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# A History of Western Philosophy: 7 Continental Philosophy since 1750

## *The Rise and Fall of the Self*

ROBERT C. SOLOMON

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## Kant and the German Enlightenment

Two things have always filled me with awe: the starry heavens above and the moral law within.<sup>1</sup>

Kant

In an important sense, the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) developed in a vacuum. In France (and earlier in England) Enlightenment theories were blueprints for reform or revolution, but in Germany the political situation was such that reform was all but unthinkable. The middle class was powerless. Germany was fragmented into hundreds of tiny states and principalities, and apart from Prussia, which was ruled by the iron-fisted but 'enlightened' Frederick the Great, there was no central government as in Paris or London. In 1789 Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) wished the French revolutionaries well, but with no thought that a similar revolution might or should be staged in Prussia. Heine may have compared Kant to Robespierre for the bold radicalism of his thinking, but their revolutions were not on a par. The Enlightenment in England and France fostered a hard-headed, visionary realism. In Germany it had to settle for an abstract idealism, and enlightenment of the spirit only, or as Marx would write in *The German Ideology*:

While the French bourgeoisie, by means of the most colossal revolution that history has ever known, was achieving domination and conquering the Continent of Europe, while the already emancipated English bourgeoisie was revolutionizing industry and subjugating India politically and all the rest of the world commercially, the impotent German burghers did not get any farther than 'good will'. . . . Kant's good will fully corresponds to the impotence, depression and wretchedness of the German burghers, whose petty interests were never capable of developing into the common interests of a class but had their counterpart in their cosmopolitan swollen-headedness.<sup>2</sup>

Immanuel Kant read and admired Rousseau; he practically worshipped Isaac Newton. From his perch on the Baltic Sea he surveyed the panorama of the world, and identified himself as the representative of humanity. As such he saw his mission in philosophy to be the defence of science, morality, and the rationality of religion. This was no easy task, for science and religion in particular had been at war for centuries. Kant was living (as we all are) in a transitional age. Science had won a long and hard-fought battle against the authority of religion, but though this was all well and good from a scientific point of view it was a disaster from the point of view of morality and religion. Kant may have worshipped Newton, but he was also a devout Lutheran, and though Newton himself had struggled to reconcile his theories of the universe with his own Christian beliefs, the conflict had not yet been satisfactorily resolved. To be sure, it was a good thing that science had won its autonomy and freedom from the dogmatic interference of religion, but if this meant that all religious and other unscientific beliefs were unjustifiable, and as such irrational, then the victory of science from a religious and humanist point of view was a disaster. Kant's mission, then, was not just to provide foundations; he had to redefine what it meant to be a rational human being. Consequently he announced his plan to 'deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith'.

Kant's philosophy is consummated in three magnificent volumes that he called 'critiques'. These were critical in the spirit of the Enlightenment, but also idealistic and speculative, with a spirit hardly known among the French *philosophes*—except in Rousseau. German idealism—often called Kantian idealism—is idealistic in the familiar sense of defending abstract ideals. In philosophy, however, it also has a technical sense: the world is constituted out of ideas. It is 'idealistic' too in its assurance that such a world is real and good, an assurance that had been shaken by Hume, who raised serious questions about the foundations of both knowledge and morals. Our knowledge, he had argued, is based only on habit, and morality is based on sentiment, not reason.

The first Critique, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, tackles the problem of knowledge and Hume's scepticism. At the heart of

