

Mind and the World
First session on Kant
January 22, 2007

Kant's Prefaces to *CPR*

Kant sets out a fundamental proposition in the first sentence of the Preface to the First Edition: [read]

At a number of critical points, Kant aligns himself with Hume and Locke: particularly that an adequate inquiry into what we know and how we know it has been carried out, we come to the conclusion that the scope of Reason has been curtailed. He's emphatic that he cannot "...extend human cognition beyond the bounds of all possible experience." (A xiv) He also agrees with Hume and Locke that we must attend to the "facts" of our cognition in carrying out a responsible inquiry.

Where he differs, from the outset, is his contention that it is an inherent feature of Reason to reach beyond itself and raise questions in cannot answer. It is in the very nature of Reason to "step beyond itself." This is his first point in the first Preface.

As the result, Kant contends, we "cannot be indifferent" to Big Questions (even though we must accept that we cannot answer them). What can we do? Using a legal metaphor, he says we must, "...institute a court of justice...[read]" (A xii)

Kant shows himself to be an Enlightenment thinker in his emphasis on Reason as the ultimate "court of appeal" in addressing the Big Questions raised by our very nature as human beings. He also recognizes the work in science – beginning with Bacon and extending through Leibniz and Newton – as an extraordinary achievement and one that philosophy must in some sense emulate. It is, however, philosophy that will finally give an "explanation" of how science can accomplish what it does. Philosophy will accomplish its ends through "scientific" means, as perhaps Hume and Locke had imagined. Rather, philosophy has to approach its work in its own way, which Kant dubs "transcendental argument." One of our important tasks will be figuring out what kind of argument this is and what constitutes the basis for its authority. Invention of this kind of arguments stands as one of Kant's fundamental, major achievements.

What is it that Kant finds so impressive about Science, about Science and Mathematics? It's nothing new, of course. He recognizes what we saw in *Meno* as one of Plato's central concerns. How can we account for our capacity not just to know how things are, but how they must be? This square drawn on the diagonal of a given square, doesn't just happen to be double the area of the given square, it has to be. Actually if it isn't, then we haven't drawn it correctly!

Kant will not give up on this feature of human knowledge, and this drives him to part company from Hume, and in a radical way.

Judgments that are *necessary* and *amplifications* on what we experience: how is it possible for us to know such things?

Kant's radical strategy:

Kant identifies the work of Francis Bacon and those coming after him, as the source of his inspiration for an approach he saw as a critical breakthrough in philosophy. [Read B xii, 9 – B xiv, 5]

So, at B xvi, Kant offers his famous comparison of his work with that of Copernicus. We must drop the notion that Knowledge arrives when and if “our cognition conforms to objects”; rather, “...let us try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition.” Thus, “If intuition [read B xvii]...”

Kant's Big Problem:

Kant immediately notes that as result of this strategy, “...there emerges a strange result...” [B xix, 7]

While this allows us to account for our capacity to “cognize *a priori* [and ‘ampliatively’], “...with this faculty we can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience.” (B xix, 9-12)

Now what's the problem here? Why should we mind discovering that our cognition is constrained in this way?

It's not just that we would like to know more; we find ourselves compelled to ask about a Larger Reality that “...extends itself beyond the boundaries of sensibility.” (Bxxv)

Kant's Payoff:

At B xxv (p. 114), Kant offers one of his key theses, arguably one of the fundamental motivations that drove his work. Here he stands up to the question that had driven Leibniz to his extremes: How can a deterministic, causal science be understood as compatible with Free Will, Moral Autonomy and Responsibility?