
UNIT 3 IMMANUEL KANT

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of unit is to expose Kant's contribution to Western philosophy. His epistemological and metaphysical positions along with his moral thought by categorical imperatives are dealt here. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a philosopher of enlightenment, is famous for his epistemology and metaphysics. His outstanding contribution to Western philosophy is laudable, especially in his notion of phenomenon and *noumenon*, categorical imperatives in moral philosophy. His transcendental idealism is seen as an attempt to resolve the issues of rationalism and empiricism in approaching reality.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant has been regarded as the most important modern philosopher and the paradigmatic philosopher of the European Enlightenment. He is also one of the most influential German Idealist philosophers and the founder of Transcendental or Critical Idealism.

Kant proposes a "change in point of view" to reform metaphysics from the shackles of dogmatism and scepticism. While dogmatism, according to Kant, trusts in the principles of metaphysics "without a previous critique of the faculty of reason itself, merely with a view to their success," scepticism holds a "general mistrust in pure reason," again, "without a previous critique, merely with a view to the failure of its assertions." Metaphysics has hitherto been a merely random groping ..., a groping among mere concepts."

In spite of his strictures on the traditional metaphysics, he is ready to admit that "the idea of is as old as speculative human reason," and is "what rational being does not speculate either in scholastic or in popular fashion?" Interestingly, Kant opens the first *Critique* with a statement of the inevitability of metaphysics, indicating that it is "prescribed by the very nature of reason itself." Dogmatic metaphysics attempts to have *a priori* knowledge of reality independent of sensibility and experience.

The new metaphysics, which, for Kant, is only worthy of the name, is metaphysics as a science, “a system of *a priori* knowledge from mere concepts” and “the inventory of all our possessions through pure reason, systematically arranged.” Assuming that the quest of human reason for metaphysics is inherent to human nature (“natural disposition”), he looks for a justification of its ideas in the practical realm. Metaphysics of morals is indirectly a concession Kant gives to fulfil the natural quest of human reason for the realization of its ultimate ideals, which he rejects as untenable on the basis of the principles enshrined in the *Critique* itself. Kant tailors human natural disposition for metaphysics into the new metaphysics.

Reflecting on the development of his philosophy, Kant distinguished three periods: The ‘dogmatic period,’ The ‘sceptic period,’ and The ‘transcendentalist period.’ Kant’s philosophy can be characterised as an attempt to answer three fundamental questions: a) What can I know? b) What ought I to do? c) What may I hope for? He addresses these questions in his important works namely the three Critiques. a) In 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* was published. ‘Pure reason’ means a critical enquiry into the faculty of reason with reference to all the cognitions to which it may strive to attain independently of all experience. b) It is true that his original conception of his critical philosophy anticipated the preparation of a critique of moral philosophy. *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), the result of this intention, is the standard source book for his ethical doctrines. *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), one of the most original and instructive of all of Kant’s writings - was not foreseen in his original conception of the critical philosophy. Thus it is perhaps best regarded as a series of appendixes to the other two Critiques. The work falls into two main parts, namely “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment” and “Critique of Teleological Judgment.”

3.2 METHOD OF KANT

Kant uniquely synthesizes Rationalism and Empiricism into Critical Philosophy of his own, by inspiration of both, eliminating the faults of both thoughts and critically unifying the strengths of these opposing philosophical insights. He rejected rationalism for being so dogmatic in metaphysics and the second for too sceptical in epistemology. His main objective was to save religion from reason and yet at the same time to save science from scepticism. For Kant, knowledge proper must have universal and necessary factors along with factuality. Such knowledge is found in mathematics and physics. Empiricism cannot give such knowledge as on the basis of experience, strict universality and necessity cannot be obtained. So empiricism cannot explain knowledge as it is found in mathematics and physics. According to Rationalism, there is a universal faculty of reason by virtue of which each individual has certain innate ideas. This theory explains universality and necessity according to Kant. All men have the same innate ideas because of their possessing a common faculty of reason. But the difficulty of rationalism lies in another direction. Innate ideas are subjective, being in the mind of human knowers. There is no guarantee that they will be true of facts. The upshot of the review is that reason, unaided by experience, can build castle in the air only, and by no stretch of imagination can it lay claim to actuality. Therefore, Kant discarded rationalism on the ground that it dealt with airy structures without correspondence with facts.

