

# Ethical, Scientific and Theological Reflections on Kant's Canon of Pure Reason<sup>12</sup>

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## Introduction

In this essay, I surveyed Kant's ideas in *Canon of Pure Reason* (Canon) in the context of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), specifically I focused on one possible Kantian suggestion on ethics, science and theology. In the theological part, I attempted a defense of cartesian ontological argument from Kant's attack. The essay is divided into two parts: the first part consists of the first 2 sections after "Introduction" the necessary interpretive groundwork to the second part, the suggestions aforementioned.

## Constitutive-Regulative Distinction

In CPR, besides the phenomena-noumena distinction, the constitutive-regulative division of judgments is of utmost importance. According to Robert Brandom the classical thoughts to which Kant is heir have long given predication two roles, one to constitute the content of thought and the other to endorse this content.<sup>3</sup> This leads to a dilemma. I would reuse Brandom's heuristic syllogism here:

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Wei Sun of Mountain View, CA and Yu Chen of Beijing, China for fruitful and inspiring discussions.

<sup>2</sup> In the midst of this global pandemic and political unrest, I hope this work could give people some fresh air through hopefully an enlightenment on ideas of Kant, who is well-known for his contribution to the Enlightenment and hence the American Revolution. Kantian philosophy in its vicinity pioneered a new definition of human, and hence, a new standard of a good government. Through its connection with American pragmatism, these ideas were relevant in Dewey's time only a few decades ago and arguably still is today. I wish this paper could elicit meaningful reflections on the human condition and democracy, two indispensable subject matters worthy of thought.

<sup>3</sup> Brandom, 4-5

1. If  $Pa$  then  $Pb$
  2.  $Pa$
- $\therefore Pb$  4

The problem would be to stipulate that the predicative operator  $P$  do two tasks *whenever* instantiated, one to constitute the problematic content of judgment, the other to endorse this content, i.e. judging it to be true. Now let us suppose the top two clauses were endorsed to be true. This then would lead to a dilemma as in the first clause the operator  $P$  must in no case endorse, as the conditional has to have  $Pa$  as a problematic antecedent whereas in the second clause  $P$  supposedly endorsed. Surely this dilemma only arises if we neglect the context of  $P$  with regards to where it is in a syllogism, but let us for the time being suppose it is context-free logic. Kant's method of contravening this results in his distinction between the reason (capable of regulative judgments) and understanding (capable of constitutive judgments), in which reason has dynamic, regulative principles with respect to *intuition* and dynamic, constitutive principles with respect to *experience*, and the understanding has the mathematical principles constitutive with respect to *intuition* only.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the understanding, which is constitutive, uses dynamic principles of reason to constitute concepts of experience, while the mathematical principle of itself is used to constitute concepts of intuition, as in the case of Newtonian mechanics, the gravitational force, an empirical concept, is to be seen as a constituted by understanding according to dynamic principles, whereas the objects carrying out the movement, subject to force having mass is a concept constituted according to mathematical principles.<sup>6</sup> The another important idea is that regulative judgment is dedicated to asserting already-made propositions by understanding, with these being either problematic, necessary or assertory. The key difference between the two is that the regulative judgments has nothing to do with giving the concepts any more content. The example used by Kant is this: picture

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Friedman, 78-9

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, 81-2

in your mind one stack of 100 dollars and suppose you have another stack on the table in front of you, in two cases, are the concepts of “one stack of 100 dollars” different in terms of their contents? Kant’s answer is no. The very regulative judgment asserting “‘one stack of 100 dollars’ is ‘there’” does nothing with regards to make the concept “one stack of 100 dollars” any different. The concept involved in the imaginary 100 dollars is identical to that in the on-the-table 100 dollars.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, the task of reason is regulative on experience insofar as it is responsible for us, the discursive, “concept-mongering” creatures that Brandom talks about in both theoretical judgments and practical actions according to transcendental law.<sup>8</sup> The very law itself is hidden from sight, but it is indispensable even in the above heuristic device when we need to ‘go’ from clause 1 to clause 2, and suppose now we’ve erased ∴ and we ignore the dilemma that was in question, while I tell you to write down the correct answer in that line, the very working of your thought in this case would be through this regulative use of reason.

