A Kantian Critique of Our Epistemological Common Sense

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Abstract – Following Kant's suggestive discussion of the “preformationist” error in philosophical theorizing, I identify structurally similar methodological commitments at the heart of standard contemporary models of epistemological reflection and justification. Because of their defining construal of our considered judgments as the “data” corresponding to our epistemic “theories,” such models prove unable to motivate an assent to the norms of human cognition as genuine norms. Thus, the core methodological commitments of what I call “standard analytical epistemology” lead in the end to absurd consequences, regardless of their specific content or conclusions. Kant's counterproposal of radically dissociating normative questions of right from explanatory questions of fact, by contrast, presents a viable alternative to these metaphilosophically inadequate approaches.

Particularism is the metaepistemological view on which epistemological reflection proceeds by way of careful consideration of particular claims to know, the legitimacy of which is immediately clear, so as to justify the general principles or criteria of justification comprising our theories of knowledge itself.¹ The particularist's initially plausible thought is that we can single out certain valid epistemic claims without this meta-level knowledge being knowingly licensed by some fully general criterion. This means that such initial or basic knowledge claims are the starting points of even the most sophisticated forms of epistemological reflection. Thus, the first question epistemologists must ask in order to settle their disputes is not “What are the criteria of knowledge?,” but rather “What is the extent and content of our knowledge?” Epistemically, though not necessarily temporally, our answer to the latter question is the ground of any legitimate claims of the first sort. In this way, we can

¹ Particularism is one possible answer to the problem of the criterion, which is itself a metaepistemological construal of the classic Agrippan trilemma argument for skepticism, due to Sextus Empiricus (1934, §20 and §§116-117). Versions of this interpretation of the problem, and defenses of its cogency, can be found in Amico 1993, Cling 1994 and 2009, Floridi 1993 and 1994, Fumerton 2008, and Steup 2010. The present paper only critiques the most popular response to criteriological skepticism, without directly confronting the skeptic. Thus, I will not pause to give a detailed account of this mode of skeptical challenge. I should also note here that the doctrine I call “particularism” is only tangentially related to the view of the same name sometimes defended in ethics, according to which moral judgment cannot be captured in terms of rules or norms at all. Metaepistemological particularists are as interested as anyone else in developing a full-blown theory of knowledge – they simply endorse a very distinctive strategy for doing so.
responsibly commit epistemology – not only will our method enable resolution of disputes as to the criteria and extent of human knowledge; it also protects us from falling prey to various intellectual illusions that can make skepticism or radical revisionism seem tempting, or even mandatory.²

There is a well-known “common sense” tradition in philosophy which is defined by its commitment to this view of responsible epistemologizing. Thomas Reid, of course, is the honored exemplar of these approaches in the era of modern philosophy.³ G. E. Moore's refutation of skepticism stands near the wellspring of analytic philosophy proper; and Roderick Chisholm influentially defended this methodological view in the formative period of post-war analytic epistemology.⁴ Kant, for his part, famously inveighed against these “naturalists of pure reason,” and consequently most interpreters read him as opposed to this tradition.⁵ But in doing so, they generally assume that Kant has nothing more in mind than the vague worries about conservatism or begging the question against the skeptic, which are pressed against the common sense tradition by virtually everyone who considers it. But Kant at least has the resources for a more developed, and more valuable, critique. In this paper, then, I shall argue that particularism, and the epistemological traditions that build on it, are irresponsible methods of

