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## THE KANTIAN REVOLUTION

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Accounts of the history of modern German philosophy generally begin with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). However, exclusive attention to Kant's role can distort what was significant about German philosophy in the modern period. Concentrating on Kant produces a picture of the early development of modern philosophy in which the dominant factor is the analysis of the structures of the mind as the new post-theological basis of knowledge and ethics. This picture leads to the claim that the decisive contribution of the twentieth century to philosophy is the 'linguistic turn' – the turn towards the primacy of questions of language before questions of the mind – which some philosophers regard as invalidating much of what was attempted by Kant. An account of this kind fails, though, to show that a version of the linguistic turn is itself part of German philosophy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the work on language of J. G. Herder and J. G. Hamann from the 1760s onwards, which is taken up by the Romantics at the end of the century and developed by the linguist, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and the philosopher and theologian, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, the role of language in thought is regarded as essential. Many of the assumptions of the 'linguistic turn' are, therefore, already present much earlier than is usually thought. Modern German philosophy has always been concerned both with the mind and with language. However, even though Herder had already published his *Essay on the Origin of Language* in 1772, nine years before Kant's most influential work, it is still best to begin with Kant. We will look at Kant in more detail than many of the other philosophers because his innovations affect all his successors.

## Making Kant Accessible

Many approaches in contemporary theory in the humanities involve questions about the nature of the self which demonstrably derive from Kant. Kant is, however, not easy to understand. Much of the notorious difficulty of Kant's thought is a result of the language he employs. His vocabulary often derives from philosophical texts of his era which are now neither easily accessible nor widely read. He is, moreover, writing at a time when there is no real precedent for writing philosophy in German: most philosophical texts until his time were written in Latin. Despite these obstacles, things are not as hard as they are sometimes made out to be. To take one example: the fact that Kant refers to what he is writing as 'transcendental philosophy' is enough to make many people think that he is concerned with something incomprehensible beyond the everyday world. However, what he means by 'transcendental' has nothing to do with anything otherworldly. Something is transcendental if it is, in Kant's phrase, the 'condition of possibility' of something. Thus it might be said that sex, at least until the advent of in-vitro fertilization, was transcendental in relation to pregnancy. Another example: the first part of Kant's first major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (the 'first Critique') of 1781, is called the 'Transcendental Aesthetic'. *Aisthesis* in Greek means perception by the senses, and this section of the work is simply concerned with the conditions under which perception takes place. Perception must be of something in a spatial location at a specific time. Kant's claim is that the conditions of perception are functions of the mind. Space and time are the prior framework – what he terms the 'forms of intuition' – within which we perceive objects, so they are not attributes of the objects themselves. Why is this so important?

The idea that space and time are functions of the mind remains one of Kant's most controversial doctrines. However, the idea is part of a series of contentions about the nature of knowledge which revolutionized modern philosophy. In order to understand a revolution one has to understand what preceded it that meant there had to be a radical change, rather than a gradual one. The thinking which Kant put in question can be summed up in a phrase used by the contemporary American philosopher, Hilary Putnam. Putnam refers to the rejection of the idea of a 'ready-made world'. This idea can be construed in a theological sense, so that Kant is understood as undermining the idea that God made the world. The real point of the idea, though, is that in a 'ready-made' world there is no doubt that the truth about what is the case is already 'out there' as part of the world itself.

Knowledge therefore entails establishing something which is the way it is completely independently of anything we do. Kant's contention is that we can no longer justifiably claim to be able to attain such a point of view, because what we know is known under certain unavoidable conditions. It is *not* that Kant is denying the validity of well-confirmed scientific theories, or that what we justifiably know *might* indeed be true of a 'ready-made' world; he is just asking what it is that makes theories reliable once previous assumptions about this reliability have been shown to be impossible to sustain.

The power of what preceded Kant's new claims lay in the idea that the world was held together on the basis of a pre-existing divine foundation which could not be shaken. There was a way the world really is because it was *made* that way. René Descartes (1596–1650) had already begun to shake the faith in this basis when he pointed out both how unreliable the senses could be and how much of the science of the ancients turned out to be mistaken. Along with his argument about the certainty of his existence as thinking being, Descartes did, however, also rely on the claim that he could prove God existed.

Kant not only shows in the first Critique that Descartes's proof of God's existence is invalid, but he also accepts aspects of an even more emphatic attack on the notion of a reality with an inbuilt rational structure, that of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume (1711–76). Hume's arguments threaten any claim to the effect that the universe is, so to speak, held together by theological glue. This glue is supposed to be apparent in the laws of nature, which reveal a regularity and necessity which we cannot escape or ignore. Hume's argument is simple. He asks how we in fact arrive at the knowledge of the laws that govern the functioning of nature, and insists that we require observation of phenomena for this. The phenomena come to us through our senses, and we can only know something if it is associated with other phenomena that have also come to us through our senses. If we think something is caused by something else, we therefore do so because we *habitually* see a conjunction of events of the same kind. However, the vital fact about what comes to us through the senses is that it is contingent. We never absolutely know what we will perceive next, and even when we think we are certain that we do know, we can be mistaken. Everything we know therefore has contingency built into it, because it is reliant on what we happen to have perceived in the past, rather than on anything 'out there' which is already ordered independently of ourselves. This 'empiricist' view made the world feel a very unstable place indeed.

What, though, of the fact that there did seem to be a kind of knowledge which was not subject to contingency, namely the a priori truths

of mathematics, which could not be changed by experience? The 'rationalist' philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, had invoked these truths as a proof that there must be a pre-existing structure of things. In the light of the success of Newton's new laws of physics, the mathematically based view seemed highly plausible, but it was always confronted in actual scientific investigation with the empiricist reliance upon contingent observation. What was therefore required was a way to combine the empiricist and the rationalist positions, and this was what Kant tried to establish.

Kant refers to what he is initiating as a 'Copernican turn'. During the first half of the sixteenth century Copernicus had been the first modern thinker to oppose the view that the earth was the centre of the universe with mathematically based arguments. In the wake of Copernicus, at almost exactly the same time as Descartes was beginning to change the medieval world-view in the 1630s, Galileo gave more decisive evidence for what Copernicus had suggested, and was threatened by the Catholic Church with being burned at the stake for doing so. Here it becomes rather easy to see what might have been 'at stake' in challenging medieval religious authority: others had already been burned to death for doing so.<sup>1</sup> The odd thing about Kant's turn is that it can be seen as involving the *opposite* of Copernicus's turn, though it is just as revolutionary. Copernicus began to take us *away* from the centre of the universe, and thereby helped set in motion the development of the scientific image of the universe we now inhabit, in which the place of humankind is pretty insignificant. Kant, on the other hand, makes our thinking the very principle of the universe's intelligibility, thus putting the human mind at the centre of everything.

