**Kant on Cognition and Knowledge**

**[Draft; forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Kant*]**

**Introduction**

The distinction between ‘Erkenntnis’ (‘cognition’) and ‘Wissen’ (‘knowledge’) has, until recently,[[1]](#footnote-1) been somewhat neglected in Anglo-American Kant scholarship, partly because Kemp Smith collapsed it (translating both as ‘knowledge’) in his translation of the first *Critique*.[[2]](#footnote-2) But the issue is not simply one of translation. When I (a native speaker) first read the *Critique* in German, I did not recognize it as a distinction at all. As Rolf George notes,[[3]](#footnote-3) ‘Wissen’ and ‘Erkenntnis’ are (more or less) synonymous in contemporary German, but not in Kant’s 18th century German. In this chapter, I try to illuminate how these concepts differ and (yet) intersect in Kant’s philosophy.

I proceed as follows. In section 1, I explain the major differences that obtain between cognition and knowledge. In section 2, I consider the many different species of cognition Kant acknowledges. In section 3, I explain Kant’s conception of knowledge and the connection between knowledge and cognition. In section 4, I conclude with a brief survey of where Kant locates the limits of human cognition and knowledge.

**1 Cognition vs. Knowledge**

Kant introduces a generic or wide notion of cognition, which I call cognition-w, in his *Stufenleiter* (A320/B376-377; cf. JL 9: 91; MvS 28: 471). He defines cognition-w as a conscious representation that relates to an object. This definition places cognition-w in contrast with sensation, which is a conscious representation that ‘relates merely to the subject, as a modification of its state’ (A320/B376). Some sensations, e.g. of warmth (MvS 28: 471), are subjective only as initially given to us but can be related to objects, and thereby acquire cognitive significance, when they are conceived as effects of causal powers. Other mental states are more radically subjective, namely, feelings of pleasure and pain that are ‘an effect of sensation’ (A41), e.g. when a strong sensation of heat feels painful. Sensations and feelings (unless they are altogether unconscious states: cf. Anth 7: 135) yield a primitive kind of inner awareness that has some phenomenal character or ‘feel’ to it. This phenomenal awareness does not (yet, as such) refer to any state, property or object apart from the subject’s occurrent mental state. Cognitions-w, by contrast, are mental states that (as it were) reach beyond themselves: they have a representational content that presents some state, property or object *as external to* the subject’s occurrent mental state.

Kant’s list of cognitions-w in the *Stufenleiter* includes (‘blind’) intuitions and (‘empty’) concepts (‘intuitive and discursive cognitions’, JL 9 :36) as separate items; it also includes, as a species of concepts, the transcendental ideas of reason. Hence, the kind of objective reference Kant ascribes to cognition-w is not the demanding relation to an object which looms large in his critical epistemology (and which I discuss in section 2).[[4]](#footnote-4) Nonetheless, all cognitions-w relate to objects at least in the minimal sense that they have intentional ‘aboutness’: they represent something distinct from the subject’s occurrent mental state. This intentional relation to an object need not involve any existential commitment, but through cognition-w we can at least represent something *as* existing external to us. For instance, when I daydream about unicorns, I have cognition-w of unicorns because I imagine them as existing in some world outside my mind.

Kant sometimes applies the term ‘cognition’ to judgments that (via our assents to them) constitute knowledge. For instance, he refers to theoretical sciences like mathematics, which contain synthetic a priori propositions that yield ‘theoretical cognition a priori’ (B20). Passages like these can lead one to overlook the fact that cognition *per se* need not have the propositional structure of a judgment. As George points out, in the 18th century usage ‘to have Erkenntnis of a thing was to have in one’s mind a presentation, an idea, an image, a token referring to that thing’ (1982: 35, 38), so the standard locution would have been ‘*cognition of*’ followed by a noun in the genitive (cf. JL 9 :65), not ‘*cognition* *that or whether*’. Thus, if my daydream involves a mental image of a unicorn, I have cognition-w of a unicorn without judging that unicorns exist; if I draw a line, I cognize a determinate space (B138) without necessarily judging that this is a line or that it has a certain length; if I see a house, I cognize the house without necessarily rendering any judgments about it, potentially even without conceptualizing it *as* a house (JL 9: 33). Hence, the term ‘cognition’ can be applied either to judgments or to non-propositional representations that one may eventually combine in judgments. Consider here Kant’s point that in a judgment ‘many possible cognitions are…drawn together into one’ cognition of an object (A69/B94). His example is ‘All bodies are divisible’, where the more generic concept ‘divisibility’ is predicated of the more specific concept ‘body’. These two concepts are cognitions in their own right that yield representational units for the propositional cognition that all bodies are divisible. The concept ‘body’ relates to many possible intuitive representations, which in turn relate immediately to bodies. The ‘many possible cognitions’ that are ‘drawn together’ in the judgment, ‘All bodies are divisible’ are all (actual and possible) non-propositional, intuitive cognitions of bodies that we (may) receive through outer sense. Through the act of judgment, these intuitions are ‘drawn together into’ the ‘one’ propositional cognition that all bodies share the property of divisibility.

 Thus, cognitions-w can exist, as conscious representations of objects, apart from the context of judgment.[[5]](#footnote-5) By contrast, knowledge can only exist in relation to a judgment with propositional content. This is because knowledge is a species of a mental act that Kant calls ‘Fürwahrhalten’ (A820/B848), literally, ‘holding to be true’, often translated as ‘assent’ or ‘belief’. Kant’s discussion of knowledge, opinion (Meinen) and faith (Glauben) as three species of Fürwahrhalten involves many complexities I cannot discuss here in much detail.[[6]](#footnote-6) Notably, Kant assumes that these doxastic terms are already clear and familiar to his audience (A822/B850).

Kant’s distinction between the three kinds of assent rests on two criteria: on the subjective and the objective (in)sufficiency of one’s state of assent. When one forms an opinion, one’s assent to a judgment lacks both subjective and objective sufficiency. Faith is an assent that is subjectively sufficient but lacks (and is acknowledged to lack) objective sufficiency. Knowledge is an assent which has both subjective and objective sufficiency (A822/B850; JL 9: 66). The underlying assumption here is that every assent to a judgment has both a degree of subjective strength that determines how firmly a person believes something, and a degree of objective strength that corresponds to how well supported the judgment is by objectively valid reasons. The highest degree of subjective strength, which is required for both knowledge and faith, yields a *conviction* that the judgment is true.[[7]](#footnote-7) The highest degree of objective strength, which is required for knowledge, yields *certainty* that the judgment is true. In German there is a tight linguistic connection between certainty and knowledge: ‘The word knowledge [*Wissen*] is the stem [*Stammword*] of certainty [*Gewissheit*]’ (BL 24: 227-228).

