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DEGLI STUDI
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Theoretical philosophy: The ethics of belief

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Belief/faith in Kant

- Both in the Canon of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the Dialectic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant defends the idea that it is rational to assume that God exists and that the soul is immortal even though we cannot have cognitions regarding these objects.
- Given the results of the Transcendental Dialectic, we know that God and immortality are objects that lie beyond the limits of our cognition.
- Nevertheless, it is possible to take the propositions asserting the existence of God and the immortality of the soul to be true on practical grounds.



Belief/faith in Kant

- ‘Taking something to be true...has the following three stages in relation to conviction...: having an opinion, believing, and knowing. Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing.’ (A822/B850)



Belief/faith in Kant

- Objectively sufficient taking-to-be-true: based on grounds that guarantee that the proposition we take to be true is true;
- Subjectively sufficient taking-to-be-true: based on grounds that determine a conviction that the proposition we take to be true is true.



Belief/faith in Kant

- Opinion:
 - Based on grounds that make the truth of a proposition more probable than its opposite;
 - These grounds produces a degree of conviction which is proportional to the probability.



Belief/faith in Kant

- Knowledge:
 - Based on grounds that makes the truth of a proposition certain;
 - These grounds produce a maximal degree of conviction.



Belief/faith in Kant

- Faith/belief:
 - Not based on grounds that guarantee its truth;
 - We are conscious that we do not have these grounds;
 - However, we have grounds that produce a conviction that the believed proposition is true;
 - These grounds not only casually explain but also justify our belief.



Belief/faith in Kant

- Faith/belief:
 - It is a propositional attitude in which we are justified on practical grounds to take a proposition to be true even though we are aware that we do not have objective grounds that demonstrate its truth.
 - If I pursue a certain end which is realizable only if a certain state of affairs is given, and if it is not possible to exclude or prove that this is in fact given, then I can (or should?) believe that it is given.



Belief/faith in Kant

- Pragmatic belief/faith:
 - ‘The doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger, but he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption. His belief is merely contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better. I call such contingent beliefs, which however ground the actual use of the means to certain actions, pragmatic beliefs.’ (A824/B853)



The highest good and belief/faith

- 'All interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical) is united in the following three questions:
- **What can I know?**
- **What should I do?**
- **What may I hope?**
- ...The third question, namely, "If I do what I should, what may I then hope?" is simultaneously practical and theoretical... (A804-805/B832-833)



The highest good and belief/faith

- Two motives of our agency:
- Happiness (empirical; it determines pragmatic/prudential imperatives/oughts);
- The moral law (rational).
- What is the highest good for Kant?
- It is a concept that connects these two motives of action by thinking a proportionality between morality and happiness.



The highest good and belief/faith

- ‘I say, accordingly, that just as the moral principles are necessary in accordance with reason in its practical use, it is equally necessary to assume in accordance with reason in its theoretical use that everyone has cause to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness, though only in the idea of pure reason.’ (A809/B837)



The highest good and belief/faith

- Why do we think a proportionality between 'worthiness' and happiness?
- Pursuing happiness is in our nature as sensible beings;
- This pursuit, in order to be considered rational, must be subordinated to morality;
- Insofar as, in pursuing morality, we still also are sensible beings, we cannot but link to this pursuit the hope to also be happy.



The highest good and belief/faith

- The proportionality between morality and happiness is possible only if God exists.
- In a sensible world, there is no guarantee that who acts morally will be happy;
- ‘...and the necessary connection of the hope of being happy with the unremitting effort to make oneself worthy of happiness that has been adduced cannot be cognized through reason if it is grounded merely in nature, but may be hoped for only if it is at the same time grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature.’ (A810/B838)



The highest good and belief/faith

- The proportionality between morality and happiness is possible only if the soul is immortal.
- In our sensible world, there is no sign of a necessary proportionality between morality and happiness;
- ‘Now since we must necessarily represent ourselves through reason as belonging to such a world, although the senses do not present us with anything except a world of appearances, we must assume the moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world; and since the latter does not offer such a connection to us, we must assume the former to be a world that is future for us.’ (A811/B839)



The highest good and belief/faith

- Moral belief/faith:
- The end we (necessarily) pursue is the highest good;
- The existence of God and the immortality of the soul are conditions for realizing the highest good;
- On objective grounds, we must remain agnostics regarding these objects;
- In pursuing the highest good, it is legitimate (or rationally required) to believe that God exists and the soul is immortal.



Kant's examples

- The doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger, but he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption. His belief is merely contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better. I call such contingent beliefs, which however ground the actual use of the means to certain actions, pragmatic beliefs.' (A824/B853)



Kant's examples

- 'Thus the businessman, for example, to strike a deal, needs not just to opine that there will be something to be gained thereby, but to believe it, i.e., to have his opinion be sufficient for an undertaking into the uncertain.' (Jäsche Logic, 9:67-8n)



Kant's examples

- ‘Suppose you would like to retain a good relationship with your teenage son, and you are aware that this requires believing the best of him whenever possible. You have no conclusive evidence for or against the proposition that he turns your house into an opium den of Edwardian proportions when you are away (he claims that he has recently taken up meditation and that the funny smell when you come home is just incense). Because you know that your relationship will be seriously damaged if you come to think of your son as a hardcore drug user, or even if you suspend assent about the issue, you are (according to Kant) rationally permitted to go ahead and accept that he is not doing drugs, at least until you have much more evidence on the matter.’ (Chignell, *Belief in Kant*, 344)



Kant's examples

- 'For instance, if I want to save money for my retirement (= end) by making a deposit in a bank (= action), I must believe (in Kant's sense) that the bank will still be active, and able to pay out the money, when I retire. Of course, I cannot be certain of this; thus my taking it to be true is not objectively sufficient and hence not knowledge. But nevertheless I must be sufficiently convinced that the bank will repay my money if I am to be motivated to make the deposit.' (Willaschek, Kant and Peirce on Belief)



Kant's examples

- 'Is there anything to be said on behalf of Moral Belief? ...I want to suggest that some kinds of consistent moral activity presuppose firm commitment to propositions for which we do not have sufficient objective grounds. ...Consider for example, the following:
 - (Equality) *All human persons are of equal moral value.*
 - Equality is a principle about relative value that seems to be presupposed by normative claims such as that all people enjoy the same moral standing, have equal fundamental rights, are deserving of fair treatment under the law, and so forth. ...I suspect that Equality is not a principle for which we can find conclusive a priori or a posteriori evidence.' (Chignell, *Belief in Kant*)