Kant did not reject empiricism and rationalism outright. He tried to give solution based on the Critical, Transcendental and Agnostic philosophy.

Kant states that both empiricism and rationalism are right in what they affirm but wrong in what they deny. Empiricism affirms that knowledge is constituted by experience and rationalism affirms that knowledge is constituted by innate or *a priori* ideas. Empiricism is right in as much as it points out that propositions of facts can be derived from experience. But rationalism is also right in as much as it points out that knowledge is constituted of *a priori* elements also. Again, empiricism is wrong in as much as it denies the presence of *a priori* elements involved in knowledge. In the same way, rationalism wrongly denies that sense-experience also constitutes knowledge. The proper view, according to Kant, is “Knowledge begins with experience and does not necessarily originate from it.” Therefore, knowledge proper is a joint venture of sense and understanding. Nevertheless, we shall also find in due course that the mind does not remain satisfied with scientific knowledge of the phenomenon only. It also tries to know *noumena* (thing-in-itself - *das Ding an sich*) as well but becomes impossible. Apart from sense and understanding there is reason which tries to constitute knowledge. Hence, according to Kant, knowledge begins with sense, proceeds to understanding and ends in reason.

According to Kant, any epistemology should have occupied itself with the enquiry of *a priori* elements involved in knowledge. These elements are independent of any experience whatsoever. Indeed, they are the pre-conditions of any cognitive experience whatsoever. Unless, these *a priori* elements be operative, no experience of any object would arise at all. So Kant is not so much concerned with any specific objects of knowledge as with the universal or *a priori* ways of knowing any object. Hence, Kant has called his epistemological enquiry Transcendental. It means something like going beyond ordinary level of experience. The term transcendental signifies the *a priori* condition of all possible knowledge. In Kant’s philosophy ‘*a priori*’ is the mark of necessity. Such necessity can never be explained in terms of experience. E.g. Unity, good, truth. Thus Kant’s method is called transcendental method.

Agnosticism is that branch of philosophy according to which it is claimed that human beings have no faculty for knowing certain ultimate realities. It also holds that any attempt to prove or disapprove the existence of God becomes impossible. Agnosticism, in other words, completely or partially denies the possibility of knowing the nature of Universe. Following this philosophy, Kant maintains that there are things in themselves which are unknown and unknowable. Therefore, he concludes that we can know objects only as they appear to us, coloured and transformed by our ways of knowing. What these objects are in themselves apart from our ways of knowing, of course, can never be ascertained by us. Hence, according to Kant, knowledge of the *phenomena* alone is possible and *noumena* remain unknown and unknowable. Later on, Kant has maintained that although they are not objects of knowledge, they are yet proper objects of faith. After all, he was a deeply religious man and so he demolished knowledge in order to make room for faith.

3.3 KANT’S PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE

Kant observed the sorry and confused state of philosophy which has been reduced to mere groping among concepts. Metaphysics has not been established on sure foundation. Instead man is a metaphysical animal that constantly asks questions about being. Metaphysics is a natural disposition of man. He is driven

on by an inward need to ask questions which cannot be answered by empirical employment of reason. The Metaphysics of Kant's time was tinged with dogmatism and illogic and was not worthy of the name 'science' because science sought after precision and perfection. There is still a way for Metaphysics to enter upon the secure path of science. If in the past Metaphysics was not able to enter upon the secure path of science it was because it has been following a wrong path. Therefore Kant felt the need for a kind of radical re-ordering of presuppositions. Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects outside us. Instead Kant proposed that we should suppose that the external world must conform to our knowledge, to the forms and categories of objects in our mind. This came to be known as "Kantian Copernican Revolution".

