
UNIT 3 INTRODUCING SOME COMPLEXITY

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The ancient philosophy of the Greco-Roman world was concerned about understanding the fundamental causes and principles of the universe and explaining it in an economical and uniform way. The medieval philosophy remained wedded to Theology but in contrast the modern philosophy arose in the wake of science and remained subservient to scientific methodology. This aggressiveness of modern philosophy results in recapturing of faith in human capacity to know and an ever increasing quest for the new reliable foundations. Instead of searching for the first principles of being, modern philosophers are looking for the first principles of human knowledge. This epistemological turn away from the ancient ontology of nature was performed in a ground breaking manner by Rene Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* and more decisively and elaborately carried out by Hume and Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The principal objective in this course is to become acquainted with the development of modern Philosophy particularly in Hume and Kant. In pursuing that goal, the students should develop necessary skills to evaluate the main arguments of these thinkers. The second goal is to help students to understand the rationale and the motivation of the empirical and the transcendental positions.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The history of philosophy is marked by the epistemological revolution which occurred around the time of Descartes. For centuries, the philosophers assumed the reliability of human mind. It was Descartes who called in question the very foundation of knowledge by doubting the reliability of our knowing. The problem of our knowing springs from the inquiry into the presuppositions of knowledge and the limits within which our thought processes are valid. The primary origin of thought is spontaneous. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask to what extent we are then justified in ascribing real meaning to the results of our thought. Where does the truth of knowledge consist? This was the question which was taken up for

discussion by the thinkers of the modern philosophy and this intellectual enquiry resulted in some amount of complexity in understanding this vital issue. Hume and Kant are the two fine thinkers who made their contributions in understanding this epistemological problem in their own inimitable style. In this unit we try to understand the philosophies of these two thinkers.

3.2 THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUME

David Hume is the most prominent philosopher ever to write in English and belongs to the exclusive club of three “British empiricists”. He was also well-known in his own time as an historian and essayist. David Hume was born at Edinburg, Scotland in the year 1711 and took up philosophical learning against the wish of his family who wanted him to study Law. He went to France in 1734, to devote himself to literary pursuits and returned in 1737. Hume was to stay three years in France during which time he worked on his first book, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. In 1737, Hume returned from France and spent about a year and half at London completing and publishing his work. He sought employment at the university at Edinburgh as a professor but he did not get the job due to his controversial religious stand. In 1766, Hume was appointed as an Under-Secretary of State, a position in the Home Office. But, due to ill health he was obliged to give up his Home Office position after about a year, and he died on the 25th of August, 1776. Hume’s philosophical work, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, was written in 1748. It was a follow up to an earlier work, a less popular work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. In addition, in 1752, Hume wrote *Political Discourses*. In 1755, he wrote *The Natural History of Religion*.

Hume’s Theory of Knowledge

Following Locke, Hume agrees that all our knowledge originate from experience. His major philosophical quest was to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding and then go on to analyze its power and capacity. In his theory of knowledge, the primary concern of Hume has been the origin of *Ideas*. He begins to treat this question of *Ideas* by saying that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind and its memory in the mind. For instance, it is one thing to feel the pain instantly and quite another to recall it to one’s memory or anticipate it by imagination. This might present us with the pale images of the perceptions by the senses but they would never have the vivacity of the original. After all, the portrait is only the representation of the reality. It would mean that even the liveliest thought is still way behind even the vague form of sensation. When we reflect on the past our thought is like a faithful mirror which projects the object on it. Thus it is clear that original is a no match for the reality. His concept of ‘Perception’ includes the entire contents of the mind.

He divides perceptions into two categories, distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity namely; *Impressions* and *Ideas*. By *Impressions* Hume means the perceptions of seeing, hearing, loving, feeling or willing. The *Ideas* can be distinguished from the fact that they are less lively than the *Impressions* and which come to our knowledge as resulting from the reflection on those sensations. The impressions are similar to sensation and the immediate data of experience and by ideas he means the copies or the faint images of thinking and reasoning. Thus the difference between these two lies only in the grade of their perfection. When

I look through the window I get the lovely landscape and when I close my eyes and think of them the ideas which come to my mind are the images of the representations and thus we see that the Ideas and Impressions always seem to correspond to each other. In Hume's understanding Idea refers to some form of image. Locke attempted to arrive at knowledge from simple Ideas whereas Hume makes it through the Impressions arising from the sense experience.

