

From: Justin Kalef justinkalef@yahoo.com [fallible-ideas] <fallible-ideas@yahoogroups.com>

Subject: Re: [FI] the line separating good and evil

Date: June 12, 2017 at 12:33 PM

Hi, everyone. I've now looked at the Fallible-Ideas book recommendation site. I just joined this group a couple of days ago, perhaps under a misunderstanding. First, a little bit about myself: One thing I can't stand to be around is an insular community in which everyone accepts very similar views -- views that would be controversial elsewhere. I think healthy discussion should involve sharply critical, but reasoned, debates on what everyone takes to be sacred cows.

I don't care whether the group contains radical feminists, free marketeers, men's rights activists, utilitarians, atheists, socialists, liberals, conservatives, or whatever else: I'm happy to take part if there's free and intelligent discussion; if everyone in the group seems to be unhealthily taking ideas for granted, I feel inclined to press against those ideas; and if something cultish seems to be going on and certain views are not valued, I head quickly for the door.

I have known many people involved in Objectivism, which (full disclosure) I take to be a cult, as allergic to free inquiry as any others. I think that, in addition to being a hypocritical and conceited human being, Ayn Rand was at best a half-decent novelist, and a laughably bad philosopher.

The 'books to read' page begins, "If you care about reason, truth, or your life, you should read the books of humanity's smartest thinkers. But which ones? Enemies of humanity, like Kant, are commonly recommended."

The idea that Kant is the enemy of humanity is boilerplate for Randoids. I'm no Kantian, but I once taught an upper-level course on Kant that was attended by a fervent Randoid. He came in saying that Kant was the embodiment of all evil. He admitted by the end of the course that Kant's actual views were nothing like the way they were represented by Rand, Leonard Peikoff, etc., who (he admitted reluctantly) clearly misunderstood them. Now, I'm hearing again about how great Rand is and... how terrible Kant is.

There is no way on God's green earth, to my and most people's way of thinking, that Ayn Rand could be anywhere near the first tier of authors one must read. There's even less of a claim for making people read such a vast list of her philosophical attempts and novels.

If it would be useful for the group to have someone around to take up cudgels against Rand's ideas and arguments (such as they are), I'd be glad to stay in the group and contribute sometimes.

However, if accepting Rand's position as a serious thinker is desired for membership in this group, then I should take my leave at once.

-Justin

From: "Kate Sams ksams434@gmail.com [fallible-ideas]" <fallible-ideas@yahoogroups.com>

To: FI <fallible-ideas@yahoogroups.com>; FIGG <fallible-ideas@googlegroups.com>

Sent: Monday, June 12, 2017 7:18 AM

Subject: [FI] the line separating good and evil

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t--pNU9ZfVE>

this short video talks about the book The Gulag Archipelago by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

regarding the nature of evil, Solzhenitsyn writes:

Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, not between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains...an unuprooted small corner of evil...It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict in within each person.

Jordan Peterson has said something similar, maybe he got the idea from Solzhenitsyn.

is there any truth to this quote?

does it help explain how seemingly normal people end up doing atrocious things?

is it a dangerous idea which works to destroy the good and raise up evil? does it work to put everyone into a category of moral grayness?

#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871 -- #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp {border:1px solid #d8d8d8;font-family:Arial;margin:10px 0;padding:0 10px;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp hr {border:1px solid #d8d8d8;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp #yiv4452035871hd {color:#628c2a;font-size:85%;font-weight:700;line-height:122%;margin:10px 0;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp #yiv4452035871ads {margin-bottom:10px;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp .yiv4452035871ad {padding:0 0;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp .yiv4452035871ad p {margin:0;}#yiv4452035871 #yiv4452035871ygrp-mkp .yiv4452035871ad a {color:#0000ff;text-decoration:none;}#yiv4452035871

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>  
Subject: Re: [FI] books to read -- draft  
Date: June 12, 2017 at 12:57 PM

On Jun 12, 2017, at 9:12 AM, Justin Kalef justinkalef@yahoo.com wrote:

| [Sorry, Is this an Ayn Rand group? I didn't realize that on the way in...](#)

No, this is a truth-seeking group.

The most popular philosophers here are Ayn Rand and Karl Popper, but no one here thinks all their ideas were right. You're welcome to hold other views. I'd be happy to discuss and try to reach agreement about which philosophy ideas are good and why.

If you've had some bad experiences with Ayn Rand fans, well, me too! I've never found people who are primarily fans of a single philosopher to be very good. I'm banned from the main Ayn Rand group [1] because they do not appreciate Popperian dissent...

But if you're put off by capitalism or liberty, then we have a big disagreement! I like to discuss with people who have very different views from me, but find they usually don't want to discuss enough to understand each other.

[1] <http://curi.us/1930-harry-binswanger-refuses-to-think>

- Elliot

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>  
Subject: Re: [FI] the line separating good and evil  
Date: June 12, 2017 at 1:26 PM

On Jun 12, 2017, at 9:33 AM, Justin Kalef justinkalef@yahoo.com wrote:

Hi, everyone. I've now looked at the Fallible-Ideas book recommendation site. I just joined this group a couple of days ago, perhaps under a misunderstanding. First, a little bit about myself: One thing I can't stand to be around is an insular community in which everyone accepts very similar views -- views that would be controversial elsewhere. I think healthy discussion should involve sharply critical, but reasoned, debates on what everyone takes to be sacred cows.

I don't care whether the group contains radical feminists, free marketeers, men's rights activists, utilitarians, atheists, socialists, liberals, conservatives, or whatever else: I'm happy to take part if there's free and intelligent discussion; if everyone in the group seems to be unhealthily taking ideas for granted, I feel inclined to press against those ideas; and if something cultish seems to be going on and certain views are not valued, I head quickly for the door.

I have known many people involved in Objectivism, which (full disclosure) I take to be a cult, as allergic to free inquiry as any others. I think that, in addition to being a hypocritical and conceited human being, Ayn Rand was at best a half-decent novelist, and a laughably bad philosopher.

The 'books to read' page begins, "If you care about reason, truth, or your life, you should read the books of humanity's smartest thinkers. But which ones? Enemies of humanity, like Kant, are commonly recommended."

The idea that Kant is the enemy of humanity is boilerplate for Randoids. I'm no Kantian, but I once taught an upper-level course on Kant that was attended by a fervent Randoid. He came in saying that Kant was the embodiment of all evil. He admitted by the end of the course that Kant's actual views were nothing like the way they were represented by Rand, Leonard Peikoff, etc., who (he admitted reluctantly) clearly misunderstood them. Now, I'm hearing again about how great Rand is and... how terrible Kant is.

There is no way on God's green earth, to my and most people's way of thinking, that Ayn Rand could be anywhere near the first tier of authors one must read. There's even less of a claim for making people read such a vast list of her philosophical attempts and novels.

If it would be useful for the group to have someone around to take up cudgels against Rand's ideas and arguments (such as they are), I'd be glad to stay in the group and contribute sometimes.

However, if accepting Rand's position as a serious thinker is desired for membership in this group, then I should take my leave at once.

I'd love to have a dissenting voice about Rand and Kant. Please stay.

I'm going to remove the text about Kant because of your feedback. You've reminded me that it's needlessly offensive to some people. The page is opinionated enough without it. I should avoid controversial, off-topic remarks.

I agree with you that Objectivists don't have correct, detailed, scholarly criticism of Kant. I've looked. So I also shouldn't trash Kant in a serious, non-discussion context until I've at least written my own essay about him which I can footnote.

I often use strong wordings and think I'm right about views which I've exposed to public criticism for a long time. I try not to hedge. This is the Popperian idea of making bold claims. I want to stick my neck out so it's easier to spot disagreements, and so I expose as much as possible to criticism. That doesn't indicate emotional attachment or other bias (at least I do my best).

Elliot Temple  
[www.fallibleideas.com](http://www.fallibleideas.com)

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>

Subject: Popper on Kant

Date: June 12, 2017 at 2:40 PM

Let's reread some Popper on Kant! Popper's positive comments on Kant are one of the reasons many Objectivists refuse to learn what Popper's views are.

