

Question on Kant

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Date: Sun, 7 Apr 1996 11:15:52 +0200

From: Bo Dahlin <Bo.Dahlin@hks.se>

Now and then I return to Kant's distinction between sensuality (Sinnlichkeit) and understanding (Verstand). At first I thought he meant this to be a *real* distinction, i.e., they are in reality two different things. Then I read a German author (Günther Buck) who indicated that Kant meant this distinction as purely *analytic*. i.e., Sinnlichkeit and Verstand can be distinguished conceptually in thinking, but are in reality inseparably together. Does anyone on this list know anything about this question, or where I could turn to find out?

I raised this question on a philosophical list here in Sweden, but not a single answer came forth! I am not a philosopher professionally, nor an intellectual historian, I am just an educationalist deeply interested in these areas. Grateful for help.

Sincerely,
Bo Dahlin

Bo Dahlin
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tel: ++ 46 54 83 81 82

Date: Wed, 10 Apr 1996 22:55:10 EDT

From: lcoqc@qcvaxa.acc.qc.edu

I'd suggest offhand that, at least in English, "sensuality" is not the word for what Kant distinguishes from "understanding," though the result is more provocative than what the usual translations afford. Paul Guyer's **Kant and the Claims of Taste** and **(ditto) Knowledge** would I think be a good (staid and authoritative) enough place to start looking for answers?

L Cook

Date: Thu, 11 Apr 1996 10:10:01 -0600 (CST) From: crossleyd@sask.usask.ca

A couple of remarks on the recent Kant inquiry: first, Kant's basic position is that human experience is experience of objects - not just the subjective flow of sensory material, such as Hume's fleeting impressions - and that this experience involves activity on the part of the person experiencing; this activity involving the processes of our sensory awareness (which are not just passive as Locke and

others thought, but which involves our giving the incoming data some form of spatial and temporal articulation) and also our faculty of judgment (which synthesizes the sensory manifold according to certain categories of the understanding). In a way, Kant's view is not that dissimilar from modern views, such as Goldman's that hold that perceptual experience entails a double processing of the incoming information: first, it is processed by the senses and then further cognitive processes occur.

Second, I am not sure what to say about whether the distinction is "real" or "conceptual" because I fear these terms are used in different ways. If 'conceptual' meant that we somehow 'make up the distinction' - as with 'nominal essences' - rather than it reflecting differences in the real world, I think Kant would be a 'realist' on this. (Note his talk of what things are "empirically real". However, if we mean by 'analytic' that the two processes do not really operate in isolation from one another then this is correct. Compare your car: both gasoline and oxygen are required for the production of the energy needed to make it run. Oxygen and the fuel are clearly distinct things but the running of the car needs both together in a certain relationship. The same holds for our experience of objects and hence, for empirical knowledge: we need both the processes attached to sensation (e.g., spatial articulation) and those attached to the understanding.

On the subject of books, it is hard to find a short fast introductory discussion which does not get complicated rather quickly. I often tell students to try W.T. Jones, "Kant and the Nineteenth Century," which is the second edition of Volume IV of Jones' "A History of Western Thought". I also like Royce's "Lectures on Modern Idealism" or S. Korner's "Kant"- if you want to stick to the older secondary sources and to those which are brief. Your library should turn up the standard sources and the newer texts. Of course, Kant's own introductions to the "Critique of Pure Reason" are not too hard either.

Hope this helps,

David Crossley, University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Date: 11 Apr 96 13:34:25 PDT

From: William Peck <William.Peck@directory.Reed.EDU>

Forgive my tardiness in responding to this question. I'm not an historian either, but a philosophy teacher who has often taught Kant. I think any decent book on Kant will address the relation between *Sinnlichkeit* ("sensibility") and *Verstand* (understanding). What's a relevant decent book? The most respected single book on Kant in English is, I imagine, "The Bounds of Sense", by P.F. Strawson. It has the advantage of relative brevity, and being written in a way that should be intelligible (though difficult, no doubt) for the general educated reader. I would also recommend the Penguin book on Kant by Stephan Koerner, short and clear and intelligent.

The distinction looks analytical rather than real if one takes the position Kant works out, that we cannot perceive things apart from "categories", or more generally, concepts -- and vice versa, because concepts without sensory content are bare forms or rules, purely formal and so just barely intelligible at all, much less cognitive. Hence we must treat K's story about the combining or

synthesizing activity of the understanding as something that we must postulate in order to understand our knowledge, but of which we cannot be directly aware.

Bill Peck
Reed College
Portland, Oregon

Date: Fri, 12 Apr 96 16:34:48 -0400
From: Hughie Lawson <a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu>

Two things I've always wondered about Kant.

1. Why was it so important to him to have synthetic a priori knowledge?
2. Am I the only person who doubts whether his "7 + 5 = 12" example is really properly classified as synthetic a priori knowledge. Looks analytic to me.

And a final question: does anybody today care about synthetic a priori knowledge?
Hughie Lawson, Murray State <a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu>

Date: Thu, 11 Apr 1996 19:38:26 -0600 (MDT) From: Helen Liebel-weckowicz
<hliebelw@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca>

On Thu, 11 Apr 1996, David Crosley wrote: > A couple of remarks on the recent Kant inquiry: first, Kant's basic

- > position is that human experience is experience of objects - not just
- > the subjective flow of sensory material, such as Hume's fleeting
- > impressions - and that this experience involves activity on the part of
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- > we mean by 'analytic' that the two processes do not really operate in
- > isolation from one another then this is correct. Compare your car: both
- > gasoline and oxygen are required for the production of the energy needed
- > to make it run. Oxygen and the fuel are clearly distinct things but the
- > running of the car needs both together in a certain relationship. The
- > same holds for our experience of objects and hence, for empirical
- > knowledge: we need both the processes attached to sensation (e.g.,
- > spatial articulation) and those attached to the understanding.

Of course the view of Kant described here also describes some of Leibniz' reasoning on the same phenomena. The publication of Leibniz' collected works during the 1760s may have influenced Kant's reasoning. **HLW**

Date: Mon, 15 Apr 1996 17:20:00 +0000

From: Nicholas Dronen <ndronen@bpsi.net> >

On 11 Apr 96 13:34:25 William Peck <William.Peck@directory.Reed.EDU> wrote:

- >
- > Forgive my tardiness in responding to this question. I'm not an historian
- > either, but a philosophy teacher who has often taught Kant. I think any decent
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- > way that should be intelligible (though difficult, no doubt) for the general
- > educated reader. I would also recommend the Penguin book on Kant by Stephan
- > Koerner, short and clear and intelligent.

I currently am reading The Cambridge Companion to Kant, a collection of essays by Kant scholars on the various essential themes and arguments of his work. It so far has proven to be quite useful in helping me figure out that most difficult philosopher. As only a soon-to-be first year graduate student in philosophy, I cannot speak with the authority of Mr. Peck, but the CCK does seem to be broad, thorough, and lucid enough to qualify as a recommendable primer on Kant. > > The distinction looks analytical rather than real if one takes the position

- > Kant works out,
- that we cannot perceive things apart from "categories", or more
- > generally, concepts -- and vice versa, because concepts without sensory content
- > are bare forms or rules, purely formal and so just barely intelligible at all,
- > much less cognitive. Hence we must treat K's story about the combining or
- > synthesizing activity of the understanding as something that we must postulate
- > in order to understand our knowledge, but of which we cannot be directly
- aware.

Would someone be willing to post the original question, and any relevant preceding messages, so that

I may read Mr. Peck's response in its right context? I would appreciate it very much.

Nicholas Dronen
Laws and Sausages, Laws and Sausages.
ndronen@bps.net

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 17:42:15 -0500 (CDT) From: 5SH6FREEBURG@vms.csd.mu.edu

>Two things I've always wondered about Kant.

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>really properly classified as synthetic a priori knowledge. Looks analytic
>to me.

I agree with you on the example. And of course you can reduce almost anything in math down to such a statement (you have one subject "7+5" being identical in value with a second subject "12.") I think that you can make a good case that all true propositions are tautologies and therefore analytical.