Synthetic a priori Judgements

From a logical point of view, the propositions that express human knowledge can be divided according to two distinctions. 1) Distinction between propositions that are *a priori*, in the sense that they are knowable prior to experience. Necessity and Universality are the two criteria of *a priori* propositions and both of these criteria are inseparable. By 'strict universality' means 'true in all possible world.' *A posteriori* propositions are those that they are knowable only after experience. 2) Distinction between propositions that are analytic, that is, those in which the predicate is included in the subject. For example, "All bodies are extended." If we understand the meaning of the term 'material body' whose connotation was taken by Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz to be extension, then certainly the predicate 'extended' is already contained in the subject. And a synthetic proposition is one in which the predicate is not included in the subject. E.g. Material bodies are heavy. Whether a body is heavy or not is known through experience.

The distinction between the analytic and the synthetic is based on the content of propositions. Here the question is: "Does the proposition add or does not add to cognition or knowledge?" If it does, it is called synthetic, if it does not, it is called analytic. However, the distinction of *a priori* and *a posteriori* propositions has reference to the sources of cognition. *A priori* propositions stem from pure reason or pure understanding. As such they are valid independently of any experience whatsoever. *A posteriori* propositions, on the other hand, are derived from experience. They, therefore, require experience for their validation.

For the most of the empiricists, *a priori* and the analytic propositions, and, *a posteriori* and the synthetic propositions are identical. But, for Kant, synthetic propositions instead of being *a posteriori* may be *a priori*. For the empiricists and rationalists, who are unanimous in claiming that the analytical propositions are *a priori* in their nature, they are absurd and self-contradictory and consequently nonsense. For Kant, however, synthetic propositions *a priori* are most significant in scientific cognition and are found in mathematics and in physics. For example: $5+7$ are together equal to 12. It is universal, necessary and *a priori* in mathematics. Every event has a cause. Although it is not part of the concept of an event that it be a cause, it is universally true and necessary that every event has a cause. These judgements or propositions are synthetic as they explain the progress of science and they are *a priori* as they explain the universal aspect of scientific knowledge.

The Process of Knowledge

Kant was meditative and methodical. A desire for thoroughness has made him highly analytic. As such Kant divides and sub-divides his subject into indefinite details. It was Kant who has introduced the tripartite division of mental processes into cognition, cognition and affection. Corresponding to these three divisions, the three Critiques are developed. In the history of philosophy, Critique of Pure Reason has played more important part than the other critiques. For Kant, knowledge requires both sensation (empiricists) and understanding (rationalists). Sensation supplies the data for knowledge to the understanding. Kant said, "Objects are 'given' to us by means of sensation and it alone yields us 'intuitions'; they are 'thought' through the understanding, and from the understanding arise 'concepts'." Therefore, it is only from the united action of sensation and understanding we can obtain knowledge. The only valid use of the understanding consists of its 'thinking of the data' supplied to it by sensation. Using the understanding to go beyond to the data of sensation is an illegitimate use of the understanding. The contribution of sensation: The data of sensation come to us through various sense organs and present themselves to us in a confused and unconnected way. This is known as 'matter' of sensation. These must be ordered properly. In sensation there are two 'a priori' forms which provide this ordering namely, 'space' and 'time'.

Space is nothing but the form of all appearances of outer sense. It is the subjective condition of sensibility under which alone outer intuition is possible for us. Time is the determinate form in which alone the intuition of inner states is possible. Neither space nor time is derived from experience nor do they represent any property of things in themselves. They are a priori forms according to which we organise and perceive sense data. The objects of our sense experience are represented as being spatio-temporal. The contribution of understanding: The confused sense data are supplied to reason which organises them in spatio-temporal forms and passes on the result to understanding to be 'thought' by it through concepts.

The Twelve Categories of Kant

There are 12 basic categories (concepts) according to which these sense-data are thought. Each category is linked to a type of judgement. These judgements can be brought under four groups: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Each of these heads has 'three moments'; the last moment is the synthesis of the first two moments.