C&R, ch 7, Kant's Critique and Cosmology:

Popper calls Kant:

a teacher of the Rights of Man, of equality before the law, of world citizenship, of peace on earth, and, perhaps most important, of emancipation through knowledge.

Those sound good.

Kant believed in the Enlightenment. He was its last great defender. I realize that this is not the usual view. While I see Kant as the defender of the Enlightenment, he is more often taken as the founder of the school which destroyed it—of the Romantic School of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. I contend that these two interpretations are incompatible.

That sounds interesting.

Note: Popper's sometimes overly nice to other thinkers, so be careful with his praise. He goes out of his way to acknowledge anything he thinks they got right. Except Hegel, who Popper is harsh to in OSE. Popper may want to separate Kant from Hegel because he likes Kant and dislikes Hegel. Or, alternatively, Popper may like one and not the other because he saw major ways they are separate.

Example of Popper giving too much credit:

\_The Philosophy of Karl Popper\_, vol 2, edited by Schilpp, part 3, ch 3, section 13, page 1014:

Although I am fully aware of the fact that I may be mistaken, I think that I have solved the problem of induction, this major philosophical problem first raised by David Hume. Perhaps I should be more wary; I claim only to have solved the other half of the philosophical problem whose more fundamental half was already solved by Hume, in his early *\*Treatise on Human Nature\**, 1739. With a little generosity the problem may even be described as the *\*problem of human knowledge\**.

Popper solved the problem of induction, and Hume didn't, but Popper wants to give Hume more than half the credit! Meanwhile, Popper criticizes Hume's views extensively here and elsewhere. Popper mostly disagrees with Hume about this. He thinks Hume got one part right (induction doesn't logically work) and basically went badly wrong from there. Hume was led to irrationalism because he thought induction didn't work but was unwilling to reject it. I sympathize with that difficult problem. Coming up with an alternative to induction is the really hard part. Which is why I think Popper's contribution was the big breakthrough.

Back to C&R:

In *\*A Public Declaration Concerning Fichte\**,<sup>[6]</sup> which is too little known, Kant wrote: 'May God protect us from our friends. ... For there are fraudulent and perfidious so-called friends who are scheming for our ruin while speaking the language of good-will.'

That's a good sign.

Kant chose [the name] 'Transcendental Idealism'. He soon regretted this choice,<sup>[14]</sup> for it made people believe that he was an idealist in the sense of denying the reality of physical things: that he declared physical things to be mere ideas. Kant hastened to explain that he had only denied that space and time are empirical and real— empirical and real in the sense in which physical things and events are empirical and real. But in vain did he protest. His difficult style sealed his fate: he was to be revered as the father of German Idealism. I suggest that it is time to put this right. Kant always insisted<sup>[15]</sup> that the physical things in space and time are real.

Popper thinks Kant has been misunderstood. But in a rather different way than Rand claims.

There's some overlap though. That difficult writing style was criticized by Rand too.

I think that's an important matter. Did Kant do it on purpose? Was he bad at writing? Did everyone write like that, given the date and country?

Today some people write badly on purpose. They try to be impressive. They try to imitate old thinkers like Kant or Locke. And sometimes they use dense writing because they have little to say and that'd be too obvious if they wrote clearly.

But it's much harder to judge this issue for thinkers from the past, especially via translation. (Though Popper didn't need a translation.)

For what the \*Critique\* criticizes is pure reason; it criticizes and attacks all reasoning about the world that is 'pure' in the sense of being untainted by sense experience. Kant attacked pure reason by showing that pure reasoning about the world must always entangle us in antinomies.

People get confused by reductio arguments a lot. You argue that X implies Y, and that Y is wrong. They often think you're advocating X or Y.

I (and Rand too) agree that it's important to connect our reasoning to the real world using sense data.

In C&R ch 8, Popper finds pieces of his own solution to the problem of induction in Kant. E.g.

Thus Kant wrote in the preface to the 2nd edition of the \*Critique of Pure Reason\*:

When Galileo let his globes run down an inclined plane with a gravity which he had chosen himself; when Torricelli caused the air to sustain a weight which he had calculated beforehand to be equal to that of a column of water of known height; ... then a light dawned upon all natural philosophers. They learnt that our reason can understand only \*what it creates according to its own design: that we must compel Nature to answer our questions\*, rather than cling to Nature's apron strings and allow her to guide us. \*For purely accidental observations, made without any plan having been thought out in advance, cannot be connected by a ... law—which is what reason is searching for.\*[5]

I can see why Popper likes this. Popper would read it as contradicting e.g. Bacon's view that we should open our minds, empty them of designs, plans and biases, and let observation teach us.

Popper sees here the need to have ideas first, and then search \*selectively\* for relevant observations which can help test those ideas.

I have a hard time thinking of how a non-Popperian would interpret this Kant passage and make much sense of it.

For example, someone could read, "reason can only understand what it creates" and think it's anti-realism. Does that mean only products of your own mind are comprehensible to you, and the rest of the universe will always be a mysterious jumble?

And someone could read the comment on accidental observations as meaning the law of gravity only connects different data points if you think of it in advance, but gravity



won't apply if you observe haphazardly.

Popper goes on to say Kant made an error:

| [Kant] was convinced that Newton's theory was \*true\*.

Popper says the error was basically unavoidable until Einstein, which I think is overly generous. I think William Godwin, for example, was a post-Newton, pre-Einstein fallibilist.

Popper basically says Kant recognized induction doesn't work, and that this clashes with Newton's claims. Popper then gives arguments on the matter and it's unclear which aspects of them come from Kant.

Popper attributes to Kant the view that:

| \*the world as we know it is our interpretation of the observable facts in the light of theories that we ourselves invent.\* As Kant puts it: 'Our intellect does not draw its laws from nature ... but imposes them upon nature.'

I agree with Popper's version, though it requires various elaborations to avoid the undermining all human knowledge as arbitrary and subjective.

Kant's version, quoted here, I read as ambiguous. I can see how it could mean Popper's view. That sentence could also mean other things, e.g. that man's consciousness has control over reality. And it could mean that our minds are outside of nature and not controlled by the laws of physics.

"Impose" is the wrong word. We're trying to understand nature, not impose our will on it. The point is to take an active and (tentatively, fallibly) opinionated role in understanding the world.

| Since Kant believed that it was his task to explain the uniqueness and the truth of Newton's theory, he was led to the belief that this theory followed inescapably and with logical necessity from the laws of our understanding. The modification of Kant's solution which I propose, in accordance with the Einsteinian revolution, frees us from this compulsion. In this way, theories are seen to be the \*free\* creations of our own minds, the result of an almost poetic intuition, of an attempt to understand intuitively the laws of nature. But we no longer try to force our creations upon nature.

Popper apparently does think Kant meant something about forcing our ideas on nature, and wants to revise that part.

Elliot Temple  
[www.curi.us](http://www.curi.us)

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>  
Subject: More Kant Popper Quotes and Comments  
Date: June 12, 2017 at 3:32 PM

I'm searching previous discussion of Kant. I found some Popper quotes I used the past. Some emphasis is probably missing from these quotes. If someone knows more (especially primary source info) or wants to discuss (positively or negatively) any of the ideas from these quotes, please reply!

From Objective Knowledge:

When Kant said that our intellect imposes its laws upon nature, he was right-except that he did not notice how often our intellect fails in the attempt: the regularities we try to impose are psychologically a priori, but there is not the slightest reason to assume that they are a priori valid, as Kant thought.

That sounds to me like Kant was mistaken.

I also broadly disagree with \*anything\* being a priori valid. I think that epistemology and logic depend on the laws of physics. Under different physics, evolution (which is how I think knowledge is created) doesn't have to work at all. And physics controls the results of computations, including for the logic operations AND, OR, NOT, etc.

Objective Knowledge:

This solved for him [Kant] Hume's problem. But was it a tenable theory? How could the truth of the principle of causality (for example) be established a priori?

Here Kant brought in his 'Copernican Revolution': it was the human intellect which invented, and imposed, its laws upon the sensual morass, thus creating the order of nature.

This was a bold theory. But it collapsed once it was realized that Newtonian dynamics was not a priori valid but a marvellous hypothesis-a conjecture.

