



Knowledge Sources II

Dr. Josh Redstone

PHIL 1301B

24 March, 2020

Recap

- The ***Egocentric Predicament***: a recurring theme of this chapter and the next!
- Descartes's rationalist approach:
 - Methodological doubt.
 - Descartes doubts knowledge from authority, his senses, mathematical certainty, etc.
 - He can only be certain that he exists, ***Cogito ergo sum.***

Recap

- Descartes re-establishes certainty with:
 - God, specifically:
 - Ontological argument for God's existence.
 - Innate idea of God.
 - Clear and distinct idea of God.
 - God as the guarantor of clear and distinct ideas (*Cartesian Circle*).
 - Substance dualism:
 - *Res extensa & res cogitans*
 - Mind-Body Interaction problem...

Recap

- Baruch Spinoza:
 - God is everything; God is a single substance with infinite attributes.
 - We know two of them: extension and thought.
 - One substance means no mind-body interaction problem!
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz:
 - Everything is made of monads.
 - No interaction; rather, pre-established harmony.
 - No interaction means no mind-body interaction problem!

Recap

- John Locke:
 - No innate ideas; tabula rasa.
 - Knowledge comes from the senses.
 - Realism.
- George Berkeley:
 - Everything is perceived everywhere, all the time by God.
 - Idealism.
 - Empiricist, or a rationalist in disguise?

David Hume

- Like Locke, David Hume believed that all knowledge came from the senses:
 - Hume denied the existence of innate ideas
 - Hume was an atheist
 - He differentiates between *impressions* and *ideas*.

David Hume

- Impressions:
 - "...all our sensations, passions and emotions as they make their first appearance in the soul."
 - Impressions are strong and vivid.
 - They're perceptual/involve the senses.
- Ideas:
 - "By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning."
 - We get our ideas, i.e. knowledge, from impressions, i.e. from the senses.
 - Note the difference here between Hume and Plato!

David Hume

- We can build up complex ideas, or new ideas of things we've no impression of, by combining simpler ideas.
 - If something doesn't first exist as an impression, it cannot exist as an idea.
 - Hume thought that this meant philosophers who spoke of substance were speaking nonsense.
 - He likewise thought the idea of God was nonsense, for no one has any sense impressions of God.
 - Hume even denied the mind, or self, of Descartes. He wrote that the mind is merely a "Bundle of perceptions." He is what Derek Parfit calls a "bundle theorist."
 - Thus, Hume would certainly have thought of people as artichokes, not avocados!

David Hume

- Hume obviously saw metaphysics as somewhat of a “blind alley.” But what about science’s claims to knowledge?
- Hume explains this by examining three ways ideas are associated with one another:
 - Resemblance
 - Contiguity
 - Cause and Effect

David Hume

- Resemblance:
 - Ideas of things are related in the sense that ideas of one thing resemble ideas of similar things.
 - E.g., My idea of a Raven is associated with my idea of a Crow owing to resemblance.
- Contiguity:
 - Things that are contiguous are close together in space and time.
 - E.g. my idea of my guitar is contiguous with my idea of my amplifier because they are sitting right next to one another.

David Hume

- In the cases of Resemblance and Contiguity:
 - Associations between ideas are a result of the imagination.
 - These “patterns of association” are not necessary truths like those we find in mathematics.
 - So, patterns of association arise out of feeling, sentiment, or imagination, not logic.
 - But what about cause and effect?

David Hume

- Cause and Effect:
 - According to Hume, cause and effect is also a pattern of association!
 - We associate events in the world in terms of cause and effect; but cause and effect is in our minds, not in the world.
 - Hume thought that for there to be cause and effect in the world, three criteria must be met:
 - Contiguity: objects must be close enough together.
 - Priority of time: the cause must precede the effect.
 - “Necessary connexion”: *this* effect *must* follow from *this* cause.

David Hume

- Hume granted that contiguity and priority of time were met, for we can have impressions (thus ideas) of them.
- He did not believe there was a “necessary connexion,” i.e. a logically necessary connection, between causes and effects.
 - Rather, we observe a “constant conjunction” between two events.
 - Then we apply the pattern of cause and effect.
 - We don’t observe the connection between the cause and the effect, only the cause and the effect as a result of applying this pattern of association.

David Hume

- If Hume was right, then not just metaphysics but also science was useless as a knowledge making tool:
 - Science relies on cause and effect to make predictions, test hypotheses, and understand the world.
 - If cause and effect is just a psychological device, then science has no power to do this.
 - If Hume is right, that means we cannot have certain knowledge about the world!

Implications of Empiricism for Philosophy

- Hume's Fork:
 - Hume insisted that we cannot know anything about the world beyond the ideas we form from our impressions.
 - He divides this small area of inquiry into two areas:
 - Truths of reason/necessary truths, like those of mathematics; however, these tell us nothing about the world.
 - Matters of fact (about the world); they tell us what we want to know, but when can't be certain of them.
 - This has since come to be known as *Hume's Fork*.

Implications of Empiricism for Philosophy

- Hume's Fork:
 - (1) Ideas that are certain, but that tell us nothing/very little about the world.
 - (2) Ideas that tell us about the world, about which we cannot be certain.
 - Neither are very appealing choices!
- What are philosophers to do?