Hume argues that *Impressions* and *Ideas* seem always as corresponding to each other. This would further mean that without impressions there could be no ideas. For if an idea is simply an *Impression* it follows that for every *Idea* there must be a prior *Impression*. However it is here Hume makes a distinction between simple and complex perception which can be applied to both Idea and Impression. This distinction becomes extremely significant in understanding the correlation between these both. This could be better understood through some examples. The perception of a gray area on the wall is a simple impression and the very thought of it brings about the simple Idea. But, when I go on to the top of St. Peter's Basilica, I get the complex impression of the entire Vatican City and if I think of that complex Impression at a later time then I get the complex Idea. Here, the complex Idea corresponds to the complex Impression. There could be a similar instance, where what was never seen or heard of, may yet be conceived as our thought appears to possess this boundless freedom. A closer look at this will tell us that this is nothing more than the ingenious power of the mind to compound, transpose and gather the materials provided by the senses. When we think of a "flying horse", our imagination joins two of our ideas, 'wings' and 'horse' which were originally acquired as Impressions through the senses.

We cannot argue with absolute certainty that to every idea there is a corresponding impression but it is important to realize that the complex idea like the "flying horse" in our previous example could be broken into simple ideas and then a corresponding impression to every idea would be traced. Hume states, "The rule here holds that without any exception, and that every simple idea has a simple impression which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea." Though we cannot make a study of all cases and prove his claim, we can certainly ask the person who denies it to prove the contrary.

The next dilemma that we would be confronted with is, whether these Impressions are derived from Ideas or the Impressions are derived from the Ideas. It is a question on the order of appearance and Hume answers it saying that the Impressions precede Ideas. But Hume would hold an exception to this rule that Ideas are derived from Impressions. Hume explains it with an example of a person who had enjoyed excellent eye sight for thirty years during those thirty years he had the privilege to see all colours and particularly all shades of Blue, with no exception from deepest to the lightest. Now, if he is presented with the entire series of shades of Blue in a graded continuity, and if all others except one blue shade which he has never seen were to be presented, then he would see a blank in the continuous series. Is it possible for him to supply to this deficiency through his own imagination and formulate an 'idea' of this particular shade though he never experienced an 'impression' corresponding to it? And, Hume says that this is an extreme case and it does not deserve the attention to the level of changing our general maxim that every Idea comes from a corresponding Impression. However Hume would also speak about the possibility of forming

ideas of ideas. These ‘ideas of ideas’ are also referred as ‘secondary ideas’ which evolve from previous ideas rather than directly coming from impressions. Hume argues that this is not an exception to the general rule that the impressions precede ideas because they evolve from ideas which were originally the results of impressions.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How does Hume distinguish *Perception* from *memory* in presenting his origin of Ideas?

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2) How do Impressions and Ideas correspond to each other?

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Association of Ideas

All the ideas and abstract ideas in particular are vague and lack clarity and the mind does not possess a clear hold of them. So, often when we use certain terms we use to mean these ideas without a distinct meaning. We only imagine that the term means a particular idea. But in case of doubt over the authenticity on the reliability of a philosophical term, meaning if a term is used without any meaning or idea, Hume says that we need to enquire about the Impression which is at work behind such an Idea. If it is impossible to assign any then our suspicion is confirmed. Thus Hume arrives at the theory of truth which states that if it is possible to trace the original impression corresponding to an idea, that idea is true, if it is not possible to trace the corresponding impression, that idea is false.

Hume argues that it is not by chance that these ideas relate to each other. There is a principle of connection, a bond of union at work among them. There is an associating quality which naturally brings them together and they introduce to each other with some amount of regularity and method and anything which splits this chain of ideas is immediately rejected. Hume would further state that what brings these ideas together is not a faculty in the mind rather the pattern of thinking and grouping of our ideas which explains it. He further explains that there are certain qualities in these ideas due to which they are associated to each other. They are basically three in number. They are, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* in time or place and *Cause* or *effect*. We can understand them better through the following examples. *Resemblance* is made clear through the example that a picture naturally

leads our thoughts to the original; the mention of one apartment in a building naturally introduces an enquiry concerning others which is an example of *Contiguity* and *Cause effect* relation is seen in the example of 'wound and pain', where if we think of a wound, we cannot overlook the pain involved in it.

Hume's Fork

David Hume in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section IV Part I, explains what mattered most in his philosophy, where we find the following quoted passage: "All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, *Relations of Ideas*, and *Matters of Fact*."