From Open Society (OSE):

Kant, in his Critique of Pure Reason, asserted under the influence of Hume that pure speculation or reason, whenever it ventures into a field in which it cannot possibly be checked by experience, is liable to get involved in contradictions or 'antinomies' and to

produce what he unambiguously described as 'mere fancies'; 'nonsense'; 'illusions'; 'a sterile dogmatism'; and 'a superficial pretension to the knowledge of everything'. He tried to show that to every metaphysical assertion or thesis, concerning for example the beginning of the world in time, or the existence of God, there can be contrasted a counter-assertion or antithesis; and both, he held, may proceed from the same assumptions, and can be proved with an equal degree of 'evidence'.

I agree with this. One can take any idea and then manufacture infinitely many contradictory claims which equally fit (do not contradict) the identical set of empirical evidence.

This is why, as Deutsch explains, we criticize most ideas with arguments (e.g. saying why it's a bad explanation, contains contradictions, contains non sequiturs, etc) and only use empirical tests when there's contradicting empirical claims to adjudicate.

In other words, when leaving the field of experience, our speculation can have no scientific status, since to every argument there must be an equally valid counter-argument. Kant's intention was to stop once and forever the 'accursed fertility' of the scribblers on metaphysics. But unfortunately, the effect was very different. What Kant stopped was only the attempts of the scribblers to use rational argument; they only gave up the attempt to teach, but not the attempt to bewitch the public (as Schopenhauer puts it 29 ).

Oh dear! And that effect, which Popper attributes to Kant, is one of Rand's biggest complaints about Kant as well.

For this development, Kant himself undoubtedly bears a very considerable share of the blame; for the obscure style of his work (which he wrote in a great hurry, although only after long years of meditation) contributed considerably to a further lowering of the low standard of clarity in German theoretical writing 30 .

:(

None of the metaphysical scribblers who came after Kant made any attempt to refute him 31 ; and Hegel, more particularly, even had the audacity to patronize Kant for 'reviving the name of Dialectics, which he restored to their post of honour'. He taught that Kant was quite right in pointing out the antinomies, but that he was wrong to worry about them. It just lies in the nature of reason that it must contradict itself, Hegel asserted; and it is not a weakness of our human faculties, but it is the very essence of all rationality that it must work with contradictions and antinomies; for this is just the way in which reason develops. Hegel asserted that Kant had analysed reason as if it were something static; that he forgot that mankind develops, and with it, our social

heritage. But what we are pleased to call our own reason is nothing but the product of this social heritage, of the historical development of the social group in which we live, the nation.

If anyone knows something good about Hegel, I'd be interested to hear it.

I recall Bryan Magee was positive about some German philosophers in *Confessions of a Philosopher*, particularly Kant and Schopenhauer. But he failed to convince me. The index has a lot of entries for Hegel. I found Magee quoting Schopenhauer on pp 361-2:

Fichte, Schelling and Hegel are in my opinion not philosophers, for they lack the first requirement of a philosopher, namely a seriousness and honesty of enquiry. They are merely sophists who wanted to appear to be, rather than to be, something. They sought not truth but their own interest and advancement in the world. ... they have excelled in one thing, in the art of beguiling the public ..."

But Magee says he disagrees with Schopenhauer. Magee goes on to discuss three of Schopenhauer's arguments against them. He does concede that they deliberately wrote obscurely, as Schopenhauer and Rand charge. But did Kant do that too? Popper above offers the explanation that Kant rushed his writing.

Back to quoting OSE:

The sociology of knowledge can be considered as a Hegelian version of Kant's theory of knowledge. For it continues on the lines of Kant's criticism of what we may term the 'passivist' theory of knowledge. I mean by this the theory of the empiricists down to and including Hume, a theory which may be described, roughly, as holding that knowledge streams into us through our senses, and that error is due to our interference with the sense-given material, or to the associations which have developed within it; the best way of avoiding error is to remain entirely passive and receptive. Against this receptacle theory of knowledge (I usually call it the 'bucket theory of the mind'), Kant argued that knowledge is not a collection of gifts received by our senses and stored in the mind as if it were a museum, but that it is very largely the result of our own mental activity; that we must most actively engage ourselves in searching, comparing, unifying, generalizing, if we wish to attain knowledge. We may call this theory the 'activist' theory of knowledge. In connection with it, Kant gave up the untenable ideal of a science which is free from any kind of presuppositions. (That this ideal is even self-contradictory will be shown in the next chapter.) He made it quite clear that we cannot start from nothing, and that we have to approach our task equipped with a system of presuppositions which we hold without having tested them by the empirical methods of science; such a system may be called a 'categorical apparatus' 3 . Kant believed that it was possible to discover the one true and

unchanging categorial apparatus, which represents as it were the necessarily unchanging framework of our intellectual outfit, i.e. human 'reason'. This part of Kant's theory was given up by Hegel, who, as opposed to Kant, did not believe in the unity of mankind. [it continues by talking about Hegel]

Both Kantians and Hegelians make the same mistake of assuming that our presuppositions (since they are, to start with, undoubtedly indispensable instruments which we need in our active 'making' of experiences) can neither be changed by decision nor refuted by experience; that they are above and beyond the scientific methods of testing theories, constituting as they do the basic presuppositions of all thought. But this is an exaggeration, based on a misunderstanding of the relations between theory and experience in science.

That sounds like Kantians basically think we're born biased and can't fix it.

I agree with Popper's view that we're born with something like some initial ideas, expectations and biases, but that we can change them and make progress.

Some things are very difficult to change, e.g. changing our eyes to see infrared light. That would require some sci fi technology. But we can use tools to help us see the world better, so it's OK and doesn't present some kind of fundamental limit on human knowledge.

I acknowledge the common experience that people's minds are tangled messes and it's daunting to try to fix their biases. But I don't think we're screwed from birth by some ideas which are too hard to change. I think people create their own messes and could, step by step, untangle their thinking.

OSE:

A critical interpretation, however, must take the form of a rational reconstruction, and must be systematic; it must try to reconstruct the philosopher's thought as a consistent edifice. Cp. also what A. C. Ewing says of Kant (A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, 1938, p. 4): '.. we ought to start with the assumption that a great philosopher is not likely to be always contradicting himself, and consequently, wherever there are two interpretations, one of which will make Kant consistent and the other inconsistent, prefer the former to the latter, if reasonably possible.' This surely applies also to Plato, and even to interpretation in general.

I like Popper's method.

I may remark, in this connection, that Kant's ardent liberalism is very little appreciated in English and American writings on political philosophy (in spite of Hastie's Kant's Principles of Politics). He is only too often claimed to be a forerunner of Hegel; but in view of the fact that he recognized in the romanticism of both Herder and Fichte a doctrine diametrically opposed to his own, this claim is grossly unjust to Kant, and there can be no doubt that he would have strongly resented it. It is the tremendous influence of Hegelianism that led to a wide acceptance of this, I believe, completely untenable claim.

I'm doubtful of Kant's liberalism, on Popper's statement, because I consider Popper to misunderstand liberalism. For example Popper said, "if there could be such a thing as socialism combined with individual liberty, I would be a socialist still"

OSE:

It is astonishing to see that, thanks to a conspiracy of noise, a man like Fichte succeeded in perverting the teaching of his 'master', in spite of Kant's protests, and in Kant's lifetime. This happened only a hundred years ago and can easily be checked by anybody who takes the trouble to read Kant's and Fichte's letters, and Kant's public announcements; and it shows that my theory of Plato's perversion of the teaching of Socrates is by no means so fantastic as it may appear to Platonists. Socrates was dead then, and he had left no letters.

and

I agree with Nietzsche that Kleist's words are moving; and I agree that Kleist's reading of Kant's doctrine that it is impossible to attain any knowledge of things in themselves is straightforward enough, even though it conflicts with Kant's own intentions; for Kant believed in the possibility of science, and of finding the truth.

this says Kant contradicted himself. that would help explain confusion about his views.

From C&R:

Kant believed that Newton's dynamics was a priori valid. (See his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, published between the first and the second editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.)

His Critique of Pure Reason is one of the most difficult books ever written. Kant wrote in great haste, and about a problem which, I shall try to show, was not only insoluble but also misconceived.

it's conceivable that Kant himself was OK but his legacy is awful.

