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of Judgments (An examination of
Lovejoy's Critique of Kant)**

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Kant's Treatment of the Modality of Judgments (An examination of Lovejoy's Critique of Kant)

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Abstract

Immanuel Kant's notion of modality and his classification of judgments with respect to modality have been vehemently criticized by Lovejoy in his work titled 'Kant's Classification of the Forms of Judgment' in 'Kant: Disputed questions'. Lovejoy has claimed that categorization of modal judgments as problematic, assertoric and apodeictic by Kant coincides largely with the earlier classification of Lambert of these judgments as possible, actual and necessary. According to Lovejoy, Kant's innovation lies only in the introduction of new terminologies. Terming the definition as ambiguous and incoherent, Lovejoy argued that the ambiguities obfuscate a significant logical distinction that his predecessors had clearly drawn. He suggests that Kant's interpretation of modality led to two distinct and incompatible concepts one of which seems to introduce a subjectivism in the doctrine of objective categories and the other appear to reduce the categories of relation to those of modality. Lovejoy however clarified that apodeictic judgment is an exception here as it does not fit into the same scheme as problematic and assertoric. The present work attempts to review Lovejoy's objections to Kant's treatment of the Modality of Judgments. Arguments are put forward to suggest that Kant's originality with respect to classification of the modal judgments cannot be denied.

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Kant's notion of modality and his classification of judgments with respect to it have been vehemently criticized by A. O. Lovejoy [1]. He claims that the idea of classifying judgments with respect to modality is not original with Kant. According to him, Kant's innovation here consists only in the introduction of new terminologies. He further points out that Kant's definition of modality is ambiguous, and this ambiguity renders the whole classification incoherent and obfuscates a significant logical distinction that had been clearly drawn by his immediate predecessors.

Let us first consider Kant's definition of modality and a difficulty associated with this definition which is somewhat obscure. This would be followed by a discussion on Kant's classification of judgments with respect to modality.

While defining modality, Kant observes, '*The modality of judgments is a quite peculiar function. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment (for, besides quantity, quality, and relation, there is nothing that constitutes the content of a judgment), but concerns only the value of copula in relation to thought in general*' [2].

It appears that Kant's assertion that quality, quantity, and relation constitute the content of a judgment contradicts his demand that forms of judgment must be taken into account. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* [3], where he defines modality, he is concerned only with the classification of forms of judgment. So his classification with respect to quantity, quality, and relation is obviously a classification of the forms of judgment. This shows that quantity, quality, and relation constitute the formal structure of judgments. Hence, to say that quality, quantity, and relation constitute the content of a judgment seems to contradict his demand. Nevertheless, by saying that quantity, quality, and relation constitute the content of a judgment, Kant does not mean that these, like particular objects, concern some judgments and not others. Actually what he wanted to express is that they are concerned with the way in which the constituents of a judgment must be combined, while the distinctions of the possible, the actual, and the necessary are concerned with the nature of the judgment as a whole.

Kant's contention can be explained as follows:

The constituents of the categorical judgment are subject and predicate; now, the difference in quantity and quality depends on the way in which these are combined. This difference has nothing to do with the difference of content in the subject and predicate concepts. For example, the difference between the affirmative and negative judgments which are classified under qualitative judgments depends on the way in which the subject and predicate are related. In the affirmative judgment (S is P) a predicate is ascribed to a subject, whereas in the negative judgment (S is not P) the predicate is denied of a subject. The difference in the way in which the constituents of these two judgments are related is evident from the difference in their linguistic forms. This difference in the linguistic forms of these two judgments lies in the fact that in the affirmative categorical judgment the expression *is* or *are* occurs between the subject and the predicate, whereas in the negative judgment we find also the expression *not*. But modal judgments are not concerned with the way in which the subject and the predicate are related. In the case of such a

judgment we consider the logical status of the whole judgment in relation to the subject (in the sense of the judgment-maker). In whatever manner the subject and the predicate may be combined, the whole judgment may be thought problematically or assertorically or apodeictically. In this sense, differences in quality, quantity, and relation may be said to concern differences in the content of the judgment, i.e. the way in which the subject and predicate are combined; but differences in modality do not. As differences in content (the way in which the constituents are related) are evident from the linguistic forms of the judgments, these differences might be termed as differences in formal as opposed to material content. Hence Kant's assertion here suggests that quantity, quality, and relation constitute the formal content of a judgment. So there is no contradiction between Kant's above-mentioned demand and his definition of modality.