that formidable book, and the dramatic shift in Western thinking that begins with it, is an enormous expansion in the concept of the self, its scope, power, and richness. The primary change is a shift from the passive to the active mode, a rejection of the traditional idea of the human mind as a receptacle or receiver, to the insistence that the mind *imposes* its order on nature, an order which is fixed and immutable in all of us. 'The understanding does not derive its laws from, but prescribes them to nature.'<sup>3</sup> The second, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, is an attempt to analyse and justify the concept of morality, to free it from the unpredictability of sentiment and social fashion, and to defend it as a product of pure practical reason which is, as such, valid for all people at all times and under all conditions. The third Critique, *The Critique of Judgement*, has been considered the least consequential of the three, and is often neglected in English Kantian scholarship; but this is certainly not true on the Continent, where Kant's influence was based at least as much on this work as upon the other two. Goethe confessed that he could not read the first two Critiques, but he admired the third, as did Schiller, who reinterpreted the first two in its light, attempting a grand synthesis of Kant's version of the international Enlightenment and the uniquely German romantic *Sturm und Drang* ('Storm and Stress') reaction to it. On a superficial reading the third Critique might seem to be an unwieldy conglomeration of theses about the nature of art and beauty, the role of 'teleology' (purposive explanations) in science, and edifying remarks on the ultimate meaning of life and the universe. But what Kant has in mind in his discussion of beauty is not the protected domain of aesthetics and 'art for art's sake' but something much grander, the beauty of human life and morality, of nature, and of the universe as a whole as an expression of God's beneficence and human destiny. So understood, we can more readily appreciate how the third Critique was intended as the synthesis and culmination of the other two, and how it was the third Critique that so heavily influenced the German idealists and romantics who followed Kant.

Although the problems that drove Kant to philosophy were deeply felt, it was not in his nature to write, as had his hero

Rousseau, an elegant popular treatise or a semi-fictional novel, much less a revealing *Confessions*. His ideas had to be couched objectively and impersonally, for while Rousseau projected outward from his peculiar, personal self to the whole of humanity, Kant began with the view that human reason was universal and objective. One's personal autobiography had little relevance to the important truth about the self that Rousseau had discovered. For Rousseau, that special sense of self was something to be experienced first of all; for Kant, it was a profound metaphysical thesis to be demonstrated through the cold calculations of deductive logic. But what those deductions revealed—what Kant called his 'Copernican Revolution'—was nothing less than a revision of our view of the self in the world.

The first Copernican revolution had denied the obvious—that the sun revolved while the earth stood still. What Kant denied seemed even more obvious, that the world was 'out there' and independent of our experience of it. The whole history of metaphysics depends upon the belief in the presence of a reality independent of us, from Thales' precocious insights and Plato's brilliant defence of a World of Being beyond our own world of change and becoming, to Descartes's systematic doubts about our knowledge of the external world and the scepticism of Hume. The problem with metaphysics was that no one seemed to have the slightest hold on the true nature of reality, or as Kant put it:

metaphysics has rather to be regarded as a battle-ground quite peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats, and in which no participant has ever yet succeeded in gaining even so much as an inch of territory, not at least in such a manner as to secure him in its permanent possession.<sup>4</sup>

But while Hume's conclusion was that all such metaphysical efforts should henceforth be 'committed to the flames' as nothing more than 'sophistry and illusion', Kant insists that metaphysics is inescapable:

That the human mind will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we, to avoid inhaling impure air, should prefer to give up breathing altogether.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, there are three metaphysical questions which the human mind finds unavoidable. Kant summarizes these as 'God, Freedom, and Immortality'. But in addition there are other questions: about the nature of the self, the substantiality and the workings of the world, space and time, and the seemingly eternal verities of mathematics and geometry, as well as of religion. These questions define the structure of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, while God, freedom, and immortality are discussed in the second Critique and, to a lesser extent, in the third.

*The Critique of Pure Reason* has a single central thesis: knowledge of the world is possible because the self—the transcendental self or ego—determines the structure of our every experience, or as Kant puts it:

Hitherto it has been assumed that our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics if we suppose that objects must conform to knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

The reasoning behind this revolution in philosophy can best be appreciated by referring back to Descartes and Hume. However radical Kant's suggestion that we determine our experience may be, it is more palatable and plausible than the sceptical implications of Descartes's method of doubt, and Hume's devastating conclusion that we could not really know the world at all. Descartes's first-person, subjective standpoint lies at the basis of Kant's arguments (and Hume's too), for the leading question of Kant's epistemology is how is it possible for our consciousness to know the world? So long as the world lies outside the realm of our experience, scepticism is inescapable, but to Kant it is also intolerable. What is necessary is to complete the move that Descartes began, recognizing not only the importance of the first-person point of view, but also its all-encompassing nature. The world *is* the world of our experience, not something outside of it. We are not just acted upon by a world we never know directly; we act upon the world to give it its basic forms.