What lesson did Kant draw from these bewildering antinomies? He concluded that our ideas of space and time are inapplicable to the universe as a whole. We can, of course, apply the ideas of space and time to ordinary physical things and physical events. But space and time themselves are neither things nor events: they cannot even be observed: they are more elusive. They are a kind of framework for things and events: something like a system of pigeon-holes, or a filing system, for observations. Space and time are not part of the real empirical world of things and events, but rather part of our mental outfit, our apparatus for grasping this world. Their proper use is as instruments of observation: in observing any event we locate it, as a rule, immediately and intuitively in an order of space and time. Thus space and time may be described as a frame of reference which is not based upon experience but intuitively used in experience, and properly applicable to experience. This is why we get into trouble if we misapply the ideas of space and time by using them in a field which transcends all possible experience--as we did in our two proofs about the universe as a whole. To the view which I have just outlined Kant chose to give the ugly and doubly misleading name "Transcendental Idealism". He soon regretted this choice, for it made people believe that he was an idealist in the sense of denying the reality of physical things: that he declared physical things to be mere ideas. Kant hastened to explain that he had only denied that space and time are empirical and real--empirical and real in the sense in which physical things and events are empirical and real. But in vain did he protest. His difficult style sealed his fate: he was to be revered as the father of German Idealism. I suggest that it is time to put this right. Kant always insisted that the physical things in space and time are real. And as to the wild and obscure metaphysical speculations of the German Idealists, the very title of Kant Critique was chosen to announce a critical attack upon all such speculative reasoning. For what the Critique criticizes is pure reason; it criticizes and attacks all reasoning about the world that is 'pure' in the sense of being untainted by sense experience. Kant attacked pure reason by showing that pure reasoning about the world must always entangle us in antinomies.

**KANT'S COPERNICAN REVOLUTION** Kant's faith in his theory of space and time as an intuitive frame of reference was confirmed when he found in it a key to the solution of a second problem. This was the problem of the validity of Newtonian theory in



whose absolute and unquestionable truth he believed, in common with all concontemporary physicists.

It was inconceivable, he felt, that this exact mathematical theory should be nothing but the result of accumulated observations. But what else could be its basis? Kant approached this problem by first considering the status of geometry. Euclid's geometry is not based upon observation, he said, but upon our intuition of spatial relations. Newtonian science is in a similar position. Although confirmed by observations it is the result not of these observations but of our own ways of thinking, of our attempts to order our sense-data, to understand them, and to digest them intellectually. It is not these sense-data but our own intellect, the organization of the digestive system of our mind, which is responsible for our theories. Nature as we know it, with its order and with its laws, is thus largely a product of the assimilating and ordering activities of our mind. In Kant's own striking formulation of this view, 'Our intellect does not draw its laws from nature, but imposes its laws upon nature'. This formula sums up an idea which Kant himself proudly calls his 'Copernican Revolution'. As Kant puts it, Copernicus, finding that no progress was being made with the theory of the revolving heavens, broke the deadlock by turning the tables, as it were: he assumed that it is not the heavens which revolve while we the observers stand still, but that we the observers revolve while the heavens stand still. In a similar way, Kant says, the problem of scientific knowledge is to be solved--the problem how an exact science, such as Newtonian theory, is possible, and how it could ever have been found. We must give up the view that we are passive observers, waiting for nature to impress its regularity upon us. Instead we must adopt the view that in digesting our sense-data we actively impress the order and the laws of our intellect upon them. Our cosmos bears the imprint of our minds. By emphasizing the role played by the observer, the investigator, the theorist, Kant made an indelible impression not only upon philosophy but also upon physics and cosmology. There is a Kantian climate of thought without which Einstein's theories or Bohr's are hardly conceivable; and Eddington might be said to be more of a Kantian, in some respects, than Kant: himself. Even those who, like myself, cannot follow Kant all the way can accept his view that the experimenter must not wait till it pleases nature to reveal her secrets, but that he must question her. He must cross examine nature in the light of his doubts, his conjectures, his theories, his ideas, and his inspirations. Here, I believe, is a wonderful philosophical find. It makes it possible to look upon science, whether theoretical or experimental, as a human creation, and to look upon its history as part of the history of ideas, on a level with the history of art or of literature. There is a second and even more interesting meaning inherent in Kant's version of the Copernican Revolution, a meaning which may perhaps indicate an ambivalence in his attitude towards it. For Kant's Copernican Revolution solves a human problem to which Copernicus' own revolution gave rise. Copernicus deprived man of his central position in the physical universe. Kant's Copernican Revolution takes the sting out of this. He shows us not only that our

location in the physical universe is irrelevant, but also that in a sense our universe may well be said to turn about us; for it is we who produce, at least in part, the order we find in it; it is we who create our knowledge of it. We are discoverers: and discovery is a creative art.

Thus Kant wrote in the preface to the 2nd edition of the Critique of Pure Reason: 'When Galileo let his balls run down an inclined plane with a gravity which he had chosen himself; when Torricelli caused the air to sustain a weight which he had calculated beforehand to be equal to that of a column of water of known height; . . . then a light dawned upon all natural philosophers. They learnt that our reason can understand only what it creates according to its own design: that we must compel Nature to answer our questions, rather than cling to Nature's apron strings and allow her to guide us. For purely accidental observations, made without any plan having been thought out in advance, cannot be connected by a . . . law which is what reason is searching for.' This quotation from Kant shows how well he understood that we ourselves must confront nature with hypotheses and demand a reply to our questions; and that, lacking such hypotheses, we can only make haphazard observations which follow no plan and which can therefore never lead us to a natural law. In other words, Kant saw with perfect clarity that the history of science had refuted the Baconian myth that we must begin with observations in order to derive our theories from them. And Kant also realized very clearly that behind this historical fact lay a logical fact; that there were logical reasons why this kind of thing did not occur in the history of science: that it was logically impossible to derive theories from observations. My third point the contention that it is logically impossible to derive Newton's theory from observations follows immediately from Hume's critique of the validity of inductive inferences, as pointed out by Kant. [The details of the argument follows]

As I have said, Kant, like almost all philosophers and epistemologists right into the twentieth century, was convinced that Newton's theory was true. This conviction was inescapable. Newton's theory had made the most astonishing and exact predictions, all of which had proved strikingly correct. Only ignorant men could doubt its truth. How little we may reproach Kant for his belief is best shown by the fact that even Henri Poincaré, the greatest mathematician, physicist and philosopher of his generation, who died shortly before the First World War, believed like Kant that Newton's theory was true and irrefutable. Poincaré was one of the few scientists who felt about Kant's paradox almost as strongly as Kant himself; and though he proposed a solution which differed somewhat from Kant's, it was only a variant of it. The important point, however, is that he fully shared Kant's error, as I have called it. It was an unavoidable error--unavoidable, that is, before Einstein.

We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This would agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects a priori, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given.

To actually judge Kant well would require looking at primary sources. Preferably in German, which I can't read.

However one can judge something like Kant's influence on the world today, and the meaning most people have taken from him, just from secondary sources in English.

Elliot Temple

Get my philosophy newsletter:

[www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter](http://www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter)

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>

Subject: Kant Quotes

Date: June 12, 2017 at 3:50 PM

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4280/4280-h/4280-h.htm>

The understanding was defined above only negatively, as a non-sensuous faculty of cognition. Now, independently of sensibility, we cannot possibly have any intuition; consequently, the understanding is no faculty of intuition. But besides intuition there is no other mode of cognition, except through conceptions; consequently, the cognition of every, at least of every human, understanding is a cognition through conceptions—not intuitive, but discursive. All intuitions, as sensuous, depend on affections; conceptions, therefore, upon functions. By the word function I understand the unity of the act of arranging diverse representations under one common representation. Conceptions, then, are based on the spontaneity of thought, as sensuous intuitions are on the receptivity of impressions. Now, the understanding cannot make any other use of these conceptions than to judge by means of them. As no representation, except an intuition, relates immediately to its object, a conception never relates immediately to an object, but only to some other representation thereof, be that an intuition or itself a conception. A judgement, therefore, is the mediate cognition of an object, consequently the representation of a representation of it. In every judgement there is a conception which applies to, and is valid for many other conceptions, and which among these comprehends also a given representation, this last being immediately connected with an object. For example, in the judgement—"All bodies are divisible," our conception of divisible applies to various other conceptions; among these, however, it is here particularly applied to the conception of body, and this conception of body relates to certain phenomena which occur to us. These objects, therefore, are mediately represented by the conception of divisibility. All judgements, accordingly, are functions of unity in our representations, inasmuch as, instead of an immediate, a higher representation, which comprises this and various others, is used for our cognition of the object, and thereby many possible cognitions are collected into one. But we can reduce all acts of the understanding to judgements, so that understanding may be represented as the faculty of judging. For it is, according to what has been said above, a faculty of thought. Now thought is cognition by means of conceptions. But conceptions, as predicates of possible judgements, relate to some representation of a yet undetermined object. Thus the conception of body indicates something—for example, metal—which can be cognized by means of that conception. It is therefore a conception, for the reason alone that other representations are contained under it, by means of which it can relate to objects. It is therefore the predicate to a possible judgement; for example: "Every metal is a body." All the functions of the understanding therefore can be discovered, when we can completely exhibit the functions of unity in judgements. And that this may be effected very easily, the following section will show.

