

ACADEMIA | Letters

Academia Letters Fake, Facts, and Conspiracy – Kant revised and Beyond

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Introduction

This Academia Letter addresses three subjects:

a) A presentation of controversial topics such as fake, facts, and conspiracy that has been frequently debated. Last US election is illustrative. So is the current war in Ukraine. b) Another ambition with this Letter is to present a new re-interpretation and revision of Kant. c) Additionally, an important objective will be to demonstrate the applicability of a critical re-examination and revision of Kant's philosophy. The revision will be applied to investigate controversies and conflicts mentioned above (a). Issues addressed in a) will be applied to illustrate the applicability of b).

Kant's three critiques are the main sources for our critical examinations. Specific attention will be provided to the last of his three critiques, "The Critique of the Power of Judgment" (CPJ/[KdU], (Kant 1977)).

Presenting Kant in English raises challenges. Specific German expressions can be demanding. Corresponding German expressions will therefore be provided in brackets [].

In a classical presentation of Kant, Kaulbach (1969) states that the three critiques are closely interlinked. Our approach acknowledges Kaulbach's position regarding a close connection between the three critiques. On the other hand, our approach diverges substantially from major features of Kaulbach's contribution.

Presentation of topics

Judging distinctively between true and false requires specific capabilities. When everyone offers his/her individual verdict, competing opinions and arbitrariness will promote anarchic decision-making processes. On the other hand, claiming an absolute fact as true, does not facilitate critical reflections. Processes of mutual understanding, and ambitions to reach overlapping consensus (Rawls 1996) [Eilverständnis, (Habermas 2004)] as to what count as facts versus fakes, will be restricted when anarchy and absolutism reigns.

Disagreement concerning the fairness of an election could question the legitimacy of a democratic order. Mutual accusations of false and fake observations, based on conspiracy, could produce destructive controversies.

A way to cope with such an outcome, could be to enhance capabilities and skills to produce knowledge and reasonable critical reflections. Prior skills and capabilities would have to anticipate that some common preconditional requirements are operative. These common requirements need to facilitate investigations, examinations, and critical reflections. Phenomena and issues themselves must be recognized as debatable objects for critical examination, and investigation. Subjects and issues must comply with capacities for investigations and critical examinations. Output should aim to expand mutual knowledge generation [Verstand] and reason [Vernunft].

Conflicts and war restrict common understanding and mutual outcomes generated through knowledge generation [Verstand] and reason [Vernunft]. Opponents affected rather experience threats and violent incidences as signs of mutual disrespect and strategic moves to surpass the rival.

Two cases can illustrate our topics. In one case, the recent election in the US is claimed to be stolen. For the winners, facts were complying with law and order that justified a fair and democratic election. For the loser, the so-called justly elected president, was assumed to supported by fake and false validations.

In a second case, the West and the former East bloc, relicts from the cold war, are stakeholders in the present war in Ukraine. Mutual accusations regarding violation of international law, respect for sovereignty, i.e., enhances controversies, tensions, conflicts, and actions of warfare. Diplomacy is practiced through mutual accusations and suspicion. Disagreements about facts, fakes and thrusts are violating possibilities for reason [Vernunft] and knowledge generation [Verstand] between the involved.

What seems to be lacking in these cases are skills and capabilities to orchestrate a *third person perspective*. Mutual accusations obstruct the possibilities to acknowledge any rational justifications produced by the opponent.

Based on the above, there can be three fundamental ways to acknowledge the opponent's position;

a) Diverse casual assertions operate behind the perspectives of opponents. Investigating these casual assertions could fertilize a critical examination and investigation. Additionally, this could provide an opportunity for self-critical reflections. More considerate approaches would stimulate alternative perspectives to emerge. In Kant's terminology this could be conceptualized as the *work of knowledge* [Verstand].

b) Additionally, the opponent could be accused of violating common recognized regulations of social conduct, and risk to face appropriate penalties. For Kant, complying with *universal regulative arrangements* corresponds with the applicability of reason [Vernunft].

c) A third way to acknowledge the opponent's position, is to move between the two, a) and b). Comparatively and continuously, we could evaluate our critical examinations against the way that our findings comply and support common recognized regulations of social conduct. Analyzing and comparing our evaluations could be supplied with a critical examination of the opponent's position. A critical self-reflection addresses possible biases and weaknesses that additionally could comply with our *power of critical judgement* (CPJ).

This third way, c), constitutes the foundation for a *third person perspective*. A third person perspective exercised communally, through social skills and capacities that are gained from the society, which we are raised *through*, and become members *of* (Natorp 1904, 1907).

