



BonJour, Kant and the A Priori

Kurt Mosser
University of Dayton

Disputatio No. 7

November 1999

DOI: 10.2478/disp-1999-0010

ISSN: 0873-626X

BONJOUR, KANT, AND THE A PRIORI

Kurt Mosser

In his 1985 *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Laurence Bonjour presented a compelling and articulate defense of a coherence theory of knowledge.¹ Following what he called a “dialectical” strategy, he began by indicating the central issue at stake: the justification of empirical knowledge claims. He then argued that no available foundationalist or coherentist account could provide that justification, and that all such attempts either end in sheer dogmatism, or succumb to skepticism. After a lengthy critical discussion, he turned to developing a argument for his own view, combining a correspondence theory of truth with a coherence theory of justification. He further suggested that such a view, to be adequate, must include a commitment to the *a priori* — indeed, the synthetic *a priori* — while recognizing that this could not be described as a pure coherence theory. However, this suggestion was relegated to an appendix, and put forward rather gingerly by claiming only that skepticism about the synthetic *a priori* was “by no means as intellectually mandatory as it is often thought to be” (SEK: 211).

In a subsequent series of papers, which form the basis of his recent *In Defense of Pure Reason*, Bonjour has pursued this aspect of his argument much further.² Again following a “dialectical” approach, he criticizes at length both moderate (represented by Hume and Kant, among others) and radical (chiefly Quine) empiricists, and then defends a view he calls “moderate rationalism,” which includes as an essential component a commitment to the *a priori*, thus offering a defense for the rational, albeit fallible, insight into necessity that the other approaches cannot provide. The epistemic stakes are quite high here, and Bonjour concludes that any epistemological view that fails to include the synthetic *a priori* cannot succeed, generating skepticism of greater or lesser virulence, and risking “intellectual suicide” (5; 99), the loss of

¹ Cambridge: Harvard University Press. All further references to this text are hereafter indicated by “SEK,” and given parenthetically.

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; all parenthetical citations, unless otherwise noted, are to this text. The earlier papers are “Toward a Moderate Rationalism,” *Philosophical Topics* vol. 23 (1995), pp. 47-78; “Against Naturalized Epistemology,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol. XIX (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 283-300; and “A Rationalist Manifesto,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* supplementary vol. 18 (1992), pp. 53-88.

“cognitive sanity” (128), “irrationality and intellectual chaos” (138), and “giving up rational thought altogether” (152).

Any discussion of the synthetic *a priori* must include an examination of the views of Kant, who was not only the first to claim that synthetic judgements *could* be *a priori*, but took the questions of whether such judgements could occur, and if so how, to be central to his revolutionary approach to metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Bonjour recognizes this need to take Kant’s account into consideration, and devotes a section of the first chapter of *In Defense of Pure Reason* to Kant’s views; furthermore, no philosopher is mentioned in the text more than Kant, with the (possible) exception of Quine. Unfortunately, Bonjour so badly misunderstands Kant’s philosophical view that his critique of it cannot be accepted. What makes this something more than a relatively idle exercise in the history of philosophy is that his rejection of Kant’s theoretical philosophy forces Bonjour to abandon his most powerful ally in defending the very views he puts forth. Elsewhere, I have argued that 1) Bonjour and Kant largely agree on what an adequate epistemology must look like in its outlines, namely, the combination of a correspondence theory of truth, a coherence theory of justification, and a commitment to the synthetic *a priori*; 2) Bonjour’s dialectical strategy fails to persuade because of a lack of positive arguments for his own position; and 3) for sound epistemological reasons, Bonjour should find the kind of argumentative strategies Kant deploys considerably more attractive than he does.³ Here I want to focus on the specifics of Bonjour’s reading of Kant’s views — particularly those found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* — in order both to document the inaccuracies and ambiguities of that reading, and to provide further evidence for the claim that, on the basis of a misguided interpretation of Kant’s text, Bonjour fails to embrace precisely the strategic option that would best support his own argument where it is at its weakest.

