

KANT STARTER PACKAGE

Created by Alexander T. Englert, Ph.D., Research Associate, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey

For the Goethe Institute, Washington, D.C.

Date: July 31, 2023

Purpose of the Kant Starter Package

- Familiarize those working with the Goethe Institute in Washington, D.C. with central questions, methodologies, and concepts in Kant's philosophy, in particular with those related to a just society, freedom, dignity, and issues that influence Kant's standing and legacy (e.g., his views on race).¹
- Show in the discussion of these key concepts why they remain relevant in how we think about what it means to form a just society and act morally. (In each section, I present a summary of Kant's position, explain why it is still relevant, and point out lasting influences.)
- Highlight some classic and key passages that might be of use for the Goethe Institute in its planning of the tercentennial celebrations of Kant's birth.

Table of Contents

- 1 Important Quotations – p. 1
- 2 General Introduction to Kant's Transcendental Method – p. 6
- 3 Central Concepts and Questions in Kant's Philosophy Relevant to the Themes for his Tercentennial Celebration – p. 9
 - 3.a Autonomy, Freedom, and the Good – *Autonomie, Freiheit, und das Gute* – p. 9
 - 3.b The Categorical Imperative and Respect – *Die kategorische Imperativ und Achtung* – p. 10
 - 3.c Dignity – *Würde* – p. 12

¹ Throughout I refer to Kant's works in the way that is standard in the literature. After a quote, I include an abbreviation of the source text, which references the German title. Then, there is a volume number, referring to the Akademie Ausgabe volume (i.e., the standard German editions) followed by a colon and the page number from that volume. If working with translations or non-standard German editions, these numbers are typically found in the margins.

3.d Enlightenment and the *Sensus Communis* – *Aufklärung und das Sensus Communis* – p. 14

3.e Race and Racism – *Rasse und Rassismus* – p. 15

3.f Rights and a Just Society – *Rechte und eine Gerechte Gesellschaft* – p. 18

3.g The Three (really: Four) Central Questions of Philosophy – *Die Drei (wirklich vier) Hauptfrage der Philosophie* – p. 22

1 Important Quotations²

- “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”
Critique of Pure Reason, A51/B75

“Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind.”

- “The **I think** must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.”

Critique of Pure Reason, B131-132

“Das: *Ich denke*, muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können; denn sonst würde etwas in mir vorgestellt werden, was gar nicht gedacht werden könnte, welches eben so viel heißt, als die Vorstellung würde entweder unmöglich, oder wenigstens für mich nichts sein.”

- “It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**. Understanding, wit, judgment and the like, whatever such *talents* of mind may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one’s plans, as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitutions is therefore called *character*, is not good.”

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 4:393

“Es ist überall nichts in der Welt, ja überhaupt auch außer derselben zu denken möglich, was ohne Einschränkung für gut könnte gehalten werden, als allein ein *guter Wille*. Verstand, Witz, Urteilskraft, und wie die *Talente* des Geistes sonst heißen mögen, oder Mut, Entschlossenheit, Beharrlichkeit im Vorsatze, als Eigenschaften des *Temperaments*, sind ohne Zweifel in mancher Absicht gut und wünschenswert; aber sie können auch

² Following each English translation is the original German in blue script (pagination is, of course, the same for both and only included once after the English).

äußerst böse und schädlich werden, wenn der Wille, der von diesen Naturbeschaffenheit darum *Charakter* heißt, nicht gut ist.”

- “Rational nature is distinguished from the rest of nature by this, that it sets itself an end.”

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 4:437

“Die vernünftige Natur nimmt sich dadurch vor den übrigen aus, daß sie ihr selbst einen Zweck setzt.”

- “Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy is therefore: to choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition.”

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 4:440

“Autonomie des Willens ist die Beschaffenheit des Willens, dadurch derselbe ihm selbst (unabhängig von aller Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände des Willens) ein Gesetz ist. Das Prinzip der Autonomie ist also: nicht anders zu wählen, als so, daß die Maximen seiner Wahl in demselben Willen zugleich als allgemeines Gesetz mit begriffen sein.”

- “*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes.”

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 4:446

“Der *Wille* ist eine Art von Kausalität lebender Wesen, so fern sie vernünftig sind, und *Freiheit* würde diejenige Eigenschaft dieser Kausalität sein, da sie unabhängig von fremden sie *bestimmenden* Ursachen wirkend sein kann; so wie *Naturnotwendigkeit* die Eigenschaft der Kausalität aller vernunftlosen Wesen, durch den Einfluß fremder Ursachen zur Tätigkeit bestimmt zu werden.”

- “He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.”

Critique of Practical Reason, 5:30

“Er urteilt also, daß er etwas kann, darum, weil er sich bewußt ist, daß er es soll, und erkennt in sich die Freiheit, die ihm sonst ohne das moralische Gesetz unbekannt geblieben wäre.”

- “For, the moral law in fact transfers us, in idea, into a nature in which pure reason, if it were accompanied with suitable physical power, would produce the highest good, and it determines our will to confer on the sensible world the form of a whole of rational beings.”

Critique of Practical Reason, 5:43

“Denn in der Tat versetzt uns das moralische Gesetz, der Idee nach, in eine Natur, in welcher reine Vernunft, wenn sie mit dem ihr angemessenen physischen Vermögen begleitet wäre, das höchste Gut hervorbringen würde, und bestimmt unseren Willen, die Form der Sinnenwelt, als einem Ganzen vernünftiger Wesen, zur erteilen.”

- “The moral law is, in other words, for the will of a perfect being a law of *holiness*, but for the will of every finite rational being a law of *duty*, of moral necessitation and of the determination of his actions through *respect* for this law and *reverence* for his duty.”

Critique of Practical Reason, 5:82

“Das moralische Gesetz ist nämlich für den Willen eines allervollkommensten Wesens ein Gesetz der *Heiligkeit*, für den Willen jedes endlichen vernünftigen Wesens aber ein Gesetz der *Pflicht*, der moralischen Nötigung und der Bestimmung der Handlungen desselben durch *Achtung* für dies Gesetz und aus Ehrfurcht für seine Pflicht.”

- “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*”

Critique of Practical Reason, 5:161

“Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmenden Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: *Der bestimmte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir.*”

- “A constitution established, first on principles of *freedom* of the members of a society (as individuals), second on principles of the *dependence* of all upon a single common legislation (as subjects), and third on the law of their *equality* (*as citizens of a state*) – the sole constitution that issues from the idea of the original contract, on which all rightful legislation of a people must be based – is a *republican* constitution.”

