

Chapter 21

Kant: Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic

Key Words: Intuition, synthetic function of mind, forms of sensibility, space, time, *a priori* forms of the mind, categories of understanding.

In the previous chapter, we have examined the notion of synthetic a priori propositions. It is with the demonstration of the possibility of such propositions Kant initiates his Copernican revolution in philosophy. This chapter examines this further with an elaboration of the various aspects of the synthetic a priori propositions.

As the term indicates, these types of propositions are both synthetic and a priori. They are synthetic because they are based on and depend on sense experience. They require percepts from an external source. In other words, our experience of the world must be perceivable and it must be about a world that exists outside. They are *a priori* as they presuppose certain elements that are not derived from experience. It refers to a faculty of the mind that facilitates a reception of the percepts from external sources and their further ordering in order to develop a system of knowledge. This psychic counterpart in the knowledge acquisition process is innate. Kant thus says that our experience of the world must be thinkable as well. It should say something about us. Kant combines these two essential aspects of knowledge and conceives them as constituting the very preconditions of knowledge.

The first precondition asserts the experiential aspect. Kant says that knowledge is possible only about a world that we can experience. But the experiential knowledge is thinkable only if there is some regularity in what is known. Kant further affirms that this regularity is possible only if there is some knower in whom that regularity can be represented. Asserting the importance of both the experiential and the *a priori* aspects of knowledge—the empiricist and rationalist counterparts—Kant declares that concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind.

The Role of Intuition

If we explore the beginning of knowledge, we realize the importance of intuition, as the only way in which our knowledge can relate immediately to objects is by means of an intuition. This factor asserts the importance of an external world of objects. An intuition can take place only in so far as an object is given to us; only when our subject is affected by the object. According to Kant, the capacity for receiving representations of objects by being affected by them is named sensibility. With regard to this factor, Kant seems to be agreeing with empiricism.

But Kant disagrees with those empiricists who conceive mind as a passive receiver of sensations or percepts. He argues that the synthetic function of thought is active from the very beginning. Kant thus refers to the constructive power of understanding and argues that even in the reception of sensations the human mind is active. He thus opposes the photographic theory of sense perception and replaces it with the theory which asserts that perceptions are produced by the active working of thought upon the sensory material. In other words, Kant affirms that seeing is thinking.

Transcendental Philosophy: Preliminary Assumptions

The *Critique of Pure Reason* deals with three transcendental domains; the transcendental aesthetic, transcendental analytic and transcendental dialectic. The transcendental aesthetic deals with the problem of sensibility and hence addresses several issues related to sense perception. The transcendental analytic addresses problems related to the relating of various perceptions and the third one, transcendental dialectic deals with reasoning, as it addresses issues related to inference.

The transcendental approach, as mentioned above focuses on the preconditions, rather than a mere description of what happens. It addresses those factors that are indispensable and necessary in the perception and understanding of objects in the world. The transcendental aesthetic thus deals with those indispensable factors that are preconditions of all perceptions. It deals with the elements present in the sensory processes, but are not qualities of any particular objects of perception. Since they deal with preconditions, they have an *a priori* and not an empirical origin and hence are transcendental.

Kant focuses on those common forms in which all objects of sense perception show themselves in experience and identifies the variable and constant elements in the knowledge we gain through

senses. The variable elements refer to the qualities of the object that distinguish it from other objects and the constant elements are space and time. Among the latter, space is observed by the outer sense and time by the inner sense. Together they are referred to as “forms of sensibility”.

According to Kant, space and time are the constant elements in the objects of perceptions and they themselves are not the result of inductive generalizations of experience. Things appear in space, and are connected with some point or period of time. Kant maintains that all experience is conditioned by them and though they themselves are not experienced, they show themselves in experience. Kant considers them as the *a priori* forms of the mind according to which it arranges sensations and which have their origin in the very nature of thought itself.

Kant further elaborates this by stating that, it is not that we are at first aware of unordered sensations and then we subject them to the *a priori* forms of space and time. He affirms that we are never faced with unordered sensations, as ordering is a condition of awareness or consciousness, not a consequence of it. He maintains that all representations are determinations of the mind and hence are universal and necessary. He holds that all experience must conform to constraints imposed by space and time, which are nothing but forms that are imposed by the nature of the mind which conceives them. Hence they are the subjective conditions imposed upon experience by us. But their application is conditional and limited. They are applied only to things as appearing to us and not to things-in-themselves. They are essentially conditions for the possibility of appearances.

According to Kant, space and time are empirically real but transcendently ideal. They are empirically real because, what is given in experience is in space and in time. Again, they are transcendently ideal, because the sphere of phenomena is the only sphere of their validity, and that they do not apply to things-in-themselves, considered apart from their appearance to us. Kant also asserts that they are not mere illusions.

Transcendental Analytic

Transcendental analytic deals with the co-operation of sensibility and understanding in human knowledge. Sensibility refers to the faculty of receiving impressions and understanding stands for the power of thinking the data received from sensations using concepts. Kant’s transcendental logic is therefore, concerned with the *a priori* concepts and principles of the understanding and their application to objects. It studies the *a priori* concepts and principles of the understanding as

necessary conditions for us to even think about objects. In other words, it examines the *a priori* concepts of understanding by which the human mind synthesizes the phenomena.

The primary task of transcendental analytic is to ascertain the *a priori* concepts of the understanding with an examination of the faculty of judgment or the power of thought. Kant thus examines human thinking process and analyses the judgements by means of which human understanding functions. He reduces all operations of the understanding to judgments and examines what are the possible kinds of judgements. The process of judging is a unique logical operation carried out by the human mind. To judge and to think are not two distinct acts. In such acts the human mind unifies different representations with the aid of concepts in order to form one cognition. In other words, judgements synthesize representations by means of concepts.