² Explicit defenders of particularism, as an independent doctrine, are relatively rare, since most epistemologists prefer to proceed directly to defending or assaulting various doctrines on the basis of the methodology. But recent years have seen a few focused defenses of the position. Amongst the most prominent of these are Greco 2000, chapters 1 and 5; Kelly 2005 and 2008; Lemos 2004, chapters 6 and 7; Lycan 2001; and Sosa 2009, chapters 7, 9, and 10.
³ See Rysiew 2002 and Wolterstoff 2001 for reflection on Reid's metaepistemological position.
⁴ Discussions of Moore's anti-skeptical argument abound, and naturally focus on the pivotal question of whether or not Moore's obviously valid argument can live up to the normative obligations of the reflective epistemic agent. Pritchard 2001 and Williams 2004 are particularly insightful treatments of this topic. Chisholm – the source of my distinction between methodism and particularism in this essay – drew attention to the problem of the criterion in its contemporary form in a number of works, but most prominently in his 1982. Chisholmian epistemology is critically reviewed on behalf of other particularistic perspectives in Kaplan 2003 and Kornblith 2003. All of the defenders of particularism cited in note 2 consider the adequacy of Moorean and Chisholmian approaches at length as well.
⁵ For a sampling of such indictments, see A232-233/B285-286, A237-238/B296-297, A746-747/B774-775, A782-784/B810-812, A842-844/B870-872, and A850-851/B878-879; Pro 4.258-262, 4.314, and 4.370-372; and Ground 4.403-405 and 4.450-453. A few commentators have nonetheless drawn attention to “moderate” or “common-sense” elements of Kant's thinking, and thereby cast him as essentially Reidian in his methodology. Of these, Ameriks 2005 and Kuehn 1987 are prominent examples (and cf. note 11 as well). In his 2000, 287-294, Ameriks even goes so far as to propose reading Kant as a particularist. Though there is much of value in these readings, they have a hard time coping with the features of Kant's thought I survey at the end of this paper.
epistemic reflection after all. This is not because they are conservative per se, but because they are essentially *fanatical* (in Kant's special sense of that term).\(^6\)

Evaluating this claim is crucial, since particularism is not in fact restricted to the canonical “greats” of the common sense tradition. Particularistic tendencies run very deep in broadly “analytic” contemporary epistemology. Consider the role of so-called “intuitions,” conceptual analysis, counterexamples, and thought-experiments in today's practices of epistemic reflection.\(^7\) In all of these approaches, our judgments about particular cases are taken to count decisively against putative principles that are offered in the course of theory-construction.\(^8\) That is precisely the demand embodied by particularism. Likewise, today's diffusely naturalistic *zeitgeist*, however it expresses itself in practice, echoes David Lewis's particularistic thought that “It is not the business of philosophy either to undermine or justify [our] preexisting [common-sense or scientific] opinions to any great extent, but only to try to discover ways of expanding them into an orderly system.”\(^9\) Even when philosophers venture out on their own, into clearly metaphysical or extra-scientific domains, their method is generally to seek “reflective equilibrium” between principles and particular judgments, which means accepting particularism's claim that in philosophy we can affirm a key class of epistemic propositions without being able to cite any justifying principles.\(^10\) This current of thought has even had a powerful

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6 Zuckert 2010 provides a valuable discussion of Kant's notion of “fanaticism.” Of course, calling one's methodological opponents fanatics tends to poison the well a bit, so it is vital to keep in mind throughout my exposition that this is a technical term for Kant.

7 For discussions of this strain of thought in recent philosophical thinking, see Kelly 2005, 179-182; Rinard 2013, 185-189; and Soames 2003, xi-xvi. Soames, for instance, claims that one of the two great methodological achievements of analytic philosophy “has been the realization that no matter how attractive a philosophical theory might be in the abstract, it can never be more securely supported than the great mass of ordinary, pre-philosophical convictions arising from common sense, science, and other areas of inquiry about which the theory has consequences” (ibid., xi). Gendler 2010 assesses the psychological, and Reynolds 2010 the metaphysical, presuppositions of these “naïve” methods.

8 Even recent “experimental” critiques of the intuitional methodology focus only on attacking the unreliability or idiosyncrasy of philosophers’ intuitions; they have not challenged the underlying methodology. For influential discussions of these critiques, see Alexander and Weinberg 2007; Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2001; and Sosa 2007.


