



# Kant and Critical Philosophy

Week 3. 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016

# Class aims

- Explain why Kant proposes a 'Copernican' revolution in philosophy
- Understand the difference between *synthetic* and *analytic* judgements
- Discuss Kant's synthetic a priori judgements in relation to Hume and Leibniz
- Determine what Kant means by pure reason, transcendental idealism, and why his is a transcendental philosophy
- Work through B Preface and the Introduction

## Recap: Preface (A)

‘reason sees itself necessitated to take refuge in principles that overstep all possible use in experience, and yet seem so unsuspecting that even ordinary common sense agrees with them. But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions, from which it can indeed surmise that it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors; but it cannot discover them, for the principles on which it is proceeding, since they surpass the bounds of all experience, no longer recognize any touchstone of experience’ – A vii

- Why does reason err, for Kant?
- Which accounts is he challenging here?

# Recap: reason on trial

- A new 'age of criticism' demands everything submit to reason
- The ripened power of judgement of scepticism demands that reason use self-knowledge to institute a court of justice to secure its status, dismiss pretensions, and determine its limitations or laws.
- It 'demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions' (A xii)
- This occurs through determining its 'eternal and unchangeable laws', through a 'critique of pure reason itself'.

‘a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.’ – A xii



## B Preface: science of metaphysics

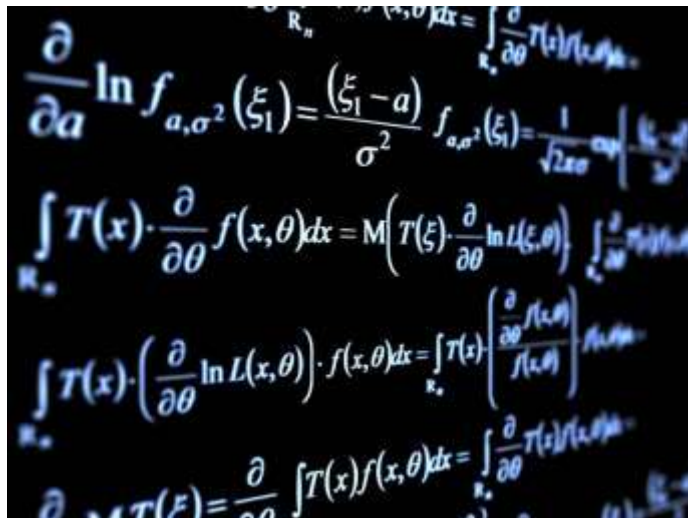
- Reason is tasked with the ‘treatment of the cognitions’ (B vii)
- Seeks a new scientific basis for epistemology
- Logic provides one basis, abstracting from cognitions within itself rather than inferring beyond them, but all it can prove is formal rules – it is dangerous to go beyond that
- Reason should therefore operate within the limits of possible experience (B x)
- Yet reason must be concerned with what is cognised a priori in the sciences.





# B Preface: Theoretical Philosophy (B x)

- Kant makes an early important distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy
  - *Theoretical*: merely determining the object and its concept. Determining the limits of what we can think, speculatively.
  - *Practical*: making the object actual or real in the world. More broadly, determining how we should act.


$$\frac{\partial}{\partial a} \ln f_{a, \sigma^2}(\xi_1) = \frac{(\xi_1 - a)}{\sigma^2} f_{a, \sigma^2}(\xi_1) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma^2}} \exp\left(-\frac{(\xi_1 - a)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right)$$
$$\int_{\mathcal{X}} T(x) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} f(x, \theta) dx = M\left(T(\xi) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \ln L(\xi, \theta)\right)$$
$$\int_{\mathcal{X}} T(x) \cdot \left(\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \ln L(x, \theta)\right) \cdot f(x, \theta) dx = \int_{\mathcal{X}} T(x) \cdot \left(\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \ln f(x, \theta)\right) \cdot f(x, \theta) dx$$
$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \ln L(\xi, \theta) = \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \ln f(\xi, \theta)$$



## B Preface: Theoretical Philosophy (B x)

- Mathematics became a science through becoming *theoretical*: Thales determines from the figure itself only what necessarily follows from it, or is contained within it
- Thus: 'reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design'.
- Rather than letting nature guide it, it must determine 'principles for its judgements according to constant laws', and consistently subject nature to its questioning.



# Copernicanism

‘Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us.