The structure of the first Critique is based upon a three-part

division of the 'faculties' of the human mind into sense, understanding, and reason. Sense is our capacity to be affected by sensations, to see, hear, smell, and feel. Understanding is our ability to categorize and identify those sensations, to recognize objects and relations between them, and to employ concepts in experience. Reason is our ability to entertain and manipulate those concepts quite apart from our actual experience, as in mathematics or logic. One might say that understanding is the application of concepts to sensory experience to give us knowledge, while reason is the application of concepts to themselves, which is why self-reflection and philosophy are primarily matters of reason, not experience. Each of these faculties has certain built-in structures which determine the nature of our experience. It is the nature of sense that all of our experiences take place in the forward flow of time and in three-dimensional space. It is the nature of understanding that what we experience are objects, not just sensations, and that these objects exist independently in the world, in various causal relationships with one another (and with us). The intriguing and somewhat paradoxical thesis here is that the human mind is responsible for the appearance of objects and their structures as independent of us, even though we can come to appreciate, through reason, that this appearance of independence is dependent upon us. But reason, because of its remarkable ability to operate independently of the facts of experience, is also capable of tying itself up in paradoxes and over-extending itself in realms where our concepts are inappropriate. Thus Kant's book is a 'critique of pure reason', an effort (in part) to curb the historical pretensions of reason, and reason alone, to gain knowledge of God, eternity, and the nature of the world beyond the realm of our experience.

But *The Critique of Pure Reason* is, first of all, an investigation into those structures that determine our experience, that is, the structures or rules of sense and understanding. Kant's stated aim may be critical but his actual method is to clarify and justify our most basic claims of knowledge about the world, those claims whose justifiability Hume had doubted: our knowledge that there is an 'external world' of objects, and that there are 'necessary connections' among them. His method is to introduce a new

vision of human knowledge, a basic mode of knowledge that is something more than the passive reception and interpretation of sensations, and more substantial than the abstract manipulation of ideas, knowledge that is basic to and yet independent of experience. If this vision is correct and if it can be demonstrated that such knowledge is genuine (and not mere subjective judgement), then Kant will have succeeded in refuting Hume's scepticism, but more momentously will have succeeded in revising the traditional picture of the human mind. Kant calls such knowledge 'a priori', and it is through the display and proof of the a priori principles that rule our experience that Kant tries to show that the world has and *must* have the structures that we impose upon it, and that there is but one possible set of such structures, so that our Western scientific knowledge (with Newton's theories as its model) is and ought to be the standard of knowledge the world over.

The word 'transcendental' is central to Kant's theory, and to the story of philosophy that we are studying here. 'Transcendental' means 'necessary and universal', in contrast to the merely personal or psychological. Transcendental structures of experience are those which are basic to any experience whatever (the adjective 'transcendental' should be distinguished from 'transcendent', which means 'beyond' or 'outside of'). Kant sometimes calls his philosophy 'transcendental idealism', which refers to the thesis that certain ideas are the basic (a priori) conditions for all possible human experience. The self that is the basic source of our concepts and experience is called 'the transcendental ego', the principles that are basic to the various realms of experience are called 'transcendental principles', and the demonstrations that establish the universal validity of these principles are called 'transcendental arguments'. To say that an idea or a principle is not just personal or psychological is to say that it is not only basic to *our* experience, but that it is universal and necessary for every being or creature who can be said to have a mind at all. Thus the enormous burden that Kant takes upon himself is not just the discovery of a priori or transcendental principles, but the demonstration of their universality and necessity.

*The Critique of Pure Reason* is nothing less than a detailed catalogue of the a priori or transcendental principles that govern

our experience, and a series of arguments to show that there could be no other such principles. The book is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three faculties of the mind, each with its own a priori structures and principles. First there is the Transcendental Aesthetic, which presents and proves the fundamental principles of all sensory experience. Since the basic structures of the faculty of sense—the 'a priori forms of intuition'—are space and time, the a priori principles presented in this first part of the Critique turn out to be none other than the familiar first principles of arithmetic and Euclidean geometry. It is sometimes said that the eternal truths of mathematics are nothing more than conventions determining the way we use certain symbols. It has also been said—notably by Plato—that mathematical propositions are true because they refer to some ethereal (transcendent) entities beyond the realm of our experience. What Kant tells us is that neither of these alternatives makes any sense. Arithmetic and geometry are not mere systems of symbolic conventions, for they apply without fail to the world, and they are not outside the world of our experience but basic to it. The propositions of mathematics do nothing less than describe the basic structures of our experience itself. But there is a further consequence of this view, and that is that the ego itself is 'outside' of time, and timeless. It projects temporality but is not itself temporal.