10 Reflective equilibrium is sometimes taken as an alternative to particularism and methodism, but, at least as I define those views, it is no such thing. Merely by countenancing particular judgments which *could* disconfirm principles introduced by the epistemologist, practitioners of this method posit the Moorean facts I criticize below (and cf. the extensive survey by Kelly and McGrath 2010).
effect on Kant-studies, via P. F. Strawson's famous distinction between worthwhile “descriptive” and unjustifiably “revisionary” forms of metaphysics.11

Sometimes, though rarely, the particularistic method is even explicitly codified as a stasis requirement on the justification of epistemological theories. Thus, Jaegwon Kim intends to speak for the majority of the field when he declares that in epistemic reflection “it is expected to turn out that according to the criteria of justified belief we come to accept, we know, or are justified in believing, pretty much what we reflectively think we know or are entitled to believe.”12 While some degree of loyalty to our present beliefs is no doubt commendable, epistemological reflection is most naturally construed as involving a search for positive reasons to advance our principles, over and above our mere present, reflective inclination to do so. It is striking, then, that so many now reflect on human knowledge under the presumption that we were right all along, at least in central cases.13

Kant's critique of such metaepistemological views, in essence, is this: that they are constitutionally incapable of relating us to our own norms, as norms. Simply in virtue of the way they conceive of justification within epistemology, particularistic views license a conception of the normative obligations we incur in making epistemic claims, for specifically epistemological purposes, which prevents us from claiming our principles as our own (at least on that basis). That is why standard analytic epistemology, as I shall call it, is a form of fanaticism.14 Kant's alternative is an unusually pure and self-conscious form of methodism: the contrasting thesis that the justification of principles does not involve any obligation to “save the data,” whether these particularistically known

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11 First in his 1959 book Individuals, and then later in his seminal 1966 study of Kant, The Bounds of Sense, Strawson advocated a conception of metaphysics as the descriptive exploration of “a massive central core of human thinking which has no history.” Such readings of Kant are deeply particularistic, and since Strawson's book played a major role in the revival of interest in Kant in the English-speaking world, this picture has wielded substantial influence.

12 Kim 1988, 382. Bishop and Trout discuss the stasis requirement in their 2005, 8-11 and 105-106.

13 Of course, the actual reason that contemporary philosophers are inclined to do this is likely the myriad historical examples of outré theories which turned out to rest on simple misunderstandings. But sheer pessimism is not a good reason for a general methodological commitment or standard of justification in epistemology.

14 I borrow this phrase from Bishop and Trout 2005, 4 and 8, who use it to characterize a “contingently clustered” set of methodological views that have dominated English-language philosophy for the past half-century or so.
items of knowledge are experiential or metaphysical, *a posteriori* or *a priori*. On this view, criteria have epistemic priority over particular judgments within epistemic reflection.\(^{15}\)

First, consider what these methodological views actually amount to. There are many ways to be a particularist, but the essential commitment is to the existence of what have been called “Moorean facts.” As Thomas Kelly puts it, these are “some particular judgments, inconsistency with which suffices to undermine the credibility of a general principle to the point that it is reasonable to reject that principle.”\(^{16}\) These judgments might be picked out one-by-one, as a class, or as a certain “critical mass” of propositions which are revisable individually but not wholesale. They might even be judgments about highly general epistemic “facts,” such as the JTB analysis of knowledge. All that is required is that our initial facts, or “considered judgments,” be sufficient to guide us through a process of responsible epistemologizing, however deep or far-reaching. That is enough to commit us to the particularist's model for the interpretation and resolution of epistemological disputes.

So what is wrong with Moorean facts? Think about how epistemological disputes arise. Someone lodges, or wishes to lodge, a claim to knowledge, and they, or another person, wonder whether this is really legitimate. Now we need a criterion, something which could be given as a reason for deciding one way or another. Often, this means citing some shared background commitment or discovering some new fact that shows why the claim to know is licensed. But sometimes this is not sufficient, and we find ourselves in properly philosophical territory. That is how the *criteriological question* concerning knowledge in general arises. This question immediately generates a distinction

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15 That is not to say that we cannot form justified beliefs prior to epistemic reflection, of course – that would mistake epistemic for temporal priority. Kant dismisses this thought that philosophy somehow precedes experience *überhaupt* in the very first lines of the first *Critique* (that is, at A1-2 and B1-3).

