

Class Sixteen - Kant (part two)

Philosophical Perspectives II - Ryan Simonelli

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1 Quick Recap and Context

- **Kant's Copernican Turn:** Rather than thinking about our cognition as *conforming itself to objects*, and thinking about what those objects must be like, independent of any relation they bear to our cognition, think instead about objects as *conforming themselves to our cognition*. Then, we can think about what objects must be like by thinking about how they must be insofar as we have cognition of them.
 - **The A Priori Methodology Yielded by this Turn:** An investigation into what objects must be—which, if objects were conceived of as wholly independent, would seem to have to be an *empirical*—turns into an investigation into how it is that we conceive of objects insofar as we cognize them at all—a *reflective* investigation into the form of our own cognitive capacity.
- **Kant's Analysis of an Act of Cognition:** Kant breaks down an act of cognition as a joint act of two basic faculties of mind:
 - **Sensibility:** The faculty of mind through which we are *passively given objects*, through representations (or, perhaps better, “presentations”) that Kant calls “intuitions.”
 - * **Intuitions:** “Intuition” here doesn't mean what we mean by it nowadays (for instance, when we say “I have a gut intuition that *p*”). Rather it is a *having in view*. My intuition of this blue bottle is my having this blue bottle in view. These are supplied by the faculty of sensibility and it is through them that we are “given” objects for cognition.
 - **Synthesis:** Intuitions are not simple immediate sensations (how Hume seems to imagine “impressions” to be) but, rather, are the product of the *synthesis* of a *manifold* of sensations.
 - Question for Hume:** How, actually, are “impressions” individuated. I've been speaking of an “impression of this bottle” but isn't there actually a manifold of impressions of blue patches, here, and then here, and then here?
 - Question for Kant (which he'll answer):** What's doing the synthesizing of the sensations that give rise to intuitions?
 - **The Understanding:** The faculty of mind through which we *actively grasp objects* through the use of *concepts*.
 - * **Concepts:** A concept, for Kant, is a kind of rule: something that determines what an object can, must, and cannot do if it is to be the object that it is.
 - **Pure Concepts of the Understanding:** Rules that an object must conform to, not insofar as it is this kind of object or that one, but, insofar as it is an object *at all*.
- **Kant's Task:** Explicate the capacity for cognition in such a way that makes it clear that its objects—things that we can possibly be given in intuitions and conceptually grasp—necessarily conform to the pure concepts of the understanding, such as cause and effect.

2 The Objective Application of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding

- **The Basic Concepts of Natural Science:** Natural science is based on the idea of things with *natures*; things “whose existence is determined according to universal laws,” (46). Now, there are *particular* principles of natural science—for instance, that an object accelerates to earth at 9.8 meters per second squared—and then there are completely *universal* principles of natural science. These include principles of *substance* and *cause and effect*:

“But among the principles of this universal physics a few are found that actually have the universality we require, such as the proposition: that substance remains and persists, that everything that happens always previously is determined by a cause according to constant laws, and so on. These are truly universal laws of nature, that exist fully *a priori*. There is then in fact a pure natural science, and now the question is *How is this possible?*” (47).

- **The A Priori Nature of These Principles:** Unlike the particular principles of special natural sciences, which we arrive at through experimenting on objects and observing what they do, the absolutely universal principles that such as substance and cause and effect must be *a priori*, since any observation *presupposes* them, and so they can’t be based on observation.
- **Subjective Validity and Objective Validity:** Hume acknowledged that we *do* make causal inferences. That is, he acknowledge that the concept of causality was *subjectively* valid. What he denied is that we have any grounds for thinking that it is *objectively* valid; that it really applies to objects in the world.
- **Kant’s Basic Strategy:** Start with the basic forms of *judgment*, which we can arrive at through thinking about the capacity for judgment itself. Then articulate objects of experience as conforming to corresponding *concepts*, since they are, given our conception of them as cognizable, *fit for judgment*. In other words, insofar as cognition through judgments is possible, objects must conform to the concepts that correspond to the forms of the judgment.

