Kultura i Wartości
ISSN 2299-7806
Nr 39 (2025)

http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/kw.2025.39.43-59

How Could Kant's Distinction between Opinion, Belief, and Knowledge Address Epistemic Challenges in the Digital Age?

Tailine Hijaz*
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8149-1005

This paper draws on aspects of Kant's epistemology to investigate the potential contribution of his conceptual distinctions to contemporary discourses concerning disinformation, fake news, and public discourse. Focusing on the *Canon of Pure Reason* in the first *Critique*, I examine Kant's distinction between opinion, belief, and knowledge, as well as the role of transcendental reflection in clarifying these levels of epistemic legitimacy. The hypothesis is that this conceptual structure may clarify the confusion between different forms of assent in digital environments, where misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, for example,

TAILINE HIJAZ, doctoral student at the Philosophy Department of the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil, and University of Vechta, Germany; address for correspondence: Paula Gomes, 145, 80510-070, São Francisco, Curitiba, Brazil; e-mail: tailinehijaz@hotmail.com

* This research was conducted during a scholarship supported by the International Cooperation Program (PROBRAL), financed by Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education within the Ministry of Education of Brazil (CAPES). An earlier version of this paper was presented in April 2025 during the internal seminars of the PROBRAL research group. I am grateful to Egyle do Nascimento Lopes, Karine de Souza Barboza, and Professor Joel Klein for suggesting key texts that informed Part 1 of the paper, as well as to Professors Joel Klein and Jean-Christophe Merle for their thoughtful feedback, which helped me improve the argument. I also thank Luciana Martínez, who encouraged me to explore this topic following the presentation of a different paper in 2024.

blur epistemic boundaries and raise questions about freedom of expression, the conditions of Enlightenment, and the viability of rational public discourse.

Keywords: *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kantian epistemology, digital disinformation, Enlightenment

Introduction

In this paper, I draw on some aspects of Kant's epistemology to investigate the potential contribution of his conceptual distinctions to contemporary discourses concerning disinformation, fake news, and public discourse. My focus will be on the *Canon of Pure Reason* in the first *Critique*, with an emphasis on Kant's distinction between opinion, belief, and knowledge, as well as the role of transcendental reflection in clarifying these levels of epistemic legitimacy. For the purposes of this paper, I will not consider Kant's treatment of these forms of assent in other works, such as the *Lectures on Logic* or the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. My aim is not to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive examination of all Kantian references to assent, but rather to focus on whether and how the *Canon* and the *Transcendental Dialectic* offer conceptual resources that remain pertinent for understanding the epistemic challenges of the digital age.

The hypothesis posited here is that this conceptual structure can facilitate a more profound comprehension of the epistemic challenges that are currently being confronted, particularly within digital environments, where misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, for example, blur the boundaries between knowledge, belief, and opinion. This confusion also raises questions regarding the conception of freedom of expression. On the one hand, open debate is fundamental to democratic life and, in Kant's view, a condition for *Aufklärung, Enlightenment*. Conversely, a failure to differentiate distinctly between varied forms of assent can compromise the fundamental principles of rational discourse. Therefore, in this paper, I want to explore whether Kant's distinctions—especially those found in the *Canon* and in his account of transcendental reflection—can offer useful tools for addressing these contemporary problems.

Part 1: Transcendental Reflection and the Epistemic Distinctions Between Opinion, Belief, and Knowledge

In the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant introduces the concept of transcendental reflection as a critical activity through which we examine the proper use of our cognitive faculties.[1] This reflective process enables us to distinguish the legitimate operations of the understanding from the illusions that arise when reason oversteps its limits, particularly when it seeks knowledge beyond the boundaries of possible experience. As Kant elucidates:

