

# Christopher Benzenberg

University of Cambridge

cpb67@cam.ac.uk

christopherbenzenberg.com

AOS: Kant, Early Modern

AOC: Epistemology, Metaphysics, Metaethics

## Education

---

- 2019 – present      **University of Cambridge**, St Edmund's College, UK  
PhD in Philosophy (expected spring 2024)  
Thesis: *The Power of Reason: Kant's Empirical Study of the Mind*  
Supervisor: Angela Breitenbach
- 2017 – 2019      **University of Oxford**, St Cross College, UK  
BPhil in Philosophy (distinction)  
Thesis: *Moral Worth and Knowledge*  
Supervisors: Ralf Bader and Alison Hills
- 2014 – 2017      **Humboldt-University of Berlin**, Germany  
BA in Philosophy (4.0/4.0 GPA, highest mark in the year)  
Thesis: *Kant's Antinomy of Practical Reason: A Defence*  
Supervisor: Tobias Rosefeldt

## Visits

---

- 09/2023 – present      **University of Cologne**, Center for Contemporary Epistemology  
and the Kantian Tradition, Germany  
Visiting Researcher  
Host: Paul Silva Jr.
- 02 – 03/2024      **University of Notre Dame**, History of Philosophy Forum, USA  
Visiting Researcher  
Host: Alix Cohen
- 01 – 06/2023      **Princeton University**, University Center for Human Values, USA  
Visiting Student Research Collaborator  
Host: Andrew Chignell

## Scholarships

---

2024	Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship ( <i>offered</i> )
2023 – present	Cambridge Philosophy Faculty Studentship
2020 – 2023	Studienstiftung Doctoral Scholarship three years of full funding, awarded on academic merit
2019 – 2020	Cambridge Philosophy Faculty Studentship
2019	UT Austin Provost’s Graduate Excellence Fellowship ( <i>declined</i> ) awarded to the most promising PhD applicant each year
2019	Brown University Graduate Scholarship ( <i>declined</i> )
2019	Johns Hopkins University Graduate Scholarship ( <i>declined</i> )
2017 – 2019	DAAD Graduate Scholarship
2017 – 2019	Studienstiftung Graduate Scholarship
2016 – 2017	Germany Scholarship

## Publications

---

### Book Chapters

1. “Was Kant a Kantian About Doxastic States”, in: Paul Silva Jr., *On Believing and Being Convinced*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, under contract.
2. “From Opinion to Knowledge: Kant on Hypothesis Confirmation and Epistemic Infallibilism”, in: *Proceedings of the 14th International Kant Congress*, forthcoming.
3. “Defending Kant’s Antinomy of Practical Reason”, in: Camilla Serck-Hanssen et al. (eds.), *The Court of Reason, Proceedings of the 13th International Kant Congress*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 423-432, 2021.

### Book Reviews

4. “Review of Gabriele Gava, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*”, in *European Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.
5. “Review of Ian Proops, *The Fiery Test of Critique, A Reading of Kant’s Dialectic*”, in *Philosophical Review*, forthcoming (with Andrew Chignell).

## Under Review

---

1. A paper on Kant’s theory of knowledge
2. A paper on Kant’s doxastic voluntarism
3. A paper on Spinoza’s monism (with Johannes Wagner)

## Work in Progress (Selection)

---

3. A paper on Kant's Principle of Sufficient Reason
4. A paper on Kant's system of empirical concepts
5. A paper on Kant's empirical argument for the immortality
6. A paper on suicide and immortality in Kant
7. A paper on Kant's theory of the highest good
8. A paper on Kant's theory of moral motivation (with Lawrence Pasternack)