We would normally take canon to mean rules, laws or standards, a testament to God’s revelation, whereas there is a lesser known option of taking it to mean ‘cane’<sup>9</sup>, as if an instrument of a divine *agent*. The canon we see in the title of Canon, I contend could be seen as the transcendental law of pure reason which is beyond the extent of experience yet presumably governs our every transitioning of the mind and changing of the world, also known as pure moral laws:

I assume that there are really pure moral laws, which determine completely a priori (without regard to empirical motives, i.e., happiness) the action and omission, i.e., the use of the freedom of a rational being in general, and that these laws command absolutely (not merely hypothetically under the presupposition of other empirical ends), and are thus necessary in every respect.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kant, 567, A600/B628

<sup>8</sup> Brandom, 7

<sup>9</sup> In ancient Greek, *Kanna* means cane, *Kanon* means measuring rod, with both being attributed as ancestors to the English word canon.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, 678, A807/B835

Our being subjugated to this mystical ‘cane’ could then be seen as God’s immanent presence in human life. To take canon to mean cane rather than simply law, we commit ourselves to Kant’s immanent, moral theology. The logic proper, general logic hidden from view governing reason as opposed to transcendental logic it seems is *hard-wired* into our brain as a basic, if not evolutionary feature of human. So a Kantian philosopher in theory would only appreciate the hilarity when someone comments to make a point, “learn logic!”

### **Failure of Speculative Proofs of God’s Existence**

In CPR, Kant is famous for his “all-destroyer” arguments, which extinguished any flame of hope, at least according to Kant’s theory, in the possibility of proving God’s existence through theoretical use reason. In the Section IV-V of Chapter 3 in *Doctrine of Elements* of CPR, the working method of Kant in this bull-doing project is as follows: first the ontological argument (OA) is discredited using Kant’s philosophy, and then cosmological argument (CA) is reduced logically first to OA, and then since OA was already discredited, CA was as well. And finally, the physico-theological argument (PA), though Kant shared a good deal of sympathy with, was again reduced to OA, and then invalidated. I will now give an account of how this works. It was not clear as to exactly which syllogism he was attacking. In *Doctrine of Elements* there were at least three notions of what the proponents of OA try to prove: “*highest being*”, “*original being*”, or “*ens realissimum*.” I take it that Kant is in disapproval of the conclusion that “from things in this world, there must be one, final being existing”.

This archetypical argument of OA goes as follows:

1. All things necessarily have one absolute cause.
2. This cause exists
- ∴ This cause is God

According to Kant, the argument is invalid in three aspects. First, there is a dialectical illusion as a result of misidentifying regulative and constitutive judgments.<sup>11</sup> The constitutive judgment of understanding works to constitute the content of a concept as we have mentioned. the constitutive is the only determinative type of judgment in the determination of concept, i.e. the judgment of understanding that determines what is *in* the concept. The understanding as we have seen has two principles regarding constituting concepts, the *mathematical*, pertaining to the quality and the quantity part of conceptual contents and the *dynamic*, pertaining to the modal and relational conceptual contents.<sup>12</sup> The mathematical principles could *only* be constitutive with respect to intuition, whereas the dynamic principles could be *either* regulative with respect to intuition *or* constitutive with respect to experience.<sup>13</sup> Let us re-examine the first claim OA purports: “all things must have cause.” Now this is definitely an *a priori* judgment given the necessity of such a claim as Kant claims all objects in intuition must be conditioned and therefore contingent. By the constitutive use of dynamic principles with respect to experience we must have the contentful concepts in place in order for concepts of experience to be given,<sup>14</sup> and therefore the original cause here whose existence we ascertain has no conceptual content based on appearances. But since clearly by definition, the regulative judgment of reason does not constitute, and therefore this does not confer the ‘cause’ in question in “all things have a cause” any content, which here is a mere made-up postulate of pure reason which is empty, the like of “noumenal objects” which has no truth-valueless.<sup>15</sup> To be fair, I think in cases we could make up imaginary objects whose truth is subject to observation such as “an electron with a positive charge” in physics, yet in the case of an original cause, even it is conferred empirical data by our understanding then it must be appearances which as we have said, must in this

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<sup>11</sup> Kant, 576-8

<sup>12</sup> Friedman, 79

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 75-9

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Hanna, Section “Kinds of Use”

case be conditioned by other objects, i.e. have a cause. But then this therefore could not be God as God must be absolute, that is, unconditioned. However, it is not mentioned here the possibility of the cause being a subjective representation which in this case makes the argument plausible, but which was not brought to our attention by Kant. I contend that by relegating it to a weaker version the original, stronger OA which is based on subjective, *a priori* causality, Kant may have discredited his attack on OA in general.<sup>16</sup> In fact the designation of a subjective, *a priori* and ideal postulated finality was exactly what Kant used in his own moral theology, which I will demonstrate towards the end of the essay. I will then also give a stronger Cartesian OA compatible with Kant's theoretical framework. Let us, as we are recounting Kant's ideas settle now for Kant's idea that the 'cause' in question is nothing but an empty signifier. As manifest in 2, this idea, according to Kant, was nonetheless set up as an empty concept where its existence, which is actually never an attribute *in* concept, is presupposed:

one has made a concept a priori of a thing that was set up so that its existence was comprehended within the range of its meaning, one believed one could infer with certainty that because existence necessarily pertains to the object" of this concept, i.e., under the condition that I posit this thing as given (existing), its existence can also be posited necessarily (A594/B622).<sup>17</sup>

