Kant on Conviction and Persuasion

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Forthcoming in Luigi Filieri, Sofie Møller (eds.), *Kant on Freedom and Human Nature*, London & New York: Routledge.

Please cite the published version.

Abstract

Interpretations of Kant's account of the forms of "taking-to-be-true" (*Fürwahrhalten*) have generally focused on three such forms: opinion (*Meinung*), belief (*Glaube*), and knowledge (*Wissen*). A second distinction that has received comparatively less attention is that between conviction (*Überzeugung*) and persuasion (*Überredung*). Kant appears to use the distinction between the subjective and the objective sufficiency of a taking-to-be-true to characterize all of these forms. However, it is impossible to account for the differences between them by relying on this latter distinction alone. In turn, this makes it difficult to fit all of these forms into a single classification of taking-to-be-true. In this chapter, I propose a new approach to conviction and persuasion that dissolves these problems. Conviction and persuasion are not single forms of taking-to-be-true with distinctive characteristics, yet it is not useful to treat them as "classes" of taking-to-be-true either. Rather, they are "operators" that determine whether a taking-to-be-true is apt or inapt, depending on whether it rests on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have.

1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, the literature on Kant's account and classification of the forms of "taking-to-be-true" (*Fürwahrhalten*) has grown exponentially. In particular, the main focus of the discussion has been three such forms: opinion (*Meinung*), belief (*Glaube*), and knowledge (*Wissen*). One of the chief challenges when discussing these forms is determining how we can discriminate between them. Moreover, since the "tool" that Kant uses to obtain the relevant discriminations is the distinction between the "objective" and the "subjective" sufficiency of a taking-to-be-true, one key issue is deciding what "objective sufficiency" and

"subjective sufficiency" are. Famously, Kant submits that opinion is both objectively and subjectively insufficient, belief is objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient, and knowledge is both objectively and subjectively sufficient (A822/B850). That Kant scholars have mainly directed their attention to this first classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true is due to the fact that distinguishing between two forms within it, namely belief and knowledge, is key to understanding Kant's moral arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. As Paul Guyer pointedly remarks, when considering these arguments, we are immediately led to ask "how is it even possible for us to believe something 'from a practical point of view' that we know to be theoretically indemonstrable?" (Guyer 2000: 335).

Yet, opinion, belief, and knowledge are not the only forms of taking-to-be-true that Kant discusses. He also speaks of persuasion (*Überredung*) and conviction (*Überzeugung*), and subjective and objective sufficiency seem to play a role in distinguishing between these as well.[1] He writes that the ground of conviction is "objectively sufficient" (A820/B848) and that, in the case of persuasion, the ground of the judgment "lies solely in the subject" (A820/B848). But this makes conviction and persuasion difficult to distinguish from knowledge and belief, respectively. Both knowledge and conviction appear to be objectively and subjectively sufficient. Both belief and persuasion appear to be objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient.

Of course, there are strategies for differentiating between knowledge and conviction, on the one hand, and belief and persuasion, on the other. While in believing we are conscious that our taking-to-be-true is objectively insufficient, this is not so when we are "persuaded." Rather, with persuasion we take our taking-to-be-true to be objectively sufficient (A820/B848). As far as conviction and knowledge are concerned, while knowledge entails truth, one might suggest that conviction does not (accordingly, Chignell 2007a: 333, 358 speaks of "mere" conviction). These strategies notwithstanding, attempts to provide a comprehensive classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true discussed by Kant have generally focused on providing a satisfactory characterization of objective and subjective

[1] I say "seem" because this can be challenged. For example, in the passage where Kant appears to attribute objective sufficiency to conviction, he uses the term "*hinreichend*," whereas when he introduces the objective sufficiency/insufficiency of a taking-to-be-true in connection with opinion, belief, and knowledge, he uses "*zureichend/unzureichend*." On this point, see Techert (unpublished).

sufficiency such that we can make sense of the differences between opinion, belief, and knowledge. One gets the impression that conviction and persuasion are then slotted into the classification *after* this operation has been completed. As a consequence, their position in the general scheme often appears arbitrary, which is confirmed by the fact that there is no agreement regarding where they should be placed (cf. the schemes in Stevenson 2003; Chignell 2007a and 2007b; and Pasternack 2014).[2]

