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Rationale for a Mini-Symposium on Kant on Cognition

Kant's position in the history of philosophy is unique in that despite their radically different methods, terminologies, and positions, many of the most important schools of thought in both analytic and continental philosophy over the past two hundred years have, in one way or another, a common source in Kant and are reactions to Kant. One popular point of departure in Kant has been his assertion of *synthetic a priori cognition*, where much attention has been paid both to the analytic-synthetic distinction (e.g. in the logical positivists and Quine) and to the possibility of what, if anything, can be established a priori (e.g. in Philip Kitcher, Richard Rorty, Lawrence Bonjour and, again, Quine). Surprisingly, much less explicit attention has been paid to the third crucial term, cognition (*Erkenntnis*), and to exactly how it is to be understood.

It has been quite common to take cognition in Kant to be more or less equivalent to knowledge, and hence to interpret Kant as an arch-epistemologist, responsible for synthesizing the rationalist and empiricist epistemological traditions. This view was perhaps especially encouraged by Norman Kemp Smith's influential English translation of the first *Critique*, which translated both '*Wissen*' and '*Erkenntnis*' as knowledge. Now, if '*Erkenntnis*' just is knowledge, then Kemp Smith is correct, but by not marking the different terms, he made it impossible for English readers to decide for themselves whether cognition and knowledge might be distinct. Other more recent interpretations have picked up on the possibility that Kant's focus is, at the very least, much broader than knowledge, with Sellars,

McDowell and Brandom for example, and also German Kant-scholars such as Gerold Prauss, arguing that Kant's basic interest in the *Critique of Pure Reason* lies in developing a theory of intentionality (grounded in normative vocabulary).

While there is much to recommend in this broadening of perspectives, what is still lacking from these discussions, and what would help decide among competing interpretations, is a more focused analysis of what Kant says about *cognition* in particular. Since the primary focus of the first *Critique* is on investigating the possibility of synthetic a priori cognition, a proper understanding of the very subject matter of this seminal work, along with its most basic argument, hangs on a proper answer to this question.

In light of this situation, what is needed is a sustained investigation of the nature of cognition in Kant that is based on detailed textual exegesis and careful philosophical argument. Moreover, it would be helpful to have not simply one more scholar's particular perspective, but contributions from several scholars with different philosophical perspectives, exegetical frameworks, and historical sensitivities. Eric Watkins and Marcus Willaschek (Professors of Philosophy at UCSD and the Goethe Universität Frankfurt, respectively) have jointly written a paper, titled "Kant on Cognition and Knowledge" that provides a cohesive argument showing that and why cognition, for Kant, must be distinct from knowledge, both as he understood it and as it has traditionally been understood (as justified true belief). They argue, instead, that cognition is a mental state through which one is aware

of the existence and (at least some of the) general features of objects. Unlike knowledge, it does not require either an act of assent or (an objectively sufficient) justification.

Further, Clinton Tolley (Associate Professor at UCSD) has written a paper, titled “Kant on the Place of Cognition in the Progression of our Representations”, that analyzes cognition from the point of view of the broader systematic context of Kant’s philosophy of mind. Tolley argues that Kant thinks of cognition as occupying a particular, intermediate place within a ‘progression’ (*Stufenleiter*) of our mind’s representational activities. This runs from basic sensory representations, through consciousness of them, to the cognition of real objects through these sensory representations, and then from here on up to highly complex rational systematic knowledge. In this way, he illuminates the exact nature of cognition itself, by showing how it differs both from knowledge but also from other mental representations (such as sensation, intuition, perception, consciousness).

By arguing in these distinct, but complementary ways for the difference between cognition and knowledge and for thinking of cognition primarily in representational, and less in epistemological terms, these two papers make a significant contribution not only to Kant scholarship, but also to clarifying a foundational issue that is still very much alive in contemporary philosophy.