This is terribly hard to understand, and also I'm suspicious of the translation. Consider, "besides intuition there is no other mode of cognition, except through conceptions". What? The original text could be bad. But it could easily be that the words "intuition" and "conceptions" are inadequate translations. (It also presumably makes more sense if you read the whole book.)

I'm not motivated to try to make sense of passages like these unless someone can tell me the value to be gained. But I've read some pro-Kant secondary sources and wasn't convinced of the value.

Here's one more which is relevant to the Popper quotes I posted.

It appears to me that the examples of mathematics and natural philosophy, which, as we have seen, were brought into their present condition by a sudden revolution, are sufficiently remarkable to fix our attention on the essential circumstances of the change which has proved so advantageous to them, and to induce us to make the experiment of imitating them, so far as the analogy which, as rational sciences, they bear to metaphysics may permit. It has hitherto been assumed that our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to ascertain anything about these objects a priori, by means of conceptions, and thus to extend the range of our knowledge, have been rendered abortive by this assumption. Let us then make the experiment whether we may not be more successful in metaphysics, if we assume that the objects must conform to our cognition. This appears, at all events, to accord better with the possibility of our gaining the end we have in view, that is to say, of arriving at the cognition of objects a priori, of determining something with respect to these objects, before they are given to us. We here propose to do just what Copernicus did in attempting to explain the celestial movements. When he found that he could make no progress by assuming that all the heavenly bodies revolved round the spectator, he reversed the process, and tried the experiment of assuming that the spectator revolved, while the stars remained at rest. We may make the same experiment with regard to the intuition of objects. If the intuition must conform to the nature of the objects, I do not see how we can know anything of them a priori. If, on the other hand, the object conforms to the nature of our faculty of intuition, I can then easily conceive the possibility of such an a priori knowledge. Now as I cannot rest in the mere intuitions, but—if they are to become cognitions—must refer them, as representations, to something, as object, and must determine the latter by means of the former, here again there are two courses open to me. Either, first, I may assume that the conceptions, by which I effect this determination, conform to the object—and in this case I am reduced to the same perplexity as before; or secondly, I may assume that the objects, or, which is the same thing, that experience, in which alone as given objects they are cognized, conform to my conceptions—and then I am at no loss how to proceed. For experience itself is a mode of cognition which requires understanding. Before objects, are given to me, that is, a priori, I must presuppose in myself laws of

the understanding which are expressed in conceptions a priori. To these conceptions, then, all the objects of experience must necessarily conform. Now there are objects which reason thinks, and that necessarily, but which cannot be given in experience, or, at least, cannot be given so as reason thinks them. The attempt to think these objects will hereafter furnish an excellent test of the new method of thought which we have adopted, and which is based on the principle that we only cognize in things a priori that which we ourselves place in them.[\*]

Note e.g., "It has hitherto been assumed that our cognition must conform to the objects". Then Kant appears to say let's try assuming reality will match some of our a priori ideas.

You have to be really careful though because the book is a *\*criticism\** of pure reason. When you read an isolated passage you don't know if Kant actually agrees with it or is just discussing it.

Elliot Temple  
[www.curi.us](http://www.curi.us)

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>

Subject: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Kant

Date: June 12, 2017 at 4:30 PM

Regardless of what Kant meant to say, let's look at what he means to English speaking philosophers today. I think this should be a reasonably representative source:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/>

by Michael Rohlf

The problem is that to some it seemed unclear whether progress would in fact ensue if reason enjoyed full sovereignty over traditional authorities; or whether unaided reasoning would instead lead straight to materialism, fatalism, atheism, skepticism (Bxxxiv), or even libertinism and authoritarianism (8:146). The Enlightenment commitment to the sovereignty of reason was tied to the expectation that it would not lead to any of these consequences

My position: reason properly understood doesn't lead to those things. But misunderstandings of reason are common and can lead there. (That is what happened in the French Revolution which Burke criticized.)

Kant's main goal is to show that a critique of reason by reason itself, unaided and unrestrained by traditional authorities, establishes a secure and consistent basis for both Newtonian science and traditional morality and religion. In other words, free rational inquiry adequately supports all of these essential human interests and shows them to be mutually consistent. So reason deserves the sovereignty attributed to it by the Enlightenment.

The page also says Kant thinks something like: metaphysics = a priori thinking = the domain of reason.

Kant's revolutionary position in the Critique is that we can have a priori knowledge about the general structure of the sensible world because it is not entirely independent of the human mind. The sensible world, or the world of appearances, is constructed by the human mind from a combination of sensory matter that we receive passively and a priori forms that are supplied by our cognitive faculties.

and

For Kant, analogously, the phenomena of human experience depend on both the sensory data that we receive passively through sensibility and the way our mind actively processes this data according to its own a priori rules.

and

we cannot have a priori knowledge about things whose existence and nature are entirely independent of the human mind, which Kant calls things in themselves

and

That is, Kant's constructivist foundation for scientific knowledge restricts science to the realm of appearances and implies that a priori knowledge of things in themselves that transcend possible human experience — or transcendent metaphysics — is impossible.

and

[Kant] claims that rejecting knowledge about things in themselves is necessary for reconciling science with traditional morality and religion

This denies that science deals with the real world with things "independent of the human mind".

So either science can't deal with rocks, or rocks don't exist in nature as things in themselves apart from humans.

Does someone have a more positive reading of this?

The only way I see to make much sense of this is to interpret it heavily along Popperian lines. Something like this:

Humans don't have pure, unbiased, or a priori knowledge. We use our fallible sense organs and our fallible reasoning. We try to understand the real world from limited, imperfect information. That's OK. We can still find and correct errors in order to make progress in scientifically understanding objective reality.

But I don't actually read the Kant material as saying this.



I can agree with Kant that "human beings experience only appearances, not things in themselves". We don't have direct knowledge of reality. Our eyes, for example, are tools, like a camera, which detect a small evolutionarily-determined slice of the available information and which can malfunction. (This claim deeply disturbs some Objectivists, but I don't recall Rand herself contradicting it.)

As to what Kant meant:

But scholars disagree widely on how to interpret these claims, and there is no such thing as the standard interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism.

The article presents two main types of interpretation:

According to the two-objects interpretation, transcendental idealism is essentially a metaphysical thesis that distinguishes between two classes of objects: appearances and things in themselves.

ok, sort of. i wouldn't call appearances "objects". the photons i see which carry information to me about a chair are a different sort of thing than the chair. also this is sounding similar to Plato's cave.

Things in themselves, on this interpretation, are absolutely real in the sense that they would exist and have whatever properties they have even if no human beings were around to perceive them. Appearances, on the other hand, are not absolutely real in that sense, because their existence and properties depend on human perceivers.

This reading sounds neither valuable today nor particularly bad for an old view. It's kinda confused by the gist is trying to understand the difference between 1) a chair 2) my perception of a chair. I get that that's a hard problem. This stuff is much easier to understand if you're familiar with modern physics, photons, cameras, information theory, etc.

Moreover, whenever appearances do exist, in some sense they exist in the mind of human perceivers.

