

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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**Class 24 - Kant's Copernican
Revolution**

Business

- Read the *Critique* slowly, carefully.
 - Kant's jargon takes some getting used to.
- Bring texts for the last two weeks.
- Papers are due on Tuesday
 - 5-7 pages
- I'll be out of the office until Monday, but available as much as I can over email.

The *Critique of Pure Reason*

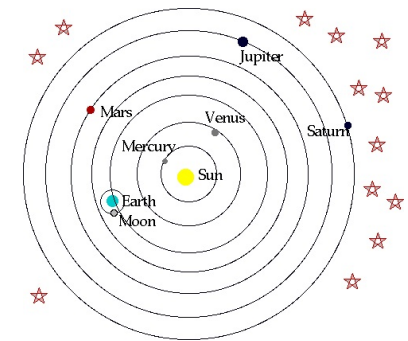
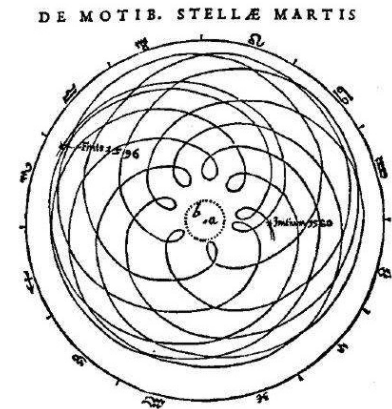
- Define 'critique'.
- First Critique
 - "Is metaphysics possible?"
 - "If so, how?"
 - What are the limits of human knowledge?
- Two editions
 - A version, in 1781
 - B version, in 1787
- The Second Critique (*Critique of Practical Reason*) concerns moral philosophy.
- The Third Critique (*Critique of Judgment*) concerns aesthetics.
- Kant's work marks the end of the modern era.

Reason

- Everyone we've read accepts an ability to reason.
- The rationalists and empiricists disagreed about the matter for reason.
 - The rationalists thought that the content of our judgments is provided by innate ideas and sense experience.
 - The empiricists thought that the content is only sensory, and looked to reduce reasoning to some kinds of association among images.
- Kant rejects both rationalism (dogmatic, going beyond its true abilities) and empiricism (skeptical).
- If we take logic, as Kant does, to be the rules of reasoning in thought, then Kant's project is logical.
 - Reason can determine an object (structure it).
 - Reason can make it actual (pure thought).
 - Some cognition is pure, reason acting on itself.

Copernicus

- Aristoteleans believed that the sun, stars, and other celestial bodies circled the earth.
- But, astronomical discoveries made the cycles of those bodies highly complicated.
- Copernicus (and others) found that the mathematics became tractable if he posited a moving earth.
 - “Having found it difficult to make progress there when he assumed that the entire host of stars revolved around the spectator, he tried to find out whether he might not be more successful if he had the spectator revolve and the stars remain at rest (Bxvi, AW 720a)”.
- Hume and Berkeley found it impossible to justify knowledge of the material world by assuming that our cognition has to conform to objects.
 - We are stuck, either with Berkeley, as idealists, or with Hume, as skeptics.
- But, if the objects have to conform to our cognition, then we might have a priori knowledge of those objects.



Subjective Idealism

- One way in which objects conform to our cognition is in imagination, when we fantasize.
- If all of the world were merely one person's fancy, then the objects of that world would necessarily conform to that person's cognition.
- Such a view of the world would be an unacceptable, subjective idealism.

Transcendental idealism

- In Kant's transcendental idealism, the world conforms to our cognition because we can only cognize in certain ways.
 - The world of things-in-themselves remains, as it did for Hume, inaccessible, completely out of range of our cognition.
 - The noumenal world is beyond the limits of possible experience.
- But, all possible experience has to conform to our cognitive capacities.
 - The phenomenal world, the world of possible experience, is necessarily structured according to those capacities.

Our Cognitive Capacities

intuitions and understanding

- Intuition is our mental faculty for having something presented to us.
- Understanding, which is structured according to certain basic concepts, is our mental faculty for determining, or thinking, about objects.
- All objects have to be presented in intuition and determined by concepts in order to be thought.
- Thus, all of experience necessarily conforms to our cognition.
- Logic, as the laws of thought, will help us understand our faculty of cognizing, and will thus help us understand the phenomenal world.

Kant Against Rationalists

- We should distinguish between the realm of objects of possible experience and the world of transcendent objects.
- God is outside the range of possible experience, and thus can not be an object of knowledge.
- Similarly for freedom, and immortality.
 - Transcendental dialectic; antinomies
- Kant denies knowledge in order to make room for faith, AW 724b
- *A priori* knowledge of a mind-independent world is impossible.
- We can not have any proper philosophical knowledge of those topics.

Kant's Central Claim

- Metaphysics is possible, and it consists of synthetic *a priori* judgments.
- Two distinctions
 - Analytic vs synthetic claims
 - *A priori* vs empirical, or *a posteriori*, claims

Analyticity

- A linguistic distinction, a difference between kinds of propositions or statements.
 - For Kant, analyticity and syntheticity are characterizations of judgments, which are mental acts.
- Conceptual containment
- Judgments, for Kant, following Aristotle, are all of subject-predicate form.
- A judgment is analytic if the concept of the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject.
- So, 'bachelors are unmarried' is analytic because the concept of a bachelor contains the concept of being unmarried.
 - If you're running then you're moving.
 - All neurologists are doctors.

Concepts

- Concepts may be taken either as mental objects (thoughts) or as abstract objects.
- If we take concepts to be thoughts, then different people can not share concepts.
 - My thoughts are not your thoughts, even though we can think about the same thing.
- So, it's preferable to take concepts as abstract objects, and to take our thoughts to be about concepts.
- When I think of a concept, like the concept of a bachelor, I perform a mental act which we can call grasping the concept.
- These concepts are structured, so that they can contain, or not contain, other concepts.

