



Kant and Critical Philosophy

Week 11. 28th November 2016
Kant's Politics

Class recap

- Introduce the *Critique of Judgement* and the necessity of a third critique
- Grasp the reflecting power of judgement, and why judgements of taste are universal and objective
- Discuss Kant's four moments of beauty
- Explore Kant's notion of the sublime in its context
- Round-up on Kant's overall critical project through teleology



Kant's four moments of beauty:

1. Disinterested pleasure
2. Universal validity
3. Form of purposiveness
4. Necessary pleasure

The sublime directs us back to the power of our reason, which can direct our sensible faculties to not feel fear in such circumstances. Nature cannot control our minds, what is the most important and eternal part of us, for Kant.



‘This sublimity in the mind is a form of self-awareness, *through feeling*, of a transcendental power of the human mind. In Kant’s language, it is the consciousness that we are superior to nature within us and therefore also superior to nature without us, insofar as it influences us’.

– Donald Crawford, “Kant”, *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* p. 64.





Class aims

- Introduce Kant's politics, and its emergence from his critical system and moral beliefs
- Explore Kant's intellectual and political context
- Discuss the relationship between individual freedom and the state
- Grasp Kant's contributions to political theory on human rights, the social contract, and international relations



Recap: First *Critique*

- In order to vindicate science and morality from scepticism, Kant turns not to objects of experience or cognitions, but the mind which perceives them - Copernicanism
- Laws of nature or morality are not inherent in nature or *out there*, beyond us – rather, they are constructions of the mind used for constructing a coherent, unified world-view
- To explain the world, we have to determine the necessary principles prior to and independent of experience which precede it
- We exist in a world of appearances, but that alone isn't sufficient to explain it – we also need *a priori* principles and ideas of reason
- Hence the importance of synthetic *a priori* judgements: how can we formulate propositions that are necessary, universal, logically independent of sense-experience and capable of being contradicted?

Recap: Second Critique

- Similarly, moral conduct should be understood through *a priori* principles that are logically independent of experience
- Thinking about moral decisions necessarily supposes that we are free to act
- We are not merely phenomenally free (subject to natural causality), but also a noumenal being with free will (intelligible causality)
- Each person has a will, which alone makes a moral choice
- An action is moral if it is done according to duty (deontology)
- The categorical imperative is the general moral law: that we act in such a way that we would will it to become a universal law
- Though we act by a self-imposed moral law, our actions are understood not in a vacuum but in relation to others

Politics out of morality

- Kant's political views stem from his account of morality
- The moral law is based on our autonomy in acting according to duty
- His politics is concerned with *right*: what we ought to do in political and social contexts
- This is grounded on *laws* which regulate our relationships with others
- Such laws can be universal and necessary (*a priori*) in the realm of politics, and they reflect justice
- Whilst individual morality is concerned with subjective will and obligations, laws are concerned with actions themselves objectively, and can be enforced

Politics therefore concerned with law

- Kant's laws are normative, as they are intended to be universally valid
- Thus *right* 'ought never to be adapted to politics, but politics ought always to be adapted to right'.
- Yet politics should never interfere with the inner life or thinking of another person; rather establish a universal law making external freedom possible

Politics therefore concerned with law

- Kant's politics therefore seeks out a universal law of right:
 - 'Every action which by itself or by its maxim enables the freedom of each individual's will to coexist with the freedom of everyone else in accordance with a universal law is *right*'
 - 'let your external actions be such that the free application of your will can coexist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law'.
- (From "Introduction to the Theory of Right")

Freedom from interference

- The only original right belonging to all human beings is freedom, writes Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals*...
- But this isn't a transcendental sort, but simply 'independence from being constrained by another's choice'
- In a Hobbesian vein, external freedom is freedom from all constraints *except those posed by the law*
- This gives human beings an 'innate *equality*' to pursue their own ends
- Yet whilst one man, one vote applies, only 'active citizens' can vote, those who have economic independence (not servants, employees, or women)
- 'A constitution allowing the *greatest possible human freedom* in accordance with laws which ensure *that the freedom of each can co-exist with the freedom of all the others*' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, "Of Ideas in General").

