The Contemporary Kantian Philosophy Project
8th Annual Workshop
"Kant and AI: Metaphysical, Epistemic, Moral, and Sociopolitical Issues"
University of Liverpool, Liverpool UK
17-18 December 2025
WORKSHOP PROGRAM (Updated 5 December)

The Contemporary Kantian Philosophy Project (CKPP) is pleased to announce its eighth annual workshop, which will take place on 17-18 December 2025 at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool UK, and will be jointly organized with the Liverpool-Oxford-St Andrews Kantian (LOSAK) Research Centre, the ERC/UKRI 'KantianDESERT' Advanced Grant and the Kantian Standing Group of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR-KSG).

The topic of the workshop is "Kant and AI: Metaphysical, Epistemic, Moral, and Sociopolitical Issues." Papers will be presented on any aspect of how Kant's Critical philosophy, or how Kantian philosophy more generally, whether theoretical philosophy or practical philosophy, bears on the concept, theory, and fact of digital technology, especially including artificial intelligence (AI) and "the strong AI thesis," which says that it's possible to build and implement digital technology—for example, robots—that equals or surpasses the achievements of rational human animals.

WEDNESDAY 17 DECEMBER

Welcome: 12-12:15pm

Session I: 12:15-1:15pm

Till Hoeppner (Gottingen)
Title: "Kant and Strawson on Thought as a Cognition Through Concepts, or Why Generative AI Cannot Think"
Abstract: In the first Critique's Analytic of Concepts, Kant analyzes our human capacity for thought by investigating what specific representational capacities and acts are required to realize its task of a "cognition through concepts" (A68/B93, A69/B94), by which he understands a representational, true or false relation of general concepts to individual objects. Similarly, Strawson, in the first chapter of *Individuals*, conceives of the representational relation to individual objects as the task of conceptual schemes, and soon arrives at Kant's problem of individuating the objects specifically of concepts. The main point of contact between Strawson and Kant that I want to emphasize concerns the

essential link between a descriptive or conceptual relation to objects in thought and a demonstrative or perceptual (intuitive) relation to the same objects in experience: According to both, the capacity of relating concepts to objects requires the possibility to relate these concepts to objects that are demonstratively related to through sense-perception. After sketching these arguments in the first half of my talk, I will, in its second half, begin to tease out what I take to be a direct implication of them: namely, that generative AI, at least in the form of LLMs but maybe more generally, cannot be taken to think the world, because it cannot relate concepts to objects of experience. I end by speculating on what it would take for AI to be able to think in the relevant sense.

Lunch: 1:15-2:00pm

Session II: 2:00pm 3:00pm

Uri Eran (Jerusalem)
Title: "Will Machines Ever Have Kantian Autonomy?"

Abstract: We commonly refer to sophisticated automated machines such as self-driving cars and automated weapon systems as autonomous. Philosophers, however, are often uncomfortable with bestowing this honorary degree to machines and insist that it be reserved to those who possesses certain capacities (e.g., independence of human supervision, setting one's own ends). Autonomy, according to this approach, is a matter of having these capacities, and whether a machine has them is an empirical question to be decided by observing how well it performs on certain tasks. By contrast, I will argue that there is another, normative conception of autonomy we find in Kant. To attribute autonomy in this sense to someone is not a matter of judging that he has certain capacities, but rather that he ought to act in certain ways, be committed to certain principles, and properly respond to certain considerations. If 'ought implies can,' then being obligated to act in these ways entails that one can do so. Accordingly, evidence bearing on the existence of the required capacities should lead us to revise our ascriptions of autonomy in the normative sense. But since the capacities often thought sufficient for machine autonomy are insufficient for being obligated to behave and respond in certain ways, the fact that a machine has them is not a sufficient reason to regard it as autonomous in the normative sense. Whether machines will ever have this kind of autonomy depends more on our shared conception of agency and responsibility than on any technological advances.

Session III: 3:05pm-4:05pm

Cecilia Brotzu (Pavia)
Title: "Why Artificial Intelligence Lacks Schematism: Kant on the Transcendental Conditions of Meaning"
Abstract: Debates about artificial intelligence often suggest that advanced computational systems are capable of replicating some aspects of human cognition, or even human cognition as such. From a Kantian standpoint, however, this assumption obscures a crucial distinction between the empirical association of data and the transcendental conditions of meaning. Whereas cognition requires both intuitions and concepts (cf. CPR, A51/B75), AI fails to reproduce either of them in the strict Kantian sense. AI systems are highly effective in detecting interconnections in large datasets, while lacking the capacity to temporally synthesize concepts, as required by Kantian schematism, which is not merely a matter of producing images; rather, it provides the temporal determination that makes their application to intuitions possible (cf. A142/B181). Accordingly, it is a spontaneous and synthetic act of the subject, grounding the possibility of experience. The absence of schematism implies that AI cannot genuinely exhibit meaning, but only simulate it through correlations. By framing the discussion within transcendental philosophy, this paper aims to show that AI cannot properly be said to know or understand, but only to imitate understanding through correlations. This is, indeed, a structural limit, which proves Kant's transcendental philosophy to be highly relevant to current discussions, explaining why meaning and knowledge remain bound to human cognitive faculties. Far from being a mere empirical comparison, the analysis highlights the conceptual gap between mechanistic processing and the synthesis required for cognition, emphasizing that the conditions for experience.

