Mini-symposium on Kant and cognition

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Kant's position in the history of philosophy is unique in that many of the most important schools of thought over the past two hundred years in both analytic and continental philosophy are all, in one way or another, reactions to Kant and have a common source in Kant, despite the fact that they often have radically different methods, terminologies, and positions. Now one popular point of departure in Kant has been his assertion of *synthetic a priori cognition*, where much attention has been paid both to the analytic-synthetic distinction (in the logical positivists and Quine) and to the possibility of what, if anything, can be established a priori (in Philip Kitcher, Richard Rorty, Lawrence Bonjour and, again, Quine). Surprisingly, much less explicit attention has been paid to the third crucial term, cognition (*Erkenntnis*), and to exactly how it is to be understood. It is true that different traditions have taken very different stances on cognition. For example, Sellars and some of his prominent followers (such as Robert Brandom and John McDowell) have proceeded on the assumption that Kant's basic interest in the *Critique of Pure Reason* lies in developing a theory of intentionality (or representationality). But it has also been quite common to take Kant to be an arch-epistemologist (responsible for synthesizing the rationalist and empiricist epistemological traditions), a view that was encouraged by Norman Kemp Smith's influential English translation of the first *Critique*, which translated both 'Wissen' and 'Erkenntnis' as knowledge. (If 'Erkenntnis' just is knowledge, then Kemp Smith is correct, but by not marking the

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different terms, he made it impossible for English readers to decide whether cognition and knowledge might be distinct.) But what reason do we have for favoring one of these competing interpretations of cognition over the other? Since the primary focus of the first *Critique* is to investigate the possibility of synthetic a priori cognition, the very subject matter of this seminal work, along with its most basic argument, hangs on a proper answer to this question.

In light of this situation, it would be quite useful if Kant scholars were to undertake a sustained investigation of the nature of cognition in Kant that was based on detailed textual exegesis and careful philosophical argument. Moreover, it would be helpful to have not simply one more scholar's particular perspective, but contributions from several scholars with different philosophical perspectives, exegetical frameworks, and historical sensitivities. Eric Watkins and Marcus Willaschek have jointly written a paper, titled "Kant on Cognition and Knowledge" that provides a cohesive argument showing that and why cognition, for Kant, must be distinct from knowledge, both as Kant understood it and as it has traditionally been understood (justified true belief). They argue, instead, that cognition is a mental state through which one is aware of the existence and (at least some of the) general features of objects. Unlike knowledge, it does not require either an act of assent or (an objectively sufficient) justification.

Further, Clinton Tolley has written a paper, titled "Kant on the Place of Cognition in the Progression of our Representations", that similarly argues for the distinctness of cognition and knowledge, though his argument is based on an extensive analysis of the different kinds of representations Kant invokes. What's more, Tolley argues that Kant thinks of cognition as occupying a particular place within a 'progression' (*Stufenleiter*) from basic sensory representations up to highly complex rational systematic knowledge. In this way, he illuminates, by way of comparison and contrast, the exact nature of cognition in Kant.

By arguing in these distinct, but complementary ways for the difference between cognition and knowledge, these two papers may help constitute an important step forward in our understanding by contributing not only to Kant scholarship, but also to clarifying a foundational issue that is still very much alive in contemporary philosophy.