

IMMANUEL KANT

The
Great
Synthesizer

IN THIS LECTURE

- In this lecture we will discuss the following:
 - 1. Review of the 'ism's of modern philosophy
 - 2. Review of Hume on causal inference
 - 3. Kant, the person
 - 4. Kant on Hume's problem
 - 5. Kant on the structuring of experience
 - 6. Essays

1. ISMS

■ What is rationalism?

- Rationalism is the view that the ultimate foundation of knowledge is reason, as opposed to experience.
- Claim: By introspecting, we can observe within our own minds ideas that are immutable and hence innate.
- Two rationalists we have discussed so far are Descartes and Spinoza.

1. ISMS

■ What is empiricism?

- Empiricism is the view that all knowledge and ideas ultimately derive from experience.
- Claim: There are no innate ideas. The human mind is a *tabula rasa*, or 'blank slate', at birth.
- Empiricists include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and George Berkeley.

1. ISMS

■ What is materialism?

- Materialism is the view that only physical matter exists in the world.
- Claim: Mental phenomena are really physical motions in the brain, themselves caused by and causing other physical motions.
- Thomas Hobbes is a materialist.

1. ISMS

- What is idealism?
 - Idealism is the view that only (immaterial) ideas and minds exist in the world.
 - Claim: The mind only perceives ideas, so it is absurd to posit the existence of unperceived, non-ideal 'objects'.
 - George Berkeley is an idealist. He thinks it's ideas all the way down. "To be is to be perceived."



1. ISMS

■ What is dualism?

- Dualism (in metaphysics, specifically substance dualism) is the view that the world consists of two distinct substances — immaterial (e.g., mind) and physical (matter).
- Dualist philosophers include Descartes, Locke, and (to an extent) Spinoza.



1. ISMS

■ What is monism?

- Monism (in metaphysics, specifically substance monism) is the view that the world consists of only one substance (e.g., physical matter or immaterial mind).
- Monists include Thomas Hobbes, George Berkeley, and Baruch Spinoza.

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- David Hume, a British empiricist, presents us with a problem:
- If all of our knowledge comes from experience, what is the origin of our indispensable notion of causation?
- Is there any reasoning behind causal inference?



David Hume
(1711-1776)

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- While we tend to think we are making a justified inference from the past behaviour of some experiences to the future of other, similar experiences, we do not, in fact, reason our way from one to the other.
- Hume challenges us to produce any such argument or chain of reasoning.
- He thinks we cannot, and that is his basis for skepticism about human knowledge.

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- What we really do, Hume thinks, is develop expectations based on the habitual association of experiences and ideas with one another.
- *“I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect, and I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects”* (p. 698)

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- For example, with fire comes heat.
- Does the fire cause the heat?
- Even a chemical explanation of combustion (i.e., rapid oxidation) seems open to Hume's criticism.
- “Causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience” (p. 695).



