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Kant: Here, Now, and How


Essays in honour of Truls Wyller

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INTRODUCTION

1. KANT TODAY

It is hardly possible to overestimate the philosophical influence of Immanuel Kant. A significant part of modern philosophy may be categorized either as neo-Kantian in a narrow or broad sense, or as developed in dialogue or contrast with Kant's ideas. In this anthology we find examples that fit into all of these different categories. What the writers have in common, besides relating in some way to Kantian philosophy in the broad sense, is a relation to the Norwegian philosopher Truls Wyller, who celebrates his 60th birthday this year. This anthology is put together in honour of Professor Wyller and his extensive efforts towards rethinking Kantian ideas and making them relevant for philosophy today.

Among the many managers of the Kantian heritage we may distinguish between the »museum keepers«, who are eager to give a correct interpretation of what Immanuel Kant really meant or to pass on his original insights in untainted form; and more »reconstructive Kantians«, who apply a Kantian framework of some kind to new areas of research. Although being an insightful and careful interpreter of philosophical works, Professor Wyller primarily belongs to the second category. His many creative contributions to new ways of applying Kantian ideas, for example by combining them with ideas from Wittgenstein and the philosophy of language, have been an important contribution to philosophical research, in Norway and further afield.

There is an increasing specialization in philosophy today, as in most areas in society. This means that many concentrate on one or two limited areas of philosophy from early on in their studies, through their PhD training to later in their academic careers. This stands in contrast to classic philosophers such as Kant, who wrote extensively on a broad area of subjects touching on all the philosophical disciplines: From ontology and epistemology to ethics and aesthetics. In the same spirit, Professor Wyller has a wide orientation, and has published books on topics ranging from ethics and the idea of a just war, to language, time, and the size of objects.

In order to organize the contributions to this anthology, we have divided it into two parts in line with the traditional division of philosophy into a practical (ethics,

politics, aesthetics) and theoretical (ontology, epistemology, theory of science) branch. The first part we have called »Space, Time & Language«, and the second »Life, Death, and Beauty«.

2. SPACE, TIME & LANGUAGE: A KANTIAN APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE AND THE WORLD

The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my presentations. For otherwise something would be presented to me that could not be thought at all – which is equivalent to saying that the presentation either would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. (Kant, 1996a, B132)

These words from the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason* introduce what according to Truls Wyller is »perhaps the single most important passage in the complete writings of Kant« (cf. Wyller 2000, p. 16, our translation). But wherein exactly lies the philosophical significance of this passage? According to Wyller, the answer to this question can be summed up in the two words: *apperception* and *spontaneity*, which together enunciate Kant's characteristic take on human understanding of the world (including ourselves as part of that world) as a form of *activity*. Apperception signifies our rational ability for self-consciousness, as opposed to simple perception or consciousness; whereas spontaneity is the active contribution of our mind to understanding what the world is like, as contrasted with the mere *reception* of impressions. Understanding is according to Kant not limited to a passive registration of what our senses provide, neither is it determined by our bodily dispositions or the subjective mechanisms of our mental capacities. It involves an element of *freedom* – spontaneity – which contributes actively to the way we conceive the world. This is what Kant formulates as the »I think« accompanying all representation, but without itself being a representation of anything (e. g. a subject).

This latter point, that the »I think« itself is not a representation, points to the particular role of thinking in our rational self-consciousness; that it cannot itself be reduced to an object of thinking. This insight has become an important point of departure in many later theories of human consciousness and subjectivity, as well as for much contemporary philosophy of language. Within this context, *indexicality* develops into a central philosophical concept. Through publications such as *Indexikalische Gedanken: Über den Gegenstandsbezug in der raumzeitlichen Erkenntnis* (Wyller, 1994), and through the organizing of two conferences on the topic of *Indexicality and Idealism* (in Trondheim in 1999 and 2000 – two anthologies by the same name were published by mentis Verlag in 2000 and 2002), Wyller has contributed to this development. Indexicality, in the sense of the essentially context-dependent nature of concepts such as »I«, »here«, and »now«, brings into

focus the relationship between irreducibly subjective experience (the »I think«) and the possibility of objective, context-free knowledge.

