

## Kant Revisited

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Kant doesn't make it any easier for his reader to understand his first critique when he fails to tell us bluntly that consciousness should not be understood as a mental or, if one prefers, a psychic reality. As long as we think of consciousness as somehow mental, we'll wonder how to accommodate the fact that mentality most often comes across as individualized, as distributed in finite minds, yet Kant surely means to be talking about any consciousness, not this or that consciousness. Moreover, were consciousness not other than mental, neither Kant nor for that matter, Hegel, could seriously mean to seek "objective" knowledge instead of intersubjective knowing. For both, to conceive consciousness as psychic would forbid moving from consciousness as shared to the kind of unique subjectivity required to make judgements of any kind. If instead consciousness is treated as a kind of nonindividualized, high-energy mental stuff, no subjectivities robust enough to make judgments will ever occur. If the subjectivity required to make judgments which can in principle be right because they can in principle be wrong is to survive, this Glop Theory of Consciousness and thus of subjectivity must be rejected. Neither Kant nor Hegel can allow consciousness as a sameness which includes difference as difference of a kind and thus includes difference as the structure of sameness. The self-identity of individuals requires only a partly nonindividual sameness (or there would be no need to recognize both similarity and difference simultaneously); the sameness or self-identity of individuals which are also subjectivities allows only a partly non-individual sameness (or there would be no capacity to recognize both simultaneously).

Avoiding this mentalization of consciousness does not, however, allow Kant to avoid accounting for the particularity which is represented in part by the individuality of minds. Neither will Kant be able to get away with the treatment he affords this variety of particularity by conflating some of these notions under the title of a "self" and then confining that structure to a mere regulative idea of reason. He has to get freedom and subjectivity from somewhere, presumably from consciousness, yet in the usual characterization, consciousness is tied too tightly to the phenomenal realm to allow Kant a plausible treatment of

particularity. If one focuses only upon the first critique, Kant all but identifies particularity with sense particulars, seeming to think that he can handle particularity merely by distinguishing between transcendental and empirical ideality. Plainly he was thinking only about objective empirical knowledge and thus identifying particularity with sense particulars. Had he not made that identification, it would not be terribly difficult to eliminate particularity instead via the “general particulars” or instances ploy. He might well have said, for example, that any phenomenon, as a determinate object *x*, is a particular but a particular in the sense of a fusion of phenomenal particulars (as universalized, generalized particulars corresponding to the transcendental modes of cognition) and sense-particulars (tantamount to alterations in the subjective constitution of the knower, having no objective validity). General particulars would constitute the realm of possible experience; sense particulars would arise in actual experience. He could then argue that we think by rules and that as such, *a priori* truths are dependent upon beings which are themselves general particulars.

But the problem isn't with consciousness as instances, it's with consciousness as subjectivities. Kant recognizes this problem himself, at least implicitly, in his distinction between pure and practical reason as well as in the paralogisms. For Kant, practical reason makes its object actual, its object being freedom. The making of a kingdom of ends is actually the constitution of an intersubjective domain of freedom, a nonphenomenal domain, which yields the intersubjective ought as contrasted to the objective/necessary must. He thinks we cannot say that we are free in the direct way that we can say that we cognize that chair. In the latter case, the *we* is dominant to the extent that our cognitive experience of the chair is shared knowledge where in the former case, only *I* can say that *I* am free. Any “*we*” resulting from this activity is intersubjective. The recognition by the “*I*” of freedom requires us to infer that “*we*” is free. Intersubjectivity must, then, be the locus of both freedom and of subjectivity since if intersubjectivity were reached (epistemologically) prior to this constituting, objective knowledge could degenerate in collective illusion.

But how can we assign the required texture to intersubjectivity when that structure must rest upon fiercely independent subjectivities? The best hope lies in the recognition that any analysis of reason which when made consistent as it was by Hegel must identify being with knowing and must treat reason's project of self-knowledge as bi-directional. It is in a sense easier to work from the “outside” in, to proceed as Kant did in the Prolegomena and in at least some

portions of the first critique, by examining the alleged products of reason and then to infer what the cognitive faculties must be like given the evident products. This activity, for Kant, yields objective knowledge. But what of the product of reason called the “phenomenal self”? How does one examine that product, a product so different from the rest that Kant even says that although determined in time, space has no role in its status? It would seem that reason must in this case be examined from the “inside”. The immediate problem, however, is that we now have a process of a self-knowing reason and that activity, as knowledge, cannot be undertaken from a subjective ground but only from an intersubjective ground. Intersubjectivity, then, has to be the recognition of similarity through difference, an activity which requires giving subjectivity its due without giving it everything. Each locus must reach the others primarily through their particularity rather than through their commonalities.

Otherness and subjectivity therefore necessarily arise in tandem, just as Hegel said they did. We require otherness to link the “inside” and the “outside” especially when we’re dealing with a philosopher whose work when taken seriously, as seriously, say, as Hegel took Kant, links being and knowledge inextricably. Otherness is necessary to identify them in both epistemological and in ontological terms:

- 1) as a mode of being—the status of a thing in itself
- 2) as a mode of knowledge—the consciousness of the objects’ relation to a subject

2) balances 1) in the subject-object relation; 1) balances 2) in the subject-subject relation. Together they form a continuum from knowledge/being to being/knowledge as the basis for the movement from objective to intersubjective knowledge. These two must balance each other to prevent dissolution into subjective atomicity, which would forbid any identity stronger than that of logical identity, the identity of consciousnesses as instances. Intersubjectivity turns out on this reading to be the condition of subjectivity; the self can never be only self-identical. It must be denied absoluteness to preserve itself.