It should now be clear that something spectacular is afoot in what Kant proposes. The big question is how he is to be interpreted. On the one hand, he can be understood as demonstrating that reliable knowledge depends upon our ability to employ certain prior mental rules which cannot be derived from looking at the world. On the other hand, he also seems to be suggesting that nothing could be intelligible at all without the activity of thought, which becomes the 'light' that illuminates an otherwise dark universe. It is vital to

1 There is a kind of rationale for some of the opposition to such challenges, which is well illustrated in Bertolt Brecht's play about Galileo. In it the little monk suggests that what Galileo proposes is likely to render his peasant parents deeply unhappy because it threatens the stable world-picture that made sense of the harshness of their lives. This kind of ambivalence about science is crucial to modern German philosophy.

remember that, even though he has generally been read in the English-speaking world as a theorist of knowledge and of ethics, what Kant is ultimately trying to achieve is a map of our location in the world once we can no longer assume a theological basis for what we know and do.

Kant himself says that he is drawing the limits of knowledge to make space for religious faith, but it is now pretty clear that the modern world has been unable to fill that space. In the philosophy of J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel, known as ‘German Idealism’, which begins in the 1790s, the space is often filled with aspects of what Kant proposes which are given a more emphatic status than Kant himself thinks possible. Fichte, for example, will make the activity of the I the source of the world’s intelligibility in a way that Kant rejects.<sup>2</sup> Development of some of these thinkers’ ideas will be germane to Schopenhauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche, who, though, reject many of the central philosophical contentions of German Idealism. However, the structures which inform much of what these thinkers say still depend upon what might initially appear to be rather specialized aspects of Kant’s philosophy. In the following I will primarily consider elements of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)<sup>3</sup> and the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), with the emphasis mainly on the first Critique.

## The First Critique

The *Critique of Pure Reason* seeks to come to terms with the fact that modern science has begun to progress so rapidly, both because of the new importance of empirical observation and because of its reliance upon the certainties of mathematics. The problem is that the first of these two sources of knowledge is changing and contingent, whereas the second is supposed to be unchanging and necessary. This problem has been around in Western philosophy at least since Plato, so the impact of Kant cannot just be explained in terms of his contributions to dealing with this perennial dilemma. Let us, then, look at how Kant tries to reconcile the apparently incompatible dimensions of observed empirical data and a priori knowledge. In previous

2 He does, though, seem to come close to Fichte in his final work, the unfinished *Opus Posthumum*.

3 I choose this in preference to the second Critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, because it is more accessible and its influence has probably been greater.

philosophy the realm of a priori knowledge, the realm of ‘pure reason’, had been the location of debates about the nature of God and being, which did not rely on empirical evidence. The title *Critique of Pure Reason* indicates Kant’s desire to question the basis of such debates. The vital element in the first Critique is the establishing of a series of necessary – a priori – rules of thought for the classification of phenomena, together with the idea that these rules are based on the ‘spontaneous’ nature of the mind. For Kant something is spontaneous when it takes place ‘of its own accord’, rather than being caused by something else. It might seem odd that in cognition *spontaneity* functions in terms of necessary rules, but this is the crux of what Kant proposes. The idea is that the knowledge of natural necessity is only possible on the basis of something which is itself not necessitated. The borderline between deterministic nature, and human spontaneity, is the location of the most fundamental disputes in modernity about how human beings are to describe themselves. Kant’s three ‘Critiques’ can be seen as concerning themselves with: in the first, how we arrive at natural laws and what that means for our descriptions of our place in the universe; in the second, how we understand human freedom; and, in the third, how we might connect the realms of natural necessity and freedom via the fact that we can also apprehend nature as beautiful and create beauty ourselves in art.<sup>4</sup> This threefold division has, in turn, led to the view that Kant maps out the ways in which modernity separates the spheres of natural science, law and morality and artistic expression, which had not been separated in pre-modern cultures (see the Conclusion).

Kant claims that knowledge must have two sources: ‘intuition’, what is ‘given to us’ in specific perceptual experience of the world, and ‘categories’ and ‘concepts’, the mental rules according to which we link intuitions together into judgements. The first source involves ‘receptivity’: it depends upon how the world impinges on us. The second source is spontaneous: it involves the activity of the mind. The way to understand what is persuasive about this is to ponder how we apprehend objects in the world. We have no choice but to do this all the time, although we can be mistaken about what we apprehend. In one respect the impact of the world upon us is just causal: physiological reactions in the brain and the rest of the organism take place when we perceive things. This does not explain, though, how an object which we may assume is the same object can be apprehended in very different ways. At this level it seems clear that there must be an active

4 All three Critiques discuss the relationship between freedom and necessity, but their primary focus is what is suggested here.

element of judgement in play. The very possibility of re-describing something cannot just be the result of how it impacts upon our organism, because we can so easily misjudge. This might be because the object has been located in the wrong context, as when a vegetable is classified as a fruit. It can also be because what were thought to be the boundaries of an object turn out not to be. This kind of confusion is apparent in the history of the chemical elements, in which things that are now seen as different were seen as the same, and vice versa. Immediate perception, then, is not the same as judgement: the former is passive and can take place with only a minimal active contribution by the mind, the latter entails the activity of the mind. The source of Kant's ideas here is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Curate' from *Émile*. What Kant means is underlined by his claim that the 'senses do not judge', so they cannot be mistaken: mistakes occur when we judge what the senses provide us with in terms of concepts.

The use of concepts to describe perceivable objects inherently involves the possibility of re-describing what is perceived. However, in the first Critique, Kant is initially most concerned about how scientific laws can be invariably valid, despite Hume's sceptical objections. His contention is that there must be necessary kinds of judgement. These involve what he terms 'categories', or 'pure concepts of the understanding', by which he means forms of thought which cannot be derived from looking at the world. The difference between empirical and pure judgements is vital to his conception. If I assert that there is one red billiard ball on a table, my understanding of its being red comes from having learned to use the concept 'red' by seeing red things that have the same or similar attributes as what I now see. We learn concepts by repeatedly seeing things as related to each other. How, though, do we learn about 'oneness', which is a notion universally applicable to any single entity and is required for mathematical thinking, or how do we learn about 'sameness'? We cannot learn the notion of oneness from seeing lots of single things, because that *presupposes* the notion we are trying to learn. The categories of oneness and manyness are the basis of what Kant terms 'synthetic judgements a priori'. The judgement  $2 + 2 = 4$ , which is usually taken to be both a priori (not derived from experience) and 'analytic', in the manner of the analytic judgement 'all bachelors are unmarried men', is, he claims, really 'synthetic' (i.e. it adds to our knowledge).<sup>5</sup> This is because 4 can also be  $3 + 1$ ,  $4 + 0$  and an infinity of other combinations, such as 3.3333 recurring + .7777 recurring. There can

5 We shall come back to this – questionable – distinction in chapter 8.

therefore be pure knowledge that can be increased without input from the senses, so this knowledge is also ‘synthetic’.