The first article in this part, Geert Keil's »Ich bin jetzt hier – aber wo ist das?« sums up some central elements of indexicality in philosophy, with a focus on the specifically human capacity for spatio-temporal self-localization. Keil starts out from Kant's pre-critical writings on space, and specifically his determination of what Keil calls »der Nullpunkt der Orientierung«: that each of us constructs an egocentric space of orientation, a system of co-ordinates with our own body as »zero point«. Kant thus makes an important contribution to the philosophical investigation of the foundations of our orientational abilities, alongside those of Husserl, Strawson, Tugendhat and Evans. With regards to Wyller's contribution to this tradition, Keil stresses his anti-naturalistic efforts to make clear that the ability to determine our position in time and space has implications regarding the conditions of the very *possibility* of experience. *Contra* Wyller, however, Keil states that his intention in the investigation of indexicality is »to get by as far as possible without transcendental idealism«.

Spatio-temporal localization is at the very centre of the philosophical interest of both Keil and Wyller. Space and time are everyday concepts, but at the same time they designate a branch of philosophy, as further exemplified by the articles of Solveig Bøe, Ronny S. Myhre, Thomas Krogh, and Dagfinn Dybvig. Wyller attempts to reconceptualize the Kantian view of time and space as *a priori* forms of perception, in light of more recent philosophy of language and subjectivity. In her article, Solveig Bøe instead takes us back in time, to ancient Greece where time and space already were in the centre of philosophical attention. Aristotle discusses the concepts of *time*, *place*, and *the void* in book IV of *Physics*. In her paper, Bøe investigates Aristotle's account of these concepts, and sees them in relation to Kant's theory. Specifically, she stresses the subjective dimension in Aristotle's analysis, which points in the direction of Kant's pre-critical account of time and space.

Ronny S. Myhre views the Kantian account of space from a quite different perspective, namely in relation to neuroscientific findings regarding our visual system. Many interpretations of Kant suggest that his view is that representations of space are innate rather than learned through experience. However, Kant may be interpreted more interestingly, in a way which also corresponds better with recent neuroscience. Myhre discusses John O'Keefe's theory of spatial representation in light of such an understanding of the Kantian account of space, as presented by Lorne Falkenstein. According to this view, spatial cognition according to Kant is a basic property of the constitution of our sensory systems rather than constructed by a prior cognitive operation.

In Thomas Krogh's article, »The Past in the Present«, we are presented with two different views on the nature of time, by John McTaggard coined the *A-theory* and *B-theory* (or theory of A-series and B-series). The A-theory takes our

intuitions of time in terms of past, present and future as its basis, while the B-theory claims that all positions in time can be uniquely determined by the relations of earlier and later. Krogh takes so-called presentism as his point of departure, understood as the view that neither past nor future exists – only the present. By carefully examining this view, Krogh argues that while presentism is unsatisfactory as an account of time, such a view does not necessarily follow from an A-theory as some have argued. By establishing the possibility of a non-presentist A-theory, Krogh seeks to defend a more plausible version of this account of time.

Time is of the essence in Dagfinn Dybvig's contribution as well. In »Kant in the Garden of Infinitely Forking Paths: Time, Causality and the Labyrinth of Philosophy«, Dybvig describes what he calls the labyrinths of philosophy, referring to the lack of *straight lines* in philosophical research, the lack of permanent results and definite progress, distinguishing it from science in the narrow sense. The relationship between causality and time-determination in the first *Critique* is the basis for Dybvig's investigation, which he carries out with reference to Jorge Luis Borges' short-story *The Garden of Forking Paths*. Dybvig argues that to Kant a purely imaginative world would be a »garden of infinitely forking paths« in Borges sense, a surreal or labyrinthine »multiverse«. Thanks to the linearity of causality, we experience a comprehensive universe.