This gives us a further way of distinguishing knowledge from cognition, in addition to the fact that cognition need not have the propositional structure that is essential to knowledge. Even cognitions that do have this structure, i.e. cognitions *qua* judgments, may lack the defining features of knowledge – for instance, if they (more precisely, our assents to them) are mere opinions. ‘All our cognition begins for the most part from opining’ (JL 9: 66-67), which is a type of assent that involves a consciousness of *un*certainty (PHIL 24: 439-440), a ‘taking to be true from a ground of cognition that is neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient’ (JL 9: 66). Consequently, propositional cognitions may be false (B83), whereas ‘false knowledge’ is (strictly speaking) a contradiction.

**2 Kantian Cognitions**

The notion of cognition-w that Kant presents in the *Stufenleiter* includes the ‘general cognitions of reason’ (A421/B448) which Kant critiques in the Transcendental Dialectic: namely, pure ideas such as ‘God’, ‘freedom’, ‘the entire world’ or ‘the immortal soul’ that cannot be applied to sensible intuition. Hence, cognition-w is not at issue in Kant’s famous claim that ‘cognition can arise only through’ the ‘unification’ of intuitions and concepts (A51/B75-76). This claim requires a narrower notion of cognition, which I call ‘cognition-n’.[[8]](#footnote-8) While intuitions and concepts are *separate* species of cognition-w, cognition-n is a representational state in which intuitions and concepts are appropriately combined. This state may but need not be a judgment: for instance, I might form a cognition-n of house as part of a visual orientation process that precedes my explicit judgmental activity; or, I might cognize-n a house while deliberately suspending judgment, suspecting an illusion.

 As we saw, the cognitions-w we do have concerning God etc. are representations that differ from cognitively insignificant sensations in that they allow our mental states to refer to an external object apart from our occurrent mental states. Why, then, should it matter that we lack cognitions-n of these supersensible entities? The answer is that cognitions-w and cognitions-n enable two different types of objective reference. A state of cognition-n in which concepts are appropriately combined with sensible intuition ‘determines’ an object (A258/B314; A92-93/B124-126). This cognitive determination ensures: that the object can be located within a public spatiotemporal framework where it stands in relations (such as distance, simultaneity, etc.) to all other (similarly determined) objects; that it can be informatively characterized in terms of (physical and/or mental) states and properties; and, that it can be brought under empirical laws and scientific theories that allow for explanation and prediction of its changes and interactions with other objects. Cognition-n is required to *experience* things as parts of one objective natural order that is the same for all perceiving subjects. Such experience culminates in empirical judgments that rest on intersubjectively accessible evidential grounds. Judging subjects can invoke these grounds as their justifying reasons to demand (rightly or wrongly) assent from other subjects (Prol 4: 299).

Cognitions-w lack these characteristics. Predicates one ascribes to objects on the basis of empty cognition-w lack the informative theoretical meaning (allowing for explanation, etc.) that attaches to predications based upon cognitions-n.[[9]](#footnote-9) Moreover, such ascriptions cannot be defended via objective rational grounds, which means that the judging subject has no legitimate (theoretical) basis for demanding assent from other judging subjects. Likewise, although cognition-w allows us to represent things like God *as* existing apart from our mind, we cannot (on a theoretical basis) rationally support the verdict that such things really do exist outside of our thought or imagination. For these reasons, what we represent through purely conceptual cognitions-w remains cognitively *indeterminate*. If one abstracts from all sensible data for cognition-n, the only remaining object-concept is the pure concept of ‘an object in general’ that is the highest, most generic, emptiest concept in all cognition (A290/B346; ML2 28: 544).

These remarks should not be taken to diminish the importance of cognition-w altogether. Through conceptual cognition-w, we can represent things as distinct from our mental states, and we can represent theses thing as being or not being a certain way (although such predications should be seen as analogical rather than truly determinative; cf. footnote 9). Such conceptions may play various important roles in abstract (e.g. philosophical) reasoning (see section 4), even though they cannot contribute to our theoretical understanding of the way things are. We need cognition-n to obtain such understanding.

This distinction helps to avoid seeming contradictions, for instance in Kant’s views on self-consciousness. When Kant says that a human being ‘cognizes itself through pure apperception’, ‘as a merely intelligible object’ (A546/B574), we need not suspect that he ‘here misstated his position’ (Allison 2020: 270). The statement does not conflict with Kant’s insistence that it is ‘impossible’ for the thinking self ‘to cognize it[s] [existence] as noumenon’ (B430) if we make the plausible assumption that he is using ‘cognition-w’ in the first passage and ‘cognition-n’ in the second passage. Pure apperception is a universally shared, intellectual representation through which every thinking being conceives itself as the transcendental subject of thoughts (A346/B404; B423). But our pure apperceptive self-cognition-w is empty in the sense that it supplies no determinate predicates (not ‘the least property’, A355) that could yield an informative theoretical understanding of ourselves. For such a self-understanding, we must draw upon our self-cognition-n which requires empirical data and thus concerns our phenomenal self.

What, exactly, is required for cognition-n? In a recent article, Eric Watkins and Marcus Willaschek argue that cognition-n must satisfy two conditions: first, an object must be given in (for us, spatiotemporal) intuition so that our representational state can actually latch onto an object; second, the given object must be thought through concepts that represent general features which enable us to understand the object as having a determinate character (Watkins & Willaschek 2017).

The thought-condition must be understood through Kant’s central notion of *synthesis*. ‘Cognition in the proper sense’ arises when a manifold of different representations is collected and ‘unified into a certain content’ (A78/B103). ‘Synthesis’ is Kant’s general term for the various mental acts of collecting and unifying a manifold of representations (A77/B103). In order to yield cognition-n, synthesis must not be arbitrary or haphazard but rule-governed: it must be a ‘synthesis according to concepts’ that provide ‘a common ground of the unity’ among separate representational elements (A78/B104) – for instance, when we count different particulars under a number unit that relies on their common generic identity, e.g. as ten trees, or when we grasp different perceptions (e.g. of a branch, trunk, leaves) as jointly indicating the presence of a tree. This picture raises many difficult questions: for instance, whether all acts of synthesis must be at least implicitly conscious; or, how we should understand acts of synthesis that generate new empirical concepts.[[10]](#footnote-10)

A problem for Watkins’s and Willaschek’s givenness-condition is that some representations qualify as cognitions-n without latching onto an actually given sensible object.[[11]](#footnote-11) These representations include the ‘schematized’ categories and pure mathematical concepts. The categories do not depend for their objective reality upon actual experience of given objects. (‘Objective reality’ here designates the thick, determinate content that is missing in ‘empty’ conceptual cognitions-w.) Rather, their strict universality and a priori necessity requires that they are necessary conditions for any *possible* experience. The categories qualify as a priori cognitions-n that possess objective reality because (and only because) they must govern every synthesis of perceptions that is to yield empirical cognition-n of actually given objects:

…only from the fact that these concepts express *a priori* the relations of the perceptions in every experience does one cognize their objective reality…to be sure, independently of experience, but yet not independently of all relation to the form of an experience in general and the synthetic unity in which alone objects can be empirically cognized. (A221-222/B269)

Kant’s appeal to the general *form* of experience here is significant: the thick cognitive content or objective reality of the categories requires that their conceptual content be unified, not with actually given empirical intuitions, but with the pure general form of our sensible intuition which supplies the ‘schemata of sensibility’ that ‘first realize’ the categories (A146/B185).