Nathan Freeburg
5sh6freeburg@vms.csd.mu.edu

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 16:48:02 -0600 (MDT) From: Helen Liebel-weckowicz
<hliebelw@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca>

On Fri, 12 Apr 96 Hughie Lawson <a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu> wrote: >

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>

>

>

And a final question: does anybody today care about synthetic a priori > knowledge?

> Hughie Lawson, Murray State <a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu>

>

Kant must be seen within the context of a general development of psychological theory. (See Weckowicz & Weckowicz, 1990). Now that we have computers we can get a better idea of some of

these problems. Wasn't he assuming that one needs to postulate some memory capacity and operating programs before one could process knowledge ? H.Liebel-Weckowicz

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 17:45:17 -0600 (CST) From: crossleyd@sask.usask.ca

As per the Hughie Lawson questions:

- > 1. Why was it so important to him to have synthetic a priori knowledge?
- >
- > 2. Am I the only person who doubts whether his "7 + 5 = 12" example is
- > really properly classified as synthetic a priori knowledge. Looks analytic
- > to me.
- > And a final question: does anybody today care about synthetic a priori
- > knowledge?

It seems I answered question 1 for someone on this list about four months ago. I think the place to start is a little different than this question implies. The question makes it look as though Kant began with some idea of a certain sort of knowledge he wanted and then went in search of it or of a way to provide it or something similar. Rather, I think it puts things better to say that he was convinced that we do seem to know certain things - that any event will have a cause, for example - and his task was to figure out how such judgments were possible. Putting it roughly, if "All events have causes" were merely learned from experience - i.e., were an empirical generalization - then it would be always possible that the next event we encounter might not have a cause (this is just a point about the logic of inductive inferences of a certain sort). But we do NOT think this possibility reasonable - i.e., we think, "All events have causes" is necessarily true. (Try it: If my car stops suddenly on the road, do I really think that one possible explanation is that it stopped "for no reason at all"???, that there was no cause of this happening???). If this is right then we need to account for our conviction that this proposition is necessarily true. Well, analytic propositions are necessarily true but then they are uninformative, and "All events have causes" certainly seems to be making some sort of claim about the empirical world. So, according to Kant we are in a box: this sort of proposition cannot be empirical (Not sythetic a posteriori) nor can it be analytic. There is, according to the way Kant distinguishes judgments (propositions) only one class left, the sythetic a priori and, "all events have causes" fits the requirements for this. So, we DO make these types of judgments. The puzzle now is "how is this possible?" Of course, it is not possible for an empiricist like Hume, for all knowledge must arise FROM, or OUT OF, our experience. It IS possible for Kant because WE bring something to experience - first, senses capable of providing the spatial articulation necessary for an experience of objects, and a mind which synthesizes material via certain concepts of the understanding, among other things.

As for Question #2, the answer

is "NO". This is a standard objection raised in virtually all the Kant literature and some have even argued that it can be shown, on Kant's own principles, that this sort of proposition is not going to be synthetic a priori. Of course, logical empiricists, such as A.J. Ayer argued that Kant was wrong about the other purportedly synthetic apriori propistions as well.

As to the "final question" the answer is "Yes".

I hope this helps

David Crossley, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 18:57:10 -0500 (CDT) From: JA Good <gem@owl.net.rice.edu>

On April 12 Hughie Lawson wrote:

- > Two things I've always wondered about Kant.
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- >
- >
- > And a final question: does anybody today care about synthetic a priori
- > knowledge?

As I understand Kant and his context, it was crucial for him to demonstrate that there was a basis for synthetic a priori knowledge, because the principles of causation, and induction were synthetic a priori. Hume had submitted these principles to the universal acid of skepticism, and they appeared to be found wanting. This had to be troubling to a scientist such as Kant.

More recently (early 50s I believe), W.V.O. Quine has convinced an awful lot of philosophers that the analytic/synthetic distinction was bunk in the first place. I believe your question about whether $7+5=12$ is synthetic or analytic may arise because there are problems with the distinction. This is all on the edge of my ken, but I would love to know more about it.

Can someone elaborate on the implications of Quine's arguments against the analytic/synthetic distinction? Rorty finds it extremely important.

Jim Good
Rice University

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 18:46:35 +0000
From: Nicholas Dronen <ndronen@bps.net>

Also in response to Hughie Lawson:

It seems that Kant's motivation to establish the possibility of a priori synthetic knowledge was to

show that pure reason, the understanding, could itself be a source of knowledge. A priori synthetic knowledge, Kant reasoned, can provide us the ability to form universal _judgements_, and hence to be autonomous moral agents.

Surely, that sort of project is not as popular in professional philosophical circles today as it used to be. But enough people take it as given that their moral sense has an origin in themselves to make the task of SHOWING how that can be so is still worthwhile to some.

Nicholas Dronen
Laws and Sausages, Laws and Sausages.

Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 15:06:01 -0600 (MDT) From: Helen Liebel-weckowicz
<hliebelw@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca>

Kant himself says that the $7 + 5 = 12$ statement at first seems to be analytic and then goes on to explain why it is not. HLW

Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 08:52:31 +0200
From: Bo Dahlin <Bo.Dahlin@hks.se>

>2. Am I the only person who doubts whether his " $7 + 5 = 12$ " example is
>really properly classified as synthetic a priori knowledge. Looks analytic
>to me.

To me it looks synthetic and not apriori: in the sense that concepts are EXPERIENCABLE, just as percepts, but in another mode, of course. Even number concepts. " $2+2=4$ " thus is an expression of a conceptual experience. I think this is the main weakness in Kant's thinking, that he cannot see concepts as experiences. This was one of Hegel's points of critique against Kant. Kant's "critique" is itself an expression of pure conceptual experience, without any sense-perceptual content. And modern thinking is still caught in Kant's mistake.

Bo Dahlin

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Date: 18 Apr 96 16:58:53 PDT
From: William Peck <William.Peck@directory.Reed.EDU>

More on the Lawson questions:

yes, hughie, there is a kant alive and well into the present. ie, plenty of philosophers (and other theorists) think the idea of synthetic a priori knowledge is important, though there's lots of disagreement about what it really comes to. For Kant this was a question about whether there any empirical truths that necessary and universal, thus something like laws of nature. The star example -- all the examples being of course debatable -- is the principle of causality (however exactly it is to be formulated). Kant's idea is not that we can see that this is a necessary truth about the universe, but that we can't get anywhere in trying to get knowledge of the world unless we assume that it is true, since it is presupposed by anything else one would say about the world. ie it's a standard - a standard of objectivity: if you don't adhere to it you can't distinguish between objective and subjective experience.

That's certainly an issue to care about, whatever conclusion you come to about it. In the last half-century or so in Anglo circles, aka analytic philosophy, Quine sparked a revolt against a traditional form of empiricism, a revolt that is definitely not the pre-kantian rationalist kind, or any other kind of position one could very well describe as rationalist. It's the sort of holist, "coherentist" position also familiar from eg t s kuhn and r rorty, according to which our beliefs lie in a spectrum, from core to periphery. The latter represents beliefs we easily give up if our experience - ie our other empirical beliefs - get in its way. The former = beliefs we damn well won't give up until hell freezes over -- although it is just barely conceivable that the Big Freeze might actually occur some day.

And then there's Peter Strawson (still among the Anglos), who takes at least roughly the same sort of position, and in his book on Kant represents him, or an acceptable kantian nowadays at least, as analyzing the concept of experience, and laying down conditions for its coherent and meaningful use (= what it makes sense to say our experience is of).

As for 7+5, the kantian question is whether the DEFINITION of adding 7 and 5 directly yields 12. And that's certainly dubitable/debatable.

Bill Peck
Philosophy
Reed C

Date: Fri, 19 Apr 1996 13:59:39 -0600 (CST) From: crossleyd@sask.usask.ca

I am curious about Nathan Freeburg's recent claim that all true propositions are tautologies. Unless he meant to say " all MATHEMATICAL statements are tautologies" this claim does not seem obvious, and I would like to see the case for the claim that an empirical proposition, such as "all the books in my satchel have red covers". or "I have two quarters in my pocket", both of which are true as it turns out, would be tautologies. Better yet, on this thesis the proposition, "All true propositions are tautologies" would either have to be false or a tautology (which presents a dilemma I do not think we want to be in).