16 Kelly 2005, 203. Compare Steup 2010, 627, on particularism's “key assumption”: “in order to acquire knowledge of an epistemic fact, one need not *apply*, but only *satisfy* the antecedent condition of the epistemic principle that governs the fact in question.” Though logically distinct, these formulations have equivalent implications for epistemology's justificatory obligations. In Kelly's rendition of particularism, commitment to Moorean facts involves both a policy and a prediction. Upon considering certain claims to know, we can justifiably predict that no philosophical argument will be able to unseat them; then, on that basis, we can endorse the policy of rejecting such arguments even when they are valid, their premises all appear plausible, and we cannot identify any error in the reasoning. Though this is a form of dogmatism, it is one that emphasizes our epistemic *limitations*. Kant, as we shall see, views this as the same false modesty religious fanatics express via their refusal of any obligation to think for themselves.
between principles and particulars. Criteriological skeptics think neither of these can be justified without the other, and that justification of epistemic propositions is therefore impossible. Methodists and particularists both deny this. But the particularist's postulation of Moorean facts goes beyond the neutral principles/particulars dichotomy by superimposing an additional theory/data distinction. This is because the principles are now thought of as answering to a crucial class of particulars that serve as supporting data for them (or, alternatively, as counterexamples to them). Anyone who asserts a general principle has an obligation not to contradict our Moorean facts. Thus, the epistemologist's task is to explain why we make the judgments we make – however that “we” is construed – by providing an inference to the best explanation of these Moorean facts of the matter.

Even if it is carried out a priori, in the armchair, this move transforms an initially first-personal evaluation of the legitimacy of an agent's knowledge claims into a basically third-personal enterprise. We have our data, and we need to trace its causal structure. That is what we are doing, even if we unfailingly refer to those causes as “reasons.” But following this procedure can, at best, generate a sort of auto-ethnology: the anthropological theory which best accounts for and predicts our present and future epistemic judgments. And that is a thing of quite dubious value. No matter how well it accounts for the observed judgmental behavior of a certain class of beings, auto-ethnology seems incapable of providing us with any guidance in epistemological disputes. In the context of epistemic reflection, after all, it is always possible – as the skeptic will insist – to ask whether an apparent reason to claim knowledge is really a reason for me to judge in this or that way at all.

The result is an odd situation in which we cannot discharge the open criteriological question from which we began, of whether or not to judge in accordance with the epistemologist's postulated

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17 This is an ironic reversal of the standard charge against naturalism in epistemology: that it is not normative. As Bishop and Trout 2005, 107, have it, the practice of standard analytic epistemology “tells us about the reflective epistemic judgments of a group of idiosyncratic people who have been trained to use highly specialized concepts and patterns of thought.” And who cares about that, when we are trying to draw normative conclusions?

18 The point that we can always gain reflective distance on what seems to us to be true, or what seems to us to be good to do, is central to Christine Korsgaard's exploration of the sources of normativity (see especially her 2009).
norms. Since we have arrived at these alleged principles as an explanation of our judgmental habits, we can only assent to them as an account of our past and future behavior, and not as the norms of cognition themselves. That is, since we have argued to them and not from them, we can only assent to these norms as the correct third-personal description of ourselves, for particular explanatory and predictive purposes. We cannot exercise our authority as rational agents to determine the norms of our own cognition, and so cannot view the results of such inquiries, however useful they might be for other purposes, as answering the criteriological question. This is not a Moorean “open question.” The norms the epistemologist has identified may very well be (at least some of) the true norms of human cognition. But to assent to them on this basis alone does not get us anywhere in epistemology.

Contemporary particularists often stress the method's deliberative or maieutic aspects. Yet this either leads them into methodism, or makes no ultimate difference at all. Thomas Scanlon, for instance, argues that in reflective equilibrium the deliberative has priority over the descriptive, since we at least sometimes revise our actual judgments based on principles we have proposed, as we would not do in a purely descriptive endeavor.19 But this move either capitulates to the methodist, or is simply irrelevant. It is irrelevant if the result remains simply a prediction (or exemplification) of what one would believe after undergoing certain psychological processes. And it is just a self-denying form of methodism if it instead allows that, at crucial moments, we can directly determine crucial normative principles, and modify our beliefs accordingly. After all, if we could responsibly render epistemic judgments of this sort all along, why shouldn't we do so universally? Thus, as interesting and even intellectually revealing as an exploration of the possibility of reflectively stable self-satisfaction is, it cannot be interpreted, straightforwardly, as even an attempt to answer the criteriological question. So the particularist's basic model of responsible epistemologizing seems fundamentally flawed.