Proponents of this version of OA, in Kant's view, is simply playing the game of making up empty concepts and derive from the concept which presupposes existence, existence. In fact the whole empty concept of "a necessary being" could be negated without incurring any logical difficulty, as the necessity is inserted in the subjective constitution through constitutive judgments based off of this empty idea. Here we could see Kant's perhaps clever taxonomy of forms of judgments, as the genus of this existence-smuggling predication is constitutive judgment, which does as little as

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<sup>16</sup> The original Cartesian OA goes as follows, emphasizing the subjectivity of his proof, "[b]ut if the mere fact that I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one that I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature." From Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and (for vol. 3) Anthony Kenny, eds. and trans., 1984. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1–3, 4–45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, 565.

constituting concepts whose existence is yet asserted by regulative judgment of experience. As it is mentioned, imagined 100 dollars as a concept is the *same* as the concept part of actual 100 dollars *there* whose existence is asserted.<sup>18</sup>

The CP, following the same fashion as OA that is, for all existing beings, they as a whole as a contingent being, must be conditioned by one absolute being which has no antecedent. This only starts from experience, and transcends the object so that we again go on the same discursive, theoretical thought-process that embodies the same syllogism of OA (CP is now reduced to OA), which finally leads to the same “final stop”, which we did not and perhaps never will we be able to experience as the requirement of such a final stop to be an absolute that is unconditioned final nexus cannot be satisfied in the project of tracing down every single causal chain that links every contingent real thing, since an empirical object “has to be considered as necessarily conditioned,” and “no thing can be regarded as absolutely necessary.”<sup>19</sup> That was Kant’s attack on OA and CP.

From formal perspective clause 1 in the syllogism above could be reformulated as,  $\exists x \forall y (x \rightarrow y)$ , where  $y$  symbolizes all the logical constants in the world. Such a proposition is necessary, and apodeictic. Then we could easily use existential instantiation to derive:  $\forall y (a \rightarrow y)$ , where  $a$  is a constant term. And here then the burden is shifted to the problem of what the logical constant would mean here. Normally all things are intuitable insofar as it could be instantiated using  $a$ . Then in terms of logical deduction, if  $\exists x \forall y (x \rightarrow y)$  is necessary, of course it follows that  $\forall y (a \rightarrow y)$ . Then there is an empirical object existing that is just the highest being we are looking for. The problem according to Kant is that the  $a$  is impossible insofar as it must be conditioned and therefore not absolute. Yet his argument only is successful if this is true. Yet I do not see such to be anything other than a postulate which has the same status as “there must be a God.”

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<sup>18</sup> Kant, 567, A600/B628

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 570, A605/B633

The problem then could also seem to be what do we mean when we say, “there is necessarily an original being” which can also be changed into, changing synonyms, “there must be a Creator”. Now it might be clear what is at problem here. The “necessary” here is not really the same in terms of semantics as in “it is necessary that triangles have three sides.” In the latter case, by bearing the word necessary it fits Kant’s taxonomy in his concepts of understanding: the modal in the Table of Logical Functions, “apodeictic,” meaning “clearly established, beyond dispute” is the *correct* moment that “necessary” in the Table of Categories correspond to. Now in the case that “there is necessarily an original being” the mood of the statement is clearly very dubious, lacking the Wittgensteinian “picture” compared to the axiomatic, geometrical necessary. To be fair, empty propositions like this do have utility as they are instead the *idea* of pure reason, which we will discuss in coming sections as well.<sup>20</sup> The whole argument could also seem a misconception in this way since “there is necessarily a cause of this thing here, now” rather than “there is one original cause of all real things” is apodictic. If we misuse this proposition as if constructing a chain of causality in hope of finding a final, unmoved mover we are simply doing this:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 \forall y \exists x (x \rightarrow y) & \\
 \exists x_0 (x_0 \rightarrow a) & \text{Existential Instantiation} \\
 \exists x_1 (x_1 \rightarrow x_0) & \\
 \exists x_2 (x_2 \rightarrow x_1) & \\
 \vdots &
 \end{array}$$

which simply does not follow, as  $x_i$  are free variables. Now here comes PA’s proponents, who actually, with scientific spirits that Kant greatly admire, instantiates these free variables, and who

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<sup>20</sup> Stang, Section “Transcendental Realism and Empirical Idealism”



organize these manifold, purposive structures into an “artful” unity so that it is as if a Creator’s work<sup>21</sup>:

This proof always deserves to be named with respect. It is the oldest, clearest and the most appropriate to common human reason. It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets its existence from this study and through it receives ever renewed force (A623/651).<sup>22</sup>

But still, the focus of these proponents is on the artful, formal aspect of this unity, then it would be either a being that is proportionate to us in this world as its “architect”,<sup>23</sup> and therefore only a Deistic god, or such artful aspect is only a subjective phenomenon, which proves nothing.