Kant introduces another crucial notion in this context; the notion of categories of understanding. As mentioned above, the process of understanding involves a process of judging, which actually is a process of synthesizing. Kant examines how this is carried out by the mind. He seeks to examine the different ways of judging and contends that the number of possible ways of judging and the number of logical types of judgment are identical. Logicians have already identified that there are 12 types of judgements and Kant seeks to know why these, and only these, forms of judgment are possible.

Kant affirms that each form of judgment is determined by an *a priori* concept. According to him these *a priori* concepts reflect the fundamental synthesizing functions of the understanding. They actually stand for the possible ways in which the human mind synthesizes the percepts it receives through sensations. Kant calls them categories of understanding. He thus identifies the very process of understanding with the unifying or synthesizing or judging power of the mind. He asserts that the mind does this because it possesses an *a priori* categorical structure. It necessarily synthesizes representations in certain fundamental ways, according to these basic categories. He maintains that the categories of the understanding are *a priori* conditions for knowledge. They are the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of objects being thought. The following table summarises the 12 categories which Kant places under four broad categories of understanding: of quality, quantity, modality and relations.

CATEGORY OF QUANTITY

CATEGORY OF QUALITY

JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES	JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES
Universal	Unity	Affirmative	Reality
Particular	Plurality	Negative	Negation
Singular	Totality	Infinite	Limitation

CATEGORY OF MODALITY		CATEGORY OF RELATIONS	
JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES	JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES
Problematic	Possibility/ impossibility	Categorical	Inherence & subsistence
Assertoric	Existence/non-existence	Hypothetical	Causality & dependence
Apodectic	Necessity/contingency	Disjunctive	Community

These 12 categories constitute the a priori structure that determines human understanding by guiding the functioning of pure reason. As mentioned above, even before the categories synthesize the percepts in understanding, the sensations caused by the world are ordered by the forms of intuition, space and time. Such an ordering is necessarily required in order that objects should be given to us. These ordered sensations are further categorized by the 12 categories of understanding in order to frame knowledge of the phenomenal world. These categories are thus the *a priori* conditions of all experience, which determine the conditions of the possibility of experience. In other words, they refer to the conditions which are necessarily required for objects to be *thought*. Objects cannot be thought except through the synthesizing categories of the understanding. For instance, to know that there are 10 green apples and 12 red mangoes in a basket, the mind should a priori possess the ability to quantify (10 apples and 12 mangoes) and grasp the qualities of being green and red. To know that heat causes warmth, the mind should know to connect the two percepts with each other in causal terms. Concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind.

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Assessment

The two transcendental approaches—*aesthetic* and *analytic*—explain how *sensibility* and *understanding* cooperate in order to provide us an account of the empirical reality. It thus tries to understand the process of knowledge acquisition in natural sciences. Kant places the human mind at the center, which we have already seen in the previous chapter when we have discussed the idea of Copernican revolution in philosophy. The exact nature of this revolution is clear with an explication of the transcendental *aesthetic* and *analytic*. It underlines the crucial role the human mind plays in the process of knowledge acquisition.

Kant's exposition of the nature of pure reason has more important consequences. His critical approach suggests that in our knowledge about the world the human mind and its synthesizing function play crucial roles. Hence, we can never know the "real" world of entities, but only a world which is given to us through our percepts and further synthesized by the concepts. The ultimately real is never accessible by us, as all our access to the world is mediated through percepts that are spatio-temporally ordered and concepts which constitute the *a priori* structure of the mind. Therefore, Kant mentions about a domain of reality which is mind-independent, which is the ultimate source of our percepts, but maintains that this domain remains unknown forever.

Kant's transcendental critique of pure reason thus points to the limitations of human knowledge. It explains how our knowledge about the world is derived from the senses and what role does our understanding play in the process of converting the sense data into knowledge. Kant tells us that this knowledge is essentially constrained by the conditions our mind imposes and he calls it *phenomena*. The phenomenal world is the world as we see it with our preconditions and limitations. On the other hand, the real world, constitutive of the things-in-themselves or *noumena* is always unknown. We can never have knowledge about them owing to the limitations of our faculty of understanding. This suggests the impossibility of metaphysics as a science. To gain knowledge we need the sensations that are ordered by the forms of *sensibility* and further they are synthesized by the 12 categories which are the *a priori* preconditions of understanding. Metaphysical reality or things in themselves cannot be comprehended in this fashion as they are necessarily beyond our understanding which is constrained by space and time.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not held by Kant?
(a) Mind is a passive receiver of sensations (b) The synthetic function of thought is active from the very beginning (c) The photographic theory of sense perception is incorrect (d) Seeing is thinking.
2. In what way does transcendental philosophy deal with experience?
(a) Describes what happens when we experience (b) Explains the psychological aspects involved in experience (c) Addresses the preconditions of experience (d) Explains how experience leads to knowledge.
3. According to Kant, space and time?
(a) Are known through inductive generalizations of experience (b) Are variable elements in the objects of perceptions (c) They only show themselves in experience (d) They are not a priori.
4. Space and time are not?
(a) Applied to things-in-themselves (b) Forms imposed by the nature of the mind (c) Subjective conditions imposed upon experience by us (d) Are essentially conditions for the possibility of appearances.
5. Kant identifies the process of understanding with
(a) Synthesizing power of the mind (b) Forms of sensibility (c) Categories of quantity (d) Categories of modality

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [c]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [a]

Assignments

1. Describe Kant's notion of forms of sensibility.
2. Discuss Kant's idea of transcendental analytic.

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