In this chapter, I will not try to provide a new general classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true by focusing on the distinction between conviction and persuasion. Rather, I will try to figure out what this distinction is intended to capture. I will focus on persuasion in particular, arguing that persuasion does not describe a single form of taking-to-be-true with distinctive characteristics. Persuasion is commonly described as a taking-to-be-true in which we are convinced of the truth of a certain proposition and certain of having objective grounds for it but where in fact we do not have such grounds. While I think that this describes a relevant case of persuasion, it is not the only one. In contrast to the common description of persuasion, I claim that persuasion functions as an "operator" that determines whether our taking-to-be-true is "inapt" in the sense that it is not based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have. Conviction also functions as a similar operator, but only for "subjectively sufficient" takings-to-be-true. It determines whether "subjectively sufficient" takings-to-be-true, namely those in which we are fully convinced of the truth of what we take to be true, are based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have.[3]

While this approach to conviction and persuasion illuminates what they are, it also has positive consequences for how we should approach Kant's general classification of taking-to-be-true. First of all, it shows that a comprehensive classification that includes persuasion and conviction is less desirable than it first seems. Since the distinction between persuasion and

[2] That providing an adequate account of "conviction" in Kant is important becomes evident if we consider Paul Guyer's recent reconstruction of arguments for the existence of God in Kant and Mendelssohn. According to Guyer, in *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn provides an argument for the existence of God according to which we can be *convinced* that God exists on theoretical grounds even though this conviction does not amount to knowledge (Guyer 2020: 139-41). Therefore, it is crucial to understand what distinguishes Kant's account of moral belief, as a kind of conviction based on practical grounds, from Mendelssohn's *theoretical* conviction, which is not knowledge.
[3] Hebbeler (2021) distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate subjective sufficiency. In my view, a conviction is correctly described as having legitimate subjective sufficiency. However, Hebbeler's distinction does not capture subjectively insufficient takings-to-be-true that are legitimate. As will become clear, there are cases of taking-to-be-true that can be described as legitimate (because they are not cases of persuasion), even though they are not subjectively sufficient.

conviction works at a different level than the distinction between opinion, belief, and knowledge, placing them within a single general classification is more misleading than helpful. Moreover, if we do not have to place persuasion within the same classification in which we place belief, we do not need to find seemingly arbitrary ways to distinguish between them. For example, one such way is to distinguish between two kinds of "subjective sufficiency," one that applies to belief and one that applies to persuasion. But once persuasion and belief no longer belong to the same classification, we do not need to use this tool to distinguish between them, or so I will argue.

I will start in Section 2 by evaluating attempts to position persuasion and conviction within a general classification of taking-to-be-true and by identifying the problems associated with this approach. In Section 3, I argue that persuasion takes more than one form according to Kant. In particular, we can also be "persuaded" that we have what Kant calls opinion. But this means that persuasion is not a single form of taking-to-be-true. In Section 4, I argue that Kant's use of conviction in reference to both logical and moral conviction should be read in a similar way. Conviction and persuasion signal whether our taking-to-be true is either apt or inapt, depending on whether it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have. Section 5 considers why Kant does not discuss cases in which we are "persuaded" that we have a belief. I argue that Kant does not discuss such cases because even when we are wrong in thinking that our taking-to-be-true is justified on practical grounds, we still hold our taking-to-be-true to only have "private" validity. Accordingly, we do not require the agreement of others, and our error remains a private matter. Finally, in Section 6 I consider whether my account of persuasion and conviction commits Kant to an infallibilist account of knowledge.

2. Classifying Persuasion and Conviction

That classifying persuasion and conviction is not an easy task can be seen by comparing two influential attempts to sort out Kant's forms of taking-to-be-true: one by Leslie Stevenson, the other by Andrew Chignell. While according to Stevenson persuasion belongs to the same subclass of taking-to-be-true as opinion (2003: 82), Chignell lists persuasion as an independent form of taking-to-be-true (2007a: 333, 358; 2007b: 49, 57). As far as conviction is concerned, while this concept does not play a relevant role in Stevenson's classification (2003: 82), for Chignell it constitutes a class with two members: knowledge and "mere conviction" – a form of taking-to-be-true where the subject has objective grounds but is not

in a position to cite them (2007: 333, 358; 2007b: 38, 49, 57). In this Section, I will consider these two attempts, highlighting certain problems. I will then move to briefly discussing Lawrence Pasternack's account of persuasion and conviction. Although his approach makes some progress in this regard, it too is ultimately unsuccessful.