> In order to distinguish the proper action of the understanding from the force that meddles in, it will thus be necessary to regard the erroneous judgment of the understanding as a diagonal between two forces that determine the judgment in two different directions, enclosing an angle, so to speak, and to resolve the composite effect into the simple effects of the understanding and of sensibility; in pure judgment *a priori* this must happen through transcendental reflection, through which (as already shown) every representation is assigned its place in the faculty of cognition proper to it, and hence also the influence of the latter is distinguished from it.[2]

By engaging in transcendental reflection, we are able to discern whether a representation is rooted in sensibility or in the understanding, and in doing so, we are able to evaluate the legitimacy of the judgment it supports. This process facilitates the identification of that which is knowable, that which can only be conceived as a regulative idea, and the genesis of errors in reasoning. Although transcendental reflection does not entirely eliminate transcendental illusion—which, "contrary to all the warnings of criticism, carries us beyond the empirical use of the categories, and holds out to us the semblance of extending the pure understanding"[3]—, it allows us to identify such missteps, limit their effects, and clarify the scope of valid cognition. Kant's primary concern here isn't with empirical illusion, which occurs when the imagination misleads our capacity to evaluate phenomena based on experience, or with logical illusion, which arises from the inad-

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 351.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., B352.

equate application of logical principles. Instead, he addresses the concept of transcendental illusion, which emerges when reason operates independently of experience and applies its principles beyond their proper domain. In such cases, there is an absence of an empirical standard to correct our judgments. The illusion stems not from faulty reasoning but from its application in a domain where reason has no legitimate authority.

This reflective task assumes particular significance in the third section of the *Canon of Pure Reason* [4], where Kant outlines a distinction between three forms of epistemic assent: opinion (*Meinen*), belief (*Glauben*), and knowledge (*Wissen*). These are not simply descriptive categories of mental attitude; rather, they reflect varying degrees of normative legitimacy. According to Kant, the act of "taking something to be true"[5] (*Fürwahrhalten*)—that is, to ascribe to it *subjective validity*—can occur under one of these three modes, depending on whether the grounds for assent are subjectively or objectively sufficient.[6] I am aware that Kant's tripartite distinction has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Some commentators even regard it as a "puzzle,"[7] noting the tensions between its subjective and objective elements and calling into question the coherence of the *Canon*'s definitions. I do not aim to resolve these interpretive controversies here, nor do I engage with the alternative treatments found in the *Lectures on Logic* or in §91 of the

[4] Ibid., B 848-859.

[5] Ibid., B 848.

[6] The precise nature of "subjective sufficiency" and "objective sufficiency" remains ambiguous and has given rise to different interpretations. Höwing and Stevenson note that Kant does not fully explain this distinction in the first *Critique*, which has prompted numerous attempts at interpretation, drawing upon other works by the philosopher, such as his *Logic* lectures. See Thomas Höwing, "Kant on Opinion, Belief and Knowledge," in *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Höwing (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Leslie Stevenson, "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," *Kantian Review* 7 (2003): 72–100. Gava suggests that "a subjectively sufficient assent is based on grounds that are sufficient to produce full approval of a proposition in a particular subject, whereas an objectively sufficient assent is based on grounds that are sufficient to warrant the truth of the proposition to which we assent". Gabriele Gava, "Kant and Crusius on Belief and Practical Justification," *Kantian Review* 24, no. 1 (2019): 53–75, 55.

[7] For example, see Höwing, "Kant on Opinion, Belief and Knowledge."

Critique of Judgment.[8] My aim is more modest: to provide a general reconstruction of the distinctions as presented in the *Canon*—one that is intended to be clear and sufficient for the purposes of this paper, namely, to examine how these different forms of assent might help clarify some of the epistemic disorientation we face in contemporary public discourse.

