

The Emergence of Modern Protestantism
1725 - 1810

Lecture 11 – Immanuel Kant

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substituting for
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Immanuel Kant - Basics

- April 22, 1724 - February 12, 1804
- Königsburg, East Prussia
- Early training in Pietism
- Stayed within 100 miles of home
- Daily walk at precisely 4:30 p.m.

- Copernican revolution in philosophy
- Transcendental method
- Phenomenal and noumenal realms
- Criticisms of proofs of God's existence
- Categorical imperative

- *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787)
- *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)
- *The Critique of Judgment* (1790)



Quotes about Kant: R.C. Sproul

“Kant ... still dominates the intellectual scene. He claimed that in the realm of mind, he effected a Copernican revolution. In retrospect the claim was a modest one. Kant banished God from the world of pure reason and God remains an exile from His own land. *The Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781 [the same year the British surrendered at Yorktown]. In comparison the American revolution was a trifle. The United States declared political independence of Great Britain; Kant declared intellectual independence of God.”

Quotes about Kant: R.C. Sproul (continued)

“Kant went beyond all previous refutations by laying his ax at the root of the tree of the knowledge of God. He tried to demonstrate (satisfying most of the scholarly world) that it is impossible to know God intellectually or to prove His being. While it has always been realized that humankind could not comprehend God fully (*finitum non capax infinitum*), Kant was saying that humans cannot know Him even partially.”

Quotes about Kant: C. Van Til

“Kant says that on the basis of empiricism we can have only brute facts and more brute facts but no systematic relation between them. He adds that on the basis of rationalism we would have only order, but it would be merely the idea of order without any ordering of facts. Kant sought to remedy the situation by means of his Copernican revolution. No one had ever conceived the idea that the mind itself was doing the ordering even as it was doing the observing. Facts cannot be observed, argues Kant, except they are observed as being incorporated into systematic arrangement. So it is the mind itself that imposes its categories of substance and causality upon nature even as it observes nature. Nature means causally related facts. And causally related facts are brute facts observed and arranged by the mind of man.”

Quotes about Kant: Van Til (continued)

“Kant’s great contribution to philosophy consisted in stressing the activity of the experiencing subject. It is this point to which the idea of a Copernican revolution is usually applied. Kant argued that since it is the thinking subject that itself contributes the categories of universality and necessity, we must not think of these as covering any reality that exists or may exist wholly independent of the human mind. By using the law of non-contradiction we may and must indeed determine what is possible, but the possibility that we thus determine is subjective rather than objective. It is a possibility *for us*.”

Quotes about Kant: Gordon Clark

“Kant, the source of all contemporary philosophies, or at least the funnel through which all modern ideas have passed, is unbearably self-contradictory. Not only are there the gigantic contradictions which Jacobi and the post-Kantians saw at first — we may forgive or even sympathize with big blunders — but there are the innumerable detailed inconsistencies from paragraph to paragraph almost all the way through.”

Concerning Kant’s 100 dollars example: “... this homely, this very homely, illustration stands out like an oasis in an 884 page desert of the most crabbed literary style on record.”

Quotes about Kant: Others

“Immanuel Kant is often said to have been the greatest philosopher since the Greeks. Certainly, he dominates the last two hundred years in the sense that - although few philosophers today are strictly speaking Kantians - his influence is everywhere. Moreover, that influence extends over a number of different philosophical regions: epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics, politics, religion.”

“I realize that it is extremely difficult to give a clear but accurate summary of Kant's thought here in three sentences. Indeed it is extremely difficult to give a clear but accurate summary of Kant's thought in three hundred sentences, or three hundred pages. That is because Kant's thought does not lend itself to clear and accurate summary at any length; as far as I can see it contains deep ambiguities and confusions.”

Kant on YouTube



Transcendental Method

- Motivated by Hume's skepticism:
 - “I freely confess that it was the thought of David Hume which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumbers and gave an entirely new direction to my inquiries in the field of speculative philosophy.”
 - Wanted to rescue knowledge from skepticism
- Did not ask, “Is knowledge possible?”
- Asked, “If knowledge is possible, then what is necessary for it?”

