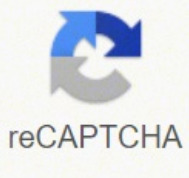




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space and time are the pure forms of human intuition. If we had different forms of intuition, then our experience would still have to constitute a unified whole in order for us to be self-conscious, but this would not be a spatio-temporal whole. Given that space and time are our forms of intuition, however, our understanding must cooperate with sensibility to construct a spatio-temporal whole of space and time because, once again, we cannot present anything as an object without having previously constituted ourselves," and "all combination [i.e.] is an object of the understanding" (B130). So Kant distinguishes between space and time as pure forms of intuition, which belong solely to sensibility; and the formal intuitions of space and time (or space-time), which are unified by the understanding (B160-161). These formal intuitions are the spatio-temporal whole within which our understanding constructs experience in accordance with the categories.[18] The most important implication of Kant's claim that the understanding constructs a single whole of experience to which all of our representations can be related is that, since he defines nature "regarded materially" as "the sum total of all appearances" and he has argued that the categories are objectively valid of all possible appearances, on his view it follows that our categories are the source of the fundamental laws of nature "regarded formally" (B163, 165). So Kant concludes on this basis that the understanding is the true law-giver of nature. In his words: "all appearances in nature, as far as their combination is concerned, stand under the categories, on which nature (considered merely as nature in general) depends, as the original ground of its necessary lawfulness (as nature regarded formally)" (B165). Or more strongly: "we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity that we call nature, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there. [...] The understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances: it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all" (A125-126). 5. Morality and freedom Having examined two central parts of Kant's positive project in theoretical philosophy from the Critique of Pure Reason, transcendental idealism and the transcendental deduction, let us now turn to his practical philosophy in the Critique of Practical Reason. Since Kant's philosophy is deeply systematic, this section begins with a preliminary look at how his theoretical and practical philosophy fit together (see also section 7). 5.1 Theoretical and practical autonomy The fundamental idea of Kant's philosophy is human autonomy. So far we have seen this in Kant's conclusivist view of experience according to which our understanding is the source of the general laws of nature. "Autonomy" literally means giving the law to oneself, and on Kant's view our understanding provides laws that constitute a prior framework for our experience. Our understanding does not provide the matter or content of our experience, but it does provide the basic formal structure within which we experience any matter received through our senses. Kant's central argument for this view is the transcendental deduction, according to which it is a condition of self-consciousness that our understanding constructs experience in this way. So we may call self-consciousness the highest principle of Kant's theoretical philosophy, since it is (at least) the basis for all of our a priori knowledge about the structure of nature. Kant's moral philosophy is also based on the idea of autonomy. He holds that there is a single fundamental principle of morality, on which all specific moral duties are based. He calls this moral law (as it is manifested to us) the categorical imperative (see 5.4). The moral law is a product of reason, for Kant, while the basic laws of nature are products of our understanding. There are important differences between the senses in which we are autonomous in constructing our experience and in morality. For example, Kant regards understanding and reason as different cognitive faculties, although he sometimes uses "reason" in a wide sense to cover both.[19] The categories and therefore the laws of nature are dependent on our specifically human forms of intuition, while reason is not. The moral law does not depend on any qualities that are peculiar to human nature but only on the nature of reason as such, although its manifestation to us as a categorical imperative (as a law of duty) reflects the fact that the human will is not necessarily determined by pure reason but is also influenced by other incentives rooted in our needs and inclinations; and our specific duties deriving from the categorical imperative do reflect human nature and the contingencies of human life. Despite these differences, however, Kant holds that we give the moral law to ourselves, as we also give the general laws of nature to ourselves, though in a different sense. Moreover, we each necessarily give the same moral law to ourselves, just as we each construct our experience in accordance with the same categories. To summarize: Theoretical philosophy is about how the world is (B63/B66). Its highest principle is self-consciousness, on which our knowledge of the basic laws of nature is based. Given sensory data, our understanding constructs experience according to these a priori laws. Practical philosophy is about how the world ought to be (ibid., A800-801/B828-829). Its highest principle is the moral law, from which we derive duties that command how we ought to act in specific situations. Kant also claims that reflection on our moral duties and our need for happiness leads to the thought of an ideal world, which he calls the highest good (see section 6). Given how the world is (theoretical philosophy) and how it ought to be (practical philosophy), we aim to make the world better by constructing or realizing the highest good. So both parts of Kant's philosophy are about autonomously constructing a world, but in different senses. In theoretical philosophy, we use our categories and forms of intuition to construct a world of experience or nature. In practical philosophy, we use the moral law to construct the idea of a moral world or a realm of ends that guides our conduct (4:433), and ultimately to transform the natural world into the highest good. Finally, transcendental idealism is the framework within which these two parts of Kant's philosophy fit