“In order therefore to explain the possibility of experience insofar as it rests on pure a priori concepts of the understanding, we must first present that which belongs to judgments in general, and the various moments of the understanding therein, in a complete table; for the pure concepts of the understanding – which are nothing more than concepts of intuitions in general insofar as these intuitions are, with respect to one or another of these moments, in themselves determined to judgments and therefore determined necessarily and with universal validity – will come out exactly parallel to them,” (54).

- **The Strategy Applied:**
 - **Two Basic Kinds of Judgments:** Kant distinguishes between *categorical* judgments and *hypothetical* judgments:
 - * **Categorical Judgments:** Judgments of the form “*S is P*” that assert, straight up, what or how something is.
 - **Example:** “The billiard ball is plastic.” Here, we’re saying what the billiard ball is made of. In this judgment, there is a *subject*—the billiard ball—and a *predicate*—plastic. We *apply* the predicate to the subject.
 - * **Hypothetical Judgments:** Judgments of the form “If *S is P*, then *S is (or will be) Q*” that assert what or how something is or will be *on the hypothesis* that something else is the case.
 - **Example:** “If the billiard ball is plastic, then it will melt at 266 degrees fahrenheit.” Here I’m not claiming that the billiard ball really *is* plastic (I might not know), just that *if* it is, then it will melt.
 - **Two Basic Categories of Concepts:** Corresponding to these two basic kinds of *judgments* are two basic kinds of *concepts*:
 - * **Substance and Attribute:** The concept of some *persistent thing* and the various different *properties* or *attributes* that it possesses.

- **Example:** The *billiard ball* is a *substance*, and one of its *attributes* is that it is plastic.
- * **Cause and Effect:** The concept of some object—a cause—having a *power* to bring about a certain effect.
 - **Example:** The billiard ball's being heated to 266 degrees *causes* it to melt.
- **The Core Thought:** The fact that objects *really do* conform to the principles of substance and attribute and cause and effect follows from the fact that they are cognizable by us and so capable of figuring in categorical and hypothetical judgments that we might make.
- **Responding to Hume:** "This complete solution of the Humean problem, though coming out contrary to the surmise of the originator, thus restores to the pure concepts of the understanding their *a priori* origin, and to the universal laws of nature their validity as laws of the understanding, but in such a way that it restricts their use to experience only, because their possibility is founded solely in the relation of the understanding to experience: not, however, in such a way that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them, a completely reversed type of connection that never occurred to Hume," (64-65).

The Explanation for this Correspondence: The explanation of this fact being that the same capacity that is actualized in judgment—the understanding—is actually at work in intuition:

- **From the First Critique:** "The same function that gives unity to the different representations *in judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding," (A79/B105).

3 Questions

- **Question about Transcendental Idealism:** Don't lose sight of the fact that this whole account is within the context of Kant's *transcendental idealism*: "[E]ven the pure concepts of the understanding have no significance at all if they depart from objects of experience and want to be referred to things in themselves," (64). Is this too steep a price to pay for a response to Hume? Does it even constitute a genuine response to Hume insofar as we're limiting ourselves to the realm of appearances?

4 Kant's Tables

The Table of Judgments

Quantity

Universal: All S are P
Particular: Some S are P
Singular: This S is P

Quality

Affirmative: S is P
Negative: S is not P
Infinite: S is non- P

Relation

Categorical: S is P
Hypothetical: If S is P , then S is Q
Disjunctive: S is P or S is Q

Modality

Problematic: S might be P
Assertoric: S is P
Apodictic: S must be P

The Table of Categories

Of Quantity

Unity
Plurality
Totality

Quality

Reality
Negation
Limitation

Relation

Inherence and Subsistence
Causality and Dependence
Community

Modality

Possibility
Existence
Necessity