## Presentations

---

1. "Belief Without Bounds: Kant on the Supreme Principle of Reason"  
UKKS Annual Conference, University College Dublin, 05/24.  
Fribourg workshop, University of Fribourg, 02/24.
2. "From Opinion to Knowledge: Why Kant Could Not Have Been a Fallibilist"  
14th International Kant Congress, University of Bonn, 09/2024.  
CONCEPT Colloquium, University of Cologne, 11/2023.
3. "Kant on Immortality: Teleological and Practical Arguments"  
PPPR Colloquium, Princeton University, 05/2023.
4. "Reasoning About Reason: Kant on Mental Hypotheses"  
Workshop on Kant's Metaphilosophy, Princeton University, 04/2023.
5. "Laws of the Mind: Kant on Causal Powers in Inner Sense"  
Work in Progress Workshop, Humboldt-University of Berlin, 07/2023,  
PPPR Colloquium, Princeton University, 03/2023.
6. "Why Did the Volcano Erupt: Kant's Bayesian Theory of Hypotheses",  
Moral Sciences Club, University of Cambridge, 02/2022,  
Cambridge Graduate Seminar, University of Cambridge, 11/2021.
7. "What is the Principle of Theoretical Reason for Kant?"  
UKKS Annual Conference, King's College London, 09/2022,  
Cambridge Kant Colloquium, University of Cambridge, 05/2020.
8. "The Moral Fiction: Solving a Metaethical Dilemma"  
Ockham Society, University of Oxford, 02/2019.
9. "Understanding Moral Worth: A Counterfactual Analysis"  
Cambridge Graduate Seminar, University of Cambridge, 11/2019,  
Ockham Society, University of Oxford, 11/2018.
10. "Attaining the Highest Good: Kant on Happiness, Virtue, and God"  
UKKS Annual Conference, Cardiff University, 09/2018,  
GAP 10th International Congress, University of Cologne, 09/2018.

11. "Kant's Antinomy of Practical Reason: A Defence"  
 13th International Kant Congress, University of Oslo, 08/2019,  
 Oxford Kant Colloquium, University of Oxford, 5/2018.  
 Kant Colloquium, Humboldt University of Berlin, 06/2016.
12. "Kant and Hume on Causality and Objectivity"  
 Kant Graduate Workshop, Humboldt University of Berlin, 03/2016.

## Comments

---

1. Gabriele Gava: "Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics", Author Meets Critics Workshop, University of Cologne, 01/2024.
2. Joseph Shieber: "Kantian Social Epistemology and Non-Ideal Theory", Kant on Epistemic Authority and Autonomy Conference, University of Cologne, 09/2023.
3. Ferhat Taskin: "Divine Freedom and the Best of All Possible Worlds", Early Career Workshop on Islamic Thought and Anglophone Philosophy, Princeton University, 05/2023.

## Teaching

---

### University of Cambridge

#### *Kantian Philosophy*

1. II Kant's Ethics (3rd year undergraduates), LT22  
 topic: Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*  
 formats: lecture series (designed from scratch), dissertation supervision
2. II European Philosophy from Kant (3rd year undergraduates), LT21, LT24  
 topics: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*  
 formats: tutorial, extended essays supervision

#### *Practical Philosophy*

3. II Ethics (3rd year undergraduates), LT21, MT21, LT22  
 topics: population ethics, moral epistemology, acting from duty, trust  
 formats: tutorial, extended essays supervision
4. IB Ethics (2nd year undergraduates), MT20, LT21, MT21, LT22  
 topics: aggregation, consent, promise, early modern, practical reasoning  
 formats: seminar, tutorial, extended essays supervision

5. IA Ethics and Political Philosophy (1st year undergraduates), MT21, LT22  
 topics: consequentialism, deontology, emotivism, equality of opportunity  
 formats: tutorial, extended essays supervision

*Theoretical Philosophy*

6. IB Knowledge, Language and the World (2nd year undergraduates), LT21, MT21  
 topics: nature of knowledge, scepticism, logical form, truth, modality  
 format: tutorial
7. IA Formal Methods (1st year undergraduates), MT19  
 topics: truth-functional logic, first-order predicate logic, set theory  
 format: seminar
8. IA Discussion Group (1st year undergraduates), MT19, MT20, LT21  
 topics: Descartes's *Meditations* and Hume's *Enquiry*  
 format: seminar

**Humboldt-University of Berlin**

9. Kant's Theoretical Philosophy (undergraduate), SS17  
 topics: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (esp. the Aesthetic and Analytic)  
 format: tutorial
10. Introduction to Philosophy (undergraduate), WS16/17  
 topics: metaphysics, epistemology, (meta-)ethics, philosophy of mind  
 format: tutorial
11. Plato's Philosophy of Language (undergraduate), SS16  
 topics: Plato's *Kratylos*, *Theaitetos*, and *Sophistes*, plus Frege and Russell  
 format: tutorial