Opinion (*Meinen*) is the weakest form of assent, as it is deficient in both subjective and objective sufficiency. Indeed, Kant describes it as a judgment that is characterized by its conscious insufficiency from both subjective and objective standpoints.[9] When we merely opine, we are not willing to assert our judgment universally, nor do we rely on it with full confidence. The grounds provided are insufficient both for personal conviction and for public justification. The subject consenting to a proposition does not entail the expectation that others to do the same, and even the subject's own endorsement is characterized by hesitancy and provisionality. In this sense, opinion could be understood as a form of epistemic hesitation: it marks a recognition that one's judgment is not yet ready to be acted upon or defended. While the act of opining may have a legitimate role in the early stages of inquiry, when hypotheses are still being tested, it cannot provide a stable foundation for either personal belief or rational communication. Precisely because it lacks both internal conviction and external validity, *Meinen* remains epistemically fragile. As such, transcendental reflection fulfils a pivotal function in the identification of instances in which we are merely opining. That is to say, in circumstances where judgment must be suspended or more robust justification is required.

Belief (*Glaube*), by contrast, is characterized by subjective sufficiency, though it lacks objective grounds.[10] While the subject is personally convinced of the veracity of the judgment, the available grounds are insufficient to demand universal assent. In this case, we can say that the judgment may be grounded in practical interests or moral commitments. While not arbitrary, it also cannot claim

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Part II: *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, Appendix, §91: *The Type of Assurance Produced by a Practical Faith*.

[9] Id., *Critique of Pure Reason,* B 851.

[10] Ibid.

objective validity: "Only in a **practical relation**, however, can taking something that is theoretically insufficient to be true be called believing."[11]

Some scholars, such as Höwing[12], argue that *Glaube* requires non-epistemic justifications—practical or moral reasons, for instance. As Fonnesu[13] observes, Kant introduces *glauben* not merely as a weaker form of knowledge but as a necessary expression of reason's practical orientation when theoretical cognition reaches its limits. Höwing[14] reinforces this idea by insisting that belief falls within a distinct normative domain. According to Chagas,[15] "Kant states that the necessary presupposition of the idea of the Highest Good cannot have the same validity as judgments based on certainty, precisely because there is no corresponding object for this idea in possible experience."

Knowledge (*Wissen*) requires both subjective and objective sufficiency: it is subjectively sufficient (conviction) and objectively sufficient (certainty).[16] Therefore, *Wissen* entails not only personal certainty but also justificatory grounds that are capable of withstanding public scrutiny and rational criticism. As Höwing observes, *wissen* involves a kind of rational necessity; when both forms of sufficiency are present, we are obligated to assent: "a ground of knowledge does not simply make it *necessary* for the agent to assent to some judgment; it makes it *universally and objectively necessary."* [17] Knowledge, according to Kant, binds any rational agent who possesses the relevant justification.[18]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Höwing, "Kant on Opinion, Belief and Knowledge," 209.

[13] Luca Fonnesu, "Kant on Private Faith and Public Knowledge," *Rivista di Filosofia* 106 (2015): 361–390.

[14] Höwing, "Kant on Opinion, Belief and Knowledge."

[15] Flávia Carvalho Chagas, "O Cânon da Razão Pura," in *Comentários às obras de Kant. Crítica da Razão Pura*, ed. Joel Thiago Klein (Centro de Investigações Kantianas—UFSC, 2012), 721–746, at 741, https://www.nefipo.ufsc.br/files/2012/11/comentarios1.pdf (accessed December 12, 2023).

[16] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B 851.

[17] Höwing, "Kant on Opinion, Belief and Knowledge."