The Transcendental Analytic is Kant's study of the a priori or transcendental principles of understanding, the way in which we apply concepts to our sense experience to gain knowledge. Most concepts, of course, are learned through experience, as we learn to recognize different objects and the various distinctions among them. But some of our concepts—the most basic ones such as the concept of an object as such, or the concept of one event causing another—are not learned but are presupposed in every experience. Kant (following Aristotle) calls these a priori concepts 'categories'. Drawing on the psychologists of his time, Kant presents us with what he believes to be an exhaustive list of categories, which conveniently number twelve, in four sets of three. In an infamously obscure 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories' Kant tries to show that this set of twelve constitutes the only possible conditions for experience. Along the way he refutes

Hume, who had argued that our experience never includes any observation of the necessary connection between two events, no matter how regularly one event follows the other in time. Kant agrees with this, but only to add that we necessarily apply the a priori idea of causation to every single observation, and have no choice but to do so. It is easy to miss in the labyrinthine argument of the Transcendental Analytic, but Kant is defending a most spectacular claim: that it is we ourselves who give form to the world. We know the world—and know that we know the world—not because our experience corresponds to external reality but because reality must conform to the structures of the mind. 'We can know a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them.'

One of the conditions for there being any experience or knowledge whatever is the existence of a self that has these experiences and understands them. Every experience, to put it simply, must be *someone's* experience. In one sense Kant is only repeating Descartes's famous formulation of self-knowledge, but he goes beyond this when he claims that the unity of our experience can only be explained through transcendental necessity. Indeed, it has been argued that Kant's difficult deduction of the categories has a similar (though far more sophisticated) form to Descartes's demonstration of our knowledge of the external world, taking the 'possibility of the "I think" accompanying all of our experience' as its first premiss, but Kant's conception of the self and self-knowledge is far more than a mere formal inference or a mere condition for experience; it is itself one *source* of our experience, and as such the condition for the existence of the world.

In one sense this would seem to be utter nonsense, for as any philosophy undergraduate will be quick to point out, the world was here long before any of us, and presumably it—or some devastated version of it—will long survive us. But Kant does not claim that the self by itself produces our experience; it supplies only the forms, not the sensory data of experience—which are 'given'. Moreover, the self that Kant calls 'transcendental' is clearly something other than our ordinary notion of self, one that is 36 years old, blonde but balding, timid on social occasions but a tiger on the football field. This is what Kant calls the 'empirical'

self, the individual self that has a certain history, body, and personality, that was born in Manchester in October 1951, and will die of causes and at a time yet unknown. But there is another transcendental self that does not share these characteristics. Sometimes Kant limits himself to the claim that this transcendental ego is a merely formal self, known only through inferences to its necessity (as in Descartes), but elsewhere he makes it clear that the transcendental self is not just inferred; perhaps it is even known directly, in each and every experience. In the second Critique Kant says that the self is not only the source of the categories, and consequently of all knowledge, but is also the source of *agency*, the will behind our actions. Furthermore, at least one of the three basic concerns of metaphysics—the idea of immortality—intimately concerns the self as well. Kant rejects Descartes's claim that the self is a substantial *thing*, independent of the body, and therefore capable of surviving the death of the body, but nevertheless defends belief in the immortality of the soul.

The transcendental ego, then, is quite different from the empirical self of everyday life, but it is also much more than the merely formal recognition that my every experience is 'mine'. It is a rich source of a priori knowledge (and, we shall see, of morality too). It is timeless and universal, and so in a profound sense not 'mine' at all. Kant writes not about transcendental egos but *the* transcendental ego, 'consciousness in general'. Some of Kant's followers will make ample use of this indeterminacy.