A further pure concept is the notion of cause. If I see the billiard ball move because it is hit by another billiard ball, the movement is caused by the moving ball. What I see, though, are two balls moving in certain ways. I cannot *see* that one causes the other to move. In order to do this I must *already* possess the notion that if one thing *necessarily* follows from the other in time it is caused by it. Hume’s alternative is that *any* event which is followed by another event would have to be seen as possibly caused by the preceding event, even though the events might be completely unrelated apart from the fact that I see one follow the other. To say something really *is* causal, then, means adding an element of necessity *in thought*. This necessity cannot be said to pertain in the world, because all our information from the world is subject to the contingency Hume highlighted.

Another element of Kant’s thought can suggest why his argument should be taken seriously. For Kant, the essential factor in knowledge is the ability to say something is the same as something else. The problem here is that, as Leibniz had demonstrated by his principle of the ‘Identity of Indiscernibles’, it may be that no thing really is the same as anything else. Any two objects may appear to be identical in all respects, but they will always differ in some respect, even if it is only at the microscopic or even smaller levels (although there are now arguments that in the quantum domain this may not apply). A strict application of Leibniz’s idea would mean that the only real form of identity is that of something with itself. As a result, all true statements would have to be tautologies, because they would simply explicate a particular thing’s already existing intrinsic properties. Each thing would just be what it is, and would never be identical with anything else. For Leibniz this leads to the notion of a divine insight into the ultimate true nature of things, all of which are inherently particular.

Leibniz’s conception of identity would, though, render all scientific knowledge based on observation liable to the sceptical objection that, because things are never really the same, one could not assert that they obey laws. This is precisely what Kant wishes to avoid. We therefore need a way of dealing with the fact that things may never *be* exactly the same. They may, of course, also *appear* to be completely different, even though they are the same with regard to the laws which govern them. Yet more problematic is the fact that subjective *experiences* are both contingent and also never identical, because we never receive precisely the same patterns through our senses at any two moments in our lives. Kant consequently argues that the identity



required for informative knowledge must be a built-in function of our thought. In order for our thinking to function in this manner, there must, though, be a way of coming to terms with the fact that the sources of knowledge are of a different order from each other. One source receives endless particularity, the other actively subsumes this particularity into forms of identity. The vital factor here will be the identity across time of the subject that apprehends in terms of these forms, without which experience would merely disintegrate into random particularity.

The first Critique is divided up into three main sections. The first is the 'Transcendental Aesthetic', the theory of space and time as the 'forms of intuition'. The second is the 'Transcendental Logic', the account of the necessary forms of thought. The third is the 'Transcendental Dialectic', the account of what occurs if concepts that are only supposed to apply to the world of experience are applied to what is beyond the limitations inherent in experience. These limitations are: (1) that experience has to take place in a specific time and place, (2) that experience requires certain a priori notions to be intelligible at all. In this latter part of the Critique Kant is referring to what one does if, for example, one moves from using the notion of causality to explain a specific regular occurrence in nature based on empirical evidence, to asserting that the whole of nature is causally determined. The latter judgement would require infinite confirmation, because the evidence for it is only ever supplied when the law for a phenomenon is arrived at by experiment and observation. At the same time, without the *assumption* that all of the natural world functions deterministically, we would be faced with scepticism, because the particular part of nature under examination might in fact be an exception to the iron law of causality. Kant's attempt to deal with this situation has far-reaching consequences for his successors. The first Critique moves, then, from an account of the necessary framework of thinking, to considerations of what happens to the traditional questions of metaphysics, concerning God, the world, and freedom, in the light of the restrictions imposed by this framework.

## The Transcendental Subject

The decisive aspect of the first two parts of the first Critique, which influenced much subsequent philosophy, is the role given to the subject, in the light of the 'Copernican turn'. The first aspect of the subject, which is dealt with in the Transcendental Aesthetic, is the fact that it can only perceive objects within a framework. The account of

the 'forms of intuition', space and time, is part of Kant's demonstration that our knowledge requires step-by-step elaboration, because we are never able to grasp an object as a whole all at once. The ability to know the whole of something at once would only be possible for God, who actually brings the object into existence. Once it is acknowledged that space and time should be thought of as belonging to how we must perceive things, rather than to the things themselves, we can achieve certainty within the limits set by how objects can appear to us. We cannot know how objects are independently of the form in which we must perceive them. Knowledge of 'things in themselves' is therefore impossible.

The Transcendental Logic is Kant's account of what he calls the 'understanding', our capacity for law-bound knowledge. If it is the case that experience has an irreducibly contingent element, there must be an element in knowledge which overcomes contingency. Experience takes place in time, and judgements of experience require the linking of contingently occurring events as *necessarily* related. Perceptions *must* be different from one another (otherwise they would merge into one inarticulable whole), and they are not actively produced by the knowing subject, because the subject receives them in 'intuition'. What links them together must, then, itself be something that remains the same. Cognition depends upon memory, and memory depends upon a subject which itself remains identical between different experiences and which can *apprehend* the experiences as the same. Furthermore, the subject must also be able to apprehend the moments of remembered perception as belonging to *it*. The moments must have a 'mineness' which means they can be reidentified as part of my experience as a whole.

This essential requirement Kant terms the 'synthetic unity of apperception'. 'Apperception' is Leibniz's term for the 'reflective' awareness *that* one is perceiving something in the world. I think about my partner, and then 'apperceptively' think about the way in which I think about my partner. This kind of self-consciousness is essential to being able, for example, to ponder whether one may have misjudged something. Kant's extension of the use of the term beyond 'empirical apperception', which occurs when I reflect on my awareness at a particular moment, to the 'synthetic unity of apperception', is vital for his whole account of epistemology. Consider the 'synthetic unity of apperception' as follows. If I am to remember later in the day something I saw this morning, a whole series of perceptions, experiences and thoughts will have intervened between now and this morning. Most of these experiences will not have occurred to me in an 'apperceptive' manner: I will just have had them without reflect-

ing on their relationship to my consciousness. How, then, is it that I can connect to moments of awareness in the past as being part of my experience at all, unless there is a connecting unity of myself which makes this possible? I am not conscious of this unity in my general experience, because empirical apperception only occurs when I reflect on my perceiving, and this may be a rare occurrence. The unity does, however, seem to have to exist if I am to make sense of experience at all, especially ‘experience’ in Kant’s strong sense of perceptions correctly judged according to rules. As Kant puts it, ‘an “*I think*” must *be able* to accompany all my representations’ (1968a: B 132).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, if scientific laws are to be possible, the ‘*I think*’ which accompanies my experience must also be able to make necessary links between moments of experience. These moments are not subject to my will, even though the linking itself must take place via my ‘spontaneity’ in judgement.