Pure mathematical cognition-n also bears an indirect relation to actual perception. What is ‘given’ in a pure mathematical construction of (e.g.) a triangle is not an actual object but ‘only the form of an object’, which would remain an empty ‘product of imagination’ (i.e., a mere cognition-w) were it not for the fact that the construction exhibits ‘conditions upon which all objects of experience rest’ – namely, the formal conditions of spatial intuition that enable and restrict all our possible outer experience (A223-224/B271-272). Pure mathematical concepts yield cognition-n insofar as they ‘can be applied to empirical intuitions’ (B147): this is guaranteed by their capacity to be constructed in the pure spatial intuition which exhibits the form of all possible (outer) empirical intuitions.

Let this suffice as a broad-stroke account of cognition-n in contrast with cognition-w. I now discuss further, *practical* species of cognition.

At Bix-Bx (cf. A92-93/B124-126; A633/B661, CPrR 5: 46-47; Corr 10: 131), Kant defines the difference between a priori theoretical and a priori practical cognition as follows: the a priori theoretical cognition-n of reason (in the broad sense of ‘reason’, as including the understanding) conceptually determines an object that already exists and affects our mind with perceptual data, whereas the a priori practical cognition of reason relates to a not-yet existent object in a causal fashion, ‘making the object actual’. This gives us a primary notion of practical cognition, which I call cognition-p1. This notion refers to a priori moral representations of which actions are *good or evil*, i.e. which actions we have sufficient reason (not) to perform and thus (for finite wills like ours) *ought* (not) to perform. Cognition-p1, unlike cognition-n, relates to an object as a cause to its effect because my representation of how I ought to act can lead to my performance of the corresponding action and to my production of intended physical effects. Kant’s claim that cognition-p1 makes an object actual leaves implicit a qualification he makes explicit in his definition of the will as a capacity *either* to produce the objects corresponding to its (normative-practical) representations *or* at least to determine ‘itself to effect such objects (whether the physical power is sufficient or not)’ (CPrR 5: 15). If I have a good will, my cognition-p1 that I ought to be on campus at the promised time shall determine my will to strive to be on campus at that time. But my physical power might not suffice to realize the intended effect(s) – e.g. on the way to the bus I might slip and break my leg.[[12]](#footnote-12)

While moral cognition-p1 is a priori, we also have *empirical* practical cognition-p2 of how we should act in pursuit of our individual happiness. Here reason lacks the autonomy it has in moral legislation; it serves as a mere tool for the satisfaction of our sensible needs (CPrR 5: 61). Cognition-p2 is based on the empirical cognition-n of our empirical desires (as given through inner intuition) and of the causal means for approximating a state of happiness *qua* maximum of desire-satisfaction (A806/B834; G 4: 417-419; CPrR 5: 21-22, 25-26).[[13]](#footnote-13)

There is another important sense in which Kant uses the term ‘practical cognition’. In order to provide for the objective validity or real possibility of an otherwise empty concept (a cognition-w), one needs ‘more’ than logical consistency among the marks of the concept, ‘but this more need not be sought in theoretical sources of cognition, it may also lie in practical ones’ (Bxxvi).[[14]](#footnote-14) The ‘practical sources of cognition’ Kant invokes here are cognitions-p1, namely, a priori moral representations that specify which actions ought (not) to be done. Cognitions-p1 can furnish empty concepts of theoretical reason with a determinate content, an objective validity that entitles us to assert that the objects of these concepts are possible in a real (rather than merely logical) sense. I use the term ‘cognition-p3’ for representations that result when cognitions-p1 are combined with ideas of theoretical reason in this way.

The most prominent instance of cognition-p3 is the practical representation of noumenal freedom. Since there is no sensible intuition and hence no cognition-n of a noumenal causality, ‘*causa noumenon* is, with respect to the theoretical use of reason, a…thinkable but empty concept’ (CPrR 5: 55-56), i.e. a mere cognition-w. But if I now ‘connect the concept of causality with that of freedom (and with what is inseparable from it, the moral law as its determining ground)’, then the concept of a *causa noumenon* ‘has practical reality’, the ‘objective reality of a pure concept of the understanding in the field of the supersensible’ (CPrR 5: 56). Applying the moral law to the empty theoretical concept of an unconditioned cause gives that concept ‘meaning…for a practical use’ (CPrR 5: 49): namely, the use we make of the idea of free will when we engage in causal-productive efforts that are governed by the moral law as the supreme principle of normative-practical cognition-p1. This practical meaning transforms the empty cognition-w of a transcendentally free cause into a determinate cognition-p3.[[15]](#footnote-15) But the ‘meaning provided [for the concept of causality] by reason through the moral law is merely practical’ (CPrR 5: 50): it affords us no determinate theoretical cognition-n through which we could explain or predict free agency.

It is easy to get confused here by Kant’s ambiguous use of the notion of ‘determination’. He correlates three different senses of determination with three kinds of cognition. First, there is the *theoretical-cognitive* determination of given objects via cognition-n: for finite cognizers like us, ‘understanding and sensibility can determine an object only in combination’ (A258/B314). This also includes the determination of objects for the categories, i.e., of relational properties like causality or substance: this determination occurs when the (as of yet) empty categories are combined with sensible schemata. Second, there is the *practical-causal* determination of objects via cognition-p1 or -p2, where we strive to realize external states of affairs that we cognize as worth realizing. Third, there is the *practical-cognitive* determination of objects via cognition-p3, as in the case of freedom or also in the case of God, where ‘there remains for reason only one single procedure to arrive at this cognition, namely, as pure reason to start from the supreme principle of its pure practical use’ (the moral law) so that the indeterminate theoretical cognition-w of God becomes ‘a precisely determined concept of this original being’ (CPrR, 5: 139).

Let me briefly survey the various types of cognition I have distinguished. Cognitions-w lack a determinate objective representational content on their own but can acquire such a content when they are combined with other representations. In a theoretical context, the (appropriate) combination of intuitive and conceptual cognitions-w yields cognition-n. In a practical context, the combination of certain cognitions-w (ideas of theoretical reason) with moral cognitions-p1 yield cognition-p3. Empirical-practical cognition-p2 arises when we unify cognitions-n of our given desires and cognitions-n of the causal means towards their (maximal) satisfaction. Moral cognition-p1 is special: as cognition of the moral law, it has a determinate objective content and is thus not mere cognition-w, even though this content is purely intellectual and involves no unification with sensible intuition (CPrR 5: 31).