Here we see Hume making a distinction between 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact' which is broadly known today as *Hume's Fork*. It is a distinction central to Hume's epistemology and one that he exerts with great argumentative effect. It is more rarely a name sometimes given to the dilemma that either our actions are determined, or that they are the results of random events. However in both of these cases we are not responsible for them. Some scholars also expand this distinction to much broader areas of his philosophy and bring them all under the umbrella of Hume's Fork. According to them, the description of his fork corresponds to three separate distinctions which have been important in analytic philosophy. Though not explicit, Hume's fork identifies three dichotomies namely, *analytic/synthetic*, *necessary/contingent* and *a priori/a posteriori*.

The importance of Hume's fork lies not only in its clear presentation, but holds the central place in Hume's philosophy. It is the seed of Hume's scepticism, which precisely draws up the boundaries of the scale of deductive reason than had until then appeared. Hume's reasoning forward from the fork is well structured. Having asserted that our evidence for matters of fact is quite distinctive from that we have for relations between ideas, he goes on to say that our conclusions about matters of fact are obtained from their evidence by causal reasoning. This constitutes a more detailed account of what lies on the two sides of this fundamental dichotomy, and what Hume provides here is far better than any previous account. Let us briefly look into what Kant would mean by these two terms namely; *Relations of Ideas* and *Matters of fact*.

In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section IV, Part I, Hume states that "of the first category are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. *That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides* is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. *That three times five is equal to the half of thirty*, expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would forever retain their certainty and evidence."

The *Matters of fact* which are the second objects of human reason cannot be arrived at in the same manner. But this does not mean that the matter of fact is impossible rather it is very much possible and it does not involve a contradiction. The mind is capable of understanding it clearly and distinctly. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible without being contradictory. The following example is sighted by Hume to explain what he means by *Matters of fact*. "The

sun will not rise tomorrow” involves no contradiction than its affirmation that “The sun will rise tomorrow”. So any effort to disprove it will be considered futile as it is not demonstratively false. Thus we find here that in this example that “The sun will not rise tomorrow” is as much a matter of fact as its contrary is.

According to Hume, every analysis regarding the Matter of fact is to be established based on the relation of cause and effect because only such a relation takes us beyond our sense experience and memory. For Hume, that the knowledge of cause and effect is not achieved *a priori* rather arises as a result of experience. For instance, someone who finds a watch or a similar object in an isolated desert would immediately think that there were people living there. There is a connection between the present fact and that which we infer from it. The inference is invalid if there is nothing which binds them both and thus the causes and effects are discoverable not by reason but by experience. This makes us to conclude that every effect is a distinct event from its cause and is therefore independent.

We have already seen how the ideas are associated to each other and there is a connection existing between them. Hume asks by what impression the idea of causation is derived. First of all, the so called ‘causes’ cannot be the origin of the idea of causation since we cannot determine any feature which is common to them all. Thus there is no impression corresponding to the idea of causality. If so, how does this idea of causality arise in mind? Hume says that the idea of causality arises in the mind when we experience certain relation between objects. When we speak of cause and effect we mean that ‘A’ causes ‘B’. But what kind of relation does this indicate between ‘A’ and ‘B’? Hume reduces this principle of connection between them into three.

The first kind of relation which Hume speaks about is Contiguity and this means that ‘A’ and ‘B’ are always closer to each other. By this Hume does not mean that the things which we consider as causes and effects are always immediately contiguous. For instance, if we consider Cause ‘A’ and its effect ‘Z’, then ‘A’ and ‘Z’ are not immediately contiguous to each other rather we will be able to discover that ‘A’ and ‘B’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ are contiguous. And this will go on further and we will be in a position to understand the relation existing between Cause ‘A’ and effect ‘Z’. The second kind of relation which Hume speaks about is the ‘Temporal priority’. This means the priority in time for, ‘A’ the cause is always temporally prior to the effect and the cause and effect cannot be contemporaries. If all effects are contemporaries to the cause then there is no way one thing following the other could be talked about. The third kind of relation which he speaks about is the ‘Constant Conjunction’. This is because we see that ‘A’ is always followed by ‘B’.

