

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

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

Introduction

-Kant’s Big Question: “How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?” (146.4)

-this is important to metaphysics (139.5), the fate of which Kant is concerned about in his Preface (starting at 109.6) as well as here in the Intro (139.4), where we see Kant’s interest in “God, freedom, and immortality”; and is a problem from Hume (146.7).

With regard to the middle item (freedom), that ‘Everything that happens has its cause’ (142.9) is threatening

-The *a priori/a posteriori* distinction (136.8-138.9; PF slide 10)

-Signs of difficulty at B1: There can be no doubt that all our knowledge* begins with experience. . . . But though all our knowledge* begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. (p. 136)

-necessity and universality as marks of the *a priori*: 137.7; PF slide 10

-The analytic/synthetic distinction (130.1-133.9; PF slide 10)

- We focus on the discussion and examples at 130.6-132.2, esp. the example of ‘Everything that happens has its cause’ (131.7)

-Kant and Hume (146, and see Hume, below): If Kant’s analytic/synthetic distinction matches up with Hume’s relation of ideas/matter of fact distinction, then he would seem to have a direct answer to Hume’s skeptical argument in section IV of the *Enquiry*, which is based on the claim that there is/can be no *a priori* knowledge of matters of fact (synthetic propositions?)

-Kant’s Big Answer (in brief): Synthetic *a priori* knowledge of the empirical world is possible,

because certain synthetic propositions must be true of any empirical world by virtue of the necessary conditions for any possible experience. Huh?

Preface (to the B edition; with a brief look at the Transcendental Aesthetic)

-Kant's "Copernican Revolution" (esp. 110.5-111.5, 113n): "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.*" (110.6)

-“We can know* *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them” (111.5). This includes propositions about space and time (115.2), and causality (115.6).

-But this limits us to knowledge* only of appearances, leaving the things in themselves behind (112.2): the Phenomena/Noumena distinction

-Is Kant here relying on a sensitivity condition on knowledge (or justified cognition): that we don't know that objects as they are in themselves have these properties if we'd have the same grounds for thinking they do as we actually have, even if they didn't have the properties?

-Does Kant mean to be denying that things in themselves have the spatial, temporal, and causal properties we experience them as having, or merely to be agnostic about whether they have those properties? Can read the “only what we ourselves [have] put into them” differently on this matter: Does that mean we put into them something they did not in themselves have, or just that we would experience them as having these properties whether or not they really had them? At various places Kant reads to me as if he's making the stronger (denying) inference. Let's just look at what Kant has to say here about space in the Transcendental Aesthetic at B42-B44 (GW pp. 176.8-178.2)

-But “though we cannot *know** these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in position at least to *think* them as things in themselves” (115.4)

*The difference in translation seems important here: G&W have “cognize” rather than “know”

-Thus taking the object “in a twofold sense” (116.0) saves the thought that we are free, because the principle of causality applies to us only as objects of experience : “But though I cannot *know*, I can yet *think* freedom” (116.4: note G&W's much less zippy translation here!)

-More generally, with regard to thoughts of God and immortality, as well as of freedom (117.1), Kant says he has “found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*” (117.2: note that here G&W match NKS in using “knowledge” and “faith,” because here Kant is not using the German word that G&W translate to “cognize/cognition”)

-Indeed, Kant presents his critical philosophy as the only antidote to a host of unsavory enemies: materialism, fatalism, atheism, free-thinking, fanaticism, superstition, idealism, skepticism (119.2)

