

Kant's wager?: Betting as a touchstone of subjective conviction

Uma aposta de Kant?: A aposta como pedra de toque da convicção subjetiva

Jean-Christophe Merle
Universität Vechta
jean-christophe.merle@uni-vechta.de

Abstract: In the *Third Section. On having an opinion, knowing, and believing* of "The Canon of Pure Reason" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes: "Taking something to be true, or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing and knowing [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*] (A822/B850). This article attempts to show that P. Guyer and A.W. Wood's translation of *Glaube* is inadequate. The translation rests on false premises and leads to a momentous misunderstanding of what is at stake in "The Canon of Pure Reason" as well as its entire thesis and argument. This article offers a new interpretation of the Third Section, in which rational faith is put at the same level of certainty as knowledge.

Keywords: belief; canon; faith; Kant; knowledge; opinion.

Resumo: Na *Terceira Seção: Da opinião, da ciência e da fé* de "O cânone da razão pura" da *Crítica da razão pura*, Kant escreve: "A crença ou a validade subjetiva do juízo, relativamente à convicção (que tem ao mesmo tempo uma validade objetiva), apresenta os três graus seguintes: opinião, fé e ciência [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*]" (A822/B850). O presente artigo tenta demonstrar que a tradução de P. Guyer e A.W. Wood para *Glaube* é inadequada. A tradução repousa sobre falsas premissas e nos conduz a um grave equívoco na compreensão daquilo que está em jogo em "O cânone da razão pura", assim como de sua tese e argumento como um todo. Este artigo apresenta uma nova interpretação da Terceira Seção, na qual a fé racional é posta no mesmo nível da certeza como conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: crença; cânone; fé; Kant; conhecimento; opinião.

Recebido em 10 de setembro de 2025. Aceito em 11 de dezembro de 2025.

doisPontos, Curitiba, São Carlos, vol. 22, n. 3, dez. de 2025, p. 3-13 / ISSN: 2179-7412
DOI: 10.5380/dp.v22i3.101182

1) Four problematic assumptions about *Glauben* and *Wissen* in Kant

In “The Canon of Pure Reason” of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant famously asserts:

Taking something to be true [*das Fürwahrhalten*], or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages [*Stufen*] in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing and knowing [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*] (A822/B850).

Since, depending on the context, the German word *Glaube* may be translated either as “belief” or as “faith”, I provide in this quotation of the Cambridge edition by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood the German original in square brackets. What is at stake with the adequacy of the translation of this word in the “Third Section. On having an opinion, knowing, and believing” is nothing less than a correct understanding of that whole section, and of the “The Canon of Pure Reason” itself.

Commentators usually make the following four assumptions about this passage.

First, they assume that *Glauben* refers both to “doctrinal beliefs” (*den doktrinalen Glauben*, is plural in the original too) (A825/B853) and to “moral belief” (*dem moralischen Glauben*, is singular in the original too) (A828/B856) in the following passages:

[...] there is in merely theoretical judgments an analogue of practical judgments, where taking them to be true is aptly described by the word belief [*Glauben*], and which we can call doctrinal beliefs [*Glauben*] (KrV, A 825/B 853).

But there is something unstable about merely doctrinal belief [*doktrinale Glaube*]; one is often put off from its difficulties that come up in speculation, although, to be sure, one inexorably returns to it again. It is entirely otherwise in the case of moral belief. For it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points (KrV A 828/B 856).

Second, they assume that the meaning of *Glauben* is “belief”.

Third, they assume that knowledge [*Wissen*] has nothing in common with *Glauben*. The evidence usually provided for this third assumption is found in the following passage:

Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing [*Glauben*]. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing [*Glauben*]. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction [*Überzeugung*] (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty [*Gewißheit*] (for everyone) (A822/B850).

Fourth, they assume that both “doctrinal beliefs” and “moral belief” are objectively insufficient, and thus are not knowledge [*Wissen*].