**3 Kantian Knowledge**

In Kant’s view, knowing a judgment requires: (1) a firm *subjective* conviction that the judgment is true; (2) sufficiently justifying, universally valid reasons that render the judgment *objectively* certain and thus true; (3) a (perhaps implicit[[16]](#footnote-16)) consciousness *of* these objective reasons, which makes them communicable to other thinkers ‘regardless of the difference among the subjects’ (A821/B849; cf. A829/B857; JL: 70) – this is why Kant calls the objective sufficiency of a knowledge-state ‘certainty (for everyone)’ (A822/B850). Opinions violate (1), (2) and (3). Faith-assents satisfy (1) but violate (2) and (3).

Conditions (1)-(3) are interconnected. For me to know that a judgment is true, I must appreciate (and be capable of communicating) the objective reasons that conclusively justify it, and my firm subjective conviction that the judgment is true must be based on this appreciation. This is clearly what contemporary epistemologists would call an internalist conception of knowledge.[[17]](#footnote-17) On externalist views, knowledge requires only that there be the right kind of connection between a person’s belief and the objective considerations that support the belief; such a connection can exist without a firm subjective conviction that the belief is true and apart from the subject’s (implicit) awareness of the considerations that justify it.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Due to its internalist implications, Kant’s conception of knowledge is demanding one. The impression that it is *radically* demanding arises from his frequent emphasis that knowledge *qua* ‘certain taking to be true’ is connected with ‘the consciousness of necessity’, whereas uncertain taking to be true (opinion and faith) is connected with ‘the consciousness of contingency or of the possibility of the opposite’ (JL 9: 66). If Kant held that *all* knowledge requires consciousness of objectively necessary reasons for assent, this would mean that in his view we cannot have knowledge in our assents to empirical propositions, since necessity is the privilege of a priori judgments whose justification is independent of experience (B3-4). Experiential cognition (*Erfahrungserkenntniß*) cannot ground more than ‘mere opining’ because in any judgment that is based upon experience I recognize that ‘the opposite could yet perhaps be proven’, which means that my assent lacks both subjective and objective sufficiency (JL 9: 67).

There are, however, two considerations that render Kant’s account of knowledge more permissive. First, the experiential grounds of empirical judgment can acquire considerable objective strength. For Kant, any empirical judgment that P on the basis of objectively insufficient grounds is a judgment based on probability, where the reasons that objectively tell in favor of P being true are (again, objectively) greater than the reasons that objectively tell in favor of P being false (JL 9: 81-82; cf. PHIL 24: 433). Such probability can increase to ‘an approximation to certainty’ (JL 9: 82, 84), i.e., can ‘elevate itself to an analogue of certainty’ when the objectively justifying reasons for an opinion have risen to such a high degree that we can treat the opinion ‘as if it were completely certain, even though it is only certain through induction’ (JL 9: 85). Thus, some well-founded empirical judgments – e.g. medical or chemical hypotheses – can be treated as if they did yield knowledge, even though our assents here are fallible and lack necessity.

Second, Kant seems willing to allow that *some* empirical judgments qualify as certain knowledge in the strict (not merely ‘as if’) sense despite their lack of necessity. He seems to entertain a distinction between empirical and rational (apodictic) certainty: only the latter is accompanied by a consciousness of necessity, but both kinds of certainty constitute genuine knowledge. Kant further distinguishes between two kinds of empirical certainty: I can become certain of something through my own experience, but also through the experience of others, i.e., through testimony (‘historical certainty’) (JL 9: 70-71).

I suggest that Kant’s overall view here is (roughly) as follows. Empirical judgments that cannot yield knowledge proper (which lack both a priori-apodictic and empirical certainty) represent a presumed necessity. Most obviously, these are judgments that posit a causal relation between some natural power and a type of effect. Here one presumes that the causal power necessitates (i.e., is sufficient for) the relevant effect(s) under some conditions. Since we cannot directly perceive causal powers or necessary relations, we can offer only inductive support for empirical causal claims through our experience of events that we take to result from the relevant power. Finite inductive experience can only approximate to, but never reach, the full certainty or knowledge that the relevant events really are the necessary effects of a specific law-governed causal condition that, if it existed, would *always* (in *every* relevant past, present, future case) produce these effects. By contrast, those empirical judgments that can reach (genuine, empirical) certainty do not purport to grasp necessary (e.g. causal) relations that, *qua* necessary, cannot be perceived through the senses. When Kant says that these judgments have ‘only an assertoric certainty’ (JL 9: 71), he means (I suggest) that these judgments merely assert the present or past existence of some state of affairs, without inquiring into its causal conditions and thus without trying to explain or predict anything. Paradigmatic examples of such judgments might be, ‘I have two hands’, or ‘Henry VIII was married six times’. Assents to these judgments may satisfy the abovementioned conditions for knowledge, if the firm conviction that these judgments are true is based on the subject’s awareness of intersubjectively communicable reasons that conclusively support these judgments. The reasons for assenting to these judgments may derive either from one’s own certain experience that some fact obtains or from the well-certified, ‘historically certain’ experience of the fact by other subjects.

Now that we have a fuller sense of how Kant conceives human knowledge, we can reconsider the relation between knowledge and cognition. Here the crucial point is that (some species of) cognitions provide the certain, objectively sufficient grounds for knowing assents.[[19]](#footnote-19) ‘To know something means nothing other than to cognize it with certainty’ (BL 24: 242); we can know things only ‘from a ground of cognition that is both objectively and subjectively sufficient’ (JL 9: 70). For Kant, to cognize something with certainty involves a *conscious recognition* of certainty: for a priori certainty, this is a ‘consciousness of necessity’; for empirical certainty, it is a ‘consciousness of truth’ (JL 9: 66; cf. BL 24: 57). Conversely, our assents fall short of knowledge if they are based on cognitions that fail to provide certain, objectively sufficient grounds for assent. For instance, inductive experiential cognition can only ground a highly probable opinion. Since it lacks genuine (a priori or empirical) certainty, it cannot provide (genuine) knowledge that given events are effects of some specific causal power.

This cognition-knowledge link explains why Kant uses these concepts interchangeably in some passages. For instance, he argues that whether we can ‘bring it to certainty…regarding…the knowledge’ of metaphysical objects (B22) turns on the possibility of ‘extending its’ (i.e., metaphysics’) ‘cognition synthetically’ (B23). To know that God does (not) exist, I would need cognitions that provide objectively certain reasons for judging that God does (not) exist. These cognitions must be a priori because only a priori cognitions can ground an awareness of apodictic certainty (empirical certainty is out of the question with regard to non-sensible entities like God). These cognitions must be synthetic because (in Kant’s view) mere analysis of the concept ‘God’ cannot provide any objective theoretical reasons for judging that God does (not) exist. Kant’s denial that we can know whether God does (not) exist is based on his denial that we have cognitive grounds that provide an objectively sufficient, certain justification for this existential assertion. Our only (theoretical) cognition of God is an ‘empty’ cognition-w whose content is too indeterminate to justify any controversial (synthetic, non-trivial) conclusions.