Let us begin with persuasion. Why does Stevenson believe that persuasion has something in common with opinion? We know that Kant submits that opinion is both objectively and subjectively insufficient (A822/B850). We also saw that persuasion likewise appears to be objectively insufficient (A820/B848). Stevenson assumes that persuasion is subjectively insufficient. What characterizes persuasion with respect to opinion is that we hold our taking-to-be-true to be objectively sufficient, even though it is not. Therefore, according to Stevenson, persuasion is a taking-to-be-true that, like opinion, is both subjectively and objectively insufficient but, unlike opinion, is erroneously taken to be objectively sufficient (Stevenson 2003: 80).[4]

It is unclear why, for Stevenson, persuasion is subjectively insufficient. One way to spell out subjective sufficiency is to say that a subjectively sufficient taking-to-be-true is one in which we have a high degree of confidence in the truth of a proposition. Since, according to Stevenson, in the case of persuasion we hold our taking-to-be-true to be objectively sufficient, why shouldn't we have a high degree of confidence that what we take to be true is actually true? Alternatively, subjective sufficiency might be regarded as having to do with what we think concerning the grounds we have. A subjectively sufficient taking-to-be-true would be one in which we think we have objective grounds in support of it. This can be construed as the thought that our taking-to-be-true is objectively sufficient. But since, for Stevenson, persuasion is a taking-to-be-true which is erroneously taken to be objectively sufficient, when we adopt this understanding of subjective sufficiency it is difficult to make out the sense in which persuasion is subjectively *insufficient*. In fact, Stevenson himself seems to indirectly recognize this problem; while he identifies one sense of subjective sufficiency as "*thinking one has objective sufficiency*" (2003: 82), he stresses that adopting this sense of subjective sufficiency would make persuasion indistinguishable from belief. They would both be objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient (2003: 83). As a result

[4] Stevenson also describes a secondary form of persuasion in which the subject does not ask herself whether the grounds of her taking-to-be-true are objective or subjective (2003: 81).

of these problems, Stevenson's attempt to position persuasion within the classification of forms of taking-to-be-true appears to be unsuccessful.

Unlike Stevenson, Chignell regards persuasion as an independent form of taking-to-be-true that does not fall under any sub-class (2007a: 333, 358; 2007b: 49, 57). He describes it as a taking-to-be-true that, like belief, is objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient. Persuasion can be distinguished from belief because the meaning of "subjective sufficiency" is different in the two cases. Persuasion is subjectively sufficient in a first sense, according to which the subject is in a position to cite what she takes to be sufficient objective grounds for her taking-to-be-true (Chignell 2007a: 329, 340). Belief, by contrast, is subjectively sufficient in a second sense, according to which the taking-to-be-true has sufficient non-epistemic merit for a subject (Chignell 2007a: 336; see also Chignell 2007b: 56). This way of distinguishing between persuasion and belief is plausible. However, Kant does not explicitly differentiate between these two senses of subjective sufficiency. Therefore, this approach may end up forcing a distinction on Kant that is not his own (helpful attempts to provide a unitary account of subjective sufficiency are provided by Pasternack 2014 and Höwing 2016).

Focusing on Chignell's account helps us to appreciate the difficulty of classifying conviction as well. According to Chignell, what characterizes conviction is objective sufficiency. There are two cases of conviction: either our taking-to-be-true is both objectively and subjectively sufficient (and, additionally, the proposition we take to be true is true) or it is objectively sufficient and subjectively insufficient (Chignell 2007a: 333, 358). In the first case, our conviction is knowledge (Chignell 2007a: 330); in the second case, it is "mere" conviction (Chignell 2007a: 331-2). The latter is subjectively insufficient in the sense that the subject of the taking-to-be-true is unable to cite the grounds that support it. One problem with mere conviction is that Kant does not explicitly identify a taking-to-be-true that is objectively sufficient but subjectively insufficient. Of course, this does not mean that we should not consider this case; it is at least logically possible given Kant's distinctions. The main problem with Chignell's account of conviction lies elsewhere. Kant sometimes speaks of moral beliefs as cases of "moral" or "practical" conviction (A829/B 857; see also 9:72), but these are cases in which our taking-to-be-true is objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient. Therefore, objective sufficiency cannot be the defining feature of conviction in this case. Does this mean that we should distinguish between two types of conviction, where only one is characterized by objective sufficiency? No matter how we answer this question, what is

clear is that deciding where to locate conviction (or kinds of conviction) within the classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true is not straightforward.