These four assumptions are highly problematic on at least three points.

First, they do not provide any clear information about what is exactly the object of “*Wissen*” in “The Canon of Pure Reason”, and more precisely in its “Third section. On having opinions, knowing [*Wissen*], and believing [*Glauben*]”.

Second, they do not give any clear information about the way in which the three “stages” [*Stufen*] – or, more literally, “levels” – are really ordered. On this point, the “Third section” seems to provide pieces of information that are hardly compatible with one another, if one makes the assumptions mentioned above. Indeed, on the one hand, Kant mentions: “three stages [*Stufen*] [...]: having an opinion, believing and knowing [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*]” (A 822/B 850), while, on the other hand, the title of the whole section is “On having opinions, knowing [*Wissen*], and believing [*Glauben*]” (A 820/B 848). Now, whereas in both cases opinion [*Meinen*] continues to be the first “stage”, *Wissen* and *Glauben* are reversed in order. Thus, if one assumes consistency,

one should either read in the order of the former quotation not three “stages” or *Glauben* in the latter quotation does not mean the same as *Glauben* in the former quotation. I will argue for the latter of the two options.

In fact, this problem of consistency brings the focus back to the issue of the adequate translation of *Glaube*. In this regard, there are two equivocations: (i) *Glaube* may mean either “belief” or “faith”; (ii) *Glaube* may refer either to doctrinal beliefs [*doktrinale Glauben*] or to moral faith [*moralischer Glaube*].

2) Offering a consistent and adequate translation and interpretation

Concluding from the problems of consistency mentioned above that there is a lack of consistency in Kant’s famous passage on *Glaube* and *Wissen* should be our last resort solution. Therefore, I offer the following consistent interpretation, which rests on a suggestion for adequately translating *Glaube*.

Let us begin with the second “stage” mentioned above. Since this “second” stage, i.e. *moralischer Glaube*, is not related to any existing state of the world, unlike opinion [*Meinen*] and knowledge [*Wissen*], but, instead, to hope, I suggest distinguishing “doctrinal beliefs” from “moral faith”. Thus, in this quotation, one ought to translate *Glauben* as belief, and to understand it as doctrinal beliefs. Since “doctrinal beliefs” are dismissed by Kant as speculative and “unstable”, they cannot belong to the last stage or level. Thus, I suggest modifying the translation of one of the two quotations or making it more precise: “three stages” [*Stufen*] [...]: having an opinion, [*doctrinal*] beliefs and knowing [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*].” Thus, I will refer the other term of the equivocation mentioned above, i.e. “moral faith”, to the other quotation: “On having opinions, knowing, and [*moral*] faith”. Here, one may put knowing and moral faith on the same level, not only because there is no explicit conceptual order in the title of the section, rather, only a stylistic order between both, but also because of the following: knowing [*Wissen*] is both subjectively and objectively sufficient, and thus knowledge is considered by Kant as certain. Yet, in Kant’s view, moral faith is certain too, so that knowing and faith have something in common that puts them at the same level, namely, certainty. This is shown clearly in the following passage:

Of course, no one will be able to boast that he knows that there is a God and a future life [...]. All knowing (if it concerns an object of reason alone) can be communicated [...]. No, the conviction is not logical, but moral certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say ‘It is morally certain that there is a God,’ etc., but rather ‘I am morally certain’ etc (KrV, A 829/B 857).

Admittedly, Kant also asserts: “Subjective sufficiency is called conviction [*Überzeugung*] (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty [*Gewißheit*] (for everyone).” (KrV, A 823/B 850) Yet, there is no impossibility for moral certainty to be an objective certainty too. Indeed, one should conceptually distinguish between the communicability of the common judgment (“[...] the judgement of every understanding must agree”, KrV, A 820/B 848) and the “common ground” (A 820/B 848) of this universal agreement. The common ground is the basis for communicability. Therefore, there is no incompatibility for conviction for myself and certainty for everyone to share the same common ground.