Table of Judgements	Illustrations	Derived Concepts
Quantity: Universal Particular Singular	All politicians are corrupt Some are honest Vijayakanth is corrupt	Unity Plurality Totality
Quality: Affirmative Negative Infinite	Man is mortal The soul is not mortal The soul is immortal	Reality Negation Limitation
Relation: Categorical Hypothetical	God is just If God is just, he will	Substance – Attribute Cause – Effect

Disjunctive	punish sinners God is either just or unjust	Reciprocity of agent – Patient
Modality: Problematical	This may be poison	Possibility – Impossibility
Assertoric	This is poison	Existence – Non-Existence
Apodictic	Every effect must have a cause	Necessity – Contingency
(Beyond Dispute)		

Hence, according to Kant, knowledge is the application of pure concepts of the understanding or categories to objects furnished us by the senses and perceived as spatial and temporal. Categories serve to make experience possible.

Noumena and Phenomena

Kant made a famous distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*. The *noumenon* (plural *Noumena*) is the thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*) as opposed to the phenomenon—the thing as it appears to an observer. Though the *noumena* holds the contents of the intelligible world, Kant claimed that man’s speculative reason can only know phenomena and can never penetrate to the *noumenon*. ‘*Phenomena*’ refers to ‘things perceived’, that is, the things as-we-know-it. ‘*Noumena*’ refers to ‘things thought’, that is, the things in themselves. By this distinction Kant wanted to show that what we know is the appearance of reality, clothed under the a priori forms of space and time and invested in a category. In other words, we can never know anything in its pure state, divested of forms and categories. Therefore, knowledge consists in getting objects to conform to the forms and categories of the mind. The universality and necessity of cause-and-effect relationship, weakened by David Hume, is now restored in strictness.

3.4 KANT’S PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

Morality and freedom give us the right to believe in the reality of two other Ideas of reason, namely those of God and immortality. He argues that we must postulate the reality of these Ideas in order to be able to act as moral beings in this world. Without immortality and God we would be condemned to moral despair. Moral action makes us deserving of happiness but frequently does not lead to happiness in this world. If we want to establish a connection between the two, we must assume that they will be made to coincide by God in the long run. In this way, the notions of God and immortality, as prerequisites for the realisation of the *summum bonum* or the highest good, make possible the moral enterprise for Kant, and therefore we must believe in their reality.

To elaborate on this: Reason’s search for the unconditioned, the dialectical inference from contingent existence to the existence of a necessary being is an effective drive to advance beyond experience to the transcendental ideal. It is also the *ens entium*, the being of all beings, or the ground of all beings, which in the transcendental sense is God, and the ideal of pure reason. Here it must be borne in mind that what is being considered by Kant is the objective reality of the concept of God, and not the objective reality of God, as it is

beyond the critical philosophy to consider it, as God cannot be given in intuition. Kant insists that the transcendental ideal, or the concept of God can have the valid employment only as a regulative principle of reason; any attempt to employ the same to be constitutive of the existence of God would be dialectical and detrimental to the nature of human reason itself. The only possible proof for the existence of God, for Kant, must use moral premises; his insistence to rule out speculative theology gives way to the possibility of moral theology, and an initial attempt is made in this regard in the “Canon of Pure Reason” which is elaborated in his later ethical works. The schema of God is only a human way of conceiving the ground of nature, for the purpose of employing our cognitive faculties, in order to arrive at the unified understanding of the world of sensibility and understanding. Therefore, theoretical philosophy, in fact, does not address the question of the belief in the existence of God (it being set apart for moral theology), but deals only about thinking of the world *as if* it were created by God, with a view to purposive unity of nature.

Belief in these three concepts is central in Kant’s so-called moral faith. Though Kant himself was not religious and was indifferent to forms of external religious worship, he did believe that morality inevitably leads us to the acceptance of certain tenets of traditional theism. In his essays on religious matters and especially in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, he attempts to develop the parallels between revealed religion and philosophical theology. He claims that all that is essential in religion can be reduced to morality. Accordingly, he criticises established religion severely as engaging in mere idolatry in its insistence on merely formal requirements. According to Kant, then, what we may hope is that our moral actions ultimately do make a difference. Kant held the view that the three possible approaches to the existence of God established through reason are illusory.

a) **Ontological Proof:**

It is based on the notion of the most perfect being (St. Anselm). For Kant existence cannot be considered an attribute of a being, though a necessary being necessarily includes all its attributes. To grant ‘existence’ to the necessary being, we must go out of the concept, to experience. The concept expresses only what is possible.