2. HUME ON CAUSATION

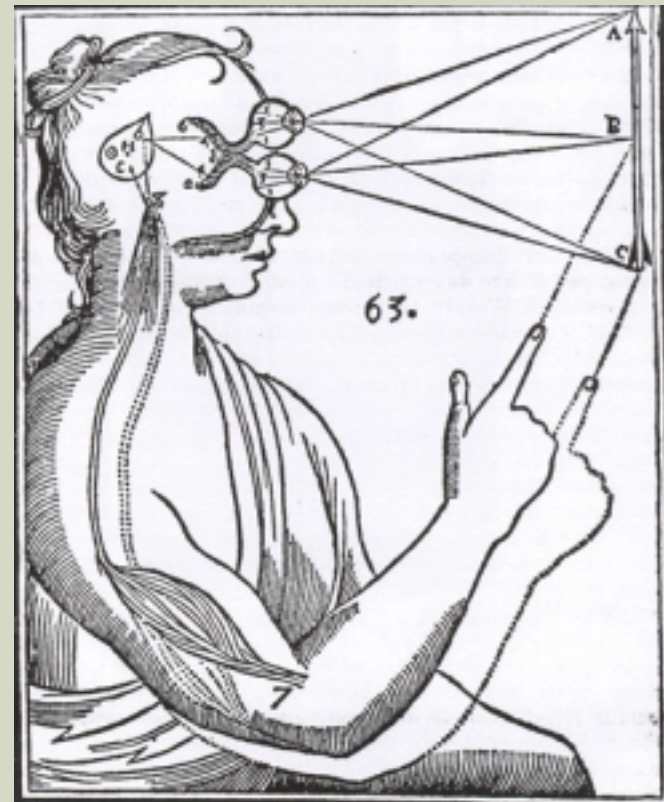
- “In reality, all arguments from experience are founded on the similarity [...] among natural objects. [...] From causes which appear similar we experience similar effects. This is the sum of all our experimental conclusions” (p. 699).
- **Even** “the most ignorant and stupid peasants — nay infants, nay even brute beasts — improve by experience” (p. 701).
- **It seems that** “[a]ll inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning” (p. 703).

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- Hume extends his skepticism to the external world and the existence of physical, extended, solid objects.
- “[P]hilosophy finds herself extremely embarrassed,” because we cannot prove by reason that “the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects” (p. 755).

2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- “The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects” (p. 755).
- That is, we cannot view our experience of the world sideways-on: we are always *in* our own experience.



2. HUME ON CAUSATION

- Hume concludes his *Enquiry* by arguing that we must adopt a mitigated skepticism.
- While it is true that excessive skepticism is correct in the context of philosophy, “[n]ature is always too strong for principle” (p. 758).
- Philosophers must ‘leave the shade’ and recognize that we do, in fact, make use of notions like causation and extension.
- Perhaps Hume thinks we should merely keep our skepticism an uncomfortable secret.

3. KANT, THE PERSON

- Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg in East Prussia (or what is now Kaliningrad, Russia).
- He lived his entire life there and never traveled more than ten miles away.
- He was also very regimented in his daily life: according to legend, his neighbours could set their watches by his afternoon walk.



1724-1804

3. KANT, THE PERSON

- He began his studies at the University of Königsberg at 16, and later became the chair of logic and metaphysics at age 46.
- He published *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, but its abstruseness left his readers hopelessly confused.
- He wrote a short summary of the *Critique*, called *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in 1783.



4. KANT ON HUME

- In his Introduction to the *Prolegomena* ('critical introduction'), Kant frames his main question as follows:
- “My purpose is to persuade all those who think metaphysics worth studying that it is absolutely necessary to pause a moment and, regarding all that has been done as though undone, to propose first the preliminary question, ‘Whether such a thing as metaphysics be even possible at all?’”

4. KANT ON HUME

- As with Descartes and Hume before him, Kant's question about the possibility of metaphysics is a question about its status as a science, or in relation to science:
- “If it be a science, how is it that it cannot, like other sciences, obtain universal and lasting recognition? [...] [W]e must come once for all to a definite conclusion [...] It seems almost ridiculous, while every other science is continually advancing, that in this, which pretends to be wisdom incarnate [...] we should constantly move round the same spot, without gaining a single step.”

4. KANT ON HUME

- Kant very quickly turns to Hume, whose recollection he says “was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber.”
- “Hume [...] challenged reason, which pretends to have given birth to this concept [i.e., of cause and effect] of herself [...] He demonstrated irrefutably that it was perfectly impossible for reason to think *a priori* and by means of concepts [...] why, in consequence of the existence of one thing, another must necessarily exist.”