Toward Perpetual Peace, 8:349-350

“Die erstlich nach Prinzipien der *Freiheit* der Glieder einer Gesellschaft (als Menschen); zweitens nach Grundsätzen der *Abhängigkeit* aller von einer einzigen gemeinsamen Gesetzgebung (als Untertanen), und drittens die nach dem Gesetz der *Gleichheit* derselben (als Staatsbürger) gestiftete Verfassung, - die einzige, welche aus der Idee des ursprünglichen Vertrags hervorgeht, auf der alle rechtliche Gesetzgebung eines Volks gegründet sein muß, ist die *republikanische*.”

- “In accordance with reason there is only one way that states in relation with one another can leave the lawless condition, which involves nothing but war; it is that, like individual human beings, they give up their savage (lawless) freedom, accommodate themselves to public coercive laws, and so form an (always growing) *state of nations* (*civitas gentium*) that would finally encompass all the nations of the earth.”

Toward Perpetual Peace, 8:357

“Für Staaten im Verhältnisse untereinander kann es nach der Vernunft keine andere Art geben, aus dem gesetzlosen Zustande, der lauter Krieg enthält, herauszukommen, als daß sie, ebenso wie einzelne Menschen, ihre wilde (gesetzlose) Freiheit aufgeben, sich

zu öffentlichen Zwangsgesetzen bequemen und so einen (freilich immer wachsenden) *Völkerstaat (civitas gentium)*, der zuletzt alle Völker der Erde befassen würde, bilden.”

- “That kings should philosophize or philosophers become kings is not to be expected, but it is also not to be wished for, since possession of power unavoidably corrupts the free judgment of reason. But that kings or royal peoples (ruling themselves by laws of equality) should not let the class of philosophers disappear or be silent but should let it speak publicly is indispensable to both, so that light may be thrown on their business; and, because this class is by its nature incapable of forming seditious factions or clubs, it cannot be suspected of spreading *propaganda*.”

Toward Perpetual Peace, 8:369

“Daß Könige philosophieren oder Philosophen Könige würden, ist nicht zu erwarten, aber auch nicht zu wünschen, weil der Besitz der Gewalt das freie Urteil der Vernunft unvermeidlich verdirbt. Daß aber Könige oder königliche (sich selbst nach Gleichheitsgesetzen beherrschende) Völker die Klasse der Philosophen nicht schwinden oder verstummen, sondern öffentlich sprechen lassen, ist beiden zu Beleuchtung ihres Geschäftes unentbehrlich, und weil diese Klasse ihrer Natur nach der Rottierung und Klubbenverbündung unfähig ist, wegen der Nachrede einer *Propagande* verdachtlos.”

- “I can indeed think of a *moral politician*, that is, one who takes the principles of political prudence in such a way that they can coexist with morals, but not of a *political moralist*, who frames a morals to suit the statesman’s advantage.”

Toward Perpetual Peace, 8:372

“Ich kann mir nun zwar einen *moralischen Politiker*, d.i. einen, der die Prinzipien der Staatsklugheit so nimmt, daß sie mit der Moral zusammen bestehen können, aber nicht einen *politischen Moralisten* denken, der sich eine Moral so schmiedet, wie es der Vorteil des Staatsmanns sich zuträglich findet.”

- “Right is therefore the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choices of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom.”

Metaphysics of Morals, 6:230

“Das Recht ist also der Inbegriff der Bedingungen, unter denen die Willkür des einen mit der Willkür des anderen nach einem allgemeinen Gesetze der Freiheit zusammen vereinigt werden kann.”

- “In accordance with the ethical law of perfection ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ the maxim of benevolence (practical love of human beings) is a duty of all human beings toward one another, whether or not one finds them worthy of love.”

Metaphysics of Morals, 6:450

“Die Maxime des Wohlwollens (die praktische Menschenliebe) is aller Menschen Pflicht gegeneinander; man mag diese nun liebenswürdig finden oder nicht, nach dem ethischen Gesetz der Vollkommenheit.”

- “Respect for the law, which in its subjective aspect is called moral feeling, is identical with consciousness of one’s duty.”

Metaphysics of Morals, 6:464

“Die Achtung vor dem Gesetze, welche subjektiv als moralisches Gefühl bezeichnet wird, ist mit dem Bewußtsein seiner Pflicht einerlei.”

2 General Introduction to Kant’s Transcendental Method

Immanuel Kant was born on April 22, 1724 and died on February 12, 1804, all the while in Königsberg, Prussia (today: Kaliningrad, Russia). He is famous for never making it far from his city of birth (though he did travel a few miles outside the city limits on occasion). He was a lifelong bachelor and dedicated scholar. Well known for his rigorous discipline, he would carve up the day into periods for work and teaching, with breaks only for walks and meals. In the evenings, he was a popular host of dinner parties where he insisted that one avoid the topic of philosophy (probably because he needed a break from it). With his work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, Kant experienced a meteoric rise to fame. From 1781 until his death, he never stopped working on his theory, writing two more *Critiques* as well as many treatises and shorter essays. Even though Kant was prolific even before 1781 (in what is referred to by scholars as his “pre-critical” period), it is for his works beginning with the first *Critique* that he persists as a foundational figure in the Western canon of philosophy.

Philosophically, he is famous for the development of what he referred to as “transcendental idealism.” By “idealism,” Kant meant a theory of reality in which any possible object of experience that we represent receives its form from the mind, as opposed to possessing this form independently of whether a mind is viewing it or not. That is, we do not know how objects are in themselves, but instead we determine how they must *appear* to us in certain universally necessary ways – regardless of whether this is how they *are* independent of a perceiving mind. But Kant did not think that this gave us license to say that everything was merely a construct of the mind or that – given the power of the mind to determine subjective experience – we could assume that our minds know the true essence of certain non-material objects. This is why he qualified his idealism as “transcendental,” in order to set it apart from other forms of idealism like that of Plato or Berkeley. By “transcendental,” he meant the quality that makes known conditions of the possibility of experience. Thus, his idealism was not claiming to reveal that everything was a mere creation of a mind, but rather a method by which one could discern what can be known based on the limits and powers of the mind from that which cannot be known.