[18] This requirement anticipates, to some extent, a concern that would resurface in contemporary debates, such as in Edmund Gettier's objections to the model of knowledge as justified true belief: even when justification and truth are present, the connection between them may be merely accidental, thereby undermining the epistemic claim involved. Edmund L. Gettier,

This idea of universal justification underscores the notion that epistemic legitimacy is not solely dependent on personal conviction but also on persuasion. The assertion of knowledge claims must withstand rigorous scrutiny from others, requiring the capacity to evaluate from perspectives beyond our own. This reflective judgment, associated with Kant's notion of rational agency, involves both consistency and the ability to test our claims against a broader context. This phenomenon becomes more discernible when we contemplate our relationship to historical or empirical knowledge that has not directly verified, often relying on testimony and inference. For instance, while there may be a subjective belief in the existence of China or that the platypus is a real animal without having seen them myself, such beliefs can still amount to *Wissen* according to Kant's criteria, provided they are substantiated by sufficient objective and subjective evidence. They exemplify the notion that empirical knowledge is frequently mediated and indirect, yet this characteristic does not diminish its legitimacy. Conversely, the belief in the existence of Atlantis exemplifies how conviction may persist even in the absence of substantial evidence, highlighting the variability of epistemic support in empirical contexts. Moreover, empirical knowledge is inherently subject to constant reevaluation, as demonstrated by paradigm shifts observed in various scientific disciplines, such as the transition from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein's theory of relativity. This provisional character does not undermine its legitimacy; rather, it manifests a fundamental feature of scientific inquiry—its capacity for self-correction and for deepening our understanding through continuous critical engagement.

Thus, when Kant distinguishes these three forms of assent, he is not merely describing different psychological states. He is also identifying different levels of normative legitimacy. And it is through transcendental reflection that the determination of the categorization of a judgment within this structure is achieved—whether it should be claimed as knowledge, held as belief, or merely proposed as opinion. This reflective assessment is fundamental for identifying whether a judgment is grounded in reasons that genuinely justify assent, or merely in subjective

"Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (1963): 121–123, https://www.finophd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Gettier.pdf (accessed April 22, 2025). Although Kant does not present the problem in these terms, his distinction suggests that objective sufficiency must encompass not only the truth of the proposition but also the validity of the grounds that support it. This is a condition that cannot be secured by mere coincidence.

persuasion. Finally, this task is not only central to theoretical philosophy; it is also essential for the exercise of public reason and for the possibility of rational discourse.

Part 2: Kantian Approaches to Addressing Epistemic Challenges. The Role of Critical Reflection and Epistemic Justification

The objective of this analysis is to demonstrate the efficacy of the Kantian structure previously outlined in elucidating a fundamental issue in contemporary public discourse: the pervasive conflation of distinct levels of justification. This phenomenon is especially visible in the digital environment. *Disinformation*[19]—defined as content deliberately created to deceive or cause harm—does not meet any Kantian standard for legitimate assent. Indeed, it does not qualify as *opinion* in the proper sense. For Kant, *opinion* still presupposes an orientation toward truth, even if it is tentative and lacks full justification. However, *disinformation* is disseminated with a disregard for factual accuracy, with the primary objective being manipulation rather than rational persuasion.

Misinformation,[20] in contrast, may sometimes qualify as opinion—if and only if it is shared in good faith by someone who believes it to be true. In such cases, the issue lies in the absence of sufficient epistemic reflection. The individual

[19] I discussed these definitions, such as disinformation and fake news, in my Master's thesis in law. See here: Tailine Hijaz, "«Quanto vale a liberdade»: o problema da desinformação em face de concepções instrumentais e constitutivas de liberdade de expressão/ How much is freedom worth? The problem of disinformation in the face of instrumental and constitutive conceptions of freedom of expression" (Master Thesis, Federal University of Paraná, 2022), https://acervodigital.ufpr.br/xmlui/handle/1884/77997 (accessed April 22, 2025). The thesis was published as a book, in Portuguese, in 2023: Hijaz, Tailine. 2023. *Quanto vale a Liberdade? O problema da desinformação entre os diferentes fundamentos da liberdade de expressão* (São Paulo: Dialética, 2023).