David Crossley, University of Saskatchewan

Date: Sun, 21 Apr 1996 11:17:36 +0200
From: Bo Dahlin <Bo.Dahlin@hks.se>

Nicholas Dronen asked:

> Would someone be willing to post the original question, and any
>relevant
>preceding messages, so that I may read Mr. Peck's response in its right
>context?

My original question was about the difference between Verstand and Sinnlichkeit in Kant's philosophy; whether it is an 'analytic' or 'real' distinction. I.e., are understanding and 'sensuality' two distinct 'things' in reality, or are they only conceptually distinguished in our thinking, in order to make sense of the possibility of knowledge?

Bo

Bo Dahlin
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S-651 88 Karlstad
tel: ++ 46 54 83 81 82

Date: Sun, 21 Apr 1996 21:21:43 +0000
From: Fotis.Jannidis@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

> From: Bo Dahlin <Bo.Dahlin@hks.se>
>
> Now and then I return to Kant's distinction between sensuality
> (Sinnlichkeit) and understanding (Verstand). At first I thought he meant
> this to be a *real* distinction, i.e., they are in reality two different
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> meant this distinction as purely *analytic*. i.e., Sinnlichkeit and
> Verstand can be distinguished conceptually in thinking, but are in reality
> inseparably together. Does anyone on this list know anything about this
> question, or where I could turn to find out?
>

As you read Buck I assume you can read German. So I would recommend the >Kant-Lexikon< by Eisler. It is a great help with Kants terminology.

Fotis Jannidis
Institut fuer Deutsche Philologie
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet Muenchen EMail: Fotis.Jannidis@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

Date: Mon, 22 Apr 96 13:25:06 -0400
From: Hughie Lawson <a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu>

Thanks to David Crossley for the information about the objections in the Kant literature to the Kant example ("7 + 5 = 12") of synthetic a priori knowledge. I'm sorry I missed his earlier explanation.

The effect of Kant's example for me was to call into question Kant's conviction that synthetic a priori knowledge exists at all. But Kant writes as though it were the easiest thing in the world--with some examples--to get agreement that synthetic a priori knowledge exists. Is he relying on what Carl Becker called "the climate of opinion" here?

Has the "climate of opinion" changed enough that the existence of synthetic a priori knowledge is no longer "obvious"? For me it has; pragmatist descriptions of knowledge seem "obvious", while Kant's views look like a big intellectual Rube Goldberg contraption, even though constructed with overwhelming genius and subtlety.

Maybe it is wrongheaded of me, but my grappling with the Critique and the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic makes me think that it *was* important for Kant to distinguish synthetic a priori knowledge, that he was disturbed by Hume's view that statements like "all events have causes" cannot be rationally grounded.

So far as I can tell, Hume never denies that causal judgments happen. Neither does he consider them illegitimate. Indeed he recognizes that we make them all the time, that they are the basis of all our intellectual efforts to carry out our projects (inventing a better mousetrap, whatever). Hume seems satisfied to leave it at that. If I read him right, the causation principle is a sort of convention endorsed by custom; this is Kant's view of Hume on causation. This (to me) seems to be what bothers Kant.

So it still seems to me that Kant did begin with a notion that synthetic a priori knowledge exists, but was overlooked by Hume. Most of the Critique, as I understand it (dimly, I confess) is an effort to show that for such knowledge to exist, there must logically exist other truths. Since the knowledge exists, as I trace the argument, then the logically necessary conditions of its existence must be true. It seems to defy gravity. The existence of the knowledge creates the need for the transcendental argument which props up the knowledge.

Was there some reason why it bothered Kant to leave science up in the air as he thought Hume had done? In philosophy, excepting four or five college courses long ago, I am an autodidact; my questions, to those with longer training, may seem amateurish and badly posed. They mix philosophical and intellectual history issues, but they are the questions I have.

Finally, I wonder what Kant means by "show how" and "possible", as in "show how synthetic a priori judgments are possible."

Hughie Lawson, Murray State University
a06432f@msumusik.mursuky.edu

Date: Tue, 23 Apr 1996 11:26:15 -0500 (CDT) From: susan longfield <sfl@falcon.cc.ukans.edu>

Just a few moments ago I finally finished my honors thesis, which just happen to deal with Kant's philosophy of history. I'm not sure if the question was directed toward his conception of history, but I found that many of the secondary texts that I used did an excellent job making the Critiques comprehensible.

Especially the Cambridge Companion already mentioned but also: Michel Despland _Kant on History and Religion J. Gray Fox _The Will At the Crossroads_ Peter D. Fenves _A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World-History in Kant_

This book by Fenves directly addresses the Schw^armerei 'problem'
in regard to Kant's idea and emphasis upon Freedom in history.

well, there are many more... but I type too slow. If anyone is interested I Would be more than happy to just send my bib. through regular e-mail.

Susan Longfield
sfl@falcon.cc.ukans.edu

Date: Mon, 22 Apr 1996 22:19:28 -0500 (CDT) From: 5SH6FREEBURG@vms.csd.mu.edu

>I am curious about Nathan Freeburg's recent claim that all true
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>like to see the case for the claim that an empirical proposition, such as
>"all the books in my satchel have red covers". or "I have two quarters in
>my pocket", both of which are true as it turns out, would be
>tautologies. Better yet, on this thesis the proposition, "All
>>true propositions are tautologies" would either have to be false or a
>tautology (which presents a dilemma I do not think we want to be in).

ok. I don't think I said that it can be proven that all true propositions are tautological in nature, but that is my "gut feeling." I think you could make a case that all propositions can be reduced to mathematical statements. As for the two examples that you gave--I'll send a second post tomorrow attempting to demonstrate how they are tautological. As for the proposition "All true propositions are tautologies," if one defines "true proposition" as being equivalent to "tautology with true premises." Then it works out like this: the set of tautologies with true premises is a member of the set of tautologies. This is interesting--and I could be totally wrong but I like my case for now.

Nathan Freeburg
5sh6freeburg@vms.csd.mu.edu

Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 13:58:41 +0200
From: Hartmut Krech <kr538@zfn.uni-bremen.de>

Bo Dahlin wrote on Sun, 7 Apr 1996 11:15:52 +0200 >
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> Verstand can be distinguished conceptually in thinking, but are in reality
> inseparably together. Does anyone on this list know anything about this
> question, or where I could turn to find out?

It would have been helpful if you would have given Buck's statement in quotation. With regard to your problem, Kant has the following to say about the relation between Sinnlichkeit and Verstand. First, he calls them the "two stems of human cognition that may perhaps derive from a common root that is unknown to us" (KrV, 2nd ed., 29). Yet as two opposing aspects of the human mind, its "passive or receptive" (Sinnlichkeit) and its "active or spontaneous side" (Verstand), they have to be "distinguished and separated clearly" (KrV, 2nd ed., 76). Being the empirical psychologist and subjective idealist that he is, Kant maintains that Sinnlichkeit and Verstand have to be regarded as two capacities of the *individual* mind without which cognition is impossible: "No object would be given without sensuality and would be thought without understanding" (KrV, 2nd ed., 75). Within the individual mind, the relationship between Sinnlichkeit and Verstand has to be conceived of as a dialectical process: "Reason presupposes perceptions of understanding (Verstandeserkenntnisse) that are applied to experience in the first place and envisions its ideal unity (Einheit nach Ideen) that goes much further than experience can reach." (KrV 438). As it is, this subjective dialectical process of thinking is Kant's solution to his problem how synthetic judgments are possible apriori, in the individual mind. (Please refer to Kant's original text as these are my translations on the fly).