More recently, a different approach to persuasion and conviction has been proposed by Lawrence Pasternack. What is promising about his classification is that the aim of the distinction between persuasion and conviction is to disentangle justified and unjustified takings-to-be-true. Pasternack first distinguishes between takings-to-be-true that have "mere private validity," which is the defining feature of persuasion, and takings-to-be-true that have "intersubjective validity," which are cases in which our taking-to-be-true is justified and can be cases of either opinion, belief, or knowledge (Pasternack 2014: 48-9). Among intersubjectively valid takings-to-be-true, cases of conviction are those in which the taking-to-be-true is subjectively sufficient, that is, either belief or knowledge (Pasternack 2014: 48-9). While I think Pasternack is right to say that the conviction/persuasion distinction should track whether our taking-to-be-true is justified, his account still faces problems. In particular, in his account belief is an intersubjectively valid taking-to-be-true. Pasternack argues that this description is adequate because (moral) beliefs are based on a principle of reason with universal validity. However, Kant stresses at various points that beliefs (including moral beliefs) have only private validity (A828-9/B856-7; 9:70; 24:732; on the private nature of belief, see Fonnesu 2015). Unless we can find a way to make these passages cohere with the claim that belief is an intersubjectively valid taking-to-be-true, it appears that intersubjective validity cannot always be used to track when a taking-to-be-true is justified.

3. Persuasion and Opinion

I want to challenge the idea that the only case of persuasion is the one in which we form a firm taking-to-be-true because we falsely think we have sufficient objective grounds for it, or, put differently, because we hold our taking-to-be-true to be objectively sufficient. I will suggest that persuasion can also occur in cases of "presumed" opinion, that is, in cases where we think we have adequate objective grounds for a provisional or partial taking-to-be-true, as in opinion, but where our evaluation of our grounds is in fact inaccurate. This causes problems for attempts to include persuasion in a general classification of forms of taking-to-be-true. Clearly, persuasion cannot be a single such form of taking-to-be-true. It might form a "class" within this classification, namely, the class of takings-to-be-true that are based on an incorrect evaluation of one's grounds. However, I will argue that it makes little sense to classify the "forms of persuasion."

Let us see why persuasion can occur for presumed opinion as well. This can be appreciated if we consider Kant's characterization of verisimilitude (*Scheinbarkeit*) as a possible basis of a taking-to-be-true. We know that opinion is both objectively and subjectively insufficient. This does not mean, however, that our taking-to-be-true is without grounds. Rather, in opinion we have objective grounds that give a proposition a certain probability. We correctly evaluate these grounds and form a taking-to-be-true that is "partial" insofar as it conforms to the probability of the proposition's being true given those grounds. By contrast, when our taking-to-be-true is based on verisimilitude, we are able to identify grounds that speak in favor of the truth of a proposition, but we cannot provide an objective assessment of the probability of that proposition's being true.

> With probability there must always exist a standard in accordance with which I can estimate it. This standard is *certainty*. For since I am supposed to compare the insufficient grounds with the sufficient ones, I must know how much pertains to certainty. Such a standard is lacking, however, with mere verisimilitude, since here I do not compare the insufficient grounds with the sufficient ones, but only with the grounds of the opposite. (9:82 translation altered; see also *Refl* 2602, 16:436; *Refl* 2603, 16:436-7)

Kant suggests that in the case of probability, we are able to objectively determine a "degree" because we can determine a "value" for the probability of a proposition by comparing the objective grounds we have with the grounds that would be sufficient for certainty. These are equated with the grounds that could support an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true. By contrast, in the case of verisimilitude we are able to identify grounds pro and con. We also have more grounds in favor of the truth of a proposition than in favor of its opposite. However, we cannot determine that the grounds in favor of a proposition are "more" than those that *can possibly* be found in favor of its opposite (see 9:81-2), which means that we cannot determine how they relate to certainty or objective sufficiency.[5]

Kant does not think that it is always wrong to form a taking-to-be-true on the basis of verisimilitude, especially when we are aware that it can be misleading. Accordingly,

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[5] Interestingly, Kant argues that while probability is appropriate in mathematics, in philosophy there is only space for verisimilitude (24:883-4). This provides a different perspective on Kant's distinction between these disciplines.

verisimilitude can be the basis of a "provisional judgment" (*vorläufiges Urtheil*) (*Refl* 2595, 16:434) which plays a positive role in inquiries directed at truth (see La Rocca 2003). However, since verisimilitude does not provide an objective criterium for assessing the "weight" of our grounds, following it can be a source of error. We can form a taking-to-be-true without actually having adequate grounds to support it. This can happen with partial taking-to-be-true, like opinion, such that we believe that our grounds of verisimilitude are enough to support an opinion when in fact they are not. Accordingly, Kant submits that "[v]erisimilitude is merely quantity of persuasion" (9:82, translation altered; see also 24:143-4).