[20] The terms *misinformation*, *fake news*, and *disinformation* are not used consistently in the literature. Building on the foundation laid out in my previous work (see note above), I use the term disinformation—or the more widely used term "fake news"—to refer to false content that is intentionally produced to mislead or cause harm. Misinformation, by contrast, is defined as false information that is disseminated without the intent to deceive.

has not sufficiently interrogated the basis of their belief, questioning whether it is rooted in subjective conviction or in objective support—or in neither. From a Kantian point of view, this kind of assent is classified as mere opinion (*Meinen*), which, again, lacks both subjective and objective sufficiency.

My point here is that this kind of epistemic confusion also has important consequences for how we understand freedom of expression today. What we increasingly see is the inversion of Kant's degrees of assent: knowledge, often supported by both subjective conviction and objective grounds, is disregarded as if it were mere opinion, while speculation or ungrounded claims are treated as truths. One need only consider the discourse surrounding vaccines or abortion to see this phenomenon. Scientific consensus, particularly regarding the efficacy of vaccines, is often portrayed as "just one side of the argument," while anecdotal evidence or conspiracy theories about treatments like hydroxychloroquine are elevated to the level of scientific alternatives. In the context of the abortion debate, deeply held religious beliefs may be regarded as morally significant on an individual level, thus being classified as belief (*Glauben*). However, these beliefs lack the requisite of objective support (*objektive Gültigkeit*) that would be required for them to count as knowledge (*Wissen*). Treating such beliefs as if they justify universal legal norms disregards the requirement that public reasoning be accessible to all rational agents, independent of particular worldviews.

It is not my intention to suggest that disagreement should be suppressed. On the contrary. Open public debate remains a core principle of democratic life. However, the assertion is that not all contributions to the debate are equally founded on epistemological principles—and Kant's distinctions offer a framework for understanding the nuances of this claim. From a Kantian perspective, once more, the principle of freedom of expression is not only compatible with the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*); it is a necessary condition for it. In essays like *What is Enlightenment?* and *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?*,[21] Kant defends the public use of reason as the main way individuals free themselves from intellectual dependence. However, this public use of reason presupposes an inclination to evaluate one's perspectives, provide rational justifications, and adjust

[21] I analyzed the issue of social irrationality and its relationship with Enlightenment and freedom of expression, based on a Kantian interpretation, in a previous paper titled *What is Enlightenment in the digital age?,* which is currently under review for publication.

judgments in accordance with reason. In my interpretation, freedom of speech does not inherently lead to epistemic chaos; rather, it is an essential element that facilitates reasoned deliberation and mutual accountability.

However, within the contemporary digital public sphere, the conditions conducive to such discourse are frequently undermined. The rapid and extensive disseminations of information, in conjunction with algorithmic systems that prioritize engagement over justification, fosters an environment that hinders rational evaluation. The study by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral,[22] for example, demonstrates that false content spreads faster and more broadly than true content across all topics. This suggests that claims are evaluated not on the basis of the justification they offer, but rather on their efficacy in attention economies.

This is where Kant's distinctions between *Meinen*, *Glauben*, and *Wissen* can serve as a valuable diagnostic instrument. If that is the case, we would treat opinions as tentative, beliefs as only subjectively grounded, and knowledge as requiring both conviction and objective support. *Transcendental reflection* in this context would entail a pause to inquire: what kind of claim is this? What sort of justification is being offered, if any? Am I dealing with something I merely assume, something I believe based on personal grounds, or something that meets both subjective and objective standards? More specifically, what authorizes me to judge something as knowledge, belief, or mere opinion? What is the structure of the assent I am about to give?