A discussion on his classification of modal judgments would be now appropriate. Kant classified modal judgments as problematic, assertoric and apodeictic. According to him, problematic judgments are those in which affirmation or negation is accepted as merely possible (optional) and are of the form 'S may be P' or 'S is possibly P' (in case of affirmation), or 'S may not be P' or 'S is possibly not P' (in case of negation). In assertoric judgments, affirmation or negation is regarded as real or true, e.g. 'S actually is P' or 'S is actually not P'. In apodeictic judgments, we look on affirmation or negation as necessary. Such judgments are of the form 'S must be P' (or 'S is necessarily P'), or 'S cannot be P'.

Now an exposition of Lovejoy's criticism of Kant will be in order.

Kant's tripartite division of modal judgments as problematic, assertoric and apodeictic more or less coincides, Lovejoy contends, with the earlier logician Lambert's classification of judgment as possible, actual, necessary. The principle underlying Lambert's classification consists in the relation of the subjects and predicates of the propositions from the standpoint of our knowledge of the *compossibility* of concepts. According to this principle, a proposition is called possible if its subject and predicate can be conceived as compossible. In other words, all judgments are possible in so far as they are not self contradictory. A possible judgment cannot be declared as true apart from empirical verification. 'An actual judgment', on the other hand, 'is one which being possible, is also empirically found to be true. And a necessary judgment is one of which the truth may be known from the impossibility of conceiving the subject in accordance with the terms of its own definition when the predicate is negated of it' [1]. Lovejoy contends that Kant, without altering the meaning of Lambert's expressions 'possible', 'actual', and 'necessary' has replaced them only by new terminologies, viz., problematic, assertoric, and apodeictic.

Lovejoy proceeds to accuse Kant of confusing the clear and consistent division of modal judgments that had been drawn by his predecessors, holding that this confusion is due to his ambiguous definition of modality.

Lovejoy observes that Kant's statement that modality concerns only the value of copula in relation to thought in general, at first appears to mean 'that the modality of a judgment consists in the (subjective) degree of

confidence with which it is affirmed'[1]. Lovejoy says that although it may be one of the several notions in Kant's mind, it does not fit the categories included under modality. For if the categories under modality were derived from modal judgments which reflect subjective degrees of confidence, it would be impossible to justify their objective validity. Again, it is not consistent with the rest of the discussion. For Kant's intention is to derive all categories from one single principle, namely the faculty of judgment or thought, and not from the subjective degrees of confidence.

Lovejoy finds a second sense of modality in Kant. In this sense, Kant identifies modality with the relation of conditionality between one truth and another. Kant observes: '*Thus the two judgments, the relation of which constitutes the hypothetical judgment (antecedens et consequens), and likewise the judgments the reciprocal relation of which forms the disjunctive judgment (members of the division), are one and all problematic only*' [4]. In a hypothetical judgment, the consequent is affirmed to be true only under a condition, i.e., the condition of the truth of the antecedent which is not affirmed. Moreover, the disjunctive judgments can also be grouped under the single genus of problematic judgments. For, in a disjunctive judgment also, the truth of one disjunct is conditioned by that of another. This second sense of modality reduces the problematic judgment to identify with the hypothetical or disjunctive judgment, and the assertoric judgment to identify with the categorical judgment. But this leaves out apodeictic judgments hanging since the apodeictic judgment does not involve the relation of conditionality of the assertions contained in it. The apodeictic character of a judgment consists in its necessity for our thought and its capacity to be known *a priori*.

So, according to Lovejoy, Kant means by modality two different and incompatible things; one of these meanings seems to introduce a subjectivism which is not in keeping with the doctrine of objective categories; the other meaning is such as to reduce the categories of relation to those of modality with the exception of the apodeictic judgment which does not fit into the same scheme with the problematic and assertoric. These are the confusions and obscurities in Kant of which Lovejoy has complained.