Although Descartes considered himself as the first philosopher to have refuted scepticism, Kant directs his transcendental argument in the first *Critique*'s »Refutation of Idealism« against Cartesian skepticism about the external world. Erling Skjei starts out from this relation in »A Pyrrhonian Critique of Descartes' Critique of Global Scepticism«. Pyrrhonism refers to a form of global or universal scepticism, i. e. a denial or doubt that any knowledge or reasonable belief is possible. From this perspective, Skjei critically examines Descartes' attempt to overthrow scepticism, and concludes that it will not overthrow the Pyrrhonian sceptic. Descartes' sceptic is of an academic kind, in the sense that he seems to assert both that everything is doubtful and that he knows that he doubts; while the Pyrrhonian even doubts that he is doubting.

Bengt Molander's »Subjectivity, Fallibility and the Absence of Doubt« and Jonathan Knowles' »Action, causes, and causal explanation« both take Truls Wyller's (2000) book on Kantian thinking, *Objektivitet og jeg-bevissthet: En aktualisering av Immanuel Kants filosofi* as their point of departure. Molander focuses on the first part of Wyller's book, challenging the expressivist or performativity account of Kant's notion of pure apperception defended in this part. Wyller claims here that Kant's transcendental idealism still has a lot to tell us about the nature of subjectivity in the world, even if Kant's version of it needs both elaboration and modification. Among the important heirs to Kantian thinking, according to Wyller, is Wittgenstein. However, Molander argues that Wittgenstein's position, particularly as developed in *On Certainty*, presents a much more substantial challenge to Kant's transcendental idealism than that Wyller accepts. The reason is

partly the essentially social character of the »I« in Wittgenstein, and partly that thinking with and about this »I« is not infallible.

In »Action, causes, and causal explanation«, Jonathan Knowles focuses on the theory of action presented in part two of Wyller's book, where transcendental idealism is (again) allied with Wittgensteinian considerations to form the basis for a critique of the causal theory of action, and for the view that actions demand a non-causal explanation. Knowles argues that, though Wyller's arguments go some way to undermining Donald Davidson's well-known causalist account, his central observations are in fact reconcilable with a causal understanding of action under an improved, non-Humean account of the notion of cause.

Agency and causality remain at the centre of attention in Audun Øfsti's »The Turntable. Two intersecting transformation spaces/frames«. According to Øfsti, the structure of colloquial language deviates from the empirical-observational frame of the natural sciences. However, these two frames »meet« in the *descriptions* of things and persons in ordinary, pre-scientific (natural, colloquial) language, and it is this intersection which according to Øfsti can function as a kind of »turntable«. This structure brings forth the irreducibility of ordinary language as the medium of interaction and understanding. This language is one of action verbs, pronouns and tenses, and is indispensably a language containing indexical expressions.

That indexicals are context-dependent is hardly a controversial claim in the philosophy of language. More disputed, however, is the degree of context-dependence, and what kinds and sources of context-dependence there are. These topics are raised by Olav Asheim, who argues that the one and the same thought cannot be expressed in two different contexts. More specifically he argues that what is said with a sentence σ in a context C cannot be said with σ or any other sentence in a context different from C.

Anton Koch's article, »Die Bildtheorie des Elementarsatzes und die Lesbarkeit der Dinge (Wittgenstein, Sellars, Kant)«, concludes the first part of the anthology. Through his remarks on Wittgenstein, Sellars and Kant, Koch defends a thesis of the »readability of things«. He claims that, thanks to our linguistic capability, we may in a direct, non-metaphorical sense *read* the things surrounding us. This means, among other things, that we project a propositional form on the world, simply by talking about it, and of the things in it. Koch places this in connection with Kant's transcendental deduction, according to which this propositional form *is* the categorical structure of things, brought forth when we speak about them. This is the »Copernican turn« of Kant.