together (20:311). Theoretical philosophy deals with appearances, to which our knowledge is strictly limited; and practical philosophy deals with things in themselves, although it does not give us knowledge about things in themselves but only provides rational justification for certain beliefs about them for practical purposes. To understand Kant's arguments that practical philosophy justifies certain beliefs about things in themselves, it is necessary to see them in the context of his criticism of German rationalist metaphysics. The three traditional topics of Leibniz-Wolffian special metaphysics were rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology, which dealt, respectively, with the human soul, the world-whole, and God. In the part of the Critique of Pure Reason called the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant argues against the Leibniz-Wolffian view that human beings are capable of a priori knowledge in each of these domains, and he claims that the errors of Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics are due to an illusion that has its seat in the nature of human reason itself. According to Kant, human reason necessarily produces ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God; and these ideas unavoidably produce the illusion that we have a priori knowledge about transcendent objects corresponding to them. This is an illusion, however, because in fact we are not capable of a priori knowledge about any such transcendent objects. Nevertheless, Kant attempts to show that these illusory ideas have a positive, practical use. He thus reframes Leibniz-Wolffian special metaphysics as a practical science that he calls the metaphysics of morals. On Kant's view, our ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God provide the content of morally justified beliefs about human immortality, human freedom, and the existence of God, respectively; but they are not proper objects of speculative knowledge.[20] 5.2 Freedom The most important belief about things in themselves that Kant thinks only practical philosophy can justify concerns human freedom. Freedom is important because, on Kant's view, moral appraisal presupposes that we are free in the sense that we have the ability to do otherwise. To see why, consider Kant's example of a man who commits a theft (5:95f.). Kant holds that in order for this man's action to be morally wrong, it must have been within his control in the sense that it was within his power at the time not to have committed the theft. If this was not within his control at the time, then, while it may be useful to punish him in order to shape his behavior or to influence others, it nevertheless would not be correct to say that his action was morally wrong. Moral rightness and wrongness apply only to free agents who control their actions and have it in their power, at the time of their actions, either to act rightly or not. According to Kant, this is just common sense. On these grounds, Kant rejects a type of compatibilism that he calls the "comparative concept of freedom" and associates with Leibniz (5:96-97). (Note that Kant has a specific type of compatibilism in mind, which I will refer to simply as "compatibilism," although there may be other types of compatibilism that do not fit Kant's characterization of that view). On the compatibilist view, as Kant understands it, I am free whenever the cause of my action is within me. So I am unfree only when something external to me pushes or moves me, but I am free whenever the proximate cause of my action is internal to me as an "acting being" (5:96). If we distinguish between involuntary convulsions and voluntary bodily movements, then on this view free actions are just voluntary bodily movements. Kant ridicules this view as a "wretched subtlety" that tries to solve an ancient philosophical problem "with a little quibbling about words" (ibid.). This view, he says, assimilates human freedom to "the freedom of a turnspit," or a projectile in flight, or the motion of a clock's hands (5:96-97). The proximate causes of these movements are internal to the turnspit, the projectile, and the clock at the time of the movement. This cannot be sufficient for moral responsibility. Why not? The reason, Kant says, is ultimately that the causes of these movements occur in time. Return to the theft example. A compatibilist would say that the thief's action is free because its proximate cause is inside him, and because the theft was not an involuntary convulsion but a voluntary action. The thief decided to commit the theft, and his action flowed from this decision. According to Kant, however, if the thief's decision is a natural phenomenon that occurs in time, then it must be the effect of some cause that occurred in a previous time. This is an essential part of Kant's Newtonian worldview and is grounded in the a priori laws (specifically, the category of cause and effect) in accordance with which our understanding constructs experience: every event has a cause that begins in an earlier time. If that cause too was an event occurring in time, then it must also have a cause beginning in a still earlier part, etc. All natural events occur in time and are thoroughly determined by causal chains that stretch backwards into the distant past. So there is no room for freedom in nature, which is deterministic in a strong sense. The root of the problem, for Kant, is time. Again, if the thief's choice to commit the theft is a natural event in time, then it is the effect of a causal chain extending into the distant past. But the past is out of his control now, in the present. Once the past is past, he can't change it. On Kant's view, that is why free actions would not be in his control in the present if they are determined by events in the past. Even if he could control the past events in the past, he cannot control them now. But in fact past events were not in his control in the past either if they were determined by events in the more distant past, but eventually the causal antecedents of his action stretch back before his birth, and obviously events that occurred before his birth were never in his control. So if the thief's choice to commit the theft is a natural event in time, then it is not now and never was in his control, and he could not have done otherwise than to commit the theft. In that case, it would be a mistake to hold him morally responsible for it. Compatibilism, as Kant understands it, therefore locates the issue in the wrong place. Even if the cause of my action