

Belief in Kant

Andrew Chignell

Cornell University

A. Overview

Most work in Kant's epistemology focuses on what happens "upstream" from experience, prior to the formation of conscious propositional attitudes. That story is familiar: first there is sensory or pure intuition, then conceptualization in accordance with categorical rules, and, ultimately, cognitive experience that is susceptible to propositional judgment. Precisely how all this works, of course, has been the topic of 225 years of debate.

Most work in Kant's epistemology ignores what goes on "downstream" from experience, despite the fact that this aspect of Kant's account touches directly on issues of substantial interest in contemporary philosophy. In particular, commentators neglect Kant's view of what it is for a judgment to be justified or count as knowledge, as well as his account of the principles that ought to guide our practices of judgment formation if the latter are to count as rational.¹

We might well wonder why. One suggestion is that Kant's discussions of this sort of thing—justification and the ethics of belief—are short and sketchy, and, moreover, they're located in the "Canon of Pure

I am indebted to the following people for helpful discussions of the ideas in this essay: Robert Adams, Karl Ameriks, Keith DeRose, Dina Emundts, Tamar Szabó Gendler, Hannah Ginsborg, Harold Hodes, Desmond Hogan, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Patrick Kain, Michelle Kosch, Scott MacDonald, Avishai Margalit, Ulrich Schlösser, Daniel Sutherland, Rahel Villinger, Daniel Warren, Eric Watkins, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Allen Wood, Melissa Zinkin, and an anonymous referee for this journal.

1. Leslie Stevenson is an important exception. I will interact with his article, "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," *Kantian Review* 7 (2003): 72–101, in what follows.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Reason” at the very back of the book (few courses on the first *Critique* make it to Akademie page 800 and beyond!). More substantive examinations can be found in the lectures on logic, but these weren’t widely available until comparatively recently (especially for those who read Kant in English), and they are a rather laborious read.

I think this suggestion has something by way of plausibility. But the fact that some readers neglect the relevant portion of Kant’s work does not, obviously, amount to a substantive objection to the idea of studying it. On the contrary, I think it *invites* study since most of us agree that Kant was a worthy philosopher, and the realization that he has some undernoticed things to say on topics of abiding significance might well provoke our interest.

There is another explanation of why this portion of the critical philosophy is neglected, one that is more threatening to my project below. It is simply that the account Kant offers is hopeless or uninteresting or both. The really substantive items in Kant’s epistemology are the account of space and time as the forms of our intuition, the Transcendental Deduction of the categories, the prohibition on cognition of things-in-themselves, the critique of metaphysics, and so forth. The account of justification and the ethics of belief is thin gruel by comparison, so goes the explanation, and worse yet it is a gruel whose main ingredients Kant took from Locke, Leibniz, and their followers in eighteenth-century Germany.

My goal here is to argue that this latter explanation is misguided. I won’t have space to compare Kant’s views to others in the tradition, but it should become obvious as we go that there is much that is original here. Space constraints also require that I focus my attention on Kant’s tripartite concept of “Belief” (*Glaube*) rather than analyzing all of the propositional attitudes in his system, but that should be enough to show that Kant’s account is of ongoing interest. Part of the interest lies in its ability to facilitate digestion of his better-known projects—the substantive issues I just mentioned—by placing them within his broader conception of our situation and obligations as rational, inquiring beings. Another part consists in the fact that Kant’s account is far from thin or hopeless; on the contrary, much of it is rich and still worthy of attention.

Here is how the essay is organized. First, I briefly sketch Kant’s views about what it is for an assent to have positive status of an epistemic sort. Up to now I have been speaking of “judgment” or “belief,” but the relevant Kantian concept is “*Fürwahrhalten*”—that is, “assent” or, more literally, “holding-for-true.” Assent is the genus of which most other positive

Belief in Kant

propositional attitudes are species. The evaluative term that Kant applies to assent is “*zureichend*”—“sufficiently”—which is an adverb, so strictly we should speak of propositions being sufficiently assented to (*zureichend für wahr gehalten*). Here I will often nominalize and talk of an assent’s “sufficiency” in the same way that contemporary epistemologists speak of a belief’s “justification.”

Using the account of epistemic sufficiency, I go on to provide an analysis of Kant’s concept of Knowledge and then a sketch of the other main kinds of Kantian assent: Conviction (*Überzeugung*), Opinion (*Meinung*), and Persuasion (*Überredung*). The bulk of the essay, however, is concerned with “Belief” (*Glaube*)—a kind of assent that is rendered sufficient by *nonepistemic* considerations and which itself comes in three varieties. We will find that in his discussion of Belief, Kant openly plumps for a rejection of the Lockean principle that assents must always be guided by our evidence, especially in matters of “maximal concernment.” Still, he is not a full-blown subjectivist about leaps-of-Belief: he remains committed to the enlightenment dictum that we must think for ourselves and that this, in turn, requires that we somehow think from the point of view of every other rational agent. As usual, it is in forging a middle way between two extremes that Kant is at his most creative and interesting.

I conclude by highlighting what I take to be one of the most significant interpretive benefits we gain from examining this aspect of Kant’s philosophy. Kant’s discussion of Belief shows that we should reject standard accounts of the extent to which *theoretical* reason can provide justified assent about things-in-themselves, in favor of one that is much more liberal. Interpretive benefits are not the only results of this discussion, however. I also hope it will become clear along the way that there *is* such a thing as Kantian Belief, and that we often have quite a lot of it.

B. Sufficiency and Knowledge

Kant opens the third section of the “Canon of Pure Reason” by characterizing assent as “an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds (*Gründe*), but that also requires subjective grounds (*Ursachen*) in the mind of him who judges” (A820/B848).² I have analyzed

2. Quotations from Kant’s work are from the Akademie Ausgabe, with the first *Critique* cited by the standard A/B edition pagination, and the other works by volume and page. Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin [now de Gruyter], 1902–). The English translations here usually differ insubstantially from the translations in the Cambridge Edition of the

ANDREW CHIGNELL

these notions at greater length elsewhere;³ in what follows I'll provide just a sketch of each sort of ground.

Here are five main features of an *objective ground*. First: an objective ground for Kant is something that provides reliable information about “the constitution of the object” or state of affairs described by the relevant proposition (A821/B849). The ground thus indicates that the proposition has some objective probability (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*) of being true (24:143, 24:194, 9:81–82).

Second: the fact that an objective ground is connected to probability in this way implies that it is something that any rational inquirer in the same situation could take to be indicative of the truth of the assent that “rests” (the German verb is *beruhen*) on it. In other words, that fact ensures that the assent is “intersubjectively valid” and “communicable” (A820–21/B848–49).

Third: an objective ground is either sufficient or insufficient. A *sufficient objective ground* for assent to a proposition is one that indicates to a moderate-to-high degree—though not always infallibly⁴—that the proposition is true. Thus, other things being equal, it is “sufficient” to license rational assent with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence. I don't think we should draw a sharp boundary here at probability over .5, although Kant does indicate that he thinks a sufficient objective ground is simply one that renders the proposition more probable than not.⁵ I don't think we should do this because Kant also expresses skepticism about the project of using precise numerical formulations outside of purely logical and mathematical contexts to characterize objective probability (see 24:38–39 and 9:82).

An *insufficient objective ground*, by contrast, is a ground that does not render the relevant proposition objectively probable enough to be held with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence by a rational subject. Kant thinks we can at times form rational assents on the basis of

Works of Immanuel Kant, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992–).

3. In “Kant's Concepts of Justification,” *Noûs* 41, no. 1 (2007): 33–63. I have drawn on that article for much of the material in this section.

4. Kant usually appears to be a fallibilist about sufficient objective grounds: that is, he usually holds that a subject can have a sufficient objective ground for an assent and the assent still turn out to be false. See his remarks at 9:72 and 24:160, for instance.

5. “If there is even one more degree of truth on the side of the . . . ground than there is on the side of the opposite, then the cognition is no longer *ambigua* but rather probable” (24:144). See also 24:194.

Belief in Kant

insufficient objective grounds, but these will be weakly held *Opinions* (*Meinungen*).

Fourth: Sufficient objective grounds typically not only license but also necessitate firm assent. In other words, once we acquire sufficient objective grounds for *p*, we typically just find our assent to *p* following along.⁶ Kant thus sides with Hume over Descartes on the issue of direct doxastic voluntarism: assents that are candidates for Knowledge (what Kant calls Convictions) are typically “determined [in us] through objective grounds of truth that are independent of the nature and interest of the subject” (9:70). As we will see, however, Kant pays his respects to the Cartesian tradition by including a kind of assent in his system—Belief—that is under the direct control of the will.

Finally: what sorts of things can serve as objective grounds? I can’t make an extended textual case here, but I think that Kant’s view is that objective grounds *typically* consist of perceptual, memorial, and introspective states, as well as other sufficient assents we already hold (the results of inductive and deductive arguments, assents about what others have testified, assents about one’s experiences, and so forth). Consider in support of this a quotation from the Jäsche lectures: “Assent based on a ground . . . is either *empirical* or *rational*, accordingly as it is grounded either on *experience* (*Erfahrung*)—one’s own as well as that communicated by others—or on *reason*. This distinction relates, then, to the two sources from which the whole of our cognition is drawn: *experience* and *reason*” (9:70).⁷

In sum: to have an objective ground for an assent to a proposition *p* is simply to have experiences and/or assents that render *p* objectively probable to some degree or other. To have a *sufficient* objective ground for an assent that *p* is to have experiences and/or assents that render *p* objectively probable to a moderate-to-high degree—that is, probable to a degree that licenses assent with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence. Insufficient grounds can license rational assent, but only with a

6. “If the will had an immediate influence on our conviction concerning what we wish, we could constantly form for ourselves chimeras of a happy condition, and always hold them to be true, too. But the will cannot struggle against convincing proofs of truths that are contrary to its wishes and inclinations” (9:73–74).

7. Robert Hanna argues that, for Kant, certain kinds of *nonconceptual* content can justify assents. I’m not committing myself to that thesis here, but rather to the weaker claim that the content of perceptual, introspective, and memorial experiences—conceptual or not—can serve as objective grounds for assent. See Hanna, “Kant on Non-Conceptual Content,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (July 2005): 247–90, especially 263ff.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

low degree of confidence. With this sketch of the relevant concepts in the background, we can now analyze objective sufficiency as follows:

- (1) S's assent that *p* is objectively sufficient if and only if S has sufficient objective grounds for assenting to *p*.

