

# Phil 971 – Kantian Conceptualism

## Handout 4 – Kant

9.19.13

### 1 Kant – Overview

- Born 1724 in Königsberg, Prussia; Died 1804, also in Königsberg
- Attained professorship at the University of Königsberg in 1770
- Wrote the “critical” philosophical works relatively late in his career (1781-1790)
- Some relevant contemporaries
  - G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716)
  - Christian Wolff (1679-1750)
  - Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762)
  - John Locke (1632-1704)
  - David Hume (1711-1776)
  - Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

### 2 The Two-Stem Theory of Cognition

#### 2.1 Powers of the Mind<sup>1</sup>

**Receptivity:** Power of the mind to receive representations via affection from something distinct from itself

**Spontaneity:** Power of the mind to generate representations from itself without any external influence

#### 2.2 The Faculties

**Sensibility:** passive/receptive; sensory intuitions arise from the affection of sensibility by objects<sup>2,3</sup>

**Understanding:** active/spontaneous; conceptual judgments arise via discursive acts of the understanding<sup>4</sup>

**Objective representation:** A conscious representation of a mind-independent feature of (empirical) reality<sup>5</sup>

**Cognition [Erkenntnis]:** An objective representation, generated by the cooperation of both faculties, which may “conform with its object” (A58/B83)—i.e. be truth-apt

#### 2.3 Three Kinds of Representation (A320/B376-7)

**Sensation:** A perception “which relates to the subject merely as a modification of its state”

<sup>1</sup> Our cognition arises from two basic sources of the mind, of which the first is to receive the representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty of cognizing an object through these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the first an object is given to us, through the second it is thought in relation to that representation (as mere determination of the mind). (A50/B74).

<sup>2</sup> Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts (A19/B33).

<sup>3</sup> That representation which can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition (B132).

<sup>4</sup> Our nature is so constituted that our intuition can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to think the object of sensible intuition is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind (A51/B75).

<sup>5</sup> The genus is representation in general (**representatio**). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (**perceptio**). A perception that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation (**sensatio**); an objective perception is a cognition (**cognitio**). The latter is either an intuition or a concept (A320/B377).

**Intuition:** An objective representation which “relates immediately to the object and is singular”

**Concept:** An objective representation which is a “mediate [relation to an object], via a mark, which can be common to many things”

## 2.4 Representation and Consciousness

- Representation
  - Conscious: Immediate (non-inferential/independent of further representation) awareness of a representation R<sup>6</sup>
    - \* Representation of another representation(?)<sup>7</sup>
    - \* Clear: May or may not be identical with consciousness of R<sup>8</sup>
      - Distinct: Conscious representation of R and the component parts of R
        - sensible: sensory discrimination of the parts of a scene
        - intellectual: intellectual discrimination of the component marks of a concept
      - Indistinct: Conscious representation of R but not of its component parts
  - Unconscious: Mediate (inferential/dependent on a further representation) awareness of R
    - \* Obscure
      - i. lack of consciousness in representation
      - ii. Consciousness of representation but lack of consciousness of representation of sameness and difference (cf. B414-15 note)

<sup>6</sup> If I am conscious of a representation, it is clear, if not, [it is] obscure.

<sup>7</sup> Consciousness is actually the representation that another representation is in me. (JL 9:33).

<sup>8</sup> Clarity is not, as the logicians say, the consciousness of a representation; for a certain degree of consciousness, which, however, is not sufficient for memory, must be met with even in some obscure representations, because without any consciousness we would make no distinction in the combination of obscure representations...Rather a representation is clear if the consciousness in it is sufficient for **a consciousness of the difference** between it and others. To be sure, if this consciousness suffices for a distinction, but not for a consciousness of the difference, then the representation must still be called obscure. Hence, there are infinitely many degrees of consciousness down to its vanishing (B414-15, note).

## 2.5 Perception, Wahrnehmung, Perceptio

- The Leibnizian usage of ‘**perceptio**’ presumes only that the state is representational
- The Kantian usage of ‘**perceptio**’ tracks his usage of the German ‘**wahrnehmung**’, which requires that the subject be conscious (in one of the sense discussed above) of the representation (be it sensation, intuition, or concept)<sup>9</sup>
  - so the Kantian term ‘**wahrnehmung**’, often translated as ‘perception’, is not ‘perception’ as it is typically meant in English—viz. sensory apprehension of an object in space

<sup>9</sup> At its [Experience’s] base lies the intuition of which I am conscious, i.e. perception (**perceptio**) (Prolegomena, 4:300).

## 3 The Independence of the Stems

- The two stems of cognition play different functional roles with respect to cognition<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts (A19/B33).

- yield different kinds of representations<sup>11</sup>
- The status of intuition as a form of (objective) representation independent of the understanding is unclear
  - Intellectualism: All objective representation depends on an act of the understanding
  - Sensibilism: Some objective representations do not depend on acts of the understanding

<sup>11</sup> If we reflect on our cognitions in regard to the two essentially different basic faculties, sensibility and the understanding, from which they arise, then here we come upon the distinction between intuitions and concepts. Considered in this respect, all our cognitions are, namely, either intuitions or concepts. The former have their source in sensibility, the faculty of intuitions, the latter in the understanding, the faculty of concepts. This is the logical distinction between understanding and sensibility, according to which the latter provides nothing but intuitions, the former on the other hand nothing but concepts. (JL 9:35-6).

## 4 Engstrom

### 4.1 Two Conditions on Cognition

1. Unity (Formal): every cognition must be in full agreement not only with itself but also with every other (8)
2. Actuality (Material): there must be a relation of causal dependence connecting the **actuality** of cognition and the **actuality** of its object (9)

### 4.2 Spontaneity and Receptivity

- Spontaneity is completely self-determining
  - the dependence of spontaneity on the receptivity of sensibility concerns only the material conditions of spontaneity (it's having something to "work upon") not any further dependence on sensibility to "guide" it
- Sensibility yields representations only insofar as they have been "determined" by the understanding<sup>12</sup>
  - intuition depends for its existence on acts of synthesis carried out by the understanding (qua imagination)

<sup>12</sup> As receptivity, sensibility cannot determine itself to represent at all; only through an act of spontaneity that inwardly determines sensibility to represent—animating it, so to speak—can intuition arise (Engstrom (2006), 17).

## 5 Further Reading

1. Engstrom, Stephen. 2006. "Understanding and Sensibility." *Inquiry* 49 (1): 2-25.
2. Heidegger, Martin. 1997a. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Indiana University Press.
3. ——. 1997b. *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Indiana University Press.
4. Hintikka, Jaakko. 1974. *Knowledge and the Known: Historical Perspectives in Epistemology*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
5. Hogan, Desmond. 2009a. "How to Know Unknowable Things in Themselves." *Noûs* 43 (1): 49-63.
- . 2009b. "Noumenal Affection." *Philosophical Review* 118 (4): 501-532.
6. Longuenesse, Béatrice. 1998. *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
7. Prichard, Harold Arthur. 1909. *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
8. Smit, Houston. 2000. "Kant on Marks and the Immediacy of Intuition." *The philosophical review* 109 (2): 235-266.

9. ——. 2009. "Kant on Apriority and the Spontaneity of Cognition." In ***Metaphysics and the Good: Themes From the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*** ***Metaphysics and the Good: Themes From the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams***, ed. Samuel Newlands and Larry M. Jorgensen, 188-251. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Tolley, Clinton. 2012. "The Generality of Kant's Transcendental Logic." ***Journal of the History of Philosophy*** 50 (3): 417-446.