It is this project of discovering the conditions of possible experience that explains why Kant chose to use *Critique* or *Kritik* for the title of his main works that expound the powers and limits of the mind in shaping subjective experience. It is often a misconception that Kant with this title intended to express disapproval or suspicion of reason in its various employments. However, this is a superficial and completely inaccurate view. Kant referred to his works as critical or *kritisch* with reference to the Greek term κριτικός, which meant to “discern” or “judge.” And in the unique methodology of Kant, each of his major works is attempting to discern what makes various, universally necessary experiences possible

(such as, the knowledge of cause and effect, as well as moral certainty of one's duty in certain instances), along with discerning the boundary beyond which certain objects *cannot* be experienced (such as, supersensible entities, like God or immortal souls).

In each of his three major *Critiques*, Kant puts his methodology to work to map out the knowable and distinguish it from that which cannot be known. In the first *Critique*, he analyzes human experience of what can be known theoretically (the *Critique of Pure Reason*). In the second, he explores the possibility of reason to influence our behavior despite appearances having to conform to certain deterministic laws of nature (the *Critique of Practical Reason*). In the third and final work, he shows that there is a universal form of possible experience at work in our aesthetic assessments, as well as biological judgments (the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*). In these works, his intention is explicitly to lay the foundation for future works (some that he completed and others that he did not) in which he would move from discerning the forms of experience to exploring the actual content of experience based on these forms. For example, his famous *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) together form the critical foundation for the later *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), in which he – based on the results of aforementioned works – builds a system of duties for human, rational freedom.

In all of these works, Kant insists that he is doing something that is unprecedented in the history of Western philosophy (though it was most likely a first in the history of world philosophy as well). Certainly there were idealists before Kant. But they all took the stance that all reality was a creation of the mind (or God's mind). Not so Kant. For Kant, proper knowledge depended on there being some reality that is beyond the mind of which we can have no direct knowledge. This sphere is what he referred to as the “noumenal” sphere, and whatever inhabits it as “noumena.” When we, though, experience reality, we are in some (highly debated) way influenced by this sphere of unknowable reality and, subsequently, apply (automatically and necessarily) certain forms of the mind that represent it in ways that we all share. What we represent and experience in empirical existence is “phenomenal,” and any objects thereby conditioned “phenomena.” Thus, he thought that there was a mind-independent reality of things and, yet, that proper experience was always forcing this mind-independent reality to take on certain forms based on the mind's influence.

It is this unique methodological approach that Kant himself thought warranted the claim that his philosophy presented the history of Western philosophy with a “Copernican” revolution. In the preface to the second edition of the first *Critique* (1787), Kant writes:

This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. Now in metaphysics we can try in a similar way regarding the intuition of objects. If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them a priori; but if the object (as an object of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility to myself. (BXVI-XVII).

Es ist hiemit eben so, als mit den ersten Gedanken des *Kopernikus* bewandt, der, nachdem es mit der Erklärung der Himmelsbewegungen nicht gut fort wollte, wenn er annahm, das ganze Sternheer drehe sich um den Zuschauer, versuchte, ob es nicht besser gelingen möchte, wenn er den Zuschauer sich drehen, und dagegen die Sterne in Ruhe ließ. In der Metaphysik kann man nun, was die Anschauung der Gegenstände betrifft, es auf ähnliche Weise versuchen. Wenn die Anschauung sich nach der Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände richten müßte, so sehe ich nicht ein, wie man a priori von ihr etwas wissen könne; richtet sich aber der Gegenstand (als Objekt der Sinne) nach der Beschaffenheit unseres Anschauungsvermögens, so kann ich mir diese Möglichkeit ganz wohl vorstellen. (BXVI-XVII).

With his Copernican revolution, Kant thought he had found the sure footing that we often seek for certain forms of experience, indeed for those which we think to be true and universal. Instead of seeking stability in the ever-changing world of nature and appearances, however, we have better luck in finding such stable foundations through transcendental philosophy. By re-orienting ourselves to investigate the conditions and limits of reason, we can discern which forms must be in the human mind to enable experience in the first place. Because these forms are not drawn from experience, Kant referred to them as “*a priori*,” by which he meant independent and prior of any experience. The actual representations we then form with them, which are enabled by the *a priori* forms of experience, Kant referred to as “*a posteriori*.” These are moments that are empirically conditioned experiences that occur within our ongoing and developing subjective lives (and, as such, are completely unique to every person). For example, the form of cause-effect is *a priori* and enables any and all such causal experiences of which we become aware. The breaking of a window with a ball or the setting off a chain reaction in some actual system, by contrast, are two *a posteriori* instances of the *a priori* form.

Even though Kant thought that his theory set certain limits on experience, he nonetheless believed this to be of great benefit for many areas of human experience. For instance, one might think that this would be quite dangerous for theology and religion, which profess to uncover an unperceivable relation to a divine being who (typically) stands outside of experience. And Kant is, moreover, famous for attacking many classically popular arguments for the existence of God in the first *Critique* (that is, attacking the cosmological, ontological, and design arguments). Surprisingly, however, Kant thought that his theory was the best hope for a rationally grounded religion. In the second edition preface to the first *Critique*, he even goes so far as to claim that in his philosophy, “Thus I had to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**” (BXXXI) / “*Ich mußte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben platz zu bekommen.*” By this, Kant means that the limits of what can be known hinder *disproving* the existence of God and an immortal soul, just as much as they hinder *proving* God and the soul. Without theoretical grounds to disprove God, that is, we have a room to form a faith on practical grounds: namely, the moral law. Thus, when combined with his practical philosophy, Kant thinks we in fact are justified in having faith and hope that there is a divine source to all of reality.

Despite many aspects of Kant’s theory becoming outdated by advances in natural science (for example, some of Kant’s beliefs about organisms relative to the later discoveries made by Darwin in his theory of evolution), his transcendental idealism persists as a live option for understanding the relationship between the mind and world. Both in modern

neuroscience, as well as in physics, his theory remains a popular option according to which the mind brings along determining forms of possible experience (among these space, time, causation, and community), beyond which an unknowable substrate must be postulated. Though writing and thinking in the 18th Century, Kant's unique method continues to make waves well into the 21st Century.

3 Central Concepts and Questions in Kant's Philosophy Relevant to the Themes for his Tercentennial Celebration

3.a Autonomy, Freedom, and the Good – *Autonomie, Freiheit, und das Gute*

For Kant, there is nothing free or even philosophically mysterious in choosing what one wants to do anyway. Kant's conception of freedom is important for this reason, especially in the context of the United States, where amongst "life" and the "pursuit of happiness," the concept of "liberty" is of chief importance. Whereas in today's context, one often associates liberty or freedom with the right to do as one pleases, whenever one pleases, this for Kant is not a true moment of freedom. Indeed, for Kant this sort of behavior is hardly different from what we observe in the behavior of animals working from instinct. To be sure, human beings can rationally determine clever means for achieving our ends. But whenever we are doing so, we are just as much servants to desire as any creature that seeks satisfaction of some end that would grant pleasure.

