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.
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.