Kantian Synthesis

- Two main schools of philosophy
 - Rationalism - priority of thought - innate ideas
 - Empiricism - priority of experience - no innate ideas
- Kant synthesized the two
 - All knowledge begins with sense experience - no innate specific ideas
 - But do have *pure intuitions* of time and space
 - And *a priori categories* (causality is one of 12) in the mind through which to interpret experience
 - Knowledge results from a cooperative process between the senses and the mind making judgments
 - The mind plays an active role in structuring reality

Kantian Epistemology (from Sproul, Gerstner, Lindsey)

- The knowing process begins when something comes to our minds from out-there through our senses
- This something is experienced with intuitions of space and time which are not out-there but in-here, in our minds
 - We could never apprehend the out-there without this in-here element
- But we are not yet able to form a rational judgment without reference to certain categories (quantity, quality, relation, modality) which are also not out-there but in-here
- The final step in knowledge is the schematism of the reason proper which combines these judgments
- Our knowledge is largely subjective (in-here)

Experience and Cognition

“That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.

“But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the occasion), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skilful in separating it. ...”

Intuitions and Conceptions

“Our knowledge springs from two main sources in the mind, first of which is the faculty or power of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions); the second is the power of cognizing by means of these representations (spontaneity in the production of conceptions). Through the first an object is given to us; through the second, it is, in relation to the representation (which is a mere determination of the mind), thought. Intuition and conceptions constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither conceptions without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without conceptions, can afford us a cognition. Both are either pure or empirical. They are empirical, when sensation (which presupposes the actual presence of the object) is contained in them; and pure, when no sensation is mixed with the representation. Sensations we may call the matter of sensuous cognition. Pure intuition consequently contains merely the form under which something is intuited, and pure conception only the form of the thought of an object. Only pure intuitions and pure conceptions are possible a priori; the empirical only a posteriori.”

Concerning Time

“1. Time is not an empirical conception. For neither coexistence nor succession would be perceived by us, if the representation of time did not exist as a foundation a priori. Without this presupposition we could not represent to ourselves that things exist together at one and the same time, or at different times, that is, contemporaneously, or in succession.

“2. Time is a necessary representation, lying at the foundation of all our intuitions. With regard to phenomena in general, we cannot think away time from them, and represent them to ourselves as out of and unconnected with time, but we can quite well represent to ourselves time void of phenomena. Time is therefore given a priori. In it alone is all reality of phenomena possible. These may all be annihilated in thought, but time itself, as the universal condition of their possibility, cannot be so annulled.”

Phenomenal & Noumenal Realms

- Phenomenal realm
 - Concrete, material world
 - Where sensations occur – our experience is all here
- Noumenal realm
 - Realm of metaphysics
 - God, the self, the thing-in-itself (essence, being)
- Nothing in the noumenal realm can be known
 - We can speculate and believe, but we cannot know
 - “transcendental apperception of the ego”
 - An unscalable wall between the realms

Towards the Noumenal

“We have now not only traversed the region of the pure understanding and carefully surveyed every part of it, but we have also measured it, and assigned to everything therein its proper place. But this land is an island, and enclosed by nature herself within unchangeable limits. It is the land of truth (an attractive word), surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the region of illusion, where many a fog-bank, many an iceberg, seems to the mariner, on his voyage of discovery, a new country, and, while constantly deluding him with vain hopes, engages him in dangerous adventures, from which he never can desist, and which yet he never can bring to a termination. But before venturing upon this sea, in order to explore it in its whole extent, and to arrive at a certainty whether anything is to be discovered there, it will not be without advantage if we cast our eyes upon the chart of the land that we are about to leave, and to ask ourselves, firstly, whether we cannot rest perfectly contented with what it contains, or whether we must not of necessity be contented with it, if we can find nowhere else a solid foundation to build upon; and, secondly, by what title we possess this land itself, and how we hold it secure against all hostile claims?”