 A knowing assent may be based on very different species of cognition. Consider two such species: first, the cognition-n that results from the construction of the angle sum of a triangle in pure sensible intuition, which grounds mathematical knowledge that the internal angle sum of triangles is 180 degrees; second, the entirely intellectual, non-sensible cognition-p1 that a maxim of making a promise with no intention of keeping it cannot be conceived as a universal law, which grounds moral knowledge that intentional promise-breaking is unconditionally wrong and that one ought not perform this type of action. These two cognitions differ greatly with regard to their internal representational structure and content. Yet, they yield the same doxastic state of knowledge. We can, of course, speak of different kinds of knowledge here just on account of the two different subject matters, but this does not reflect a difference in the criteria or the constitutive features of knowledge (namely, (1)-(3)). Accordingly, Kant stresses that mere opining is absurd in both cases: in mathematics, ‘one must know, or else refrain from all judgment. It is just the same with the principles of morality, since one must not venture an action on the mere opinion that something is allowed, but must know this’ (A823/B851).

 My suggestion that assents which are based on objectively sufficient cognitions-p1 qualify as certain moral knowledge is controversial. It runs against the widely held view that Kant’s concept of knowledge applies exclusively to *theoretical* propositions, or (as W.H. Walsh puts it) that ‘the cognitive powers of reason’ are ‘the powers of theoretical knowledge of the world of sense’ (1975: 1).[[20]](#footnote-20) This view is especially prevalent among commentators who discuss Kant’s account of doxastic attitudes.[[21]](#footnote-21) I do not see how it can be reconciled with Kant’s appeal to a univocal sense of knowledge for both mathematics and morality. Given Kant’s strong denial that assents to moral judgments can be matters of opinion, some commentators argue that such assents are a matter of *faith* (*Glauben*).[[22]](#footnote-22) However, Kant explicitly denies this as well, again stressing the parallel between morality and mathematics: ‘Matters of faith are…not objects of the cognition of reason...neither of the theoretical cognition of reason (for instance in mathematics...), nor of the practical cognition of reason in morality’ (JL 9: 69-70); ‘regarding rights and duties, there can be...no mere faith’ (JL 9: 70). Of course, some practical cognitions do provide us with mere faith that certain objects exist. But these are cognitions-p3 that give us subjectively sufficient, objectively insufficient grounds for adopting *descriptive* beliefs that there aresuper-sensible things like God which have certain properties like omniscience. When Kant stresses that ‘the practical cognition of reason in morality’ grounds knowledge rather than opinion or faith, he refers to cognition-p1, i.e. to objectively valid *normative-practical* representations of the good or of how we ought (not) to act.

 There is a principled reason for the reluctance to take Kant at his word here. Consider the cognition that a maxim of intentional promise breaking cannot be conceived as a universal law. This cognition yields a sufficient objective ground for judging that intentional promise-breaking is unconditionally wrong *only if* it is based upon a further practical cognition that yields a sufficient objective ground for judging that maxims which cannot be conceived or willed as universal laws are unconditionally wrong. This further cognition-p1 is the moral law, the fundamental principle of all cognition-p1. But our cognition of the moral law could only provide the sufficient objective grounds required for knowledge if our assent to the moral law *itself* had the status of knowledge: i.e., if we knew that we ought to act only upon maxims that can be conceived and willed as universal laws (so that acting upon any other maxims is unconditionally wrong). The denial that Kant allows for moral knowledge is, I believe, rooted in the denial that assent to the moral law is a cognitive attitude that qualifies as knowledge.[[23]](#footnote-23)

 Here we run into one of the hardest questions about Kant’s philosophy: how does he defend our acceptance of the moral law as yielding normative-practical knowledge, especially in the context of the second *Critique’s* view that we are conscious of the moral law as a ‘fact of reason’ that does not rest upon (and cannot be ‘deduced’ from) further justifying grounds (CPrR 5 :46-47)? Notably, in the second *Critique* Kant is more explicit than anywhere else that we know the moral law (CPrR 5: 4) since it ‘is apodictically certain’ (CPrR 5: 47) and ‘knowledge is an apodictic judging’ (JL 9: 66). Hence, the morality-as-faith view is best understood as a revision of Kant’s view.[[24]](#footnote-24) This revision does not, I think, accord with Kant’s overall commitments.[[25]](#footnote-25) Moreover, I do not believe that his appeal to knowledge of the moral law as a fact of reason is clearly indefensible. But in the context of this essay, I can only highlight some points in partial defense of Kant’s appeal to moral knowledge that are also relevant to Kant’s overall epistemology.

Kant’s general conception of knowledge does not require that the ‘certainty for everyone’ that attaches to objectively sufficient grounds of cognition (A822/B850) must always be based upon *further* cognitive grounds (so that we are faced with a vicious epistemic regress or an allegedly benign coherentist circle). Rather, he stresses that aside from the ‘mediate’ certainty that is based on some further ground or proof, ‘there must also be something indemonstrable or immediately certain, and our entire cognition must proceed from immediately certain principles’ (JL 9: 71; cf. BL 24: 226). His appeal to the moral law as an indemonstrable yet certain, known fact of reason thus accords with his general epistemological strictures. Indeed, the moral law owes its distinguished epistemic status precisely to the fact that it serves as an immediately certain, foundational principle from which all and any mediately certain moral knowledge (of concrete duties etc.) can be derived. In other words, acceptance of the moral law has the status of knowledge (Wissen) precisely because it enables ‘the practical cognition of reason’ as one of the ‘objectively so-called sciences’ (Wissenschaften) (Bix-x). A science, for Kant, requires the systematic unity of various specific cognitions under common principles (Prol 4: 306); such a system is possible in the domain of practical reason because ‘all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one [categorical] imperative as a principle’ (G 4: 421) so that we can ‘measure out the entire scope of rational cognition of this kind’ (G 4: 412) in a metaphysics of morals (G 4: 410).