This third person position is a position that every opponent and social member of a society should gain. Enhanced skills and competences would improve coping capacity to handle controversies, conflicts, fakes vs. facts, and conspiracies, internally and externally.

For Kant, a third person position could be stated as an ongoing process offered by the continuous work of the power of judgement, as well as the (self-)critic of this power of judgement.

The ventures undertaken by knowledge work [Verstandes-Erkenntnis] anticipates and addresses that we, as universal beings, relates our investigations to a common world. As universal beings we constitute this common world as object for our investigation, - free, equal, and independent of any interference from religious, divine, natural and nonhuman ritual powers. Our equal anticipations and investigations are free and independent to manipulate, examine, compare, observe, categories and judge. These universal communal approaches constitute a communal common world that transcends any ritual, cultural, religious, and local communality. A rational "We", with its constituted anticipated objective world, are approached through investigations and classification that "transcends" any specific subjective, local, external-human and divine restraints.

Every aspect of knowledge work [Verstand] is conducted by human intellectual efforts

[Erkenntnis-Arbeit]. So is the case with our reason [Vernunft], which provides regulative ideas that directs our priorities and guides our common conduct. Both are aspects of our knowledge work and reason [Erkenntnis-Vermögen] that structures human intellectual efforts [Erkenntnis-Arbeit].

We make the common world, when we trust our way of conducting knowledge work [Verstand] and apply common reason [Vernunft] through public communal bourgeoisie life. For Kant, enlightenment and the bourgeoisie state order express that human species had become the sole intentionality, decreasing, and replacing divine, religious and superstitious knowledge.

As for Kant, even the notion of external human subjectivity is a product of our intellectual efforts [Erkenntnis-Arbeit].

Two cases - three phenomena; conspiracy, fakes, and facts

Was a current election arranged, and by whom? Maneuvering between conspiracy, fakes and facts is not straight forward.

Democracy, individual freedom, and equality is the landmark of Western civilization. The rule of law and the established democratic institutions have proven the facts and acknowledged a winner. At least that is what we have been told by our parents, at school, by our headmaster, by the president, by God, by social elites and their power structures. But is any of this fake?

If we turn to a classical scholar of social science, like Max Weber, democracy (and bureaucracy) mirror something we attempt to achieve. It is something we measure and criticize the current state of affair up against, as *ideal type* (Weber 1968). These ideal types are images of specific phenomena (bureaucracy, democracy, rationality) that we compare and measure our critical reflections up against. They correspond with the regulative ideas that we previously presented with references to Kant.

An implication of this assumption is that there *are no absolute* democracy, individual freedom, and equality for all. Democracy constitutes imaginary pictures of ideals that we compare and critically reflect the existing democratization processes up against. Democratization processes occur, are abolished, reappear, and are destroyed. In the long run, mutual learning processes could accumulate democratic practices and competences. Contrary movements, based on feudal pre-modern social arrangement, could reappear and threaten to weaken and destroy accumulated democratic skills and practices.

After World War II (WWII) mankind was divided into two distinct antagonistic blocs. In the post-war bloc arrangements, one side mirrored the other, both politically, institutionally, and culturally. Solidarity and socialism against liberalism and individualism were Mantras.

Presently the Ukrainian war seems to be fueled by relicts from the Cold War. Russia argues that NATO pushes US interest to control and dictate.

Does Ukraine possess a legitimate right to choose which allies to join? Is this a choice Ukraine can exercise irrespective of its location and the global political power structure, which is the context that a Ukrainian choice is embedded within?

Diverse opinions are expressed that are critical to the legitimacy of the invasion of Ukraine. For others, it appears as a hypocrisy when Western allies justify their criticism and sanctions against Russia. History is said to be crammed with examples where the Western allies have violated human rights, invaded, manipulated, exercised surveillance. Based on fakes or facts?

If we conduct a more thorough investigation of the dilemmas and paradoxes of fake, facts, and conspiracy, a possible path could be to make a return to our “enlightened” classics of the past. Some of these classics were wisely and fiercely struggling in support of a growing rationality, through a combat with religious superstitions and feudal social arrangements. Kant, with a follow up through other German Idealists, could be an alternative path to follow in this respect.

Complying with Kant’s critic of the power of judgement could foster the Bildung of a humanity that would be capable of advocating decision-making and governing capacity for the future. For a critical self-reflective power of judgement, the current state of affair seems not to be promising, at least not if it is measured up against possible alternatives.

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