In addition to having a sufficient or insufficient objective ground—or no objective ground at all—every assent also has a *subjective cause or ground*.⁸ Assent that is subjectively grounded in an appropriate fashion is “subjectively sufficient,” for Kant, and assent that is both objectively and subjectively sufficient counts as Knowledge (*Wissen*). The most obvious candidate for an *appropriate* subjective ground is the subject's own determination that the assent is based on sufficient objective grounds. Thus:

- (2) S's assent that *p* is subjectively sufficient if and only if S determines that he has sufficient objective grounds for assenting to *p*.

(2) goes in the right direction, but it is too demanding. It requires that the subject actively determine whether his objective grounds for *p* are sufficient in order for the assent that *p* to be subjectively sufficient. Our ordinary concept of justification is ambiguous just here: sometimes we speak of *justifying* a belief as an active process of reflection and investigation, and so too does Kant (at 9:76, for instance). Typically, however, the sort of justification we're interested in is a state rather than an activity. A subject's belief that *p* can *be justified*, even if the subject doesn't do anything to determine that it is.

One way to accommodate this point is to use a principle that appeals to the reflective assent that the subject is *in a position to make* about his objective grounds *if* he were to reflect on them. By “reflection” I mean the everyday process of using memory, a priori reasoning, introspection, and so forth to cite the experiences and/or assents that he takes to be his grounds. Kant himself seems to go this route in the Blomberg lectures when he says that the “criteria of truth” of our assents

8. Kant uses “*Ursache*” rather than “*Grund*” in the Canon passage quoted above (A820/B848). Perhaps this is supposed to signify that the subjective occasion for the assent *may* be a nonrational, psychological cause (wishful thinking, self-deception) instead of an appropriate rational ground (recognition that one has good objective grounds). It's also worth noting, however, that the semantic difference between these words in German is less significant than it is in English, and that Kant also sometimes uses “*Grund*” to refer to nonrational psychological causes (see 5:144n).

Belief in Kant

are “objective criteria, which contain the ground for why some [assent] is really true or false . . . [and] subjective criteria . . . by means of which one is *in a position (im Stande ist)* to make a supposition about the truth or falsehood [of the assent]” (24:87–88, my emphasis). Thus:

- (3) S’s assent that p is subjectively sufficient if and only if S is in a position, on reflection, to cite what he takes to be his sufficient objective grounds for assenting to p .

(3) is better than (2), but there is still a problem: (3) leaves open the possibility that S’s assent that p is objectively and subjectively sufficient (and thus counts as Knowledge on Kant’s view) even though it is not *well founded*.⁹ With that in mind, consider the following revisions:

- (4) S’s assent that p is objectively sufficient if and only if ($\exists g_1$) such that
- (i) g_1 is a ground that S has, and
 - (ii) g_1 is a sufficient objective ground for assenting to p .
- (5) S’s assent that p is subjectively sufficient if and only if ($\exists g_2$) such that
- (i) g_2 is a ground that S has,
 - (ii) S’s assent is based on g_2 , and
 - (iii) on reflection, S would cite g_2 as the sufficient objective ground for his assent.

In these principles, the grounds are explicitly picked out in order to ensure that, in cases where $g_1 = g_2$, the assents are well founded—that is, the grounds that render the assent objectively sufficient are also the grounds on which S bases the assent and which S would, on reflection, take to be his or her sufficient grounds. I have also strengthened the “in a position” clause in (3) to the “would” clause in (5.ii) in order to make

9. Suppose that S has sufficient objective grounds (his perceptual experience of his best friend Q drinking a martini) for his assent that Q is drinking a martini, but suppose also that S has a long-standing habit of placing his trust in the communications he receives from fortune cookies. Suppose, finally, that on reflection S would *take* his ground for that assent to be the fact that a fortune cookie he just opened informed him that his best friend is now enjoying a martini. In such a case, S’s assent would be objectively sufficient according to (1) and subjectively sufficient according to (3)—and thus, if true, it would count as Knowledge. Clearly something has gone wrong: the assent is not well founded.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

it clear that S is both in a position to and *would* (in the nearest world in which he or she reflects) cite the right grounds.

The analyses could go further, but these will be enough for present purposes. In (4) and (5), we have a sophisticated if still schematic account of objective and subjective sufficiency, one that I think adequately represents Kant's picture in the *Critique* and the logic lectures. Since Knowledge is true assent that is both objectively and subjectively sufficient, we can simply combine (4) and (5)—and stipulate that $g_1 = g_2$ —in order to acquire the following analysis:

Knowledge (Wissen): S's assent that p counts as Knowledge if and only if ($\exists g$) such that

- (i) g is a sufficient objective ground that S has,
- (ii) S's assent is based on g ,
- (iii) on reflection, S would cite g as the sufficient objective ground for his assent, and
- (iv) p is true.

Two caveats: First, Kant never explicitly says that truth is a condition on Knowledge; he says only that Knowledge is objectively and subjectively sufficient. I take it for granted here, however, that Kant is operating in the broadly Platonic tradition and *assuming* that Knowledge has an independent truth condition. If this is wrong, then we have two options. We could simply add another subcategory of Conviction to Kant's taxonomy (see the chart below): in that case, the three species of Conviction would be "Mere Conviction," "Knowledge," and—*horribile dictu!*—"True Knowledge." Or we could build truth into the conditions for "objective sufficiency" and abandon what elsewhere appears to be Kant's fallibilism about objective sufficiency. I think that the obvious disadvantages of both options push in the direction of including the truth condition (iv) in the analysis of Knowledge.

Second: Kant thinks that the highest sort of Knowledge will be part of an explicit scientific system: its logical and evidential relations to other items of Knowledge (more general and more specific) will themselves be known to the subject who has it, and the whole system will be brought under a small number of unifying ideas (in particular the idea of the "systematicity of nature" (24:891). This sort of articulate, systematized Knowledge is a descendant of the *scientia* that is much discussed in the scholastic/rationalist tradition in which Kant was trained. But most of the time Kant appears to leave room for unsystematized Knowledge in his

Belief in Kant

account, and so I've left talk of actual systematizing out of the necessary-and-sufficient-conditions analysis.¹⁰

C. Persuasion, Conviction, Opinion

Although objective sufficiency and subjective sufficiency often come together in the form of Knowledge (*Wissen*), they also come apart in a number of different ways. There are assents, for instance, that are subjectively sufficient but not objectively sufficient—Kant calls them “Persuasions” (*Überredungen*). A subject is persuaded of a proposition when he would hold on reflection that he has sufficient objective grounds for taking a proposition to be true (so (5) is satisfied) but when, in fact, the grounds he cites are insufficient (so (4) is not satisfied). “Persuasion is mere semblance (*Schein*), since the ground of the judgment, which lies solely in the subject, is held to be objective” (A820/B848). Wish-fulfillment and self-deception are paradigm cases of Persuasion.

Kant typically contrasts Persuasion with “Conviction” (*Überzeugung*): “If it is valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason, then its ground is objectively sufficient, and in that case taking something to be true is called **Conviction**. If it has its ground only in the particular constitution of the subject, then it is called **Persuasion**.” This means that an important “touchstone” (*Proberstein*) of Conviction is

the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to assent to it; for in that case there is at least a presumption that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among subjects, rests on a common ground, namely the object, with which they therefore all agree and through which the truth of the judgment is proved. (A820–21/B848–49)

So “Conviction” is the name for any assent for which the subject has sufficient *objective* grounds—grounds that render the assent probable enough to be rationally acceptable with a moderate-to-high degree of confidence for anyone in the subject’s position. Cases of what I will call “Mere Conviction”—Conviction that doesn’t count as Knowledge—are

10. Kant does say at A651/B679 that without assuming some sort of systematicity, we can have “no reason, and without that, no coherent use of the understanding, and, lacking that, no sufficient mark of empirical truth.” If we take comments like this at face value, then perhaps some sort of systematicity condition should be added to the analysis of Knowledge itself. For discussion, see Ido Geiger, “Is the Assumption of a Systematic Whole of Empirical Concepts a Necessary Condition of Knowledge?” *Kant-Studien* 94, no. 3 (2003): 273–98.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

cases in which a subject has sufficient objective grounds for the assent but is not in a position, even on reflection, to cite those grounds.¹¹ Mere Conviction is quite common: no doubt it comprises the lion's share of what children and animals have by way of objectively sufficient assent.¹²

There is more to say about Persuasion, Conviction, and their various subspecies, but here I will press on and briefly contrast these two attitudes with a third kind of assent that Kant calls Opinion. Kant introduces it as follows: "**Having an Opinion** is assent (*Fürwahrhalten*) with the consciousness that it is subjectively **as well as objectively** insufficient" (A822/B850). In other words, the assent satisfies neither (4) nor (5), and yet it can still be rationally held under the right circumstances. By way of example, consider the scientist who takes on board a working hypothesis in order to see whether she can find confirming or disconfirming evidence for it. The scientist is not, in such a situation, *persuaded* of the proposition she assumes, since she is not mistakenly taking some faulty ground (a mere wish, for example) to be objectively sufficient. On the contrary, the scientist openly admits that she lacks sufficient objective grounds for the assent, and as a result the assent is not subjectively sufficient. We have stipulated that it is not in fact objectively sufficient, so it is neither Mere Conviction nor Knowledge. Rather, the assent is objectively and subjectively insufficient, and the subject is at least implicitly aware that this is so.

Kant is not opposed to mere opining of this sort, since it is not masquerading (like Persuasion does) as objectively sufficient assent, and as a result the subject will avoid staking too much on it: "Opinion is not really a mistake, but only an imperfect cognition, a lack, since something in our judgment does not have sufficient grounds" (24:218).¹³ Kant does insist, however, that until sufficient objective grounds are found,

11. Stevenson holds that objective sufficiency in an assent *entails* its subjective sufficiency ("Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," 78). But he doesn't provide an argument for this, and I see no reason to agree. It seems quite possible, conceptually speaking, for there to be an assent for which a subject has sufficient objective grounds but regarding which he or she is in no position to hold that he or she has such grounds.