Kind regards
Dr. Hartmut Krech
kr538@zfn.uni-bremen.de

Date: Tue, 23 Apr 1996 20:53:38 -0600 (MDT) From: Helen Liebel-weckowicz
<hliebelw@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca>

Whether concepts of number are built in or acquired needs some empirical study. Mammals seem to be able to know how many offspring there are in a litter. At least females do. Is that an ability to understand numbers or is some other encoding at work? Many herd animals have only one offspring at a time. Perhaps there is no need to count there. But herds travel in a group and the more intelligent animals like elephants, seem to know if one is missing. If there is a litter of several offspring the mother usually knows how many. Is counting an innate ability found in more than one

species ? **HLW**

Date: 24 Apr 96 16:31:26 PDT

From: William Peck <William.Peck@directory.Reed.EDU>

To H Lawson's questions today:

Just a quick word on two points: 1) was the climate of opinion in Kant's day such that he could pretty much take the existence of synthetic a priori truths for granted? Not at all. He invented the idea -- well, as much as any idea is ever invented. It's a central expression of his new kind of "critical" rationalism, between Leibniz and Hume.

2) Kant's arguments about the above are the type he calls "transcendental deduction": starting from some knowledge we all think we have, they argue to the conditions of the knowledge by a "regress". I follow Strawson in figuring that the main opponent here is empiricist skepticism, and the main line of the argument is to convict Hume and Co. of incoherence when they try to doubt the causal principle, e.g. The empiricist line he's fighting says that we can't know causes; all we can know is patterns of succession. Kant argues that any objective empirical judgment, including ones about succession, require commitment to the causal principle because it serves as our standard of objectivity ("relation to an object").

Bill Peck
Reed C

Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 17:38:42 EDT

From: [Scott Wayland](#)

You don't have to be persuaded by Kant's idea of the synthetic a priori to question whether "all true propositions are members of the set of tautologies." Any proposition that is true but not a tautology will show that the case is otherwise. "Kant is being discussed on the H-Ideas list" is one proposition of this kind, and other examples have been given in previous postings.

The point of each of these examples is that, insofar as the stated proposition is true, it's not tautologically or analytically true. On the one hand, "7+5=12" and "All bachelors are unmarried" are true just by virtue of what they say. On the other, "Kant is being discussed on the H-Ideas list" is true not just because of what it says but because of what is happening on this list. So not all true propositions are tautologies, notwithstanding questions raised by the special case of the synthetic a priori.

Scott Wayland

Date: Tue, 23 Apr 1996 13:54:57 -0500 (CDT)

From: [Nathan Freeburg](#)

>I am curious about Nathan Freeburg's recent claim that all true >propositions are tautologies. Unless he meant to say " all MATHEMATICAL >statements are tautologies" this claim does not seem obvious, and I would >like to see the case for the claim that an empirical proposition, such as >"all the books in my satchel have red covers". or "I have two quarters in >my pocket", both of which are true as it turns out, would be >tautologies. Better yet, on this thesis the proposition, "All >true propositions are tautologies" would either have to be false or a >tautology (which presents a dilemma I do not think we want to be in). > Ok. Here's a further post on this topic. The two examples that you gave of empirical propositions can be stated in a tautological format. Assuming an omniscient observer; "all the books in my satchel" is a subset of the set "books with red covers." As for the second example, the specific set "I have two quarters" is a subset of "what I have in my pocket." What this really gets into is the question of the existence of synthetic vs. analytical propositions. I'm not sure that you can make a distinction between the two. If you argue that a context-sensitive proposition is synthetic, then all propositions are synthetic (which means that no proposition is a tautology). The obvious example is that "bachelor" does not necessarily mean "unmarried male" in all contexts. It could refer to the sound one makes which is written as "bachelor." However the same is true for what is supposedly an obvious analytic proposition, "A triangle has 3 sides." Hypothetically, there could be a possible word where "triangle" refers to "4-sided object" in which case "triangle" is also context-sensitive. But I guess that all of this is leaving my territory--my field is history, not analytical philosophy. I'll leave this for those with more knowledge than I.

Nathan Freeburg
Graduate Student
Marquette University

Date: Thu, 25 Apr 96 17:29:23 -0400

From: [Hughie Lawson](#)

Bill Peck wrote, in reply to my questions about Kant.

>Just a quick word on two points: 1) was the climate of opinion in kant's >day such that he could pretty much take the existence of synthetic a >prior truths for granted? Not at all. He invented the idea -- well, as >much as any idea is ever invented. It's a central expression of his new >kind of "critical" rationalism, bwteen Leibniz amnd Hume.

I see now my question was badly posed. Let me try again. Could Kant depend upon some kind of climate of opinion support for the principle that we surely have certain knowledge, other than analytic, and that an important function of metaphysics is to demonstrate that?

Hence, was Kant writing a sort of epistemological theodicy, justifying certain knowledge for those who wanted it?

>2)K's arguments about the above are the type he calls "transcendental >deduction": starting from some knowledge we all think we have, they argue >to the conditions of the knowledge by a "regress". I follow Strawson in >figuring that the main opponent here is empiricist skepticism, and the >main line of the argument is to convict Hume and Co. of incoherence when >they try to doubt the causal principle, e.g. The empiricist line he's >fighting says that we can't know causes; all we can know is patterns of >succession. Kant argues that any objective empirical judgment, including >ones about succession, require commitment to the causal principle because >it serves as our standard of objectivity ("relation to an object").

As I read Hume (not a Hume scholar) he doesn't deny that causation exist, or that it is useful for all our projects; he just denies that it can be rationally grounded, whether we all believe it or not.

Doesn't Hume mean by "know causes" something like "possess apodictic certainty of"?

Thanks to Bill Peck and others trying to educate me on this.
Hughie Lawson, Murray State

Date: Fri, 26 Apr 1996 07:49:08 -0400

From: [Bill Everdell](#)

Ammunition for Nathan Freeburg,

In November or December of 1913 Wittgenstein wrote to Russell: "All the propositions of logic are generalizations of tautologies" (Monk, Wittgenstein, p95)

-Bill Everdell, Brooklyn

Date: Mon, 29 Apr 1996 16:39:14 -0500

From: [Will Wagers](#)

Scott Wayland wrote:

> On the other, "Kant is being discussed on the H-Ideas list" is true > not just because of what it > says but because of what is happening on this list. So not all true > propositions are tautologies, notwithstanding questions raised by the > special case of the synthetic a priori.

Scott,

It seems to me that since you are discussing Kant in the surrounding post that "Kant is being discussed on the H-Ideas list" is a tautology.

Will

Date: Mon, 29 Apr 1996 14:53:43 -0500 (CDT)

From: [Nathan Freeburg](#)

>You don't have to be persuaded by Kant's idea of the synthetic a >priori to question whether "all true propositions are members of the >set of tautologies." Any proposition that is true but not a >tautology will show that the case is otherwise. "Kant is being >discussed on the H-Ideas list" is one proposition of this kind, >and other examples have been given in previous postings.

If you'd permit a little digression, it may be helpful to define "true proposition" or "TP." By TP I don't mean a proposition that just happens to be true. For me to state that "because I have black hair, therefore at this moment, someone in China is throwing a coin in the air" may well have a true conclusion, but it does not logically follow from my premise. A TP would have to have both a true conclusion and one that logically follows from its premise or premises.

>The point of each of these examples is that, insofar as the stated >proposition is true, it's not tautologically or analytically true. >On the one hand, "7+5=12" and "All bachelors are unmarried" are true >just by virtue of what they say. On the other, "Kant is being >discussed on the H-Ideas list" is true not just because of what it >says but because of what is happening on this list. So not all true >propositions are tautologies, notwithstanding questions raised by the >special case of the synthetic a priori.

But if we define the "H-Ideas list" as "the place where Kant and other intellectually significant figures are being discussed right now" then your example doesn't work (I think.) Any thoughts?

Nathan Freeburg

Date: Tue, 30 Apr 1996 15:07:17 +0200

From: [Bo Dahlin](#)

Hartmut Krech wrote on Thu 25 April:

>It would have been helpful if you would have given Buck's statement in >quotation.

Buck's statement (from *Rückwege aus der Entfremdung* 1984) was merely in passing, not

elaborating the problem. In connection with Schiller's **Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man** he simply notes that for Schiller the distinction between *Verstand* and *Sinnlichkeit* was "real", in contrast to Kant, for whom it was "analytical".