### **To Be or Not to Be: Ethical Canon**

Kant now leads us who are somewhat baffled by this pessimistic outlook on spirituality into the last section of the book, the Canon we have been anticipating. The more serious tone of CPR here becomes more interpersonal, when Kant encourages us, “do that through which you are worthy of happiness,” as an answer to “what should I do?” and “what should I hope?” The problems of speculative pure reason, as we have seen, would finally all point these pure ideals such as the proof of God’s existence. However as we have seen, no matter how hard we try to use our theoretical, pure reason the only three approaches to answering this final question, according to Kant are OA, CP and PA are all discredited. To wit, all knowledge must be based on sensible intuitions, and therefore metaphysics whose incorporeal nature empties our thought when we philosophize is unjustifiable within Kant’s system. In fact, there are three fundamental questions of interest, according to Kant to the pure use of reason, namely, “do I have free will?”, “is there an eternal life?”, “is there God?” We, according to Kant may have long misunderstood ourselves in the pursuit

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<sup>21</sup> Kant, 579

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 581, A627/B655

of these highest ideals. These intellects, when acquired generates little to no interest to us.<sup>24</sup> If we are free, that is, we get some intellectual insight, though to be sure there is no empirical intuition about it, into the transcendental first ground of causality of freedom whether it be thought or act.<sup>25</sup> To be sure we know nothing more insofar as the corporeal and hence the cognizable is concerned, that is the causation of representations be it external or internal generating from a mysterious singularity at the very center of our mind, in the dark. Such causality which we are perfectly good at cognizing is with this proof complete, needing no expansion. The problem of whether there being an eternal soul or not is also trivial, for what could we do with the knowledge? Notice here this is not trivial. Kant now in the Canon gives a new paradigm of knowledge that is, there are three stages of conviction: to have an opinion, to believe and to know. What this tells us is regarding the intelligibility of things in general when nothing about this intelligence is materialized there as if a gauge on which all human beings stare, what you have, since you lack this final piece of objective persuasion, you would only have a believe, no matter how strong is your internal justification. And therefore this entails that if God is there it must be purely supernatural hence incorporeal, and then the only thing left for us is highly probably a boost of belief in God, which we could always have through religious practices and reflections. The story of the conception Jesus interestingly reminds us about how realistic this theory is. If God wants to really intervene, getting his hands dirty, he will send his son as the *Salvator Mundi*, but even if that is the case, if one does not believe in Jesus one still does not get any utility out of this divine intervention. So we see that Kant clearly knows the importance faith in interaction with the divine. The mystical phenomenon of subjective belief is given absolutely. The key idea I think is this, the practical reason and theoretical reason now is unified to be the pure reason, and practical reason is only the the *practical use* of pure reason. I find some philosophers have overlooked this as an option to answer the theoretical-practical divide of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 676-7, A805/B44

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 673, A798/B826

ethical life as to how our mind determines mysteriously the very decision it gives us. It seems moral theories have no regulation on actions whatsoever: knowing what you should do does not mean doing what you should do, as Philippa Foot says, “then what.”<sup>26</sup>

Kant in first Critique makes the court analogy of mind:

Reason, in order to be taught by nature, must approach nature with its principles in one hand, according to which the agreement among appearances can count as *laws*, and, in the other hand, the experiment thought out in accord with these principles—in order to be instructed by nature not like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who *compels* witnesses to *answer the questions he puts to them* [B14].<sup>27</sup>

Reason is therefore like a judge, the judgment itself then must lead to a cognition of things that would *prima facie* claim the innocence of things. Things-in-themselves are the totality of nature, whereas appearances are witnesses, which are responsible to the questions of this judge, the “I” and the “you” whose minds are now about this paper. When the aboutness of our mind is now directed at any appearance of the mind, upon thinking, relevant facts are always given absolutely. The very shirt hanging on the wall when you read the paper, is there, and you are cognizant of it: you intuit it, that is it is not blind, as to intuit it is to see it. It is there. Whereas your mind is not about the shirt at this moment, as your mind supposedly, as you are reading, should be focusing on this paper instead. Now if we wander, supposing the room you are currently in has inevitably turned very cold, as someone else just opened the window, given that it is now winter. Then your mind is immediately about that very shirt, an objective appearance, and you think insofar as the following concepts are given, “this shirt can bring me warmth, I should wear it” The thought in this is that very questioning, *compelling* act that elicits all these cognitions that are now given to the mind, as if the appearance of witnesses of the court just spoke, and their voices are now heard in the court of mind. The normativity of reason is manifest therefore in this process. Reason, thought, has *authority*

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<sup>26</sup> Foot, *Transition into Humanbeings*,