Bonjour’s interpretation of Kant’s theoretical philosophy can be summarized fairly briefly, although some of its details will be brought out below. In general, he sees Kant’s view as representative of what is described as “moderate empiricism,” a position that incorporates “empiricist skepticism” about the *a priori*, and claims that “*a priori* justification concerns only ‘relations of our ideas’ as opposed to ‘matters of fact’”(17).⁴ While most associate this doctrine with Hume, Bonjour argues that Kant is “in fact much closer to Hume” than he is to rationalism, and that Kant’s views are closer to Hume’s than either Locke’s or Berkeley’s; indeed, this skepticism about the *a priori*, which has become so dominant in Anglo-American philosophy, largely de-

³ “What Do Foundationalists Want? What Do Coherentists Need? Prospects for Bonjour’s Moderate Rationalism” (manuscript).

⁴ Bonjour, as do many, uses “*a priori*” adjectivally, although it has been correctly pointed out by R.P. Wolff and W.H. Werkmeister that Kant uses the term adverbially; hence, we should more precisely speak of, e.g., synthetic judgements put forth or employed *a priori*. See Werkmeister, W.H., *Kant* (LaSalle IL: Open Court, 1980), p. 67, p. 215 n. 42, and the reference there to Wolff.

rives from Hume and Kant (17). Furthermore, for Kant, “the mind so shapes or structures experience as to make the synthetic *a priori* propositions in question invariably come out true *within the experiential realm* (23; BonJour’s emphasis). From this, and because Kant’s synthetic *a priori* claims do not pertain to *an sich* reality, “it appears to be for him [Kant] self-evident that we can have no *a priori* knowledge of independent reality except that which is analytic and ultimately trivial” (25). The synthetic concepts and principles Kant seeks to justify as *a priori* reduce to analytic trivialities, that “*necessarily falsify reality*” (152 n.15; BonJour’s emphasis), and the Kantian view “concedes that the skeptic is right, not only about induction but about knowledge of the real world generally, and then proceeds to offer us a pale substitute for the knowledge thus abandoned” (200 n. 18). In sum, “if Kant had ever faced clearly the problem of the epistemological status of his own philosophical claims, he might have retreated into a more traditional rationalism” (25); having not done so, his project collapses into a uneasy mixture of dogmatism and phenomenism, embracing rather than defeating skepticism, and thus utterly failing to offer any defense for the rational insight into necessity the *a priori* must provide.

Two general themes emerge from this critique, an objection to Kant’s metaphysics, and a more explicitly epistemological concern with the *a priori* and its role in the justification of knowledge claims. BonJour is on much safer ground in putting forth the former, for the ontological claims that result from the perspectival shift in Kant’s “Copernican Revolution” have generated the greatest controversy of any of Kant’s doctrines, including reactions from Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Peirce, and Rorty, among many others. The basic complaint is made succinctly by Hegel:

Thoughts, according to Kant, although universal and necessary determinations, are only our thoughts — separated by an impassable gulf from what the thing *in-itself* is.⁵

On this view, Kant’s is committed to an ontology of two kinds of objects: as they appear to human beings, and objects as they are “in themselves,” or what BonJour refers to as “*an sich* reality.” The obvious problem that results is determining the relationship *between* the two, a problem that becomes insoluble on Kant’s insistence that human beings, in principle, can never know the latter. Thus human beings are forever denied access to reality, quickly leading to skepticism due to the impossibility of bridging the impassable gulf to which Hegel refers.

While this view (now generally referred to as the “two world” interpretation) of Kant’s ontology has a long history, an alternate interpretation (the “two aspect” view) has been put forth that yields several distinct advantages: having better textual support, ascribing to Kant a considerably more defensible view, explaining more plausibly changes Kant makes in his revisions for

⁵ Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopedia* (“Lesser”) *Logic*, § 41 z.2.

the *Critique of Pure Reason's* second edition, and, most important, not attributing a doctrine to Kant that he spends much of his effort in the First *Critique* rejecting. In brief, on the two-aspect reading, a given epistemic subject has two ways of regarding objects, or two different descriptions under which those objects can be taken; only one such description has any cognitive relevance for a being who makes judgements relative to a sensible manifold that is itself passively received within the subjectively contributed forms of time and/or space (e.g., a human being). On this reading, any references to the "thing in itself," or the constituents of *an sich* reality, are cognitively vacuous, and in any case parasitic upon the objects of possible experience, the objects that satisfy those conditions necessary for the epistemic subject to *have* experience and make truth-evaluable judgements about them. As Arthur Melnick has made the point,

the notion of a thing in itself is that concept of an object according to which being an object or a thing would make sense in abstraction from any idea of a (type of subject) and his intellectual organization of his experience.⁶