12. Assents that are not well founded occupy a middle ground between Mere Conviction and Persuasion and may well count as either, depending on which grounds we are considering. In such cases, both (4) and (5) are satisfied, but $g_1 \neq g_2$, and so the subject is still making a mistake in reflectively taking g_2 to be the sufficient objective ground for assent.

13. As opposed to Persuasion, which always involves a mistake. This difference seems sufficient to undermine Stevenson's suggestion that Persuasion is a *species* of Opinion. See "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," 82.

Belief in Kant

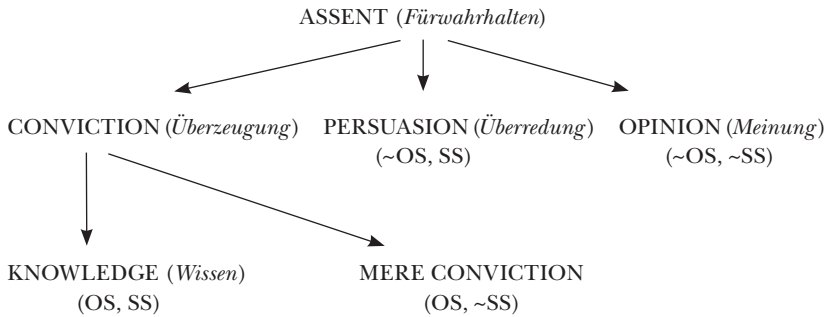


Figure 1

Opinions must be held in a weak fashion. He also anticipates the thought (later championed by Ramsey) that betting scenarios can serve as good tests for discerning how strongly a subject really holds an attitude. If we find a man who “pronounces his statements (*Sätze*) with such confident and inflexible defiance that he seems to have entirely laid aside all concern for error,” it may still be that “a bet disconcerts him.” For if the stakes of the bet are high enough, he may “become aware of what he had not previously noticed, namely that it is quite possible that he has erred” (A824–25/B852–53). In other words, thrust into a situation where he has to wager a great deal on the issue, a subject will likely reflect on whether his objective grounds for the assent are really sufficient or not. And this reconsideration may lead him to realize that the assent should at most be an Opinion.

The diagram in figure 1 provides a map of the conceptual territory we have covered so far, where “OS” stands for objective sufficiency and “SS” for subjective sufficiency.

D. Another Kind of Subjective Sufficiency

The foregoing discussion of Opinion suggests that a rational subject can only *firmly* hold a proposition if she has sufficient objective grounds for it. In fact, however, Kant leaves room for another kind of firm assent that has *nonepistemic* grounds or merits that are sufficient to make it rational in particular contexts, even if it doesn’t have sufficient objective grounds.

Although it is not Kant’s own term, I will use “merit” here to designate a property of an assent that makes it valuable or desirable for a particular subject given his or her goals, interests, and needs. Kant does often speak of the speculative or moral “interests” that human subjects have in the truth of certain propositions and of the “needs of reason” that

ANDREW CHIGNELL

make certain assents desirable for us.¹⁴ A “merit,” then, is simply the very general property, possessed by an assent, of allowing a subject partially or wholly to meet one of these goals, interests, or needs.

The merits of being objectively sufficient and subjectively sufficient, as defined in (4) and (5) above, are two of the most important merits that an assent can have. These merits are *epistemic* merits: they allow us to approach our goal of having assents that are likely to be true and count, under the right conditions, as Knowledge. A *nonepistemic* merit, on the other hand, is a property of an assent that makes it valuable or desirable for a subject—given his or her needs, interests, and goals—by which does not do so by way of directly indicating that the assent is true. The property of satisfying Matt’s desire to think that Debbie requites his affection is a nonepistemic merit of Matt’s assent that Debbie has just returned his affectionate smile. The merit is connected, not to Matt’s cognitive goal of maximizing truth and minimizing falsehood, but rather to his romantic interest in Debbie. (Of course, Kant does *not* think that this sort of wish-fulfilling merit can make an assent subjectively sufficient!) According to the “moral proof” of the immortality of the soul, assent to the proposition that there is a future life has the nonepistemic merit of allowing us to avoid a sense of practical absurdity or incoherence in the face of the demands of the moral law. The merit in this case is connected to our universal practical interest in having a coherent and morally motivating self-understanding. (Of course, Kant notoriously *does* think that such a merit can render an assent subjectively sufficient!)

Clearly the kind of subjective sufficiency that is at work here is not subjective sufficiency as characterized by (5). Adherents of Kant’s moral proof would not hold on reflection that they have sufficient objective grounds for firmly holding that the soul is immortal. Rather, these assents have nonepistemic merits that make them rationally acceptable for certain people in certain contexts. I propose to use the phrase “sufficient nonepistemic merits” to pick out any set of such merits. The secondary sense of “subjective sufficiency” at work in Kant’s discussion can thus be characterized as follows:

- (6) S’s assent that *p* is subjectively sufficient₂ if and only if it has sufficient nonepistemic merits for S.

14. See, for example: A305/B362; A309/B365; A450/B478; *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:144n; *Critique of Judgment* 5:402; “Orientation” 8:136–41; “Real Progress” 20:287, 291.

Belief in Kant

It should be obvious that the two kinds of subjective sufficiency are quite different, and that it is crucial to keep them distinct in any discussion of these matters (I will do so using subscripts from now on). Kant himself typically fails to mark the distinction, although he is clearly relying on it, and that is part of what makes his account in the Canon seem so confusing.

E. Belief (*Glaube*)

We're now in a position to address the main topic of this essay. The discussion of Belief is a fascinating portion of Kant's project, not only because its antievidentialist flavor anticipates strands of later pragmatism, but also because it explicitly allows for rational assent about things-in-themselves that is based on *theoretical* (rather than just moral or practical) grounds. It is thus very important to Kant: in the first *Critique*, he famously claims that a main goal of the critical philosophy is to "deny Knowledge [of things-in-themselves] in order to make room for Belief" (Bxxx). Commentators typically focus on the denial of Knowledge, and when they do talk about the Belief for which that denial makes room, they assume that Kant is talking about what I will call Moral Belief. I will argue below that Kant may just as well be making room for a kind of theoretical assent that is not based on explicitly moral arguments. Kant's discussion of this anticipates an important trend in recent philosophy: his notion of Belief is quite similar to what some epistemologists and philosophers of mind have called "acceptance" (indeed, Kant even anticipates their terminology: he calls the attitude "acceptance" (*Annehmung*) instead of "Belief" (*Glaube*) in a number of places). I suspect that Kant is right to think that there is such a thing as Belief; in what follows I will try to highlight both the interpretive import of his analysis and the ongoing interest of his discussion.¹⁵

15. It will become obvious in what follows that for Kant the term "*Glaube*" has a much more restricted meaning than the term "belief" does in English and a somewhat different meaning from our word "faith." I suspect that the standard practice of rendering "*Glaube*" as "faith" has caused many readers of English to miss the facts that (a) the object of *Glaube* is not always something religious (e.g., God, the afterlife) and (b) that there are different types of *Glaube*, some of which are quite different from the "moral faith" for which Kant is famous. In an effort to avoid confusion, then, I simply capitalize the first letter of the word 'Belief' when referring to the Kantian notion. Kant's term (like its predecessors in Aquinas, Locke, and Leibniz) is irredeemably technical, and often has little to do with the everyday notion of "believe" (*glauben, croire, credere, etc.*).

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Here again are the analyses of objective and subjective sufficiency that emerged above:

- (4) S's assent that p is objectively sufficient if and only if ($\exists g_1$) such that
- (i) g_1 is a ground that S has, and
 - (ii) g_1 is a sufficient objective ground for assenting to p .
- (5) S's assent that p is subjectively sufficient₁ if and only if ($\exists g_2$) such that
- (i) g_2 is a ground that S has,
 - (ii) S's assent is based on g_2 , and
 - (iii) on reflection, S would cite g_2 as the sufficient objective ground for his assent.
- (6) S's assent that p is subjectively sufficient₂ if and only if it has sufficient nonepistemic merits for S.

Recall that the phrase "sufficient objective grounds" in (4) and (5) refers to grounds that provide reliable information (evidence) about the object or state of affairs in question—information such that anyone who has those grounds could rationally base an assent with moderate-to-high confidence on them. "Sufficient nonepistemic merits" in (6) refers to other merits that an assent enjoys by way of responding to certain goals, interests, and needs that the subject has. These merits are "sufficient" to make the proposition worthy of firm assent.

Kant introduces **Belief** in the Canon by saying that "if assent is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called **Belief**" (A823/B851; cf. 8:141). A couple of initial clarifications: first, the fact that assent that p is objectively insufficient for S does not mean that assent that *not-p* is objectively sufficient for S. Rather, the idea is that in the case of **Belief**, as in the case of **Opinion**, S doesn't have sufficient objective grounds to hold that p , and he or she also doesn't have sufficient objective grounds to hold its opposite. **Belief**, for Kant, is *not* irrational assent (à la Tertullian or Kierkegaard in some moods) to something that we have sufficient grounds to deny.

Second, although Kant claims that **Beliefs** are "objectively insufficient" here, he does not mean to deny that they are "objective" in the sense of being rationally acceptable for anyone in the subject's position. In this portion of Kant's philosophy, there are at least two senses of "objective" at work. The first characterizes assents that are grounded on

Belief in Kant

experiences and/or other assents that are, in turn, evidentially connected to the object or state of affairs in question. This is the sense of “objective” at work in the analysis of objective sufficiency (4) above.

The second sense of “objective” is much broader: it applies to any intersubjectively “communicable” (*mitteilbarem*) assent—that is, any assent that is rationally acceptable for someone in the assenting subject’s position. Belief is objective in this broader sense since it is such that anyone in the subject’s position could base that Belief on the same subjective grounds. When Kant says in the Canon that Belief is objectively insufficient, then, he does not mean to suggest that it is not intersubjectively communicable. He is merely saying that it is not objective in the narrow sense since it is not based on grounds that provide sufficient evidence about an object.