Immanuel Kant

- Reading Hume awakened Kant from his “dogmatic slumber.” He believed that Hume’s philosophy, however radical, had to be taken seriously:
 - Kant granted that knowledge has its origin in sense experience.
 - However, he did not think empiricism told the whole story.
 - The data that comes from sense experience forms the *content* of our knowledge.
 - But the *form* of our experience comes from ***a priori*** concepts in the mind.
 - ***A priori***: knowledge that is deductive and/or independent of sense experience.
 - ***A posteriori***: knowledge that is inductive/abductive and/or comes from sense experience.

Immanuel Kant

- Kant begins by asking the reader to try and imagine objects not existing in space or time:
 - Try it yourself! What happens?
 - Kant argued that this exercise illustrates that we cannot conceive of objects existing outside of space or time.
 - He argues further that this means space and time are not perceptions themselves, but a **priori** “patterns of perception” or “sensible intuition.”
 - Your textbook mentions the operating system of a computer.
 - I think a better analogy is the architecture of the computer. Space and time are a priori concepts that form part of the architecture of the mind.

Immanuel Kant

- The second level of **a priori** concepts are *categories of understanding* or *pure concepts of the understanding*:
 - Kant includes things like quantity, quality, relation and modality.
 - We can make various judgements about each category.
 - When information from the senses enters the mind:
 - It is placed in space and time.
 - Then, the information is perceived under the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality.
 - Otherwise, the world would be a meaningless jumble of raw, unprocessed “data.”

Immanuel Kant

- Recall: Kant grants that Hume is correct about all knowledge coming from sense experience.
 - However, knowledge claims must also take into account the concepts and categories that structure sense experience.
 - But Hume also denied the mind, in the Cartesian sense, because there's no direct impressions of the mind!
 - Kant responds by arguing that the mind becomes knowable by examining how it shapes our sense experience.

Immanuel Kant

- Our knowledge is still restricted, but we can make meaningful statements about much more than Hume believed we could:
 - For example, Kant includes the concept of causality under the category of relation.
 - Our sense experience is “filtered” through the concept of causality.
 - We can justifiably say we “know” of cause/effect relations in the world because we know that the mind is structured to perceive the world in this way.

Immanuel Kant

- Then again, what we can know is still limited in a powerful way:
 - Kant distinguishes between *phenomena* and *noumena*:
 - *Phenomena*: Things as they appear to us under the categories of perception.
 - *Noumena*: Things as they are in themselves, beyond the limits of perception and knowledge.
 - We can know things as they appear to us, i.e. *phenomena*, but we cannot know things in themselves, i.e. *noumena*.

Immanuel Kant

- In addition to an *a priori/a posteriori* distinction, Kant also makes an *analytic/synthetic* distinction:
 - **Analytic:** propositions whose predicate concept is contained in their subject concept.
 - *E.g.:* "All triangles have three sides," or "all bodies are extended."
 - **Synthetic:** propositions whose predicate concept is not contained in their subject concept.
 - *E.g.:* "All bachelors are alone," or "all bodies are heavy."

Immanuel Kant

- Thus for Kant there are four kinds of propositions, which express judgements:
 - **Analytic a priori:** predicate concept within subject concept; necessarily true.
 - **Synthetic a priori:** predicate concept not contained in subject concept; necessarily true.
 - **Analytic a posteriori:** predicate concept contained within subject concept; logically contingent.
 - Thus, Kant rejects the possibility of such propositions.
 - **Synthetic a posteriori:** predicate concept not contained in subject concept; logically contingent.
 - Can we know if such propositions are true? That is, can we have this kind of knowledge?

Immanuel Kant

- ***Synthetic a priori*** judgements:
 - (1): Tell us something about the world (synthetic).
 - (2): Are logically prior to experience (a priori).
 - Remember, this applies to ***phenomena***, but not to ***noumena***.
 - Thus Kant: "Hereby then objects 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 objects of understanding.'"

Immanuel Kant

- Kant is often called “the great synthesizer”:
 - That’s because he sought to make the foundations of knowledge secure by synthesizing ***Rationalism*** and ***Empiricism***.
 - Rationalism: Knowledge comes from the mind, or rational principles.
 - Empiricism: Knowledge comes from the senses.
 - Kant’s ***Transcendental Idealism***: Knowledge comes from the senses, but the structure of the mind is what makes the world knowable.
 - He called this his “Copernican revolution in metaphysics.”
 - Kant’s work is amongst the most important in philosophy; he’s one of the greats like Plato or Aristotle.

Immanuel Kant

- But Kant's philosophy has startling implications just like Hume's:
 - We can never know what the world is *really* like; we can only know it as it is structured by categories of understanding and patterns of perception.
 - There's a superficial similarity here with Plato's Allegory of the Cave.
 - Cause and effect is "part of the map, not the territory."
 - Causal laws don't exist in the world, but in the way that we perceive and come to know the world.
 - It comes as no surprise that Albert Einstein – who is famous for his Special and General Theories of Relativity – had read Kant's philosophy as a young man!

Next Time...

- We will turn to the next chapter, "Truth Tests."
- I'll have more to say about your final exam on cuLearn shortly.