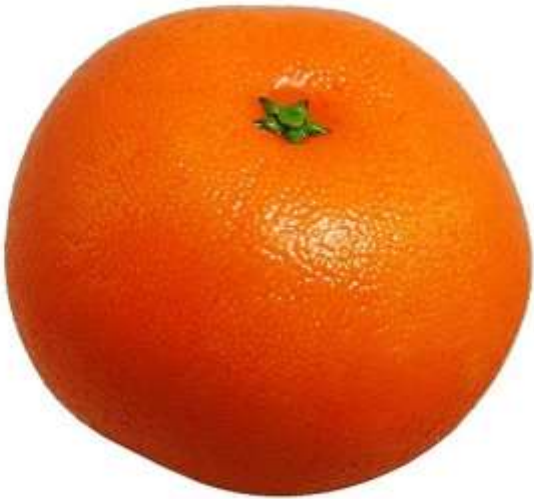
This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest.’ – B xvi

# Kant's new 'altered method'

- We can have a priori knowledge of the world precisely because it is dependent on the human mind. The sensible world is *constructed* by the mind out of passive sensory matter and a priori forms of reason, which structure its experience.
- Thus: 'we can cognize of things a priori only what we ourselves have put into them' (Bxviii).
- The shift is from assuming our cognitions must conform to objects, to instead '*objects must conform to our cognition*' (Bxvii).
- Metaphysics now has a secure basis: it determines the truths of concepts a priori, based on their corresponding objects given through experience ('intuition')

# Group exercise: perceiving a tangerine

- A rationalist would say... Mind understands its a priori nature
- An empiricist would say... Senses perceive, upbringing defines
- Kant says... Senses perceive, but actively make sense of it through underlying objective a priori laws
  - *How do these laws work?*



# Copernicanism: summary so far

- **Not** what do we know about the world from experience?
- **Instead** we ask “how is experience possible?”

*Hence* Kant has questions of metaphysics tilt on epistemology

- Experience must have a certain necessary structure in order to count as being experience at all
- Thus our minds are not passive in receiving impressions, but actively *construct* and participate in forming our experience



# Kant's 'Copernican revolution':

“sensible impressions”  
+ “*a priori* concepts”  
= experience

# Dualism: appearances vs unconditioned

- What exists beyond possible experience?
- For Kant, theoretical philosophy is concerned with appearances. Speculative philosophy must remain limited to possible experience. Arguing this is the 'first usefulness' of the CPR (B xxv)
- Practical philosophy is concerned with the actual thing in itself, which we cannot directly perceive or cognise, but is necessary for morality
- 'Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith' (B xxx)



# Kantian morality

- Free will would be undermined by scientific causality
- The soul has no evident effect on the world
- God is not proven by the ontological argument...
- ‘just the same will is thought of in the appearance (in visible actions) as necessarily subject to the law of nature and to this extent not free, while yet on the other hand it is thought of as belonging to a thing in itself as not subject to that law, and hence free, without any contradiction hereby occurring.’ (B xxviii)
- *How convincing do you find Kant’s twofold solution?*



‘Through criticism alone can we sever the very root of materialism, fatalism, atheism, of freethinking unbelief, of enthusiasm and superstition, which can become generally injurious, and finally also of idealism and skepticism, which are more dangerous to the schools and can hardly be transmitted to the public.’ (B xxxiv)

*What is Kant trying to accomplish with his twofold solution?*

*How persuasive do you find it?*

# Introduction A: transcendental philosophy

- By *transcendental* Kant means that which transcends or is beyond experience.
- Experience is prior but in itself insufficient for knowledge.
- It's the 'terrain' or 'raw material' which the understanding builds on.
- 'It tells us, to be sure, what is, but never that it must necessarily be thus and not otherwise.' (A1)
- Thus reason requires a priori cognitions, universal and necessary, which are 'clear and certain for themselves, independently of experience' (A2).

# Thoughts without concepts...

- If we extracted all knowledge from the senses, as Hume suggests, would we be left with nothing?
- No: for Kant, there would be some remaining cognitions ('concepts and judgements') giving that sense-experience order, independent of experience
- But can we base our knowledge on 'pure reason' (A3-4, B6-7) – that which ventures beyond possible experience?
- Why does Kant think that Plato errs then?
- The error is in attempting to base reason on something *groundless*, not founded in any possible experience.