But there seems to be another type of relation which is at work between ‘A’ and ‘B’ besides the three we have just mentioned above which is a ‘necessary connection’ between them. For Hume, no there is no object that implies the existence of another when we consider objects individually. For instance, no amount of observation of hydrogen will mean that when blended with oxygen will give water unless we see them together. Thus it is the experience of seeing them both which makes us to infer the existence of another object. Though we have the impressions of Contiguity, Priority in time and constant conjunction, we don’t experience similar kind of impressions with regard to the ‘necessary connection’. Thus he concludes that causality is not a quality in the objects we observe but it

is the result of the “habit of association” we experience at the level of mind due to the repetition of events of the same nature. However it is to be noted that Hume does not deny that there are causal relations between two objects rather what he wants is to make an enquiry into the statements regarding their meaning. Thus he does not put causal relations into question rather what do we mean by them and in the similar fashion he does not question the existence of ‘necessary connections’ but what do we mean by it when we say that there are ‘necessary connections’.

The External Realities

Hume’s extreme empiricism leads him to argue that there is no rational explanation to say that the bodies have an independent existence external to us. For him, the continual existence of external of things is simply a matter of belief. All that the mind has is nothing but impressions and therefore, we are simply confined to the world of perceptions and do not have any access to the world of objects existing independently. Though Hume says that ideas are basically reducible impressions, he does not deny the existence of bodies independently of our perceptions. He says that we are not able to prove that the external world exists and at the same time feel the inability to prove it’s opposite. He further asks what makes us to take the independent existence of external world for granted. We do find that the human mind has no way to go beyond the impressions or the Ideas made possible by the impressions. So he concludes that the continued existence of the external world is not to be attributed the senses or to reason or understanding rather to imagination and primarily to two specific features of imagination namely: Constancy and coherence. It is due to these two features that the imagination leads us to believe that some things exist outside of us independently and this is only a belief and not a rational proof.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain briefly the argument for the association of ideas put forth by Hume.

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2) What do we mean by the term “Hume’s Fork”?

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3.3 THE PHILOSOPHY OF IMMANUEL KANT

Immanuel Kant was born in the year 1724 in the small provincial town of Königsberg in East Prussia. His parents were of modest means, and their religious spirit, nurtured by a sect known as Pietists, was to have a permanent influence upon Kant's thought and personal life. In 1740 Kant entered the University of Königsberg where he studied the classics, physics, and philosophy and he was a professor in his native city of Königsberg.

Although Kant's personal life contains no extraordinary events, as he did not travel or build up any notable political or social connections, he was immensely successful as a lecturer and was an interesting conversationalist and charming host. He was a man of great self discipline and Without this discipline, however, he could hardly have produced such a striking succession of famous books as his monumental *Critique of pure Reason* in 1781, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* in 1783, *Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics* in 1785, *Metaphysical First Principles of Natural Science* in 1786, *the Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788, *the Critique of Judgment* in 1790, *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* in 1793, and the small work *Perpetual Peace* in 1795.

Kant's Critical Philosophy

The turning point in Kant's intellectual development was his encounter with Hume's empiricism. Hume had argued that all our knowledge is derived from experience and that therefore we cannot have knowledge of any reality beyond our experience. This argument struck at the very foundation of rationalism whose proponents had argued that human reason can gain knowledge about realities beyond experience simply by moving from one idea to another as one does in mathematics. Kant read Hume's arguments with dismay, and finally tossed them aside with contempt as "dogmatic dreams." Hume takes away all grounds of certitude and the best that a man can have is only a probability and this for Kant is no knowledge at all. Kant was convinced that what man seeks is scientific knowledge, meaning, knowledge that is universally and necessarily true and reliable.

Kant's critical philosophy consists of an analysis of the powers of human reason, by which he meant "a critical inquiry into the faculty of reason with reference to all the knowledge which it may strive to attain independently of all experience." The way of critical philosophy is, therefore, to ask the question, what and how much can understanding and reason know, apart from all experience? Kant asked the critical question whether the human reason enjoys the privilege to undertake such inquest. If metaphysics has to do with knowledge that is developed by reason alone, which is *a priori* in nature then the critical question is how is such *a priori* knowledge possible?

The Metaphysical Dilemma

Kant takes up this issue right at the first edition of the *Critique of pure reason*, which is a clear indication of the seriousness he gives to this problem. The priority for Kant is not the possibility of Metaphysics rather if Metaphysics can do anything at all to expand our knowledge of reality. For Kant the main concerns of Metaphysics are God, freedom and Immortality, which he calls as the three moral

postulates. So the question could be restructured as; whether Metaphysics is able to give us certain knowledge regarding these assumptions. Kant agrees that Metaphysics was held in high esteem for a long time and it has fallen into some amount of disrepute over the years due to the progress of mathematics and natural sciences. The major difficulty with Metaphysics is its inability to find any sure scientific method in line with the one offered by Physics.