Round-up so far

- His politics reflect his Critical Philosophy and categorical imperative
- They seek the conditions for what is universal and necessarily valid, independent of experience, through the notion of *right*
- They place external limitations on human freedom to prevent conflict, so that human beings may cultivate the freedom of moral action
- His politics is therefore premised on a view of human nature as rational and moral, and human history as directed by a natural plan for mankind to realise its essence, through becoming rational
- ‘Be ye therefore as wise as serpents, and harmless as doves’
(*Perpetual Peace*)
- An idealist, or a principled, consistent philosopher?





Age of revolution

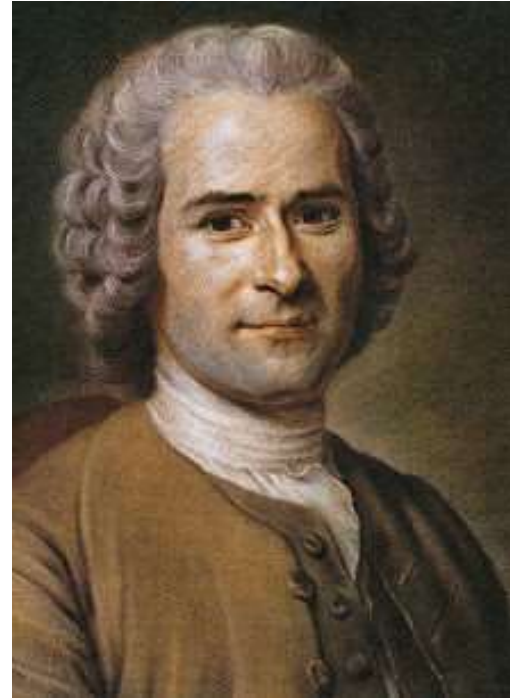
- What do we know about the 'Age of Revolution'?
- 1775 – War of Independence begins in America
- 1776 – US Declaration of Independence and Paine's *Common Sense*
- 1781 – *Critique of Pure Reason*
- 1783 – Treaty of Paris ends the War of Independence
- 1787 – US Constitution ratified; *CPR* 2nd edition
- 1788 – *Critique of Practical Reason*
- 1789 – Storming of Bastille by National Guard
- 1790 – *Critique of Judgement*
- 1791 – Haitian revolt begins among black African slaves
- 1793 – execution of Louis XVI & Girondists; 'Terror'; *Theory & Practice*
- 1794 – Rise and fall of Robespierre, state religion
- 1795 – *Towards Perpetual Peace*
- 1797 – *Metaphysics of Morals*
- 1799 – Napoleon becomes effective dictator of France

The philosopher of the French Revolution?

- Asserting the independence of the individual in the face of authority
- The American and French revolutions sought to realise the 'rights of man' – universally, philosophically understood
- Kant was opposed to revolution in itself, but sympathised with the French revolution
- They appealed to a secular natural order and broke with the past
- They opposed prejudice and superstition, and appealed to reason and self-mastery
- *Sapere aude!*

Rousseau (1712-1778)

- Admirer of Rousseau, the 'Newton of the moral realm'
- Possessed one artwork, a portrait of Rousseau, and forgot his punctual walk once while reading *Emile*
- A state is only legitimate if it is guided by the 'general will' of its members
- Individuals are interdependent naturally in a state of nature which is good and innocent
- Inequality has been produced socially and historically
- Because the authority of the good state is invested in the general will of all its members, who will obey it freely, citizens are 'forced to be free'
- Believer in toleration, pluralism and a civic religion



Did Kant support the French revolution?

- In theory, yes...
- When Louis XVI convened the Estates General, he transferred sovereignty to the people, so did not illegitimately rebel later
- But rebelling against a government is incoherent, as it embodies all the right of the existing state – the ‘general legislative will’
- Rebelling against the state forfeits the *social contract*...
- This is not a real event in nature, but rather an Idea of reason, which justifies and limits state power and individual obedience to it
- At the same time, Kant allows for passive civil disobedience, particularly where it conflicts with one’s ‘inner morality’

Social contract

- The social contract is based on a general will and possible consent
- The sovereign must 'give his laws in such a way that they could have arisen from the united will of a whole people and to regard each subject, insofar as he wants to be a citizen, as if he has joined in voting for such a will'
- But with rights come duties to the sovereign
- This social contract, like in Hobbes, is not voluntary nor based on actual consent
- But whereas Hobbes bases the social contract on individual self-interest, Kant grounds it in the principle of *right*, freedom for all persons in general rather than just the individual

Theory and Practice

- In groups of 2-3, please read through the excerpt and discuss the following questions:
- What is the nature of *freedom* Kant describes?
- In what ways are human beings equal?
- How does Kant define citizenship?