The kinds of linkage which are a priori rules for organizing experience are termed the ‘categories’, or ‘pure forms of understanding’. Kant lists twelve of these, under four headings: *Quantity*, *Quality*, *Relation*, *Modality*. These forms divide up how things exist in terms of ways of thinking which cannot be derived from observing the world. The forms have been argued about ever since, and we do not need to get embroiled in the detail of these arguments. Two points should, though, be noted. An important issue for subsequent philosophy is how these forms of thought relate to natural languages: do they remain the same even in languages which do not possess the same distinctions as Kant is making? The other point concerns how these distinctions came to emerge at all in human thinking. Kant does not concern himself with the genesis of the categories in the first Critique, but a significant part of German Idealism, and the work of Heidegger and others, will be concerned with the genesis of forms of thinking.

The next stage of the Critique, the ‘Transcendental Deduction of the Categories’, is about justifying the use of these a priori forms of thought in relation to objects encountered in the world. ‘Deduction’ is used in an old German legal sense, where it means ‘legitimation’. This part of the Critique will give rise to some of the major questions in German Idealist and Romantic philosophy. We have already encountered the main argument in explaining the ‘synthetic unity of apperception’. Kant insists that this unity is the ‘highest point, to

<sup>6</sup> The page references to Kant are, as is now standard, to the A and B versions of the Academy edition which are generally given in all editions of Kant. The A version is the original 1781 version, the B version is the extended version of 1787.

which all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic, and, following it, transcendental philosophy' (ibid. B 134) must be attached. The basic issue is how 'subjective conditions of thought can have objective validity'. They can only do so if there are necessary a priori rules of synthesis which make true judgements possible, and which are inherent in the thinking subject. For *this* to be possible, as we saw, there must be an underlying unity in the subject which is independent both of the contingency of its experience and of the different moments of its temporal existence.

The question which is vital to Kant's immediate successors, such as Fichte, is how the claims about the 'transcendental subject' can be substantiated. If knowledge comes about on the basis of the unity of this subject, how can the subject arrive at knowledge of *itself*? Knowledge must always be arrived at under the conditions of space and time, and of the categories, and these depend precisely upon the subject. The subject is therefore split. On the one hand, it is an empirical object in the world, namely its body. On the other hand, its body obeys laws that are *themselves* only possible because of the subject's *further* existence as something that is *not* in the world, namely as the spontaneous source of judgements. It is this issue which leads to radically divergent construals of Kant. Some of these go in an extreme Idealist direction, making the spontaneity of the I the ultimate key to the very intelligibility of nature itself. Others try to make out that this apparent necessary opacity of the thinking subject to itself need not invalidate Kant's claims about knowledge. A further crucial divide emerges here. Some thinkers, like Schopenhauer and Freud, claim that the problem of self-knowledge reveals an irrational basis for the rational aspects of the subject. This basis is the source of the subject's spontaneity, which is inaccessible to philosophical explanation and which must be explored by other means, such as art or psychoanalysis. We shall return to these issues in the coming chapters.

## Judgement

Kant describes knowledge in terms of a 'threefold synthesis', in which something is first 'apprehended' as affecting the mind, then is 'reproduced' in the imagination and finally is 'recognized' via a concept which classifies it. This all depends on the ability of self-consciousness to 'synthesize' identity from multiplicity. We order appearances by the 'power of judgement'. Judgement takes place when the rules of the understanding (categories and empirical con-

cepts) are applied to intuitions. Even though the understanding is the source of rules, judgements applied to things encountered in the world cannot *themselves* be rule-bound. In order to judge in terms of rules whether a phenomenon belongs under a particular rule or not – is the object I see in front of me to be classified as a dog or a horse? – one would require a rule for deciding that this is a decision between dogs and horses, a rule for deciding between dogs and horses, a rule for applying that decision, a rule for that rule, and so on. Kant therefore claims that judgement is a ‘talent’ that cannot itself be acquired by rules. We are always going to be in situations where an indefinite number of rules could apply to a phenomenon, so that a regress of rules for rules would be ubiquitous. If someone is bad at judging, there is therefore no way in which they can improve their judgement by just learning more rules. Judgement involves an element of ineliminable contingency, and yet is required in *any* concrete knowledge claim. The exception to this are the categories, which necessarily apply to objects a priori. If I am trying to judge how many x’s there are (whether they be dogs or horses), I cannot even begin to do so if I do not already have oneness and manyness as a prior part of my thinking. I may make mistakes in judging the actual number of x’s, but even to do this in an intelligible manner requires the ability to be able to count at all.

There is a further important stage in Kant’s account of judgement, which makes things significantly more complex. The problem is how pure concepts can be applied to the world of the senses. This dilemma leads Kant to the notion of ‘schematism’. He illustrates the problem when he says that ‘nobody is going to say: this, e.g. causality, could also be intuited through the senses and is contained in appearances’ (ibid. B 176–7, A 137–8). You can’t point to a cause, saying ‘Look at that cause!’, and hope to be understood. All you can do is to point to two events and claim their connection is causal. Dichotomies between wholly separate domains always cause difficulties in philosophy, and the attempt to separate the a priori and the empirical is no exception. Kant argues that there must be a third, connecting term between categories and appearances, which must therefore be both pure and empirical. The argument is made more plausible by his example. Five points . . . . . are, he says, an ‘image’ of the number five. What, though, of a thousand points? The image of this, like the image of a thousand-sided figure, is quite easy to represent – it can be drawn without great difficulty – but it will not be perceptible *as such* to any normal person. The ‘schema’ of a thousand is, therefore, ‘more the idea of a method’ (ibid. B 180, A 140) of representing a thousand in an image than the image itself. The schema seems suspended between

the empirical and the a priori. It does, though, make some sense of how it is that wholly accurate mathematical calculations about a triangle can be linked to the messy empirical object we recognize in a drawing.

The implications of the notion of schema are more far-reaching than it might at first appear. The schema is also what allows one to apply a general concept to a concrete particular in the world, such as a dog. A dog can look like a small, rat-like beast, or like something closer to a small horse. Without the schema any new, never-before encountered member of the species 'dog' could not be recognized as such. The empirical schema is what enables us to 'see something as' something, even if we have not encountered this version of the something before. Such an ability is crucial if one considers that the same object can be seen as a whole variety of different things, or can have an indefinite number of descriptions attached to it. Schelling will soon realize (in 1800) that there is therefore a link between what Kant seeks to achieve with the schema, and the working of language. Use of the same word for different things involves the ability to abstract from the particularity of the things to a general rule that applies to the type of thing, which governs whether the word is correctly applicable. The link between schematism and language will be central to Romanticism, and to the development of modern 'hermeneutics', the 'art of interpretation'.

Kant discusses the role of schemata with regard to the categories. All these ways of thinking about objects in the world depend on how the a priori category is applied to contingent intuitions. This application always involves some form of temporal ordering: 'Schemata are for this reason nothing but *determinations of time* a priori according to rules' (ibid. B 184, A 145). The schema of 'reality', for example, is therefore the 'existence at a specific time' of an object given in perception. For Kant, something's being real means that it can be given in perception, and this, as we have seen, can only be at a specific time in a specific place. The link between the schemata and temporality will be a crucial component in Heidegger's thinking. Heidegger argues that without the prior 'opening up' of a world where time reveals things as *different* the subject would not be in the position of bringing these forms of identity to bear on the world.