 Perhaps those who reject Kant’s view that we know the moral law as a fact of reason presuppose that this view would require a refutation of moral skepticism. This presupposition may underlie the unsympathetic dismissal of the fact of reason doctrine as mere ‘foot stomping’ (Guyer 2007: 462) or ‘moralistic bluster’ (Wood 2008: 135).[[26]](#footnote-26) But here we should be careful not to impose on Kant’s practical philosophy a burden that his theoretical philosophy is unable and unwilling to bear. Kant complains that it would be a ‘scandal of philosophy’ to accept the existence of physical things outside our mind as a mere matter of faith without disproving relevant skeptical doubts (Bxl). Kant’s proof (the Refutation of Idealism) rests on the premise that we possess experiential cognition – which, as we saw earlier, can be a ground of (empirically) certain knowledge – of our empirical self and of the temporal relations among its fleeting mental states (B275-278). He argues that our empirical self-cognition and knowledge presupposes our cognition and knowledge of permanent material substances. A suitably radical skeptic could reject this proof by denying the premise that we *can* know temporal relations among our mental states.[[27]](#footnote-27) But Kant would be unmoved by that reply because his theoretical philosophy *presupposes*, hence does not try to prove, that we do have objectively valid empirical cognition-n that can ground empirical knowledge claims.[[28]](#footnote-28) Likewise, Kant might defend the moral law as the supreme principle of practical knowledge by arguing that without this law, our practical orientation would be without certain rational foundations and would thus be cognitively impoverished. A practical skeptic who professes to believe that we indeed lack any certain practical knowledge would (for better or worse) be taken no more seriously by Kant as a philosophical interlocutor than someone who professes to doubt that we know the temporal order among our empirical mental states.

**4: The limits of cognition and knowledge**

I want to conclude with a (broad strokes) survey of where Kant’s philosophy locates the limits of and the constraints upon human cognition and knowledge.

 Our ‘empty’ conceptual cognition-w is limited only by our basic forms of thought and by logical constraints such as formal consistency (cf. Bxxvi). Our ‘blind’ intuitive cognition-w is limited by our spatiotemporal forms of sensibility and by what empirical sensations we receive from without. The limits of our determinate theoretical cognition-n are set jointly by the limits of intuition and by the conceptual conditions of objective theoretical thought: what we can cognize-n depends on our forms of sensible intuition, on the sensations we receive, and on the categorial rules for synthesizing sensations into the determinate representation of natural phenomena.

Our a priori practical cognition-p1 coincides, at an abstract or foundational level, with the moral law. Beyond this level, what we can cognize-p1 as our concrete moral duties depends on our cognition-p1 of the moral law and on our cognition of various kinds of descriptive facts: namely (first), on our cognitions of general facts about our nature as finitely rational creatures,[[29]](#footnote-29) and (secondly) on our cognition-n of empirical-anthropological facts about our *human* nature and the socio-political world that we inhabit (MM 6: 217).

Empirical-prudential cognition-p2 of what we have reason to choose among several morally permissible options depends upon our cognition-n of our empirically given desire-base and upon our inductive cognition-n of the means for gaining as much desire-satisfaction (happiness) as possible.

Finally, the limits of cognition-p3 – a priori, practically-determinate representations of super-sensible objects such as freedom or God – are set jointly by certain cognitions-w (ideas of theoretical reason) and cognition-p1 of the moral law.

Since knowledge requires cognitions that provide sufficient grounds for certain assents to judgments, we can expect the limits of our cognition to have a crucial bearing on the limits of our knowledge. Let us here first consider our theoretical knowledge.

As we saw, Kant criticizes traditional metaphysics for its attempt to ground theoretical knowledge claims upon merely conceptual cognitions-w. We cannot know whether God exists since our only theoretical representation of God is an empty concept that does not yield objectively sufficient grounds for determinate, informative theoretical assertions about God’s existence or properties. This suggests one central lesson about Kant’s Critical epistemology: the limits of *determinate, informative theoretical* knowledge coincide with the limits of cognition-n. But we must not confuse this lesson with the stronger claim that cognition-n is a necessary condition for *any* theoretical knowledge claims. This stronger claim leads to the venerable paradoxes about Kant’s doctrine: how can Kant claim to know that there *are* non-sensible things in themselves, if we cannot know anything beyond the limits of sensibility that constrain our cognition-n?

Kant argues that the features that we represent through our senses depend on our mental faculties. From this, he concludes that our spatiotemporal mode of sensibility, and thereby our cognition-n as well as our determinate theoretical knowledge, do not characterize things as they are in themselves (A26-28/B42-44; A34-36/B51-52). For Kant, the claim that the spatiotemporal character of the things that we cognize-n depends on our representational faculties is a piece of indubitably certain philosophical knowledge (A46/B63). Such knowledge also includes the claim that the objects of our cognition-n exist apart from our mind (since our finite theoretical intellect does not create what it cognizes-n; cf. B72; A92/B125), and the claim that things cannot exist without having some character (way of being). In my view, these claims are purely conceptual cognitions-w.[[30]](#footnote-30) They jointly ground the knowledge that those things which we cognize-n as existing and as possessing mind-dependent spatiotemporal features must also have some mind-independent character that they possess in and by themselves. This knowledge can be grounded in purely conceptual cognition-w because it is entirely indeterminate: it does not inform us about what (or how many) particular things in themselves exist or what their mind-independent properties are. Kant’s claim to know that the mind-independent constitution of things does *not* include spatiotemporal features is consistent with his critical commitments because negative judgments ‘are not yet a genuine cognition’ (B149) – they do not provide cognition-n, which yields a determinate grasp of how things exist in virtue of their positive realities (whereas, ‘Negation signifies a mere want, and, so far as it alone is thought, represents the abrogation of all thinghood’, A575/B603).[[31]](#footnote-31) Thus, we can know that there *are* beings whose intelligible constitution differs from their sensible-spatiotemporal constitution: intelligible beings ‘certainly correspond to sensible beings’ (B308). But since we lack cognition-n of non-sensible reality, ‘…we…cannot know anything determinate about…intelligible beings’ (Prol 4: 315) on a theoretical basis.

 Let us now consider our practical knowledge. For Kant, we can have a great deal of such knowledge based on cognitions-p1 that we derive via practical reasoning from our fundamental a priori cognition-p1 and knowledge of the moral law. Practical cognitions-p1 yield systematic knowledge of our concrete positive and negative duties of various (perfect, imperfect, etc.) kinds. By contrast, practical cognitions-p2 cannot ground any practical knowledge claims because we lack (a priori or empirical) certainty about what things, projects or activities would make us happy or unhappy. Inductive experiential cognition of what tends to make people of certain broad (socio-cultural, psychological) types happy can yield no more than unreliable subjective opinions of what we ought to do (CPrR 5: 36; MM 6: 215-216). Hence, the principles of an allegedly rational egoist would not be very rational at all (which, I suggest, partly explains Kant’s aforementioned refusal to take moral skepticism very seriously).[[32]](#footnote-32)

 What about the doxastic status of assents to judgments that are based on cognition-p3? In the case of God and immortality, it is clear that for Kant cognitions-p3 can ground only a practically rational faith that these things exist and have certain (positive) features. Unlike (inherently probabilistic, empirical) opinion, such faith is subjectively sufficient (unshakeable); unlike knowledge, it provides no objective certainty that these things really do exist or possess the relevant features. How, precisely, Kant defends the subjective sufficiency and the subjective rationality of such faith is a matter of debate.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Kant draws an epistemic distinction between God and immortality on the one hand and freedom of will on the other hand. Many commentators deny such a distinction; in their view, our assents to the judgments that freedom, immortality and God exist are epistemically on par (as mere faith).[[34]](#footnote-34) However, Kant says that we know the real possibility of freedom (CPrR 5: 4), and he treats freedom as a knowable matter of fact (CPJ 5: 468, 474), in stark contrast with God and immortality which are ‘a mere matter of faith for pure reason’ (CPJ 5: 470). His argument seems to be as follows: we know that the moral law makes a binding normative claim on our will; we know that transcendental freedom of will is a necessary ontological condition (*ratio essendi*) of the moral law’s normative validity; hence we know that we possess transcendental freedom of will. By contrast, ‘the ideas of God and immortality are not conditions of the moral law’ (CPrR 5: 4); they are merely subjective conditions for a finite agent’s rational pursuit of the highest good. Hence, Kant concludes, the cognitions-p3 of God and immortality can only ground subjective faith, whereas the cognition-p3 of freedom can ground objective knowledge.