<sup>27</sup> Kant, 109, B14

over the understanding insofar as understanding must give contents, i.e. concepts upon the very judging, the being-the-judge moments as a result of your judging, thinking. Now the practical reason, then, would bring this normativity to a new scenario. You, the judge, now wanders out of court after today's dismissal, you now again is yourself, a citizen under law. Therefore every being-the-agent moments replaces your being-the-judge moments. You walk on the street and now realizes it is you who are responsible to the acting, committing of your actions. You are perfectly cognizant of the fact that, if you now run over a child crossing the street in the neighborhood while checking e-mail in your car, your career may very well see its end very soon. And therefore you would resume to attentive driving, leaving it aside. The analogy ends here. The practical rationality then is the transcendental reason in its practical use. What it compels is no longer merely appearances, but your physical self in this world. The moral deliberations then would be then the same as reason in theoretical use, that is in your court of mind the appearances now answers your compelling. You think, "do this, then this would happen, do that, then that would happen," which are concepts of the mind brought to you by understanding. But the decisive moment is the final moment we choose the "this" over "that" or "that" over "this,"<sup>28</sup> the materialization of them in the form of your action as a material fact. Therefore the normativity of pure reason in its practical use is never any different than in the case of its theoretical use, to wit, they both give orders to the sensibility, the physicality of self which answers *absolutely* whatsoever. The answering of self in the case of theoretical use is the data of sensibility, and in the case of practical use is both data of sensibility and the action itself, which, to be sure, can only be known through sensibility. Therefore Putnam's brain-in-a-vase problem is therefore still valid here. The data of sensibility might very much be only data, but now what they seem to be. But Kant would agree that this problem is not of our concern, as they are not practical: remember the questions that pertains to noumena is inherently inscrutable. Let us all believe we are not brains-in-the-vases now but go back to Kant's moral philosophy.

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<sup>28</sup> Try think of "this" as "moving your hand" and "that" as "moving your legs, and take a break reading this paper."

Kant's verdict to how we are to live our lives in the Canon is this, "do that through which you will become worthy to be happy".<sup>29</sup> There are three aspects of moral life. First is free choice. The free choice, to be sure, is not something that is transcendental or incorporeal, but insofar as what is intuitable is concerned, in a Wittgensteinian fashion,<sup>30</sup> the free choice here-now-there-then is the representational function of the reason in terms of rational motives, as opposed animal impulses, similar to the concept of rational desire. The designation of free choice thereof then is insofar as it is believed by common sense that our actions are *far from* decided by the external, sensual matters, but the very motive of action and reason comes from somewhere within the mind, spontaneously, the "singularity" aforementioned. Therefore Kant later subjugates these intrapersonal knowledge to be a matter of belief, as far as there is no corporeal entity that embodies it visible to all people who have intuition, but to that extent, the only thing we could say is still a matter of belief, since the people there-then could very well be only an illusion, as their intentionality is not proved by their extensionality. By their saying "it is there" is simply a persuasion, rather than necessarily knowledge, as the utterance is only a material and therefore objective fact, and has nothing to do with the part which is super-physical, the intentionality, spontaneity of reason and mind. Now Kant conceives the moral life as follows:

Axiom: whether the efficient cause of an objective representation's being here, now is *my* action or thought, is clear.

1. **Happiness**, an ideal given through theoretical reasoning is the form of all ends. The end refers the satisfaction of *this* or *that* inclination.
2. The means to achieve these ends are given by reason through **pragmatic** laws, which is to be decided by pure reason in practical use.

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<sup>29</sup> Kant, 679, A809/B837

<sup>30</sup> Here I mean his therapeutic approach, i.e. "to say A" actually means "to reason so and so."

3. The use of pure reason in deciding which end to pursue is according to pure **moral** law, which is *a priori*.

Now, point 3 it seems is rather controversial. This is consistent with Kant's post-critical idea that the human will when it comes to decision is infallible, that is the moral law *proper* are inherent laws that governs the functioning of reason, transcendental and therefore hidden from view:

The good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end; it is good only because of its willing, i.e., it is good of itself. And, regarded for itself, it is to be esteemed incomparably higher than anything which could be brought about by it in favor of any inclination or even of the sum total of all inclinations.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore we have no cognitive resources when it comes to decide which one of the many options in the specific thing should we do. The “should”, then is to be seen *a priori* as the best choice, which I believe would be the pure hypothesis that Kant is proposing. The possibility of action, another term that Kant introduced, means the sum total of all the things *could* be encountered in the history of human beings. Notice this *could* here, which is critical in our understanding of Kant's idea. If this *could* is replaced with *used to*, then the meaning of the sentence is very different. The history, it seems, would be a pure concept. The could subordinates the should, Kant would agree, “[f]or since they command that these actions *ought* to happen, they must also be *able* to happen.”<sup>32</sup> This means every *should* is within the *could*. The *could* then symbolizes the form of *should*. This could seem a surprising conclusion, which is twofolds. Firstly, every decision we make is a moral, and hence good action. Then and secondly, it would seem our choice is not at all evaluated by the consequences it leads to. Neither action is justified nor unjustified with regards to what consequence it leads to, but rather