This statement isn't very clear. It's trying to talk about something without knowing all the details: that photons carry information about objects to our eyes which is then processed by our brains which are computers. In this modern physics view, one can understand what information exists at what locations at what times.

Kant is walking a fine line in claiming on the one hand that we can have no knowledge about things in themselves, but on the other hand that we know that things in themselves exist, that they affect our senses, and that they are non-spatial and non-temporal.

This kind of statement worries me about translations and context. What did Kant actually mean by "no knowledge"? Maybe he meant no justified, true believe. Maybe he meant no infallible knowledge.

This passage directly asserts (according to the two-objects interpretation) that Kant was a skeptic. No knowledge of the real world! But it doesn't leave me confident the author is conveying Kant's meaning correctly.

even if that problem is surmounted, it has seemed to many that Kant's theory, interpreted in this way, implies a radical form of skepticism that traps each of us within the contents of our own mind and cuts us off from reality.

My primary opinion of this is I don't really care. People are confused (perhaps Kant, and certainly many of his interpreters) and a much better view of the matter is available today.

The article goes on to talk about the "two-aspects reading" of Kant, which I again don't see the value in.

Elliot Temple

Get my philosophy newsletter:

[www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter](http://www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter)

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>

Subject: Kant and Liberalism

Date: June 12, 2017 at 5:45 PM

I want to find some information about Kant's political views, separate from his complex, abstract views about reason. Was he liberal or anti-liberal? Did he have a view on free trade or small government? That's a different sort of thing than e.g. discussion of the Categorical Imperative which only relates to human life indirectly.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>

Kant defines virtue as “the moral strength of a \*human being’s\* will in fulfilling his duty” (MM 6:405)

This sounds really bad. It sounds like a recipe for obedience to authorities who say what your duty is.

Why should it take strength and will to act morally, instead of being pleasant? Why should you fulfill duty instead of self-interest?

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>

According to Kantian contractualism, “society, being composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, is best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not \*themselves\* presuppose any particular conception of the good...” (Sandel, 1982: 1).

This might mean a tolerant society where the laws don't discriminate against people with different moral views.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_philosophy\\_of\\_Immanuel\\_Kant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosophy_of_Immanuel_Kant)

Kant's most significant contribution to political philosophy and the philosophy of law is the doctrine of \*Rechtsstaat\*. According to this doctrine, the power of the state is limited in order to protect citizens from the arbitrary exercise of authority.

That sounds good. But it doesn't sound like a big contribution. Wasn't that idea already known by e.g. Locke?

Kant opposed "democracy" – which, in that era, meant direct democracy – believing that majority rule posed a threat to individual liberty.

Guess who else criticizes democracy similarly. Ayn Rand! e.g.

<http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/democracy.html>

“Democratic” in its original meaning [refers to] unlimited majority rule . . . a social system in which one’s work, one’s property, one’s mind, and one’s life are at the mercy of any gang that may muster the vote of a majority at any moment for any purpose.

I found a discussion of whether Kant is a classical liberal at Cato Unbound. It's new (Oct 2016) and I hadn't seen it before!

Mark White argues in favor, and an Objectivist and Gregory Salmieri (an Objectivist) and two others write replies. Let's take a look:

<https://www.cato-unbound.org/issues/october-2016/immanuel-kant-classical-liberalism>

Quotes are from individual pages and I mention when I switch authors.

White says Kant favors autonomy, meaning:

the ability to make moral choices without undue regard or deference to either external authority or internal inclinations

sounds good.

Kant wrote that his categorical imperative was nothing but a formalization of the moral intuitions of the common person on the street: treat everyone the same and, if you need their cooperation, convince them to work with you, rather than lying or forcing them to

sounds good.

the categorical imperative generates two types of duties. \*Perfect duties\*, also called strict duties, allow for no exceptions in one’s own interests, and are normally negative in nature: do not lie, do not steal, do not kill, and so forth.

And there's weaker duties which are like general guidelines such as "help others,

cultivate your talents", etc.

The perfect duties concern me because there are no conflicts between morality and self-interest! Does Kant think lying, stealing and murdering are actually in one's self-interest?

White makes an accusation about Rand but doesn't footnote a Rand quote. That's a bad sign!

White denies that Kant advocated extreme altruism.

Given the negative nature of duties and the ubiquity of conflicts among them, our judgment ends up being more useful than the duties themselves, which are just the building blocks of moral behavior. The need for judgment to decide how to implement and balance duties and obligations also has the effect of highlighting the surprising degree of flexibility in Kant's ethics, where even perfect duties can be overridden by an imperfect duty if the latter has a stronger ground of obligation. This flexibility belies caricatures of Kant as a cold, rigid moralist, and reveal him to be a true supporter of freedom within the bounds of sociality.

This sounds like an unprincipled mess. If your principles conflict, some of them are wrong! Don't ignore the contradiction and then take different sides of it as it suits you!

The details of those bounds on freedom concern me too.

White says Kant advocated small government.

On to Salmieri:

Kant coopted some of the Enlightenment's language and used it to defend a purified form of the dogmas that had long been accepted as common sense but were newly under attack. In particular, by defining morality in contradistinction to prudence, Kant gave a new prominence to the idea that morality requires sacrifice. The "freedom" (or "autonomy") he extols is not the Enlightenment's freedom to conceive and pursue ambitious, life-affirming goals, nor is it the freedom to follow one's whims. Rather, it is the ability to obey a morality the entire content of which Kant derives from the notion that there must be \*something\* for the sake of which one must be always ready to sacrifice the whole of one's happiness.

Scathing! And footnoted:

See especially Ak. IV 405–407 and Ak. V 73.

I wish people would just link public domain works, it'd be way easier to find the right passage. I could also Google the passage if he'd given any quote. I'll look for this later.

Salmieri also denies White's claim that sometimes perfect duties can be overridden.

[Kant insisted] that motives of philanthropy give us no right to lie to murderers who inquire after the locations of their intended victims.

Awful! And Footnoted to Ak. VIII 425–430.

This Kantian conception of morality as something essentially different from prudence was widely adopted by subsequent ethicists, who disagreed with Kant on specific content of morality.

In other words, Kant may bear substantial responsibility for a disaster: the current widespread anti-commonsense belief that morality and practicality are in massive conflict.

For Locke, rights defined the freedoms a rational and industrious person needs to pursue his happiness in the world. The Kantian conception of morality, which accords no value to this pursuit as such, leaves these rights with no foundation. Appeals to Kantian dignity are of no help, because a person has this dignity only qua being able to act dutifully, and acting dutifully has little to do with charting one's course through the world or supporting oneself in it. How is one's ability to be dutiful infringed upon by, for example, a political system that redistributes money?

If someone could refute this, I'd be interested.

But part of the difficulty is that people disagree about what Kant actually said and meant. So it can be better to move on and talk about what's true and false, rather than worrying too much about Kant.

Moving on to Hicks:

[Kant] did argue for a robust freedom of speech, at least for the philosophical use of reason. He advocated property rights. He resisted some types of commodifications of human beings. And on numerous matters in foreign policy he called for more peace-oriented and humanistic policies.

Yet he also argued against allowing the smallpox vaccination: “So that states do not become overcrowded with people and thus stifled from the outset, two evils are placed in them as antidotes: smallpox and war.”

Hicks says Kant was against the freedom to sell your hair to a wigmaker, and thought it's no crime for an unmarried mother to kill her child because bastards are illegitimate.

Also, given Kant's many negative remarks about Jews,[4] women,[5] and blacks and other races,[6] it is far from clear that he believes the majority of human beings are capable of agency at a level worthy of moral dignity.

:(

I will argue that the anti-liberalism is much deeper in Kant's philosophy than the liberalism.

ok let's see.

What some philosophers mean by \*self\*, \*individual\*, and \*freedom\* is the opposite of what other philosophers mean.

i agree with Hicks's methodological point about interpretation, and specifically that terms like these get used in widely different ways.

incorporating [Kant's] fundamental distinction between phenomenal and noumenal realms is essential.

ok

Kant argues that we experience only the phenomenal world with its features of time, space, cause and effect. This world is bounded, finite, and Isaac-Newton-physically deterministic. Yet beyond the phenomenal world is the noumenal, which is perhaps the realm of God, freedom, and immortality.

