

New Work on Kant and German Idealism

University of Bergen, Department of Philosophy

June 1st, 2018

Schedule

- 9.00-10.15 Omri Boehm (New School, New York): Descartes on Kantian Doubt and Impossible Thinking
- 10.15-11.30 Anita Leirfall (UiB): Kant on Absolute Space and Negative Magnitude
- 11.30-11.45 Coffee break
- 11.45-13.00 Axel Hutter (LMU München): No Choice: Kant's Critique of Freedom
- 13.00-14.00 Lunch (Café Christie)
- 14.00-15.15 Franz Knappik (UiB): Kantian Views on Mineness and Depersonalization
- 15.15-16.30 Hans Marius Hansteen (UiB): Kants 'Geschichtszeichen' in Light of Rhetoric
- 16.30-16.45 Coffee break
- 16.45-18.00 James Kreines (Claremont McKenna College): Hegel's Absolute Idealism and Metaphysical Definitions of God

Abstracts

Omri Boehm (New School, New York): *Descartes on Kantian Doubt and Impossible Thinking*

Descartes holds a puzzling doctrine, according to which God created the necessary truths. Arguably, accepting this doctrine amounts to embracing the absurd: the meaning of the claim that x depends on will just is that x isn't necessary. Yet, Descartes claims, the necessary truths are necessary because God willed that they be.

In this paper, drawing on some previous work, I argue that this absurd position is absolutely crucial to Descartes rationalism -- specifically, to his embrace of clear and distinct ideas. I therefore turn to reflect on his grounds for accepting this doctrine -- arguing that radical doubt, which, pace Conant generates Kantian rather than Cartesian skepticism, ultimately pushes Descartes to accept the creation of necessary truths.

Anita Leirfall (UiB): *Kant on Absolute Space and Negative Magnitude*

In this paper I will look into Kant's conception of absolute space in his work *Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space* from 1768 in order to see how absolute space is related to his conception of directions, and how the different directions themselves are related. In this regard, I will draw on some of Kant's arguments his work *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* from 1763.

In the *Directions*, Kant maintains that absolute space has a reality [Realität] of its own and as such space is an unanalysable quality. This implies, among others things, that in this context space is not a magnitude that can be determined in the logical, or mathematical, sense the way Leibniz accounted for it. For Kant, absolute space is an ultimate ground [Grund], or foundation, that makes representations of objects, and positions in space, possible. Such a ground is not an empirical entity, hence it is not perceivable.

Further, Kant argues that the system of directions is related to absolute space and that the way the different directions are related is by standing in reciprocal positions. According to Kant, such reciprocal relations are uncovered through an analysis of spatial qualities like directionality and incongruency. In contrast to Leibniz logicist approach, Kant considers both directionality and incongruence as real relations, that is, relations that are not purely logical. Also, the system of relations stands in an immediate relation to absolute space as real.

In order to figure out what relation there is between absolute space and the system of directions, in addition to what relation there is between the directions themselves, I shall draw on some of Kant's arguments in the *Negative Magnitudes* from 1763. In this work Kant refers to "unanalysable concepts of real grounds" and he relates these concepts to what he names negative magnitudes. According to Kant, negative magnitudes are characterised by standing in a real opposition. A real opposition occurs when "two predicates of a thing are opposed to each other, but not through the law of contradiction". (*Negative Magnitudes*, 2: 171) When standing in a real opposition, negative magnitudes "reciprocally cancel an equal amount in each other". (*Negative Magnitudes*, 2: 174) Also, negative magnitudes are intensive magnitudes and as such they are measured in degrees.

The paper has a negative and a positive part:

(1) Kant's critique of a concept of freedom that understands freedom as choice (*libertas indifferentiae*). My claim here: This critique provides one of the best arguments for Kant's transcendental idealism.

(2) Kant's positive concept of freedom as building character. My claim here: despite being responsible for one's own character, the moral character is nothing we could "choose". Instead of choosing our character more or less "instantaneously" we have to build our character through time.

Franz Knappik (UiB): *Post-Kantian views on mineness and depersonalization*

It is widely held that conscious states have a qualitative character, and are experienced by a subject. But is that subject always, or at least normally, also conscious of those states as being its own states? Does the subject experience a sense of "mineness" for those states? After rehearsing different answers to this question that have been proposed in the wake of Kant's discussions of self-consciousness, I examine an argument in favour of the view that consciousness normally, but not always, involves mineness. This argument draws on the psychopathological phenomenon of depersonalization. Depersonalization is a relatively frequent disorder, in which patients feel massively detached from themselves and their environment—they say that they don't feel like being themselves anymore, that everything seems unreal, etc. Depersonalization was much studied by late 19th century and early 20th century French and German authors, but has been widely neglected since. According to the argument I discuss, depersonalization is best explained in terms of a lack of a sense of mineness that is present in healthy consciousness. Against this view, I argue that explanations of depersonalization as a lack of mineness have significant shortcomings. Instead, I propose an alternative explanation, which is compatible with different views on mineness. This explanation is based on the idea that many intentional states employ non-conceptual I-representations (e.g. because they are "reflexive states" (Recanati 2007) with implicit de-selements), and that these representations may be impaired in depersonalization.

Hans Marius Hansteen (UiB): *Kants 'Geschichtszeichen' in Light of Rhetoric*

Kant's philosophy of history can be understood as an attempt at giving a secular answer to the overarching question "what can I hope?". "Geschichtszeichen" (historical sign) is a key concept in this context: I examine what Kant does when he interprets the public reactions to the French Revolution as such a sign.

James Kreines (Claremont McKenna College): *Hegel's Absolute Idealism and Metaphysical Definitions of God*

Hegel is an absolute idealist. But there are serious difficulties with regard to explaining, first, the philosophical content of this idealism, and second, how it is supposed to be supported by philosophical argument. I find a key in what Hegel has to say about other "metaphysical definitions of God", especially in Spinoza and Aristotle. Attention to Aristotle in particular highlights a distinction between two kinds of metaphysical priority. And this will allow understanding of Hegel's absolute idealism, specifically as the claim that a kind of self-determining thought is metaphysically prior (in the most important sense) to being.