

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Awakened by Hume from his “dogmatic slumbers”

Early on, Kant was a Leibnizian, but later on he read Hume and became disenchanted with “dogmatic” metaphysics. However, Kant was not satisfied with Hume’s extreme empiricism and consequent scepticism. In particular, Kant thought that the empiricist account of concepts was utterly inadequate. Our most fundamental concepts, he claimed, are *applied to* sense experience, not derived *from* it.

As we shall see, Kant also rejected Hume’s view that all questions of fact are to be settled on the basis of experience

Some terminology

“Analytic,” “synthetic,” “*a priori*,” “*a posteriori*”

Hume holds that all *a priori* judgments are analytic, and that all synthetic judgments are *a posteriori*.

Kant disagrees. He holds, for example, that the propositions of mathematics are both synthetic and *a priori*. He also holds that certain fundamental judgments about the natural world (e.g., “every alteration has a cause”) are synthetic and *a priori*.

Kant’s question: How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?

Kant’s “Copernican Revolution”

“Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.” (From the *Preface* to the 2nd edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*)

Sensibility (receptive) and the understanding (active)

- **The *manifold of sensibility***
- **The *forms of sensibility* (space and time)**
- **The *categories of the understanding***

For example, the categories of relation are “inherence and substance,” “causality and dependence,” and “community.”

Kant's *transcendental argument*

Kant argues that the categories must be applied to experience (with all that this entails). Otherwise, experience would not be possible.

This gives him a sort of “answer” to Hume. Kant agrees with Hume that if nature were not uniform, we could have no coherent experience. But (unlike Hume) he does not think an incoherent experience is possible. So the applicability of the categories and the consequent uniformity of nature are necessary conditions of the possibility of any experience at all. Since we plainly do have experience, it follows that nature is uniform.

The importance of a *critique* of pure reason

Our task is to discover the limits of reason – what it can and cannot do. The most important discovery is this. While reason *can* establish necessary truths about the world *as experienced* it can *not* justify any conclusion about the nature of things as they are *in themselves*.

This introduces an important qualification to the earlier conclusion that nature must be uniform. It is only nature *as* experienced that has been shown to be uniform. What it is *in itself* is another matter.

“Things in themselves” (*noumena*) vs. things *as* objects of experience (*phenomena*)

Kant holds that we can discover the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience. And this, he thinks, will tell us something universal and necessary about things *as* objects of experience. But *not* about things as they are *in themselves*.

The *phenomenal* vs. the *noumenal* self

The self as an object of empirical psychology (the phenomenal self) must be distinguished from the transcendental subject of experience. We can't know the transcendental subject as it is in itself (as a *noumenon*) any more than we can know any other things as it is in itself. But we can know what it *does* by way of shaping our experience of the phenomenal world (including ourselves as objects of empirical psychology).

Empirical realism* combined with *transcendental idealism

The rest of the *phenomenal* world has objective reality apart from the *phenomenal* self, but the phenomenal world as a whole is structured by the mind (the transcendental self), which imposes the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding on the manifold of sensibility.

Noumenal freedom and phenomenal determinism

The phenomenal self is one object among others in the phenomenal world, subject to the same causal laws as everything else. Within the phenomenal world, therefore, causal determinism is universal.

Noumenal freedom is possible, but its reality cannot be proved by *theoretical* reason. It is, however, a presupposition of *practical* reason (of our knowledge of moral duty).