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<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, first section, third paragraph

<sup>32</sup> Kant, 678, A808/B836

action itself is infallibly good, as our decision, if free, is *absolutely* moral. I would use Thomas Nagel's example here:

However jewel-like the good will may be in its own right, there is a morally significant difference between rescuing someone from a burning building and dropping him from a twelfth-story window while trying to rescue him.<sup>33</sup>

Surely, with regards to Kant's theory in CPR, such conclusion is compliant. The moral actions are a subset of possible actions. How could that be? This I think could be Kant's attempt on a solution to some of the moral dilemmas when it comes to the standard of morality. Try find a standard of what it is to live a good life: doing good things. Then what is doing good? It rather consists in what end we choose. An important aspect we should notice is this, Happiness is not a result of fulfillment of inclination, and therefore its efficient cause must not be natural. One could very much have had 1 million dollars and still live a miserable life. The *this* money here does not make you happy, as you would still think, "I need to be rich", so as it is often the case, you would still speculate with this money in the financial market for even more money. But you could never be happy in terms of money. The end must be a concept, rather than a physical object itself. The idea of "doing this for what?" is interesting. Thomas Aquinas thinks that, I here paraphrase Philippa Foot, to be a human is to go after the good, while being an animal is to always choose *this* or *that* good.<sup>34</sup> It must be an ideal, a mediate concept, i.e. concept that builds upon other concepts rather than a concept that is immediate to objects for example *this* horse or *that* stack of money. But being rich, having meals, or being "great" could be ideals that are recommended by our pure reasons. To wit; we do not live to eat, but we eat to live. We could eat *this* chicken or *that* salad to better philosophize, but in doing this we are only choosing a concrete *means* to an end. But eat *this* chicken so as to eat chicken (not so as to eat *this* chicken) is a matter of free choice, which in this case could mean to choose a career of being a chicken-eater, which if that makes one happy, just go for it. I suppose Kant would not

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<sup>33</sup> Nagel, 2

<sup>34</sup> Foot, *Practical Rationality*

disagree to be the legendary John the Ripper, that is to carry out killing as your career is the same as to be a killing beast. The regulative judgment involved in this in terms of choosing and acting is just the same as in physico-theological proof, to do science in order to find a final cause, which is but an ideal that is a representation which is abstract of appearance. To be a human means to choose death, a representation that has the objective, empirical appearance in the deconstruction of the physicality of the body for democracy, -isms or glory, are among free choices. A dilemma here arises: to choose death to end suffering, the “thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,” versus to choose death for promoting democracy so that no humans will suffer from tyranny, which is more moral? I do think Shakespeare has a right point on this describing a troubled mind, “[w]hether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer [t]he slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, [o]r to take arms against a sea of troubles, [a]nd by opposing end them.”<sup>35</sup> That aside, Kant’s moral theory which could be interpreted as a liberating idea of respecting all human choices is ground-breaking.

### **Unreasonably Correct: Scientific Canon**

The usefulness of subjective belief in ideals is critical to science. The *doctrinal beliefs* that we stick to, just as what a doctor has subjectively in an attempt to treat the patient in an urgency is necessary in order that proceed:<sup>36</sup>

The doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger, but he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption. His belief is merely contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might per haps do better (A825/B853).<sup>37</sup>

The metric that applies to the subjective beliefs such as these is according to Kant, how much we would wager for it, “[t]he usual touchstone of whether what someone asserts is mere persuasion or at least subjective conviction, i.e., firm belief, is betting[,]” and sometimes the belief is strong

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<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare, “Speech: ‘To be, or not to be, that is the question’”

<sup>36</sup> Kant, 687.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



enough that a bet for ten ducat does not disconcert the asserter while in other cases only one ducat would disconcert him (A825/B853).<sup>38</sup> Kant then claimed the belief about there being extraterrestrial life is to be justified if there is a way to ascertain the matter in question, “[i]f it were possible to settle by any sort of experience whether there are inhabitants of at least some of the planets that we see, I might well bet everything that I have on it”(A825/B853).<sup>39</sup> Postulates like these are exactly what motivates science. When we assert, “there must be a couple of laws that all motion would stick to”, we endeavor to do theoretical science like Newton did. The non-sensical ideal that there is a relative speed (of an object) to its referential frame which, according to our referential frame should stay constant regardless is such an ideal immune to attack. As an ideal of pure reason, it is free from prosecution whatsoever. But when it is asserted, it must be reasonable, i.e. there must be a representation at least as to what this is for. And such a choice is very much given through pragmatics as a means that would best serve this goal.