Kant also believes that if there is to be morality, it must come from a place of freedom. Consequently, that freedom must be outside of the phenomenal world, since the phenomenal is ruled by deterministic cause and effect in space and time. In other words, since morality depends upon freedom and the phenomenal realm is unfree, the origin of morality can only be noumenal.

really bad if correct.

So when Kant says that human selves are moral agents, that they have a capacity for dignity, and that their freedoms ought to be respected, he is speaking only about \*noumenal\* selves. He is \*not\* speaking about our phenomenal selves. Our phenomenal selves are not free and are consequently not in the realm of morality.

ewwww

moving on to Long:

I think Kant's political writings have strong classical liberal, even libertarian strands, and that these stem in large part from his more basic principles. I also think his political writings contain deeply illiberal elements. In many cases, I take these to be the result of Kant's misapplication of his own principles, and would expect a more consistent application of those principles to result in a still more thoroughly libertarian set of policies.

and he says Kant is good on the principle of property rights. and something about everyone gets as much freedom as possible without coercing each other.

he says overall he sides with Kant's defenders against Rand, but accepts she had some correct points.

But however libertarian Kant's theory of property may be in its basic outlines, it is far less so in application. And here I cannot agree with Dr. White's statement that "Kant did not support forced beneficence," or that Kant's political theory "rules out any state welfare system." As part of the social contract (a \*fictional\* social contract – more on that anon), Kantian citizens are understood to cede to the ruler a degree of ownership over their private holdings; hence Kant explicitly defends

the right of the supreme commander ... as supreme proprietor (lord of the land), to \*tax\* private owners of land, that is, to require payment of taxes on land, excise taxes and import duties, or to require the performance of services (such as providing troops for military service) .... On this supreme proprietorship also rests the right to administer the state's economy, finances, and police.[11]

That services clause, including conscription, is a big deal!



the taxing power also includes “the right to impose taxes on the people ... to support organizations providing for the poor, founding homes, and church organizations,” which sounds like a state welfare system to me. Kant even stresses that such public support is to occur “not merely by voluntary contributions” but “by way of coercion,” explaining that taxpayers “have acquired an obligation to the commonwealth, since they owe their existence to an act of submitting to its protection and care, which they need in order to live.”[12]

that really doesn't sound liberal to me.

Kant's (classically) illiberal streak goes much farther than mere support for state welfare. He holds that illegitimate children have “stolen into the commonwealth ... like contraband merchandise” and so stand outside the protection of civil law;[13] he denies citizens a right of self-defense against the state by declaring the ruler to be above the law and not to be rebelled against;[14] he denies wage workers the right of self-defense against the wealthy classes by depriving them of the vote;[15] and he is so enamored of capital punishment as to insist that “if a civil society were to be dissolved by the consent of all its members ... the last murderer remaining in prison would first have to be executed.”[16]

and there's more, e.g. that husbands should dominate wives because they're naturally superior.

i'm now curious what \*good\* things Long is going to say about Kant! so far Long is basically like: "Kant mentioned a few good principles from which I can derive great political views which Kant would disagree with."

well i read the rest and it has more really bad things about Kant and I didn't find the good things very convincing.

there's some back and forth discussion after the first 4 pieces. White follows up once and makes some concessions, then stops responding when further criticism comes in. read more if you're interested.

in the big picture my takeaway is that Kant is bad. if someone knows a good thing to read to change my mind, please point me to it.



From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>

Subject: Looking at Kant Cites

Date: June 12, 2017 at 8:04 PM

I managed to look up the three Kant primary source cites from:

<https://www.cato-unbound.org/2016/10/12/gregory-salmieri/kant-ideal-statement-classical-liberalism>

Many Kant cites are a mess to deal with because they give the volume and page number from a German collection. Then you have to try to figure out which English book it's in, which I'm told is usually reasonably easy to guess once you've read a lot of Kant... And you can't use public domain copies of Kant that I've found because they don't have the German page numbers in the margins. I've never found cites for any other author to pose this kind of difficulty to look up.

This page helps:

<http://users.manchester.edu/Facstaff/SSNaragon/Kant/Helps/AcadEd.htm>

But if you expected (like my first guess) to find everything from Volume 8, Essays after 1781, in the Cambridge \_Theoretical Philosophy after 1781\_ you'd be wrong.

I found the 3 cites in the Cambridge \*Practical Philosophy\*.

<https://www.amazon.com/Practical-Philosophy-Cambridge-Works-Immanuel-ebook/dp/B00AKE1RYO/>

OK so let's actually check Salmieri's claims about Kant against his footnotes.

Kant coopted some of the Enlightenment's language and used it to defend a purified form of the dogmas that had long been accepted as common sense but were newly under attack. In particular, by defining morality in contradistinction to prudence, Kant gave a new prominence to the idea that morality requires sacrifice. The "freedom" (or "autonomy") he extols is not the Enlightenment's freedom to conceive and pursue ambitious, life-affirming goals, nor is it the freedom to follow one's whims. Rather, it is the ability to obey a morality the entire content of which Kant derives from the notion that there must be \*something\* for the sake of which one must be always ready to sacrifice the whole of one's happiness. Though a softer face is often put on it by present-day Kantians, this point is crucial to his derivation of the first formulation of the categorical imperative.[7]

There's two cites. First: 4:405–407.

Kant says people's needs, inclinations and satisfaction (in sum, happiness) are a powerful counterweight against the commands of duty. Kant says reason tells us of this duty while having disregard and contempt for our happiness. So Kant says there's a *"natural dialectic"* to argue against duty, corrupt it, and destroy its dignity, in order to try to make duty better suited to human happiness.

Kant says moral worth requires doing your duty because it's your duty. If you do the same actions for a different reason (e.g. because they are practical) you don't get any moral credit.

Kant says even if you carefully introspect and think there's nothing powerful enough in yourself to move you to moral duty -- "move us to this or that good action and to so great a sacrifice" -- then there could still be covert self-love as the real cause of your will. We can never be morally pure no matter how hard we try. (Note the comment abruptly equating good action with great sacrifice .)

Second cite: 5:73

we can see a priori that the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain

Morality is pain!? This is sure separating morality from practical concerns like human happiness, as Salmieri claimed.

Kant then uses the word "freedom" to mean "an intellectual causality", rather than in the usual way.

Kant calls *\*satisfaction with oneself\** "self-conceit" and says the moral law strikes it down. He also says reason restricts self-love and self-benevolence.

Salmieri's next paragraph is:

It is this observation about the structure of Kant's position, rather any concern about rigidity or heroic amounts of charity, that is the essence of Rand's objection to Kantian ethics.[8]She recognized that Kantian ethics is flexible in many of the ways White describes, and she did not consider it a point in Kant's favor.[9] (This is as good a spot as any to mention one interpretive claim White makes about Kant's ethics that was new to me: he writes of "the surprising degree of flexibility in Kant's ethics, where even perfect duties can be overridden by an imperfect duty if the latter has a stronger

ground of obligation.” It would certainly be surprising if Kant thought this, especially given his insistence that motives of philanthropy give us no right to lie to murderers who inquire after the locations of their intended victims.[10] I’d be interested to hear more about which texts support this interpretation.)

And footnote 10 is 8:425–430, a short essay titled, "On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy"

Kant says if you speak, then you must speak the truth. That's your duty to everyone no matter how much harm it causes, and even if lying would do no harm to the person you're speaking to. Kant says lying harms humanity in general even if no individual is harmed.

Kant himself discusses the case of a murderer at your door who wants to kill someone in your home. Kant says if you try to lie and say "he's not home", and you're mistaken (he actually isn't home, but you thought he was) and then the murderer leaves (since you said he's not home) and finds and kills him elsewhere, you "can by right be prosecuted as the author of his death". I wondered if Kant really meant you'd be legally prosecuted, rather than just morally guilty. He makes this clear by bringing up paying a penalty in civil court.

Kant states very clearly that being truthful in all your declarations is a "sacred command of reason" which is unconditional regardless of convenience.

Kant says if you tell the truth and aid in a murder, you bear no moral guilt because you had no freedom to choose in the matter because truthfulness is your duty. Kant says an "accident \*causes\* the harm" in that case (not the murderer!?)