Noumenal Unknowable

“The doctrine of sensibility is also the doctrine of noumena in the negative sense, that is, of things which the understanding is obliged to cogitate apart from any relation to our mode of intuition, consequently not as mere phenomena, but as things in themselves. But the understanding at the same time comprehends that it cannot employ its categories for the consideration of things in themselves, because these possess significance only in relation to the unity of intuitions in space and time, and that they are competent to determine this unity by means of general a priori connecting conceptions only on account of the pure ideality of space and time. Where this unity of time is not to be met with, as is the case with noumena, the whole use, indeed the whole meaning of the categories is entirely lost, for even the possibility of things to correspond to the categories is in this case incomprehensible.”

Criticisms of Classical Proofs of God

- **Against ontological argument** (being greater than which none can be conceived must exist)
 - Existence is not a predicate
 - There is no difference between the idea of a fictional God and the idea of an existing God
- **Against cosmological argument** (if anything exists, necessary being must exist)
 - We do not know that causality and law of non-contradiction apply in the noumenal realm
 - Ultimately reduces to the ontological argument
- **Against teleological argument** (design requires a designer)
 - Reduces to the ontological argument

Existence not a predicate

“Being is evidently not a real predicate, that is, a conception of something which is added to the conception of some other thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations in it. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgement. The proposition, God is omnipotent, contains two conceptions, which have a certain object or content; the word *is*, is no additional predicate- it merely indicates the relation of the predicate to the subject. Now, if I take the subject (God) with all its predicates (omnipotence being one), and say: *God is*, or, *There is a God*, I add no new predicate to the conception of God, I merely posit or affirm the existence of the subject with all its predicates- I posit the object in relation to my conception. The content of both is the same; and there is no addition made to the conception, which expresses merely the possibility of the object, by my cogitating the object- in the expression, *it is*- as absolutely given or existing. Thus the real contains no more than the possible.”

In Through the Back Door

- For all practical purposes, we must *assume* the existence of God
- We cannot *know* that God exists, but we must *act as if* he exists for ethics (and thus society) to be possible
- Transcendental moral argument for the existence of God
 - What is necessary for ethics to be meaningful?
 - Ethics is meaningful only if justice prevails. Since justice does not exist perfectly in this world, there must be a future state in which justice will prevail. For justice to prevail in the future state, there must be a Judge who is morally blameless, since a morally corrupt judge would not render perfect justice. This judge must be omniscient, never erring in his judgment, and he must be omnipotent, ensuring that his justice is enacted.

Categorical Imperative – 1st Formulation

- “Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”
- Decision procedure
 - 1. Formulate a maxim for the proposed action
 - 2. Recast that maxim as a universal law of nature governing all people
 - 3. Consider whether your maxim is even conceivable in a world governed by this law of nature
 - 4. Ask whether you could rationally will to act on your maxim in such a world

Categorical Imperative – Example

“A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels sick of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether taking his own life would not be contrary to his duty to himself. Now he asks whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. But his maxim is this: from self-love I make as my principle to shorten my life when its continued duration threatens more evil than it promises satisfaction. There only remains the question as to whether this principle of self-love can become a universal law of nature. One sees at once a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would destroy life by means of the very same feeling that acts so as to stimulate the furtherance of life, and hence there could be no existence as a system of nature. Therefore, such a maxim cannot possibly hold as a universal law of nature and is, consequently, wholly opposed to the supreme principle of all duty.”

Elements of a Biblical Response

- Against the neumenal realm
 - Psalm 19
 - Romans 1:19-20
 - John 1
 - Philippians 2:5-11
- Against subjectivity of knowledge
 - John 14:6
 - Psalm 119:89
 - Psalm 25
 - Proverbs 9:10

Kant's Continuing Influence

- In general culture
 - Only science and mathematics can provide knowledge
 - Knowledge is not possible in religion, ethics, ...
- In liberal Christianity
 - Unimportance of objective truth in Scripture
 - Importance of subjective beliefs of individuals
- In conservative Christianity
 - Apologetics wars
 - Re-active skepticism about science

Concluding Remarks

- Kant may be the least-read, most-influential philosopher in history
- Kantian ideas to watch out for
 - divorcing ‘faith’ from reason or from an object
 - ‘constructing’ or ‘creating’ reality
 - denying non-empirical knowledge
- Over-reactions to Kant to watch out for
 - equating the metaphysical and the physical
 - denying empirical knowledge
 - dismissing the relevance of scientific inquiry