>With regard to your problem, Kant has the following to say >about the relation between *Sinnlichkeit* and *Verstand*. First, he calls >them the "two stems of human cognition that may perhaps derive from a >common root that is unknown to us" (KrV, 2nd ed., 29).

So this possible common root is completely open to speculation? If so, then the character of the distinction seems undecidable, doesn't it?

>Being the empirical psychologist >and subjective idealist that he is, Kant maintains that *Sinnlichkeit* and >*Verstand* have to be regarded as two capacities of the **individual** mind >without which cognition is impossible:

That would make the distinction real enough, wouldn't it? As two distinct psychological faculties.

>"Reason presupposes >perceptions of understanding (*Verstandeserkenntnisse*) that are applied to >experience in the first place and envisions its ideal unity (*Einheit nach >Ideen*) that goes much further than experience can reach." (KrV 438).

APPLIED to experience ^ÊThe very concept of application to me suggests a real difference between the forms of *Verstand* and the stuff of *Sinnlichkeit*. What is the original German word for "applied"?

Sincerely

Bo Dahlin
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University of Karlstad
S-651 88 Karlstad
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Date: Wed, 1 May 1996 15:15:26 +0200

From [Harmut Krech](#)

Bo Dahlin raised the question if Kant's distinction between *Sinnlichkeit* and *Verstand* has to be regarded as **real** or as **analytic**.

As a matter of fact, Kant seems to contradict himself if we isolate individual statements from his system. Remember that he calls *Sinnlichkeit* and *Verstand* the "two stems of human cognition that may perhaps derive from a common root that is unknown to us" (KrV, 2nd ed., 29). In another place (KU 401), he is quite explicit in calling them "two totally heterogeneous [sic] pieces" that are necessary in order to distinguish between and realize (*erkennen*) the potentiality (*Moeglichkeit*) and

reality (Wirklichkeit) of things: "Waere naemlich unser Verstand anschauend, so haette er keine Gegenstaende als das Wirkliche," i.e. the exception of Sinnlichkeit from cognition will lead to a virtual reality in which the objects of the understanding are real. By contrast, Sinnlichkeit without Verstand will lead to perceptions (Anschauungen) that are "blind" (KrV 75). That is to say, a lot of visual information that we have come to experience nowadays would pass as "blind" perceptions without understanding and cognition. Kant's ideal is a peculiar unity of Verstand and Sinnlichkeit, of Begriff and Anschauung that he calls "character" and develops in his anthropology. But to return to your question: Verstand and Sinnlichkeit are to be regarded as inseparable and therefore can only be distinguished analytically. Yet any judgment that postulates an existence is also a synthetic judgment: "...weil ein jeder Existentialsatz, das ist der, so von einem Wesen, von dem ich mir einen Begriff mache, sagt, dass es existiere, ein synthetischer Satz ist ..." (KpV 250). We are here at the well-spring of a development that eventually led to psycho-analysis and the various models of the psychic apparatus elaborated by Freud and his followers. Kant's solution was the application (Anwendung) of Verstandesbegriffe to Sinnliche Anschauung from which would result experience and reason (KrV 237) -- at least within the limits of his system. Yet the still unresolved conflict (perhaps we can even speak of a dualism here) between Sinnlichkeit and Verstand has become a strong and tragic theme in the Western intellectual tradition.

Kind regards
Dr. Hartmut Krech

Date: 01 May 96 12:29:32 PDT
From: [William Peck](#)

Perhaps we should bring out more clearly and strongly the fact that Kant was fighting Cartesian rationalism, especially Leibniz, as well as Hume and comrades. Kant clearly convicts the rationalists of one fundamental mistake: claiming that we have a faculty of rational (intellectual) intuition. Kant sides with the empiricists on this issue: the only intuitive data are sensory, while Verstand is an organizing, synthesizing faculty. Note that Hume can be thought of as having his own version of the fundamental mistake: where Cartesians asked how clear and distinct an "idea" has, Hume asked how much "force and vivacity" an idea or impression has. So Kant constructed his "critical" rationalism by claiming that knowledge is not (only) intuitive, but discursive. Sensory impressions by themselves are not cognitive, or even representational (they have no "relation to an object").--Hence empirical objects (objects of empirical knowledge) are mere phenomena, vs "noumena" = objects of intellectual intuition (nous-ing, noein).

bill peck
philosophy
reed c

Date: Thu, 2 May 1996 12:26:45 +0200

From: [Bo Dahlin](#)

Dr Krech wrote:

>Yet the still unresolved conflict (perhaps >we can even speak of a dualism here) between Sinnlichkeit and Verstand >has become a strong and tragic theme in the Western intellectual >tradition.

This seems very close to what interests me about Kant. I feel that his notion of the relation between "sense" and "understanding" has devastated our cognitive relations to just about everything, and it has destructive consequences for educational practice too. It separates "rational thinking" from sense-experience and thereby contributes to the feeling of alienation and separation between consciousness and world.

I have written a paper about this but it has been rejected by a Swedish journal on educational research because the reviewer claimed that Kant did NOT separate "sense" and "understanding" and therefore could not be "blamed" for the above. I felt this to be a very unfair rejection, since the question is ultimately, as you seem to imply, undecidable. I'd like to send my paper to other journals, but first it would be good to get hold of some texts (books or articles) which deals explicitly with this problem. Do you, Dr Krech, or anyone else, know of any such texts? I could of course refer directly to Kant's Critique, as Dr Krech does, but since I am not a professional philosopher (thanks God!) it may seem somewhat preposterous. Could refer to Dr Krech's messages, as "personal communication"?

I would like to communicate directly with Dr Krech but I could not reach him on the e-mail, message was returned with 'User unknown'.

Yours sincerely

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Date: Wed, 1 May 1996 19:01:54 EDT

From: [Scott Wayland](#)

I receive messages from the H-Ideas list in indexed bunches, so I hope these points haven't already been made by others. I agree with Nathan Freeburg that some distinctions need to be kept in mind, and several are relevant to the discussion of tautologies.

One is a distinction between conventional meanings or definitions and stipulative ones. While a conventional definition is one already in accepted use, anything can be proposed as a stipulative definition (though not all proposals will work). As a "definition" of "the H-Ideas list," for example, "the place where Kant and other intellectually significant figures are being discussed right now" can only be stipulative. Even so, it's not a plausible definition, because it encompasses many discussions which clearly are not part of the H-Ideas list. (It seems more like an ad hoc device for fitting a particular non-tautological proposition--"Kant is being discussed on the H-Ideas list"--into the framework of a deductive argument.)

A second relevant distinction is that between propositions and arguments. In the context of this discussion, propositions are things that are true or false that can (but need not) be put together in the form of arguments. Arguments are valid or invalid and can be constructed of premises and conclusions in the form of propositions. You cannot make an argument in propositional form without propositions, but you can make a proposition without arguments. I suspect that some misunderstanding about the issue of tautologies has arisen because of confusion about this distinction. For example, to propose that a "true proposition" (TP) be defined as one that must "have both a true conclusion and one that follows logically from its premises" is to mistake propositions and arguments. Confusion about the distinction makes the definition unconvincing.

These two distinctions might help to clarify the central one between tautological and non-tautological propositions. The sense of tautology I have in mind is one common in philosophical contexts: a single proposition that is true just in virtue of what it says (or "by definition"), such as "All triangles have three sides". The main point of having the category is to make it possible to distinguish this kind of proposition from other categories, including propositions that are made true by other propositions or other evidence. A tautology in this strict sense is a proposition considered individually, not an argument; and it is one that is true just because of what it says, not in relation to other things. (Looser or alternative senses of tautology, with correspondingly different implications, are possible. But this sense is distinct, and I'm not sure it's dispensable.)

Scott Wayland

Date: Fri, 3 May 1996 13:17:13 +0200

From: [Hartmut Krech](#)

William Peck wrote:

> Perhaps we should bring out more clearly and strongly > the fact that Kant was fighting Cartesian rationalism, > especially Leibniz [...] K sides with the empiricists > on this issue: the only intuitive data are sensory, while > Verstand is an organizing, synthesizing faculty.