This line of thought raises many complications that I cannot consider here. But since Kant’s appeal to practically grounded knowledge of transcendental freedom has a firm textual basis, we should at least be prepared to question the common view that Kant makes a ‘persistent, robust denial of transcendent knowledge’ (Bird 2006: 11).[[35]](#footnote-35)

**Bibliography**

Allais, Lucy (2015), *Manifest Reality. Kant's Idealism and His Realism* (Oxford University Press).

Allison, Henry E. (2011), *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*

(Oxford University Press)

Allison, Henry E. (2020), *Kant’s Conception of Freedom. A Developmental and Critical Analysis*

(Cambridge University Press).

Ameriks, Karl (2003), ‘Kant’s Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument’, reprinted in

His *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford University Press).

Bird, Graham (2006), *The Revolutionary Kant. A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Open Court).

Brueckner, Anthony L. (1984), ‘Transcendental Arguments II’, *Nous* 18/2: 197-225.

Chignell, Andrew (2007a), ‘Belief in Kant’, *Philosophical Review* 116: 323-360.

Chignell, Andrew (2007b), ‘Kant's Concepts of Justification’, *Nous* 41/1, 33-63.

Engstrom, Stephen (2009, *The Form of Practical Knowledge* (Harvard University Press).

George, Rolf (1982), ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant‘, in M. S. Gram (ed.), *Interpreting*

*Kant* (University of Iowa Press), 31-40.

Ginsborg, Hannah, ‘Lawfulness Without A Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and

Understanding’, Philosophical Topics 251/1: 37-81.

Grüne, Stefanie (2007), *Blinde Anschauung* (Vittorio Klostermann).

Grüne, Stefanie (2017), ‘Givenness, Objective Reality, and A Priori Intuitions’,

*Journal of the History Philosophy* 55/1: 113-130.

Guyer, Paul (1987), *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge (Cambridge University Press)*

Guyer, Paul (2007), ‘Naturalistic and Transcendental Moments in Kant's Moral Philosophy’,

 *Inquiry* 50: 444-64.

Kain, Patrick (2010), ‘Practical Cognition’, in J. Krueger, B. Bruxvoort (eds.), *Kant’s*

 *Moral Metaphysics* (De Gruyter), 177-209.

Kohl, Markus (2015a), ‘Kant and ‘Ought Implies Can’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 65/261: 690-

710.

Kohl, Markus (2015b), ‘Kant on the Inapplicability of the Categories to Things in Themselves’,

*British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23/1: 90-114.

Kohl, Markus (2017), ‘The Normativity of Prudence’, *Kant-Studien* 108/4: 517-542.

Kohl, Markus (2018), ‘Kant’s Critique of Instrumental Reason’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*

99/3: 489-516.

Kohl, Markus (2020), ‘Kant on Cognizing Oneself as a Spontaneous Cognizer’, *Canadian Journal*

*of Philosophy* 50/3: 395-412.

Kohl, Markus (forthcoming): ‘Die radikale Unbegreiflichkeit von Gott für den menschlichen

Verstand‘, in B. Dörflinger, D. Hüning (eds.), *Die Gottesidee in Kants theoretischer und*

*praktischer Philosophie* (Olms-Verlag).

Longuenesse, Beatrice (1998), *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton University Press).

Pasternack, Lawrence (2011), ‘The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest

 Good, the Practical Postulates, and the Fact of Reason’, *Kant-Studien* 102/3: 290-315.

Rauscher, Frederick (2002), ‘Kant's Moral Anti-Realism’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40/4: 477-499.

Stevenson, Leslie F. (2003), ‘Opinion, belief or faith, and knowledge’, *Kantian Review* 7:

 72-101.

Stephenson, Andrew, Gomes, Anil (2017), *Kant and the Philosophy of Mind: Perception, Reason,*

*and the Self* (Oxford University Press).

Schafer, Karl (forthcoming), ‘Kant’s Conception of Cognition and Our Knowledge of Things in

Themselves’, in K. Schafer, N. Stand (eds.) *The Sensible and Intelligible Worlds* (Oxford University Press).

Tolley, Clinton (2020), ‘Kant on the place of cognition in the progression of our representations’,

*Synthese* 197: 3215-3244.

Walsh, W.H. (1975), *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics* (University of Chicago Press).

Ware, Owen (2014), ‘Rethinking Kant’s Fact of Reason’, *Philosophers’ Imprint* 14/32:

 1-21.

Watkins, Eric & Willaschek, Marcus, ‘Kant’s Account of Cognition’, *Journal of the History of*

*Philosophy* 55/1: 83-112.

Willaschek, Marcus (2018), *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics. The Dialectic of Pure Reason*

(Cambridge University Press).

Wood, Allen (1978), *Kant’s Rational Theology* (Cornell University Press).

Wood, Allen (2008), *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press).