The third part of Kant's first Critique, which concerns the faculty of reason, is called 'The Transcendental Dialectic'. It is highly critical of the pretensions of reason, and seems far more concerned with attacking the a priori claims of the great philosophers than with defending them. Indeed, Kant calls the Dialectic 'the logic of illusion', and his main concern is to show that certain principles that have been put forward as knowledge *cannot* be rationally defended.

It is in the Transcendental Dialectic that Kant attacks Descartes's notion of the self as a substantial entity, 'a thinking thing', and insists that there is no way that we could possibly know of a self that goes beyond the contingencies of human

existence, and at the same time no way that the transcendental self could be an object of any possible experience. As the source of the categories the self cannot be known by the categories. It cannot even be known to be 'something'. This leads to some intriguing complications. We have noted Kant's conscientious ambiguity about the self, which leaves open such questions as 'who has one?' and 'how many might there be?' But because these are questions that fall under the categories, there can be no appropriate response in the case of the ego itself. So to the question 'who has the self?' we can only answer 'everyone', without being able to say what would seem obvious—that everyone has *one*. In view of the centrality and importance Kant gives to the self it is easy to see how this logical curiosity could be utilized by his followers (and to a certain extent by Kant himself in *The Critique of Judgement*) to defend the cosmic transcendental thesis, that the self is ultimately everything.

It is also in the Dialectic that Kant launches his famous attack on the traditional proofs of God's existence, eloquently refuting the arguments that have defined much of theology since the days of Anselm and Aquinas. But his rejection of these arguments and their ultimate conclusion—that one can *know* that God exists—does not indicate any justification for atheism or even agnosticism. God remains for Kant a transcendental *ideal*, whose existence may not be a matter of knowledge but nevertheless is an absolutely necessary condition of human existence.

The most tantalizing arguments in the Dialectic, however, are those curious pairs of contradictions called 'antinomies'. An antinomy produces two conclusions, each supported by a perfectly sound argument, which nevertheless cannot both be true. The claim that the universe has a beginning in time (the Creation), and the claim that it is timeless and has no beginning are equally valid, Kant assures us, and he presents us with proofs of both theses. So too he argues that everything both can and cannot be analysed into basic elements, that every event has natural causes but some events do not, and that there is and is not at least one being in the universe who is necessary. What is demonstrated by the antinomies, he suggests, is the illusory nature of reason. Starting with seemingly incontestable principles, philosophers

throughout history have produced ingenious arguments to support a variety of conclusions that are mutually contradictory. By so displaying the antinomies Kant hoped to bring an end to these pointless squabbles. The capacity for self-contradiction is built into reason itself, and there is no point in squandering the best minds in the world in an enterprise with no possible resolution. Nevertheless, just as his refutation of the proofs of God's existence does not indicate his abandonment of religion, and his rejection of Descartes's postulation of a 'thinking thing' does not foreclose belief in the immortality of the soul, so too his attack on the pointlessness of much philosophical debate does not indicate a disillusionment with philosophy. Indeed, it is Kant more than any other figure in the modern world who represents philosophy as a serious, essential, and professional endeavour, and this attitude towards philosophy, just as much as his ideas, would have a powerful influence on many of his successors.

By the end of the first Critique Kant has given us a justification of knowledge in general and a refutation of Hume's scepticism, a bold new vision of the nature of both knowledge and reality, a rejection of much of metaphysics, and a promissory note about the transcendental ideals of God, freedom, and immortality. That note is not to be made good in the realm of knowledge, however, and for all the brilliance of Kant's first Critique it would be a mistake to think of 'Kant's philosophy' on that basis. Knowledge is important to Kant, but he summarized his own philosophy as the need to 'limit knowledge in order to make room for faith'. It is this, rather than his sympathy for and defence of Newtonian science, that would inspire generations of German philosophers. And it is not just religion that could be threatened by excessive attention to science. Art, craftsmanship, poetry, love, morals, mutual human understanding, and the exigencies of international politics—every human endeavour that does not fall under the specialized view of the scientist—tends to be ridiculed or dismissed, or distorted to fit the scientific world view. It is this part of Kant's work which sets the tone for the following century, the part linked to Goethe and Rousseau, not to Newton and the British empiricists.