Given that subjective sufficiency₁ involves the subject holding that he or she has sufficient objective grounds, the sort of subjective sufficiency that Belief enjoys must be subjective sufficiency₂: articles of Belief have nonepistemic merits that are not related to the possession of sufficient objective grounds. Kant discusses these merits under the headings of the three different types of Belief that they can license: “pragmatic,” “doctrinal,” and “moral.” I will consider them in that order.¹⁶

E.1. Pragmatic Belief

Kant says that Belief involves a “practical relation” between an end that the subject has adopted and the assent in question. In order to understand this claim, we first need to grasp Kant’s general doctrine according to which, when I set an end for myself, “the conditions for attaining it [become] hypothetically necessary” for me (A823/B851). For example, if I set as my end the possession of the ability to play the bagpipes well, then practicing and taking lessons become hypothetically necessary actions for me. There is thus a “practical relation” between the end I set for myself and my performance of the actions in question.

In some cases, according to Kant, the hypothetically necessary conditions of attaining an end will include not just performing certain

16. In “Kant’s Concepts of Justification” I argue that for Kant there is both Belief *simpliciter* and also the more demanding state of “Reflective Belief.” The latter has sufficient nonepistemic merits *and* is such that the subject is in a position, on reflection, to cite those merits. Presumably there are nonreflective and reflective versions of each of the three types of Belief discussed below. I’ll leave this complication aside here for the sake of simplicity.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

actions, but also taking certain propositions to be true. In such cases, there will be a “practical relation” between the end I set for myself and my assent to a proposition: the assent will enjoy the nonepistemic merit of allowing me to achieve my end. For example, suppose that I set as an end the very general one of *experiencing pleasure*. An assent will then possess a nonepistemic merit for me if it is in some way connected to my attainment of that end. An assent to the proposition that I have inherited a signed first edition of the *Critique* is (let us suppose) connected to the attainment of this end because holding it causes me to feel—given my other interests and assents—a great deal of pleasure. So it has a nonepistemic merit for me. Of course, Kant does *not* allow most nonepistemic merits to count towards an assent’s subjective sufficiency₂—again, he is not writing a blank check. Certainly if the end in question is one that is ruled out by ethical principles (for example, the end of discovering new ways to torture people), then the merits possessed by an assent that responds to it will not count toward the assent’s subjective sufficiency₂. Likewise, I think, the end of feeling pleasure per se—even an exceedingly noble pleasure like the one just mentioned—cannot make an assent that responds to it subjectively sufficient₂. As we might have expected, Kant is not a crass utilitarian in his ethics of assent.¹⁷

Kant cites a number of cases of Pragmatic Belief in which the nonepistemic merits of an assent *are* able to make it subjectively sufficient₂ for a particular subject in a particular situation. In the end the cases he provides do not seem compelling, but I’ll discuss them anyway in order to get Kant’s own picture in front of us. At the end of the section, I will provide a couple of cases that I take to be more impressive.

17. Kant was accused of sanctioning assent based on mere inclination by Wizenmann in a 1787 article in the *Deutsches Museum*. In the second *Critique*, Kant summarizes Wizenmann’s criticism as follows: “he disputes the authorization to conclude from a need to the objective reality of its object and illustrates the point by the example of a *man in love*, who, having fooled himself into an idea of beauty that is merely a chimera of his own brain, would like to conclude that such an object really exists somewhere.” Kant responds to the criticism by distinguishing between assent to a proposition on the basis of mere inclinations, and the assent based on needs of *reason*. “I grant that he [i.e., Wizenmann] is perfectly correct in this, in all cases where the need is based upon *inclination*, which cannot necessarily postulate the existence of its object even for the one affected by it, much less can it contain a requirement valid for everyone, and therefore it is a *merely subjective* ground (*Grund*) of the wish. But in the present case [i.e., the moral proof of God’s existence] it is a *need of reason* arising from an *objective* determining ground of the will, namely the moral law, which necessarily binds every rational being and therefore justifies him a priori in presupposing in nature the conditions benefiting it and makes the latter inseparable from the complete practical use of reason” (5:144n).

Belief in Kant

The first case Kant provides is that of a doctor who sets as his end the curing of a dangerously ill person. Note that this is what Kant calls a “contingent” end for the doctor—it is *not* a “necessary” end that he is required to will simply as a rational agent, but rather one that is appropriate to his circumstances, character, and position (A823/B851). Once he sets this contingent end for himself, however, the hypothetically necessary conditions he must satisfy in order to attain it include making a swift judgment regarding which disease the patient has and decisively prescribing a treatment. Given the predicament, the doctor faces what William James calls a *forced* and *momentous* option—as Kant puts it, “the doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger.” We are also supposed to assume that the doctor “does not know the illness”—he cannot claim to have Knowledge of the patient’s malady. As far as his evidence is concerned, he has merely a best estimation of what the disease is. Thus “he looks to the symptoms, and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption” (A824/B852).

We might wonder why the doctor’s assent here is not a mere Opinion (*Meinung*)—a weak assent for which he knowingly has insufficient objective and subjective grounds. Kant rejects this suggestion because he apparently believes that, from a rational point of view, a *firm* assent about the identity of the disease is required for achieving the end of curing the patient (we can assume that if the wrong diagnosis is made, the patient will die). In other words, the doctor cannot hope to cure the patient unless he proceeds with decisive treatment, and Kant thinks that he cannot rationally proceed with decisive treatment unless he firmly assents to a diagnosis. Thus even in the absence of sufficient objective grounds, the merit of allowing the doctor to attain his end makes it permissible for him to form and act on a confident assent that reflects his best estimation.¹⁸

In the Jäsche logic lectures, Kant provides another example of Pragmatic Belief:

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 (*glauben*) it, i.e., to have his [assent] be sufficient for an undertaking into the uncertain. (9:67–68n)

18. Alternatively, Kant might be suggesting that the doctor’s actions, together with the presumption that he is rational, imply that he has a firm Belief toward the relevant proposition, or in any case justify the ascription of such an attitude to him. For him to act so decisively in a life-or-death situation without having a firm assent about the disease would involve him in some sort of practical contradiction.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Here again there is a contingent but contextually appropriate end that the agent sets for himself—namely, the end of deciding whether to go ahead with a business deal. Although the proposition that *the outcome of the deal will be beneficial* is not objectively sufficient for him (he doesn't have sufficient evidence for it), the businessman faces a forced option: he has to make the deal or not make the deal. Furthermore, a wishy-washy Opinion will not be enough to motivate rational action one way or the other: a huge risk—the very survival of his company and all those pension plans, say—is involved. He won't be able to make the deal (and convince the shareholders to ratify it) unless he is firm in his own mind about its benefits for the company. So to achieve his end of acting decisively in the matter, the businessman has to make a firm assent either to the proposition that the deal will work out for him or to the proposition that it won't. His best estimation, given his limited evidence, is that the deal will work out. Thus, on Kant's view, a firm assent that the deal will work out has sufficient nonepistemic merits for him and counts as Pragmatic Belief.¹⁹

These examples raise a host of questions, but they also provide a clue as to how Kant wants to distinguish Pragmatic Belief from both Persuasion and Opinion. Persuasion, recall, is also supposed to be subjectively sufficient and objectively insufficient. But the subjective sufficiency in Persuasion cases is subjective sufficiency₁: the subject has a ground that he or she reflectively takes to be a sufficient objective ground for assent, even though it isn't. Pragmatic Belief, on the other hand, doesn't involve a mistake: as in the case of Opinion, the subject is aware that he or she lacks a sufficient objective ground for assent. Unlike Opinion, however, Pragmatic Belief bears a "practical relation" to action—a relation that makes firm assent hypothetically necessary. So the kind of subjective sufficiency involved is the second sort. *Only* if the situation is such that firm assent is rationally required in order to take action, and *only* if taking such action is required to achieve the appropriate end that the subject has set for himself or herself, does the assent in question count as Belief. If there are no pressing circumstances that call for firmness, then the rational thing to do is to hold the proposition as an Opinion, or to withhold assent altogether.²⁰

19. A similar case of a "merchant" who has to have a firm assent about how the crops will turn out this year in order to motivate his decision to "husband his supplies" now is found in the "Real Progress" essay at 20:298.

20. Compare this comment in the Jäsche lectures: Belief "is a kind of incomplete assent with consciousness . . . it is distinguished from opining not by its degree but rather by the relation that it has as cognition to action" (9:67n). This is not to say that

Belief in Kant

It is worth considering whether Pragmatic Belief involves “belief” in the contemporary sense. Would the doctor and the businessman really *believe* the propositions in question? I think that we should remain neutral on this question. For, first, Kant doesn’t have our contemporary concept of belief, so it’s impossible to know what he would say. Second, it is not at all clear that the subjects in these cases really would have to believe those propositions in order to be rational in acting in the way that they do. Perhaps a firm *acceptance* of the proposition that the patient has consumption is required in order to treat him for consumption, and perhaps belief that it is more likely than not that the patient has consumption is also required. But it is not at all clear that full-blown belief *that the patient has consumption* is required. Likewise for the businessman: his decisive action may imply or presuppose something like firm acceptance of the proposition that he will benefit from the deal, but it is not obvious that he actually has to believe this proposition. “Acceptance” in these cases is a more robust attitude than mere assumption-for-the-sake-of-argument: it is a voluntary species of *firm* assent that motivates assertion and action in a certain context, but which is justified by its nonepistemic merits rather than by objective grounds, and so lacks the characteristic phenomenology of belief (the involuntary disposition to “feel” that the proposition is true, for instance). As noted above, the term “acceptance” is often used in the contemporary literature to pick out precisely this sort of attitude, and it is intriguing to find Kant using “acceptance” (*Annehmung*) in this way all the way back in the eighteenth century and explicitly identifying it with Belief.²¹

the degree or firmness of Belief is an unimportant characteristic. For “the expression of Belief is . . . an expression of modesty from an **objective** point of view, but at the same time of the firmness of confidence in a subjective one” (A827/B855). Admittedly, and rather confusingly, Kant seems to insist on this firmness feature with respect to Theoretical and Moral Belief more than he does with respect to Pragmatic Belief. In fact, he says earlier in the Canon that “Pragmatic Belief has only a degree, which can be large or small according to the difference of the interest that is at stake” (A825/B853). So perhaps in the context of a low-stakes situation (suppose the patient isn’t going to die if misdiagnosed), the doctor can form a weak assent and this will be sufficient to motivate rational action. In such a case, however, it is hard to see how the assent is going to differ from Opinion, which is also weak assent on self-consciously insufficient objective grounds and that can, as we’ve seen, motivate some kinds of experimental or tentative action. I take it that in paradigmatic cases of Pragmatic Belief anyway, it is the subject’s awareness of the high-stakes character of the situation, along with his or her awareness that firm assent is required in order to act decisively in such a situation, that makes the assent subjectively sufficient₂ for him or her and thus Belief rather than mere Opinion.