If, in contrast, we initially take "objects" or "the real" to refer in some sense to objects as they "really" are, and then ask how *our* objects correspond to them, we embrace transcendental illusion, simply making it seem as if we were asking a sensible cognitive question. This is precisely what Kant is getting at when he tells us that the "true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known ... and *in experience no question is ever asked of it*" (A30=B45; my emphasis; cf. A494=B522).⁷

By adopting without discussion the two-world interpretation, BonJour is able to show without much trouble that what one might call Kant's epistemology is inadequate, and thus is forced to yield to skepticism about knowledge of the real world in general. Unfortunately, he does so by imposing a burden on Kant's account that it need not confront, and thus need not discharge; for,

⁶ Melnick, A., *Kant's Analogies of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 152; also see Bird, G., *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962); Prauss, G., *Erscheinung bei Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971); Meerbote, R., "The Unknowability of Things in Themselves" in Beck, L.W. (ed.) *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974); Allison, H., *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Thompson, M., "Things In Themselves," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 57 (1983); Buchdahl, G., "Realism and Realization in a Kantian Light" in Schaper, E. and Vossenkuhl, W. (eds.), *Reading Kant* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

⁷ This is not to deny that the thing-in-itself plays a crucial role in Kant's *practical* philosophy. All references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given parenthetically and in the standard way, citing "A" and "B" pagination for the first and second editions, respectively. In general, I follow Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1929), although I have emended his translation on occasion. All other references to Kant's texts are by volume number to *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902), abbreviated by "Ak.."

on the two-aspect interpretation, there simply is no question of explaining the *cognitive* relationship between objects of possible experience and *an sich* reality. Indeed, explaining that relationship is precisely the obligation Kant argues that neither the empiricism of Locke (and Hume), nor the rationalism of Descartes and Leibniz, can meet; in short, BonJour attributes a view to Kant, and criticizes him for being unable to defend it — transcendental realism — that Kant explicitly rejects. As Kant writes, it is the transcendental realist

who afterwards plays the role of empirical idealist. After wrongly supposing that objects of the senses, if they are to be external, must have an existence by themselves, and independently of the senses, he finds that, judged from this point of view, all our sensuous representations are inadequate to establish their actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] (A369).

BonJour argues, in spite of what Kant quite specifically denies, that he must provide an account of how the epistemic subject has cognitive access to that which has been stripped of the very conditions that would make it an object of possible experience, or an element of a possible cognitive judgement. Kant's own view, in contrast, is that the epistemic subject contributes a set of universal and necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, and that any account of empirical judgements must recognize and justify that contribution. This in turn leads to the denial that we can have experience of the external world without that subject employing some theoretical or conceptual apparatus: a view BonJour himself exploits in criticizing at length foundationalist arguments that rely, surreptitiously or not, on "the given" (see SEK: Chapter Four *passim.*, esp. pp 77-78).⁸

While I think it is clear that accepting the two-world interpretation of Kant's ontology is, at best, problematic, it is only on that basis that BonJour can draw the remarkable conclusions he does relative to Kant's account of truth, justification, the *a priori*, and cognition. BonJour seems to find Kant offering a set of claims about our knowledge of objects restricted to appearances, and thus unable to state anything about the real world of objects. On this basis, the mind constructs its own phenomenal experience; consequently, all objects of that experience will conform to the rules the mind imposes for that construction. From this, BonJour concludes that all synthetic *a priori* propositions are true, relative to this phenomenal experience (23), and thus are ultimately analytic, including specific principles such as the causal maxim (25 n. 25). While he does not specifically address Kant's own attempt to satisfy the "observation requirement" (SEK 141-144), BonJour's reading prevents him from seeing that Kant's empirical realism embraces a notion quite similar to BonJour's own, including a commitment to "extratheoretic input" couched in

⁸ The point, of course, is most familiar from Wilfred Sellars's classic "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," the influence of which BonJour's acknowledges (SEK 249 n.1) and which is itself very much in debt to Sellars's reading of Kant.