Given our analysis of verisimilitude, it appears that there are at least two cases of persuasion. We can be "persuaded" in the case of presumed knowledge, when we believe we have adequate objective grounds for an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true but we in fact do not. We can also be "persuaded" in the case of presumed opinion, when we believe we have adequate objective grounds for a partial taking-to-be-true but in fact we do not. Clearly, this shows that persuasion cannot occupy a single spot in a general classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true. It may constitute a "class" within such a classification, namely the class of taking-to-be-true based on an incorrect evaluation of the grounds we have. This is the approach suggested by Pasternack. As we saw, in his view the class of persuasion covers takings-to-be-true that are unjustified because they are not intersubjectively valid (Pasternack 2014: 48-9). I have already raised doubts regarding the use of "private validity" as a defining feature of persuasion, but I also think that it makes little sense to understand persuasion as the class of takings-to-be-true that are unjustified because they are based on an incorrect evaluation of the grounds we have. For what would we place in this class? We would find "presumed knowledge," "presumed opinion," and possibly other forms of "presumed" taking-to-be-true in which our evaluation of our grounds is wrong. That is, we would find *the same* forms of taking-to-be-true that constitute the class of justified taking-to-be-true, but with an additional "tool" to mark that we are wrong to view our taking-to-be-true as an opinion, knowledge, and so on.[6] Accordingly, it is more sensible to simply provide a classification of the forms of taking-to-be-true that are based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have. In this picture, persuasion can be understood as an "operator" that determines whether we are

[6] Therefore, persuasion and conviction apply first of all to forms of taking-to-be-true and only secondarily to the propositions that are taken to be true in them. I can be convinced or persuaded that I have an opinion, knowledge, etc. It is only indirectly that I am convinced or persuaded that *p*.

right to think that our taking-to-be-true figures among those in that classification. In other words, persuasion determines whether our taking-to-be-true is only presumed knowledge, opinion, etc.

4. Logical and Practical Conviction

If persuasion is an operator that determines whether our taking-to-be-true is "inapt" (i.e. based on an incorrect evaluation of the grounds we have), how should we read conviction? I submit that conviction has a similar function and marks whether our taking-to-be-true is "apt" (i.e. based on a correct evaluation). However, the conviction "operator" is only used to mark the "aptness" of a subset of takings-to-be-true, namely those that are subjectively sufficient.[7] Therefore, a conviction is a taking-to-be-true that: (a) is subjectively sufficient and (b) is apt because it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have.[8] That means that an opinion cannot be a case of conviction, even if it is apt.

Let us see whether this approach to conviction makes progress in comparison with existing accounts. Recall that Kant uses the term conviction to designate two forms of taking-to-be-true that seem to have little to do with each other. *Logical* conviction is an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true (which, following Chignell's account of "mere conviction," could potentially be subjectively insufficient). *Practical* conviction is an objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient taking-to-be-true. If, in order to determine what conviction is, we merely use the concepts of objective and subjective sufficiency, we are forced to distinguish between two concepts of conviction that are in sharp opposition to one another. One concept indicates whether a taking-to-be-true is objectively sufficient, the other whether it is subjectively sufficient.

But we do not have this problem if we use the characterization of conviction sketched above. Both in the case of logical conviction and in the case of practical conviction, I can use the conviction operator because my taking-to-be-true (a) is subjectively sufficient and (b) is apt because it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds I have. In the case of logical conviction, the grounds that are correctly evaluated are objective and are the basis of the

[7] In this spirit, Kant writes that "[s]ubjective sufficiency is called conviction" (A822/B850).
[8] As I suggested above, my characterization of conviction captures what Hebbeler (2021) calls legitimate subjective sufficiency.

objective sufficiency of our taking-to-be-true.[9] In the case of practical conviction, the grounds that are correctly evaluated are practical.

How should we understand subjective sufficiency in this picture? Both Chignell and Stevenson maintain that subjective sufficiency refers to different things in the case of knowledge and in the case of belief (Chignell 2007a: 340; Stevenson 2003: 84). They would probably say something similar regarding logical and practical conviction.[10] Differentiating between two kinds of subjective sufficiency serves the purpose of distinguishing between belief and persuasion since these are both commonly characterized as takings-to-be-true that are objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient. According to Chignell and Stevenson, one can nonetheless differentiate between persuasion and belief because in the former case subjective sufficiency indicates that we consider our taking-to-be-true to be objectively sufficient, whereas in the case of belief subjective sufficiency indicates the non-epistemic merits of the taking-to-be-true.