Instead, Kant thought that freedom in true sense, which he often referred to as "transcendental freedom," was different from choosing to satisfy one's desires in a twofold sense. First, whereas our pleasure-bound choices are determined by our natural inclinations and needs, freedom is *not* so bound at all. Kant refers to this often as freedom in a "negative" sense, by which he means the freedom of our wills *from* nature or the freedom *not* to be determined by some influence within nature. The second sense of freedom is positive. Kant thought that in the freedom from natural necessity, we were capable of seeking out a rational standard of action that we ourselves determine as what anyone ought to do, regardless of what one desires. It is this positive sense of freedom that Kant referred to as our "autonomy," in contrast to "heteronomy."

By the "heteronomy," Kant understood a scenario in which one acts according to a law that is determined by some other lawgiving source (*hetero* = "other," *nomos* = "law"), whereas "autonomy" was a case in which one acts according to a law that one determines as universally valid for oneself and any other rational being (*auto* = "self," *nomos* = "law"). In other words, the autonomous person is one who is free since she is the very author of the laws by which she abides.

In this way, Kant's notion of freedom is much more nuanced than the simplified sense of freedom that so often is found at the center of American politics. For Kant, the idea of freedom is essentially bound up with holding oneself accountable to a standard that anyone ought to agree with. Merely following our own whims leaves us not much different from automata that follow a script provided by a programmer. It is only when we allow our reason to take the lead and move us to practical action that we are truly free of nature.

For this reason, further, Kant thought that the only way of determining an objective sense of the good could be achieved through reason. Every subjective pleasure or desire we have (or imagine having) remains bound up with our own particularities as an individual. There is nothing *good* in a deep, objective sense, for instance in one's favoring Carolina-style barbecue over Texas-style. However, there is something objectively good when one acts on a standard that *everyone* would agree to, since it is ascertained by appealing to a standard that is not particular to any one person, but particular to reason itself (see 3.b. below). Choosing to sacrifice one's own well-being to save another, however, we can all agree to as being a *good* thing, irrespective of one's desires and inclinations.

3.b. The Categorical Imperative and Respect – *Die kategorische Imperativ und Achtung*

For Kant, action in a practical sense depended on our ability to set an end and then discern means for achieving the end. In both cases, we would – when deliberating and deciding – be thinking of various guiding principles or rules. In most cases, Kant thought that our ends are set by our natural inclinations and desires. When I am hungry, I set the end of stilling my hunger. I then think of various ways that I can most effectively do this. In such a case, I might propose the rule of: *If I am hungry for something savory, I will make myself an omelet*, along with other rules that then detail the process of producing an omelet. Whether *you* (the reader) also desire an omelet when hungry for something savory, or whether you should follow the rules of good omelet making is completely contingent on whether you also share the same desires or background knowledge about omelet making. It is for this reason that Kant thinks we are in the domain of what he refers to as “hypothetical imperatives.” In such a case, one wants the means on the supposition (or hypothesis) that one wants the end. Since such cases are completely contingent on the individual's particular desires, there is nothing morally salient about them.

However, Kant thought that we often, despite searching out our own happiness, are confronted with moments in which we – by reasoning about the situation – come to the conclusion that we *ought* to act towards a certain end regardless of whether we personally desire it or not. In such a case, we are not hypothetically bound to follow the principle or rule in question, but rather absolutely or *categorically* bound. Such imperatives, Kant referred to as possessing the form of the “categorical imperative,” which accords with what any and every rational being would agree to as right and good. In such a case, we are faced with a realization that there are certain ways of behaving that we judge as necessary without exception and with no relation to personal desires.

Kant's main formulation of the categorical imperative occurs first in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). There he writes that the categorical imperative, though singular in that it is the same for every rational being, has three formulations. They are as follows:

First Formulation

There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this: *act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.* (GMS 4:421)

Der kategorische Imperative ist also nur ein einziger, und zwar dieser: *handle nur nach derjenigen Maxime, durch die du zugleich wollen kannst, daß sie ein allgemeines Gesetz werde.*

Second Formulation

[A]ct as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a **universal law of nature.** (GMS 4:421)

[H]andle so, als ob die Maxime deiner Handlung durch deinen Willen zum allgemeinen Naturgesetze werden sollte.

Third Formulation

So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. (GMS 4:429)

Handle so, daß du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchtest.

There is an immense amount of debate about how best to understand the categorical imperative, as well as its various formulations as all unified. There is, though, consensus that the basic form has to do with the ability of the will not to stand in contradiction with itself. Practical consistency, as a condition of what is good, mirrors the theoretical side of things in which logical consistency is a marker of what is true. When our wills conform to a standard that everyone would also agree to act according to, we are accessing a shared standard that makes possible a completely unique sort of volition. Rather than acting for an end that we desire personally, that is, we are acting in accordance with a form of willing that seeks rational consistency across all agents. It is in making this standard our personal principle of action that makes us free and not bound by external influences and lawgivers, or merely slaves to our own personal desires and happiness (see 3.a above).

But why should we *want* to ever follow a universally consistent standard of reason? Kant was sensitive to the fact that agency was closely linked to our emotions. When we desire something, we *feel* inclined to pursue it. By contrast, though, Kant insisted that moral action occurs when we are not inclined by personal emotions or desires. Indeed, often we have no desire whatsoever to do what is right, since it might lead to discomfort or even self-sacrifice. So how can a law that we share as rational beings motivate us to act at all, since it by definition is something that we must remain completely disinterested in? Here, Kant proposed that there is one, and only one, emotion that comes into play when we are acting morally: namely, what he referred to as a feeling of “pure respect” [*Achtung*]. When motivated by this feeling of respect, we feel awe or wonder at the very existence of the moral law in us, which motivates us to act in accordance with it. Indeed, it is also negative in character, Kant thinks, because it often forces us to act in ways that are uncomfortable, dangerous, and happiness-confounding.

3.c Dignity – *Würde*

Kant is famous as being one of the modern pillars of human rights. And for Kant, the key to understanding why humans have rights is tied up with his conception of “dignity” [*Würde*]. It is in virtue of this feature that it is impermissible to treat oneself or others as a mere means to an end (see the third formulation of the categorical imperative in 3.b above).

