

IMMANUEL KANT THE CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON (1781; 2nd Ed. 1787)

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INTRODUCTION

I The Distinction Between Pure and Empirical Knowledge

Kant begins by arguing that "there can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience" (41). For how else, he asks,

should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience? (41)

He concludes that "we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins" (41).

Kant contends, however, that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it *all* arises out of experience" (my emphasis; 41). For, he argues, "it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself" (41-42). He admits that if "our faculty of knowledge makes any such addition, it may be that we are not in a position to distinguish it from the raw material, until with long practice of attention we have become skilled in separating it" (42).

This raises a crucial question for Kant, namely "whether there is any knowledge that is thus independent of experience and even of all impressions of the senses" (42). He distinguishes in this regard between, firstly, such "*a priori*" (42) knowledge and knowledge that is "*empirical*, which has its sources *a posteriori*, that is, in experience" (43). He further differentiates, secondly, between *a priori* and "pure" (43) *a priori* knowledge, the latter being "absolutely independent of all experience" (43) and in which there is "no admixture of anything empirical" (43). For example, the "proposition, 'every alteration has its cause,' while an *a priori* proposition, is not a pure proposition, because alteration is a concept which can be derived only from experience" (43).

II We Are in Possession of Certain Modes of A *Priori* Knowledge, and Even the Common Understanding is Never Without Them

Here, Kant seeks a "criterion by which to distinguish with certainty between pure and empirical knowledge" (43). Experience, he points out has its limitations. It teaches us, firstly, that a "thing is so and so, but not that it cannot be otherwise" (43) (i.e. not that it must be so). If, by contrast, a "proposition which in being thought is thought as *necessary*" (43), it is an *a priori* judgement. Secondly, it "never confers on its judgments true or strict, but only assumed and comparative *universality*, through induction" (44). All one can say in this regard, is we have not "observed" (44) exceptions to this or that rule. "Empirical universality is only an arbitrary extension of a validity holding in most cases to one which holds in all" (44). By contrast, if a judgment is thought "with strict universality, that is, in such a manner that no exception is allowed as possible, it is not derived from

experience, but is valid absolutely *a priori*" (44). When "strict universality is essential to a judgment, this indicates a special source of knowledge, namely, a faculty of *a priori* knowledge" (44). This leads Kant to conclude that "[n]ecessity and strict universality are thus criteria of *a priori* knowledge, and are inseparable from one another" (44).

Kant claims that "it is easy to show that there actually are in human knowledge judgments which are necessary and in the strictest sense universal, and which are therefore pure *a priori* judgments" (44). If an example from the sciences is desired, he suggests "any of the propositions of mathematics" (44). If an example is sought drawn from the "understanding in its quite ordinary employment" (44) (i.e. common sense), he argues that the proposition 'every alteration must have a cause' will do perfectly for it demonstrates, he asserts without explaining why, that the "very concept of cause so manifestly contains the concept of a necessity of connection with an effect and of the strict universality of the rule" (44). He chooses this example because it is the very one which David Hume had interrogated and which, according to Kant himself, had woken him from his own dogmatic slumber. Hume had argued that the notion of cause and effect is derived from a "repeated association of that which happens with that which precedes, and from a custom of connecting representations, a custom originating in this repeated association, and constituting therefore a merely subjective necessity" (44). Kant goes so far as to assert that "pure *a priori* principles are indispensable for the possibility of experience" (45). After all, he contends, "when could experience derive its certainty, if all the rules, according to which it proceeds, were always themselves empirical, and therefore contingent? Such rules could hardly be regarded as first principles" (45).

Kant says concepts, like judgments, can also be *a priori*. For example, he argues that if

we remove from our empirical concept of a body, one by one, every feature in it which [merely] empirical, the colour, the hardness or softness, the weight, even the impenetrability, there still remains the space which the body (now entirely vanished) occupied, and this cannot be removed. Again, if we remove from our empirical concept of any object, corporeal or incorporeal, all properties which experience has taught us, we yet cannot take away that property through which the object is thought as substance or as inhering in a substance (although this concept of substance is more determinate than that of an object in general).

Owing to the "necessity with which this concept of substance forces itself upon us, we have no option save to admit that it has its seat in our faculty of *a priori* knowledge" (45).

First Part: Transcendental Aesthetic

Introduction

With the views of Locke and other empiricists in mind, Kant argues that "*intuition*" (65) is the means by which the human mind "may relate to objects" (65) and thereby produce knowledge. Intuition "takes place only in so far as the object is given to us" (65) and "as the mind is affected in a certain way" (65). The "capacity (receptivity) for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects, is called *sensibility*. Objects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are *thought* through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*" (65). The "effect of an object on the faculty of presentation. . . is *sensation*. That intuition which is in relation to the object through sensation, is entitled *empirical*. The undetermined object

of an empirical illusion is entitled *appearance*" (65). "That in the appearance which corresponds to sensation" (65) is "*matter*" (66), whereas the "*form*" (66) is "that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations" (66). While the "matter of all appearance is given to us *a posteriori* only" (66) (i.e. we can only say after the fact that a certain object is hard, as opposed to soft, and so on), "its form must lie ready for the sensations *a priori* in the mind, and so must allow of being considered apart from all sensation" (66).