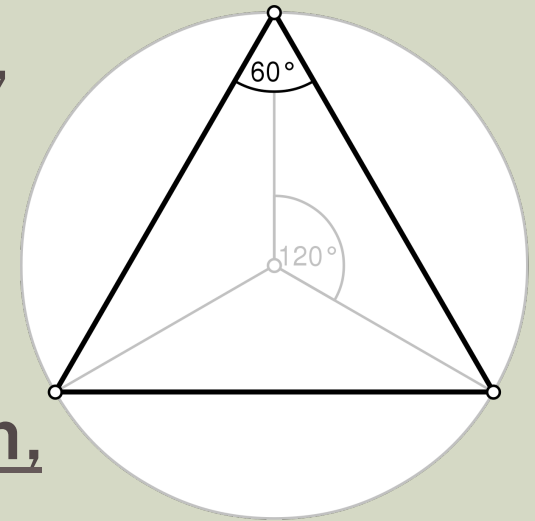
4. KANT ON HUME

■ *A priori* means

- ‘prior to, or preceding experience’
- E.g., geometry and mathematics

■ *A posteriori* means

- ‘as a result of, or proceeding from, experience’
- E.g., physical experimentation



4. KANT ON HUME

- Kant agrees with Hume that reason doesn't actually play a role in our notion of causation: “in reality it was nothing but a bastard of imagination, impregnated by experience, which subsumed certain representations under the law of association and [...] habit.”
- Hume, however, was misunderstood by his contemporaries, who mistakenly thought Hume was attacking the indispensability of causation, rather than its origin.

4. KANT ON HUME

- “The question was not whether the concept of cause was right, useful, and even indispensable for our knowledge of nature, for this Hume had never doubted; but whether that concept could be thought by reason *a priori*, and consequently whether it possessed an inner truth.”



4. KANT ON HUME

- Kant writes that he therefore decided to take up Hume's problem, and see if it could be “put into a general form” and applied to other such concepts typically found in metaphysical discourse (as Hume does too).
- For example,
 - Extension
 - Solidity
 - Temporality
 - Substance



5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Kant gives us a clue about his solution to Hume's problem in his Introduction.
- “[M]etaphysics consists altogether of such concepts [...] which I was now certain were not derived from experience, as Hume had attempted to derive them, but sprang from the pure understanding.”
- What might we conclude from this?
- That Kant must be a rationalist. But he isn't.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Kant's solution to Hume's problem is this:
“The understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, nature” (§ 36)
- In other words, the mind structures experience.
- These concepts are not innate ideas: they are not substantial propositions (e.g., ‘God exists and is infinite’) given to the mind.
- Instead, they form the structures through which experience is made intelligible.
- Space and time are two such concepts.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- A way to understand this is to look at Kant's definition of nature.
- “If we consider it *materialiter*, ‘nature is the complex of all the objects of experience’” (§ 16).
- That means nature is whatever can be possibly experienced.
- “Should nature signify the existence of things in themselves, we could never know it. [...] Experience [...] can never teach us the nature of things in themselves” (§ 14).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- But what are 'things in themselves'?
- Things in themselves are the objects of the external world presupposed by experience, but not open to experience (*noumena*).
- 'Nature' only includes objects of possible experience (*phenomena*), not things in themselves.
- The term *noumenon* signifies unknowable reality, while the term *phenomenon* signifies the appearance of reality (i.e., experience).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Things in themselves stand outside the limits of human reason, but they are necessary postulates of experience.
- “The knowledge of what cannot be an object of experience would be hyperphysical, and with things hyperphysical we are here not concerned, but only with the knowledge of nature, the actuality of which can be confirmed by experience, though this knowledge is possible *a priori* and precedes all experience” (§16).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- For Kant, ‘experience’ is a technical term: experience is the combination of *a priori* concepts of the understanding (e.g., cause and effect) with intuition (e.g., sensation).
- “[B]esides the empirical, and in general besides what is given to the sensuous intuition, special concepts must yet be superadded — concepts which have their origin wholly *a priori* in the pure understanding, and under which every perception must be first of all subsumed and then by their means changed into experience” (§ 18).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Kant thus distinguishes between judgments of experience and judgments of perception.
- Judgments of perception are only subjectively valid (e.g., “**The room is warm**”; §19; or, “**When the sun shines on the stone, it grows warm**” §20) because they depend only on the subject.
- Judgments of experience are universally, objectively valid (e.g., “**Air is elastic**”; or, “**The sun warms the stone**”; §20) because their concepts (e.g., cause and effect) are agreed upon necessarily by all subjects.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