To be human is not just to know; it is also to *do*. We are agents

as well as observers; we are not just objects in the world, but we can change it. Thus Kant distinguishes between the world of knowledge and the world of action, between ourselves as knowers and as actors. In the first Critique he draws a problematic distinction between the world as *phenomenon*—the world as it is constituted and experienced by us—and as *noumenon*, which he cryptically calls the world as it is 'in itself', leaving open the question of what possible role this residual metaphysical notion might play in his philosophy. In the second Critique the two distinctions are brought together, and the mysterious notion of the noumenon or 'thing in itself' is given a dramatic role. It is the self as noumenon, 'the self in itself', that is the ultimate agent which accounts for the immortality of the soul. This leaves troubling questions of interpretation—about the exact relationship between the transcendental ego and the noumenal self, the interaction between the acting self, the organic body through which it acts, and the material world in which it acts. But Kant defends his 'two-world' view, and his notion of the acting self as noumenon is by no means a mere residue of prior metaphysics. It is essential to his view of morality, to the very *possibility* of moral responsibility.

Over-emphasis on science has led many modern philosophers, especially in the heady days of the New Science just before Kant's time, to insist that everything in the universe is causally determined, leaving no room for personal choice or responsibility. But such a view is disastrous outside science, where the belief that decisions and responsibility exist makes all the difference to our view of morality, and Kant accordingly takes freedom to be the presupposition (or what he calls a 'postulate of practical reason') of morality. Without freedom there could be no morality, but Kant switches this conditional around to conclude that, since there is and must be morality, we must believe in freedom (this is a version of the third antinomy: that every event has natural causes but some events do not; actions caused by choices are prime examples of such events). Science and knowledge have their limits, and one of those limits is the boundary of human action.

What is human action for Kant? It is much more than the

movement of a physical object (the human body), something more than mere behaviour, and more than mere conformity to the norms of society or the pressures of one's peers. Our actions are intentional, usually more or less deliberate, and implicitly based upon principles (or 'maxims'), whether or not we actually think about these. Most of all, they are motivated, circumscribed, and defined by ethical concerns—right and wrong, obligations and duties, virtue and selfishness. If the presupposition of morality is freedom, the nature of morality is the free and practical use of reason. Here is the critical point: when Kant denies that the realm of human action gives us knowledge he is not suggesting that we enter the domain of mere subjectivity or irrationality. Morals and religion too are matters of reason, open to argument and rational justification. He is not just concerned with the possible conditions of knowledge, but also with the necessary conditions of living a rational *life*.

Kant's view of morality, however, is uncommonly strict and uncompromisingly objective. There is no bending to fashion or cultural differences, to different times or different sentiments. Because morality is a function of reason, what defines our actions are the principles upon which they are based, and because reason is by its very nature objective and universal, those principles are not just our own personal (or 'subjective') maxims, but universal laws which define *duty*. The rule that tells us not to lie, for instance, is not just a personal preference that many of us happen to share, nor is it a rule that has been canonized by some societies to suit some particular set of circumstances. It is a moral law, a product of practical reason that applies to everyone everywhere without exception. Morality is not a matter of sentiment or social conformity but a set of universal and necessary laws of reason. Accordingly Kant refers to the laws of morality as 'unconditional' or 'categorical' imperatives. He offers several versions of 'the categorical imperative', notably that we should always act in such a way that the maxim behind our actions could be generalized as a universal law for everyone, and that we should always treat other people as ends in themselves, and never merely as means. He also formulates a Utopian notion of a 'Kingdom of Ends', an ideal, harmonious community in which everyone acts

rationally all the time. The categorical imperative provides both the form of, and a general set of tests for, moral judgements of all kinds. But it also provides us with a striking analysis of 'pure' morality, not at all dependent on the contingencies of individual sentiments or cultural mores.

We see here a close parallel with the discussion of a priori knowledge in the first Critique. Just as there are principles of knowledge that are known necessarily and independently of experience, so there are principles of action that must be acknowledged as necessary independently of any particular circumstances. The rule 'do not lie', Kant argues, is not derived from experience, be it personal revulsion, contempt for liars, or observation of social calamities that have followed lies. It is a principle based on the rational argument that telling lies logically undermines the very possibility of telling the truth—for who could believe anyone if lying as such were permissible?