terms of a spatio-temporal intuition [*Anschauung*].⁹ One is tempted to see BonJour tending toward the interpretation Richard Rorty has offered, suggesting that a specifically Kantian “realist” transcendental argument must be such that

our “legitimizing” transcendental knowledge of the necessary truth that content will correspond to scheme, is made possible by the fact that our subjectivity (the scheme) *creates* the content.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the interpretation given by Rorty (and BonJour) cannot be supported either directly or indirectly by Kant’s text. Kant’s metaphysics may well move in the direction of an anti-realism BonJour finds unattractive, as can be seen in his brief critical remarks on Dummett (150-151). There is, however, a tough-minded empirical streak in Kant that BonJour ignores, yet should not be minimized:

High towers and metaphysically great men resembling them, round both of which there is commonly much wind, are not for me. My place is the fruitful bathos of experience, and the word ‘transcendental’ ... does not signify something passing beyond all experience but something that indeed precedes it a priori, but that is intended to make cognition possible.¹¹

Kant makes as explicit as possible, in the Introduction to the *Critique*, the Transcendental Aesthetic, and elsewhere, that in human experience there is a fundamental and ineliminable passive component, which he calls sensibility. To be sure, the epistemic subject, on Kant’s view, contributes the forms of intuition — space and time — within which sensibility is received; yet this hardly entails that the subject constructs its own experience, or creates its own content. This recognition that there is a dimension of our experience that we confront, rather than create, is about as close as we can get to “the given” in Kant’s epistemology. One might compare here BonJour’s own insistence on an “observation requirement” in responding to the traditional “isolation”

⁹ An anonymous reader for this journal correctly and helpfully points out that BonJour’s critique does not attribute to Kant the view here expressed by Rorty, and that BonJour’s account does not rest upon such a view. At the same time, BonJour has recognized that an adequate epistemology must take into consideration the relationship between the world and the empirical judgements made about that world, and it remains unclear on his reading how Kant addresses — or could address — the point. It should also be noted that this very question has been the source of a long controversy among Kant scholars, including Jaako Hintikka, Charles Parsons, Manley Thompson, and many others.

¹⁰ “Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism” in Bieri, Horstmann, and Krüger (eds.), *Transcendental Arguments and Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), p. 79. As Wolfgang Carl points out in his response to Rorty (*ibid*, p. 106), this seems “to flatly contradict Kant’s own and well-known position.”

¹¹ *Prolegomena*, Ak. IV, p. 373 n.; Carus translation, revised by J. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), p. 113 n..

objection to pure coherentist theories of justification: namely, that certain beliefs, as “cognitively spontaneous,” indicate input from an independent source, or what he calls “extratheoretic input” (SEK: 141ff.). Lacking what Kant calls “intellectual intuition,” we do not *create* content; all we can do, relative to this passive receptivity, is characterize reflectively the forms of intuition that condition it. But given this component of sensible intuition, we *are* responsible for contributing the intellectual apparatus that makes cognition of objects — experience — possible, a conclusion, as we have seen, BonJour himself seems to accept. Without that contribution providing justified universal and necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, the epistemic subject is simply left with a set of diverse and chaotic perceptions, not objective experience.¹² It is not an ontological claim *per se*, nor a claim about the existence of objects;¹³ it is a claim about the possibility of delineating the structure of human understanding (and reason). On Kant’s perspective, it requires reflecting on experience to determine the necessary conditions that make that experience possible. What we thereby discover is a set of concepts and principles that we are forced to presuppose, a transcendental analytic that serves as a logic of experience. Such a logic provides only a modest, minimal structure for experience, but by satisfying the requirements of universality and necessity, it avoids leaving us with simply a rhapsody of perceptions without any organization or coherence.

On this view, then, Kant seeks to justify a set of concepts and principles, *qua* transcendental logic (specifically transcendental analytic), that are universal and necessary — hence, *a priori* — for the possibility of experience. Just as we might try to justify a straightforward minimal principle of logic, such as the principle of non-contradiction, by showing its indispensability as a presupposition for any use of reason, we can see that the burden here, of justifying a minimal set of *a priori* rules for possible experience, while still difficult and fraught with controversy, is both less onerous and more plausible

¹² This is the essence of Kant’s critique of Hume. I haven’t seen any need to address directly BonJour’s claim that Hume and Kant argue largely for the same “moderate empiricist” conclusions; that they do not should already be sufficiently clear from what has been said, for Kant’s claims about the necessity involved in synthetic judgements made *a priori* can only reduce to analytic phenomenalist claims on BonJour’s adoption of the dubious “two world” interpretation of Kant’s ontology. BonJour’s view also makes it much more difficult to see why Kant spent so much time outlining the specific differences between his view and that of Hume’s, precisely in relation to this issue of necessity and the *a priori*; for a good recent discussion of some of the differences involved, see Longuenesse, B., “Kant et les jugements empirique. Jugements de perception et jugements d’expérience” *Kant Studien* 86 (1995), 278-307, esp. pp. 295-296.