19 See Scanlon 2002, 141-150; cf. Schroeter 2004. Another move Scanlon tries is to claim that reflective equilibrium in fact excludes nothing at all, and so cannot be assigned a commitment to Moorean facts. But this drains the “method” of all content, turning it into the vacuously generic recommendation to believe whatever it is rational to believe.
The temptation, at this point, is to indulge in a sort of *metaphysicalized* epistemology, which casts about for extra-normative facts capable of determining our normative decision. After all, if it is just a brute fact about us that we are creatures of a type the theory describes and explains, we seem to have our criteriological answer after all.\(^{20}\) This is to endorse a version of what Michael Williams calls “epistemological realism”: the thesis that “the object of human knowledge” has an essential nature, which we understand if and only if we understand how this nature is determined or fixed by the relevant non-normative facts.\(^{21}\) In this way, epistemology can blend seamlessly into ontology, of quite a traditional sort. But this last maneuver lands us in the error Kant calls *preformationism*:\(^{22}\) The philosophical preformationist represents our highest-order normative (broadly “metaphysical”) commitments, which define the basic constructive moves in our way of handling reasons and of conducting ourselves as rational agents, as themselves part of a grander metaphysical scheme, in which a beneficent external agency – a verific God, nature herself, our language's collected wisdom, or whatever – is ultimately required to account for the validity of our principles. Particularists' basically explanatory ambition eventually obliges them to take this further step, willingly or unwillingly.

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\(^{20}\) Thus, “sophisticated” contemporary epistemologists can find themselves recasting the criteriological question as a more-or-less disguised version of the *quaestio quid facti* that Kant famously argued was beside the point when it comes to providing a “deduction” of our highest-order norms (cf. Aix-x, A62-64/B87-88, A84-92/B116-124 and B127-128, as well as Pro 4.257-262). These projects try to explain our judgments from without, either to cast doubt on them (as Hume did) or to vindicate them (as Locke proposed). While Kant thinks that this explanation is flatly impossible to provide – since it would take us into the supersensible – the more important point is that, for him, it is *unnecessary*. Philosophers asking the criteriological question have no obligation to answer the explanatory ones which particularists insist that we take up. That is why transcendental philosophy assumes that responsible judgment is possible, and seeks to ask the “how-possible” question independently of the question of fact.

\(^{21}\) This doctrine is what Williams calls a “methodological necessity” of central projects in epistemology, rather than a doctrine within them. Only if we take it that kinds such as “human knowledge as such,” “knowledge of the external world,” “our whole system of beliefs,” or “the ideal totality of knowledge” are real in some sense, can we think of them as given objects of epistemic reflection. For critiques of the methodological roles of this assumption, see especially Williams 1996, 103-113; 1998; and 2001, 170-172 and 191-197. Note that Kant is not an epistemological realist, since his basic move in epistemology is to claim that “the object of human knowledge,” as a “metaphysical” principle of our cognition, is (transcendently) ideal – even as *particular* objects of human experience retain their (empirical) reality.

\(^{22}\) See B166-168, and cf. B34, A66/B90-91, B127-128, B145-1416, B159, A156/B195-196, and A832-835/B860-863, as well as Pro 4.318-322, 4.319n, 4.353, and 4.362-363. For useful discussions of Kant's attack on preformationism, see Genova 1974, Quarfoot 2004, and Zöller 1988; cf. note 25. These passages are much more important for correctly interpreting Kant than is usually assumed (and I am greatly oversimplifying Kant's critique to boot).
All such pictures inevitably represent our principles as receptively grounded. This, Kant declares, is “what the skeptic wishes most,” since it flatly precludes our taking any critical stance toward them. They are metaphysical givens, after all, and, considered solely in their own right, do not even rise to the level of rational disputability – much as mere sensations, by themselves, do not rise to the level of demanding judgment from us. This is (theoretical) fanaticism par excellence: a reification of reason’s own principles, driven by a yearning for passivity, which leads us treat these norms as sensitively acquired. The epistemological fanatic “dreams in accordance with principles,” or “raves with reason,” by projecting the transcendental onto the transcendent. This is to employ reason in a self-denying way which disavows normative obligations that we rightly incur when we claim reason's authority in following a principle or pursuing an ideal. At the limit, this self-alienation of reason becomes “indifferentism”: the claim that there are no real demands of “metaphysical” justification at all, either for us to meet or to skeptically fall short of. Kant regarded indifferentism as the greatest philosophical threat of his own age, and, if the particularistic course of thought sketched in this paper is as influential as I claim, it also turns out to be the root error of standard analytic epistemology. Truly consistent particularists must eventually construe our relation to our basic principles as essentially arational, and thus as such that no individual or collective knower ever is or could be in a position to rationally critique them.