Let us review Lovejoy's objections as stated above.

Lovejoy's objection that the idea of classifying judgments with respect to modality is not original with Kant is not tenable. It is true that in some respects Kant is indebted to his predecessors. For example, Kant derives the term *modality* from Baumgarten. But his originality with respect to the classification of the modal judgment cannot be denied. His principle of classification with respect to modality is completely different from that of Lambert. Kant has classified judgment under modality by considering the logical status of the whole judgment in relation to the subject (in the sense of the judgment maker) and not by considering the relation of the subject and predicate of the proposition from the standpoint of our knowledge of the *compossibility* of concepts. Moreover, Kant's 'problematic', 'assertoric', and 'apodeictic' judgments cannot be equated with Lambert's 'possible', 'actual', 'necessary' judgments. A possible judgment is that which is not self-contradictory. But a self-contradictory judgment can be problematically entertained, as for example, in the antecedent of a hypothetical judgment.

According to Kant, a problematic judgment is that in which affirmation or negation is taken as merely possible (optional). Again, an actual judgment may not be assertoric; for when we use it as the antecedent of a hypothetical judgment, we may not commit ourselves to the truth of it. In assertoric judgments, however, affirmation or negation is viewed as real (true). Moreover, necessary judgments may not be expressed apodeictically, e.g., the judgment '7+5=12' or 'every event has a cause' is necessary, but is expressed assertorically. The apodetic counterpart of the judgment will be '7+5 must be 12' or 'every event must have a cause'.

Now, let us for the time being set aside 'possible' judgments, and consider 'actual' and 'necessary' judgments. Lovejoy defines an actual judgment as a judgment, which being possible, is also empirically found to be true. From this definition it follows that Lambert's 'actual' judgments coincide with Kant's contingent judgments. Again, using Kant's terminology, Lambert's 'necessary' judgment whose opposite is inconceivable can very well be called an a priori judgment. But Kant's classification of judgments as contingent and necessary, empirical and a priori, is governed by a different principle, and must not be dragged in while we consider his 'Table of Judgments'. Lambert's 'actual' and 'necessary' judgments can be equated with Kant's 'contingent' and 'a priori' judgments, respectively. But they cannot be identified with his modal judgments, namely, 'assertoric' and 'apodeictic'.

Lovejoy is perfectly right in saying that the consequences which follow from accepting Kant's notion of modality in the sense of subjective degrees of confidence cannot be accepted. But he fails to notice that from Kant's definition of modality which concerns only the value of copula in relation to thought in general, it does not follow that modality consists in the subjective degree of confidence with which a judgment is affirmed. Kant's classification of forms of judgment does not reflect any subjective feeling. It is to be decided in the light of the objective manner of use of a judgment. There is, or can be, an intersubjective agreement as to whether a judgment in a particular context is apodeictically or problematically or assertorically entertained.

Moreover, Lovejoy points out that if we take Kant's notion of modality in the sense of the relation of conditionality between one truth and another, then the problematic judgment is reduced to the hypothetical or disjunctive judgment under relation. And this is a blunder on his part. It is true that we sometimes entertain the antecedent and the consequent of a hypothetical judgment problematically. But from this it does not follow that all hypothetical judgments are problematic. In some cases, knowing a judgment to be true we may use it as an antecedent of a hypothetical judgment. For example, if anybody, knowing that it rains, says, 'If it rains, take your umbrella', what he wants to convey by using this hypothetical form of judgment is this: 'since it rains, take your umbrella'. Here the antecedent of the hypothetical judgment is no doubt assertoric. Kant himself, in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, referred to assertoric hypothetical judgments. While distinguishing two kinds of hypothetical imperatives, he says: 'A hypothetical imperative thus says only an action is good for some purpose or other, either possible or actual. In the first case, it is a problematic practical principle; in the second case an

assertoric principle' [5]. Furthermore, Lovejoy's view that Kant's assertoric judgments can be reduced to the categorical judgments cannot be accepted. For, whereas an asserteric judgment is made after reflecting upon its truth, a categorical judgment as such does not indicate any such reflection; it is just a judgment of the form 'S is P', no matter whether it is reflectively asserted or unreflectively put forward.

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