Break, coffee: 4:05pm-4:20pm

Session IV: 4:20pm-5:20pm

Robert Hanna (Independent)
Title: "Kant, Manifest Realism, and The Refutation of Digital Idealism"
Abstract: In my view, Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism is most charitably and defensibly interpreted as a version of realistic idealism that I call "manifest realism," which says that

the natural universe is directly accessible to rational human pure or a priori intuition and human sense perception alike, precisely because the natural universe consists of a complete, unified, structuralist system of objective veridical appearances, such that anything X appears to be F (or G, or whatever) to us if and only if (i) X really and truly is F (or G, or whatever), and (ii) the fact

of X's being F (or G, or whatever) is intersubjectively directly accessible to all actual or possible rational human minded animals, and not idiosyncratically restricted to any single rational human individual or to any particular rational human community/social institution or special set of such communities/social institutions.

In turn, my demonstration of Kantian manifest realism will employ both a positive and a negative strategy, first, by demonstrating what I call *weak or counterfactual transcendental idealism*, in eight steps, and second, by refuting what I call *the skeptical thesis of digital idealism* in six steps.

THURSDAY 18 DECEMBER

Welcome, coffee: 9-9:05

Session V: 9:05am-10:05am

Omer Lipsker (Tel Aviv/Turin)
Title: "A Canon, Not an Organon: Artificial Logic, AI, and Social Mobility"
Abstract: In this talk, I examine Artificial Intelligence (notably ChatGPT) through the lens of Kant's approach to *logica artificialis*. I argue that Kant's approach offers a balanced framework: it weighs what is illusory against what is useful. Applying this framework, I suggest that AI possesses a revolutionary potential for promoting social mobility within academia. Kant inherited from the Wolffian tradition the distinction between *logica naturalis* and *logica artificiali*s (Lu-Adler 2018; Rodríguez 2012). While the former belongs to common understanding, describing the natural and unconscious use of rules, the latter serves as a methodical preparation (propaedeutic) for science by making these rules explicit through abstract precepts. Kant expressed his position with the slogan that logic is only a canon, not an organon. Whereas Meier ambitiously regarded logic as guiding the acquisition of knowledge across all scholarly domains, Kant maintained that its precepts are necessary for truth but not sufficient to produce it. For Kant, abstract rules—though necessary—cannot substitute for common sense, self-thinking, or talent.
Similarly, in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant insists that transcendental logic can serve only as a canon, not an organon (e.g. A63/B88; A132/B171). This distinction captures the balanced character of his approach: it acknowledges the limitations inherent in framing thinking artificially, yet preserves the positive function of such methods. In an impressive body of work, Robert Hanna has developed a powerful critique of what he calls "the myth of AI," arguing that AI cannot replace thinking, since it is not intelligent. This perspective clarifies why any philosophical product generated by AI is, at best, mediocre and, at worst, inherently defective. Yet Hanna, I suggest, tends to downplay AI's potential as a canon. For Kant, the rules that can and should be artificially constructed

are the most general and necessary ones. This limitation leaves untouched more concrete norms that shape philosophy. Choosing a PhD supervisor, applying for a scholarship, or participating in a conference are essential activities for a devoted student of philosophy, governed by tacit academic norms that are not readily accessible to everyone's "healthy understanding." Empirical studies (e.g., Morgan et al., 2022; Helin, 2022) confirm that such norms have traditionally been transmitted informally within academic families or privileged national contexts. Students without such backgrounds must rely on exceptionally attentive mentors or struggle to decipher them—autodidactically or together with peers. This problem is especially acute today, in what Hanna describes as the "ivory bunker" of a self-enclosed professional academic philosophy. It is precisely here that AI can play a role. Already today, it performs remarkably well in explaining, for example, how to structure a formal email or prepare a conference presentation. With such support, AI has the potential to mitigate the disadvantages faced by students from non-academic backgrounds. This potential, however, must remain confined within the bounds set by Hanna. AI must be understood as merely a canon: a set of abstract rules that can assist, but never replace, common sense and self-thinking.

Session VI: 10:10am-11:10am

Levi Haeck Gormez (Ghent)
Title: "Outsourcing Judgment: A Kantian Account of Legal Judgment and LLMs"
Abstract: This paper addresses the question of whether legal judgment can be outsourced to artificial intelligence (AI), and specifically to AI systems based on Large Language Models (LLMs). The issue has attracted international attention, at both the level of theoretical research and of practical application, and the development of LLM tools specifically designed for lawyers and judges (Legal LLMs) has sparked further discussions. Several scholars have expressed skepticism and highlighted limitations and concerns, while others have pointed out how operationalization in the legal field seems to be inevitable and even desirable, once appropriate regulation is devised. This paper, however, approaches the issue from a different angle. It turns to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in order to reconsider the very notion of judgment and, in particular, to examine what kind of judgment is at play in legal proceedings. Drawing on Kant's distinction between *determinative* and *reflective* judgment, the analysis focuses on the specifically Kantian account of how judgment proceeds syllogistically – whether in the determinative mode, where the universal is already given and the particular subsumed under it, or in the reflective mode, where, by reflecting on the particular, the universal is still to be sought. On this basis, the paper compares these Kantian features of judgment with the current capabilities of LLMs, ultimately asking whether legal judgment, understood in both its determinative and reflective dimensions, can indeed be outsourced to them.