Conceptual Containment

two different notions

- Kant uses what Frege (in the late nineteenth century) calls beams-in-the-house analyticity.
 - ▶ When we look at a house, if we want to see if it contains a certain structure, we merely peel back the walls.
 - ▶ We literally see the beams.
- In contrast, Frege defends a plant-in-the-seeds analyticity.
 - ▶ A statement can be analytic as long as it follows from basic axioms according to analyticity-preserving rules of inference.
 - ▶ Frege can handle statements that are not in subject-predicate form.
 - John walks with those with whom he strolls.
 - ▶ Such sentences seem analytic, true in virtue of the conceptual containments of their parts.

A Linguistic Distinction and an Epistemological Distinction

- Analyticity and syntheticity concern concepts, whatever we take them to be.
 - This distinction is linguistic or conceptual (or even psychological).
- The analytic/synthetic distinction is independent of the distinction between *a priori* justifications and empirical (or *a posteriori*) ones.
 - This distinction is epistemological.
- Snow is white.
 - We need to see particular snow in order to know that snow is white.
- $3+2=5$
 - We need experiences with no particular objects in order to know that $2+3=5$.
 - No empirical experiences with undermine that claim.
 - 2 cups of water plus 3 cups of salt
 - Two chickens added to three foxes

A Metaphysical Distinction

the necessary/contingent distinction

- Some claims hold necessarily, like mathematical claims.
- Other claims are merely contingent, like the claim that snow is white.
- Many philosophers typically, and traditionally, considered claims to be necessary only if they are believed *a priori*.
 - Kant makes that claim explicitly.
 - As Hume argued, one can not arrive at a necessary truth from contingent experiences.
- One might think that all *a priori* claims must be analytic.
 - One reasons to the truth of an analytic claim without appeal to experience.
- Similarly, one might align contingency with empirical justification and syntheticity.
 - A claim is contingent when it is justified by appeal to sense experience and it brings together concepts that are not necessarily related.

Hume's Alignment

- Hume claims that relations of ideas are necessary, justified *a priori*, and analytic.
- Matters of fact are contingent, justified empirically (by tracing ideas back to initial impressions) and synthetic.
- Put aside the necessary/contingent distinction, since Hume and Kant agree on it.
- We can depict Hume's claim as the following:

	<i>A priori</i>	Empirical
Analytic	Relations of Ideas	--
Synthetic	--	Matters of Fact

Kant's Big Claim

	<i>A priori</i>	Empirical
Analytic	Beams in the House	--
Synthetic	Most Mathematics and Metaphysics and Physics	Empirical Judgments

- Metaphysics is possible, and it consists of synthetic *a priori* judgments.
- “Experiential judgments, as such, are one and all synthetic” (A7/B11, AW 725a).
- There are also synthetic claims that are not experiential.

Mathematical Synthetic a priori

Mathematical propositions, properly so called, are always *a priori* judgments rather than empirical ones; for they carry with them necessity, which we could never glean from experience...It is true that one might at first think that the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ is a merely analytic one that follows, by the principle of contradiction, from the concept of a sum of 7 and 5. Yet if we look more closely, we find that the concept of the sum of 7 and 5 contains nothing more than the union of the two numbers into one; but in [thinking] that union we are not thinking in any way at all what that single number is that unites the two. In thinking merely that union of 7 and 5, I have by no means already thought the concept of 12; and no matter how long I dissect my concept of such a possible sum, still I shall never find in it that 12. We must go beyond these concepts and avail ourselves of the intuition corresponding to one of the two... (B14-5, AW 726a).

Metaphysical Synthetic A Priori

- Every effect has a cause.
- The universality of the statement entails that it is not an empirical judgment.
- But, Kant claims that it is not an analytic judgment.
- “In the concept of something that happens I do indeed find an existence preceded by a time, etc., and from this one can obtain analytic judgments. But the concept of a cause lies quite outside that earlier concept and indicates something different from what happens...” (A9/B13, AW 725b).

Physical Synthetic *A priori*

- “*Natural science contains synthetic a priori judgments as principles.* Let me cite as examples just a few propositions: e.g., the propositions that in all changes in the corporeal world the quantity of matter remains unchanged; or the proposition that in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal to each other” (B17-18, AW 726b).
- Such laws hold necessarily, and so can not be learned from experience.
- Kant’s conception of physics is closer to that of Galileo and Descartes than it is to contemporary physicists.
- While some contemporary physics is highly speculative, it is generally held that a mark of a good theory is whether it is testable, or refutable, or otherwise confirmed or contravened by experimental results.
- String theory has been controversial because its proponents have not been able to formulate tests for it.
- Kant agrees that some portions of physics must be empirically testable.
- He also believes that certain physical principles are synthetic *a priori*.
- “Experience would provide neither strict universality nor apodeictic certainty...” (A31/B47, AW 733b).

Innate Ideas and Kantian Psychology

- Kant does not argue that innate ideas are built into our minds.
- He argues that there are certain cognitive structures that impose an order to our possible experience.
- The mind has templates for judgments, which are imposed and can be known *a priori*.
- Against those who defend innate ideas, it does not contain judgments themselves.
- If we look at our cognitive structures, turning our reason on itself, we can find the necessary structure of our reasoning, and grounds for synthetic *a priori* claims.
- That process, which Kant calls transcendental reasoning, is the essence of Kant's Copernican revolution.
- Kant's transcendental arguments lead to a description of our subjective conceptual framework, which nevertheless holds necessarily for all possible experience.