, freedom, or souls.

Hence Kant – well aware of the clash between science and religion – anticipates Kierkegaard in creating a self-contained and therefore positive role for faith, partly independent of knowledge:

By contrast [to speculative rational hypothesis], rational faith, which rests on a need of reason's use with a practical intent, could be called a postulate of reason – not as if it were an insight which did justice to all the logical demands for certainty, but because this holding to be true [rational faith] (if only the person is morally good) is not inferior in degree to knowing, even though it is completely different from it in kind.

What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking? In: Kants gesammelte Schriften vol. 8: 141–2.

Faith is not poor man's knowledge. Nor can it supplant knowledge. But it can – indeed must – step forth to guide us when we venture beyond knowledge. But what is the positive role of faith or belief if it is not in service of knowledge? The pivotal moment in solving our mystery is this: it is to serve action, not knowledge.

Faith and action

Say an athlete attempts to break the world record. If you were to ask the athlete how she knows that she will break the record, you would be asking the wrong question. For not only cannot she know this, but it is wholly irrelevant that she doesn't. What is relevant is that a) she knows that the record can be broken, and that b) she believes or has enough faith in that she can do it in order to try. If knowledge of success were required for the athlete to try, then she would and could never make the attempt. Rather, it is faith and desire that motivate her.

Or consider any relationship based on trust. Indeed the very foundation of a relationship is likely built on a leap of faith: we do not ask someone out because we know they will say yes (or, at the very least, one waiting for objective certainty on this before asking will wait forever) but because we hope they will and believe that they might. Faith here is not some lofty idea like faith in God, but a very real and concrete, everyday expression of trust.

No action in life is so mundane as to not be built on faith. Although I may not expressly think that I have faith in the metro system when I go to the station, my doing so does betray such faith – and if someone might ask how do I know the train will be there, I would be, when pressed, forced to admit that I do not: it ought to be there but before it stops in front of the platform and opens its doors to me, I cannot know. And I do not need to know – the vast majority of our everyday actions is taken without certainty, and at the end it is only in sciences and philosophy that certainty is, at least in some measure, demanded. We see, then, that going beyond knowledge is not some arcane and abstract act of a philosopher but something we do all the time. For while an attempt does produce knowledge of whether it is successful or not, at the time of the choosing the action its result is, in a very real sense, beyond knowledge. Yet we must take it.

Of course, knowledge does play a role in motivating our action, but that role is negative in that knowledge sets boundaries to what is possible and what is not. To be sure, I go to the fridge partly because I know I have food there, or to the store because I know I don't – but the store does. Knowledge, by restricting what is possible, narrows down possible actions. But which

action I take is not determined by my knowledge of what is possible – it is determined also by my inclination or will: what I want and desire, value and covet. (The athlete does not attempt the record because she knows it is possible but because she desires to break the record and she knows it is possible.)

Hope, then, is one of the main ingredients of action. An action is, at bottom, an attempt to bring about what one hopes. Faith, in turn, is the engine of action: faith constitutes the motivation that allows me to move from hope to action, a push to realise the hope – to actualise that which ought to be. It is here that the bridge between the first and second question finally comes to view: constrained in alternatives by what I know and in desires by what I ought to do, I may hope for what I desire and with sufficient faith I am propelled into action to make real what I desire. In this way the theoretical and the practical that together answer Kant's third question: What may I hope?

(For more on belief and action, see: **Toni Kannisto's answer to Did Kant ever write about epistemic logic in any way or form?**)

The necessity of faith

The question – What may I hope – is not about the contingent hopes of this or that person, but generally about what all beings – insofar as they are moral – may hope for. This, Kant claims, is the highest good (*summum bonum*), the harmony of virtue and happiness: a state of the world in which we, as moral beings, are perfectly good, and in which we, as corporeal beings, are perfectly happy. Whatever precisely we believe to be good, and whatever precisely each of us longs for, none of us, if we are good, can avoid trying to reach for a world in which they both are realised together.

While we cannot know whether the highest good is possible, the moral imperative – if Kant is correct that there is such an imperative – that we ought to work towards actualising it implies that it ought to be possible. And when a human being acts morally at all, it betrays a faith in this possibility and in everything that the possibility is built on – including freedom, God, and immortality

It is thus that we arrive at the necessity of having faith in the three lofty ideas of God, freedom, and immortality. An expression of pure rational faith in an *ought to be* arises from an *ought to be*. And while we may today be more sceptical than Kant was as to whether this faith should really be in God specifically, Kant's philosophy here does disclose an intriguing and profound connection between morality, faith, and action. In some sense faith is the answer to the question, why should I do as the moral law demands? That is, I may agree with Kant that the categorical imperative expresses the true moral law, and that I ought to follow it – but apart from some abstract duty, why should I do it? While morality may stand on its own two legs, we as moral agents need some further incentives:

Thus without [faith in] a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization.

Critique of Pure Reason, A 813/B 841.

This is a point Kant makes repeatedly throughout his philosophy: while morality itself has no need for faith, we as moral agents are paralysed without its power:

He tries to act according to the duties he finds grounded in his own nature; but he also has senses which present the opposite to him with a blinding bedazzlement, and if he had no further incentives and powers to resist it, then he would in the end be blinded by their dazzle.

Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion, Kants gesammelte Schriften vol 28: 1011–12.

Ultimately we see that the role of faith in Kant is to enable free action. Knowledge cannot function as the motivation of action because we seldom if ever have any certainty that the action will succeed – we take the action nonetheless out of faith, conviction, and hope in that it will bring about what we desire. If knowledge reigned supreme, we would fail as moral beings, but luckily it does not: where we step beyond the borders of all that can be known, faith takes up its rightful role as a beacon that directs our action. And so, in order to save our free agency, knowledge beyond its rightful domain must be denied so that faith could reign in its own.