To handle particularity in even the kind of first approximation sketched thus far, then, consciousness simply must be treated in both epistemological and ontological terms. Noumena simply cannot be left in blessed ignorance. The claim in the first critique that consciousness represents a veil marking the

interface of the phenomenal and the noumenal realms is acceptable only as long as the phenomenal/noumenal distinction is merely the epistemological mate of what should be the ultimate pairing here, the one and the many. On this dual account, when you know something, you are backing away from it into your own subjectivity. The intuited object becomes less fully determinate; correspondingly, it becomes increasingly relational/empirical. "Consciousness of" itself is inherently relational above the level of the bare spatial-temporal localization of intuited objects. Objects of experience become increasingly less determinate, and correspondingly more complex. To the extent that they are known, being and knowing are opposites; this is expressed epistemologically in the phenomena/noumena dichotomy. But for Kant, being and knowing are identified insofar as we can know (experientially). This suggests that what underlies the phenomenal (knowing) self, as bound to experiential knowledge, is not identical with what underlies the noumenal (existent) self, which is free and thus able to make judgements.

Consciousness of itself could help to bridge the gap between the noumenal (subjective) self and the phenomenal self if "consciousness of" is regarded as a fusion of the two, a subjective mentality. In not entirely metaphorical terms, consciousness itself would be regarded as a sort of wave, the pulsating, unitary interface of opposites. Its structure as we infer it is logical while its content, aside from this structure, is unknown, thus incorporating Kant's notion of the limiting factor of experience, consciousness of. Around this wave, imagine four interwoven threads, space-time incarnate. At certain points (or instants), these four threads intersect with each other and with consciousness. These intersections would yield nascent subjectivities. The unity of consciousness and the unity of space-time at these loci thereby generate mentality as a function of consciousness.

Yes, we have indeed departed from the master but there's no help for it. What Kant says about the unity of consciousness as providing the unity of the pure intuitions, jointly and separately, is either flat wrong or true only epistemologically. Kant is right to say that space and time inhabit us as intuitions but he is wrong in asserting that they would not exist apart from consciousness. They need to be both phenomenal and noumenal to avoid the idealism/self-identity problem (identity like subjectivity needs a noumenal basis) and to enable beings "determined in time" to be also free.

Put bluntly, finite minds could not exist without contributions from a

self-existent space-time. Finite minds cannot be merely immanent in each other (too similar, thus no change) nor can they be entirely discontinuous (no simultaneity). It is no surprise that we do not experience space-time as being as continuous as Kant thought each was or as discontinuous as, Whitehead thought. We experience space-time as a continuum in which unitary space is presented as simultaneous (in time) and successive times are represented only via alterations registered within unitary space through time. Thus space and time are what they are for us (as phenomenal) only in tandem. We experience space-time in this manner, i.e., phenomenally, as successive continuity rather than immanence because we're not only subjectivities. We are also phenomenal beings and thus must always have a very tentative grasp of the noumenal, a grasp so tentative that if the need for a plausible account of particularity and freedom and subjectivity did not drive us to that account, we would follow Kant and put off consideration of our membership in the "intelligible" world until the second and third critiques. Fortunately, the epistemological status of space and time provides the best guide to inferences about their ontological status. For us, space and time are almost but not quite interchangeable, are sometimes one thing, sometimes two, but never anything fully reconciled. That metastable status is reflected in a qualitative gap between consciousness and consciousness of, derivatively between "outer" experience and "inner" sense. This gap must be present because our potential consciousness of experience arises out of a fusion of space-time which would make all experience (including that of space-time) impossible in the absence of such a gap. With respect to the not quite metaphorical interpretation offered just a bit ago, space and time seem almost to be alternate, super-imposed waves which intersect only along the consciousness wave, a duality which underscores the difficulty consciousness always has with being forever out of synchronization with itself. One is strongly tempted to believe that in themselves, space and time are as much other than each other as they are other than consciousness. Yes, that does suggest that they may present an alternative ontological realm. No, we're not going to pursue that suggestion here.

Instead, let's see to what extent these extensions deal with some of Kant's vices without abandoning his virtues. Given this account of space-time, the cognitive process of any human subject may be presented as a continuum consisting of the following moments:

1. Consciousness — an inferred logical structure but unknown content.
2. Consciousness — the spawn of space-time and consciousness, textured by both.
3. Mentality — fluid structure and experiential content.

How does the phenomena/noumena distinction fare when looked at from this vantage point?

Phenomena — empirical intuitions present to the inner sense which includes this entire apparatus of knowing — arise on the edge of “consciousness of”, the interface between the noumenal realm and the structures which confer human significance upon it (consciousness as a limiting factor). In consequence:

a. We experience all phenomena including the phenomenal self as pinned down in space-time.

1) The initial encounter will be the relatively static/passive isolation of the mere form of appearance (extension and figure) of the object.

2) Intuition cuts the object’s form out of the fabric of space-time producing a highly determinate intuited object.

b. If there were no gap between consciousness and “consciousness of”, and derivatively between “consciousness of” and its objects, this atomicity is as far as experience could go and we could never get from intuited objects in general to objects of experience.

1) The lag between immediate (outer sense; intuited objects) and mediate experience (inner sense; involving objects of experience) produces an increasingly less immediate, and therefore determinate cognitive process. The intuited object is “painted in” via concepts; this determines what lies in experience (objects of experience) in a more “empirical”, less determinate form.

2) Concepts and intuitions acting in tandem constrain the imagination; in unison, these three generate experience just as Kant says they do.

3) Knowing therefore represents a progressive modification of mind which heightens subjectivity which in turn allows judgments accommodating particularity without abandoning Kant’s passion for generality.

Perhaps it is not too much to hope he might be pleased.