In my account, we do not need to distinguish between two kinds of subjective sufficiency in order to distinguish between belief and persuasion, or more precisely, between belief and the case of persuasion we have called "presumed knowledge." Presumed knowledge and belief are not distinguished because they are subjectively sufficient in different senses. Following Pasternack, we can say that they are subjectively sufficient because of the firmness of our taking-to-be-true (Pasternack 2014: 43-4). In other words, in both cases we are strongly convinced that the proposition we take to be true is true. What distinguishes belief from presumed knowledge is that only in the first case is our taking-to-be-true apt, since it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have. We recognize that the grounds of our taking-to-be-true are practical and not objective.[11]

At this point one might ask: What are the grounds that are correctly evaluated in the cases of logical and practical conviction? I have called the grounds of logical conviction "objective"

[9] Since all cases of conviction, including logical conviction, are subjectively sufficient, there is no space for what Chignell calls mere conviction in my account.
[10] A specification is required here. Since for Chignell conviction is not necessarily subjectively sufficient, he would claim that in cases of logical conviction that are subjectively sufficient, subjective sufficiency means something different than it does in cases of practical conviction.
[11] While I agree with Pasternack that subjective sufficiency can be defined in terms of firmness, I do not think that intersubjective validity can be used to discriminate among subjectively sufficient takings-to-be-true that are apt and those that are not.

and the grounds of practical conviction "practical." The former can be taken to be grounds that are "truth-conducive," namely grounds that indicate that the proposition we take to be true is true, or, alternatively, grounds that increase the probability of the proposition's being true. The latter are grounds that show the practical merits of our taking-to-be-true. But this way of characterizing the grounds of logical and practical conviction has no bearing on how we should understand the subjective sufficiency of our taking-to-be-true in the two cases. Simply, for both logical and practical conviction, subjective sufficiency means that we are strongly convinced that the proposition we take to be true is true. What renders both logical and practical conviction cases of conviction is that our subjectively sufficient assent is apt because it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have.

5. Belief and Persuasion

The characterization of conviction sketched above is plausible and allows us to see why both logical and practical conviction are cases of conviction. However, one might raise two objections to my approach. First, if it is true that conviction and persuasion are operators that mark whether our taking-to-be-true is apt or inapt, why doesn't Kant discuss cases of "presumed belief"? These would be cases in which we are persuaded that we have a belief because we think we are in possession of practical grounds that would support such a taking-to-be-true but in fact we are not. Second, in the passages in which Kant distinguishes between conviction and persuasion, he does not describe conviction by writing that our evaluation of the grounds we have is correct. Rather, he insists on the communicability of the grounds of conviction, which, at least on a traditional reading,[12] is a sign that these grounds are objective (see A820-1/B848-9). Therefore, in his general characterization of conviction, Kant insists that the grounds of conviction are objective, which brings us back to the problem of understanding how conviction, so understood, could have anything in common with practical conviction.

I believe that these two objections have a common answer. One first way to provide such an answer is the following: Kant assumes that we are not subject to error in the case of belief. That is to say, there is no risk of our being wrong when evaluating the practical grounds of belief. But this explains, first, why Kant does not discuss instances of presumed belief and,

[12] Against the traditional reading, both Pasternack (2014) and Techert (unpublished) argue that communicability is not used to distinguish objectively sufficient takings-to-be-true.

second, why, in differentiating between conviction and persuasion, he insists on communicability as a sign that our grounds are objective. He does not discuss instances of presumed belief simply because he thinks that we cannot fall victim to persuasion in this case. He insists on communicability as a sign that our grounds are objective because it is only in evaluating these grounds that we can be mistaken and so are at risk of being "persuaded." In other words, communicability is a tool for determining whether we are right to regard the grounds we have as objective, because it is only in evaluating potential objective grounds that we can be mistaken. We do not need a similar tool for belief (or practical conviction) because there is no risk of our being wrong when evaluating our practical grounds.

The question now is why Kant thinks that we cannot be a victim of persuasion in the case of belief. Kant identifies certain conditions of belief such that: (a) the givenness of an object or state of affairs is a condition for attaining an end we pursue, and (b) we cannot either exclude or confirm that this object or state of affairs is given on the basis of objective grounds. Given (a) and (b), to rationally pursue our end we must (c) assume that the condition identified in (a) obtains (see A823-4/B851-2). Perhaps Kant thinks that we cannot be wrong regarding practical grounds because these rest on ends we pursue, and, arguably, these are transparent to us. However, a clear grasp of what our ends are is insufficient to deliver the justification required for belief. In order to attain the latter, we not only need to be conscious of the ends we pursue but must also identify an object or state of affairs the givenness of which is a condition for attaining those ends. In fact, it seems that we might go massively wrong in evaluating whether an object or state of affairs is indeed a condition for attaining an end we have. Take Kant's argument for the belief in God and immortality. One criticism that might be raised against it is that it is not straightforward that the existence of God and immortality are conditions for realizing the highest good. Of course, Kant might have the tools to defend himself from this line of critique. However, the fact that this criticism sounds *prima facie* plausible shows that it cannot simply be assumed that we have a clear and immediate grasp of the conditions for attaining the ends we pursue. This seems to imply that we can go wrong when evaluating whether we have practical grounds for a belief.[13]