The distinction between the world of knowledge ('the sensible world') and the world of action ('the intelligible world') yields a thoroughgoing division that lies at the heart of Kant's ethics, between nature on the one hand, and the free, rational, moral will on the other. What is shocking is that the realm of nature includes—and freedom excludes—many of the ingredients that most moral philosophers since Aristotle have thought to be essential to ethics, for example such feelings as compassion, sympathy, pleasure, satisfaction, and happiness (which Kant collectively refers to as 'inclinations'). Morality properly speaking is motivated not by sympathy or fellow-feeling, much less by self-interest or the desire to be happy, but solely by one's sense of *duty*. One's moral worth is measured not by the quality of one's inclinations but by the fact that one acts 'for the sake of duty and duty alone'. In Kant we can see the force of Nietzsche's comment that 'morality is anti-nature', a rejection of the instincts and the passions. One unhappy consequence of this theory, as Schiller would soon point out, is that one seems to be more morally worthy the less pleasure and satisfaction one derives from the proper performance of one's duties. But Kant scholars have often replied that this is an unfair and negative reading, and that the emphasis on moral worth is not intended to exclude

or minimize the importance of personal virtue and self-satisfaction.

The conceptual linkage of morality, rationality, and freedom, and the insistence that morality is not a matter of inclination or social conformity leads Kant to emphasize that the key to morality (and rational life in general) is the concept of *autonomy*. Here especially we see his deep indebtedness to Rousseau, as well as a parallel with the first Critique: Kant's notion of knowledge is born of the Enlightenment faith in reason, the confidence that the individual can, using his own resources, through observation, experiment, and careful thinking, discover what is true about the world. It is worth noting that there is no social element in this picture, no community of scientists, public opinion, or pressures from colleagues, employers, or research-granting agencies. Knowledge is purely a relationship between the autonomous individual and the world of nature, and morality is a relationship between the individual and the universal law, a product of pure practical reason. In the whole of Kant's moral theory there is hardly a word about social customs, cultural differences, or for that matter moral education. Kant's picture of the world consists of the individual and the universal, like Rousseau circumventing the conventions and interactions of society. He writes, 'Rousseau proceeds synthetically and begins with natural man: I proceed analytically and begin with civilized man'—but it is clear that they share a spectacularly self-centred image of the moral world. Rousseau discovered within himself the intrinsic worth of all humanity. Kant began with the idea that every person is autonomous and capable of discovering for himself what is right, quite apart from the conditions and opinions of his society. Rousseau's 'inner self' becomes Kant's noumenal self, and the difference is more one of method than substance. The transcendental pretence begins with this extraordinary self-confidence that one is in touch with the absolute principle of Goodness.

Kant, like Rousseau, reduces everything of importance to the 'inner self', in his case the Will, and carefully excludes almost all such factors as upbringing, socio-economic status, health, intelligence, or personality. (Kant, we should note, was well-liked and respected in Königsberg, not at all like the paranoid outcast

Rousseau.) Thus Kant writes: 'the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will.'<sup>8</sup> The consequences of our actions (which are in the domain of nature and not wholly under the individual's control) are secondary. What counts is what one intends, the maxim or principle upon which one acts, the act of rational will, and not the actual results. Unfortunately this encourages moral self-righteousness, and celebrates the moral prig who obeys all of the rules and makes everyone miserable. Duty, which we usually think of as a social concept, Kant takes to refer rather to rational principles. But when the social is reduced to second-rate status, and the individual will and universal principles take priority, we lose what would seem to be the primary ground of ethics, our membership in a community and interaction with others. Instead of morality we have cosmic self-righteousness—the transcendental pretence.