21. See, for example, 20:297, 305, 309; 5:160; 5:348; 5:460; 5:125–26; *KrV*B592. Kant defines *Annehmung* in the Dohna-Wundlacken lectures as “a contingent approval

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Remaining neutral on the issue of whether Belief involves belief allows us, second, to sidestep some problems about the connection between belief and the will. Direct doxastic voluntarism (the thesis that belief is directly under the control of the will) has few friends in contemporary philosophy, and as I noted earlier Kant himself explicitly rejects the idea that we can simply choose to assent to propositions that are *contrary* to our evidence (9:73–74). However, he does allow that in cases where we *don't* have sufficient objective grounds one way or the other, we are sometimes able to choose firmly to accept a proposition: presuppose it, act on it, assert it, defend it.²²

The analysis of Pragmatic Belief can be summarized as follows:

Pragmatic Belief: S is permitted to form a Pragmatic Belief that *p* if and only if

- (a) S has set a contextually appropriate contingent end *e*,
- (b) a hypothetically necessary condition of S's attaining *e* is S's having a firm assent that *p* or some relevant alternative to *p*,
- (c) *p* is a logically possible proposition for or against which S does not have sufficient objective grounds, and
- (d) S's available objective grounds, if any, render *p* at least as likely as any relevant alternative to *p* (though not likely enough to count as Conviction).²³

that has sufficient ground in regard to a certain purpose" (24:735). For contemporary accounts of the distinction between (involuntary) "belief" and (voluntary) "acceptance," see L. Jonathan Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Michael Bratman, "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context," *Mind* 101 (January 1992): 1–15; William Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith" in *Freedom and Rationality*, ed. Jeff Jordan (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 3–27. For related discussion, see Philip Pettit, "Practical Belief and Philosophical Theory," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76 (March 1998): 15–33, and Edna Ullman-Margalit and Avishai Margalit, "Holding True and Holding as True," *Synthese* 92 (1992): 167–87. Not all concepts of acceptance are the same, of course. Robert Stalnaker develops a concept of "acceptance" that is much broader than Kant's: in fact, it seems quite close to Kant's concept of "assent," of which "acceptance" is of course just a species. See chapter 5 of *Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, 1984).

22. For passages in which Kant explicitly associates Belief with assertion, presupposition, and deliberation, see A826/B854; Jäsche 9:66–69; *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:146; Wien 24:851.

23. One might wonder whether S's evidence has to render *p* more probable than the disjunction of *all* the relevant alternatives to *p*. Most of the time, of course, the relevant alternative is just the negation, *not-p*. But in the doctor case, for instance, there is more

Belief in Kant

Now that we have the principle before us, it is worth asking whether Kant is right about this: Is there really such an attitude as Pragmatic Belief? Although I have tried to lay out Kant's examples as sympathetically as possible, in the end we have to be skeptical about them. I do suspect that there is such a thing as acceptance: a firm and typically assertoric²⁴ propositional attitude that differs from belief in being voluntary, justified by nonepistemic merits, and accompanied by a different phenomenology. But it is not clear to me that in the situations Kant describes, the subjects really do need to accept that p (and, moreover, to do so firmly). The doctor's actions can be rationally motivated by his Convictions that it is a life-or-death situation, that he has to do something if there is to be any hope of a cure, and that it seems most likely given the symptoms that the disease is consumption. This set of attitudes needn't include any attitude toward p itself, where p is the proposition that *the patient has consumption*, except perhaps the Conviction that p is logically possible. And something analogous could be said about the businessman. If this is right, then Kant's own examples suggest *malgré lui* that, in certain pragmatic circumstances, a subject can rationally and decisively act as if p is true, even if he or she has no positive, assertoric attitude toward p itself.²⁵

We need more compelling examples if we're going to follow Kant in thinking that Pragmatic Belief actually obtains. Fortunately, Jamesian-style cases can help. Consider the mountain climber who finds himself faced with a chasm on the only route home: he has to jump if he is going to survive. It *looks* to him like a jump that he can make, but he's

than one relevant alternative: the disease could be consumption, or it could be emphysema, or it could be bronchitis, and so forth. The probability of the disjunction could be quite high, and thus the condition as I have laid it out here is intended to require only that the evidence for p be stronger than the evidence for any other single alternative. It needn't be stronger than the evidence for the disjunction of all the other alternatives. Thanks to Daniel Sutherland for a question that prompted this clarification.

24. For Kant, there are three "modes" of judging that p : "assertoric" judgment that p ; "problematic" judgment that p is possible; and "apodictic" judgment that p is necessary (A70/B95).

25. Or, at least, no *full-blown* positive attitude toward p itself. It might be suggested that the Conviction that p is probable to some degree less than 50 percent can still be construed as a *partial* Conviction that p . So to have the full-blown Conviction that (q) "It is 40 percent probable that the patient has consumption" is tantamount to having a *partial* Conviction that (p) "The patient has consumption." My own view, undefended here, is that it is better to analyze such cases in terms of full-blown Convictions toward propositions involving objective probabilities less than .5; thus, the object of the doctor's Conviction would be q and not p . Subjective probability presumably has to be greater than .5 in order for the attitude to count as a full-blown Conviction.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

not confident enough about that judgment to hold it, under normal circumstances, as more than a weak Opinion. Now let's assume that if he is going to make it over the chasm when he jumps, the climber actually has to hold firmly that p , where p is the proposition that *I am going to make it over this chasm when I jump*. He can't get by with assents in the region of p —he actually has to hold p itself, and firmly. Let's also suppose that he's aware of that—he's read some psychological literature on it, say, and the literature he's read suggests that this is true. In the example, the conditions for Pragmatic Belief have been met. The climber has set an end that is appropriate for him in his context—that is, surviving the climb and getting home safely. A necessary condition of his achieving this end is his firmly holding that p and not just acting as if p is true. And by hypothesis the climber's evidence is such that p is more likely for him than *not- p* , but not likely enough to count as Conviction.

There are also cases of Pragmatic Belief in which the proposition that is accepted is not in any way made true by the fact that the subject is accepting it. 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.

Such examples significantly improve the case for Pragmatic Belief—the concept appears to be coherent and to have metaphysically possible instances. I suspect that it also has many actual instances, and thus that it merits more discussion in contemporary philosophy than it currently receives, especially by those who work at the intersection of epistemology and ethics. The fact that a spouse firmly Believes that his or her partner is faithful in the face of ambiguous evidence reveals far more about that person's character than does an involuntary belief in response to overwhelming evidence.²⁶

26. There is a related discussion in recent literature about the apparent conflict that sometimes arises between norms of friendship and epistemic norms. See Simon Keller, "Friendship and Belief," *Philosophical Papers* 33 (November 2004): 329–51, and

*Belief in Kant**E.2. Theoretical Belief*

Kant claims in the Canon that there is an “analogue” of Pragmatic Belief that is concerned with “merely theoretical” issues. He calls it “Doctrinal Belief” (“doctrinale Glaube”) there and theoretical “acceptance” (at, for example, 5:447) or “practico-dogmatic” assent (20:293) elsewhere.²⁷ “Doctrinal” in this context does not exclusively refer to articles of religion: Kant is using the term in the broad sense to mean something like a “teaching” or a “statement.” I’ll refer to it here as Theoretical Belief so as not to invite confusion. As I hope to show in what follows, this is a very significant and lamentably underdiscussed category of assent in Kant’s philosophy.

The first thing to note about Theoretical Belief is that it involves a subject firmly assenting to a proposition for which he or she has insufficient objective grounds. Kant provides the example of the proposition that “there are inhabitants of at least some of the planets that we see” (A825/B853). This is a proposition that could not, certainly in Kant’s day, be known on the basis of empirical observation or theorizing. Still, Kant says that if he were in a situation where he *had* to form an assent about the matter, “I might well bet everything that I have on it.” Thus the assent would not be “merely an Opinion but a strong Belief” (ibid.).

A crucial difference between Pragmatic Belief and Theoretical Belief is that the former is assent for which the subject *could* in a nearby possible world have sufficient objective grounds and which *could* thereby count as Knowledge, whereas the latter is assent that *could not* in similar circumstances count as Knowledge. If the doctor in Kant’s example had just had better medical training, he could have had Knowledge of the sick person’s malady. If the businessman had just done more research, he might have been able to know whether the deal would be profitable for him. With respect to the existence of extraterrestrials, however, no one (according to Kant) is “able to undertake anything in relation to the object” (ibid.). This is what he means when he says it is a “*merely*” theoretical question: it is one regarding which we not only do not but also *could*

Sarah Stroud, “Epistemic Partiality in Friendship,” *Ethics* 116 (April 2006): 498–524. Both of these writers suggest that friendship norms sometimes make (what Kant calls) Pragmatic Beliefs regarding our friends rational in some broad sense, even though they are not *epistemically* rational.

27. Here I disagree with Stevenson, who says that Doctrinal Belief “does not seem to be a stable conception in [Kant’s] thought, and as far as I know does not recur in the Critical philosophy” (“Opinion, Belief or Faith, Knowledge,” 95).

ANDREW CHIGNELL

not (given eighteenth-century limitations anyway) have sufficient objective grounds one way or the other.

Normally speaking, of course, a rational person would not take himself to be in a position to hold anything stronger than an Opinion on such an issue. That, presumably, is why Kant introduces the exigencies of the betting scenario. Making a bet one way or the other, Kant asks us to suppose, is the end that the subject has set for himself. More precisely, his end is to bet “many advantages in life” on the truth or falsehood of *p*. The introduction of this end makes it hypothetically necessary to assent *firmly* to either *p* or *not-p*—he is not rationally able in such a high-stakes situation merely to suspend judgment or have a weak Opinion.

