

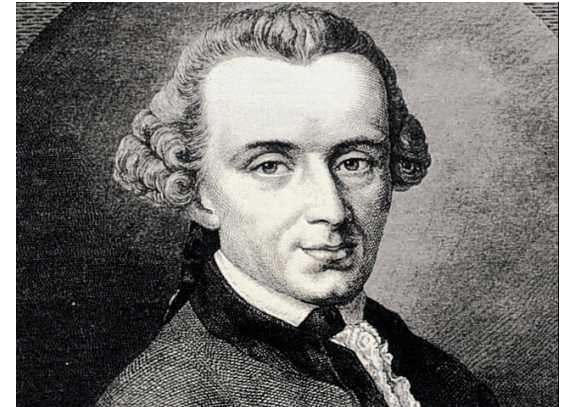
Philosophy 203

History of Modern Western Philosophy

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**Class #25
From Hume to Kant**



Topics in Hume

- ✓1. Causation and Induction
- ✓2. The Bundle Theory of the Self
- ✓3. Free Will and Compatibilism
- Now, let's conclude.

Psychologistic Rehabilitation

- The empiricists of the modern era believed that they could limit the extravagant speculations of the continental rationalists by paying close attention to our epistemic capacities.
- As early as Hobbes, we saw attention paid to psychological matters, especially the principles governing the connections of our ideas.
 - Locke claimed that our ideas of reflection were those produced by memory, comparison, augmentation, and abstraction.
 - Hume claims that the connections among ideas are exhausted by the three categories of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect relations.
- According to the representational theory of mind, we apprehend only our ideas.
 - Our ideas may or may not stand for objects external to us.
 - Our experience of the world is mediated by our ideas; we are cut off from the external world.
 - The veil of perception
 - Contrast with Aristotle's theory of direct perception, in which we are immediately acquainted with the external world.
- Locke and Hume try to reclaim some of our knowledge as psychological knowledge.
 - Causation as a psychological phenomenon
 - Mathematics as relations of ideas
- We speak as if the world and the causal laws are objective, existing independently of us, but, we are unjustified in believing that.
- Thus, the psychologist is left as a skeptic.

Some Things We Know

P1. It is raining outside right now.

- Occurrent sense experience

P2. It snowed in February.

- Memory

P3. Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

- Testimony

P4. $2 + 2 = 4$.

- Relations of ideas

P5. I exist.

- Nope

P6. Objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at 9.8 m/s^2 .

- Nope

P7. The sun will rise tomorrow.

- Nope

- Even P1 - P3 are problematic, given the problems with our beliefs in an external world.

Hume's Practical Response to Skepticism

- We have no evidence for our beliefs in laws governing an external world, but we proceed as if the world exists as we perceive it.
- The philosopher who seeks universal truths will be frustrated, but we can just ignore the skeptical questions.
 - “The abstruse philosophy, being founded on a turn of mind which cannot enter into business and action, vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade and comes into open day, nor can its principles easily retain any influence over our conduct and behavior. The feelings of our heart, the agitation of our passions, the vehemence of our affections, dissipate all its conclusions and reduce the profound philosopher to a mere plebeian” (§I, AW 534a-b).
- Berkeley decried skepticism as an immoral philosophy.
- Hume denies that skepticism leads to immorality.
- Hume sees skepticism as practically defeasible.
 - “The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism*, or the excessive principles of skepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools, where it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade and by the presence of the real objects which actuate our passions and sentiments are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke and leave the most determined skeptic in the same condition as other mortals” (§XII.2, AW 597b).

Extreme Skepticism is Self-Refuting

- “The Cartesian doubt...were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as plainly it is not) would be entirely incurable and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject” (§XII.1, AW 593a).
- “A Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind or, if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease, and men remain in a total lethargy until the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence” (§XII.2, AW 598a).

Return of the Two Humes

- The skeptical Hume argues that we have no knowledge of the future or unobserved.
- The naturalist Hume presumes our beliefs in universal scientific laws, and explains them in terms of our natural psychological capacities.
- The two Humes are compatible.
- The Radical Hume
 - Berkeley is right about abstract ideas.
 - We have no knowledge of the laws of nature, the causal structure of the world.
 - We have no reason to believe in a self.
 - The future is completely determined; we are not free.
- The Moderate Hume
 - 'Causation' is a mental phenomenon, arising from habit.
 - Mathematical theorems are secure relations of ideas.
 - We believe that nature is uniform.
 - We are free, in the only sense that is important.

Toward the Kantian Revolution

- Despite attempts to tone down Hume's skepticism (with practical and naturalist interpretations), Hume's conclusions are baldly skeptical.
- Both Berkeley and Hume may be read, in retrospect, as *reductio* arguments on the representational theory of ideas.
 - Berkeley shows that this theory, coupled with our sensory apparatus, gives us no reason to believe in a material world.
 - Hume, shows that the combination gives us no reason to believe that we have knowledge of the laws of nature.
- Something has gone seriously wrong.
- Kant attempts a Copernican revolution in philosophy.
 - The empiricists took a weak psychology into a dead end of skepticism.
 - Kant starts with our knowledge, and works backwards to our psychological capacities.
- Transcendental arguments
 - We know we have knowledge of causes, and mathematics.
 - Our experiences are insufficient to support this knowledge.
 - So, there must be psychological capacities which support our knowledge.

Business

- Read the *Critique* slowly, carefully.
 - Kant's jargon takes some getting used to.
- Papers are due on Thursday.
- I hope to have the “short” list for the final by early next week.