The most famous articulation of his view comes in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), where Kant distinguishes that which has “dignity” from that which has a “price.” He states:

In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its *equivalent*; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity. What is related to general human inclinations and needs has a *market price*; that which, even without presupposing a need, conforms with a certain taste, that is, with a delight in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers, has a *fancy price*; but that which constitutes the conditions under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*. (*GMS* 4:434)

In dem Reich der Zwecke hat alles entweder einen Preis oder eine Würde. Was sich auf die allgemeinen menschlichen Neigungen und Bedürfnisse bezieht, hat einen *Marktpreis*; das, was, auch ohne ein Bedürfnis vorauszusetzen, einem gewissen Geschmacke, d.i. einem Wohlgefallen am bloßen zwecklosen Spiel unserer Gemütskräfte, gemäß ist, einen *Affektionspreis*; das aber, was die Bedingung ausmacht, unter der allein etwas Zweck an sich selbst sein kann, hat nicht bloß einen relativen Wert, d.i. einen Preis, sondern einen innern Wert, d.i. *Würde*.

The distinction at work is easy enough to grasp. There are two sorts of value. One value is relative. That is price. For example, the value of gold fluctuates (as well as any other commodity) based on demand or what one is willing to pay for it. The other value is absolute. This is dignity and applies (for Kant) *only* to rational beings for whom reason elevates them to a perspective from which they can distinguish between themselves, as ends in themselves, and things that are means to accomplishing certain ends. And this rational capacity, Kant thinks, is directly linked to our autonomy (see 3.a above): “*Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature” (*GMS* 4:436) / “*Autonomie* ist also der Grund der Würde der menschlichen und jeder vernünftigen Natur.” There is significant debate about how this exactly works, but the key is in how rationality itself justifies treating all moral beings with respect. Because we can self-legislate, we cannot help but view ourselves as possessing a unique status amongst all beings.

It is worth noting in this context that Kant’s theory has left its mark in today’s legal systems. As one example, the European Charter of Human Rights appeals directly to the notion of an inherent dignity when taking its stance against the death penalty. Protocol No. 13 begins with:

Convinced that everyone's right to life is a basic value in a democratic society and that the abolition of the death penalty is essential for the protection of this right and for the full recognition of the **inherent dignity** of all human beings. (p. 54, emphasis added)

Überzeugt davon, dass das Recht auf Leben für alle ein grundlegender Wert in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft ist und dass die Abschaffung der Todesstrafe für den Schutz dieses Rechts und für die volle Anerkennung der angeborenen Würde aller Menschen unerlässlich ist.

One also finds evidence in Article 1 of the Basic Rights [*Grundrechte*] of Germany's constitution, which states:

(1) The dignity of the human being shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.

(1) Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller staatlichen Gewalt.

These two instances of dignity take their point of departure from Kant's work in 1785, where he thought about how there is a fundamental quality that all rational beings must possess in virtue of their capacity to employ reason.

That said, there are persistent questions with how far one can extend dignity within Kant's system. After all, are animals rational? With some complex organisms, there is growing evidence that they are perhaps capable of reason and self-reflection (e.g., dolphins and certain great apes), but this remains an open area of debate. Moreover, even if we were to prove that *all* animals are non-rational, does that license us to treat them as things with only a price? These questions clearly will have implications too for how we treat certain human beings who have mental disabilities or who are stuck in a vegetative state. And further removed, but not outside the realm of possibility, would this apply for rational, non-terrestrial beings? These questions show areas where Kant's theory is still in need of clarification, development, and deeper analysis.

3.d Enlightenment and the *Sensus Communis* – *Aufklärung und das Sensus Communis*

One of Kant's most famous essays is his short, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" In it, Kant argues that to be enlightened means to take responsibility for one's own thinking and liberate oneself from merely accepting what is taken for true or obvious by others (or insisted upon by them). Kant begins the essay famously:

Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority [Unmündigkeit]. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! [Horace: "dare to be wise"]. Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of the enlightenment. (AA 8:35)

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschliebung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.

In short: enlightenment is the process of thinking independently. There are deep connections between Kant's thought here and other aspects of his theory which center around the notion of freedom and spontaneity. As noted above (in 3.a), Kant thought that we were only truly free if we were self-legislating, as opposed to following a law or guidance of someone else. Of course, this does not mean that we all must disagree, but rather comes down to the question of whether one has truly worked out one's opinions and claims in a conscientious way. Though Kant thought that everyone must complete this task for him or herself, he remained confident that consensus about essential matters would arise through our shared rational standards.

Still, Kant was wary of any sort of self-limitation when it came to thinking. A famous line that he would often say in his lecture halls was more or less, the goal is not to learn philosophies, but rather to learn to philosophize. That is, we should not merely memorize what previous systems espoused, but learn them and test them for ourselves in a way that requires independent philosophical thought. Just as in the practical sphere, Kant was very much an advocate of freedom or self-activity being the key feature of us as human beings. Even in his theoretical works, it is the understanding's "spontaneity," which is responsible for giving form to the passively accumulated matter of the senses.

Connected with his views of the meaning of enlightenment is his notion of the "sensus communis," which is often left in its Latin form since "common sense" means something else than what Kant intended. By *sensus communis*, Kant meant three specific rules for thinking well, which he thought we each needed to actively employ. They are listed in third *Critique* as follows:

1. To think for oneself;
2. To think in the position of everyone else;
3. Always to think in accord with oneself. (*KU* 5:294)

1. Selbstdenken;
2. An der Stelle jedes andern denken;
3. Jederzeit mit sich selbst einstimmig zu denken.

And Kant clarifies them further in a way that directly connects them to what he thought the hallmark of the "enlightenment":

The first is the maxim of the **unprejudiced** way of thinking, the second of the **broad-minded** way, the third that of the **consistent** way. The first is the maxim of reason that is never **passive**. The tendency toward the latter, hence toward heteronomy of reason, is called **prejudice**; and the greatest prejudice of all is

that of representing reason as if it were not subject to the rules of nature on which the understanding grounds it by means of its own essential law: i.e., **superstition**. Liberation from superstition is called **enlightenment**. (KU 5:294).

Die erste ist die Maxime der *vorurteilsfreien*, die zweite der *erweiterten*, die dritte der *konsequenten* Denkungsart. Die erste ist die Maxime einer niemals *passiven* Vernunft. Der Hang zur Letztern, mithin zur Heteronomie der Vernunft, heißt das *Vorurteil*; und das größte unter *allen* ist, sich die *Naturregeln*, welche der Verstand ihr durch ihr eigenes wesentliches Gesetz zum Grunde legt, als nicht unterworfen vorzustellen: d.i. der *Aberglaube*. Befreiung vom Aberglauben heißt *Aufklärung*[.]