I think we have to be skeptical about Kant’s claim that it is impossible rationally (or even psychologically) to make a high-stakes bet on an assent that is not firm. If the subject is in a position where he *has* to bet, why couldn’t he rationally opt for a best estimation without first generating a firm assent to the proposition that the estimation is true? Fortunately, Kant provides examples of Theoretical Belief that appeal to practical exigencies other than forced betting. Consider the biologist who sets as her contingent end the discovery of new truths about organisms and the systematization of the assents she does have under a small number of organizing principles. In order to achieve this end, Kant says, it is hypothetically necessary for her to assent to the “merely theoretical” proposition that the world was designed in accordance with final ends set by an author of the world (*Welturheber*). Further, her sustained practice of seeking teleology or “purposive unity” in biological systems, to which she commits vast amounts of her time and resources, requires this assent as a *firm* and *stable* presupposition. Further still, her “experience liberally supplies examples of [purposive unity]”—Kant is clearly talking about experience of organisms here—and so the biologist’s best estimation of the situation is that the natural world is intelligently authored. This complex state of affairs—the fact that her best estimation in the situation favors intelligent authorship together with the fact that firm assent to the existence of a world-author has the merit of allowing her to achieve her end—makes the assent subjectively sufficient₂ for her. Because the assent is not something about which she could have Knowledge, the assent counts as Theoretical rather than Pragmatic Belief.

In the Canon, Kant plays the biologist and sums up her reasoning as follows:

Belief in Kant

For although with regard to theoretical Knowledge of the world I have nothing **at my command** that necessarily presupposes this thought [of the existence of an intelligent designer] as the condition of my explanations of the appearances of this world . . . purposive unity is still so important a condition of the application of reason to nature that I cannot pass it by, especially since experience liberally supplies examples of it. But I know no other condition for this unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as I presuppose that a highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends. Consequently, the presupposition of a wise author of the world is a condition of an aim which is, to be sure, contingent but not yet inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide for the investigation of nature. (A826/B854, Kant's emphasis)

Kant explicitly says here that the inference to best explanation does not result in theoretical *Knowledge*: it is not based on sufficient objective grounds. Rather, it is a "presupposition" (*Voraussetzung*) that the biologist firmly holds as a hypothetically necessary condition of attaining her chosen end. Lest we be mistaken, however, Kant goes on explicitly to say that the assent in this case is not "merely having an Opinion, but rather even in this theoretical relation it can be said that I firmly believe in God; but in this case this Belief must not strictly be called Practical, but must be called a Doctrinal Belief, which the theology of nature (physico-theology) must everywhere necessarily produce" (A826–27/B854–55; cf. 5:438, 478; 8:138–39).²⁸

Although the *textual* case for Theoretical Belief in a world-author is quite strong in the first *Critique*, it is not perhaps the strongest philosophical example.²⁹ That's because Kant's conception of teleology is infected with a kind of "mentalism" (i.e., the assumption that the very use of teleological concepts implies a commitment to an actual designer), and this can seem archaic in a contemporary context.³⁰ In the *Transcendental Dialectic*, as well as in the Pöhlitz lectures on religion, Kant discusses a different sort of "merely theoretical" assent about a supersensible entity that

28. A full account of Kant's view here would say more about *why* such inferences to best explanation don't comprise sufficient objective grounds and thus don't underwrite Knowledge. I hope to take up this issue elsewhere.

29. Also, Kant may have changed his views on teleology by the time he wrote the third *Critique* such that he is less hospitable to the notion of Theoretical Belief in intelligent design. See section 90, for instance.

30. See Mark Bedau, "Against Mentalism in Teleology," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (January 1990): 61–70.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

is taken on board not by the biologist but by the *cosmologist*. It is clear in his discussions of the cosmological argument that Kant thinks it is illegitimate to employ the schematized category of cause-and-effect—which applies only to appearances—in generating a theoretical proof of a self-causing first cause. But he also claims that the powerful “desire” or “need” that we have, as rational cosmologists, for accounts of the world that are “complete” and “fully systematic”—that is, that don’t contain any brute facts—will naturally lead us via something like the Principle of Sufficient Reason to Belief that an ultimate ground (though not a first cause) exists (see, e.g., A613/B641; 5:439ff.).

The central thesis here, in Kantian terminology, is that we can *think* rather than cognize our way beyond the realm of possible experience by using, *not* the schema of cause-and-effect, but rather the unschematized category that Kant calls “ground-consequence.”³¹ In doing so, we must give up claims to cognition (*Erkenntnis*) and cognition-based Knowledge (*Wissen*) since these involve the application of schematized categories to a spatiotemporal manifold. But Kant is clear that we needn’t give up all assents in the assertoric mode regarding the object of these thoughts because subjectively sufficient₂ Belief is still a possibility:

Everywhere we see a chain of effects and causes, of ends and means, regularity in coming to be and perishing, and because nothing has entered by itself into the state in which it finds itself, this state always refers further to another thing as its cause, which makes necessary just the same further inquiry, so that in such a way the entire whole would have to sink into the abyss of nothingness (*Abgrunde des Nichts*) if one did not accept (*annehmen*) something subsisting with its origin in itself and independently outside this infinite contingency, which supports it and at the same time, as the cause of its existence, secures its continuation. (A622/B650)

Kant adduces similar considerations in arguing that metaphysicians can have Theoretical Belief in an *ens realissimum*—a being that possesses all “realities” or fundamental positive properties, and thereby

31. “To **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or a priori through reason). But I can **think** (*denken*) whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object (*Object*) somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities” (Bxxviii). For the principle of ground-consequence, see, for example, A73/B98 and 20:292.

Belief in Kant

grounds all real possibility. This assent, too, is a result of the rational need for completeness or a sufficient reason—the need to avoid the abyss. The argument on its behalf, which Kant first developed as a speculative proof of the *ens realissimum* in 1763,

is unable to establish the objective necessity of an original being; rather it establishes only the subjective necessity of accepting such a being. But this proof can in no way be refuted, because it has its ground in the nature of human reason. For my reason makes it absolutely necessary for me to accept (*annehmen*) a being which is the ground of everything possible, because otherwise I would be unable to cognize (*erkennen*) what in general the possibility of something consists in. (28:1034)

So cosmologists can firmly accept the existence of an ultimate ground, and metaphysicians can firmly accept the existence of a most real being. As long as they don't mistake their subjective grounds for sufficient objective grounds, they won't run afoul of the criticisms of the Dialectic, and thus "a principle that would otherwise be **dialectical** will be transformed into a **doctrinal** principle" (A516/B544).

Note that the conclusions of these arguments are not the same as those of the postulates of Moral Belief for which Kant is renowned. The world-author in which the biologist has Belief, Kant openly admits, could be one of Hume's mediocre deities (in the third *Critique* he says that "physico-theology" could equally well be called physico-"demonology"). Likewise, the ultimate ground of the cosmologist and the *ens realissimum* of the metaphysician are not the God of Kant's own moral theism (they could just as well be Spinoza's *natura naturans*). Moreover, the considerations that Kant adduces on behalf of these arguments are significantly different from those that ground the postulates of Moral Belief in that they all have to do with *theoretical* issues. And Kant is explicit about this: Theoretical Belief involves freely holding an assent on account of its non-epistemic but still in some important sense *theoretical* merits.³² If this is right, then it is an important result: Kant is not opposed to the idea of rational, speculative, assertoric assents regarding things-in-themselves;

32. Here is another passage, this time from the *Reflexionen* on logic, in which Kant explicitly says that theoretical considerations can ground rational Belief: "The principle of the self-preservation of reason is the basis of rational Belief, in which assent has the same degree as Knowledge (*das Fürwahrhalten eben den Grad hat als beym Wissen*), but is of another kind which comes not from the cognition of grounds in the object but rather from the true needs of the subject in respect to *theoretical* as well as practical applications" (16:371–72; my emphasis).

ANDREW CHIGNELL

he's just claiming that they don't count as Knowledge. This amounts to a significant revision of the standard interpretation regarding the abilities and reach of theoretical reasoning. I'll return to this point in section F.

Note also that the inclusion of Theoretical Belief in Kant's system clearly shows that the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) doesn't go away in the critical philosophy, although Kant certainly appears to denigrate it in places (for instance, at A783/B811). Rather, the PSR bifurcates into the Causal Principle of the Second Analogy, which governs appearances, and a principle representing the interests or needs that reason has with respect to theoretical explanation—the need to avoid explanatory bruteness or absurdity, for example. These are needs that can't always be met by Knowledge, but they can often be met by inferences to best explanation resulting in Theoretical Belief.³³ This explains how Kant can be so friendly to the PSR in his logic lectures from the 1790s, long after the publication of the first *Critique* (9:51–53). It also suggests that Kant does not *materially* abandon rationalist metaphysics in the critical period: he simply thinks that the *form* or status of its results must be reconceived. The analysis that we can generate from our inquiries in this section is this:

Theoretical Belief: S is permitted to form a Theoretical Belief that *p* if and only if

- (a) S has set a contextually appropriate contingent end *e*,
- (b) a hypothetically necessary condition of S's attaining *e* is S's having a firm assent that *p* or some relevant alternative to *p*,
- (c) *p* is a logically possible, "merely theoretical" proposition for or against which S does not have sufficient objective grounds,
- (d) S's available objective grounds, if any, render *p* at least as likely as any relevant alternative to *p* (though not likely enough to count as Conviction).

The foregoing is my attempt at a fair representation of Kant's explicit views about Theoretical Belief; what follows in the next few paragraphs will be more conjectural. There are two very important assents that strike me as plausible candidates for Theoretical Belief, though I am not sure that Kant wanted to regard them in that way. The first is assent to

33. Again, the question of *why* they can't count as Knowledge is at the very heart of Kant's critique of rationalism and its claims to synthetic a priori Knowledge disconnected from all possible experience. I have to set this question aside here.