The very idea of this constant speed of light in 1920s, and till this day would be crazy. Any half-wit of physics in the streets of Berlin would see this hypothesis as ridiculous. How could any speed of any particle in motion be constant relative to one referential frame be constant disregarding the referentiality in which that very particle is in motion in? Suppose I am a physicist in Berlin, and it is now 1900: good for me that Newton is not sacrosanct and it is now centuries after the Renaissance, so I face no peril of being burned at the stake. I, through contemplation as to how to do better science, decide to try postulate that speed of light is absolutely constant, *in vacuum* so it cannot even be falsified, and you, another physicist who says, “don’t be ridiculous, I could prove this with high school trigonometry in a minute that you are dead wrong.” So you now use the good old *reductio ad absurdum*, following the following diagram of this thought experiment of a light-clock traveling at speed  $v$  within an aircraft, and we do the following mathematical reasoning. Suppose that

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the aircraft travels at speed  $v$ , so we have the following result through Pythagorean theorem (see fig.1):  $D^2 + (vt'_1)^2 = (ct'_1)^2$ ,  $D^2 + (vt'_2)^2 = (ct'_2)^2$ , we have  $(ct_1)^2 = (vt'_2)^2 + (ct_1)^2$ , which is

$$c^2 t_2'^2 = c^2 t_1'^2 + v^2 t_2'^2, \text{ and we then have } t_1 = \frac{t_2'}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}}. \text{ The different labeling of } t \text{ is just for the sake of}$$

notational convenience. But now across different referential systems we should have  $t_1 = t_2 = t'_1 = t'_2$ , as time itself has no variation regarding the choice of referential frames. But here it seems that the time measured by the light-clock aboard the aircraft moving at speed  $v$  would be *shorter* than that measured by the same light-clock on Earth. “How could it be,” you press the question to me.

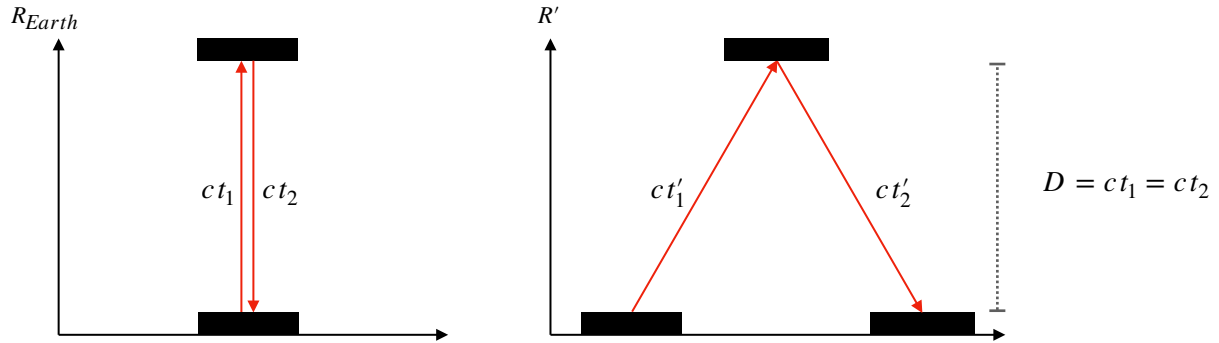


Fig. 1

In fact, the very thought experiment corresponds to Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, but in fact such effect of “time dilation” had been observed by multiple experiments. An early one of which is the Hafele-Keating experiment in 1971, in which they set a cesium atomic clock on board a scheduled commercial flight incessantly for 80.3 hours in total.<sup>40</sup> The observed time dilation sum total was, with respect to the prediction of a somewhat more complex version of our

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<sup>40</sup> Hafele & Keating

derivation which considers also the gravitational stretch-pull on time, in that case even stronger claim, only a difference of  $0.09\sigma$ , that is 0.09 times standard derivation.<sup>41</sup> Thus we see the theory about Kantian ideals is very much manifest in real life.

### **Kant's Wager: Agnostic Canon**

According to Kant, God, freedom and immortality of souls are such ideals similar to the ideal of there being an absolutely constant speed of light. In the case of practical use of reason, doctrinal belief is still important:

thus there is in merely theoretical judgments an analogue of practical judgments, where taking them to be true is aptly described by the word belief, and which we can call doctrinal beliefs (A825/B853).<sup>42</sup>

So much is clear: transcendental ideals are never to be proven. The very ascertainment of these ideals would commit ourselves to transcendental realism, the idea that we know must correspond to the transcendental *outer* object rather than the mere empirical *outer* object.<sup>43</sup> But the very postulate of God being there would be, according to Kant a skillful way for us to live more morally, which he says is but a “skill”.<sup>44</sup> Thus Kant, as we also have seen earlier does not ascertain God's existence. The faith in God is not to be seen as knowledge in God, yet the assent in faith in God's existence is nevertheless an assent that is indispensable.<sup>45</sup> So that he would wager God's existence in order to live a better life, and he would not wager the happiness of his entire life on this matter insofar as this alone would help him better carry out his practical maxim.<sup>46</sup> The Cartesian proof here then I think would be in fact sound, as to the very ideal of God is indispensable to life