The reason why this point is frequently overlooked may lie in an assumption made by most of the commentators, and explicitly formulated by Thomas Höwing. He considers the order of the three *Stufen* as being guided by an “epistemic ideal” (HÖWING, 2018, p. 1249). Yet, this assumption is

incompatible with the object of “The Canon of Pure Reason”, since its object is beyond the reach of cognition, and, hence, beyond the reach of epistemology too. Kant emphasizes:

[...] in a canon of pure reason we are concerned with only two questions that pertain to the practical interest of pure reason, and with regard to which a canon of its use must be possible, namely: Is there a God? Is there a future life? (KrV, A 803/B 831)

Instead of being related to an epistemic ideal, the “three stages [*Stufen*] in relation to conviction” (KrV, A 822/B 850) refer to a conviction concerning the existence of God and of a future life. Now, this conviction concerning the existence of God and of a future life is considered by Kant as being “valid objectively” (KrV, A 822/B 850), i.e., having “moral certainty” (A 829/B 857).

Now, Kant seems to mention two touchstones of this conviction. According to Joseph Trullinger, there are “two touchstones: communicability and betting” (TRULLINGER, 2013, p. 382). Yet, in my view, the designation of “communicability” for one of the touchstones is not appropriate. Indeed, mere communicability, on the one hand, and common judgment or common ground, on the other hand, are not exactly the same, as Habermas rightly observes:

Already in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant had ascribed the function of a pragmatic test of truth to the public consensus arrived at by those engaged in rational critical debate with one another: The touchstone whereby we decide whether our holding a thing to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore external, namely the possibility of communicating it and of finding it to be valid for all human reason. This agreement of all empirical consciousnesses, brought about in the public sphere, corresponds to the intelligible unity of transcendental consciousness (HABERMAS, 1989, 107 f.).

Accordingly, the two touchstones are accepting to or abstaining from betting and, more exactly, common judgment, which is at the basis of both Trullinger’s alleged touchstone of communicability and agreement (consensual communication). Now, Trullinger affirms the existence of a “tension between the two touchstones” (TRULLINGER, 2013, p. 394). Yet, although there are two touchstones, there is, in my view, no evidence of any tension. On the contrary, as I will now try to show, there is a commonality of these two touchstones, or, to say it more precisely, they have a common ground.

In the “Third section” of “The Canon”, there are two explicit passages about betting: one related to an unspecified issue and the second one, related to an issue of doctrinal belief. Both of them deal with betting as a criterion for distinguishing opinion and persuasion, on the one hand, from belief (second level) and conviction, on the other hand. Yet, in my view, there are two further passages on bets, although they are merely implicit ones. Although neither of them concern a positive bet, both of them concern the abstention from betting. Both passages pertain to faith, located at the same third “stage” as knowledge [*Wissen*].

Let us have a look at the first explicit passage about betting:

The usual touchstone of whether what someone asserts is mere persuasion or at least subjective conviction, i.e. firm belief [*festes Glauben*], is betting [*Wetten*]. Often someone pronounces his propositions with such confident and inflexible defiance [*Trotz*] that he seems to have entirely laid aside all concern for error. A bet disconcerts him [*macht ihn stutzig*]. Sometimes he reveals that he is persuaded enough for one ducat but not for ten. For he would happily bet one, but at ten he suddenly becomes aware of what he had not previously noticed, namely that it is quite possible that he has erred. If we entertain the thought that we would wager the happiness of our whole life on something, our triumphant judgement would quickly disappear, we would become timid [*schüchtern*] and we would suddenly discover that our belief does not extend so far. Thus pragmatic belief has only a degree, which can be large or small according to the difference of the interest that is at stake (KrV, A 825f./B 853f.).