I'm not suggesting that Kant's normative structure could or should be fully implemented by contemporary institutions. That would be unrealistic, given the complexity of digital platforms, the scale of information exchange, and the diversity of epistemic standards in democratic societies. Nevertheless, the delineations

[22] "Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information. We found that false news was more novel than true news, which suggests that people were more likely to share novel information. Whereas false stories inspired fear, disgust, and surprise in replies, true stories inspired anticipation, sadness, joy, and trust. Contrary to conventional wisdom, robots accelerated the spread of true and false news at the same rate, implying that false news spreads more than the truth because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it." Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, "The Spread of True and False News Online," *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146–1151, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559.

between opinion, belief, and knowledge persists in providing a fundamental framework for the critical evaluation of public discourse. At the individual level, for example, this entails cultivating a habit of epistemic self-assessment. Prior to endorsing or disseminating a claim, it is imperative to engage in introspection and evaluate the validity of one's thoughts on the matter: is this something I just happen to think? Is it grounded in my experience or values? Or is it supported by evidence and argument to the point that it can be called knowledge? This does not imply the expectation that all individuals should assume the role of a philosopher. However, it does underscore the necessity to cultivate heightened sensitivity towards the varied standards of justification that underpin our assertions of knowledge and the acceptance of other's beliefs as valid.

Within educational settings, the distinction between *Meinen*, *Glauben*, and *Wissen* can serve as a valuable instrument for cultivating epistemic responsibility — that is, the ability to reflect on the justification of one's beliefs and assess their validity beyond mere subjective conviction. Education is not merely the transmission of information; it is also the cultivation of the capacity to distinguish between different forms of assent, to evaluate reasons critically, and to consider whether those reasons could be endorsed from a broader standpoint. This reflective dimension is of particular pertinence in democratic societies, where individuals are constantly subjected to competing claims, misinformation, and profound disagreement. It is noteworthy that certain media literacy programs are already demonstrating a shift in this direction. A randomized controlled trial conducted by Guess, Lerner, Lyons, Montgomery, Nyhan, Reifler and Sircar, for example, found that a brief media literacy intervention reduced participants' likelihood of sharing false headlines by approximately 30%.[23] This finding suggests that even

[23] "Using data from preregistered survey experiments conducted around recent elections in the United States and India, we assess the effectiveness of an intervention modeled closely on the world's largest media literacy campaign, which provided 'tips' on how to spot false news to people in 14 countries. Our results indicate that exposure to this intervention reduced the perceived accuracy of both mainstream and false news headlines, but effects on the latter were significantly larger. As a result, the intervention improved discernment between mainstream and false news headlines among both a nationally representative sample in the United States (by 26.5%) and a highly educated online sample in India (by 17.5%)." Andrew M. Guess et al., "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment between Mainstream and False

modest educational interventions can enhance our capacity to evaluate information prior to acting on it.

At the institutional level, this Kantian approach might support practices that preserve the conditions for reasoned public discourse. These measures may encompass the establishment of autonomous fact-checking bodies, the presence of public service media entities that maintain editorial independence, and the implementation of some regulations aimed at enhancing the transparency of algorithmic processes. A review of the extant research indicates that these practices can make a difference: Nyhan and Reifler found that timely corrections from trusted sources can reduce belief in misinformation—especially when the correction follows the false claim directly.[24]

For digital platforms, this reasoning could call for a structural rethinking of platforms as part of the public sphere, this time with epistemic responsibilities. Algorithmic systems could be redesigned to prioritize credibility and justification over engagement. Studies like those of Pennycook and Rand indicate that indicators such as source transparency and contextual information facilitate more critical evaluation of content by users.[25] Platforms may also introduce features that

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News in the United States and India," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 27 (2020): 15536–15545, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1920498117.

[24] "In the experiment, a randomly assigned subset of state legislators was sent a series of letters about the risks to their reputation and electoral security if they were caught making questionable statements. The legislators who were sent these letters were substantially less likely to receive a negative fact-checking rating or to have their accuracy questioned publicly, suggesting that fact-checking can reduce inaccuracy when it poses a salient threat." Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, "The Effect of Fact-Checking on Elites: A Field Experiment on U.S. State Legislators," *American Journal of Political Science*, no. 59 (2015): 628–640, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12162.