Belief in Kant

(Grounding) *There are things-in-themselves that ground appearances.*

Kant says in the B-Preface that in theorizing about appearances “we at least must be able to think (*denken*) them as things-in-themselves, for otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears” (Bxxvi–xxvii). The idea seems to be that by theorizing about “appearances” we implicitly presuppose the existence of things that ground the appearances (by causing them in some way, perhaps, or by being identical to them). But Kant often suggests that we can’t have cognition or Knowledge of things-in-themselves. These are controversial claims, but suppose we grant them for the time being. Then assent to Grounding will have satisfied condition (a) of the Theoretical Belief principle above, since it is clearly appropriate for us to theorize about appearances, and also conditions (c) and (d), since the objective grounds are not sufficient one way or another, and if there is any evidence at all in the case it seems to point to the truth of Grounding. What about condition (b)? If we agree with Kant that one of our fundamental goals as rational inquirers is to cognize appearances, and if we also agree that we cannot pursue that goal without also firmly presupposing that there is some thing-in-itself that grounds those appearances, then the conclusion is near that Grounding is an article of Theoretical Belief for us. If this is right, then it offers a new response to F. H. Jacobi’s famous objection that Kant contradicts himself when he both claims that we can’t know anything about things-in-themselves and yet clearly assumes that things-in-themselves both exist and ground appearances.³⁴ If the latter assumption counts as Belief rather than Knowledge, the contradiction disappears.

Second: Kant thinks that there are various regulative principles or “maxims” that guide research and theory building, especially in the empirical sciences, but he is not at all clear about the status that these maxims have. It seems to me that some of them, anyway, fit the profile of Theoretical Belief. For example, our strong interest in being able rationally to prefer theories (historical or scientific) that are the simplest ones that account for all of the data demands, as a sort of presupposition, that we firmly assent to this *ceteris paribus* principle:

(Simplicity) *The world is organized in a parsimonious fashion.*

34. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* (Breslau, 1787).

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Assent to Simplicity is something for which scientists and historians do not (initially at least) have sufficient objective grounds (i.e., arguments, evidence). But making the assent, and making it firmly, is a necessary condition of attaining their rational goals, and thus it has a powerful nonepistemic merit for them. In one place, Kant goes so far as to say that in the context of theory building, “the parsimony of principles becomes not merely an economic principle of reason, but rather an inner law of nature (*die Ersparung der Prinzipien nicht bloss ein ökonomischer Grundsatz der Vernunft, sondern inneres Gesetz der Natur wird*)” (A650/B678; see also A652–54/B680–82). More generally, Kant claims that there is no rational basis for the universal application of “economic” or methodological (Kant sometimes calls them “logical”) principles that assume the parsimoniousness of nature, unless we implicitly presuppose the truth of a “transcendental principle” like Simplicity:

In fact it cannot even be seen how there could be a logical principle of rational unity among rules unless a transcendental principle is presupposed (*vorausgesetzt*), through which such a systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed a priori as necessary. (A651/B679)

These are provocative passages. One commentator takes them to mean that our assent to principles like Simplicity, if true, amounts to “transcendent a priori Knowledge” that goes beyond anything that is deduced in the *Analytic*.³⁵ I find this interpretive strategy unattractive for at least two reasons. First, principles like Simplicity refer to the object of a transcendental idea—the idea of nature as a totality or “world-whole.” Given that Kant’s entire critical project is aimed at denying positive, determinate Knowledge of the objects of transcendental ideas, it seems unlikely that Kant now wants to say we have transcendent a priori Knowledge about the world-whole. Second, Simplicity is conceptually prior to induction—we typically cannot rationally induce until we presuppose Simplicity—and so it would seem that the principle itself cannot rely for its own justification on the success of induction. But a report of that success appears to be the only candidate we have for a sufficient objective ground for Simplicity, and in the absence of such a ground the principle can’t count as Knowledge. For these reasons, I think Kant should be read as suggesting that we take Simplicity and certain other

35. Thomas Wartenberg, “Reason and the Practice of Science,” *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228–48. See especially 237, 245.

Belief in Kant

“regulative” principles on board as Theoretical Beliefs, rather than as theoretical hypotheses that aspire to confirmation or as Convictions that have sufficient objective grounds. They are subjectively sufficient₂ but not objectively sufficient; they give direction to our inquiry and motivate the search for unified, systematic, simple theories, without themselves amounting to Knowledge.³⁶

These remarks about Grounding and Simplicity are mere suggestions; a separate essay would be required fully to defend the claim that they are best construed as Theoretical Beliefs. Let me conclude this section by reemphasizing that, even in the canonical cases, the subjective sufficiency₂ of both Pragmatic and Theoretical Belief is relative to agents and contexts. The doctor’s background Knowledge is limited in important respects and yet he finds himself in a situation that requires swift and decisive action. Had he been better educated in medical school, he would have had Knowledge of what to do. But as it stands, the best he can do is form a Pragmatic Belief *in that context* and act decisively on it. For the bystanders who have no medical training at all, those subjective grounds don’t exist: they do not need to form a firm Belief on the issue since they have not set as an end the swift treatment of the patient’s illness. The rational thing for them to do is to withhold assent altogether or, at most, to form a mere Opinion. On the other hand, if there is an expert on respiratory diseases nearby, he or she will not have to settle for either Opinion or Belief on the issue: the expert will have the resources to acquire Knowledge that the disease is consumption. And if he or she is there to make the prescription, then the context will have changed such that the original doctor is no longer permitted to hold more than an Opinion on the issue (even though, let’s assume, his evidence about the disease is the same as in the original case).

Analogously, Kant thinks that the biologist can firmly hold, *in the context of her scientific research*, that an author of the world exists, given that this Theoretical Belief is a hypothetically necessary condition of the rational application of teleological concepts to nature. Evolutionary theory, of course, may provide an alternate and equally satisfying way of accounting for the apparent purposiveness we encounter in nature. But from Kant’s

36. I am thus suggesting here that many of the so-called “regulative principles” (especially the ones that Kant sometimes calls “maxims of pure reason”) are best interpreted as assertoric Theoretical Beliefs. I don’t mean to suggest that *everything* that Kant calls a regulative principle is best interpreted in that way, however. For some of them are explicitly said to be in the *problematic* rather than the *assertoric* mode, whereas Belief is always assertoric.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

pre-Darwinian perspective, the application of teleological concepts to nature had a hypothetically necessary connection to Belief in intelligent design; thus, his biologist's assent is subjectively sufficient₂. Likewise, the rational theologian's end is to seek complete and systematic theories, and so *in the context of speculative theory-construction* he or she can rationally form the Theoretical Belief that an *ens realissimum* exists.³⁷ Someone who has not set one of these ends as part of an appropriate intellectual project does not need to form Belief in the existence of such beings, and someone who has the ability to *demonstrate* that such beings exist—or has some sort of intellectual intuition of them (for Kant, this could not be someone with faculties like ours)—would have intuitive Knowledge of the relevant facts, and thus would not need mere Theoretical Belief either. The fact that the best we can do from a theoretical point of view is to form Belief in these contexts is a result of the fact that our theoretical faculties are limited in crucial ways. The latter point, of course, is one of the central tenets of the critical philosophy.

E.3. Moral Belief

In contrast to the first two kinds of Belief, the third kind is not connected to a particular action or activity that a subject sets as his or her contingent end; rather, it is connected to the general and “absolutely necessary” end of willing the highest good. This end arises directly out of our moral vocation as rational agents in the world; thus, if there are assents that are necessary conditions of the attainment of this end, they will be assents that are subjectively sufficient₂ for all of us. Kant calls such assent Moral Belief (often translated into English, somewhat misleadingly, as ‘moral faith’) and says that “no human being is free of all interest in these questions” (A830/B858). In the second *Critique*, he calls it “assent in a moral respect” (5:146).

I'm going to say less about Moral Belief than I have about the other two varieties of Belief, in part because I think it should already

37. My sense is that the betting scenario Kant invokes in the Canon (in the case of the extraterrestrials) is supposed to act as a generic surrogate for intellectual contexts such as these. Kant is not really concerned with the rationality of assent in gambling contexts; rather, the high-stakes wager plays the role that special intellectual contexts and purposes do in other cases by putting the subject in a situation where it is appropriate for him or her to form a firm assent about a “merely theoretical” proposition. Since very few of us are ever in the position of having to bet many advantages in life on the truth or falsity of a merely theoretical proposition, we will rarely have Theoretical Beliefs that actually arise in this way.

Belief in Kant

be clear how the story is going to go, and in part because Moral Belief is much more adequately discussed in the literature than the other two types.³⁸ One of the most important articles of Moral Belief for Kant, of course, is the assent that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good being exists. The merit that this assent has for us is nonepistemic in that it is connected to our practical interest in having a coherent moral self-understanding. Very briefly, Kant thinks that we can only make sense of the ethical demand to will the “dependent highest good”—that is, a natural world in which happiness exists in proportion to virtue—if we hold that such a state is realizable. But we can only rationally hold that such a state is realizable if we also assent to the claim that there is an “independent highest good”—that is, a God who has the resources and inclination to actualize the dependent highest good (cf. 8:139ff.).

Because Moral Belief in God’s existence is able to count as subjectively sufficient₂ for every moral agent in every circumstance, Kant sometimes dubs his argument here a “moral proof (*Beweis*)” of God’s existence. He also speaks of “proving” other articles of Moral Belief such as the freedom of the will and the existence of an afterlife. When he is speaking carefully, however, he notes that the assents in question do not have sufficient objective grounds and thus are not bona fide proofs or demonstrations. On the contrary, the assents have sufficient nonepistemic merits for subjects like us. In the Canon, Kant emphasizes this fact by noting that practical considerations do not allow anyone to “boast that he **knows** that there is a God and a future life.” That’s because in the case of Moral Belief, “the [Practical] Conviction is not **logical** but **moral** certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say ‘**It is** morally certain that there is a God,’ etc., but rather ‘**I am** morally certain’ etc.” (A829/B857). Kant is not suggesting that the assent in question is not intersubjectively communicable (that is, “objective” in the broad sense mentioned above) or that it is only valid for some of us and not others. Rather, he is reminding us that the sort of sufficiency the assent has is subjective sufficiency₂ and not objective sufficiency. It is a voluntary assent that we *must* make if we are to be rational agents self-consciously bound by the demands of the moral law.