¹³ In pure mathematics, it should be noted, questions about the existence of mathematical objects are for Kant questions about the *constructibility* of mathematical objects. BonJour, in both his discussion of Kant, and more generally throughout *In Defense of Pure Reason*, tends not to distinguish logic and mathematics in any significant sense, nor does he indicate that such a distinction is of fundamental importance for Kant (and others, e.g. Frege).

than that which Bonjour imposes on Kant's Critical philosophy. Indeed, it is a tactic that Bonjour himself employs; as he points out, certain positions that reject *a priori* justification "can be cogent only if they are themselves justified, directly or indirectly, in the very way that they are supposed to call into question" (123). While adopting this approach on occasion (16; 131; 155; 171), Bonjour never pursues nor develops it in any systematic fashion.

In *In Defense of Pure Reason*, Bonjour argues, largely on the basis of examples, that certain claims carry with them a degree of epistemic compulsion that cannot be accounted for by either a moderate or radical empiricist. Nor, he suggests, can the traditional rationalist view be accepted, insofar as its claims of rational insight are both infallible and impervious to empirical testing or revision (16-17; 144). The inability of empiricism to provide an adequate explanation of the *a priori*, Bonjour argues, forces it to embrace skepticism; the obvious failures of traditional rationalism — as seen in the various cases where infallible rational insight was asserted relative to a claim later refuted — require significant revision of its commitment to the *a priori*. These negative results, supplemented with Bonjour's arguments concerning our intuitions about necessity, form the basis of his defense of the moderate rationalist position. What Bonjour does not seem to recognize is the remarkable similarity between his results and Kant's.

In the First *Critique*, and elsewhere, Kant describes two models of the human intellect, only to reject them in favor of his own model. The empirical model of Locke (and with some — here irrelevant — differences, Hume) insists that the mind derives its general concepts solely by abstracting them from experience; as such it cannot sufficiently distinguish an active, spontaneous intellect from a solely reactive or passive intellect. Furthermore, it cannot guarantee the universality and necessity to pure concepts which serve as conditions of possible experience, concepts Kant argues the empiricists themselves employ, implicitly, as necessary; pure mathematics gives the clearest example of the pervasive difficulty that follows the adherence to a "universal empiricism" (B20). Toward the end of the second-edition Transcendental Deduction, he rejects such a view as a *generatio aequivoca*, an attempt to derive pure concepts, which must be independent of experience, from experience (B167).

The rationalist model, generally represented by Leibniz, is one that produces its own objects by means of "intellectual intuition," an "understanding which through its self-consciousness could supply to itself the manifold of intuition, an understanding ... through whose representation the objects of the representation would at the same time exist" (B138-139). On this account, pure concepts are "subjective dispositions of thought, implanted in us from the first moment of existence," which Kant characterizes as "a kind of preformation system of pure reason," ordered by our Creator in such a way that the employment of these dispositions would be "in complete harmony with the laws of nature in accordance with which experience proceeds" (B167).

Abstracting from the question of origins, this description is surprisingly close to the view BonJour attributes to Kant.

Consequently, it is worth noting that Kant points out two insurmountable problems with such a view. First, there could be no limit set to what “pre-determined dispositions to future judgements” might be made (B167). That is, we could not distinguish a set of concepts marked out for pure employment from concepts whose employment would be illegitimate, so called usurpatory concepts such as fortune and fate (cf. A84=B117). Second, and the reason Kant takes as decisive, this preformation model could not account for the universality and necessity required by the pure concepts of the understanding. “The necessity of the categories, which belongs to their very conception, would have to be sacrificed” (B168). The categories are synthetic concepts, employed *a priori* in judgements, whose only legitimate employment is in application to intuition. To claim such concepts are implanted subjective dispositions is to ignore the crucial relation *between* these concepts and intuitions; it is through the application of the concepts in judgement that they can achieve objective universality and necessity. To subscribe to the preformation model is to claim merely that “I am so constituted that I cannot think this representation otherwise than as connected” (*ibid.*). Because the fundamental notion behind the Copernican Revolution is that the thinking subject itself connects its representations and unifies them according to rules through the transcendental unity of apperception, pre-established harmony would eliminate the contribution of the thinking subject whereby the objective application of pure concepts is determined, limited, and justified. It would be this, Kant argues, that “the skeptic most desires” (*ibid.*).