Yes, you are right in defending Kant here, and it is definitely an argument in favor of the complexity of his system that its inherent possibilities seem to have become exhausted only because of the

technological progress we have made since then. Much of 19th century empirical research was furthered by the rigour and precision of Kant's epistemology. On the other hand, it can be proven that the polarization of sense and understanding became most popular by way of Kant's classical German philosophy at a time when a unifying philosophy was needed most. Kant may be totally innocent in the affair, but he was quoted as the foremost authority by German racial theorists because of the very fact that he had reduced "natural history" to a "systematic description of nature" which emphasized its formal aspects such as racial characteristics. Alexander von Humboldt, by contrast, always asserted that he was a "natural historian," just as he condemned slavery.

Bo Dahlin wrote:

> I feel that his notion of the relation between "sense" and > "understanding" has devastated our cognitive relations to > just about everything, and it has destructive consequences > for educational practice too. It separates "rational thinking" > from sense-experience and thereby contributes to the feeling of > alienation and separation between consciousness and world.

It is true that Kant's epistemology addresses man's (humankind's) relationship to "just about everything," and it is also true that Kant was the first in Germany (and perhaps in Europe) to give university lectures on pedagogy. Therefore I think that philosophers and intellectual historians could and should learn from your experience as an educational scientist.

> I'd like to send my paper to other journals, but first it > would be good to get hold of some texts (books or articles) > which deal explicitly with this problem.

In my dissertation, "Ein Bild der Welt, Die Voraussetzungen der anthropologischen Photographie" (Konstanz, 1989), I have tried to reach an understanding of the pictures and newsreels from Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, Warschau ... that I had seen as a young man, by reading the theoretical texts that led to the invention of "anthropological photography." I had to defend my thesis for five long years, but you are welcome to quote from it. - I am just now reading the autobiography of Rudolf Hoess, the former commandant of Auschwitz. You will find there some words that were very important for him just as for Kant: "Pflicht," "Pflichterfuellung," "Charakter," etc. But of course, Hoess lacked the sensibility to savor the ambiguity of an epistemological statement.

Kind regards
Dr. Hartmut Krech

Date: Thu, 02 May 1996 22:14:48 -0500 (CDT)

From: [Nathan Freeburg](#)

This is a reply to Scott Wayland.

First, I would rephrase my example of the list "being the place where Kant and either thinkers are being discussed" to "the email list with the descriptor 'H-Ideas' where Kant and other thinkers are

discussed." But of course you are right that this is an ad hoc after the fact argument. However, I think one can always do this after the fact with any argument. It's what one does with a "triangle has three sides." It's a tautology in retrospect. When you tried to limit a tautology to a proposition that is true in and of itself without reference to other propositions--you stated an impossibility. All propositions depend upon other propositions for their meaning. So really, we get back to the question is everything synthetic or is everything analytical. I don't think that we can have some propositions be one and some the other. Considering the relationship of language to meaning, all propositions are fundamentally the same.

Nathan Freeburg

Date: Fri, 03 May 1996 08:56:42 -0600 (CST)

From: [David Crossley](#)

In response to the item, below, I want to say that I side with the reviewer on this. We have to be clear about what can be "separated" out or distinguished in some sense in our analysis of some event or phenomenon. Thus I can sort out what the role of the red car was in the accident, as opposed to that of the blue car, even though the accident more or less could not have been what it was without the causal roles, say, of each of these cars. But, that I can make certain distinctions in my analysis does NOT mean that the distinguished item - that which is "separated" in or by the analysis - could have existed or worked or whatever in isolation. I can distinguish the roles of my rods and cones, of my optic nerve etc., but perception requires all these features, and that they work properly. My suspicion is that some of the worries that seem to be floating about on this list in respect of Kant would dissolve if we kept clear this distinction between (i) what we can separate out through analysis and (ii) what things are able to exist, play causal roles, or whatever, all by themselves, separately and independently or certain other things, processes, and events. (And the reviewer for the Swedish journal is simply correct that Kant did not "separate" sense and understanding in the second sense I indicate, although he does have to talk about these features of our experience "separately" in my first sense, simply because he cannot discuss everything at once.)

David Crossley, University of Saskatchewan

Date: Fri, 3 May 1996 13:15:35 -0500 (CDT)

From: [JA Good](#)

Bo Dahlin wrote:

> This seems very close to what interests me about Kant. I feel that his
> notion of the relation between "sense" and "understanding" has
> devastated our cognitive relations to just about everything, and it has
> destructive
> consequences for educational practice too. It separates "rational
> thinking" from sense-experience and thereby contributes to the feeling
> of alienation and separation between consciousness and world.

As someone with a love of philosophy I am amazed at your analysis of Kant's impact on society. While I would like to think philosophers are so important, I find it hard to believe.

Further, it seems to me that the "passive spectator theory of knowledge" (I believe Bertrand Russell coined this term) is what troubles you about education. This characterization of knowledge is rather clear in Locke's epistemology, and could probably be traced further back than that. It is simply the belief that in order to gain knowledge, we must subdue our emotions. If this is taken to its logical conclusion (something few philosophers have probably actually done), it means that we should subdue our interests, if we want to gain knowledge. Clearly, this is an odd way to think about learning. It is precisely the opposite of Dewey's view of learning. In fact, he responded explicitly to the passive spectator theory.

Jim Good, Rice University

Date: Fri, 3 May 1996 13:15:07 -0500 (CDT)

From: [JA Good](#)

Nathan Freeburg wrote:

> ok. I don't think I said that it can be proven that all true
>propositions are tautological in nature, but that is my "gut feeling." I
>think you could make a
> case that all propositions can be reduced to mathematical statements.
>As for the two examples that you gave--I'll send a second post tomorrow
>attempting to
> demonstrate how they are tautological. As for the proposition "All true
> propositions are tautologies," if one defines "true proposition" as
>being equivalent to "tautology with true premises." Then it works out
>like this: the set of tautologies with true premises is a member of the
>set of tautologies. This is interesting--and I could be totally wrong
>but I like my case for now.

Nathan:

I have to respond to this because I think you are on remarkably shaky ground. First, how can a proposition (in this case a tautology) have premises? Second, you seem to be defending a rather radical coherentist view of truth and knowledge. Because from your position, as you've stated it so far, truth seems to be entirely circular. Moreover, you seem to be assuming a radical version of logical atomism, in which words are discrete entities with very clearly established bounds. Mathematical might tend to be this way, but very few words outside of mathematics are so clearly defined. I think if you look at the historical development of symbolic logic, you'll find that logicians are more and more inclined to concede the impossibility of translating natural language into mathematical symbolism without some "residue" of meaning left behind. Didn't the later Wittgenstein do serious damage to your position?

Jim Good, Rice University

Date: Wed, 8 May 1996 10:06:21 +0200

From: [Bo Dahlin](#)

On Friday, May 3, JA Good wrote :

>

>> This seems very close to what interests me about Kant. I feel that his
>> notion of the relation between "sense" and "understanding" has devastated
>> our cognitive relations to just about everything, and it has destructive
>> consequences for educational practice too. It separates "rational
>> thinking" from sense-experience and thereby contributes to the feeling of
>> alienation and separation between consciousness and world.

Good's response was, in part:

>As someone with a love of philosophy I am amazed at your analysis of
>Kant's impact on society. While I would like to think philosophers are so
>important, I find it hard to believe.

My statement was not an analysis but an oversimplification of a more complex fact. Of course one person, even a 'great philosopher' cannot have that kind of impact all alone. It seems that Kant's ideas corresponds well to a 'common feeling' or a subconscious thinking of many people in the Western hemisphere, that's why he became so 'important'. On the other, since he was the one who gave a

'clear' philosophical voice to these feelings and inklings, he gave strength and authority to that point of view, and contributed to making it a kind of dogma.

Good went on to say:

>Further, it seems to me that the "passive spectator theory of knowledge"
>(I believe Bertrand Russell coined this term) is what troubles you about
>education.