**WORD COUNT: Total 9542, minus 543 (Bibliography) = 8999**

1. For a helpful recent discussion, see Schafer (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The 1998 Guyer/Wood translation still frequently translates ‘Erkenntnis’ or ‘Kenntnis’ as ‘knowledge’. They sometimes do (e.g. 1998: 340, 540) but sometimes do not (e.g. 1998: 112, 149) make this explicit in footnotes. The 1996 translation by Pluhar seems to consistently render ‘Erkenntnis’ as ‘cognition’. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. George 1982: 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tolley (2020: 3230-31) argues that one can read the demanding notion of cognition into the *Stufenleiter*: Kant is here ‘saying roughly: looking within cognition (among its component parts), we find partly intuition, partly concept’. However, Kant’s claim that cognition is ‘either intuition or concept’ (A320/B376) is clearly intended as further step in the division of the general representation-type into ever more determinate species: the type cognition has two species that consciously relate to objects in different ways, namely, immediately in the case of intuitions or mediately in the case of concepts (cf. JL 9: 91). At JL 9: 36, Kant adds that ‘the difference between intuitive and discursive cognitions’ grounds the ‘difference between the aesthetic and the logical perfection of the cognition’. Tolley argues that aside from the *Stufenleiter*-passage, Kant does not ascribe cognitive status to intuitions (*per se*) in the first *Critique*. However, I read the first sentence of the Aesthetic (A19/B33) as saying that intuition is a kind of cognition whose distinctive characteristic is that it relates immediately to objects. Even if Tolley were correct about intuitions, there are many passages where Kant views purely conceptual representations as cognitions-w (e.g. at B87, where Kant says that without intuition ‘all our cognition’ remains empty). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is important for interpreting Kant’s Analogies of Experience. In his influential reading, Guyer takes Kant to be concerned with the conditions for *knowing or verifying* judgments about whether an objective succession occurred (Guyer 1987: 224-225). For him, the only alternatives are to view the Analogies as ontological conditions of objects, or as merely psychological conditions for the occurrence of beliefs (1987: 246-247). But Kant’s notion of cognition suggests another alternative: we need the relational categories to supply our merely subjective sensations with the cognitive content that is needed to *represent* an objective change. This is a precondition for making judgments about whether a change occurred. Even though such judgments may yet be false, they are (due to their objective, intersubjective cognitive content) at least candidates for empirical truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For recent discussion, see Chignell 2007a, Pasternack 2011, and Stevenson 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Kant uses the term ‘conviction’ (*Überzeugung*) both to designate merely subjective sufficiency (at A822/B850) and in relation to objective sufficiency (A829/B848). At A825/B853, Kant refers to assertions where there is ‘at least subjective conviction, i.e., firm faith’. Perhaps, then, *objective* conviction is another species of conviction that accompanies the (factual, correct) awareness of certainty in knowledge-assents. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Here I follow Grüne 2009: 29-30 and Willaschek&Watkins 2017: 4-5; see also Kohl 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Consider here A678-679/B706-707, where Kant discusses the theoretical idea of God as a self-sufficient ground of the world-whole. He says that we ‘have no concepts’ for the ‘cognition of this object of my idea’. ‘Cognition’ here means cognition-n. We *do* have a purely conceptual cognition-n of God, but it lacks a determinate theoretical meaning because it represents God ‘through mere concepts, which really have their application only in the world of sense’; namely, through categories such as ‘causal ground’. Our theoretical cognition-w of God is merely analogical: we can think an other-worldly perfect being only ‘according to the analogy’ with this-worldly ‘realities’ like substance and causality (A677-678/B705-706), when we represent an absolutely necessary, non-sensible ground of the world ‘through properties that belong only to the world of sense’. Although the theoretical cognition-w of God lacks determinate, non-analogical content, it has a legitimate analogical use as a regulative idea in the expansion of our experience. See Kohl (forthcoming) for further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For helpful discussion, see Grüne 2007, Ginsborg 1997 and Longuenesse 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Grüne 2017, and the exchange between Grüne, McLear and Stephenson in Gomes, Stephenson 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Pure practical reason still retains some efficacy here insofar as it determines my good maxim. For discussion of how this relates to ‘Ought Implies Can’, see Kohl 2015a. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For a comprehensive account of prudential cognition-p2, see Kohl 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The significance of Bxxvi is also emphasized in Kain’s helpful 2010 discussion of practical cognition. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For an account of this transformation, see Kohl 2015b. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A subject can (sometimes) know that p without actively reflecting on her sufficient objective grounds for assent, as long as she would cite those grounds upon reflection (cf. Chignell 2007b: 47). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Chignell reads Kant as an externalist (who gives an ‘emphatic nod’ to internalism) because he thinks that some of the facts that provide sufficient objective ground for knowing assent ‘will typically be inaccessible to a normal subject’ (2007b: 49). However, this sacrifices the crucial role that the *communicability* of one’s objective grounds for assent plays in Kant’s criteria for knowledge (condition (3)). Chignell argues, specifically, that facts about the objective probability of our grounds for assent are not typically accessible to subjects. I do not believe this to be Kant’ view; moreover, probabilistic assents do not qualify as knowledge (see my discussion below). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Kant’s rejection of externalism underlies his reasoning at B167-168, where he denies that our categorial judgments would be objectively justified if our mind were set up by a benign spirit to think in ways that correspond to the laws of nature. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I take this to be compatible with Kant’s point (at A820/B848) that the *object* provides the ground for assent: for theoretical assents, we have no handle on ‘the object’ apart from the way we grasp it through cognition-n. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. By contrast, Engstrom 2009 helpfully discusses the moral law as the principle of practical *knowledge*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Chignell 2007a: 327; 2007b: 39-44, 47; Pasternack 2011: 307-314; Stevenson 2003: 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Bird 2006: 237-239; Chignell 2007a: 356-7; Pasternack 2011: 311; Rauscher 2002: 486-492, 498-499. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hence the tendency of the commentators cited in note 21 to treat acceptance of the moral law as mere faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. One might argue that when Kant says that we know the moral law, he means that we know it as a purely theoretical proposition (describing how a perfectly rational being would at), which does not entail normative-practical knowledge that we ought to act as the moral law commands (see, for instance, Allison 2011: 360). There are many problems with this proposal. For one, the only moral *law* that we know depends upon our practical self-legislation: “only [the fact] that reason can be practical as pure reason makes it possible for it to be legislative” (CPrR 5:25). Practical self-legislation cannot yield a mere theoretical proposition that fails to have normative implications for a will that imposes this law upon itself. Likewise, what is apodictically certain (hence a matter of knowledge) for us is the moral law as a fact of reason (CPrR 5: 47), which involves our consciousness that the law categorically binds our will (CPrR 5: 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The idea that morality is itself a matter of subjectively rational faith undermines Kant’s view that the moral law, *qua* *objectively* valid principle of practical knowledge, can provide objective practical reality for metaphysical concepts and ground faith in God/immortality. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For a more sympathetic discussion of the fact of reason, see Ware 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Brueckner 1984: 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This is a controversial view (for a classic defense, see Ameriks 2003). It seems to me required by Kant’s Refutation and also by his account of “the principle” governing the transcendental deduction (A92-96/B124-129). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. What species these cognitions belong to is a difficult question. Cognitions-w, cognitions-n, cognitions-p1 and certain combinations of these might all be relevant here. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This is a perhaps controversial take on a difficult ‘meta’-issue. For the conceptual nature of Kant’s claim that a non-sensible thing in itself must correspond to a sensible appearance, see A251-A252. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The translation here is my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For discussion of Kant’s dim views on instrumental ‘reason’, see Kohl 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Wood 1978 for seminal discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See, for instance: Allais 2015: 5; Chignell 2007b: 354-357; Pasternack 2011: 309; Rauscher 2002: 493; Walsh 1975: 4-5, 197; Willaschek 2018 :271-272. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. I discuss Kant’s appeal to knowledge of noumenal freedom at greater length in my book manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)