



University of  
St Andrews

## The 13<sup>th</sup> St Andrews Kant Reading Party 2022: Kant and Fichte

1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> August 2022

It is our pleasure to invite you to the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of The St Andrews Kant Reading Party which will be the first Reading Party after a hiatus of two years due to COVID-19. The event will take place between the **1<sup>st</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> of August** at [The Burn](#) in Angus and will be followed by a one-day “Kant in Progress” workshop at the University of St Andrews on the **5<sup>th</sup> of August**.

The Kant Reading Party is an annual academic retreat in the Scottish Highlands that aims at bringing together scholars of various career stages to discuss the works of Immanuel Kant and another prominent philosopher. This year’s edition will focus on core issues in **Kant’s and Fichte’s ethics**.

### The Theme

Reading Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* has changed Fichte’s life as a philosopher once and for all. In a letter to his friend Friedrich August Weißhuhn in 1790, Fichte writes:

*“I have been living in a new world ever since reading the Critique of Practical Reason. Propositions which I thought could never be overturned have been overturned for me. Things have been proven to me which I thought never could be proven – for example, the concept of absolute freedom, the concept of duty, etc. – and I feel all the happier! It is unbelievable how much respect for humankind and how much strength this system gives us!” (GA III/167)*

From his earliest publications on, Fichte emphasises that his thinking is inspired by Kant. If we take Fichte at his word, his philosophy is an attempt to reformulate Kant’s philosophy in a new way that spells out assumptions about which Kant remained silent and that defends him against objections other philosophers had raised against his three *Critiques*. It would, nevertheless, be a mistake to consider his *System of Ethics*, published in 1798 at the peak of his career as a professor in Jena, merely as a new mode of presenting Kant’s ethics or as a book that repeats in different words what has already been said by Kant himself. Rather, engaging with Kant’s philosophy encouraged Fichte to develop an ethical theory which deserves to be explored in its own right and which arrives at conclusions that are very different from Kant’s. His *System of Ethics* is the ambitious attempt to provide a deduction of the moral law, to avert the threat of empty formalism, and to explain how autonomy can be realised in our actions. Being neglected for a long time, Fichte’s ethics has very recently become a matter of intense debate and interest. In the light of these new interpretations, we aim to take a fresh look at Fichte’s *System of Ethics* and explore the following questions:

- Can a deduction of the moral law be given, or does all consciousness of the moral law rest on an indemonstrable factum?
- To what extent can a moral theory that relies on a formal and a priori principle tell us which ends we should choose?
- Which roles do feelings, desires, and drives play in our moral acting?
- What is the moral significance of conscience?
- What is the origin of evil and how can we explain that agents fail to comply with the moral law?

## **The Kant and Fichte Reading Party at The Burn (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022)**

The Reading Party involves a combination of discussion sessions, which are based on pre-circulated readings, and paper sessions, which give graduate students and early-career researchers a chance to present their work relevant to the theme of the event (please see the call for abstracts below).

Outside the paper and discussion sessions, participants will have the opportunity to attend to their own work and engage in leisure activities in The Burn's drawing room, library and games room, or outdoors. Most likely, we will also organise a hike along one of the surrounding trails for those who are interested.

## **The Kant in Progress Workshop at the University of St Andrews (5<sup>th</sup> August 2022)**

On the day following the Reading Party at The Burn, there will be a one-day workshop at the University of St Andrews, which gives all participants of the Reading Party the opportunity to present their work in progress on Kant and/or Kantian philosophy.

### **Call for Abstracts for the Kant and Fichte Reading Party**

Postgraduate students and early-career scholars are invited to submit anonymised abstracts of no longer than **500 words** by email to Johannes Nickl ([jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk)) by the **12<sup>th</sup> of June**. Abstracts should be submitted in a Word or PDF file and be prepared for blind review removing all identifying details. Please include in a separate file the title of your paper as well as your institutional affiliation and your contact details. Authors will be notified by the **20<sup>th</sup> of June** about the acceptance of their paper. Please indicate in your email if you are willing to participate in the Reading Party if your paper could not be considered for presentation.

Papers should be **suitable for a presentation of 40 minutes**. We welcome submissions that expand on one of the questions mentioned above, or that address one of the following topics (though they need not be limited to them): the notion of duty and the significance of the categorical imperative; Fichte's notion of drive; Fichte's attempt to provide an answer to the empty formalism objection; Fichte's and Kant's explanation of the origin of evil; the moral significance of other agents and the intersubjective dimension of freedom and morality; the distinction between law and ethics; the idea of moral progress and virtue; the different divisions of duties in Kant and Fichte; discussions of individual duties (such as the duty not to lie). Preference will be given to abstracts on both Kant's and Fichte's practical philosophy and/or papers that have a comparative approach.

### **Call for Abstracts for the "Kant in Progress" Workshop**

The "Kant in Progress" Workshop is open to all participants of the Reading Party and aims to provide an additional opportunity for paper presentations. We aim to give as many people as possible a chance to present their work. A separate and informal call for abstracts will be circulated around the participants of the Reading Party in due course.

### **Participation Fees**

The costs for students are **£80** and for faculty members **£160**. The fee covers accommodation and full board at The Burn for three nights, as well as transportation from St Andrews to The Burn and back.

**Student speakers** whose papers are selected for presentation at the Reading Party will be **waived** the entire participation fee. Members of the BSHP are entitled to a 10% discount (please mention in your email if this applies to you).

If you would like to attend but childcare duties make it difficult, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Johannes Nickl about it, as we may be able to provide assistance.

## Registration Process

We invite registration for participation, with or without abstract submission, from all interested parties. Since the number of places is limited, the registration process is divided into two steps:

(1) Informal registration: please register with us your intent to participate as early as possible by sending an email including your name and institutional affiliation, and a brief expression of interest (2-3 lines) to Johannes Nickl ([jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk)) by the **19th of June**.

(2) Payment: selected participants will be given instructions on how to make the online fee payment. This counts as a formal registration.

The event is also fully accessible (e.g., wheelchair access).

## Acknowledgements

The St Andrews Kant Reading Party 2022 is brought to you with financial support from the Department of Philosophy at the University of St Andrews; the [Analysis Trust](#); the [Aristotelian Society](#); the [British Society for the History of Philosophy](#); the [Scots Philosophical Association](#); and the [UK Kant Society](#).

## Contact

For further inquiries about the Reading Party, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Johannes Nickl ([jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:jmn20@st-andrews.ac.uk)). Also check out our Kant Reading Party webpage: <https://standrewskantcolloquium.wordpress.com/kant-reading-party/>

With best wishes,

The organisers: Johannes Nickl and Prof. Jens Timmermann