[25] "Reducing the spread of misinformation, especially on social media, is a major challenge. We investigate one potential approach: having social media platform algorithms preferentially display content from news sources that users rate as trustworthy. […] despite substantial partisan differences, we find that laypeople across the political spectrum rated mainstream sources as far more trustworthy than either hyperpartisan or fake news sources. Although this difference was larger for Democrats than Republicans-mostly due to distrust of mainstream sources by Republicans-every mainstream source (with one exception) was rated as more trustworthy than every hyperpartisan or fake news source across both studies when equally weighting ratings of Democrats and Republicans. Furthermore, politically balanced layperson

indicate the epistemic status of a post, aiming to clarify if it constitutes a personal opinion, an empirical claim, or the result of expert consensus, for instance.

It is conceivable that even friction mechanisms may be warranted when the epistemic stakes are high. These are features that slow down impulsive actions—like sharing a post—by prompting users to reflect before engaging. For instance, a platform could require users to open an article before sharing it, display disclaimers for unverified content, or include prompts to consider accuracy. Research by Pennycook, Epstein, Moshleh, et al. demonstrates that even minimal friction (for example, a simple accuracy reminder) can reduce the spread of misinformation.[26]

It is important to note that none of these proposals amount to censorship or a denial of freedom of expression. People make mistakes all the time; in this sense, error should be addressed through reasoned scrutiny, not authoritarian control. Consequently, the viability of freedom of thought and expression is contingent upon the existence of the conditions conducive to the operation of reason. Without space for "transcendental reflection"—without the capacity to distinguish between knowing, believing, and merely opining—public reason collapses into

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ratings were strongly correlated ($r = 0.90$) with ratings provided by professional fact-checkers. We also found that, particularly among liberals, individuals higher in cognitive reflection were better able to discern between low- and high-quality sources. Finally, we found that excluding ratings from participants who were not familiar with a given news source dramatically reduced the effectiveness of the crowd. Our findings indicate that having algorithms up-rank content from trusted media outlets may be a promising approach for fighting the spread of misinformation on social media." Pennycook, Gordon, and David G. Rand. "Fighting Misinformation on Social Media Using Crowdsourced Judgments of News Source Credibility." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 7 (2019): 2521–2526, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1806781116.

[26] "[...] the results show that subtly shifting attention to accuracy increases the quality of news that people subsequently share. Together with additional computational analyses, these findings indicate that people often share misinformation because their attention is focused on factors other than accuracy — and therefore they fail to implement a strongly held preference for accurate sharing. Our results challenge the popular claim that people value partisanship over accuracy, and provide evidence for scalable attention-based interventions that social media platforms could easily implement to counter misinformation online." Gordon Pennycook, Ziv Epstein, Mohammad Mosleh, et al., "Shifting Attention to Accuracy Can Reduce Misinformation Online," *Nature* 592 (2021): 590–595, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2.

noise, persuasion, and manipulation. From this perspective, digital platforms cannot be regarded as merely neutral channels. Their architecture has the capacity to actively shape the epistemic conditions of public life. Kant's contribution, therefore, does not entail a prescriptive methodology, but rather a conceptual framework for understanding these conditions. His distinctions between knowledge, belief, and opinion provide tools for clarifying the terms of public debate, especially in an environment where such terms are constantly blurred.

Final Remarks

While the implementation of restrictive legal measures may be deemed in certain circumstances, they frequently become effective only after the occurrence of harm, thereby offering limited efficacy in enhancing the epistemic quality of public discourse. In my interpretation, Kant's *Canon of Pure Reason* proposes an alternative approach: instead of imposing only external limits, it first calls on individuals to examine the internal justification of their claims—to ask whether they are entitled to opine, to believe, or to assert knowledge. This strategy does not result in the elimination of disagreement but elucidates the conditions under which disagreement is considered meaningful.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the erosion of epistemic distinctions in digital spaces—where belief frequently substitutes for knowledge and other combinations of the forms of assent—has practical consequences. When platforms prioritize visibility over justification, the space for critical judgment is undermined. In such contexts, the inability to distinguish between belief and knowledge may result in misguided collective decisions. The case of chloroquine as a treatment for patients with the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) illustrates this point. While individuals may hold opinions, public policy demands a higher epistemic standard. According to Kant's model, it is imperative that opinions lacking sufficient objective support do not govern collective action, particularly when the repercussions extend beyond the private sphere.