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<sup>41</sup> A very small difference in statistics.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, 686-7

<sup>43</sup> Transcendental Idealism, SEP

<sup>44</sup> Kant, 686, A824/B852

<sup>45</sup> Pasternack, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*

<sup>46</sup> Kant, 687, A825/B853

and, as Kant agrees, belief itself “must have values of truth” if it is believe, which then the ideal of God existing as a belief, which is justified subjectively and highly to at least someone in the world, is this not to mean that the belief of God’s existence is derivative of an ultimate, which is God himself? What if we develop this formal system of logic to prove God’s existence from our identity? Here is a sketch. With Leibnizian numerical identity, the you yesterday is numerically different from you today, therefore if you think the you yesterday is John, then the you today is not John anymore, as the John yesterday has no identity with the John today at all. But John is John. The John yesterday is John, the John today *should* be also John, how then could this be. This much is clear, John this moment (the temporal part in space) exists, therefore John *should* exist. That is the inference that from John spatially exists we infer John spatial-temporally exists *must* be valid, then if this type of inference could be made, why could we not say in order that John spatial-temporally exists, God *must* exist? The conviction in these cases is what Kant would call *belief*, which according to Kant is only such if it passes the test of it being an *opinion*:

I must never undertake to have an opinion without at least knowing something by means of which the in itself merely problematic judgment acquires a connection with *truth* which, although it is not complete, is nevertheless more than an arbitrary invention (A823/B851).<sup>47</sup>

More importantly, the truth in question is defined as such:

Taking something to be true is an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds, but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of him who judges (A823/B851).<sup>48</sup>

More shockingly, Kant’s subjectivist tendency is further confirmed here:

Taking something to be *true*, or the *subjective validity of judgment*, has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing, and knowing. Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing. Finally, when taking something to be true is both

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 686

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone) [A823/B851].<sup>49</sup>

Then it seems, the truth of the judgment, “I persist” is a conviction, that is subjectively valid, insofar as we would wager enough on it, and then truth of judgment “God exists” is also relative to what you would wager on it. Then why is it that the first should be considered true while the latter is not? To be sure, in both cases we are using what is certain in a lower dimension to infer what is constant in a higher dimension. Then I do not see why this argument for God’s existence could be invalid. The “whether this very object is here when we see it” could only be ascertained insofar as we believe that it is here, which is the most reliable way of judging its being here. The *truth* of a judgment involving both subjective and objective fact is solely based on *subjective validity*, then why the pure internal belief devoid of objective magnitude all of a sudden invalid? If there is a numerical threshold that dictates the truth from non-truth, which number would it be? Then if “I think” is a subjective belief that is valid and true, then why cannot “there is a God” be true, as in the former, it comes down to “I believe that I think”, and the latter comes down to “I believe that there is a God.” I do not think Kant has solved this problem in his project, and neither do I think he successfully refuted the ontological argument from faith. The only thing that Kant tells us, if he thinks that we are indispensable when it comes to belief in God’s existence, then it shows us that belief is the thing that cannot be refuted or disproved, as we have seen, it has nothing to do with the objective, then in this case it only shows that “I think therefore I am”, as the belief in your being there is the one thing that you could not in anyway refute, as the very refutation would necessitate belief about refutation itself. If “it is not” is true, then “I think it is not” is true, then the “I think” is true, then “I think” being true is the only thing that is necessarily true in all cases. That is the thing we cannot refute, i.e. having the highest truth. And then all of a sudden why “God exists” be a thing that we can refute? I therefore do not think Kant has successfully attacked the ontological judgments’ proponents, as I

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

believe this is, at least, what Descartes is for as surely there cannot be an objective God standing in this world in my living room, actually nobody thinks “God” is there. If so, where is God? “I would therefore also be able to hope to have my knowledge extended to such a wonderful degree by his instruction” says Kant.<sup>50</sup> But Kant either misunderstood or intently caricatured the OAs. Kant himself would agree with the idea that “I think therefore I am”, that is the “I think” is the thing that cannot be refuted. And then the “I think”, if, is only based on subjective belief, then why can all of a sudden “God exists” being a subject matter of subjective belief be refuted? Let us say this, suppose we give subjective belief a metric calling it S-score. I define a poll that would generate S-score as such that in the poll the participants are asked to give a score from 0-10 with 5 decimal digits accuracy, that is the first number comes up in their mind representing their belief on the following factual statements: “God exists” and “I am thinking”. Suppose, on average the S-score of “I am thinking” is 9.8753 and the S-score of “God exists” is 9.3786,<sup>51</sup> how are we to say the any of the two statements is more favorable than the other? Questions like this must be answered by those in favor of Kant’s refutation.

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<sup>50</sup> Kant, 689, A829/B857

<sup>51</sup> This is of course subject to empirical experiments, but I do not think it would be hard to reach a similar result through some careful design of the polling question and the experimental techniques.

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