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KANT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MANAGEMENT: A Reply to Ian Hunter

When Kant wrote the "Streit der Fakultäten" in 1794 (publ. 1798) he rightly assumed that his readers had a fair idea of his highly differentiated notion of reason. After all, the three Critiques, which had been published by then (1781; 1788; 1790) and were widely read, had as their goal the delimitation of what sort of job different kinds of reason are fit to do. Today, Kant would not be able to make such an assumption, if Ian Hunter's "The Intolerance of Reason" is an indication of current readings. Certainly, the notion of reason that comes across is one that suggests that Kant claims a security of truth as a result of reasoning, a claim theology and other utilitarian faculties cannot and should not make. To be fair to Hunter, this impression is sharpened probably by the fact that "The Intolerance of Reason" is an abbreviated version of Hunter's Hinkley lecture given at John Hopkins University in July 1995.

A broad reading of Kant suggests that he makes no such claims. Indeed, he is at pains to show that philosophy, unlike logic and mathematics, can never achieve truth in any strict sense. What distinguishes philosophy from theology is not that the former achieves certitude while the latter does not, but rather that the former is in a position to forever revise its findings with the help of reasoning, while theology is not, at least not as far as its descriptions of God are concerned.

Hunter's paper opens with the appropriate epistemic emphasis in Kant's notion of truth as the "free exercise of reason." However, this methodological perspective gives way in the remainder of the paper to a reason merely wearing "the mantle of reasonableness," a "simulacrum of unified reason" seen "less in pursuit of truth than a regimen" that imposes a certain "relation to truth" as a discipline. To make the point of Kant's "universal truth" and "intolerant rationalism" more persuasive, Hunter homogenises Kant's reason. Yet it is the homogeneity of reason which is precisely what Kant set out to disrupt over the decade preceding "The Contest of Faculties."

One does not have to pay "obeisance" to a romanticised Kant as heroic defender of philosophical truth. Nor on the other hand is there much point in rehearsing forms of Kantianism or empiricist readings which do little to elucidate Kant's procedures. It is pointless to repeat Kant's unenlightened views on women or to pay attention to his silly idea that the inhabitants of other

planets are morally superior to us in proportion to their distance from earth, a claim praised by Bertrand Russell, if only for its terrestrial modesty. I suggest that Kant's methods of reasoning, disputed as their validity may be, do nevertheless have a lot more to offer to contemporary thinking than the perspective of Kant's relation to the State reveals. This is supported by the recent revival of the third Critique in Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Lesson on the Analytic of the Sublime* or Derrida's use of transcendental or quasitranscendental moves in establishing his infrastructures (difference, metaphoricity, supplementarity, iterability, etc.) Hunter does acknowledge Derrida's debt to Kant, but when he does so he deplors it as a "Kantian longing." Instead, if we shift our attention from such contents as the noumenal and the unrepresentable towards ways and forms of reasoning we can see how Derrida profits from his very focus of attack.

What seems to be important to note here is the differential character of kinds of reason. What then are Kant's reasoning procedures? Even a simplified summary makes their unification difficult. Determining reason subsumes items under closed schemata which in their "purest," that is formally empty, manifestation allows for a priori logical deduction. Here truth can be achieved and secured. Kant could not avail himself of Goedel's two incompleteness theorems, though it should be remembered that Goedel shows that the truth of certain propositions within any logical system cannot be proven, rather than that we are unable to attach truth values to them.

According to Kant, the security of mathematical and a priori logical truth is not within the reach of philosophical reasoning, including that of transcendental procedures. From the fact that "mathematical concepts make their concepts" while philosophy only explains its concepts (A730/B758), follows that truth claims of a mathematical kind "can never be satisfied" and merely "divert philosophy from its true purpose, namely to expose the illusions of a reason that forgets its limits." Transcendental reasoning, that is reason addressing the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, Kant's main procedure, must not assume that "accepted premises could be securely relied upon" and that there is "no need of constantly returning to them" to check whether by inferential processes we have introduced defects which require that we determine our principles more precisely or "change them entirely." (A735f./B763f.) Nothing could be further from "intolerant rationalism." Is Kant being intolerant for defending this procedure against a utilitarianism backed by a censorious government?

Why is Kant so modest in his claims as to philosophical truth? His caution follows from his earlier conclusions that no concept, outside logical a priori reasoning, can be fully secured, for "the limits of the concept are never

assured" and "the limits of my concept are always in doubt" (A728/B756), a methodological theme which has recently been revived in Derrida's writing. Indeed, Derrida's major contribution is arguably his continuous and elaborate assault on the foundations of conceptuality from his early work in *Speech and Phenomena* and "Difference" to his most recent statements concerning justice, marxism, and the visual arts, an attack which resumes the Kantian thought towards the end of the first Critique.

Nor, on the other hand, is reason merely a subjective pursuit of truth "construed as spontaneous individual critical reflection", which is "blind to the social and disciplinary conditions of his species of reason," as Hunter puts it. "Reason," Kant might reply, towards the end of the first Critique, "has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, of whom each one must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objections or even his veto" (A738f./766f.). To read the Kantian "I" as individualist is to attach to it a Romanticist subjectivity which is at war with Kant's species emphasis. Terry Eagleton's chapter on Kant in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is probably the most extreme expression of this interpretation. Here we should remember Kant's distinction between an "objective" transcendental unity of apperception accessible only to reasoning at a highly general level and "the subjective unity" of individual consciousness. "To one man ... a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing." Only at the transcendental level does reason address objective validity. By contrast, "the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not ... necessarily and universally valid" (B139f.). So much for Kant's subjectivism.

