

## Chapter 8

# Conclusion: The Kantian Synthesis

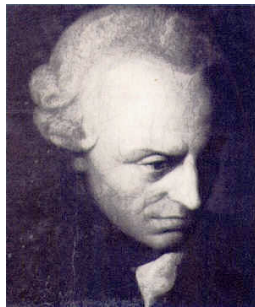


Figure 8.1: Kant

### 8.1 Introduction: Kant (1724-1804)

You can find a short bio here: <http://www.philosophypages.com/ph/kant.htm>

What you want to remember from Kant:

- born in Königsberg, studied in Königsberg, died in Königsberg – not much of travelling

- notoriously calm and regular life, but he took pleasures in life (he was not the kind of ascetical person that some will tell you he was) – dinner party every thursday !
- supposed last words: “Es ist gut” (this is good)
- wrote the three *Critiques* (of Pure Reason, of Practical Reason, of Judgement) (K1, K2 and K3), thus founding one of the most important systems of philosophy
- also:
  - *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysic* less technical version of K1
  - *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* less technical version of K2
  - *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*
  - and some *Opus posthumum* in which he presents, among other things, his philosophy of history.
- Kant in a nutshell:
  1. Criticism of speculative metaphysics and skepticism
  2. Reconciliation rationalism and empiricism
  3. Answer to the main question: what can reason achieve?

The latter question divides in :

  - 3.1 What can I know?
  - 3.2 What should I do ?
  - 3.3 What can I hope?

And all these form the various facets of the overall question : What is man? which is also the question of our finitude.

## 8.2 Readings and Homework

- Readings: Kant, second preface to the *Critic of Pure Reason*

- Study Questions:

1. How does Kant characterize the “secured path of a science”?
2. Kant asserts that Logic has entered the secured path of a science a long time ago. However, Kant goes on, Logic should be seen as only the “vestibule” of the sciences. Explain in what sense and why.
3. What is the proper method of mathematics that makes it a true science?
4. What is the proper method of physics that makes it a true science?
5. Why does Kant think that metaphysics has not entered the secured path of a science? What does Kant propose for a remedy? How is his proposal analogous to the revolutions there occurred in mathematics and physics?
6. Kant admits that, were his method adopted, it would imply “a consequence which is startling, and which has the appearance of being highly prejudicial to the whole purpose of metaphysics”. Explain what the consequence is and why it follows from Kant’s method.
7. Explain why Kant’s method has a positive role can be compared to the role of the police. Explain Kant’s illustration of such a positive role of his method on the issue of free will.
8. Explain in what sense and to what extent Kant’s critical method is against dogmatism.

## 8.3 Secured path of science

**Secured path of science:** what is it?

- No more progress or linear progress
- Objective Truth

**Logic has reached the status of science:** Aristotle

- Logic = science  
no more progress at all

- Logic's success is due to its limitations:
  - abstraction of all objects of knowledge
  - studies the forms of our understanding only
  - hence, only propraedeutic – preparation which is necessary but not sufficient – to the sciences
- The laws of Logic are necessary but empty

**Mathematics** Greeks (Thales for example)

- realized that mathematical truths are not to be found in the figures
- instead it is to be found in thought, in reason

**Physics** Newton

- realized that physical truths are not to be found in the mere observation of nature
- instead, one has to interrogate nature with an idea in mind

**Metaphysics:** Kant?

- a battle ground - no progress - hence not a science
- empty speculative philosophy

This situation is unacceptable for Kant!

## 8.4 The Copernican Revolution

**The problem of reason:** how is knowledge a priori possible?

- with Hume, Kant rejects speculative metaphysics – DOGMATISM – as a vain game or fight between equally ungrounded rational hypothesis
- against Hume, Kant wants to find a way to say that *a form of a priori knowledge is possible which is informative: not purely analytic but synthetic*

**Some definitions:** we need to keep in mind

- analytic / synthetic judgment: this distinction concerns the various ways in which something is *true*

All bachelors are not married (true by definition)

The cat is on the mat (matter of fact)

- a priori / a posteriori: this distinction concerns the various ways in which *we know* something: through pure reason or through experience

$2 + 3 = 5$

The Earth revolves around the sun.

**Hume's division** for knowledge:

- A priori = analytic
- A posteriori = synthetic

**Kant vs. Hume** Kant wants to show that *synthetic a priori judgment are possible* – in other words, reason can do better than tautologies... and science as a well grounded knowledge is possible.

The simple reason for which he believes that science is possible is: IT IS ACTUAL! and everything actual is possible...

This is to say that Kant takes as a starting point that mathematical and physical science are de facto proofs that science is possible:

- physics and mathematics exist
- they are cases of synthetic a priori knowledge

Hence: synthetic a priori knowledge is possible

*Given the above, the main question is then: how is synthetic a priori knowledge possible? This is the only question Kantian metaphysics can and will answer.*

**The Copernican Revolution:** Kant changes the perspective of metaphysics:

- Thinking about the way in which mathematics and physics became scientific, Kant finds what he believes is needed for metaphysics.
- The new method consists in determine the object according to the requirements of reason instead of taking the object as a given reality.
  - What metaphysics was doing: posit the reality as given, and try to find out what it is

- What metaphysics should do instead: understand how our knowledge of the external objects demands on us and not only on the object to know.
- Copernican revolution: from realism to idealism
  - REALISM: posit the existence of external reality et take this reality as a given – the rationalist thinks that the reality is to be known by reason, the empiricist thinks it is to be known by experience: both posit an external reality which we had to find out what it is independently of how we grasp it.
  - IDEALISM assumes, on the contrary, that we are an active part of the cognitive process. *What we take to be reality is partly constructed by our minds.*

“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”

Kantian Metaphysics: All we can know a priori of the object is the ways in which our minds inform the object.

## 8.5 Intuition, Understanding

**Matter and Form:** Our knowledge of an object is made of two parts:

- a part which comes from the object in itself : the *matter* of our knowledge of the object
- a part which comes from us: the *form* of our knowledge of the object

What the critical philosophy can do: determine what are the forms of knowledge

**Intuition and Concept:** The form of our knowledge of an object has two parts:

- Intuition coming from our sensitivity
- Concepts coming from our understanding

Kant’s synthesis of Rationalism and Empiricism: “Concepts without intuition are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.”

To know is to put our senses intuitive into concepts.

NOTE: for Kant, intuition = perception (very roughly) – this is using the word intuition in a opposite way to Descartes – be careful.

- Forms of Intuition:
  - Space
  - Time

Space and Time are not out there: it is the framework in which we inform all our perceptions.
- Forms of the Understanding: Categories – the categories are the necessary conditions of the possibility of scientific knowledge
 

Transcendental Argument:= argument which deduces the existence of some  $X$  as a condition of possibility of  $A$ , given that  $A$  exists

Metaphysics:  
 $A$  = science and synthetic a priori knowledge  
 $X$  = Categories

## 8.6 Consequences

- We cannot achieve knowledge beyond the possibility of experience
 

We cannot know the thing in itself (noumenon/noumena) but only as it appears to us (phenomenon/ phenomena)
- We must abandon the grand questions of metaphysics as knowable scientifically:
  - God
  - Freedom / Necessity
  - Immortality and Soul
- This does not mean that we have to abandon those ideas, *only that they cannot be known in a scientific way.*
  - God, Freedom and Immortality are the object of thought, not knowledge

- These ideas are in the domain of practical reason.  
“I had to set limits to knowledge in order to make place for faith.”
- Reason and Ideas as regulative ideals – guides in our infinite search: they are not object of knowledge but goals to pursue.
- Here comes Morals and Kantian philosophy of Duty