With these laws of proper thinking, Kant believed that humanity could free itself of superstition. For us today, there are deep resonances with this notion of self-liberated thinking and the phenomenon of “fake news” and “Querdenker” (in Germany). The ability, through new technologies, to deceive or manipulate emotions calls for renewed attention to Kant’s concept of enlightenment and the three rules of healthy thinking. With our advances in technology, though, might we require further rules?

3.e Race and Racism – *Rasse und Rassismus*

Based on Kant’s theory of autonomy and dignity (see 3.a and 3.c above), one might imagine it to be impossible for his theory to allow for distinctions based on race. After all, the key feature of human beings, as noted above, is an inner quality of dignity based on one’s autonomy. Any external, physical quality would appear to be irrelevant in this regard.

As much as one would hope that Kant, as a father of the enlightenment, was far-sighted and wise enough to condemn racism from the get-go, he showed himself to be racist and in general alignment with the dominant views of his culture and time in central Europe. Worse yet, Kant wrote on topics in anthropology, which was a new field of research, influenced and driven along by the reports of seafaring explorers’ encounters with far-flung nations and ethnicities. As noted above (see 1), Kant never left Königsberg with the exception of a few short jaunts outside the immediate city limits. So all of his knowledge of other nations and peoples was based on the accounts of explorers, which were anything but favorable and good faith accounts. Along with many thinkers who were trying to understand why human beings look different and why certain civilizations develop differently, Kant applied himself to the same topic in three essays. While these represent the main focus of his work on race, Kant made racist and disparaging remarks in other contexts.

In the first essay, “Of the Different Races of Human Beings” (1775), Kant begins by pointing out that all races are clearly “one and same natural species because they consistently beget fertile children with one another” (*VvRM* 2:429). At the same time, Kant attempts to articulate how race leads to a persisting sub-category of human beings, demonstrated in the hereditary passing on of skin color in necessarily regular ways that are different than, say, the less regular passing on of eye or hair color. He thinks that one can be confident (at this point in his career) that there are four races: the white race, “the

Negro race”, the “Hunnish (Mongolian or Kalmuckian) race”, and the “Hindu or Hindustani race” (*VvRM* 2:432). Based on reports, he goes on to attempt explanations of all races as some blend or offshoot of these four basic races (e.g., he postulates that Native Americans “appear to be a Hunnish race which has not yet fully adapted” (*VvRM* 2:433). Kant then argues – based on the science of his day – that these variations of the human species are best explained by “germs” or “seeds,” which are “natural predispositions” lying in wait in every subspecies of a kind. His thinking here is teleological, namely, that there are certain features of kinds of organisms that develop toward a certain end which is distinctive of a species in terms of an original purpose it is there to serve (in this Kant is in line with Aristotle, though his views change once he develops his critical philosophy 15 years later). It is here, where he then applies this theory to explain what could be the reason that certain races persist in various parts of the world. Far from Kant at his best, the worst version of him is on display here, where he – ostensibly in a scientific way – critiques all the races and ranks them with whites being the most superior. A particularly haunting line, one among many from this early essay, is:

Incidentally, humid warmth is beneficial to the robust growth of animals in general and, in short, this results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple, but who, given the abundant provision of his mother land, is lazy, soft, and trifling. (*VvRM* 2:438)

In the second essay, “Determination of the Concept of a Human Race” (1785), written 10 years later and in the same year as the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant shows himself to be covering much familiar ground from the first essay. He continues to think (in contrast to many in his day) that all races are the same species or kind due to their ability to procreate. However, the “necessarily hereditary” character of race continues to indicate, Kant thinks, that race or skin color is necessarily serving some pre-established purpose by a nature that does nothing without reason. Thus, even while claiming that all races share those “properties that belong to the species itself” (*BBMR* 8:99), Kant continues to categorize four principal races as distinct from each other in ways that call for a search regarding the underlying reason. As in the first essay, Kant thinks that geography plays a key role in why certain races exist, surmising that skin color might serve a purpose in helping humanity survive better in certain climates. If these descriptions were morally neutral, then the story would be a different one. But here too we see Kant’s racist biases influence his analysis, for example where he speaks as follows:

Now already the strong odor of the Negroes, which cannot be helped through any cleanliness, gives cause for conjecturing that their skin removes much *phlogiston* from the blood and that nature must have organized this skin so that the blood could *dephlogistize itself* in them through the skin in a far greater measure than happens in us, where that is for the most part the task of the lungs. (*BBMR*, 8:103)

Even while a member of the same species and capable of reasoning (and, hence, possessing autonomy and dignity), Kant’s philosophy of race opens a door within his theory to evaluate races in normatively weighty ways. In this essay, Kant remains at the physical level of description and backs away from comments that pertain to the moral readiness of certain races. Even though less racist relative to more extreme views amongst his contemporaries, some of whom thought that the races should be forcibly separated

and that different races were a totally different species, Kant here anything but a beacon of progress. On the contrary, his reputation and blatantly evaluative stance that belittles non-white races (even if only physically) added to the already dominant view in central Europe that the white race was special relative to all others.

In the third essay, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (1788), Kant is responding mostly to an attack on him in an essay by Georg Forster, who had travelled on Captain James Cook’s second world voyage. Forster critiqued Kant in particular for thinking that he could speak about natural scientific subjects from the armchair, letting theory precede actual observation. Even though Kant rested many of his claims on the reports offered by travelers such as Forster, Kant believed that we must let theory guide our observations if they are to have any hope of being systematic. Kant in this essay is mostly on the defensive when it comes to the topic of race, trying to argue against Forster’s objections. Kant’s racism remains on full display as he justifies the use of slavery with certain races and repeats his position that amongst the races a clear hierarchy obtains, which carries moral-normative weight in so far as the inner readiness to certain activity in non-white races is critiqued. The pro-slavery line comes in a footnote where he endorses an anti-abolitionist text, connecting it with his evaluations of certain races as being ill-suited for the sort of activity of the white race.