Kant makes a further distinction concerning the relationship between mind and world. He claims that we must think of objects of knowledge in two respects: as they appear to us, as 'phenomena', and as they exist independently of our thinking of them, as 'noumena'. The former allow one to form concepts of the object through the synthesis of intuitions. The latter, in contrast, might seem to demand their

own form of knowledge, a knowledge of things beyond what can be apprehended by the senses. However, Kant makes a distinction between two notions of noumena. In the 'negative' sense the idea of the noumenon is what we arrive at by abstracting from the object as an object of perception. We assume it exists, but can say nothing specific about it, because all determinacy relies on perceptual input. In the 'positive' sense we assume a special kind of access to objects which does not rely on their being given in 'intuition'. This access, of course, is precisely what Kant regards as impossible. The first of these conceptions of the thing can be plausibly construed in terms of thinking about the totality of the aspects of the object. We can only ever apprehend an object piecemeal, but it is not contradictory to assume the object exists under all the different descriptions we could give of it, though the question of when a new description means an object is no longer the same object as it is under another description may arise here. The second conception suggests that the thing is now a complete mystery, wholly separate from anything specific we can think about it. Despite Kant's insistence on rejecting the positive sense of noumenon, other aspects of his thought will encourage people to think that he has built a complete barrier between ourselves and the way the world 'really is'. We shall return to this point later.

## Reason

We now need to consider Kant's response in the Transcendental Dialectic to the consequences of the limitations inherent in knowledge. The understanding can only judge empirical data, and it is characterized precisely in terms of the limitations on what it has access to. Clearly, though, thinking involves more than making judgements about the laws governing specific things in the world. Even making the claim that the understanding can be *described* as being limited to such judgements means that thinking must be able to move beyond what the understanding alone can do. The further capacity of thought which makes the move beyond empirical judgements possible Kant terms 'reason'. Reason creates unity among the rules of the understanding, whereas the understanding creates unity among empirical data. The latter can rely on reality, in Kant's sense of that which is given in perception; the former runs the risk of falling back into what the whole of the first Critique is concerned to avoid, namely speculation about the ultimate nature of things based on concepts that cannot refer to reality. The problem is that the kind of notions involved in such unsustainable speculation cannot actually be

avoided if we think about questions such as: 'Is all of nature causally determined, and does that mean that there is no free human action?'

Kant has no doubt that the nature given in perception is wholly determined by laws. However, he also thinks that rational beings must be able to exercise 'causality through freedom' when they decide to *act* in terms of rules they impose on themselves, rather than merely behave in terms of stimulus and response. How can this contradiction be resolved? The question of whether people are responsible for their actions, or are just the result of causal processes in nature and society, is unavoidable in modernity. Kant wishes to arrive at an adequate answer to it which sustains a basis for moral responsibility. The underlying issue involves what he terms 'dialectic'. This is the use of forms of thought which are only valid for dealing with the phenomenal world to talk about noumenal things in themselves. We necessarily employ metaphysical notions to understand the overall nature of our knowledge of the world. These notions should, however, only have the 'regulative' function of systematizing what the understanding does in relation to particular data, not the 'constitutive' function of telling us about the ultimate nature of reality. The attempt to do the latter leads to 'dialectical' contradictions.

Kant's arguments emerge from his examination of the relationship between two terms that will dominate significant parts of German philosophy for the next fifty years: the 'conditioned', and the 'unconditioned' or the 'absolute'. All cognitive explanations rely upon finding something's condition. The condition of a body falling to earth is, for example, the greater mass of the earth than that of the body. Each such condition will itself in turn be conditioned by something else. In other words, every particular thing is relative to, or dependent upon, what makes its existence possible. Kant terms 'the *totality of conditions* to a given conditioned' (ibid. B 380, A 323) a 'transcendental concept of reason'. It is theoretically possible to think of such a concept, even though we can never arrive at the point where we know we have reached it. This totality is, however, not the 'unconditioned in every respect' (ibid. B 383, A 326). It only refers to the sequence of conditions for *one* thing, and these conditions are themselves in turn conditioned. The unity of everything that could be an object of the understanding, the unity of all possible conditions, is a more absolute concept. This unity is an 'idea', a 'necessary concept of reason'. An idea therefore cannot be apprehended in terms of the understanding, even though it involves a generalization of what the understanding does. The idea is, then, not merely arrived at through idle speculation. It is a *necessary* result of how reason works when it moves from what we can know to trying to know about the complete



unity of what we can know. There are three classes of ‘transcendental ideas’: (1) the absolute unity of the thinking subject; (2) the absolute unity of the sequence of conditions of a phenomenon; and (3) the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought. None of these could be termed an object in Kant’s terms, and they are therefore the result of a subjective necessity in thought. The three classes lead to three forms of ‘dialectical conclusions of reason’: the first to ‘paralogisms’, the second to ‘antinomies’, the third to the ‘Ideal of pure reason’. The first two of these forms make the significance of the argument clear.

In the first form, the paralogism, Kant discusses the transcendental unity of the subject. There is a logical, *formal* necessity to think of the subject as unified. If it were not unified, knowledge would, as we saw, become inexplicable. This necessity is, though, often mistakenly used to argue that the subject can be positively *known* as a substance, thus as a noumenon which is the underlying basis of my consciousness of phenomena. Kant insists, however, that the subject is really only ever accessible to itself at particular moments of apperception, not in a timeless manner in which it would grasp itself as a whole. We cannot assert that we *know* our noumenal self without offending against the fact that knowledge is possible only under the conditions of the understanding. Whether the subject can be said, despite Kant’s arguments, to exist in an unconditioned manner will form one of the key questions of the philosophers who follow Kant, especially Fichte.

The antinomies (which means ‘opposed laws’) arise if one tries positively to think the unconditioned as though it were an object of thought like any other. The result of doing so are claims which are in contradiction with each other, as thesis and antithesis, but which both seem to be valid. Kant’s point is once again that one must always avoid using the mode of thinking we use for the world of appearances for thinking about the world as it is in itself. The easiest way to understand this is in relation to the third antinomy, between ‘nature’ and ‘freedom’. The thesis of the third antinomy maintains that there cannot just be determinism in nature. Every empirical cause is also the effect of something else, but this means that there can never be a complete sequence of causes. Any supposedly first cause would also have to be the effect of something else, leading to an infinite regress. The argument is similar to that used to argue that there must be a first cause of the universe, i.e. God. There must therefore be another kind of causality in nature, an ‘absolute spontaneity’, which is not the effect of something else. The *same* kind of causality is what makes us free when we act in a manner that is not determined by antecedent causes such as the prompting of instinct. On the other hand, the

antithesis argues, if we were to assume there is such a freedom in nature, the causal chains which led us to seek the first cause themselves would no longer be a basis for explanation at all. We could not assume that the law of causality was universally applicable. If there is such freedom it must lie *outside* nature itself. There can, though, be no evidence of this, because the source of all evidence for the reality of something is what can be observed *in* nature.