Rather than offering direct solutions to contemporary problems, the *Canon* provides a conceptual framework for evaluating the epistemic status of public assertions. In environments where all forms of assent are treated alike, the condi-

tions for reasoned deliberation become fragile. The central argument of this discourse is that recognizing the distinction between asserting knowledge, expressing belief, and merely offering an opinion may serve as a preliminary measure in the restoration of a modicum of epistemic responsibility within the domain of public discourse.

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Streszczenie

W jaki sposób Kantowskie rozróżnienie między mniemaniem, wiarą i wiedzą może stanowić odpowiedź na wyzwania epistemiczne epoki cyfrowej?

Artykuł odwołuje się do wybranych aspektów epistemologii Kanta w celu zbadania, na ile jego pojęciowe rozróżnienia mogą stanowić przyczynek do współczesnych debat dotyczących dezinformacji, fake news oraz dyskursu publicznego. Skupiając się na *Kanonie czystego rozumu* z pierwszej *Krytyki*, analizuję Kantowskie rozróżnienie między mniemaniem, wiarą i wiedzą, a także rolę refleksji transcendentalnej w wyjaśnieniu tych poziomów poznawczej legitymizacji. Formułuję hipotezę, że ta struktura pojęciowa może wyjaśnić zamieszanie między różnymi formami przyzwolenia epistemicznego pojawiającymi się w środowiskach cyfrowych, w których na przykład fałszywa informacja, dezinformacja oraz teorie spiskowe zaciemniają granice epistemiczne i rodzą pytania o wolność wypowiedzi, warunki Oświecenia oraz możliwość racjonalnego dyskursu publicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: *Krytyka czystego rozumu*, epistemologia Kantowska, dezinformacja cyfrowa, Oświecenie

Zusammenfassung

Wie kann Kants Unterscheidung zwischen Meinung, Glauben und Wissen auf die epistemischen Herausforderungen des digitalen Zeitalters reagieren?

Der Artikel bezieht sich auf ausgewählte Aspekte von Kants Erkenntnistheorie, um zu untersuchen, inwieweit seine begrifflichen Unterscheidungen zu aktuellen Debatten über Desinformation, Fake News und den öffentlichen Diskurs beitragen können. Mit Fokus auf den *Kanon der reinen Vernunft* aus der ersten *Kritik* analysiere ich Kants Unterscheidung zwischen Meinung, Glauben und Wissen sowie die Rolle der transzendentalen Reflexion bei der Ordnung dieser Ebenen der kognitiven Legitimisation. Die Hypothese des Artikels lautet, dass diese Begriffsstruktur dazu beitragen kann, die Verwirrung zwischen verschiedenen Formen epistemischer Zustimmung in digitalen Umgebungen zu erklären, in denen z.B. Fehlinformationen, Desinformation und Verschwörungstheorien die epistemischen Grenzen verwischen und Fragen nach der Meinungsfreiheit, den Bedingungen der Aufklärung und der Möglichkeit des rationalen öffentlichen Diskurses aufwerfen.

Schlüsselwörter: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* Kant'sche Erkenntnistheorie, digitale Desinformation, Aufklärung

Ins Deutsche übersetzt von Anna Pastuszka

Informacja o Autorze:

TAILINE HIJAZ, doktorantka na Wydziale Filozoficznym Uniwersytetu Federalnego w Paranie w Brazylii i Uniwersytetu w Vechcie w Niemczech; adres do korespondencji: Paula Gomes, 145, 80510-070, São Francisco, Curitiba, Brazil; e-mail: tailinehijaz@hotmail.com