is internal to me, if it is in the past – for example, if my action today is determined by a decision I made yesterday, or from the character I developed in childhood – then it is not within my control now. The real issue is not whether the cause of my action is internal or external to me, but whether it is in my control now. For Kant, however, the cause of my action can be within my control now only if it is not in time. This is why Kant thinks that transcendental idealism is the only way to make sense of the kind of freedom that morality requires. Transcendental idealism allows that the cause of my action may be a thing in itself outside of time: namely, my noumenal self, which is free because it is not a part of nature. No matter what kind of character I have developed or what external influences act on me, on Kant's view all of my intentional, voluntary actions are immediate effects of my noumenal self, which is causally undetermined (5:97-98). My noumenal self is an uncaused cause outside of time, which therefore is not subject to the deterministic laws of nature in accordance with which our understanding constructs experience. Many puzzles arise on this picture that Kant does not resolve. For example, if my understanding constructs all appearances in my experience of nature, not only appearances of my own actions, then why am I responsible only for my own actions but not for everything that happens in the natural world? Moreover, if I am not alone in the world but there are many noumenal selves acting freely and incorporating their free actions into the experience I then have, how do multiple transcendental experiences of free actions in the world fit together? How do you understand the experience that your understanding constructs? [21] In spite of these puzzles, Kant holds that we can make sense of moral responsibility only by thinking about human freedom in this way, because it is the only way to prevent nature from undermining both. Finally, since Kant invokes transcendental idealism to make sense of freedom, interpreting thinking about freedom leads us to a dispute between the two-object and two-aspects interpretations of transcendental idealism. On the face of it, the two-object interpretation seems to make better sense of Kant's view of transcendental freedom than the two-aspects interpretation. If morality requires that I am transcendently free, then it seems that my true self, and not just an aspect of my self, must be outside of time, according to Kant's argument. But applying the two-objects interpretation to freedom raises problems of its own, since it involves making a distinction between noumenal and phenomenal selves that does not arise on the two-aspects view. If only my noumenal self is free, and freedom is required for moral responsibility, then my phenomenal self is not morally responsible. But how are my noumenal and phenomenal selves related, and why is punishment inflicted on phenomenal selves? It is unclear whether and to what extent appealing to Kant's theory of freedom can help to settle disputes about the proper interpretation of transcendental idealism, since there are serious questions about the coherence of Kant's theory on either interpretation. 5.3 The fact of reason Can we know that we are free in this transcendental sense? Kant's response is tricky. On the one hand, he distinguishes between theoretical knowledge and morally justified belief (A820-831/B848-859). We do not have theoretical knowledge that we are free or about anything beyond the limits of possible experience, but we are morally justified in believing that we are free in this sense. On the other hand, Kant also uses stronger language than this when discussing freedom. For example, he says that "among all the ideas of speculative reason freedom is the only one the possibility of which we know a priori, though without having any insight into it, because it is the condition of the moral law, which we do know" (4:450). Kant explains that we know freedom, but we do not know freedom, the moral law would not be possible, and on Kant's view even if we encounter the moral law a priori (5:4). For this reason, Kant claims that the moral law "proves" the objective, "though only practically, undoubted reality" of freedom (5:48-49). So Kant wants to say that we do have knowledge of the reality of freedom, but that this is practical knowledge of a practical reality, cognition only for practical purposes," by which he means to distinguish it from theoretical knowledge based on experience or reflection on the condition of experience. (5:133). Our practical knowledge of freedom is based instead on the moral law. The difference between Kant's stronger and weaker language seems mainly to be that his stronger language emphasizes that our belief or practical knowledge about freedom is unshakable and that it in turn provides support for other morally grounded beliefs in God and the immortality of the soul. Kant calls our consciousness of the moral law, our awareness that the moral law binds us or has authority over us, the "fact of reason" (5:31-32, 42-43, 47, 55). So, on his view, the fact of reason is the practical basis for our belief or practical knowledge that we are free. Kant insists that this moral consciousness is "undeniable," "a priori," and "unavoidable" (5:32, 47, 55). Every human being has a conscience, a common sense grasp of morality, and a firm conviction that he or she is morally accountable. We may have different beliefs about the source of morality's authority - God, social convention, human reason. We may arrive at different conclusions about what morality requires in specific situations. And we may violate our own sense of duty. But we all have a conscience, and an unshakable belief that morality applies to us. According to Kant, this belief cannot and does not need to be justified or "proved by any deduction" (5:47). It is just a ground-level fact about human beings that we hold ourselves morally accountable. But Kant is making a normative claim here as well: it is also a fact, which cannot and does not need to be justified, that we are morally accountable, that morality does have authority over us. Kant holds that philosophy should be in the business of defending this common sense moral belief, and that in any case we could never justify the experience that we have of freedom, but we do not know freedom, the moral law would not be possible, and on Kant's view even if we encounter the moral law a priori (5:4). 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