----

From this reading, I judge Salmieri's claims about Kant's positions to be reasonable. Cite check passed!

I thought all the Kant I read in this post was really bad. Does anyone disagree?

Elliot Temple  
www.curi.us

From: Justin Mallone <justinceo@gmail.com>  
Cc: FIGG <fallible-ideas@googlegroups.com>  
Subject: [FI] Rand vs. Kant (was: the line separating good and evil)  
Date: June 16, 2017 at 8:47 AM

On Jun 12, 2017, at 12:33 PM, Justin Kalef justinkalef@yahoo.com [fallible-ideas] <fallible-ideas@yahoogroups.com> wrote:

The idea that Kant is the enemy of humanity is boilerplate for Randoids. I'm no Kantian, but I once taught an upper-level course on Kant that was attended by a fervent Randoid. He came in saying that Kant was the embodiment of all evil. He admitted by the end of the course that Kant's actual views were nothing like the way they were represented by Rand, Leonard Peikoff, etc., who (he admitted reluctantly) clearly misunderstood them.

It would be useful if you could tell us 1) the substance of your student's understanding of Rand and Peikoff's criticisms of Kant, and 2) what you think Kant's actual views were on the matters relevant to those criticisms.

Or you could just go straight to the source, and point out some critiques that Rand and Peikoff had of Kant that you think were mistaken, and also explain why they are important mistakes and not minor detail errors.

BTW, some students tell their professors what they think their professors want to hear...

-JM

--

From: Elliot Temple <curi@curi.us>  
Cc: FI <fallible-ideas@yahoogroups.com>, FIGG <fallible-ideas@googlegroups.com>  
Subject: Re: Empiricism and Kant  
Date: June 21, 2017 at 12:43 PM

On Jun 13, 2017, at 4:59 AM, ibshambat@gmail.com:

The empiricist approach to discerning reality is making sense of evidence that has been gleaned from the senses. Some philosophers – such as Kant – challenged this approach. They stated such things as that senses are imprecise, and that (in Kant) they only see the appearance of things – the “phenomenal” - but fail to see the things in themselves – the “noumenal.”

I want to make sense of the whole thing.

Now the senses are actually not imprecise. Incomplete yes, but imprecise no. We do not see the radio waves or the infrared radiation; we see the visible light. However the information that I get from seeing the visible light is not an erroneous one. If I see you, I am fairly certain that I am actually seeing you – both the phenomenal you and the noumenal you. I can from this make an educated guess that you are not Adolf Hitler.

Sorting out these issues requires being more careful. The word "imprecise" has a meaning when it comes to observations and measurements, which you ignore. A measurement of 1.337 inches is more precise than a measurement of 1.3 inches. Our senses are imprecise in the straightforward sense that they offer limited, not unlimited, precision. You can't look at something and see the exact, precise color or length of it.

You are trying to communicate about subtle differences between terms like "imprecise" and "incomplete", but you don't define them and you aren't using them correctly according to their standard English meanings.

After that you start equivocating with "not erroneous", "fairly certain" and "educated guess". These are standard equivocations used by almost everyone including Objectivists. But they're still a big problem.

When you say "not erroneous" do you mean it CANNOT be mistaken? That is, it's infallible? The standard equivocation is to be unclear on this meaning -- to say things like "X is not mistaken" like it's a fact. But then to admit, if pressed, that X could be mistaken.

This equivocation is much worse in this context because of a second ambiguity. It's possible to say that sensory data CANNOT be mistaken, it merely IS, and the concept of error doesn't apply. If the sense data is misleading because of a defect in your eye, that's a different thing than a mistake. One can reasonably say mistakes are only made by intelligences, and that one's \*interpretation\* of sense data can be mistaken but the concept of being mistaken or not doesn't even apply to the data itself. (If one was taking that position, then one shouldn't say uses phrases like "not erroneous" to refer to error-doesn't-apply-here. But people do it anyway.)

"fairly certain" can mean things like

- you don't want to be held accountable if your claim is wrong, so you hedged.

- you don't know how certain you are, so you used a phrase that could mean pretty much any amount between 100% and 0%.

- you want wiggle room to treat what you say as meaning "certain" sometimes and meaning "uncertain" at other times.

and if that weren't bad enough, the word "certain" alone is used as an equivocation. does it mean fallible knowledge? and "educated guess" as you put it? or does it mean you found the truth and it's proven beyond being doubted? people equivocate between those two meanings. and they pretend to mean something in the middle, which they can't actually define.

now let's consider "educated guess". does this mean simply "i have a guess and i think it's good?" or does it mean something more than that? is "educated" a claim to some kind of meaningful, objective status for the guess separate from your own positive opinion? it's unclear and the phrasing allows you to shift positions mid discussion.

and it fails to specify \*how\* educated the guess is. all guesses are educated more than zero and less than infinitely. so what's the idea here? it means it's educated an amount people in our culture think is good. which is really vague and unargued/unexplained.

there are lots of ways a guess can be educated. the important things are:

1) if any of the ways the guess is educated are relevant to the discussion, they can be stated. (none were stated here.)

2) is the claim to educated status meant to grant authority to one's position?

3) there is a myth that ideas have a continuum of epistemological status. Peikoff labels points on this continuum as "arbitrary", "possible", "probable", "certain". there are terrible terms which are chosen for maximizing equivocation. "probable" mixes things up with math, "certain" suggests infallibility, and the word "possible" has a meaning (that there's no way to rule something out) which is true of many claims in \*all\* the categories. the phrase "educated guess" may be a claim for higher status on this continuum. this continuum is one of the fundamental mistakes in epistemology and has led to endless equivocating. what difference does status on this continuum actually make? fundamentally everything comes down to critical refutation of ideas – or not. and the continuum sometimes refers to good arguments (for which no continuum is needed -- one always can and should act on ideas with NO criticism of them), but sometimes the continuum hides the lack of any arguments.

so the fundamental equivocation is: do you have an argument that something is false? YES OR NO? but people don't want to face that. people want to ignore criticism and claim it's outweighed by some positive factor. they also want to ignore that they have no criticism of something, but say its merits are outweighed anyway. (but if it's actually missing some important merit, why not just criticize that inadequacy?)

and meanwhile they are very interested in arguments that something is true. but that approach can't work because there's no way to prove something true, we always have improvable fallible knowledge not some sort of final, perfection. so what does trying to argue your idea is true mean, exactly, if you aren't arguing it's perfect? you're arguing it's the best we've got right now, it's good enough to act on, stuff like that. but how do you do that? to say it's the best idea we've got so far, you refute the rival ideas. and to say it's good enough to act on, you consider if there's any criticism of acting on it.



In many cases, the things as they appear are very much the things as they are. If I am beholding an apple, I can be sure that I am holding an apple and not a frog. In this case the noumenal and the phenomenal are the same thing; and senses very much are a valid guide to reality.

Where Kant does have a point is in understanding people. People are very different inside from how they are on the outside. What a person looks like through the visual sense says absolutely nothing about the person's character or predispositions. In case of people, the Kantian argument has quite a lot of validity even if it is not conclusively correct. To understand the person in-himself takes much different skills from discerning him in appearance. In this situation, the noumenal and the phenomenal very much differ from one another; and it takes different skills to understand each.

The empiricist view works with most of non-human reality. With human reality, Kant has a point. Do not discard physics or mathematics because of its empiricist origins. Do not judge what a person is on the inside from what he is on the outside. There is a place for both approaches, and it is instructive of all intelligence to recognize which – and where – to apply.

i recently wrote several posts about Kant at the Fallible Ideas yahoo discussion group.

[https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/fallible-ideas/search/messages?advance=true&am=CONTAINS&at=Elliot%20Temple&sm=CONTAINS&st=kant&dm=IS\\_ANY&fs=false](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/fallible-ideas/search/messages?advance=true&am=CONTAINS&at=Elliot%20Temple&sm=CONTAINS&st=kant&dm=IS_ANY&fs=false)

you can read them at the link. and if you'd like a discussion group with more activity, you could join us to discuss Kant, Objectivism, YES/NO based epistemology without equivocations etc, there.

Elliot Temple

Get my philosophy newsletter:

[www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter](http://www.fallibleideas.com/newsletter)