Kant disagreed with Locke that all our knowledge derives from experience but he did not accept its opposite that all our ideas are innate. However he did believe that there are concepts which the reason is able to bring forth from within itself on the occasion of experience. And so these kinds of concepts are *a priori* in nature.

The Kantian *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinction

Kant was convinced that we all have a faculty which is able to bring forth knowledge from within itself without appealing to any experience. He did agree with the empiricists that our knowledge begins with experience but it does not mean that it arises out of experience. For Hume, our knowledge is nothing more than impressions which come to us through the senses and Hume certainly failed to spot this Kantian perspective. Hume and Kant are unanimous in agreeing that we don't get the idea of causality from experience but certainly for different reasons. For Hume, Causality is simply the psychological habit of connecting two events called cause and effect. But for Kant, we know causality not from the experience of the senses but directly from the faculty of rational judgment and therefore *a priori*. An example that Kant gives in this regard is that a child has no idea of causality but on the occasion of experience, its reason obtains the concept from within itself. It is a concept that evolves before experience but at the same time goes in line with the experience.

We have to be careful here and not to conclude that Kant is speaking about innate ideas, which are ideas before experience. *A priori* knowledge is *a priori* to all experience and is explicitly present to the mind. It is a kind of knowledge which is not derived from experience though it corresponds to the knowledge we have at the occasion of experience. This could well be expressed as, "though our knowledge begins *with* experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience." According to Kant, all mathematical proportions are examples of a *priori* and we can also trace examples of it in other sciences too. The proposition that "every change must have a cause" For Kant, knowledge of this sort cannot come from experience as we have not experienced every case of change to make such a statement and yet it is true. It can also be similarly thought about regarding *necessary* connections and *universality* of proportions. The synonym for *a priori* will be the *a posteriori* which refers to the knowledge resulting after experience.

Types of Judgments

In order to understand Kant's concern better we need to look at his classification of judgments. The crucial thing about knowledge is that its value of truth and certitude, depends on the judgments. After all, reason merely handles judgments and learns from them. There are two types of judgments, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, and besides these two, Kant also speaks of two other types namely; *synthetic* and *analytic*. We already know the meaning of *a priori* and *a posteriori* and we must look at the other terms.

In *analytic* judgments, the predicate is already contained in the concept of the subject. If I make the judgment, “A circle is round,” or “Triangle has three sides”, I have an *analytic* judgment. It is so, because by analyzing the subject, by studying it and knowing just what it is, I learn that the predicate used belongs there, since a circle to be a circle must be round. An *analytic* statement is true only because of the logical connection which exists between subject and predicate. In this case, the predicate does not give any new knowledge other than what is present in the subject though it may be implicit. An *analytic* judgment cannot be denied without eventually leading to contradiction because the concept of the “triangle” cannot be thought about leaving out the three angles.

A judgment is rightly called *synthetic* when its predicate is not contained in the subject. If I make the judgment, “Peter is ill,” I have a synthetic judgment because the predicate does not necessarily belong to the subject, but I put it with the subject because it is true that he is ill and that it (the predicate) just happens to belong there. Thus we see here, the predicate gives a new knowledge regarding the subject and we also see that something is added to the concept of the subject. Though there is a connection between the subject and the predicate, the predicate is not inherent in the subject because mere analysis of the subject will not give us any idea about the predicate. This would mean that in order to verify the predicate we require the factual experience whereby the judgment becomes a *synthetic a posteriori*. In the above example “Peter is ill”, we cannot elicit the concept ‘ill’ simply by analyzing the concept ‘Peter’ and Peter being ill is entirely *a posteriori* or after experience.

The Kantian Unique Claim: The *synthetic-a priori*

Thus, from the discussions above, it is clear that the *analytic* judgments are generally *a priori* because their meaning is not conditioned by our experience of every case and event as it happens in Mathematics for “necessity and strict Universality are the marks of *a priori* knowledge”. And the *Synthetic* judgments are *a posteriori* because they result out of experience. For instance, the statement, “All my friends excel in studies” is a *synthetic a posteriori* judgment as the validity of this statement could be established only after having verified the academic performance of all my friends.