Break, coffee 11:10am-11:20am

Session VII 11:20am-12:20pm

Linda Palmer (Independent)
Title: "Kant's Theory of Cognition and Current AI Systems"
Abstract: After decades of effort since the development of modern computers in the mid-20th century, with waxing and waning levels of attention and funding, in recent years AI (artificial intelligence) has suddenly exploded in success and popularity. How do these systems represent and use knowledge? Can a comparison with Kant's theory of cognition yield useful insights? Large language models (LLMs) don't attempt to use the same methods as human cognizers; they depend on vast datasets far beyond the ability of any human to take in. By contrast, a recent experimental AI system, Richard Evans's "Apperception Engine," attempts to implement Kant's cognitive theory in computational form. As he notes, computation enforces disambiguation, and he argues both AI and Kantian interpretation have something to gain from this interdisciplinary effort. Evan's work draws on the first Critique. I argue that Kant's first Critique theory left an open problem in the realm of empirical concepts—for which a new regulative principle (hinted at but undeveloped in the first Critique)—is required. In this presentation I will explore what the third Critique's new principle might mean for efforts like the Apperception Engine. I follow Ginsborg in arguing there is an essential cognitive, normative content to Kant's third Critique. I do not follow her in that I take the Kantian "common sense" to involve a literal feeling. Assuming that AIs do not, as yet, involve any consciousness or feelings, can this be useful?

Lunch: 12:20pm-1:00pm

Session VIII 1:00pm-2:00pm (Online)

Jordan Pascoe (Binghamton)
Title: "Kant, AI, and Precarious Labour"
Abstract: This talk explores Kantian resources for grappling with the way that the AI revolution is transforming work – and for tracking the ways that, in transforming work, it impacts our roles as citizens. I begin by positioning Kant as a theorist of labor in an era of tremendous social and economic upheaval that bears striking parallels to our own: established and relatively stable patterns of work were being upended, and workers were finding themselves replaced and displaced in ways that required a radical rethinking of both freedom and the state's duties to citizens. Kant would engage in such a rethinking, developing both moral and legal resources for thinking about the place of "free" laborers, as well as the relationship between work, citizenship, and the state's duties to support its

people. I then focus on the distinctive way that Kant thought one's role as a worker structured one's place as a citizen, drawing out the echoes of this argument in the premises of contemporary political and economic policy. These premises deserve to be fully spelled out in an era in which AI developers have prioritized "replacing" rather than "enhancing" human workers in many fields, generating tremendous uncertainty about the future of varied kinds of work. I argue that the Kantian account, which links work to citizenship, and emphasizes the importance of not treating persons "as a mere means" provide resources for challenging dominant Silicone Valley stories about the future of AI and mass unemployment, and for recognizing this future as a grave threat to both the concept and practice of citizenship.

Session IX: 2:05pm-3:05pm

Martin Sticker (Bristol)
Title: "Is AI Use a Form of Treatment as Mere Means?"
Abstract: In their 2024 paper "Should I Use ChatGPT to Write My Papers", Aylsworth and Castro present a Kantian argument against ChatGPT use for the writing of humanities essays. They argue that the process of writing humanities essays is important for the cultivation of your humanity. ChatGPT use deprives students of unique opportunities to cultivate their humanity. It thus can violate an imperfect duty to self. I will raise three problems for this argument: (i) Aylsworth and Castro's notion of humanity is ambiguous between self-governance and reasoning, (ii) it is not clear that humanities essays are unique opportunities for the promotion of an imperfect duty, and (iii) Aylsworth and Castro's argument may show too much, namely, that there is a duty to study humanities. Nonetheless, I believe that a humanity based argument against ChatGPT use may be promising, but such use may violate a perfect duty to others. I argue that creatives and writers whose work was used to train LLMs may have been used as mere means in this process, and they are now further harmed by being rendered unemployed as writers and creatives. They are deprived of the opportunity to be a means (on their own terms). I will close with thoughts on the responsibility of LLM users, if my argument goes through.

Break, coffee: 3:05pm-3:15pm

Session X: 3:15pm-4:15pm

Howard Williams (Cardiff)
Title: "Kant and the Role of Intellectuals in Dark Times"
Abstract: Immanuel Kant considered carefully the relationship between the academic pursuit of philosophical insight and public life throughout his career from the 1750s to

the late 1790s. Here I shall try to challenge the image of Kant as an ivory tower academic who disdained participation in the politics of the day. Indeed, Kant believed that philosophers had a duty to speak on the issues of the day and help generate a public sphere where the actions carried out by rulers were subject to their closest scrutiny.