23 B168.
24 CJ 5.275; cf. Anth 7:200 and 7.203.
25 There are difficult terminological issues here. Kant frames his critique in terms of autonomous and heteronomous ideas of “metaphysics.” But in the context of Kant's transcendental project, this is a question of norms, rather one falling under the “proud name” of ontology (A247/B303). Metaphysics, after all, is de facto normative. Whether it concerns features of transcendent reality, or general ontological principles governing any object at all, it clearly applies to, and provides reasons to accept or reject, any other judgments we might venture. If we have a metaphysics at all, then, it inevitably governs, or at least constrains, all of our judgments.
26 As Kant memorably puts it, indifferentism is “the mother of chaos and night in the sciences, but at the same time also the origin, or at least the prelude, of their incipient transformation and enlightenment, when through ill-applied effort they have become obscure, confused, and useless” (Ax). For an extensive argument that the indifferentist is Kant's fundamental philosophical target in the Critical philosophy, rather than the dogmatist or the skeptic, see Kelsey 2013.
Something, surely, has gone wrong. And indeed, Kant has a diagnosis: in epistemology, our true obligation is to justify our principles, *absolutely independently* of our explanations of any of our actual judgments. On his view, we cannot construe reflection on our highest-order norms – the quest for reason's self-knowledge – as the description of *any* given object or quasi-object, whether naturalistic or no. As Kant has it, a truly critical stance toward our principles is possible only for those who are willing to “think [themselves] little by little into a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever.”

This Kantian “reason itself” turns out not to be a transcendent or experiential thing in the world, but a name for our _normative vocation_, as such. The complex contours of Kant's project cannot be explored in such a short paper, of course, but we can see now why Kant thinks he must argue not so as *compel assent* in the way logical demonstrations and even highly convincing abductive inferences can often do, but instead so as put us into a position to speak for reason itself, whatever that amounts to. Only by appealing directly to our capacity to set norms for ourselves, rather than to our ability to know an _external_ object, can Kantian methodism show us how to employ a form of argument which eschews the “dictatorial authority” of dogmatic claims to know this or that fact, in favor of a claim which “is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back.”

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27 _Pro_ 4.274.

28 This is the guiding theme of a series of extremely valuable essays by Melissa McBay Merritt, and especially of her 2006, 2007, and 2009. Kant, the paradigm philosopher of the German Enlightenment, intends hereby to put his declaration that we must “dare to know” into action, by insisting that all philosophical knowledge must be “original”: endorsed by the agent as a freely-chosen project or vocation (A835-837/B863-865).

29 A738-739/B766-767. In several places, Kant analyzes this commandment to think for oneself into three “maxims of common human understanding,” which together amount to a sort of “categorical imperative of judgment”: to only endorse those judgments which anyone could take seriously, at least as an object of refutation (see _CJ_ 5.293-295, _Anth_ 7.200 and 228-229, and _Jäsche_ 9.57). This makes a certain sort of universal communicability into a general norm of human judgment. Though it is very difficult for us to embody Kant's three maxims, as he well knows, Kant nonetheless insists that this submission of our judgments to the _sensus communis_ is the only sure way to avoid fanaticism. Susan Neiman (1994, chapter 5) and Onora O'Neill (1992, 2000, and 2002) argue that this seemingly empty imperative can do a great deal of work in regulating epistemological reflection; my account of Kant's critique of fanatical epistemology shows why it must. Westphal 2011 turns this suggestion into an explicit solution to the problem of the criterion.
ordinary knowledge, then, however construed, but must answer the criteriological question with a judgment that does not seek to correspond to any further fact.30