Still, there is strong evidence that Kant’s views on race changed. Pauline Kleingeld is most famous for arguing this position in her essay, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race” (2007). She presents evidence that his use of a hierarchy and judgment of non-white races as incapable of certain activity vanishes from his thinking by the mid-1790s. And in its stead, one finds Kant arguing against colonialism and slavery explicitly. There are many references in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), for instance, to the fact that no one is permitted to be the property of another (*MS* 6:241, 270, and 283). He also in other texts criticizes the use of slavery as “absolutely contrary to cosmopolitan right” (*VAZeF*, 23:174). All these views are clear reversals of his earlier views according to which non-whites could be enslaved and were incapable of certain forms of activity and culture. Kant in the mid-1790s suddenly defends the rights of all individuals based on the same principles and limits his theory to being only as “theoretical” knowledge with no claims to being “pragmatic” (*Anth.* 7:120) / “*pragmatisch*”. None of these claims could stand under his former views since entering into contracts, having the right to self-sovereignty (regardless of race), and explicit denunciations of chattel slavery all require the view that human beings are – pragmatically and rationally – on equal footing. In short, Kleingeld and many other interpreters view his earlier racism as revealing the early Kant to have been a bad Kantian. Still, this interpretation (namely, that he changed his views for the better) is by no means the only one. Many, like Huaping Lu-Adler in her new book on the subject, think that Kant’s racism runs deeper and that his recanting of it is not as radical as others argue.

Because of the renewed focus on racism in the United States since the presidency of Donald Trump and the outbreak of nation-wide protests in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd and other black and brown Americans, this topic – while nothing new in Kant scholarship – has become a central area of debate at present. When it comes to evaluating Kant’s legacy, it is perhaps the leading question at present in the North American context given its history with slavery. The Goethe Institute would be wise to

consult as many experts as possible from diverse perspectives on this issue in the form of a video with discussions and testimonials, or a panel discussion that has some leading names in the field. Below in section 3, I provide names and emails for those who could ideally serve in this context. In my opinion, they are: Profs. Lucy Allais (Johns Hopkins University), Desmond “Des” Jagnmohan (University of California, Berkeley), Huaping Lu-Adler (Georgetown University), and Leif Wenar (Stanford University).

3.f Rights and a Just Society – *Rechte und eine Gerechte Gesellschaft*

For Kant, there was a difference between a right [*Recht*] action and an ethical one. This explains the two parts of his *Metaphysics of Morals*, the first of which is the *Doctrine of Right* and the second, the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Kant defines a right action as follows:

Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone’s freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone’s freedom in accordance with a universal law. (*MS* 6:230)

Eine jede Handlung ist *recht*, die oder nach deren Maxime die Freiheit der Willkür eines jeden mit jedermanns Freiheit nach einem allgemeinen Gesetze zusammen bestehen kann.

The idea of right, therefore, has the categorical imperative as its source (see 3.b above). If one’s actions are consistent with the freedom of everyone else, then they are right. With right action, Kant thinks that we are concerned exclusively with how one’s actions will influence or be influenced by the freedom of others:

The concept of right [...] has to do, *first*, only with the external and indeed practical relation of one person to another, insofar as their actions, as deeds, can have (direct or indirect) influence on each other. (*MS* 6:230)

Der Begriff des Rechts, sofern er sich auf eine ihm korrespondierende Verbindlichkeit bezieht (d.i. der moralische Begriff derselben), betrifft *erstlich* nur das äußere und zwar praktische Verhältnis einer Person gegen eine andere.

It is for this reason that Kant also thinks we can employ coercion and force to make sure that everyone obeys laws of right. That might sound funny at first. Doesn’t the hindering of another person’s will thwart their freedom? But here Kant thinks that force is merely the negation of a negation. That is, there is no contradiction in inhibiting someone from acting, if her intended action aims to harm the rights of others. It is consistent with the principle of right, in other words, to stop and punish those who undermine a free society by acting in ways that are inconsistent with the freedom of others.

What about virtue? For Kant, virtue is not about adhering to certain behavior that allows the freedom of other individuals, but about the setting of an intention (or “end” in Kantian language). And the setting of an intention is ethical if it leads to the flourishing of oneself or someone else in ways that are beneficial but not necessarily required by law. With rights, by contrast, we can require that everyone obey them by threat of punishment. For example, we have laws against stealing the property of others. If there were not this

law with its connected threats, then there would be no way to ensure possession of property at all. Thus, not stealing is a right action, and stealing is an action that we ought to punish and hinder since it is inconsistent with the wills of other human beings. But what about helping my neighbor with projects that make her happy? For Kant, helping one's neighbor is not a question of right, but rather virtue. It would be virtuous to help one's neighbor, but one cannot force anyone to do so. In fact, it would undermine the virtue of the action if one could force others to help this way. That is, part of the goodness of this action is that it is freely chosen. If someone were merely helping a neighbor out of fear of being punished if one refused to help, it would lose its moral significance and not be as good an action (according to Kant).

It is in developing his theory of right in 1797 that one understands why some think that Kant must have changed his mind on race (see 3.d above). When presenting a general outline of the work, Kant summarizes the three main actions that one ought to follow in order to form a just society:

1) *Be an honorable human being (honeste vive). Rightful honor (honestas iuridica)* consists in asserting one's worth as a human being in relation to others, a duty expressed by the saying, 'Do not make yourself a mere means for others but be at the same time an end for them.' This duty will be explained later as obligation from the right of humanity in our own person (*Lex iusti*).

2) *Do not wrong anyone (neminem laede)* even if, to avoid doing so, you should have to stop associating with others and shun all society (*Lex iuridica*).

3) (If you cannot help associating with others), *enter* into society with them in which each can keep what is his. (*MS* 6:236-237)

1) *Sei ein rechtlicher Mensch (honeste vive). Die rechtliche Ehrbarkeit (honestas iuridica)* besteht darin: im Verhältnis zu Anderen seinen Wert als den eines Menschen zu behaupten, welche Pflicht durch den Satz ausgedrückt wird: >>Mache dich anderen nicht zum bloßen Mittel, sondern sei für sie zugleich Zweck.<< Diese Pflicht wird im folgenden als Verbindlichkeit aus dem Rechte der Menschheit in unserer eigenen Person erklärt werden (*Lex iusti*).

2) *Tue niemanden Unrecht (neminem laede)*, und solltest du darüber auch aus aller Verbindung mit andern herausgehen und alle Gesellschaft meiden müssen (*Lex iuridica*).

3) *Tritt* (wenn du das letztere nicht vermeiden kannst) in eine Gesellschaft mit Anderen, in welcher Jedem das Seine erhalten werden kann.

And (connected with 3.a above) right after enumerating these, Kant goes on to describe that "*There is only one innate right,*" namely:

Freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity. (*MS* 6:237)

Freiheit (Unabhängigkeit von eines Anderen nötiger Willkür), sofern sie mit jedes Anderen Freiheit nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz zusammen bestehen kann, ist dieses einzige, ursprüngliche, jedem Menschen, kraft seiner Menschheit, zustehende Recht.