# A priori and a posteriori

- Our cognitions begin with experience, this is their grounding (B1)
- Yet they do not arise from experience: Kant is interested in cognitions independent of all experience and the senses, but which structure it
- Thus *a priori* cognitions 'occur absolutely independently of all experience' (B2-3).
- Cognitions borrowed from experience are *a posteriori*

# Argument for a priori cognitions

‘if you remove from your empirical concept of every object, whether corporeal or incorporeal, all those properties of which experience teaches you, you could still not take from it that by means of which you think of it as a substance or as dependent on a substance (even though this concept contains more determination than that of an object in general). Thus, convinced by the necessity with which this concept presses itself on you, you must concede that it has its seat in your faculty of cognition *a priori*.’ (B6)

# Analytic vs synthetic a priori (A7-B11)

- Accounts of a priori truths, like Plato's, lead to error because they do not distinguish between a priori truths.
- Some are *Analytic*: the subject is contained in the predicate, or the truth is contained within its terms. E.g. *all bachelors are unmarried*. Analytic a priori truths explicate knowledge.
- Others are *Synthetic*: the predicate is not contained or 'thought' in the subject. E.g. *all bachelors are unfulfilled*. Synthetic a priori truths extend our knowledge, and rely on something beyond the subject.
- It is synthetic because it relies on an additional third element which is synthesised or joined onto the predicate, through experience.

# Synthetic a priori

- Kant criticises existing metaphysics for not grasping synthetic a priori
- Leibniz distinguished between 'truths of reason' (a priori, necessary by logical principle, without contradiction, e.g. maths, geometry) vs 'truths of fact' derived from experience, which are contingent
- Hume separated 'relations of ideas' (a priori, e.g. maths) from 'matters of fact' (a posteriori).
- Yet confusingly, Hume claimed that causality was among matters of fact, in that it could happen otherwise or involve contradiction, whilst maths is a relation of ideas, being necessary and universal, and true by definition





# Synthetic a priori

- Hume's mistake is to limit the a priori to the analytic – he was unable to conceive of synthetic a priori, and so calls events 'habit'
- Thus 'every event has a cause': this is not analytic, because event does not include the definition of having an effect
- It is a priori however, because it synthesises or compounds another a priori truth to it
- Hence vs Hume, mathematic proofs do give us new knowledge about the world



# Demonstrating synthetic a priori

$$7+5 = 12$$

- All that  $7+5$  contains is the unification of two numbers (7 and 5)
- It therefore requires synthesising another concept, that of the number 12, and that of addition, to reach the answer
- 'Without getting help from intuition we could never find the sum by means of the mere analysis of our concepts' (B16)
- Thus mathematics (and natural science) rest on synthetic a priori

# Placing reason within limits



- ‘Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind’ (A51, B75)
- A synthesis of concepts (form) and intuitions/sense-experience (concepts) is necessary for synthetic a priori
- The ‘togetherness principle’: intuitions and concepts are interdependent for constituting objectively valid judgements.
- Metaphysics has a ‘predisposition’ to speculate about what is beyond possible experience (intuition), pulling it towards pure reason or concepts alone

# Placing reason within limits

- Thus metaphysics can become a science through determining the concepts comprising our cognition, and their basis in intuitions
- *What is the significance of Kant's project?*
  - Provides an a priori foundations for a modern scientific view, through examining the ability of human cognition to acquire such knowledge
  - Makes human thought autonomous, active in constructing its own knowledge, a capacity to reflect on and answer to our own cognitions
  - *What else?*

# Transcendental: beyond experience

- A transcendental argument goes beyond empirical enquiry, through establishing a priori conditions of experience.
- It leads to 'knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects *in so far as this mode of knowledge is possible a priori*' (B25).
- Kant will argue for 'transcendental idealism': that whilst space and time are not real in themselves, they are features of subjective experience and in this sense are empirically real. But they are still 'ideal', as they are not things in themselves.

# Recap on terms

- **Analytic**: subject contained within predicate  
**Synthetic**: predicate not contained in subject, requires added element
- **Synthetic a priori**: predicate not contained in subject, but whose truth is verifiable independent of experience
- **Transcendental**: beyond possible experience
- **Intuitions**: the object's being as given to us immediately, via senses  
Concepts: its being thought about, via understanding
- **Sensibility**: cognitive faculty by which objects given to us as intuitions  
Understanding: cognitive faculty which organises concepts

# Class recap

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