

The General Problem of Pure Reason

“How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?” (B19)

Analytic judgments express a relationship of conceptual containment between the subject-concept and the predicate-concept, and have the function of clarifying cognition, e.g., “All bodies are extended”

Synthetic judgments express non-conceptual relations between the subject-concept and the predicate-concept, and have the function of amplifying cognition, e.g., “All bodies are heavy”

A priori judgments should be justified in a way that is absolutely independent of sense perception

- NOTE: Kant is concerned with justification and not with concept acquisition, so these are **not innate**
- If a judgment makes a claim that is **universal and necessary**, it must be justified *a priori*

A posteriori judgments should be justified in way that depends on sense perception

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Adding a Prong to Hume's Fork

Analytic *a priori* judgments, e.g., “All effects have causes”

- Compare with Hume's propositions about relations of ideas, governed by principle of non-contradiction

Synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, e.g., “It is raining at 10:30 am on March 15 in New Haven”

What about “All events have causes?”

Humean answer:

- Neither analytic *a priori*, nor synthetic *a posteriori*, therefore not justified
- It must be explained in terms of synthetic *a posteriori* judgments based on sense perception that do not justify it, plus custom/habit and the projection of subjective necessity outside us as if it were objective necessity

Kantian answer:

- We evidently make such judgments all the time and take them to be justified, e.g., “The sum of the internal angles of a triangle is 180 degrees”
- In fact, such judgments are essential to science – not only to explanation but to mathematics
- If there's a way to preserve their justified status by reconceiving how the human mind cognizes nature, then surely that is preferable to Hume's skeptical solution

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“How possible?” Questions

Kant's question is NOT “Do we **actually** make synthetic *a priori* judgments?”

- Compare with the sceptical question: Do we actually have knowledge?

Kant's question is NOT “**How do we actually** make synthetic *a priori* judgments?”

- Compare with the psychological question: How do we actually learn from experience?

Kant's question IS:

- Given that **we actually make synthetic *a priori* judgments**
- And since we have an account of how the mind cognises that makes it seem **impossible** that we can make synthetic *a priori* judgments
- **How can we rethink how the mind cognises so that we can understand how it is possible that we do make synthetic *a priori* judgments?**
- And what are the consequences of this rethinking for our assessment of the nature and prospect of philosophy?

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Kant's Copernican Solution

“Now how can an outer intuition inhabit the mind that precedes the objects themselves, and in which the concept of the latter can be determined *a priori*? Obviously not otherwise than insofar as it has its seat merely in the subject, **as its formal constitution** for being affected by objects and thereby acquiring immediate representation, i.e., intuition, of them, thus only as the form of outer sense in general. Thus our explanation alone makes the possibility of geometry as a synthetic *a priori* cognition comprehensible.” (B41)

“We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only **from the human standpoint**. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all. This predicate is attributed to things only insofar **as they appear to us**, i.e., are objects of sensibility.” (A26/B42)

“Our expositions accordingly teach **the reality (i.e., objective validity)** of space in regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object, but at the same time **the ideality of space** in regard to things when they are considered in themselves through reason, i.e., without taking account of the constitution of our sensibility. We therefore assert the **empirical reality** of space (with respect to all possible outer experience), though to be sure its **transcendental ideality**, i.e., that it is nothing as soon as we leave aside the condition of the possibility of all experience and take it as something that grounds the things in themselves.” (A28/B44)

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