If time, what problems do you find with his account?

Theory and Practice

- All individuals are free as human beings to pursue happiness in their own way, so long as it doesn't infringe on others
- Members of a state are formally equal in terms of the law. Each has equal right to invoke the power of the state to enforce the laws on their behalf, with the exception of the head of state
- Success and rank should be acquired by skill and effort, not inherited
- Whilst all are free and equal under the law, only citizens (male adults with property) are entitled to an equal vote

Republicanism

- In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant separated *despotic* government from *republican*, involving a separation of executive and legislative powers
- Republics feature a form of representative, liberal government, but one opposed to democracy, an arbitrary majority will at odds with the universal will
- This doesn't require actual representation, but instead that decisions are made with the will of the people in mind...
- Kant, like Rousseau, is anti-monarchic; unlike Rousseau, he sees no innocence in the state of nature
- Human societies are best constructed when under a social contract, civil constitution, and representative laws that allow for human freedom

International relations

- In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant also separates the rights of individuals (*cosmopolitan right*) from the right of states
- States are conceived of as being in a state of nature with each other, which is one of war
- Like in Hobbes or Locke, they are compelled to leave this warring state through forming political unions or federations with others
- He envisions a *world republic* wherein states join a federation of others, possessing coercive power, akin to the individual in a state
- Its decisions would arise from discussion among members
- This *world republic* is an Idea, a regulative guide
- No state (individual or collective) should go to war without the actual assent of the people through some kind of vote, because people should never be used as means

International relations

- Kant approaches international relations from the same premises as his moral and philosophical beliefs
- In *Perpetual Peace* he also offers six articles aimed at reducing the likelihood of war, without themselves ensuring peace
- What do you think a Kantian system of international relations might include? Discuss in groups of 2-3



International relations

- Forbids making temporary peace treaties when preparing for war;
- Abolishes standing armies;
- Forbids the interference of one state into the internal affairs of another;
- Bans annexation of one state by another;
- Forbids taking on national debt for external affairs;
- Limits conduct of war to disallow acts that make peace impossible
- He also gives three definitive articles for this international order:
 - 1) Every state shall have a republican civil constitution
 - 2) Each state shall participate in a union of states
 - 3) Cosmopolitan (individual) right is one of universal hospitality

Property and right

- Cosmopolitan right is one of being 'citizens of a universal state of human beings', and for Kant we should respect this basic equality
- This gives all people the right to travel to other lands for sake of commerce
- Kant had supported European colonialism, and his anthropology produces a racial classification, but the 1790s he becomes critical of European abuses and exploitation of indigenous peoples capable of governing themselves
- 'a violation of right on one place of the earth is felt in all' – *Perpetual Peace*

Property and right

- Yet Kant premises freedom on the right to acquire property
- John Locke claimed that property is produced by the individual who *mixes* their labour with an object found in the natural commons
- Kant instead argues that it is founded on agreement of several wills, in a civil condition under a sovereign power
- Thus the civil condition begins when people agree to respect and defend the property rights of each other in a social contract
- State power is required to guarantee access to some property in order for an individual to realise their freedom
- Prior to this, property rights are empirical, actual and contingent

Kant's politics round-up

- How would we evaluate his politics in terms of his broader philosopher and morality?
- It emphasises the individual and the subject, but also the relations between individuals
- It is republican and anti-monarchical whilst also being non-democratic
- Attempts to understand humanity within nature, but also re-asserts the primacy of the moral law and the value of freedom
- The philosophy of right is concerned with the universal and necessary conditions for freedom for all persons in general



Class recap

- Introduce Kant's politics, and its emergence from his critical system and moral beliefs
- Explore Kant's intellectual and political context
- Discuss the relationship between individual freedom and the state
- Grasp Kant's contributions to political theory on human rights, the social contract, and international relations



Reading for next week

- For our final class, we'll be discussing Kant's overall contribution to the Enlightenment
- We'll consider his legacy and context
- We will also round up on the course overall, and what lessons and problems Kant has led us to consider differently
- Please read for the final class: "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" – photocopies provided, and a scan on the VLE