Besides the *analytic a priori* and *synthetic a posteriori*, Kant speaks of an apparently contradictory cluster of propositions which is expressed by his celebrated concept called, *synthetic a priori*. It is this kind of judgments which bothered Kant to a large extent as to the possibility of such judgments. Kant held that only an *a priori* judgment can give us absolute knowledge. But, he upholds that an *a priori* judgment that is analytic marks no progress in knowledge. For the maturity of science, there must be growth, development and advancement. Hence there must be *synthetic* judgments which are also *a priori*. This *synthetic a priori* judgment therefore, certainly adds novelty to the Kantian epistemology and could well be called the heart of Kant’s philosophy.

Now let us briefly look into this unique Kantian distinction titled, the *Synthetic a priori* and this could well be understood through an example. ‘Everything which happens must have a cause’ is synthetic because the predicate ‘cause’ is not contained in the subject and is not made explicit by the concept of the subject. However, this is certainly an *a priori* judgment because it has the traits of *necessity*

and *universality* which are the trademarks of any *a priori* proposition. It definitely means that every event with no exception certainly will have a *cause*. But this statement does depend on some form of experience because only after seeing an event being caused by something we know about its cause but the connection between the subject and predicate is given *a priori*. Here we don't arrive at conclusions by induction or mere generalizations of experiences rather we know it *a priori* and at the same time they are *synthetic*.

Again, Kant also demonstrated that in Mathematics, Physics, Ethics and Metaphysics, we do apply judgments that are not only *a priori* but also *synthetic*. In Mathematics for example, the judgment $3+6=12$ is surely *a priori* and at the same time *synthetic*. It is an *a priori* judgment because it has the mark of *necessity* and *universality* as the digits 3 and 6 always make 9 but this is a synthetic judgment and not analytic because the digit 9 cannot be brought forth by the mere analysis of the figures 3 and 6 rather it also needs two other elements namely; intuition and a plus. Thus for him, the arithmetic calculation is always *synthetic a priori* and it cannot be a *synthetic a posteriori* judgment because of the marks of *necessity and universality*.

The propositions of Geometry also belong to the same category, and they are both *a priori* and *synthetic* at the same time. To pick a Kantian example, "that a straight line between two points is the shortest, is a synthetic proportion. For my concept of *straight* contains no notion of quantity, but only of quality. The concept of *the shortest* is thus wholly an addition and it cannot be derived by any analysis from the concept of a straight line. Intuition must therefore, lend its aid here, by means of which alone is this synthesis possible."

In physics too is possible such synthesis because the statement, "in all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged" is *a priori* because this observation is made well before we look into every case of change and it is also *synthetic* because the idea of permanency of the matter is not traceable from the concept of the matter. According to Kant, the judgments we make in metaphysics such as, "man is free to choose" are also of the same nature. It is *synthetic* as the predicate adds a new meaning to the subject and at the same time it is *a priori* because the predicate *free* refers to all men including those who have lived, living and will live, even before we have experienced all of them. Thus Kant proves the co-existence of judgments which are both synthetic and at the same time *a priori* are possible without contradiction and they are not only possible in Mathematics but also in other sciences including the Metaphysics. And for Kant, if these judgments are substantiated in Mathematics then they could also well be substantiated in Metaphysics. Thus, Kant proves that we can have *synthetic a priori* judgments and they are certainly part of our everyday cognitive process.

Kant's Rational Thought

Kant says that there are two sources of human knowledge, which perhaps evolve from an unknown reality, which are sensibility and understanding. Knowledge is the relationship between the knower and the thing known. According to Kant, though we can distinguish the difference between the knower and the thing known, we can never know that thing as it is in itself, because we only come to know as the structured mind permits to know it. The specific activity of the mind is to synthesize and bring together our experiences. It achieves this synthesis first by

imposing on our various experiences in the sensible manifold certain forms of intuition namely space and time. We inevitably perceive things as being in space and time but this space and time are not ideas derived from the things we experience, nor are they concepts. Space and time are encountered immediately in intuition and are, at the same time, *a priori*. The essential element of sensibility is this twofold determination of space and time. But this conditioning of phenomena by space and time is man's own contribution to the knowledge. Space and time does not represent things, nor are they things but they are the *a priori* elements of the sensing-power.