At the same time, Kant's main tool of reasoning, transcendental procedures, can only ever generate arguments in need of continual historical readjustment. This picture is complicated further by the application of transcendental reason to social norms in the Critique of Practical Reason and to the redefinition of teleology in the third Critique. In the former, Kant empties specific rules of conduct as presented in theology and Law to arrive at formal ethics. Utilitarian rules such as "do not steal" are replaced by the formally empty imperative of "act in such a manner that the maxim of your action can become a principle of general legislation." The distinction between utilitarian rule operative in some faculties of the university and the exploration of reason in philosophy, which plays such a central role in the second Critique, furnishes an important backdrop for the "Contest." Without it, neither the separation of different tasks nor the special methods of reasoning in philosophy, which Kant defends, make much sense. Today, differentiated critical reasoning proves once more to be an inconvenient luxury. In the digitized, global market, Philosophy, the Humanities, and the Social Sciences are pressured to play the role of cultural

buffoons providing light reading, and perhaps some music and theatre criticism, or of statisticians offering market trend simulations and a clinically restored workforce.

In the Critique of Judgment, Kant introduces the notion of an open-ended teleology, an interpretive schema within which we judge complex phenomena by altering the frame and rules of judgment as we meet new interpretive hurdles. At the centre of his argument is reflective reason. Both reflective reason and open-ended teleology are major contributions to interpretive procedures. While determining reason merely subsumes items under given rules, reflective reason as employed in aesthetic judgments or judgments of the complexities of nature proceeds in a fundamentally different fashion. Its task is to subsume observations under a rule which is not available prior to the reflection on its object. Hence the rules of reflective judgment are given only as an empty schema which we must adapt step by step to the requirement of our interpretation. (Critique of Judgment, 69ff.) This part of Kant's reasoning apparatus has spawned an impressive chain of theories, and the entire hermeneutic tradition up to Heidegger and, arguably to Derrida, can be regarded as a sequence of modifications of this reflective schema.

Kant defends the investigation of methods of reason as the specialised business of philosophy. Other faculties do other things. Theology, for example, is not primarily methodologically oriented, but as far as reason is concerned derives its insights from practical reason, moral laws, and the State. If it claims philosophical forms of reasoning in order to ground its activities in the existence of God, Kant shows that it must fail. "I inevitably believe in the existence of God," he writes, yet "my conviction is not logical, but moral certainty" (A828f./B856f.). If theology employs reason in its logical, empirical, or transcendental senses, "it leaps over ... the wall of the church" (Opus Postumum, VII,334). Is he being intolerant here or are there reasons to support his position?

Theology cannot employ a priori reason, Kant argues, because its main premise, God, cannot be stipulated as a logically controlled definition. If it did, it would defeat its own purpose. Nor can theology employ empirical reason, since "all knowledge ends when we come to the limit of the sensible world" (Grundlegung, 2nd ed.,p.127). For Kant, "all knowledge arising out of reason is derived either from concepts or from the construction of concepts," from philosophical or mathematical (logical) forms of reasoning. (A837/B865) Since faith lies outside the domains of reason, Kant suggests that, as far as reasoning is concerned, theology is bound to deal with the practical reason of morality, with the social rather than with the divine. For the Philosophy faculty, on the

other hand, Kant claims the right to investigate the very possibility of reasoning itself. To show that Kant is being intolerant in stipulating these limits requires a demonstration that these limits are wrong. This is a difficult task and one which is not undertaken in Hunter's paper.

Kant's transcendental procedure allows for a certain distance from mathematical, empirical, juridical, or theological discourses, not at the same level, horizontally, as it were, but vertically, at a methodological meta-level. This makes the claim of a special critical function within universities and the state, a claim which has been increasingly challenged both by other disciplines, the public and government. Whether the ultimate rejection of this critical function is going to be beneficial to the university or the State is debatable. And when Kant defended his brand of reason he assumed that his readers had a rough idea of its highly differentiated nature. He certainly believed, not so intolerantly it would seem, that the Philosophy faculty should be able to pursue the investigation of methods of reasoning "without let or hindrance."

From a TQM point of view Kant does not score well. His "community service" is limited to research-informed teaching. But was he therefore blind to the socio-political conditions of his theorising? Hunter plays down the threat in King Friedrich Wilhelm's reprimand. While he is right in saying that the "court bureaucracy wanted a university that would train administrators, pastors and teachers," what is missing is a comment on the kind of teachers this implied. In contrast to the tolerance shown by King Frederick the Great, his successor Friedrich Wilhelm II introduced a censorship board charged with the surveillance of clerics and teachers and the punishment of deviance from official Lutheran doctrine. Johann Christoph von Woellner's letter to Kant, written "on his Royal Majesty's most gracious special order" does more than merely suggest that Kant refrain from continuing his "distortion and denigration of Christianity"; it threatens that in case of continuous "reticence," Kant would most certainly face "definite and unpleasant measures." Without tenure, Kant wisely promised to be a most obedient servant and postponed publication of the "Contest" until after the King's death to 1798.