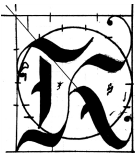


The incongruity between the sophistication of Kant's gelastic theory on the one hand, and his idea of a good joke, on the other, is itself funny. The incongruity inherent in his incongruity theory of humour amounts to an instance and illustration of the theory. The fact that one of the most sophisticated theories of humour in history would be supported by such a weak joke is itself the incongruity.

Justin E.H. Smith. *Kant on Jokes*

Silent Speech. Possible Worlds. Cancellation.



ant's idea of a good joke might well be funny in itself but for all that, it would appear he played out for high audiences. One garden-path, performative utterance, a 'sophisma-proposition'^[1] defined in terms of such 'freewheeling witty displays' is situated in the opening statement to the appendix of his early work the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens or An Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Entire Structure of the Universe Based on Newtonian Principles* (1755). Where an even further dilemma for the modern English reader has existed, it is in the way Kant's incongruity has been thrown into both obscurity and relief through its cancellation by recent translators such as Stanley Jaki (1981) and even more comprehensively by Ian Johnston (1998 and 2008), who interacts with the body of the text by remaking the consecutive word 'if' into an exceptive one so as to erase the incongruity in his translation of Kant's writing from German into modern English and where, with my emphasis, we can see the difference:

Kant: In my view it is a disgrace to the nature of philosophy when we use it to maintain with a kind of flippancy free-wheeling witty displays having some apparent truth, if we are immediately willing to explain that we are doing this only as an amusement. (1:351)

Johnston performatively interpreting Kant:

In my view it is a disgrace to the nature of philosophy when we use it to maintain with a kind of flippancy free-wheeling witty displays having

some apparent truth, unless we are immediately willing to explain that we are doing this only as an amusement.

Weil ich dafür halte, dass es den Charakter der Weltweisheit entehren heisse, wenn man sich ihrer gebraucht, mit einer Art von Leichtsinn freie Ausschweifungen des Witzes mit einiger Scheinbarkeit zu behaupten, wenn man sich gleich erklären wollte, dass es nur geschäbe, um zu belustigen.

A footnote is attached to the passage where the explanation for this re-imagining of the text is that "Kant's text has "if" rather than "unless", which seems clearly wrong in the context of the entire sentence".

We are informed in the first preface to this otherwise well-informed translation (1998), in a passage missing from the most recent edition (2008), that Kant's original footnotes, with translator's footnotes now attached, have been moved from their immediacy within and alongside the text to the end of the book in a passage which stated: "all footnotes have been moved to the end," thus deferring to the end any willingness to immediately explain, before then altogether deleting this explanation of the non-immediate explanation in the later edition.

And in this down-the-rabbit-hole move, where Johnston, like a play within a play, plays out the joke within incongruity in Kant; where we have the contrast between an 'if' that revels in philosophical impropriety with the presumption of an 'unless' that might resolve it with simulacra in translation; between the immediacy of the 'immediately willing to explain' in Kant and the deleted explanation which once explained the deferment of the non-immediate explanation in Johnston; between the manifestation of the 'some apparent truth' in Kant with the various immediacies or otherwise of the 'seems clearly wrong' in Johnston; as well as Johnston's assumption that 'unless' operates as an only or necessary alternative to a disjunctive 'if', despite an endless variety of equally coherent alternative options, and his assertion that the context of the entire sentence is sufficient in itself to fully understand Kant's meaning.

But then as introduction to various kinds of the 'seems clearly wrong' in philosophy, and it seems with Kant in mind, it was John L. Austin (1962) who intimated within the philosophy of language the potential for such configurations by systematically outlining the differing interpretational enlivenments that such a statement "despite an unexceptionable grammatical form", might function relative, if not in truth, then with at least possible felicities fulfilled in meaning or event where, with uncharacteristic yet suggestive iteration through capitalization of Font he emphasizes:

But now in recent years, many things which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. This scrutiny arose somewhat indirectly — at least in philosophy. First came the view, not always formulated without unfortunate dogmatism, that a statement (of fact) ought to be 'verifiable', and this led to the view that many 'statements' are only what may be called pseudo-statements. First and most obviously, many 'statements' were shown to be, as KANT perhaps first argued systematically, strictly nonsense, despite an unexceptionable grammatical form: and the continual discovery of fresh types of nonsense, unsystematic though their classification and mysterious though their explanation is too often allowed to remain, has done on the whole nothing but good. Yet we, that is, even philosophers, set some limits to the amount of nonsense that we are prepared to admit we talk: so that it was natural to go on to ask, as a second stage, whether many apparent pseudo statements really set out to be 'statements' at all. It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts: for example, 'ethical propositions' are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways. Here too KANT was among the pioneers. We very often also use utterances in ways beyond the scope at least of traditional grammar. It has come to be seen that many specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements do not serve to indicate some specially odd additional feature in the reality reported, but to indicate (not to report) the circumstances in which the statement is made or reservations to which it is subject or the way in which it is to be taken and the like... Along these lines it has by now been shown piecemeal, or at least made to look likely, that many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake - the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are *either* (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical *or else* intended as something quite different. (pp.2. Emphasis in the original)

Which brings us to the idea that what seems clearly wrong, if not exceptional grammatical form, is rather a necessary and indeed felicitous violation of appropriateness or politeness criteria; and as such to the idea that whatever implications or categorically inappropriate juxtapositions we find may have been 'intended as something quite different' and not merely as something different or 'seems clearly wrong'. In which case, the thought that Kant's work necessitates re-writing in order to make the logical and/or clause connections somehow

acceptable to standards of correctness in speech and politeness in the modern academy is indeed quite the element of our amusement, the beginning of our project and the focus of our first question.