As we have seen, then, in contrast to both the empirical and the rationalist models, Kant specifies a set of synthetic concepts and principles, and argues that they serve as the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of experience, relatively to a passively received manifold of intuition. In this context, it is crucial to make clear the role justification plays, relative to cognitive claims, and the entirely distinct issue of truth-determination. For Kant, one determines the truth or falsity of a given empirical judgement in accordance with “the nominal definition of truth ... the agreement of knowledge with its object” (A58=B82). While Kant repeats this formulation throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A191=B236; A820=B848), it should be noted just how *little* Kant says about truth there, in contrast to how *much* he says about justifying the conditions for assigning truth-values. Kant is not so much interested in the truth of a given proposition “p” as he is in establishing the universal and necessary conditions that allow “p” to be true *or* false. The content of a given empirical judgement is contingent upon what is provided in the relevant sensible manifold; consequently, what we know *a priori* relative to such judgements is distinct from whether that judgement is in fact true or false; “a sufficient and at the same time general criterion [*Kennzeichen*] of truth cannot possibly be given” (A59=B83).

In contrast to this account, BonJour criticizes Kant for not being able to provide a sufficient justification for any general claim (*P*) that appears to be synthetic *a priori*; worse, “the original proposition *P* turns out not to be knowledge of any kind and very possibly not even true” (25). Here BonJour utterly fails to take into consideration the distinction Kant makes between truth and justification, wherein transcendental analytic cannot *yield* the truth, but serves only as a “logic of truth” (A62=B87); on Kant’s analysis, one must sharply distinguish the truth of a given judgement and what must be presupposed even to investigate a judgement as true or false. In terms of the logical analogy that structures the *Critique*, one would be hesitant to characterize the principle of non-contradiction as “true” (and certainly not as “false”), nor is it clear that such a principle would qualify as “knowledge” in any but the most attenuated sense — as Hilary Putnam has made the point, such truths of logic “are so basic that the notion of *explanation* collapses when we try to ‘explain’ why they are true.”¹⁴ Similarly, Kant argues that the causal principle defended in the Second Analogy, *qua* a principle of the “logic of experience,” is justified as a synthetic rule employed *a priori* as a condition of possible experience; in turn, any *specific* empirical judgement appealing to that principle in characterizing an event will remain contingent. To fail to mark this distinction can, on the one hand, lead to what Kant sees as Hume’s fundamental error: “inferring from the contingency of our determination in accordance with the law the contingency of the law itself” (A766=B794). On the other hand, failing to mark the distinction between what is presupposed in *any* investigation into the truth, and the conditions that must be satisfied for a specific empirical judgement to be true, is to present “the ludicrous spectacle of one man milking a he-goat and the other holding a sieve underneath” (A58=B83).

Only on the basis of his (at best) problematic “two world” reading of Kant’s ontology, and his failure to distinguish sharply the role of the *a priori* in Kant’s account of cognition in contrast to the role of truth relative to *what* is justified *a priori*, can BonJour conclude that “a Kantian view ... does not constitute a significant further alternative with respect to the issue of *a priori* justification” (25). While I think it clear from the above account that BonJour’s conclusion here is itself not justified, there are several, relatively minor, points of misinterpretation that should at least be noted, in addition to BonJour’s tendency to conflate Kant’s views of logic and mathematics. First: BonJour seems to suggest that Kant views his claims about the cognitive capacities of the epistemic subject under consideration as necessary. It is more plausible to read Kant as saying in the *Critique* that *if* a subject satisfies certain minimal criteria — the ability to use the first-person pronoun, and to use concepts to judge passively received spatio-temporal content — *then* it must necessarily

¹⁴ “Analyticity and A Priority,” reprinted in *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 138.

have certain characteristics. Second: while BonJour argues that certain, presumably synthetic, principles are ultimately analytic (e.g. the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception and the causal principle (25 n. 25)), this is difficult to reconcile with Kant's repeated insistence that all analysis presupposes synthesis (B130, A77=B102-103), a point BonJour entirely ignores.¹⁵ Third: BonJour claims, somewhat unclearly, that it is a

quasi-Kantian idea that concepts *necessarily* falsify the reality that they attempt to depict, i.e., that any thinking being (or perhaps any being at all like us) will inevitably misrepresent in certain pervasive ways the features of the world that he attempts to represent (152 n. 15).