Here, then, is the relevant principle:

38. For lengthy treatments of Moral Belief, see Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), and John Hare, *The Moral Gap* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

ANDREW CHIGNELL

Moral Belief: S is permitted to form a Moral Belief that *p* if and only if

- (a) S has set an “absolutely necessary” *moral* end *e*,
- (b) a necessary condition of S’s attaining *e* is S’s having a firm assent that *p*, and
- (c) *p* is a logically possible proposition for or against which S cannot have sufficient objective grounds.

Other articles of Moral Belief include the assents that the will is free, that the soul exists, that there is an afterlife, that God will ensure that happiness is proportionate to virtue, and so forth. Thus we can see that Kant adopts the pendant of Locke’s famous evidentialist position in the ethics of belief according to which in matters of “maximal concernment” such as ethics and religion, we *all* have a duty *always* to seek out and follow our evidence.³⁹ Kant’s claim is that it is precisely there, with respect to matters of maximal concernment, that we are rationally permitted to go beyond our evidence and leap into Beliefs that are subjectively sufficient₂ for us.

Now that we have the concept before us, we can again ask the systematic question: Is there anything to be said on behalf of Moral Belief? Without going into a lengthy discussion, 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. And these needn’t be propositions about metaphysical entities like God and the soul. 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. And although Kant himself would have disagreed vehemently, I suspect that Equality is not a principle for which we can find conclusive a priori or a posteriori evidence. Thus, we may not find ourselves convicted of it (assuming, with Kant, that Conviction is an involuntary response to the presence of perceived evidence). Still, it is advisable in most, if not all, contexts to *accept* it—and to do so firmly. For most of us will need to hold Equality as more than a weak hypothesis in

39. See Locke, *Conduct of the Understanding* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996), section 8.

Belief in Kant

order rationally and decisively to act, legislate, and speak in an egalitarian fashion.⁴⁰ If this is correct, and if we agree (for independent reasons) that decisively acting, legislating, and speaking in an egalitarian fashion is a very good thing, then we have sufficient subjective grounds for a firm Moral Belief in Equality.

F. Conclusion: Liberal Metaphysics

We have now considered all of the major categories of assent in Kant's system and can thus complete our diagram (see figure 2).

By way of conclusion I want to underline the most significant interpretive payoff we get from examining this aspect of Kant's philosophy and then make one final point regarding its contemporary interest.

There is massive disagreement among commentators on the question of what we can say or think or know or believe about transcendent things-in-themselves—that is, things we can't cognize by connecting them in some way to sensory experience. The disagreement seems to push people into three main camps. According to those that I'll call the Hardliners, human reason can provide no access whatsoever to truths about uncognizable things-in-themselves. Any talk of such access should be written off as a violation by Kant of his own critical principles since the very idea of an uncognizable thing-in-itself is nonsensical.⁴¹

Another camp is that of the Moderates. According to them, theoretical reason is restricted to the realm of appearances or phenomena, except for the fact that it naturally and inevitably generates transcendental ideas of unconditioned entities beyond this realm. We can *entertain*

40. This thought is perhaps more Hobbesian than Kantian. In chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes concedes that Equality cannot be proved (despite his gestures in that direction at the beginning of chapter 13) but says that it should still be accepted in order to avoid the war of all against all: "If nature therefore have made men equal, that equality is to be acknowledged: or if nature have made men unequal, yet because men that think themselves equal will not enter into conditions of peace, but upon equal terms, such equality must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth law of nature, I put this: that every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature. The breach of this precept is pride." See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Thanks to Nicholas Sturgeon for pointing out the relevance of Hobbes here.

41. Here is a paradigmatic Hardliner comment: "Kant's basic position does not allow that any sense can be attached to 'real in themselves.' Our only concept of reality is an empirical one, so that for us 'real' has to mean 'related to our experience in such-and-such ways.' Kant has no right to make even agnostic or negative uses of 'real in itself,' which means 'real, whatever its relation may be to our experience.'" Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic* (New York: Cambridge, 1974), 52.

ANDREW CHIGNELL

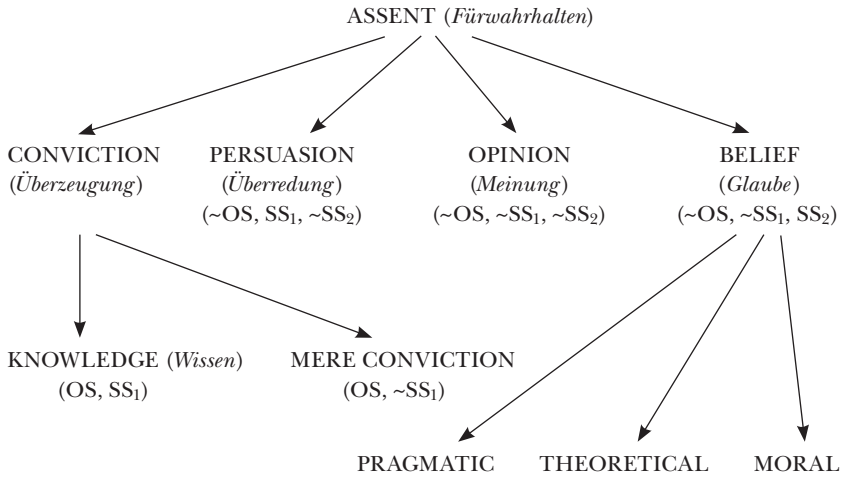


Figure 2

these ideas, and we can perhaps include them in “problematic” assents (i.e., assents according to which the relevant propositions are logically possible, but their truth is “set as a problem” for reason). We may even use the ideas as “regulative” or heuristic notions, acting “as if” they are true while also withholding positive, assertoric assent from any propositions that assert the existence of instances of the ideas. It is only on the basis of purely *moral* considerations that we can assent assertorically to such propositions—moral considerations such as those that underwrite Moral Belief in a free noumenal will, the afterlife, and the existence of God. Most commentators seem to fall into the Moderate camp these days.⁴²

42. Here are two paradigmatic Moderate comments: (1) “As far as theoretical/speculative reason is concerned, ideas are no more than thinkable possibilities beyond the reach of realizable knowledge. But practical reason shows that with such thinkable things ‘the category as a mere form of thought is here not empty but obtains significance through an object which practical reason unquestionably provides though the conception of the good.’ Practical reason can go where theoretical reason cannot tread.” Nicholas Rescher, *Kant and the Reach of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 62–63; (2) “[Kant] assumes that religious belief [i.e., belief involving transcendental ideas], if it is to be justifiably held, must be based on adequate evidence. Religious belief is not self-justifying. It must receive its justification from elsewhere. . . . Furthermore, Kant was convinced that morality is the only area of human existence in which there is any hope of finding the adequate evidence. Adequate reasons for religious beliefs will always prove to be moral principles.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Conundrums in Kant’s Rational Religion,” in *Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip Rosse and Michael Wreen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 41.

Belief in Kant

The third position, and the one I think our inquiries here recommend, is what I call Liberalism. According to Liberals (who are in the distinct minority), theoretical reason itself can provide grounds on which to form assertoric rather than merely problematic assents about certain things-in-themselves. For surely an author of the world, an ultimate ground, and an *ens realissimum* are things-in-themselves. And yet Kant says that there are *theoretical* considerations on which we can base firm rational assent that such things exist. Such assent can't count as *Knowledge*, of course, since it won't be objectively sufficient and subjectively sufficient₁. Rather, it counts as rational Belief: assent that is objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient₂. Consider once again Kant's claim in the B-Preface that he had to "deny Knowledge in order to make room for Belief" about things-in-themselves, or his admonishment to metaphysicians in the Discipline that "enough remains left to you to speak the language, justified by the sharpest reason, of a firm Belief, even though you must surrender that of Knowledge" (A744–45/B772–73). As I noted earlier, such passages are almost *always* taken to be referring to Moral Belief, and this is presumably what explains the overwhelming prevalence of the Moderate interpretation. In fact, however, I see no reason to think that Kant isn't also talking about Theoretical Belief—assent that is formed on the basis of theoretical, though still in an important sense subjective, grounds.

Having presented a brief plea on behalf of Liberalism, I should reiterate that Kant's concept of assent (*Fürwahrhalten*) is not the same as our contemporary concept of belief: it is possible for a subject to have a Theoretical Belief that *p* even if he or she doesn't believe that *p*. So Kant is not offering us some sort of procedural or subjective argument for *beliefs* about things-in-themselves. Rather, again, "Belief" is much closer to the contemporary concept of *acceptance*: a firm, positive, and voluntary attitude that is subjectively sufficient₂ for a particular subject in a particular circumstance, given his or her interests and ends, and that has implications for the subject's rational action, assertion, and deliberation.

Kant often emphasizes his critique of Knowledge-claims in metaphysics and sometimes goes overboard—saying that the concepts used by metaphysicians are nonsensical, have no reference, are "worthless," and so on (these are the sorts of passages that Hardliners exploit). In this essay, I've been emphasizing another, positive part of Kant's mature philosophy that I think may be more congenial to contemporary metaphysicians. It is this: the urge to metaphysics will not even begin to be satisfied if we stick with propositions that are candidates for Knowledge. But, in

ANDREW CHIGNELL

many cases, the urge to metaphysics is a natural and worthy urge—one that is partly constitutive of rationality itself. Given this situation, we can and should go ahead and build metaphysical arguments in all the usual ways, by appealing to “intuitions” (of the Moorean rather than the Kantian sort), reflective equilibrium, inference to best explanation, simplicity, and so forth. But we should also remember that the conclusions of these arguments, even if true, won’t count as Knowledge in the way that justified and true perceptual, testimonial, or scientific beliefs about the empirical world do. Instead, they might count as something else: Kant’s suggestion, of course, is Theoretical Belief or acceptance. The acceptance of certain synthetic a priori propositions can satisfy the metaphysical urge and provide much grist for interesting philosophical debate, without allowing us to parade our results as on an epistemic par with perceptual, historical, and scientific knowledge. Indeed, such acceptance need not even count as belief in the contemporary sense, as I just noted. And this too, I think, saves the phenomena—for I suspect that very few metaphysicians really *believe* the conclusions of their arguments, even the ones that they most firmly accept and passionately defend.