In this statement, where Austin describes the role of "specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements," Austin articulates metaphoric significance through anomalous and academically perplexing stylistic rearrangement by the pictorialization of the FONT as KANT thus twice creating the conditions of fulfillment for its own determination beyond the description.

Outside of Hermann Diels, and his elucidation of Aristotle's also twofold treatment of the "vivid picture" made by the Atomists as enaction in metaphor that involves interaction with the typeface by Aristotle, one looks in vein for anything similar in the 'array' of the FONT amongst even the most bloodthirsty of Modernist Philosophers. For Diels, Aristotle likely inherited this directly, perhaps from Leucippus or more probably from Democritus himself, as he put it in his *Elementum: eine Vorarbeit zum Griechischen und Lateinischen Thesaurus*:

Who wouldn't think of the place in Metaphysics where the differences between the Democrite atoms according to *ῥυθμός* [rhythm], *διωθινή* [array] and *τροπή* [trope] are given and made clear by the difference between the letters A and N, AN and NA, I and H? There is probably no more suitable example to make clear in a nutshell the creation of composite things from atoms that are similar in quality but different in shape and size. Such a picture was all the more obvious to Democritus because he had carried out grammatical and rhetorical studies with particular attention to the differences in the elements of language down to the last detail. And anyone who still doubts whether the vivid picture goes back to Democritus himself will be won over by a second testimony from Aristotle in the *Gen. et Corr*, where he gives the report on the change in the Abderite [Aberdite was a region in ancient Greece] *σχήματα* [shapes] with the words: "Tragedy and comedy arise from the same letters." We can therefore assume with certainty that Leucippus or, more likely, Democritus used the metaphor of letters in order to demonstrate the infinite variety of atomic connections by means of the infinite combinability of letters, but without the metaphors to condense concepts and probably without using the word *στυχεῖα* [elements]! (1899, pp. 13).^[2]

Austin capitalizes the Font in Kant twice. The first time where "First and most obviously, many 'statements' were shown to be, as KANT perhaps first argued systematically, strictly nonsense.." is a provocation which Austin knows to be untrue and cannot be sustained. Kant never systematically argued a theory of pragmatics.

The second time Austin capitalizes the Font he does so in a way where "'ethical propositions' are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways. Here too KANT was among the pioneers," is equal in incitement, unless Austin wants us to believe he thinks that no moralist before Kant attempted to influence human behaviour or sway an audience with emotives.

Above all else, Diels *Elementum* is a 'Thesaurus' and therefore focused on the art of the transference of one word into a different one, but where the rendition is such as to retain the same meaning at the level of its explication, usually understood in terms of a change in the word, but also described by Diels here in terms of a difference in the form of its *shapes*.

Not least another similarity between the proposition by Kant and the one found in Austin (unless we interpret Austin as merely 'nonsensical') is that both of them are illustrations of themselves when interpreted this way. Kant condemns the 'free-wheeling flippancy' as an 'amusement,' whilst immediately explaining that it is his intention to do just that - Austin incorporates an instance of 'specially perplexing words embedded in otherwise apparently descriptive statements' in a passage which also provides us with an example of something only coherent when digested into itself.

If instead of reading Austin here in depths we rather posit him at the surface level in terms of what he actually says, and interpret him as making a play on the forms of the incongruity in the opening statement of Kant's *Theory of the Heavens*, while also understanding that a few paragraphs later (1:353) Kant introduces Bernard de Fontenelle in the humorous episode with the flea, we can infer that Austin's array of shapes is rather a plurality of interactions with the FONT where a.) At the level of the typeface we see the change of shape in capitalization rendered twice, as also in Aristotle's references to Democritus and b.) As a play on words relative to both Bernard de Fontenelle's name and also the dialectal form of his book the '*Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*' especially as these relate to c.) the 'heavens', such as to illustrate in concrete visual metaphor the form of language as outlined by Diels, which is also, by means of the circle d.) a description of the infinite atomistic universe of Democritus that Kant also twice tells us the natural philosophy in his book is premised upon (at 1:226 and 1:227). What was previously imprecise, unclear and vague in Austin now assumes a tantalizing form in coherence.

Is there any other statement written by Kant with anything like this degree of fit relative to what Austin just did?

Was this Austin's way, by describing "specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements," with a witticism in FONT; made as reference to a witticism by Kant about the (disgraceful) nature of witticisms in philosophy therefore, articulated in such a way that Austin's witticism, while perplexing in itself, nonetheless attains clarity when read through Diels, as "intended as something quite different," as if to say that he was aware of this in Kant and thereby also, so to speak, claiming a stamp in provenance on the heavenly font in modern times?³¹