No, not really. It is rather that the Kantian view turns (scientific) thinking into a merely *formal* activity, because concepts in themselves are considered 'empty'. It motivates a destructive separation between *thinking* and *experience*, turning thinking into an abstract, formal process, devoid of its own experiential qualities. Which it essentially is not, or rather need not be, if we really allow ourselves to experience our thinking. Cf Heidegger's "What is called thinking", where he says that one of the most thoughtprovoking facts about our time is that we do not yet think!

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Date: Wed, 8 May 1996 09:56:04 +0200
From: [Hartmut Krech](#)

David Crossley wrote:

> My suspicion is that some of
> the worries that seem to be floating about on this list in respect of
> Kant would dissolve if we kept clear this distinction between (i) what we
> can separate out through analysis and (ii) what things are able to exist,
> play causal roles, or whatever, all by themselves, separately and
> independently of certain other things, processes, and events.

You missed the point. On an intellectual history list, the question never s whether "we" can separate

etc. and whether "things are" such and such. Leave the car insurance business and return to Kant, please.

With respect to Bo Dahlin's (bo.dahlin@hks.se) original question, I should like to add that it is indisputable that Kant's epistemology is correlativistic with respect to Sinnlichkeit and Verstand: either extreme requires its opposite for its own proper functioning. Nevertheless it can be demonstrated that Kant's anthropology (which he himself called the foundation of his system and which is an application of his Erkenntnis- theorie) did have "devastating effects" because it helped to found racial characteristics. It did make a difference that he wrote about Germans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Jews more so than about human beings. It is this aspect of his theory which I explained in my dissertation by placing it in the contemporaneous context established by Baumgarten and Lambert. In no way must intention obliterate fact.

Dr. Hartmut Krech

Date: Wed, 8 May 1996 19:09:24 EDT

From: [Scott Wayland](#)

The recent posts on tautology provide an opportunity to highlight some basic issues. I agree with Nathan Freeburg that it might be useful to turn from apparently non-tautological cases to apparently tautological ones. He mentions the example "A triangle has three sides" (another might do just as well). Although other understandings of tautology are possible, this proposition is tautologically true in the way I specified previously--true just in virtue of what it says.

Previously Nathan challenged the proposition's tautological status by pointing out that we can imagine a language or "world" in which "triangle" means a four-sided figure rather than a three-sided one. In that context, the example would not be tautologically true in the specified way. But other important points follow. First, in a context in which "triangle" means "four-sided figure," the corresponding tautology would be "A triangle has four sides"--and so on for similarly redefined words. By the same token, in our language or world "A triangle has three sides" is tautological as it stands. So we cannot eliminate tautologies that way.

Can they be eliminated on other grounds? According to Nathan's more recent post, the idea of a single tautological proposition is "an impossibility." The reason why it is supposed to be impossible isn't completely clear to me, though perhaps that is supposed to follow from some notion of linguistic holism. But even if we think of meanings as interrelated within a web of language, as in the discussion of the four-sided triangle above, it is still possible to distinguish individual propositions. The particular one we've picked out--"A triangle has three sides"--is true as it stands because of what it says. It does not require additional propositions to make it true. And other kinds of tautology are possible in any event. So we cannot rule out tautologies that way either.

Is there a good reason to view this as an all-or-nothing matter anyway--all tautologies or no

tautologies? Difficult cases occur, of course, and various distinctions need to be sorted out. Even so, some distinctions between tautological and non-tautological pieces of discourse seem to be viable.

Scott Wayland

Date: Thu, 9 May 1996 14:56:04 -0500 (CDT)

From: [JA Good](#)

On Wed, 8 May 1996 Bo Dahlin wrote:

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>
> On Friday, May 3, JA Good responded to this
> passage in what Bo Dahlin wrote:
> >
> >> This seems very close to what interests me about Kant. I feel that his
> >> notion of the relation between "sense" and "understanding" has
devastated
> >> our cognitive relations to just about everything, and it has destructive
> >> consequences for educational practice too. It separates "rational
> >> thinking" from sense-experience and thereby contributes to the feeling
of
> >> alienation and separation between consciousness and world.
>
> . . . the Kantian view turns (scientific)
> thinking into a merely *formal* activity, because concepts in themselves
> are considered 'empty'. It motivates a destructive separation between
> *thinking* and *experience*, turning thinking into an abstract, formal
> process, devoid of its own experiential qualities. Which it essentially is
> not, or rather need not be, if we really allow ourselves to experience our
> thinking. Cf Heidegger's "What is called thinking", where he says that one
> of the most thoughtprovoking facts about our time is that we do not yet
> think!
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I'm willing to grant that Kant perhaps articulated the distinction between thought and experience more clearly and rigidly than previous philosophers, but he merely took the distinction further than those who went before him. For Kant, however, what is "merely formal" is pure concepts. This actually gives importance to experience which must give content to the concepts.

Your point about our not being able to experience our thinking, a la Kant, also applies to Locke, does

it not? The British "empirical" tradition is more properly called "sensationalism." The only experiences that can be veridical are those which originate from the senses. Consequently, all sorts of "merely subjective" experience is marginalized at best.

My point is that the "alienation and separation of consciousness from world" is certainly in Kant, (this is precisely what bothered Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, et. al. about Kant) and is certainly problematic, but not particularly original with him. Think about Descartes's solipsism. Or Locke's indirect (or causal) theory of perception. Because of this view of perception, Hume demonstrates, Locke cannot account for the existence of the external world. If anything, Kant tried (unsuccessfully I concede) to correct this problem in the project of modern philosophy. In order to get past it you must look to philosophers such as Heidegger (as you mentioned), and Dewey, who abandon "sensationalism," Cartesian subjectivism, and see thought as a type of action as legitimate as any other type. Also, I believe, there are a number of twentieth-century analytic philosophers who have gone a long way toward correcting these problems -- Sellars, Ryle, Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, etc. I've no idea, however, if their debunking has filtered over into educational theory. It seems that scholars outside of philosophy departments pay little attention to Anglo-American analytic thought.

Respectfully,
Jim Good

Date: Thu, 9 May 96 09:35:31 -0400
From: [Hughie Lawson](#)

I continue to struggle with a question about Kant. Why was it so important to him to firmly ground knowledge?

It has always seemed to me that the Critique of Pure Reason (CPR) begs the question whether such grounded knowledge exists.

As I see it, the argument is something like this:

Maj. Premise. Firmly grounded knowledge exists. [We just know this.]

Min. Premise. The cpr identifies the only logically possible way for such knowledge to exist. [See long, masterly, subtle arguments in cpr.]

Hence the cpr theory of grounded knowledge is correct. Q.E.D.

It has always amazed me that this argument was so persuasive to others. Hume was content to get along without rational grounding for say causation. Why wasn't Kant? Was it the *job* of a German university philosophy professor to ground knowledge? Was Kant afraid that absent grounded scientific knowledge the intellectual field would be dominated by religious enthusiasts?

I ask these questions because what I've found to read on Kant is so technically concerned with

argumentation and doctrine that it never explains the cultural context within which his books achieved canonical status. It seems to me this is preeminently a question of intellectual history.

Request critique, and references that I have missed in my autodidactical reading about Kant! Hughie Lawson, Murray State

Date: Fri, 10 May 1996 00:35:32 -0500 (CDT)

From: [Nathan Freeburg](#)

This is in response to the following message:

>I have to respond to this because I think you are on remarkably shaky
>ground. First, how can a proposition (in this case a tautology) have
>premises? Second, you seem to be defending a rather radical coherentist
>view of truth and knowledge. Because from your position, as you've
>stated it so far, truth seems to be entirely circular. Moreover, you
>seem to be assuming a radical version of logical atomism, in which words
>are discrete entities with very clearly established bounds. Mathematical
>might tend to be this way, but very few words outside of mathematics
>are so clearly defined. I think if you look at the historical
>development of symbolic logic, you'll find that logicians are more and
>more inclined to concede the impossibility of translating natural language
>into mathematical symbolism without some "residue" of meaning left
>behind. Didn't the later Wittgenstein do serious damage to your
>position?