This passage addresses what current research in epistemology calls respectively cognitive virtues and cognitive vices, or “vices of the mind” (see QUASSAM, 2019). In this passage, cognitive vices are mentioned in the expressions “confident and inflexible defiance” and “triumphant”, and cognitive virtues in the consideration “that it is quite possible that he has erred”. Betting is clearly presented by Kant as a remedy against this vice, i.e., as a way to awaken doubts, discarding (“disappear”) a passion in favor of a more important interest, and, therefore, paying closer attention to the issue at stake. Indeed, according to Kant, betting manifests two major cognitive virtues, namely modesty and firmness: “The expression of belief [*Glaubens*] is in such cases an expression of modesty from an objective point of view, but at the same time of the firmness of confidence in a subjective one (KrV, A 827/B 855).

In this passage, *Glaube* is an expression of modesty because, from a theoretical point of view, it does not even claim to be a hypothesis, as Kant makes clear in the remaining part of the same paragraph. Indeed, it raises no cognitive claim at all. In order not to misinterpret this passage, one should not confuse modesty with timidity by which Kant understands the following character trait: “[...] timidity [*Blödigkeit*] [is] a kind of concern [*Besorgniß*] and shyness [*Schüchternheit*] not to appear favorably in the eyes of others.” (Anth, AA 7: 257f.) In fact, passing the test of betting does not reveal any weakness of character such as timidity, but rather demonstrates firmness, or at least more firmness. Now, what is a touchstone, and what does firmness in the passage consist in?

Suppose that proposition *p* is “*x* firmly holds proposition *r* for true”, proposition *q* “*x* bets on the truth of proposition *r*”, and let us add the assumption that one can empirically check whether *a* is true. In this passage, Kant argues in the following way:

$p \rightarrow q$

$\neg q \rightarrow \neg p$ (contraposition)

Thus if $\neg q$ (i.e., in the case of *x*'s refusal to bet on *r*), then $\neg p$ means that there is no subjective sufficiency, and that *x* holding *r* for true, that is *p*, was *x*'s mere opinion. Before the test, one cannot know whether *x* has a conviction or a mere opinion.

At first sight, firmness consists in the absence of doubt, even considering the damage occurring in the case in which one's assertion would appear to be wrong. Now, in this passage, firmness is merely relative, as Kant observes: “Thus pragmatic belief has only a degree, which can be large or small according to the difference of the interest that is at stake.” (KrV, A 825f./B 853f.) What is at stake? Respectively one ducat (i.e., 3,5 grams of gold), ten ducats (35 grams of gold), and the happiness of our whole life. The latter of these stakes is the supreme test or degree of firmness.

About this test, let us make the following observation:

$[(p \rightarrow q) \wedge q] \not\rightarrow p$.

In other words, this test, if *x* passes it, does not positively prove that *x* has the belief that *r* is true. The test can only negatively prove, if *x* fails the test, that *x* does not have the belief that *r* is true. The second explicit passage on betting shows this point clearly.

In the second explicit passage about betting, Kant explains:

Since, however, even though we might not be able to undertake anything in relation to an object, and taking something to be true is therefore merely theoretical, in many cases we can still conceive and imagine an undertaking for which we would suppose ourselves to have sufficient grounds if there were a means for arriving at certainty [*Gewißheit*] about the matter, thus there is in merely theoretical judgments an analogue of practical judgments, where taking them to be true is aptly described by the word belief, and which we can call doctrinal beliefs. If it were possible to settle by any sort of experience whether there are inhabitants of at least some [*wenigstens in irgend einem*] of the planets that we see, I might well bet everything that I have on it. Hence I say that it is not merely an opinion but a strong belief (on the correctness of which I would wager many advantages in life) that there are also inhabitants in other worlds” (KrV, A825/B853).

From all we know about Kant’s moral theory, the existence of “inhabitants in other worlds” – that is, of rational beings in other worlds – is likely to be Kant’s own wish. Support for this is found in his Doctrine of Right, where he emphasizes:

It is possible for me [i.e. for a rational being] to have any external object of my choice as mine, that is, a maxim by which, if it were to become a law, an object of choice would in itself (objectively) have to belong to no one (*res nullius*) is contrary to right (RL, AA 6: 250).