One of the major consequences of Kant's critical philosophy was his assertion that human knowledge is limited in its capacity and this limitation catches two forms. Firstly, knowledge is limited to the world of experience and secondly, our knowledge is limited by the manner in which our faculties of perception synthesize the raw data of experience. Kant did not doubt that the world as it appears to us is not the ultimate reality but he certainly distinguished between *phenomenal* reality which we experience it, and the *Noumenal* reality which is purely intelligible or non-sensual. When we experience a thing, we predictably perceive it through the *a priori* categories of thought. But what is a thing like when it is not being perceived? Or, what is a thing-in-itself? All that we know are the sensed objects but we are convinced that the world at our sight is not the production of our minds and the mind only imposes its ideas in the manifold of experience. These experiences evolve from the things in themselves which tells us that there are things which exist outside of us but will be known only as our minds perceive it and as they appear to us. So Kant concludes that the phenomenal reality is all that we can ever know about and the *noumenal* reality which is a thing in itself and can't add any new knowledge rather it would only bring to our mind the limitations of knowledge.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the Kantian distinction of judgments

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2) How does Kant arrive at the *Synthetic-a priori* judgments?

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

“Hume Was Right, Almost; and Where He Wasn’t, Kant Was’, is a kind of statement that summarizes the compliment that these two thinkers jointly deserve for their philosophical investigations. Hume undoubtedly anticipated what had to be later explored by Kant, but Kant certainly went way ahead of Hume. The epistemologies presented by these thinkers had points of convergence in spite of the fact that they belong to different streams of thought. Though not explicit, *Hume’s fork* identifies the dichotomies we talk about as *analytic/synthetic*, and *a priori/a posteriori* in Kant. But Kant certainly viewed things beyond Hume. For instance, for Hume, the knowledge of cause and effect is not achieved *a priori* rather arises as a result of experience but for Kant it is an *a priori* knowledge, which, to be specific, falls into the category of synthetic judgments. Thus, against Hume’s assertion that the mind was simply a vase for experiences and sensibilities, *Kant* suggested that there was a sphere of reason inherent to every mind. But, unlike Plato, Aristotle or Aquinas, who had spoken of this sphere within some sort of metaphysical system, which is natural or theological, *Kant*, situated it in the self. However, Kant also admits the fact of being influenced by Hume by stating that, the reading of *Hume* roused him from his “dogmatic slumber.” Thus we can conclude saying that, though they may be inadequate in certain areas of their philosophical enquiry, it has become absolutely imperative today to philosophise within the parameters set forth by these two prominent intellectuals.

3.5 KEY WORDS

Hume’s Fork

- : The distinction between ‘relations of ideas’ and ‘matters of fact’ which Hume makes is broadly known today as *Hume’s Fork*.. Some scholars also expand this distinction to much broader areas of his philosophy and bring them all under the umbrella of Hume’s Fork. According to them, the description of his fork corresponds to three separate distinctions which have been important in analytic philosophy. Though not explicit, Hume’s fork identifies three dichotomies namely, *analytic/synthetic*, *necessary/contingent* and *a priori/a posteriori*.

Apriori knowledge

- : Apriori knowledge is *a priori* to all experience and is explicitly present to the mind. It is a kind of knowledge, which is not derived from experience though it corresponds to the knowledge we have at the occasion of experience.

Synthetic Judgment

- : A judgment is rightly called synthetic when its predicate is not contained in the subject.

3.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) In his theory of knowledge, the primary concern of Hume has been the origin of *Ideas*. He begins to treat this question of *Ideas* by saying that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind and its memory in the mind. For instance, it is one thing to feel the pain instantly and quite another to recall it to one's memory or anticipate it by imagination. This might present us with the pale images of the perceptions by the senses but they would never have the vivacity of the original. After all, the portrait is only the representation of the reality. It would mean that even the liveliest thought is still way behind even the vague form of sensation. When we reflect on the past our thought is like a faithful mirror which projects the object on it. Thus it is clear that original is a no match for the reality. His concept of 'Perception' includes the entire contents of the mind.
- 2) Hume argues that *Impressions* and *Ideas* seem always as corresponding to each other. This would further mean that without impressions there could be no ideas. For if an idea is simply an *Impression* it follows that for every *Idea* there must be a prior *Impression*. However it is here Hume makes a distinction between simple and complex perception which can be applied to both *Idea* and *Impression*. This distinction becomes extremely significant in understanding the correlation between these both. This could be better understood through some examples. The perception of a gray area on the wall is a simple impression and the very thought of it brings about the simple *Idea*. But, when I go on to the top of St. Peter's Basilica, I get the complex impression of the entire Vatican City and if I think of that complex *Impression* at a later time then I get the complex *Idea*. Here, the complex *Idea* corresponds to the complex *Impression*. There could be a similar instance, where what was never seen or heard of, may yet be conceived as our thought appears to possess this boundless freedom. A closer look at this will tell us that this is