The antinomy is resolved by the argument that as phenomena we are determined like the rest of nature, but as noumena we are free. We are free because we can act in terms of an 'ought', which relies upon an idea, not of how things are, but of how they *should* be. How things should be cannot be derived from what we know of the world as it already is. Think of the issue in these terms. We can perform actions which appear as causally determined events in the world. These can be described in terms of physics, chemistry, etc. The *motivation* for the action is, though, nowhere apparent in these terms. The action *may* actually be prompted by my pleasure or self-interest, thus by inclinations based on natural causality, but it may also be that an action causes me considerable difficulties and no pleasure at all. In the latter case the action could be construed in terms of my awareness that I *ought* to do what I do, not for any benefit that accrues to me, but because I think there is more to life than self-preservation and the increase of pleasure. This fact will be what leads to the key element of Kant's moral philosophy. The remainder of the first Critique is concerned with the demonstration that the arguments of previous metaphysics do not offer what they promise in terms of proofs of the existence of God, or of accounts of the nature of reality as a whole, because they repeat the confusion which Kant seeks to avoid in his account of the antinomies. The complexities of these later sections of the Critique cannot be adequately dealt with here, though they do contain a wealth of insights into the problem of how to resolve the need of thought to think beyond what is finite without making unjustifiable positive claims about the infinite.

## Morals and Foundations

Kant's solution to the third antinomy dictates the structure of his thinking about morality, and gives rise to many of the attempts by his successors to get beyond what he achieved. The attempts are generated above all by the way Kant establishes divisions between the empirical world and the 'intelligible' world. The problem is that actions based on 'causality through freedom' must take place in a realm wholly divorced from the realm of appearing, deterministic

nature. Free decisions are therefore located neither in space nor in time. The point of Kant's argument is to avoid the situation where practical reason, the capacity of rational beings for self-determination, becomes, like everything in the appearing world, subject to something else which determines it. If practical reason were dependent in this way, one would then have to ask what determines what practical reason is determined by, and so on. The result is the following alternative. Either what practical reason depends on must itself be absolute, in the way traditional authority based on God and his representative, the monarch, is supposed to be absolute, or practical reason is itself absolute – in the sense of not being relative to anything else in the world. Kant refuses to allow appeals to divine authority in any sphere, because they entail a claim to know more than we can justify. At the same time, he also insists that reason must transcend the given world. The demand to act in terms of how things *should* be cannot be made in terms of what is already the case. The difficulties Kant attempts to resolve in his practical philosophy are the kind of difficulties which arise with the transition to modernity from societies based on traditional authority.

Kant makes the startling claim at the beginning of the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* that only a good will can be regarded as good without qualification, and that happiness, well-being, etc., cannot be considered to be unconditionally good. He argues that regarding any particular attribute, such as good health, as unconditionally good must confront the fact that a healthy mass killer is hardly supremely desirable. His concern is, then, to establish the 'supreme principle of morality' (1974: BA xv). Moral philosophers make the distinction between 'consequentialist' and 'deontological' theories. The former, such as utilitarian theories, regard the results of an action as deciding its moral worth; the latter, in contrast, regard the moral value of an action as being intrinsic to it, so that certain actions, which may have good consequences for the majority, are still just plain wrong. Kant belongs to the latter camp.

The fact that Kant is seeking a 'supreme principle' makes evident how important he thinks his view of morality is to the modern world, where there can be no appeal to transcendent authority. Morality is to depend upon 'the idea of another and much more worthy purpose of existence' (ibid. BA 7) than the purposes of nature governed by natural causality. He is, then, talking about the goal of life lived in accordance with reason and without divine guarantees.<sup>7</sup> The good will

7 Kant does argue in the first and second Critiques that it is rational to think that good behaviour will be rewarded in the long run, but he later comes to realize that this is a cop-out, and that serious moral argument can only appeal to human self-legislation.

manifests itself most obviously in relation to duty (*‘the necessity to act out of reverence for the law’*: *ibid.* BA 14), where the individual’s interest and desire can easily be in conflict with what they know they *ought* to do. Furthermore, duty is only present when an action cannot be understood to follow from a desire to perform the action because it brings one some benefit, even including the benefit of avoiding the sanctions the law may demand. The crucial factor is the maxim, the general rule, in accordance with which the act is carried out. Because the result of following the maxim is subject to the contingency of the causal events which follow in the empirical world, and so can turn into disaster, the moral worth of an action depends solely upon its being motivated by the highest principle, not on its consequences.

There is therefore no empirical content to Kant’s foundation of morality. Instead of there being Ten Commandments that one should follow in order to be moral, Kant has one wholly abstract imperative. This is the categorical imperative: ‘I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*’ (*ibid.* BA 17).<sup>8</sup> This imperative is perhaps the most criticized aspect of Kant’s moral philosophy. Why this is becomes apparent in relation to Kant’s remark that ‘it is . . . absolutely impossible for experience to establish with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action in other respects right has rested solely on moral grounds’ (*ibid.* BA 27). On the one hand, then, Kant offers a criterion for making moral decisions; on the other, he takes it away again by denying that we can ever know if we are really following the criterion.

Think of Kant’s position like this. If I am to justify something I have done I can try to do so in terms of it being a necessary means to an end. I would then, in Kant’s terms, be following a hypothetical imperative. What, though, makes the end I seek legitimate? I cannot justify it as being right because I want it, because I will at some point inevitably come into conflict with what others may want. The alternative here is between my assertion of my prior rights over others, and the acknowledgement that others have rights in the same way as I do. In a post-feudal society, where there is no reason to assign moral status in terms of one’s God-given position in the social hierarchy, the demand for some kind of universal principle is inescapable. Empirically it is, of course, obvious that people are not equal in talent, health, etc. In the West and in large parts of the rest of the world it *is*, though, now largely impossible to argue for a morality which takes

8 There are other formulations of the imperative, but this one will suffice for explaining the main argument.

these inequalities as the basis for decisions about the rights of individuals. This does not mean that this equality actually exists, but it can mean that we accept the *idea* of such an equality. Think of the way people feel when a double standard is applied and they are the ones who are negatively treated: on what is their sense of outrage based but something like what Kant intends?

A further aspect of Kant's refusal to accept empirical grounds for morality is the following. Observation of the actions of others in the world gives one no criteria for judging that they are or are not behaving morally. Only if I *already* possess some sense of what it is to perform a moral action, a sense which I cannot derive from observation, can I attribute the same kind of sense to others. If there is a highest good, our awareness of it cannot be derived from looking at the world, and thinking, for example, that happiness is that good. Any empirical good will be likely to entail confusion and difficulty as to how it can be attained, and it will depend on the individual's aims and desires as to what it consists in.