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[13] One might try to solve this problem by arguing that we need not be *right* in thinking that an object or state of affairs is a condition for attaining an end we wish to pursue. Perhaps it is sufficient that we are somehow justified in thinking that an object or state of affairs is such a condition, even though it may turn out that it is not. Take Kant's example of the doctor in the Canon. Kant argues that the doctor is justified in believing that his patient has consumption, even if his diagnosis is only tentative and, more importantly, another doctor might come up with a better one (see A824/B852). We can read the example as establishing that the doctor is justified in believing that the patient has consumption because he is justified in thinking that a certain state of affairs,

The first solution to the two problems identified above does not work. Let us consider a second possibility. We have already seen that Kant characterizes belief as a taking-to-be-true that, while justified, has only "private" validity. It is not straightforward why Kant describes the validity of belief in this way, especially in the case of moral beliefs, given that they are based on moral obligation, which clearly has universal validity. I take it that belief has "private" validity because it rests on an end that we pursue in our practice, where the kind of access we have to our own ends is radically different from the access we might have to the ends pursued by others. I see myself as rationally required to hold a certain belief because otherwise the pursuit of an end that I have would be irrational. I might have grounds to say that another person should pursue a certain end, such as being virtuous. I might also have grounds to say that *if* a person pursues a certain end—say, being virtuous—she should have certain beliefs—say, in God and immortality—on pain of being irrational. However, the fact that the access I have to others' ends will never be the same as the access I have to my own ends means that the rational requirements that my ends set on my beliefs cannot transmit to the beliefs of others.

This account of the private validity of belief needs specification. What is important for my purposes is this: the fact that Kant describes belief as having only private validity provides us with a tool for solving the problems identified above. Let me recall them: first, we must explain why Kant does not discuss instances of presumed belief; second, we must explain why, in differentiating between conviction and persuasion, he insists on communicability, which is a feature that only singles out objective grounds. I think the answer to these problems is the following. When we take ourselves to have a belief, we regard our grounds as merely private. Accordingly, we do not treat them as the basis of a requirement we set on the beliefs of others. This means that even if we are wrong in thinking that our state can be characterized as a belief—because, for instance, our evaluation of the conditions for attaining our end is wrong—we do not take the grounds we falsely think we have to have normative

namely the patient's actually having consumption, is a condition for attaining his end, which is curing the patient. But it might turn out that the patient is suffering not from consumption but from another disease (with which the doctor is unfamiliar) that can be cured by the same procedure. If this were the case, the doctor would be wrong in thinking that the patient's actually having consumption is a condition for attaining his end. However, this line of reasoning does not work for moral beliefs. In this case, there is no leeway in considering whether an object or state of affairs is a condition for attaining our ends. For example, Kant would not allow that we can justifiably think that the existence of a teleologically ordered nature is a condition for attaining the highest good.

force for the beliefs of others. Accordingly, in differentiating between conviction and persuasion, Kant only focuses on communicability as a mark of conviction because it is only when we falsely think we have objective grounds that we take those grounds to have normative force for the beliefs of others. In this way, we risk imposing our error on them. By contrast, in the case of an incorrect evaluation of grounds we view as practical, our error remains a private matter. This explains why a discussion of presumed belief is unnecessary.

6. Conviction and Knowledge

In his reading of the forms of taking-to-be-true, Andrew Chignell argues that knowledge is fallible for Kant. This means that we can have all the grounds required for knowledge but still fail to know because the proposition we take to be true turns out to be false. In this way, the grounds that *would* provide knowledge if that proposition were true do not guarantee its truth (see Chignell 2007a, 2007b and more recently, Chignell 2021; I defend a fallibilist reading of logical conviction in Gava 2016). Characterizing conviction as an operator that tells us whether our evaluation of the grounds we have is apt might be taken as speaking in favor of an infallibilist account of knowledge. In this section, I would like to show that my reading of conviction is also compatible with a fallibilist view of knowledge. In other words, my reading does not commit me to either of these options.