Enlightenment humanism is often equated with atheism, the underlying assumption being that thinking rationally, and believing in God and a divine purpose to the universe, are incompatible. To be sure, many of the French *philosophes* were atheists, or at least denied divine significance (Voltaire commented that 'it makes no more sense to say that God is good than it does to say that He is blue'). But *Aufklärung* and atheism did not go hand-in-hand at all, and though Kant may have given up the dogmatism of traditional religion he refused to give up the dogma. For Kant the Enlightenment was another way of defending religion, and Christianity in particular could be, and had to be, justified on purely rational grounds. To confuse matters he called these rational grounds 'faith', thus marking a dramatic break from those who think of faith as belief *against* reason, but his effort to 'limit knowledge to make room for faith' in no way implied that religion is any less rational than science. It is just rational in a different way, in a different realm of reason.

Religion, like morality, is a matter of *practical* reason. Having already shown (in the first Critique) that traditional arguments for the knowledge of God's existence must fail, Kant argues in the second Critique (and in one of his last books, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*) that belief in God and the immortality of the soul can be justified (like freedom) as 'postulates of

practical reason', necessary conditions of morality. In order to be moral one must believe in the ultimate justice of the world—that the good will be rewarded and the evil punished. But since this is obviously not the case in this life, where dictators live to be 80, and children are killed by drunks driving automobiles, rationality demands that we postulate a larger picture, an afterlife in which souls survive and receive their due from the divine hand of justice. Thus belief in God and immortality is justified, and religion can be shown to be rational.

This grand Christian picture is not, however, just a corollary to the discussion of morality in the second Critique. It is the overarching image of Kant's entire philosophy, which is why he had such a positive impact on the romantics who would seem to be his opposites. And here we encounter *The Critique of Judgement*. The first Critique exposed the world of knowledge and its conceptual mechanism, and the second the nature of morality and its presuppositions; but these two portraits stand in uneasy juxtaposition next to one another, not only because it is not clear how they tie together, but also because they seem to leave unanswered the cosmic questions about the ultimate nature of the universe and the meaning of life. It is the aim of the third Critique to provide those answers.

The key to Kant's cosmology is the concept of teleology or 'purposiveness'. It is the sense of purposiveness that ties together the very different topics of the third Critique (and of a variety of essays which Kant wrote soon after)—the role of purpose in nature, art, and history. Because of the limitations on knowledge outlined in the first Critique these subjects cannot give us knowledge as such, but rather ideals, ways of comprehending that the world makes sense. Art serves Kant as a model here. It has often been noted that he had terrible taste in art, and that in the age of Haydn and Mozart he preferred the music of military bands. But art as such is not the main concern of the third Critique, where it is seen rather as the key to teleology, and therefore as a gateway to the larger vision of the world which he shared with Goethe and the romantics. He also celebrated poetic genius not because he loved poetry, but because—again like the romantics—he saw an important place for intuition in recognizing the more edifying

truths about the world, in a way different from scientific knowledge and practical reason. Art is purposive, but in itself serves no ultimate purpose (this is almost a century before the 'art for art's sake' movement in France) and thus it lifts us out of our daily, practical concerns and allows us to appreciate God's larger purpose. Furthermore, it is often said that the appreciation of art and the recognition of beauty, while they require some knowledge as their basis, are ultimately matters of *taste*. But Kant claims that taste, while not objective (in the sense that science and morality are objective) is nevertheless more than a matter of individual, subjective preferences. So too the ultimate truths about the universe may be communally 'felt' rather than known. In our appreciation of the beauty of the universe knowledge of science helps a great deal, though it is not sufficient; what is also necessary, according to Kant, is the religious conception of God and His design. But central to this conception of taste and aesthetic appreciation is *feeling*, by which he does not mean some dumb physiological flush. Feeling has its own intelligence; it is akin to judgement, not just a biological reaction. And genius—not in science but in the arts—has the exceptional ability to grasp and express this grand sense of beauty.

This aesthetic appreciation of the sublimity of the universe and the beauty of God's design is not the ultimate point of the third Critique. That point is moral. 'Beauty', Kant tells us, 'is the symbol of morality.' What he means is not just the moral inspiration provided by particular works of art (which had been argued by Diderot, among others), but the grand inspiration provided by a vision of the universe governed by God. Here is the assurance of justice defended in the second Critique, and here too is some assurance that in the secular world, in the unfolding of cosmopolitan history, God's divine plan is made increasingly evident. This powerful image, more than any other in Kant, will inspire and move the post-Kantian idealists in Germany.