He adds that he "can find no intelligible rationale of any sort for such a view," although he seems not to realize that there is even less plausibility in attributing this view to Kant, any neo-Kantians, or even any view one might very generally describe as Kantian; indeed, the distinction BonJour draws on to make this attribution is not only rejected by Kant, the results BonJour objects to on the basis of this distinction are, as we have seen, precisely those Kant spends the most time arguing against: transcendental realism. Fourth: BonJour asserts that "if Kant had ever faced clearly the problem of the epistemological status of his own philosophical claims, he might have retreated into a more traditional rationalism" (25). While one might quibble with the qualification of "clearly" here, it is quite obvious from Kant's work, both published and unpublished, that he was aware of this issue, and struggled with it throughout his career. His first critic, J.G. Hamann, registered the complaint in his well-known, if curious, piece "Metakritik über den Purismus der Vernunft";¹⁶ while not published until 1800, it is a virtual certainty that Kant was aware of the thrust of Hamann's critique. In any case, Kant recognized the problem well before the writing of the *Critique*. As he points out in one of his *Reflexionen*, "I seek in an understanding, that requires rules, the knowledge [*Kenntnis*] of these rules themselves. This is paradox."¹⁷ Yet he came to believe he had solved this "paradox" — seeking rules of an understanding which must provide rules to the understanding — as he explains in the Logik Phillips, a set of lectures delivered in 1772: "But this paradox disappears when we realize

¹⁵ To be sure, Kant does claim that the *principle* of the transcendental unity of apperception is analytic (although in the first edition of the *Critique* he claims it is synthetic (A117n.)); the issue becomes even murkier from the tortuous footnote at B422, where Kant's account of apperceptive unity becomes all but impossible to follow. In any case these confusions, which naturally have spawned a great deal of debate in the literature, do not permit BonJour's much more sweeping conclusions, nor do they justify ignoring Kant's considered view that synthesis always precedes analysis.

¹⁶ *Sämtliche Werke* (Vienna: Hamann Verlag, 1949-1957), vol. III, pp. 282-289.

¹⁷ Reflexion 1592; Ak. XVI, p. 28. The editor of these notes, Erich Adickes, is unsure of the dating of this note, but places it between 1755 at the earliest, and 1764 at the latest.

we are not conscious of them.”¹⁸ The point is not simply that we are not conscious of the rules we employ, but that we can come to recognize, on reflection, *that we must* employ them in any investigation. And in other sets of logic lectures, delivered much later in Kant’s career, he turns to grammar to make the point: “one speaks without having learned grammar, that is one speaks according to rules of which one is not conscious”; “one speaks German and afterwards brings in the rules of German grammar.”¹⁹ In short, through transcendental reflection on thought and experience, we are able to isolate, articulate, and then justify the rules that are necessary for this thought and experience to be possible. To be sure, transcendental reflection takes place in accordance with rules, and the presupposition of such rules may, at some level, qualify as dogmatic. But, as Kant points out in a phrase reminiscent of Wittgenstein, “We can proceed in no other way in logic. The exercise of rules isn’t something taught, since I can do nothing other else than by means of these rules.”²⁰ If Kant’s provocative, albeit deeply controversial, analogy between general logic and transcendental logic can bear any weight whatsoever, then there may well be a path open to provide a similar kind of “justification” for the rules of a logic of experience. But, clearly enough, it is disingenuous to suggest that Kant did not recognize the issue of meta-critique.