nothing more than the ingenious power of the mind to compound, transpose and gather the materials provided by the senses. When we think of a “flying horse”, our imagination joins two of our ideas, ‘wings’ and ‘horse’ which were originally acquired as Impressions through the senses.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) Hume argues that it is not by chance that these ideas relate to each other. There is a principle of connection, a bond of union at work among them. There is an associating quality which naturally brings them together and they introduce to each other with some amount of regularity and method and anything which splits this chain of ideas is immediately rejected. Hume would further state that what brings these ideas together is not a faculty in the mind rather the pattern of thinking and grouping of our ideas which explains it. He further explains that there are certain qualities in these ideas due to which they are associated to each other. They are basically three in number. They are, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* in time or place and *Cause* or *effect*. We can understand them better through the following examples. *Resemblance* is made clear through the example that a picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original; the mention of one apartment in a building naturally introduces an enquiry concerning others which is an example of *Contiguity* and *Cause effect* relation is seen in the example of ‘wound and pain’, where if we think of a wound, we cannot overlook the pain involved in it.
- 2) David Hume in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section IV Part I, explains what mattered most in his philosophy, where we find the following quoted passage: “All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, *Relations of Ideas*, and *Matters of Fact*.” Here we see Hume making a distinction between ‘relations of ideas’ and ‘matters of fact’ which is broadly known today as *Hume’s Fork*. It is a distinction central to Hume’s epistemology and one that he exerts with great argumentative effect. It is more rarely a name sometimes given to the dilemma that either our actions are determined, or that they are the results of random events. However in both of these cases we are not responsible for them. Some scholars also expand this distinction to much broader areas of his philosophy and bring them all under the umbrella of Hume’s Fork. According to them, the description of his fork corresponds to three separate distinctions which have been important in analytic philosophy. Though not explicit, Hume’s fork identifies three dichotomies namely, *analytic/synthetic*, *necessary/contingent* and *a priori/a posteriori*.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) In order to understand Kant’s concern better, we need to look at his classification of judgments. The crucial thing about knowledge is that its value of truth and certitude depends on judgments. After all, reason merely handles judgments and learns from them. There are two types of judgments, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, and besides these two, Kant also speaks of two other types namely; *synthetic* and *analytic*. In *analytic* judgments, the predicate is already contained in the concept of the subject. If I make the judgment, “A circle is round,” or “Triangle has three sides”, I have an *analytic* judgment. It is so, because by analyzing the subject, by studying it and knowing just

what it is, I learn that the predicate used belongs there, since a circle to be a circle must be round. An *analytic* statement is true only because of the logical connection which exists between subject and predicate. A judgment is rightly called *synthetic* when its predicate is not contained in the subject. If I make the judgment, "Peter is ill," I have a synthetic judgment because the predicate does not necessarily belong to the subject, but I put it with the subject because it is true that he is ill and that it (the predicate) just happens to belong there. Thus we see here, the predicate gives a new knowledge regarding the subject and we also see that something is added to the concept of the subject.

- 2) Thus, from the discussions above, it is clear that the *analytic* judgments are generally *a priori* because their meaning is not conditioned by our experience of every case and event as it happens in Mathematics for "necessity and strict Universality are the marks of *a priori* knowledge". And the *Synthetic* judgments are *a posteriori* because they result out of experience. For instance, the statement, "All my friends excel in studies" is a *synthetic a posteriori* judgment as the validity of this statement could be established only after having verified the academic performance of all my friends.

Besides the *analytic a priori* and *synthetic a posteriori*, Kant speaks of an apparently contradictory cluster of propositions which is expressed by his celebrated concept called, *synthetic a priori*. It is this kind of judgments which bothered Kant to a large extent as to the possibility of such judgments. Kant held that only an *a priori* judgment can give us absolute knowledge. But, he upholds that an *a priori* judgment that is analytic marks no progress in knowledge. For the maturity of science, there must be growth, development and advancement. Hence there must be *synthetic* judgments which are also *a priori*. This *synthetic a priori* judgment therefore, certainly adds novelty to the Kantian epistemology and could well be called the heart of Kant's philosophy.