Indeed, if other worlds exist, which we neither know of nor can have access to, the existence of rational beings in those worlds that possess objects of those worlds as objects of their choice adds objects of reasons to those objects of reason already existing in our world. Now, since Kant cannot experience those worlds, him putting money on their existence would not be a bet, because in a bet one has partial cognition, but, instead, a gamble, because in a gamble there is complete ignorance. Thus,

[...] there is something unstable [*etwas Wankendes*] about merely doctrinal belief [*doktrinale Glaube*]; one is often put off from it by difficulties that come up in speculation, although, to be sure, one inexorably returns to it again (KrV, A827/B855).

Let us now examine the two passages that refer merely implicitly to betting.

The first implicit passage about betting exposes a case in which changing one’s holding-for-true is not possible:

But there is something unstable about merely doctrinal belief [*doktrinale Glaube*] [...]. It is entirely otherwise in the case of moral belief [*moralischen Glauben*]. For there it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inescapably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world; I also know with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that leads to this same unity of ends under the moral law. But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible [*verabscheuungswürdig*] in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted (KrV, A 828/B 856).

Notice that by holding the existence of God and of a future world for true, I do not abandon modesty, since I still do not claim to have cognition. Thus, this passage is about Glaube as faith, not as belief, unlike in Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood’s translation. The following will explain how abstention from this implicit bet is irrational.

In order to present the reason for its irrationality, let us logically analyze this passage above.

Suppose that the proposition p is “I fulfill the moral law in all points”, the proposition q “I bet (i.e. I have faith) in the existence of God and of a future world” – a faith which is the postulates of practical reason. Notice that one cannot empirically check whether p or q is true. Now, the argument is:

p

p → q

¬q → ¬p

¬q

¬p

In other words, this bet is self-contradicting. It contradicts the assertion of me being a rational being, which is a presupposition of my fulfillment of the moral law in all points. Indeed, ¬p means that it appears to me – one who thought that “I fulfill the moral law in all points”, which I consider to be the inescapably right end – that I don’t do that. I am revealed to myself as being *verabscheuungswürdig*, i.e., completely repulsive to myself (*Abscheu* is repulsive in its very definition), and this repulsion is not momentary, but constitutive of me as a rational being. Thus, betting in this case demonstrates stable firmness, that is, certainty.

Now, what is at stake in this implicit bet is me being a rational being, i.e., what is at stake is my own self. If I don’t bet, I lose nothing less than my own self.

Finally, let us examine the second implicit passage about betting:

If we [...] assume someone who would be entirely indifferent in regard to moral questions, then the question that is propounded by reason becomes merely a problem for speculation, and in that case it can be supported with strong grounds from analogy but not with grounds to which even the most obstinate skepticism must yield. But no human being is free of all interest in these questions. For although he might be separated from the moral interest by the absence of all good dispositions, yet even in this case there is enough left to make him fear a divine existence and a future [life: *Leben*; a word missing in the Cambridge edition]. For to this end, nothing more is required than that he at least cannot pretend to any certainty [*Gewißheit*] there is no such being and no future life, which would have to be proved through reason alone and thus apodictically since he would have to establish them to be impossible, which certainly no rational human can undertake to do. That would be a negative belief [*ein negativer Glaube*], which, to be sure, would not produce morality and good dispositions, but would still produce the analogue of them, namely it could powerfully restrain the outbreak of evil dispositions (A 829f./B 857f.).

Let us analyze the part of the accessory sentence “[...] that he at least cannot pretend [...] no rational human can undertake to do.” from the point of view of modal logic, supposing that r is the proposition “x fears to be punished by God in a future life for his or her immoral deeds”:

[](◇(r))

Let us now suppose that p is the proposition “x is amoral”, that q is the proposition “x is confident in the absence of any God and of any future life”. Let us notice that q is an assertion that cannot be empirically checked, so that it is a bet.