At the core of Kant's fully-developed methodism is the claim that synthetic rules for judgment systematically precede actual judgments in the order of justification, for rational agents such as us.31 A crucial class of such norms are pure, in that they have an exclusively one-way direction of fit: we judge the world in accordance with them, and hold experience accountable to them, rather than the other way around. Putative “experiences” violating these pure principles are always errors of judgment, or the result of dreams and hallucinations, and never the empirical disconfirmations they would be if our norms were disguised natural or supernatural laws, as the particularist-preformationist imagines. Without appealing to such norms, it would be nonsensical to say that we could legislate for possible experience, and thereby determine its shape ahead of time.32 Yet pure norms just as clearly play no explanatory role with respect to particular judgments, since normative commitments, as such, need not accurately reflect our actual first-order propensities to judge.33 That is indeed why they are the antithesis of Moorean facts: they claim authority over all actual judgments, “considered” or not, on some other ground entirely. Once we have these norms in place, we can then go on to resolve epistemic disputes within experience. Kant's thematization of the nature of pure norms is precisely why he is, as I suggested, a paradigmatically pure and self-conscious methodist.34

30 That is not to say that there is no (supersensible) explanation for why we have the epistemic capacities that we have. It is only to say that we can claim to know the principles of the human normative vocation without also incurring any obligation to offer such explanations – as particularists, more or less despite themselves, clearly do (cf. note 20, as well as B138-139, B145-146, A244-246, B409-410, A612-614/B640-642, and A736-737/B764-765, as well as Pro 4.318).

31 Kant's methodological views shape his first-order justifications of a pair of crucial claims: that rule-guided synthesis universally precedes analysis, and even possible experience as a whole; and that we can have a “transcendental logic” that gives an exhaustive definition of the (purely normative) “object of human cognition in general.”


33 This point about the uselessness of normative commitments for explanatory purposes is stressed by Tomoji Shogenji, in a 2000 essay on the connection between the problem of the criterion and the challenge of rule-following skepticism. Also see Ginsborg 2011, for a Kantian response to rule-following skepticism which makes use of the notion of pure or primitive normative commitment.

34 Kant's broader diagnosis of the errors of the dogmatists turns on the claim that they systematically fail to frame the correct rational idea of “metaphysics” (cf. note 25). The root of their error is the assumption that there is a smooth continuity between the metaphysical and the empirical, such that they relate to each other on the analogy of higher-
Kant's immense influence notwithstanding, I doubt anyone will be surprised when I say that there are strains of his thought that are quite alien to contemporary concerns. But if the line of thought presented here is on the right track, this is not a matter of this or that doctrinal commitment – Kant's views of *a priori* knowledge, his various assumptions about the nature of experience, his endorsements of older systems of logic, of physics, and of mathematics, or any of that – but goes to the most basic of all Critical problematics. From a Kantian perspective, mainstream epistemology never even tries to answer the central question of epistemological reflection.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS**

Quotations from Kant's works, apart from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cite the volume and page number (AA volume number.page) of the Academy edition (*Gesammelte Schriften ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902-], vols. 1-29). Quotations from the first *Critique* are cited in accordance with the standard A and B pagination for the first and second editions, respectively. English translations are from the Cambridge edition of Kant's works, found in the bibliography, and are cited according to the abbreviations indicated below.

Abbreviations used in citing Kant's works:
- **A/B**  *Critique of Pure Reason*, editions of 1781 and 1787
- **Pro**  *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*
- **Ground**  *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- **CJ**  *Critique of the Power of Judgment*
- **Anth**  *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*
- **Jäsche**  *The Jäsche Logic*


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lower-order natural laws. That assumption, in turn, leads by various routes to the myriad preformationist systems (see A91-92/B123-124 A195-196/B240-270, A767-769/B795-797, and A843/B871).