b) **Cosmological Proof:**

It begins with the cosmos and proceeds to the existence of a Creator of the orderly universe. For Kant, it is not a rational argument because it also goes outside experience to suppose the properties of the necessary being, from the ‘concept’ of the ‘most real being’. It is another form of the ontological proof.

c) **Physical-theological proof:**

It is a proof based on ‘design’ in the world or proof from order or finality (5th way of St. Thomas). For Kant, this argument proves only the ‘architect’ of the world and not its creator. That is, one who planned and ordered this world and not one who brought it into being. Secondly, this ‘finite world’, with its ‘finite order’ is insufficient ground to demand an infinite being to account for it. We may argue to the existence of a cause ‘proportionate’ to it but not of an ‘infinite being’.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What does Kant mean by *noumena*?

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2) What do you understand by Kant's proof for God's existence?

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3.5 MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF KANT

Kant's moral philosophy presented in his Critique of Practical Reason may be regarded as an attempt to discover the meaning of goodness, right and wrong, duty and the implications of our moral knowledge. In his practical philosophy, Kant argues that human reason is an autonomous source of principles of conduct, immune from the blandishments of sensual inclination in both its determinations of value and its decisions to act, and indeed that human autonomy is the highest value and the limiting condition of all other values.

Traditionally, Kant has been seen as an ethical formalist, according to whom all judgments on the values of ends must be subordinated to the obligatory universality of a moral law derived from the very concept of rationality itself. Kant exposes ethics as 'the inherent value of the world, the *summum bonum*, is freedom in accordance with a will which is not necessitated to action' and even more clearly in lectures on natural right he says that 'If only rational beings can be ends in themselves, that is not because they have reason, but because they have freedom. Reason is merely a means'. Kant holds that the incomparable dignity of human beings derives from the fact that they are 'free with regard to all laws of nature, obeying only those laws which' they make themselves.

Kant furnishes further formulations of the categorical imperative, especially the Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself - 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end'. It requires the possibility of rational consent to your action from any agent affected by it. It is the formula of the kingdom of ends, the requirement that any proposed course of action be compatible with 'a whole of all ends in systematic conjunction. The formulations are supposed to follow from the Formula of Universal Law. Humanity is an end in itself because of its potential for freedom, that the real 'ground of a possible categorical imperative' is discovered. If so, then this is Kant's theory: the ultimate source of value is human freedom as an end in itself,

manifested in interpersonal contexts in the possibility of freely given consent to the actions of others.

Postulates of Categorical Imperatives: From the categorical imperatives Kant derives three important postulates or necessary implications (arising out of practical reason).

- a) That man is free: An imperative (obligation) means that there is a possibility of disobeying, that is saying 'no' to it.
- b) That man has an immortal soul: It implies an absolute conformity with the law, which is 'holiness'. It is a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of its existence. Since such a holiness is necessary, we have to postulate an everlasting tending to it as a remote goal. This requires an everlasting duration of existence and personality of the same rational being which is called the immortality of the soul.
- c) That God exists: God must exist to justify the moral order. The practical reason demands it.

Concept of Moral Law

From infancy Kant was always been struck by 'the starry heavens above and the moral law within', the two orders, the physical and the moral. In the history of philosophy we ascribe the term 'categorical imperative' in moral philosophy to Kant. For, reason demands that the moral law for every empirical rational agent be categorical and imperative. Moral law for Kant is a synthetic *a priori* proposition. Kant believes that a moral law for all empirical rational beings can be derived only when it is rooted in the autonomous freedom of the agent. Any conjunction with the empirical nature of the agent for the determination of the moral law affects its purity. The moral law must be foundationally rational, i.e., *a priori* and should have the form of universality. Kant's *a priori* moral law has universal application. He calls a rational moral being universal law-giver as well. The deliberations of a moral agent have to be based on pure practical reason. The moral law asserts the universal nature of rational beings and the consequent rational obligation of a will that expresses itself as free yet morally obliged. Kant does not admit any empirical factor to be the determining basis of moral duty. Only pure practical reason has the capacity to provide universal, objective and absolute morals for rational beings. The moral principles should have the pure practical reason as their determining basis. The moral law as categorical imperative must be the duty-bound *a priori* general principle of action and therefore the law of action for all situations. Any inalienable dependence on empirical factors brings forth only heteronomous and conditional laws of action. To a perfect rational being, the moral law is not an imperative but 'the law of holiness', because they possess unlimited reason. The moral law, thus, is categorical imperative for those rational beings that are affected by sensual impulses.