Terming "*pure*" (66) all representations "in which there is nothing that belongs to sensation" (66), Kant argues that the "pure form of sensible intuitions in general, in which all the manifold of intuition is intuited in certain relations, must be found in the mind *a priori*" (66):

if I take away from the representation of a body that which the understanding thinks in regard to it, substance, force, divisibility, etc., and likewise what belongs to sensation, impenetrability, hardness, colour, etc., something still remains over from this empirical intuition, namely extension and figure. These belong to pure intuition, which, even without any actual object of the senses or of sensation, exists in the mind *a priori* as a mere form of sensibility. (66)

Kant terms the "*transcendental aesthetic*" (66) the "science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility" (66). It forms the "first part of the transcendental doctrine of elements, in distinction from that part which deals with the principles of pure thought, and which is called transcendental logic" (67).

In the transcendental aesthetic, Kant intends to "first *isolate* sensibility, by taking away from it everything which the understanding things through its concepts, so that nothing may be left save empirical intuition" (67) and, secondly, to "separate off from it everything which belongs to sensation, so that nothing may remain save pure intuition and the mere form of appearances, which is all that sensibility can supply *a priori*" (67). There are, he contends, "two pure forms of sensible intuition, serving as principles of *a priori* knowledge, namely, space and time" (67).

Section I Space

Kant argues here that by "means of outer sense, a property of our mind, we represent to ourselves objects as outside of us, and all without exception in space. In space their shape, magnitude, and relation to one another are determined or determinable" (67). In the intuition of all objects, the "representation of space must be presupposed" (68). It is a "necessary *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions" (68). It is the "condition of the possibility of appearances" (68).

Section II Time

Kant argues here that time is a "necessary representation that underlies all intuitions" (74) because "neither coexistence nor succession would ever come within our perception, if the representation of time were not presupposed as underlying them *a priori*. Only on the presupposition of time can we represent to ourselves a number of things as existing at one and the same time (simultaneously) or at different times (successively)" (74).

General Considerations

Here, Kant argues that

all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the subject . . . be removed, the whole constitution of the senses and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them – a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, certainly, by every human being. . . . Space and time are its pure forms, and sensation in general its matter. (82)

Second Part: Transcendental Logic

Introduction: Idea of a Transcendental Logic

I Logic in General

Here, Kant summarises that

Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind: the first is the capacity of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions), the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations (spontaneity [in the production of] concepts). Through the first an object is *given* to us, through the second the object is *thought* in relation to the [given] representation (which is a mere determination of the mind). Intuitions and concepts constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge. (92)

When thoughts “contain sensation (which presupposes the actual presence of the object), they are empirical. When there is no mingling of sensation with the representation, they are pure” (92). Sensation is the “material of sensible knowledge” (92), while “pure intuition . . . contains only the form under which something is intuited; the pure concept only the form of the thought of an object” (92).

He labels the mind’s “*receptivity*” (93), that is, its “power of receiving representations” (93), “sensibility” (93), and its “power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge” (93), the “understanding” (93). Our intuition “can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects” (93), while the understanding is that which “enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition” (93). Both these powers are indispensable: “[w]ithout sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (93). The “understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise” (93). It is just as important to “make our concepts sensible” (93) as it is to “make our intuitions intelligible” (93). Hence, Kant’s distinction between the “science of the rules of sensibility, that is, aesthetic, from the science of the rules of the understanding in general, that is, logic” (93).

Kant then divides logic into “logic of the general” (93) and “logic of the special employment of the understanding” (93). The former “contains the absolutely necessary

rules of thought without which there can be no employment whatsoever of the understanding" (93), "treats of understanding without any regard to difference in the objects to which the understanding may be directed" (93), and may be called the "logic of elements" (93). The latter "contains the rules of correct thinking as regards a certain kind of objects" (93) and is termed the "organon of this or that science" (93).

General logic is "either pure or applied. In the former we abstract from all empirical conditions . . . i.e. from the influence of the senses, the play of imagination, the laws of memory, the force of habit, inclination, etc., and so from all sources of prejudice" (94). Pure general logic accordingly has to do with "principles *a priori*, and is a canon of understanding and of reason, but only in respect of what is formal in their employment" (94), "is to constitute the pure doctrine of reason" (94) and alone is, properly speaking, a science for the simple reason that it "deals with nothing but the mere form of thought" (94).

Applied general logic is "directed to the rules of the employment of understanding under the subjective empirical conditions dealt with by psychology" (94). It is a "representation of the understanding and of the rules of its necessary employment *in concreto*, that is, under the accidental subjective conditions which may hinder or help its application, and which are given only empirically. It treats of attention, its impediments and consequences, of the source of error, the state of doubt, hesitation, and conviction, etc." (95).