1. I was using "proposition" in a loose sense.
2. I would state that truth is entirely circular but wouldn't that fit in more with a correspondence framework than a coherentist?
3. Your third point dovetails with mine. Yes of course Wittgenstein et al felt that you could not translate natural language into mathematical symbols. In other words, you cannot construct syllogisms with natural language. So we're right back to dealing with mathematical syllogisms which I would argue are all tautological.

I should probably shut up now--after all I'm a lowly history student, not an analyticist.

Nathan Freeburg
Marquette University

Date: Tue, 14 May 1996 01:01:31 -0500 (CDT)

From: [Nahan Freeburg](#)

>The recent posts on tautology provide an opportunity to highlight some
>basic issues. I agree with Nathan Freeburg that it might be useful
>to turn from apparently non-tautological cases to apparently
>tautological ones. He mentions the example "A triangle has three
>sides" (another might do just as well). Although other understandings
>of tautology are possible, this proposition is tautologically true in
>the way I specified previously--true just in virtue of what it says.

Well, I'm going to continue to throw myself to the wolves (I mean that nicely, I'm enjoying this immensely) by disputing this.

>Previously Nathan challenged the proposition's tautological status
>by pointing out that we can imagine a language or "world" in which
>"triangle" means a four-sided figure rather than a three-sided one.
>In that context, the example would not be tautologically true in the
>specified way. But other important points follow. First, in a
>context in which "triangle" means "four-sided figure," the
>corresponding tautology would be "A triangle has four sides"--and so
>on for similarly redefined words. By the same token, in our language
>or world "A triangle has three sides" is tautological as it stands.
>So we cannot eliminate tautologies that way.

However, once you've redefined "triangle" as "four-sided figure", don't you have an entirely new proposition? I can take the tautological phrase "All bachelors are unmarried men" and imagine a language where "bachelor" would refer to "married woman." Don't I then have an entirely different phrase? In the same fashion, I could make any phrase become equivalent to another phrase and thus all that I've established is the tautology, "X is the term for what is meant by X." But as soon as you start talking about meanings for "X" then you've opened another can of worms.

>Can they be eliminated on other grounds? According to Nathan's more recent post, the idea of a single tautological proposition is "an impossibility." The reason why it is supposed to be impossible isn't completely clear to me, though perhaps that is supposed to follow from some notion of linguistic holism. But even if we think of meanings as interrelated within a web of language, as in the discussion of the four-sided triangle above, it is still possible to distinguish individual propositions. The particular one we've picked out--"A triangle has three sides"--is true as it stands because of what it says. It does not require additional propositions to make it true. And other kinds of tautology are possible in any event. So we cannot rule out tautologies that way either.

For the proposition "A triangle has three sides" to be true, there has to be a proposition behind the term "triangle" and one behind the term "three sides." At this point, I should probably consult Quine on this. I have the feeling that I'm discussing on a very simplistic level what has already been run through many a time by the analyticists.

>Is there a good reason to view this as an all-or-nothing matter anyway--all tautologies or no tautologies? Difficult cases occur, of course, and various distinctions need to be sorted out. Even so, some distinctions between tautological and non-tautological pieces of discourse seem to be viable.

That's what I'm not sure about. The early Wittgenstein would appear to view all true propositions as being tautological; did the late Wittgenstein take the opposite view? Also, I think that Rorty would have to deny the existence of tautologies.

Nathan Freeburg

Date: Thu, 16 May 1996 18:59:43 EDT

From: [Scott Wayland](#)

Several interesting threads have emerged from the original question about Kant's synthetic a priori. These comments are specifically in response to the discussion of tautologies.

We can think of a language in which a word has an entirely different meaning than it has in our own (e.g., "triangle" as "four-sided figure" or "bachelor" as "married woman"). But this point, reiterated by Nathan Freeburg, is not an argument against tautologies. I used his "triangle" example to show

that, although a word's alternate meaning prevents some tautologies in our language from working in the alternate language, that same alternate meaning enables other propositions to work tautologically in the alternate language. The word (and propositions of which it is a part) thus works differently in different languages; but that poses no threat to tautology, since tautologies can be generated for either meaning. The important point here is not primarily about stipulated or nonce meanings, which are exceptional cases. It is about meanings in use within different languages.

That propositions operate within a larger linguistic context is not an argument against tautologies either. To count as meaningful propositions, "A triangle has three sides" and "It is raining outside" each require a language in which those words make sense; and the elements of a language are indeed interrelated in various ways. But within the context of the English language, no additional specific propositions are required to make those individual propositions true. In standard English the former proposition is tautologically true, In standard English the former proposition is tautologically true, the latter empirically true (or not). Within a different language, as indicated above, the meaning or status of the propositions might differ. And of course individual propositions can be gathered into sets of tautologically related propositions and formal arguments.

The later Wittgenstein is relevant to this discussion, as Jim Good has noted. Wittgenstein's later emphasis on the complexity and variety within language is important for philosophy and the history of ideas, not least because it leaves behind the kind of reductionist model of language made influential by his own earlier work.

Scott Wayland

Date: Thu, 16 May 1996 10:16:30 +0200

From: [Bo Dahlin](#)

Jim Good wrote:

>I'm willing to grant that Kant perhaps articulated the distinction
>between thought and experience more clearly and rigidly than previous
>philosophers, but he merely took the distinction further than those who
>went before him.

Not 'merely', he did take it FURTHER, that's my point.

>For Kant, however, what is "merely formal" is pure

>concepts. This actually gives importance to experience which must give
>content to the concepts.

Exactly. But my point is that even pure concepts are EXPERIENCES.

>My point is that the "alienation and separation of consciousness from
>world" is certainly in Kant, (this is precisely what bothered Fichte,
>Schelling, Hegel, et. al. about Kant) and is certainly problematic, but not
>particularly original with him.

Yes, but for us now, 'Kant' is the main figure behind this alienation.

>If anything, Kant tried (unsuccessfully I
>concede) to correct this problem in the project of modern philosophy.

Unsuccessfully, and in the wrong way, with the wrong premisses, I would say.

Thanks for your remarks!

Sincerely
Bo Dahlin Bo Dahlin
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Date: Sat, 18 May 1996 13:23:26 +0200

From: [Hartmut Krech](#)

Bo Dahlin wrote:

> >My point is that the "alienation and separation of con--sciousness from

> >world" is certainly in Kant [...] but not particularly original with him.
>
> Yes, but for us now, 'Kant' is the main figure behind this alienation.
>
> >If anything, Kant tried (unsuccessfully I
> >concede) to correct this problem in the project of modern philosophy.
>
> Unsuccessfully, and in the wrong way, with the wrong premisses, I would say.

It is a strange kind of argument to discuss Kant without making explicit reference to Kant.

As regards the concept of *influence* in the history of ideas, would you say that Kant's writings could be held responsible for a multitude of (sometimes conflicting) consequences ? And how do you account for the fact that Kant initially recurred to the anthropic principle of a common root for sense and understanding ?

Regards,

Date: Wed, 22 May 1996 09:20:22 +0200

From: [Bo Dahlin](#)

Hartmut Krech wrote:

>It is a strange kind of argument to discuss Kant without making explicit
>reference to Kant.

I don't know what is strange or not in a list-discussion. I have seen many arguments about various thinkers without explicit references. For me it is a matter of time and energy. If I was deeply involved in research on Kant at the moment I would probably have references at hand and use them. As it is now, I have to go more or less on intuition, or leave the discussion unanswered. Of course, any serious discussion would need more specific references, I agree entirely.

>As regards the concept of *influence* in the history of ideas, would you
>say that Kant's writings could be held responsible for a multitude of
>(sometimes conflicting) consequences ?

Responsibility is a moral concept, and I don't know if it applies here or not. I was thinking more in terms of cause and effect. Not that Kant's writings were the *original* cause, but they gave additional strength to the views and conceptions already mentioned in previous messages. As for conflicting consequences, isn't it just a matter of different interpretations? But some interpretations become more dominant or prevalent than others.

>And how do you account for the fact
>that Kant initially recurred to the anthropic principle of a common root
>for sense and understanding ?

I can't account for that fact. But as far as I understand, this common root idea was a matter of *speculation* for Kant. That is, he left the question open, didn't he?

Best regards

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