Moral Duties

Kant's principle of morality gives rise to a fourfold classification of duties, resulting from the intersection of two divisions: between duties to oneself and to others, and between perfect and imperfect duties. Perfect duties are proscriptions of specific kinds of actions, and violating them is morally blameworthy; imperfect

duties are prescriptions of general ends, and fulfilling them is praiseworthy. The four classes of duty are thus: perfect duties to oneself, such as the prohibition of suicide; perfect duties to others, such as the prohibition of deceitful promises; imperfect duties to oneself, such as the prescription to cultivate one's talents; and imperfect duties to others, such as the prescription of benevolence.

Ethical duties to oneself include the prohibition of injury to the physical and mental bases of one's free agency, as by suicide or drunkenness, and the prescription of efforts to improve both the physical and mental conditions for the exercise of one's freedom. And ethical duties to others include both the prohibition of injuries to the dignity of others as free agents, for example by insulting or ridiculing them ('duties of respect'), and the prescription of efforts to improve the conditions for others' exercise of their own freedom, as by beneficence and sympathy ('duties of love'). "Morality is not properly the doctrine of how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness." "Let us seek the happiness in others; but for ourselves, perfection – whether it brings us happiness or pain."

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Kant is one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Western philosophy. We can distinguish four levels of perception in Kant's theory of knowledge: the phenomenal, the ideal, the existential and the etiological (of values). *Phenomena* are known through sensibility, ideal objects through understanding, existence through volitional perception and values through feelings or emotions. The positivist line, which goes from Comte to analytical philosophy, drew from Kant his distrust of metaphysics. Even the irrational trend, so common in many philosophical tendencies, has a forerunner in Kant's voluntaristic and emotional intuitions. For Kant, while the reality of God cannot be demonstrated (by theoretical) it has to be believed (by practical reason) as the foundation of moral life. One should not say (God Is) but God must be, otherwise moral obligation is meaningless. In his dealing with the problem of God, Kant replaced reason by Faith. Kant has been accused of fideism. E.g. St. Augustine holds that faith and reason are contradictory but reason helps us in deciding what must be accepted by faith.

He eradicated the last traces of the medieval worldview from modern philosophy and joined the key ideas of earlier rationalism and empiricism into a powerful model of the subjective origins of the fundamental principles of both science and morality. Above all, Kant was the philosopher of human autonomy, the view that by the use of our own reason in its broadest sense human beings can discover and live up to the basic principles of knowledge and action without outside assistance, above all without divine support or intervention.

Kant is truly the Father of contemporary thought. His critical philosophy is important element influencing his successors. He proposed a system that was fundamentally *a priori* but upholding the value of the phenomenal reality. For him, the reality that human beings know is basically the reality constituted or constructed by human beings themselves. The autonomous individual, through the proper exercise of the will, constructs the moral world. For Kant, we can have *a priori* knowledge, which is necessary and universal. He holds that all our knowledge is ultimately rooted in sense intuitions as well as in concepts.

Kant believes that the human reason has the responsibility of determining the source, extent and bounds of its own principles.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the Categorical Imperatives.

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2) Explain the difference between synthetic and analytic propositions.

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3.7 KEY WORDS

- Categorical Imperative** : A categorical imperative declares an action to be of itself objectively necessary without any reference to any purpose, i.e., without any end.
- Synthetic A priori** : That which is not contained in the very concept of subject but at the same time is known independently of experience.
- Postulates** : Postulates are the presuppositions of reason from a pure practical point of view. In Kant's practical philosophy, they are freedom, God and immortality.

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