Thus, Kant enumerates that every single person ought to treat themselves as more than a mere means, which means not allowing others to treat us in such a way. And we cannot harm others, in particular when it comes to harming their freedom. This brings us into a state of inner equality with all rational beings. And a few pages later, Kant notes that this quality of humanity has nothing at all to do with sex or race, but rather with an inner state as a rational being:

In the doctrine of duties a human being can and should be represented in terms of his capacity for freedom, which is wholly supersensible, and so too merely in terms of his *humanity*, his personality independent of physical attributes (*homo noumenon*), as distinguished from the same subject represented as affected by physical attributes, a *human being* (*homo phaenomenon*). (MS 6:239)

Da in der Lehre von den Pflichten der Mensch nach der Eigenschaft seines Freiheitsvermögens, welches ganz übersinnlich ist, also auch bloß nach seiner *Menschheit*, als von physischen Bestimmungen unabhängiger Persönlichkeit (*homo noumenon*), vorgestellt werden kann und soll, zum Unterschiede von ebendenselben, aber als mit jenen Bestimmungen behafteten Subjekt, dem *Menschen* (*homo phaenomenon*).

On the page following, Kant explicitly denounces slavery, claiming that it is an illegitimate form of rightful relation between human beings. This is because it cannot be made consistent with universal right and the innate right of every rational being, namely, to be free of the whim of any other. Thus, we see that for Kant a just society is one in which the freedom of all is protected.

Right action, consequently, pertains to how individuals treat each other through their actions in a free society. Moreover, Kant thought that a just society presented a microcosm of what is going on at the cosmopolitan level of *many* societies (or nations) influencing one another. Essentially, Kant thought that the same principle that determines what is the right action of individuals also explains what the rights of one nation are relative to another.

In his essay, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant enumerates a number of articles that would ensure that a world of nations could create a just world order. In this context, Kant explains that just as we must act to respect the free choices of individuals, so too must we respect the freedom and sovereignty of other nations. It is in this context that Kant speaks out against oppressive colonialism. Beyond merely allowing other nations to live in peace, Kant goes on to say that a truly cosmopolitan world order requires that we act towards each other in a way that is universally hospitable. Kant is careful to say that this does not mean that we must treat every citizen of a foreign nation as if they are a citizen of our own nation or even as a guest, but it does mean that we cannot treat others with hostility. Here Kant presents a harsh judgment against how Europeans have been treating the sovereignty of other nations:

If one compares with this the *inhospitable* behavior of civilized, especially commercial, states in our part of the world, the injustice they show in *visiting* foreign lands and peoples (which with them is tantamount to *conquering* them) goes to horrifying lengths. (*ZeF* 8:358)

Vergleicht man hiermit das *inhospitable* Betragen der gesiteten, vornehmlich handeltreibenden Staaten unseres Weltteils, so geht die Ungerechtigkeit, die sie in dem *Besuche* fremder Länder und Völker (welches ihnen mit dem *Erobern* derselben für einerlei gilt) beweisen, bis zum Erschrecken weit.

Thus, just as we are not allowed to dominate each other as slaves, so too are we not allowed, as nations, to conquer other nations (regardless of what we think of their culture). Kant in this and other essays makes the case that while war has been an inevitable part of humanity's history, we – as rational beings – are obligated to cease war entirely for the same reason we are obligated to respect our neighbor's person and property. In this way, Kant develops a picture of how a cosmopolitan world and just confederation of societies might look in which war is no more. War is not the answer, instead, it is the gradual development of a “*state of nations*” that “would finally encompass all the nations of the earth” (*ZeF* 8:357) / “*der zuletzt alle Völker der Erde befassen würde.*” Herein, one can already catch glimmers of the ideal that was behind the forming of the United Nations.

For Kant, the just society was rooted in his theory of freedom and personal autonomy. And while individual rights play an outsized role, it is easy to see why his theory was an inspiration to one of the most important political philosophers of the 20th Century, namely, John Rawls. In Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), he takes himself to be building off of a Kantian framework in which we not only respect the rights of others, but furthermore employ reason to construct a society that is just in ways that makes it fair for all. Using a thought experiment referred to as the “original position,” Rawls imagines beings who forget their identities in the world and take up a position behind a “veil of ignorance.” From behind this veil, they must establish the laws of a society without knowing who they will be once put back into the society (i.e., once they are again aware of what social status, race, sex, and job they have therein). Since they do not know who they are, they must form the laws so that, once they are put back into the world, they believe they could, subsequently, endorse the society as a fair one. The influence of the categorical imperative on Rawls is clear here. Those who are trying to think of what a just society will look like, must abstract away from themselves and think of what would create the most consistent and fairly distributed society, regardless of their own interests or preferences. The question is: what would a rational being decide is fair for all agents, if one were deciding from a detached standpoint? One of the most influential political theories, therefore, has Kant's fingerprints all over it.

3.g The Three (really: Four) Central Questions of Philosophy – *Die Hauptfrage der Philosophie*

Kant is famous for his “three” questions of philosophy. At the end of the first *Critique*, he says that these are:

1. What can I know?
2. What should I do?
3. What may I hope? (A805/B833)

1. Was kann ich wissen?
2. Was soll ich tun?
3. Was darf ich hoffen?

While these are certainly the most referenced by Kant himself, he sometimes would add a fourth question to the list, for example, in his *Jäsche Logic*, where he noted that the fourth question was: “4. What is man?” (*Log* 9: 25) / “Was ist der Mensch?”

These questions are duly investigated in Kant’s works and show just how broad his philosophy was. The first deals with questions of epistemology and metaphysics. The second is concerned with ethics and morality. The final question leads into areas of philosophy of religion and theology. The fourth, less famous, question then turns to human nature. Though these questions form a skeleton of Kant’s works, there is little territory that Kant did not cover. Indeed, beyond working on philosophy, Kant was fascinated by the natural sciences. A theory of Kant’s about how the solar system formed is still widely accepted today as the best model for understanding how this occurs. It is called the Kant-Laplace nebular hypothesis.

Still, Kant remains the most famous for his question about how it is that we can know things at all (see section 1 above), which started his critical philosophy off in the first place. With his inquiries into what the conditions for possible experience are, Kant set off to develop a unified theory that makes sense of the unity of human experience. Along the way, he started off a historical epoch in the Western tradition, which is now referred to as German Idealism. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, F.W.J. Schelling, and G.W.F. Hegel continued to work out how it is that the mind relates to the world thanks to Kant’s Copernican Revolution.