What does the irrationality of abstaining from betting in this case consist in? It is self-contradiction, which can be demonstrated as follows:

p

p → q

$\neg q \rightarrow \neg p$

$r \rightarrow \neg q$

r

$\neg q$

$\neg p$

We should understand the affirmation that “there is enough left to make him fear a divine existence and a future life” having in mind the following characterization of fear: “Anxiety, anguish, horror, and terror are degrees of fear, that is, degrees of aversion to danger.” (Anth, AA 7: 256) Thus, in this case too, the abstention from betting generates repulsion in the rational being.

There are at least two commonalities between the respective abstentions of the two cases of implicit bet. First, there is a strong repulsion, which is displayed by the expressions “contemptible [*verabscheuungswürdig*]” and “there is enough left to make him fear a divine existence and a future life”. Second, both cases are about an infinite loss, which makes them radically different from the famous wager presented in Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*, which is about an infinite gain. Indeed, in Pascal’s wager, if God exists, he will infinitely reward those (and only those) who believe in him.

3) A new interpretation of the “stages” and its consequences

In all four passages about betting, the certainty of holding-to-be-true is based on the correspondence between the bet and the truth. In fact, Kant affirms:

Truth, however, rests upon agreement with the object, with regard to which, consequently, the judgments of every understanding must [*müssen*] agree (consentientia uni tertio, consentiant inter se). The touchstone [*Proberstein*] of whether taking something to be true is conviction [*Überzeugung*] or mere persuasion [*Überredung*] is, therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true; for in that case there is at least a presumption [*Vermutung*] that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on the common ground, namely the object, with which they therefore all agree and through which the truth of the judgement is proved” (KrV, A 820/B 848).

In empirical issues, Kant’s correspondence theory of truth refers to an object of experience. In moral issues, the correspondence is to what is constitutive of any rational being (which, in this case, is the “object” to which faith refers), so that it can be found “to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true”. Admittedly, one should point out that even if x necessarily has faith that p, it does not prove that the proposition p is true. Nevertheless, it proves that the proposition p is not less certain than in the case in which x had knowledge that p [*Wissen*]. Providing certainty, faith is a stable conviction, which is what Kant taught to his students:

Belief [*Glaube*, rather: faith] is firm, then, when it leads a rational man to neglect the advantages of his life for his belief [*Glauben*, rather: faith]. He who is moved by duty and hope [*Hoffnung*] combined to renounce all these advantages believes [*glaubt*, rather: has faith] and is convinced [*überzeugt*]. In regard to its effect on the subject, this holding-to-be-true [*Fürwahrhalten*] will not yield to the highest certainty, and practical conviction is the strongest possible [*höchst mögliche*]. This practical conviction [*praktische Überzeugung*] can fall on certain propositions, and these are then morally certain propositions [*moralisch gewisse Sätze*]. These are the ground of all morality, and they agree with our greatest conscientiousness [*Gewissenhaftigkeit*], if we live according to them and thus coordinate our actions to them (V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 855).

From this arises a new interpretation of the three “stages” mentioned in the passages that I quoted at the beginning of this essay:

Taking something to be true [*das Fürwahrhalten*], or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages [*Stufen*] in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing and knowing [*Meinen, Glauben, Wissen*] (A 822/B 850).

The three *Stufen*, for which a better translation would be “three levels”, on a graduated scale of increasing certainty are:

- (1) having an opinion;
- (2) believing [*Glaube*], in the sense of doctrinal beliefs [*Doktrinale Glauben*];
- (3) Knowledge [*Wissen*] and faith [*Glaube*], because both have certainty, either theoretical (in the case of *Wissen*) or practical (in the case of *moralischer Glaube*)

On this basis, one can explain two passages of Kant’s writings that are wrongly translated, and that are as famous as they are frequently misunderstood. The first one belongs to the Critique of Pure Reason:

[...] I cannot even assume [*annehmen*] God, freedom and immortality for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously deprive speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights; because in order to attain to such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, and which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an object of experience, then they would always actually transform it into an appearance, and thus declare all practical extension of pure reason to be impossible. Thus, I had to deny [*aufheben*] knowledge [*Wissen*] in order to make room for faith [*Glauben*]; and the dogmatism of metaphysics [...] is the true source of all unbelief [*Unglaubens*, rather unfaith] conflicting with morality, which unbelief is always very dogmatic (KrV, B XXX).