Let us begin by seeing why my account of conviction pairs well with an infallibilist account of knowledge (for an infallibilist reading, see Willaschek and Watkins 2020).[14] I have argued that a subjectively sufficient taking-to-be-true arises when what we *think* about our grounds correctly captures the grounds we in fact have. When it comes to a taking-to-be-true that is a candidate for knowledge, this means that we correctly take ourselves to have objective grounds that bestow objective sufficiency on our taking-to-be-true. It seems natural to describe the taking-to-be-true in question as one in which we not only *think* we have knowledge but actually have it. Namely, we are "convinced" and not "persuaded" that we have knowledge because we are right in thinking that we know, and we are right in thinking that we know because we are right in thinking that we have the appropriate grounds. This

[14] In his *Prize Essay* of 1764 (2:273-301), Kant argues that metaphysics can attain certainty, even though the latter cannot be reached by imitating the method of mathematics. Kant's argument can be read as evidence for an infallibilist account of *metaphysical* knowledge, such that metaphysics requires certainty in order to be considered a science. This appears to imply that *legitimate* claims to metaphysical knowledge must entail actual knowledge. Of course, this does not rule out Kant's being a fallibilist with regard to other kinds of knowledge or the possibility that he changed his mind in later works. For a reconstruction of Kant's argument in the *Prize Essay* in comparison with Mendelssohn's winning essay, see Guyer 2020: Ch. 1.

picture of conviction is infallibilist because, according to it, our conviction that we have knowledge is apt only if we actually have knowledge: first, being justified in thinking we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true is equivalent to being justified in thinking we have knowledge, and second, being justified in thinking we have knowledge is equivalent to actually having knowledge.

In order to make my account of conviction compatible with a fallibilist view, we need to break the immediate link between being justified in thinking we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true and actually having knowledge. I see two possible ways to achieve this. We can deny either that being justified in thinking we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true entails being justified in thinking we have knowledge or that being justified in thinking we have knowledge entails actually having knowledge.

Let us consider the first option. As we saw, fallibilists hold that having the grounds that would provide us knowledge if the proposition we take to be true were true does not guarantee that the proposition in question is in fact true (and thus that we have knowledge). But then, one might argue, when we are justified in thinking that we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true (and so in thinking that we have the grounds that would provide knowledge in the proper cases), we are not therefore justified in thinking that we have knowledge. Rather, precisely because we know that having these grounds does not guarantee that we in fact know, we should not think that we know (I provide a fallibilist reading of Kant along these lines in Gava 2016). In this picture, the function of the conviction operator would be that of determining whether we are right in thinking we have the objective grounds that would make our taking-to-be-true objectively sufficient. However, having a logical conviction in this sense does not entail being justified in thinking we know.

With that said, the fallibilist may not want to renounce the idea that we can be justified in thinking we know even if we do not have a guarantee that we know. After all, when we are justified in thinking we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true, we do have the grounds that would provide knowledge in the proper cases. Accordingly, the fallibilist could maintain that being justified in thinking that we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true entails being justified in thinking that we know, but that being justified in thinking that we know does not entail that we know. In this picture, the conviction operator would determine both that we are right in thinking we have an objectively sufficient taking-to-be-

true and that we are right in thinking that we know. But being “right” in thinking that we know does not mean that we in fact know. It only means that we are justified in thinking that we know, where this justification does not rule out our ultimately being mistaken.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a new account of conviction (*Überzeugung*) and persuasion (*Überredung*) in Kant. I have argued that conviction and persuasion should be understood as operators that determine whether our taking-to-be-true is apt or inapt, depending on whether it is based on a correct evaluation of the grounds we have. The evidence in favor of this approach includes the fact that Kant does not identify one single form of persuasion or one single form of conviction. We can be persuaded in the case of presumed opinion. Moreover, there is both logical and moral conviction. What different cases of conviction have in common is that our evaluation of the grounds we have is apt. What different cases of persuasion have in common is that our evaluation of the grounds we have is inapt.

I have provided an answer to a possible objection to my approach. Since Kant does not discuss cases of presumed belief, it does not seem that persuasion works as an operator that determines whether the taking-to-be-true is apt in this case. I have suggested that Kant does not discuss such cases because when we falsely take ourselves to have a belief, we still view the grounds that support our taking-to-be-true as private. In this way, we do not risk imposing our error on others.

Finally, I have shown that even though my account of conviction pairs well with an infallibilist approach to Kant’s account of knowledge, it is also compatible with fallibilist readings.[15]

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[15] I would like to thank Luigi Filieri and Marcus Willaschek for their useful comments on a previous draft of this chapter.

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