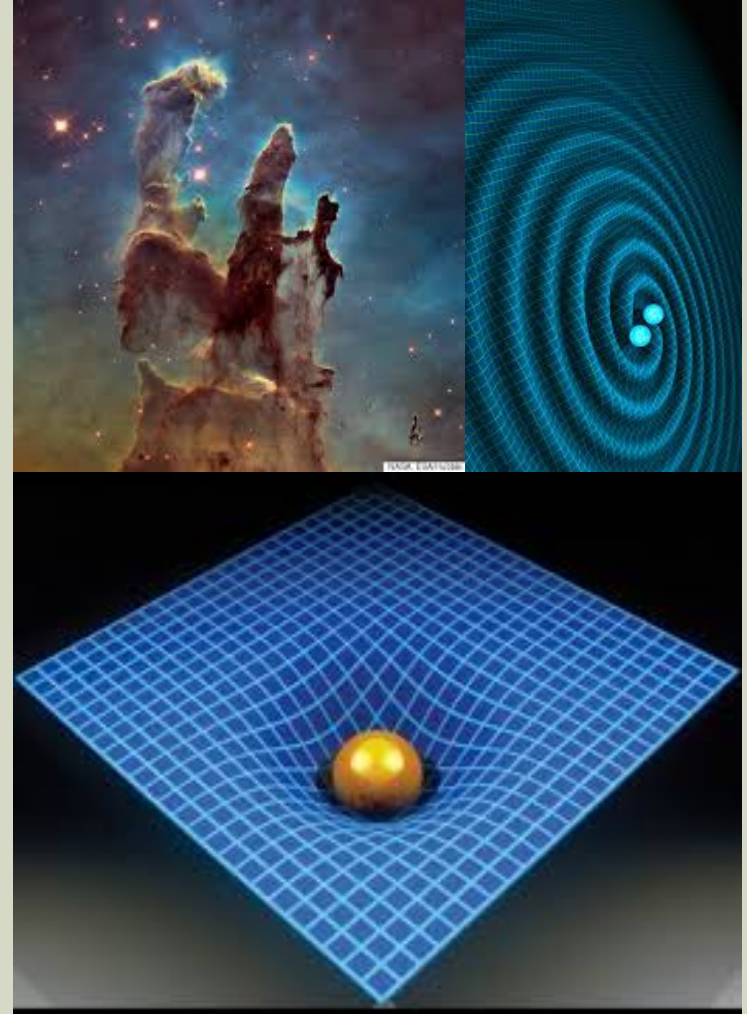
- Judgments of experience are based on universal laws of nature (read: possible experience) which are the same as the conditioning concepts of the pure understanding.
- “[W]e are discussing, not the origin of experience, but that which lies in experience. [...] [Judgments of experience] express what experience in general [...] contains” (§21).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- In describing the concepts of the understanding (e.g., unity, reality, substance, cause, existence, necessity), Kant is making a transcendental deduction about experience.
- That is, experience presupposes such concepts. That is why he describes them as universal laws of nature — laws, which, however, we do not discover through experience, but which the mind applies to perception to yield experience.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- “These are therefore the *a priori* principles of possible experience” (§23).
- The universal laws of nature make possible our discovery of nature’s empirical laws through scientific (e.g., mathematical and physical) investigation and experimentation.