The point here is not that BonJour fails to be a good Kant scholar, or that he doesn’t have an historian of philosophy’s grasp of the history of philosophy,²¹ but that he misreads Kant; on the basis of this misreading, he rejects the most powerful weapon he has at his disposal for defending his own view, a view which is ultimately quite similar to Kant’s, and without the kind of argumentative apparatus Kant — or some kind of systematic approach — provides. BonJour’s case for moderate rationalism comes to depend largely on examples, and thus lacks the support required to defend the claims motivating the need for the *a priori* to be included in any adequate epistemol-

¹⁸ Logik Phillips, Ak. XXIV.1, p. 316.

¹⁹ Logik Pölitz, Ak. XXIV.2, p. 502 (delivered in 1789); Logik Busolt, Ak. XXIV.2, p. 609 (delivered in 1790).

²⁰ Logik Phillips, Ak. XXIV.1, p. 339. Cf. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: MacMillan, 1958), §1: “Die Erklärungen haben irgendwo ein Ende.” Additionally, Kant might reply that any objection to his approach, to be communicable, must satisfy the minimal logical conditions he has articulated (cf. A820=B849), a tactic to which BonJour appeals without, again, systematically developing it.

²¹ Thus BonJour fails to mention that C.D. Broad’s remark about the failure of justifying induction as “a scandal to philosophy” (188; 196) is a clear reference — and particularly ironic in the present context — to Kant’s observation that it is a “scandal to philosophy” that philosophers (Kant specifies idealists) have had to accept the existence of the external world on faith, and have been unable to prove it (B xxxix n.); nor does he mention that the epistemological concerns about the reliability of memory (125ff.) are precisely those Descartes raises in his discussion of atheism in his Response to the Sixth set of Objections.

ogy that BonJour has so compellingly motivated. In short, he seems to dismiss precisely those arguments that might provide him support where it is most needed, and this dismissal is grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of Kant's project.

BonJour remarks,

... a combination of a coherence theory of empirical justification with a correspondence theory of truth is most unusual from an historical standpoint, but it is arguably the only hope for avoiding both foundationalism and skepticism while preserving a dialectically independent basis for defending an account of empirical justification (and also a more or less commonsensical conception of reality) (SEK: 158).

It is precisely this combination that BonJour seems unwilling to find in Kant's Critical philosophy; yet, as we have already seen, Kant is explicit in his commitment to a Tarskian (or Aristotelian) characterization of truth. As Frederick Schmitt has noted, "there are idealists who have been correspondence theorists [about truth]. Immanuel Kant, despite the common attribution to him of a coherence theory of truth, may be a prominent example."²² Furthermore, while his account of epistemic justification is notoriously complex, one can, without too much trouble, find Kant specifically appealing to precisely the coherentist criterion BonJour defends in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* and builds upon in *In Defense of Pure Reason*:

the difference between truth and dreaming is not ascertained by the nature of the representations which are referred to objects (for they are the same in both cases), but by their connection according to those rules which determine the coherence [*Zusammenhang*] of the representations in the concept of an object, and by ascertaining whether they can subsist together [*beisammen stehen*] in experience or not.²³

Finally, as we have seen, Kant's results relative to synthetic judgements put forth *a priori* can only be viewed as analytic, and even vacuous, on a reading of his texts that is difficult, if not in the end impossible, to sustain. In sum, we find in Kant's theoretical philosophy a powerful set of arguments, strategically going well beyond a dialectical strategy that must ultimately rest on the intuitive appeal to examples that BonJour uses to supply his positive com-

²² Schmitt, Frederick F. *Truth: A Primer* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 146; Schmitt cites as evidence A58[=B82].

²³ *Prolegomena*, Ak. IV. 290. I have not gone into the question here of whether Kant's appeal to empirical realism offers "a more or less commonsensical conception of reality," in contrast to BonJour's apparent endorsement of an Aristotelian or Thomistic ontology (see 183ff.). I will simply note that it is not entirely clear how one can reconcile Thomistic Realism with what BonJour has argued in *SEK* in criticizing contemporary foundationalism and its appeal to "the given." BonJour admits his views are "highly tentative and exploratory" (185) and the issue merits more attention than I can give it here.

ments in support of the *a priori*, that includes a commitment to the *a priori*, a correspondence theory of truth, and a coherence theory of justification: precisely the epistemological desideratum BonJour pursues.

Kurt Mosser
Dep. of Philosophy
University of Dayton
300 College Park
Dayton, Ohio 45469-1546, USA
mosser@checkov.hm.udayton.edu