

# Humanities 4: Lecture 14

Immanuel Kant

“Idea for a Universal History”

# Kant's Life



- (1724-1804)
- Born, lived, died in Königsberg, E. Prussia
- Tutor, academic career
- Philosopher & scientist
- Major contributions in several areas of phil.

# Kant's Major Works

- *Critique of Pure Reason (1781)*
- *Critique of Practical Reason (1788)*
- *Critique of Judgment (1790)*

# Kant's Theoretical Philosophy

- Synthesis of Empiricism & Rationalism
- Freedom and Moral Responsibility
  - Threats to freedom
  - Epistemic Humility
- *Critique of Pure Reason* occupies moderate position among Enlightenment thinkers.

# Kant's Practical Philosophy

- Rationalist vs Empiricist
- Emphasis on Duty as motive
- Categorical Imperative
  - vs. Hypothetical Imperative (desire-based)
  - Basic insights: no exceptions, respect man
  - Various formulations
- Reasons vs. desires

# Kant's Aesthetics

- Aesthetic judgments are different in kind from other judgments.
  - Not like knowledge claims or practical principles.
  - Pleasurable, but disinterested.
- New explanation of status of beauty.
  - Not in object.
  - Not in relation to conventional norms.
  - Rather in free play of individual's faculties.

# “Idea for a Universal History”

## Man’s Natural Purpose

- Man has a natural purpose, the development of his reason.
  - In the species, not in the individual, since trial & error is nec.
  - Reason is not man’s only natural purpose, but most important.
  - Man produces everything out of himself.
  - Nature’s “strictest economy” reveals that self-esteem rather than happiness is our ultimate end.
- Two difficulties & resolution
  - Earlier generations exist only for later generations
  - Only later generations profit.
  - Immortality as a species

# The Means

- What are the means for developing man's reason?
  - Antagonism: unsocial sociability
    - Man is social, as this makes him feel more like a man.
    - Man is anti-social, as he wants his own ideas realized.
  - Greatest amount of freedom, consistent with the freedom of all, i.e. just civil constitution, is required for antagonism.
- What does it lead to?
  - Transformations
    - From natural capacity for moral discrimination to pr. principles.
    - From pathologically enforced social union to law-governed social order (moral whole)
  - Just relations between states



# Kant's Political Philosophy

- The most difficult problem in pol. phil.:  
Who is to be given political authority?
  - It must be given to a man, but every man needs a master.
- States relate to each other as individuals do to each other.  
So, antagonism (i.e., war) leads states to form a federation.

# Three Views of History

- What are the possible conceptions of history of the state, according to Kant?
  - Random events until stable system emerges by chance.
  - No rationality in nature and no stability/progress.
  - Nature leads us on a gradual course upwards from lower levels of animality to highest level of humanity.

# Summary

- Nature's purpose is to develop man's rational capacities such that mere animals become members of a moral and political community.
  - No explicit religious narrative (though it can be added).
- History is conceived of as linear and progressive
  - What determines the progressive nature of history is the development of reason.