

Class Sixteen - Kant (part one)

Philosophical Perspectives II - Ryan Simonelli

February 23, 2023

1 Some Kanttext (good pun, right?)

- **Immanuel Kant:** German philosopher who lived from 1724-1804 (for context, the *Enquiry* was published in 1748, when Kant was 24). Some facts:
 - Grew up Lutheran, and remained devoutly religious throughout his life, which is reflected in his work, though, notably, he doesn't think any *theoretical* arguments can be given for the existence of God.
 - During his early years, actually wrote works of natural science as well as metaphysics, and his work was a more rationalist orientation.
 - Whereas previous Modern philosophers fell into the category of *rationalist* (like Descartes) or *empiricist* (like Hume), Kant *synthesized* rationalism and empiricism.
- **The *Critique of Pure Reason*:** Kant's master work of theoretical philosophy. Originally published in 1781, with the second (B) edition (of which you read an excerpt of the preface) being published in 1787.
 - Arguably (and perhaps not even that controversially) the greatest single work in the Western philosophical tradition.
 - Followed by two other major "Critiques," the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), dealing with ethics, and the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) dealing with aesthetics and teleology.
- **The *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*:** Published in 1783, containing the central ideas of the first *Critique*, which serves as a set of "preparatory exercises" to that larger work (11).

2 Kant's Response to Hume

- **Kant's Awakening:** Before the *First Critique*, Kant is said to have been in his "pre-critical" phase (which, since "critical" contrasts with "dogmatic," is just another way to say "dogmatic" phase). It's Hume who woke Kant up from this dogmatism:

"I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy," (10).
- **The Basic Question Raised by Hume which (the Critical) Kant Takes Up:** "Whether such a thing as metaphysics is even possible at all," (5).
- **Hume's Attack:** "[N]o event has occurred that could have been more decisive with respect to the fate of this science than the attack made upon it by *David Hume*," (7)
- **Kant on Hume's Opponents:** They completely "missed the point of his problem" and, in proposing solutions, were "constantly taking for granted just what he doubted," (8). These opponents essentially just argued for things that Hume would readily agree with, for instance, that causality is conceptually indispensable, that we could make no sense of nature without it, and so on.

- **Hume’s Real Question:** “The discussion was only about the origin of this concept, not about its indispensability in use; of the former were only discovered, the conditions of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given,” (9).
 - **Recall:** Remember the distinction between the *epistemological skepticism* discussed in Section IV and the *conceptual skepticism* discussed in section VII. Kant takes it that Hume’s fundamental question is the *conceptual one*—what could the origin of the concept of causality possibly be?
- **Kant’s Basic Agreement with Hume:** Hume showed decisively that the concept of causation (of causal power, of necessary connection, etc.) can’t be discovered on the basis of experience. Rather, it must be *a priori*. However, Hume also “indisputably proved that it is wholly impossible for reason to think such a connection *a priori* and from concepts,” (7).
 - **Question:** What alternative *is there* if it’s not a posteriori (from experience) and it’s not a priori from concepts?
 - **Kant’s Answer:** *A priori* and *not* from concepts!
- **Hume vs. Kant’s Categorization of Possible Objects of Knowledge (According to Kant):** Hume’s arguments are completely correct, but there’s a third kind of object of knowledge that he didn’t have in is purview:

	Analytic	Synthetic
A Priori	Hume’s “Relations of Ideas”	Metaphysical Principles (and Math)
A Posteriori	nothing	Hume’s “Matters of Fact”

- **Metaphysical Knowledge, Properly Construed:** For Kant, one doesn’t come to a knowledge of a relations such as cause an effect by simply bringing out what’s already contained in concepts that one has. Rather, it comes from *substantive* reasoning about *what must be the case in order for cognition of objects to be possible at all*. This precedes any *particular* experiences of things in the world, since it concerns the *very possibility* of experience of things in the world. Rather than coming from particular experiences or cognitions, it comes through a reflective investigation of the very faculty of cognition.

3 The Copernican Turn and Kant’s Transcendental Idealism

- **Copernicus’s Turn in Astronomy:** “Matters stand here just as they did for the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when things did not go well for explaining the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire host of stars rotates about the observer, sought to find whether things might not go better if he had the observer rotate, and by contrast left the stars at rest,” (144).
- **Kant’s Analogous Turn in Metaphysics:** “The same kind of thing can now be tried in metaphysics, with respect to the *intuition* of objects. If intuition had to conform itself to the constitution of objects, I do not see how anything could be known of that constitution a priori; but if the object (as object of the senses) conforms itself to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well imagine this possibility,” (144).
 - **The Basic Idea:** Don’t ask how can we know, a priori, how objects in general are independently constituted. Rather, ask how must objects be constituted, if they are to be cognizable by us, such that we can be given them in experience (or “intuition”) and make sense of them conceptually.
- **The Basic Idea, Stated Differently:** Rather than it being the case that “our cognition through experience conforms to objects as things in themselves,” it’s the case that “objects, as appearances, instead conform themselves to our manner of representation,” (146).
- **A Direct Consequence of this Idea:** The objects about which we have empirical and metaphysical knowledge are not *things in themselves*, which exist completely independently of our cognition, but, rather, *appearances*, objects as they are manifest to us and capable of

being conceptually known by us, whose form is conceived of as partially constituted by our capacity for understanding.

- **Appearances and Things in Themselves:** “[Metaphysical] cognition relates only to appearances, leaving the things in themselves, by contrast, indeed actual for themselves, but unrecognized by us” (145).
 - **Appearances:** These aren’t the same thing as mere Humean “impressions” or any kind of “perception” for that matter. Rather, the realm of appearances includes *empirical objects in space and time*, thus, things like:
 - * This blue water bottle.
 - * This desk.
 - * That tree outside.
 - **Things in Themselves:** These are things that *exist*—they’re actual—but are beyond the bounds of our cognitive reach, that are in some way *responsible* for the appearances, but for which (because they are beyond our cognitive reach), the exact manner of this responsibility can’t be completely known.
- **Transcendental Idealism:** Appearances (which, for Kant, includes all ordinary empirical objects existing in space and time) “are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not things in themselves,” (A369, 426).
- **Question:** Does this mean that the knowledge we have of objects is really *a priori*?
 - **Answer:** Well, yes and no. Knowledge of particular objects and how they are (my knowledge, for instance, that this object is a blue bottle) is not *a priori*. But knowledge of *what it is to be an object*, and knowledge of *what sort of relations objects, as such, must stand in*, is *a priori*.

4 Kant’s Criticism of Dogmatic Metaphysics

- **The Metaphysical Impulse:** The metaphysical impulse is to arrive at knowledge of “the unconditioned,” that which lies beyond any basis on anything else but is rather the basis on which everything else lies.
- **The Unconditioned, on Transcendental Idealism:** “The unconditioned has to be found, not in things insofar as we are acquainted with them (i.e., as they are given to us), but indeed in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves—then it is shown that what we first assumed for testing is well-founded,” namely that we can only have metaphysical cognition of appearances, not of things in themselves.
- **Kant’s Ultimate View:** Any knowledge we might have of the unconditioned is not *theoretical* knowledge, but *practical* knowledge. Knowledge of things like God, on Kant’s account, ends up being “practical postulates,” things that we have to postulate to have a coherent conception of reason itself, but which is not itself within reason’s theoretical reach.