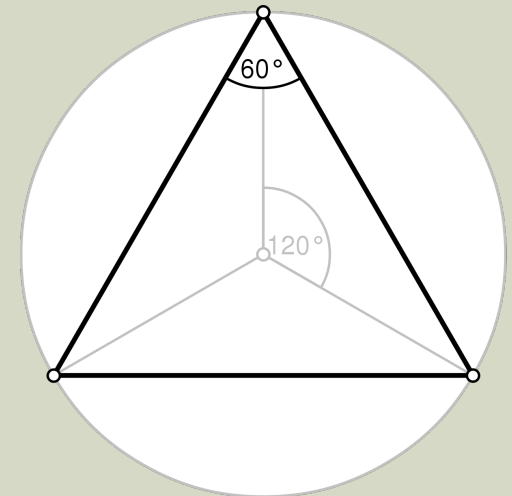
5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Thus, while Hume distinguished only between
 - relations of ideas (*a priori*) and
 - matters of fact (*a posteriori*)
- Hume could not get beyond his problem because he could not find a place for causation in either category.
- So he did not think metaphysics was possible.



5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Kant, however, was able to further distinguish between
 - analytic judgments, which are based strictly on their meaning and add no new content (e.g., all triangles have three sides)
 - synthetic judgments, which are based on the relation of their meaning to the world and add new content (e.g., the interior angles of a triangle equal the sum of two right angles)



5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Kant is able to make a priori judgments which are also synthetic by making transcendental deductions about experience. That is, he asks what experience presupposes.
- The answers are, indeed, metaphysical.
- But they are not discovered through experience (*a posteriori*), and nor are they innate content.
- They are the structural conditions of experience itself, and discoverable through reflection.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- “This complete [...] solution of Hume’s problem rescues for the pure concepts of the understanding their *a priori* origin and for the universal laws of nature their validity as laws of the understanding, yet in such a way as to limit their use to experience, because their possibility depends solely on the reference of the understanding to experience, but with a completely reversed mode of connection which never occurred to Hume — they do not derive from experience, but experience derives from them. [...]”

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- [...] This is, therefore, the result of all our foregoing inquiries: ‘All synthetical principles *a priori* are nothing more than principles of possible experience’ and can never be referred to things in themselves, but to appearances as objects of experience” (§ 30).
- Kant’s solution to the empiricist/rationalist debate is thus to synthesize their insights (e.g., the mind structures experience), while avoiding their pitfalls (e.g., skepticism and dogmatism).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- In making his transcendental deductions, Kant is doing metaphysics. But he does not think metaphysics can go beyond this to the *noumenal* realm.
- Philosophers have traditionally done metaphysics in a misguided effort to discern reality as it is, in itself. But we can only investigate nature, the totality of possible experience.
- Metaphysics must remain focused on the concepts of the understanding.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- “Since the oldest days of philosophy, inquirers into pure reason have conceived, besides the things of sense, or appearances (*phenomena*), which make up the sensible world, certain beings of the understanding (*noumena*), which should constitute an intelligible world. And as appearance and illusion were by those men identified [...] actuality was only conceded to the beings of the understanding” (§32).

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- Thus, although Kant's solution to Hume's problem is indeed a metaphysical solution, Kant's derision of traditional metaphysics is similar to Hume's.
- Traditional metaphysics has attempted to go beyond the realm of experience and make pronouncements about an unknowable reality. But such attempts are meaningless, because we can only comprehend the reality of experience.

5. THE STRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE

- “The understanding [...] by assuming appearances, grants the existence of things in themselves [...] Hereby, then, beings of the understanding are granted, but with the inculcation of this rule which admits of no exception: that we neither know nor can know anything at all definite of these pure beings of the understanding, because our pure concepts [and] pure intuitions extend to nothing but objects of possible experience [...] and as soon as we leave this sphere, these concepts retain no meaning whatever” (§32).

6. ESSAYS

- Mid-term essays may be picked up in the philosophy department office beginning Thursday. You'll need to sign for yours.
- We will discuss how people did, as well as my expectations for the final essay, next week.