The a priori status of the categorical imperative is therefore the result of the impossibility of founding morality either on what we know about the empirical world or on the information we derive about others from that knowledge. Instead, the imperative rests upon granting to others an autonomous status which we grant to ourselves. It may be, as Kant admits, that we never are autonomous in this way, but the *idea* of seeking to be autonomous gives us the possibility of having a shared aim as rational beings. The problem of how it is that we ever come to grant others that status is not answered by Kant. His successors, Fichte and Hegel, are not the least significant for their attempts to give an account of the genesis of the mutual acknowledgement required for a post-theological morality. Why did human beings not remain in a state of mere antagonism to each other, without developing what is required for acknowledging the rights of others? It is often argued that this acknowledgement comes about simply in the name of self-preservation. Constant aggression against the other would mean that I will only last as long as I do not encounter a foe stronger or more cunning than myself. This account does not explain, though, how the more differentiated kinds of moral feeling become possible. These feelings seem to transcend what would come about for mere pragmatic reasons of survival. Whatever one may think of this difficult issue, the direction of Kant's argument does find an echo in questions which still concern the contemporary world, for instance in the realm of human rights. The vital factor in his argument is autonomy, self-legislation, not heteronomy, obedience to the law for some extraneous reason, such as the fear of the con-

sequences of disobedience. Whereas everything in the realm of nature is subject to its condition, what takes us beyond this state is the ability to decide what we will be conditioned by in performing our actions.

This ability has the vital consequence of undermining a still very commonly employed notion of freedom. The liberty to do whatever I want if I can get away with it, or if it is legal, is not seen as the highest form of freedom by Kant. Instead, we are free if we give the law to ourselves because we accept that this is what we *ought* to do: 'Thus a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same' (ibid. BA 99). The reason for this attempt to square freedom and necessity is simple, and was given by Rousseau. Merely following one's desires is not the ultimate form of liberation, because one can become a slave to one's passions. How, in any case, does one decide between two apparently equally compelling desires? Deciding what one ought to do is, then, to be achieved in terms of the categorical imperative: do I think all people should have the right to decide to do what I decide to do in this situation?<sup>9</sup> If I think in this way I must regard others not as means to my ends, but as 'ends in themselves', as beings who share the capacity for self-determination. The consequence of this conception is the 'ideal' of a kingdom of ends in which we are both members and subjects. Kant makes the prophetic distinction, which will re-emerge in Marx's thought, between that which has a 'price', and that which has what he terms a 'dignity'. What has a price can be substituted for by something else as its equivalent; what has dignity is above all price, because it has an intrinsic value and cannot be substituted. Autonomous rational beings are to be regarded as possessing dignity. For Kant, the acknowledgement of the existence of beings which are 'ends in themselves' becomes the basis of a just society.

Kant's vision may sound like a woolly liberal utopia. The power of his moral vision in the later part of the eighteenth century lay, though, not least in its rendering feudalism and slavery impossible to legitimate at a time when they were still very much part of the real socio-political world. Despite Kant's own contingent, historically determined failures in his attitudes with regard both to women and to some other races, the impetus of his moral theory is towards thoroughgoing democracy. The weakness of the theory lies in how such a vision is to be translated into concrete politics, and many of the

9 The problem which Kant does not really deal with in this context is that in most morally difficult situations we are confronted with competing moral imperatives, rather than a decision about the universalization of just one imperative.

thinkers we shall be considering are concerned precisely with the gap between moral theory and the political and legal world.

## Nature and Freedom: The Third Critique

The arguments of Kant's moral philosophy serve to reinforce the separation between the determinism of the appearing natural world, and the intelligible world of human freedom. Kant later comes to ask whether this division is as absolute as it is seen as being in the works we have considered so far. In doing so, he endangers the strict distinction between the receptive and the spontaneous sources of our knowledge. The problem he faces will recur in much post-Kantian philosophy. The separation of the sphere of freedom from a wholly deterministic nature leaves no way of understanding how it is that we can gain an objective perspective on law-bound nature and at the same time can be self-legislating. How, moreover, does the spontaneity that is the basis both of knowledge and of action affect nature, if spontaneity exists in a *wholly* different realm from nature? Schelling, for example, will argue in the 1790s that the only way to avoid an implausible split between mind and nature is to accept that nature itself must be understood to be inherently subjective and spontaneous. Otherwise, explaining how something supposedly wholly objective can give rise to self-determining subjectivity becomes impossible.

Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, the 'third Critique', considers nature and our relationship to it in terms not of knowledge, but of pleasure. Our pleasure in aspects of nature is in one respect subjective, but it also involves judgement in the same way as do knowledge and morality. I can judge that this particular flower gives me pleasure in a manner that another flower does not, as I can judge that it is wrong to steal someone else's flowers. The pleasure the flower gives me is occasioned by the way in which its parts form a unified whole that cannot be understood just as the sum of those parts. The relationship between part and whole, and the relationship between particular and general, form the focus of the third Critique. One of the problems Kant tried to solve in the first Critique was how to move from the particular phenomenon to its classification under a general concept. The problem of induction is the problem that moving from particular phenomena to a general law can always involve bringing the particulars under a general law which may not characterize what they really have in common. Furthermore, there seems to be no way of finally deciding when the generalization is the right one, given the

contingency of the data used to confirm laws. Think of the explanations by the Church of the movement of heavenly bodies and those given by Galileo. In both cases the theory and the data were regarded as fitting each other: indeed, the Church's account of the heavens was apparently more accurate than Galileo's initial attempt at a new theory. There is, moreover, no cognitive reason in Kant's terms to assume that nature is a unified system whose particular laws fit together. At the same time, knowledge does, he maintains, require the assumption that what is being investigated is not merely a 'labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible particular laws' (Kant 1968b: 26) if the move from particular to general is to be plausible. Kant therefore claims that it is rational to look at nature 'as if an understanding contained the basis of the unity of the multiplicity of its empirical laws' (ibid. B xviii, A xxvi). This apparently theological claim – the understanding in question would seem to be that of a deity which guarantees that the laws of nature cohere – is both qualified by Kant's saying we should only look at nature *as if* it were so, and supported by arguments concerning the relation of parts to wholes in nature. The central aspect of the third Critique is what Kant terms reflective judgement. In reflective judgement we move from particular to general via assumptions about the systematic coherence of things which do not have the status of knowledge in Kant's sense. When reflective judgement is freed from the task of establishing cognitive laws it can also combine parts into wholes in a non-directed manner. This gives rise to a pleasure which Kant thinks was initially attached to cognition's synthesizing of different phenomena. The same pleasure also allows us to enjoy the different ways that parts of a work of art can be interrelated. Kant connects ideas about the systematic constitution of nature to the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment.