The verb “*aufheben*” should be understood as also meaning, at the same time, “*aufbewahren*”, i.e., “*sorgsam hüten*”, keeping, retaining, preserving. In this case, “*aufheben*” means that one has to deny the “extravagant” claims of speculative reason (in classical metaphysics) about God, freedom and immortality, and to preserve (theoretical) certainty in empirical matters (i.e. one has to limit theoretical certainty to empirical matters), in order to remove the obstacle to (moral) faith, safeguarding moral faith from damages (indirectly) inflicted by the “extravagant” claims of speculative reason.

The second passage of Kant’s writings that should be reinterpreted in the light of this new interpretation is a famous passage of the Critique of the Power of Judgment:

We can thus assume a righteous man (like Spinoza) who takes himself to be firmly convinced [*überredet*, rather: persuaded] that there is no God and (since with regard to the object of morality it has a similar consequence) there is also no future life: how would he judge his own inner purposive determination by the moral law, which he actively honors? He does not demand any advantage for himself from his conformity to this law, whether in this or in another world [...]. But his effort is limited; and from nature he can, to be sure, expect some contingent assistance here and there, but never a lawlike [*gesetzmäßige*] agreement in accordance with constant rules (like his internal maxims are and must be) with the ends to act in behalf of which he still feels himself bound and impelled [*zu dem Zwecke erwarten, welchen zu bewirken er sich doch verbunden und angetrieben fühlt*]. Deceit, violence, and envy will always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable, and benevolent; and the righteous ones besides himself that he will still encounter will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, which pays no attention to that, to all the evils of poverty, illness, and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth, and will always remain thus [this: *es*] until one wide grave engulfs them all together (whether honest or dishonest, it makes no difference here and flings them, who where capable of having believed themselves to be the final end of creation, back into the abyss of purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn. – The end, therefore, which this well-intentioned person had and should have had before his eyes in his conformity to the moral law,

he would certainly have to give up as impossible; or, if he would remain attached to the appeal of his moral inner vocation, [...] then he must assume the existence of a moral author of the world, i.e. of God, from a practical point of view, i.e., in order to form a concept of at least the possibility of the final end that is described to him by morality – which he very well can do, since it is at least not self-contradictory” (KU, AA 5: 452).

In Spinoza’s case, the touchstone of accepting to bet or abstaining from betting would demonstrate either (i) that Spinoza really is a righteous man, in which case it would be revealed to him that he necessarily has to renounce his atheism, or (ii) that he is amoral. (i) and (ii) are incompatible with one another. Compatibility with Kant’s writings and consistency are two criteria which I hope to have met in the present interpretation of “Meinen, Glauben, Wissen”.

References

HABERMAS, J. 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere (1962)*. Trans. Thomas Burger & Frederick Lawrence. London: Polity.

HÖWING, T. 2018. Zur Vollständigkeit von Kants Unterscheidung zwischen Meinen, Glauben und Wissen. In: WAIBEL, V.L.; RUFFING, M.; WAGNER, D. (Eds.). *Natur und Freiheit: Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

KANT, I. 1900-. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (and successors) (Eds.). Berlin: de Gruyter (and predecessors).

QUASSAM, Q. 2019. *Vices of the mind: from the intellectual to the political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TRULLINGER, J. 2013. *Kant's two touchstones for conviction: the incommunicable dimension of moral faith*. *The Review of Metaphysics*, Washington D.C., v. 67, n. 2, p. 369-403, dec 2013.