**Professional Service**

---

2020 – present	Reviewer for Philosophical Review, European Journal of Philosophy, British Journal for the History of Philosophy, History of Philosophy & Logical Analysis, Journal of Transcendental Philosophy, and Philosophia
2024	Co-organiser of workshop on Kant's Doctrine of Method
2020 – 2023	Organiser of the Cambridge Kant Reading Group
2020 – 2022	Co-organiser of the Loxbridge Kant Reading Group
2020 – 2021	Secretary and junior treasurer of the Moral Sciences Club
2019 – 2020	Co-organiser of the Loxbridge Kant Series
2018 – 2019	Co-organiser of the Ockham Society Lecture Series

2018 – 2019	Co-organiser of the Jowett Society Lecture Series
2018 – 2019	Organiser of the Oxford Kant Colloquium
2018	Organiser of a workshop on Kant's Theory of Modality
2018	Co-organiser of the 22nd Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference
2016	Organiser of the Graduate Kant Workshop

## Grants

---

10/2022	UK Kant Society Postgraduate Bursary
03/2020	Cambridge Philosophy Faculty Conference Grant
03/2020	BSHP Regular Conference Grant
12/2019	UK Kant Society Workshop Grant
12/2019	All Souls College Travel Bursary
11/2018	Mind Association Major Conference Grant

## Academic Posts

---

2021 – present	Member of the Philosophy Equality Group, Cambridge
2020 – present	PhilPapers Assistant Editor for Angela Breitenbach, Cambridge
2020 – 2022	Philosophy Translator for Lex Academic, London
2017 – 2018	Research Assistant for Ralf Bader, Oxford
2016 – 2017	Student Assistant for Jonathan Beere, Berlin

## Memberships

---

2023 – present	German Kant Society
2023 – present	British Society for the History of Philosophy
2022 – present	North American Kant Society
2022 – present	UK Kant Society
2019 – present	German Society of Analytic Philosophy

## Languages

---

German	native	
English	fluent	(TOEFL 115/120, GRE verbal: 161/170)
French	advanced	(B1 certified)
Latin	basic	(Latinum)

## Thesis Abstract

---

My thesis offers a new perspective on Kant's theory of reason. I start from the observation that Kant characterises reason as an infinitely demanding faculty. For Kant, reason not only demands that we draw valid inferences and obey the laws of logic, but because it is governed by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, reason also demands that we find complete explanations for all observable phenomena, thereby realising a system of all cognition. This account of reason is no philosophical *faux pas*, but underpins Kant's practical metaphysics. For example, Kant thinks that we must rationally believe in our own immortality, or else we couldn't realise reason's infinite demands.

This observation prompts the main question of my thesis: How does Kant justify the existence of such a faculty in the first place? How does he think we, as finite beings, can come to know that we have an infinitely demanding faculty of reason? Traditionally, Kant scholars have held that we can know our mental faculties, in general, either by being aware of their unique acts or by transcendental arguments. Both strategies, however, fail in the case of reason. We cannot be aware of reason's unique acts, which are infinite and thus never complete; and reason cannot be established via transcendental argument because it is not a necessary condition for the possibility of experience.

But how then can we know that we have reason? My thesis breaks with a long-held orthodoxy and argues that reason gains self-knowledge *in empirical psychology* (i.e., the systematic study of phenomena in inner sense). The overarching argument goes like this: Reason, for Kant, seeks to explain all phenomena, including those of inner sense. To explain inner phenomena, reason hypothesises mental faculties and their laws. Our inner urge to ask why-questions, Kant thinks, is best explained by hypothesising a faculty that demands complete explanations, i.e., reason. In empirical psychology, reason therefore comes to know itself as faculty that seeks complete explanation.

My thesis is divided into five chapters. I first show that, for Kant, mental faculties are (also) powers of inner sense (chapter 1), and that the normative demands of these faculties are grounded in constitutive principles or laws (chapter 2). I then argue that the constitutive principle of reason, to find complete explanations, demands that we systematise powers of nature (chapter 3), which we do by hypothesising their respective laws (chapter 4). Bringing it all together, I then argue that reason hypothesises its own explanation-seeking law as the best explanation of phenomena in inner sense, thereby discovering its own infinitely demanding nature (chapter 5).

last updated: Mar 2024