The fact is that all sorts of aspects of nature both obey particular laws and yet cannot be explained as just the result of the blind interaction of these laws. Organisms seem to show nature as functioning in terms of 'purposes': '*An organised product of nature is that in which everything is an end and on the other hand also a means.* Nothing in it is in vain, pointless, or to be attributed to a blind mechanism of nature' (ibid. B 296, A 292). A plant is not just an amorphous paste, made up of the chemicals of which it consists: it seems to function in terms of an 'idea' that gives it its form. We now can explain the transmission of this form in terms of DNA. However, we are not able to explain why it is that nature gives rise to organized forms at all, rather than remaining in a chaotic state. Kant's thought is that we need to understand how the capacity of the mind to organize phenomena into coherent systematic forms is linked to the fact that nature itself orga-



nizes its elements in ways which are not merely the result of particular laws. He tries to connect the pleasure nature gives us in aesthetic judgements and the way in which nature seems to function in terms of goals that are not accessible to cognitive judgement. Aesthetic judgements look at nature as though nature itself *aimed* at being appropriate to our cognition. Kant talks of the 'subjective purposiveness of nature for the power of judgement' (ibid. B 237, A 234). The key word, though, is 'subjective': the idea of nature outlined here relies on what takes place in the subject, not on something that could be said to be inherently part of nature. It might be argued, of course, that the basis of our pleasure is very clearly part of *our* nature, which is not separate from the rest of nature. Kant insists, though, throughout the *Critique of Judgement*, that we have no right to cross the boundary between the sensuous and the intelligible. At the same time, however, he suggests it is right to think as though we might, via the non-cognitive pleasure nature can give us, have a kind of access to nature that takes us beyond what we can know.

The significance of the idea that nature might communicate with us beyond the bounds of cognition becomes apparent when Kant ponders the question of artistic creation and appreciation. Two factors are important here. One is the contention that aesthetic judgements are not randomly subjective. Saying something is beautiful is not the same as saying it simply pleases me (Kant calls this the 'agreeable'), because it entails a validity-claim to which I think others should assent. Kant therefore ponders the possibility of a 'common sense', a shared capacity for feeling, which would unite rational beings, despite their empirical differences in matters of taste. He also contrasts 'the pure disinterested pleasure in the judgement of taste' (ibid. B 7, A 7) with judgements based on an 'interest' in an ulterior purpose, of the kind generated by sensuous appetites. The common sense is not something which can be said really to exist, but is another regulative idea that orients our thinking when we accept that it is worth arguing with others about beauty. The other important factor is the way in which Kant talks about the significant artist, the genius. In a striking formulation, he says '*genius* is the innate aptitude [*ingenium*] *through which* nature gives the rule to art' (ibid. B 181, A 178–9). One cannot produce art simply by making something in terms of the rules of a particular form: art involves moving beyond existing rules. The source of new rules has to be another kind of spontaneity, otherwise the rules would just reproduce what has already been done. This spontaneity seems to come from nature itself. In the first two Critiques Kant had argued that *we* give the law to nature in knowledge, and to ourselves in ethical self-determination. Now, though, the

aesthetic 'law' actually emerges as a consequence of *nature* acting in the subject.

The further importance of this strand of argument becomes apparent in Kant's famous characterization of an aesthetic idea as 'that representation of the imagination which gives much to think about, but without any determinate thought, i.e. *concept* being able to be adequate to it, which consequently no language can completely attain and make comprehensible' (ibid. B 193, A 190). He gives 'the invisible Being, the realm of the blessed, hell, eternity, the creation' (ibid. B 194, A 191) as examples of such ideas. Aesthetic ideas are means of trying to make the 'intelligible' concerns of reason available in an empirical form. Otherwise the danger is that they will be merely abstract and we will be unable to connect them to the reality of our lives, which are lived in the sensuous world. The intelligible sphere of reason and the empirical world of nature are therefore seen as potentially connected, albeit in a way which is only manifest in symbolic form.

In notes written at the time he was writing the *Critique of Judgment* Kant says that 'The general validity of pleasure [in beauty] and yet not via concepts but in intuition is what is difficult' (Kant 1996: 137). This difficulty goes right to the heart of his project. The first two Critiques relied on the strict separation of the sphere of receptive intuition from the sphere of intelligible spontaneity. In the third Critique Kant works with the fiction that we can regard the world as if these spheres were not wholly separate. Reflective judgement regards nature as a work of art, rather than as a 'labyrinth of particular laws'. In consequence, the idea of a unified system of nature is not relinquished and science can assume that the laws it arrives at do cohere. Similarly, if morality is not to be wholly separated from the empirical world, it must be manifest in things that appear in that world. Kant's ultimate aim is to find a way of showing how the existence of rational beings who can transcend nature by their self-determining freedom is the final purpose of creation. If it were possible to show this, then the regulative ideas, both of nature's systematic coherence, and of a unifying common sense shared by rational beings, would become constitutive. The philosophy of German Idealism will attempt to make this move from regulative to constitutive, but Kant remains wary of the move.

Kant bequeathes a fundamental question to modern philosophy. How much is what the world is taken to be determined by the data we receive from the world and how much is it a product of the actions of the human mind? Any answer to this question will be likely to locate the foundation for knowledge either more on the side of the

world or more on the side of the subject. This contrast is sometimes described at the end of the eighteenth century as between ‘realism’ and ‘idealism’.<sup>10</sup> The problem with any division of this kind is that one seems to have to find ways of overcoming it, if basic facts about our knowledge and experience are not to become incomprehensible. In Kant’s case, the problem lies in explaining how it is that the spontaneity of the subject emerges from a deterministic nature. If the subject is itself in some sense part of the natural world, it cannot be the case that the subject is wholly independent of the way the world is. Does that mean, though, that the subject is ultimately to be explained in the same objective, scientific terms as the rest of the world? Kant’s arguments do give strong grounds for doubting that one could turn the subject into something that can be described in completely objective terms, in the manner of contemporary computational approaches to the mind. This is most apparent in his moral philosophy, where the idea of how things *ought* to be cannot be derived from the account of how we establish how things are. Fundamental aspects of the way we understand ourselves are at stake here, and they play a role in the way the modern period develops socially and politically. This is, after all, the time of the French Revolution, much of which took place under the banner of a new conception of the centrality of reason in human life. There is, though, a complicating factor in the attempt to understand the status of reason in this period, which will form the subject of the next chapter. This factor is language.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Allison, H. E. (1983) *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press). *Important defence of Kant’s contentions in the Critique of Pure Reason.*
- Allison, H. E. (2001) *Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). *Sympathetic, detailed reading of key aspects of Kant’s Critique of Judgement.*
- Ameriks, K. (2000) *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). *Excellent defence of Kant against objections in German Idealism and since.*

10 Given the problems concerning the definition of ‘realism’, it is important to remember that its meaning at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany is often closer to materialism, in contrast with idealism. The former position is often associated with Spinoza, the latter with Berkeley. Kant’s transcendental idealism is, of course, an attempt to get beyond such a division.

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