

## **A Critical Analysis of Kant's Thoughts without Contents Are Empty and Intuition Concepts Are Blind**

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**Abstract:** It is open to no doubt that the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, was one of the widely known figures in the history of Western philosophy. The basic reason for his popularity is not far-fetched, he was the philosopher that somewhat resolved the great epistemological debate between the rationalist and the empiricist schools of thought.

In this work, we will show that the rationalist school of thought argued extensively that the paradigmatic source of human knowledge is reason while its empiricist counterpart argued to the contrary. According to the empiricist, the basic criterion of human knowledge is sense experience. We shall conclude with Immanuel Kant's novel idea that has been paralleled by some scholars with the Copernican Revolution in the realm of sciences. The paper is in support of the philosophical views of Immanuel Kant on the knowing process.

**Keywords:** Empiricism, Rationalism, Philosophy, Knowledge, Paradigmatically.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Philosophical enterprise is concerned with the search for knowledge through the doctrine of certainty. In achieving this course, philosophers had postulated various schools of thoughts and ideas among which is transcendental idealism developed by Kant. The branch of philosophy concerned with this search is epistemology. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the philosophical study of the nature, origin and limits of human knowledge. It sometimes refers to as the theory of knowledge. The word epistemology is derived from the Greek word *episteme* and *logos*. The two principal schools of thought in epistemology are Rationalism and Empiricism.

Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason attempts to know the meaning of knowledge. According to him, an idea taken by man is not knowledge. For such idea to translate to knowledge, it must be combined with other ideas in which there must be a subject and a predicate. All knowledge according to him is judgment but not every judgment is knowledge. He further explicates that judgment can either be analytic or synthetic. The former merely analyzes an idea without adding anything new to it. E.g. Bodies are extended. For this example, it shows that the predicate extended adds nothing to the subject that is not already contained in it. On the other hand, synthetic judgments enrich, extend, and increase my knowledge. e.g. the earth is spherical in shape. This distinction undoubtedly forms the basis of Kant's philosophy.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KANT.**

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) whose writings profoundly influenced western thought, was born in Königsberg, East Prussia (Now in the Soviet Union) on April 22, 1724.<sup>1</sup>

At the age of 16, Kant entered the University of Königsberg, where he studied philosophy, mathematics and physics<sup>2</sup>. When five years later, his father died, Kant found himself in financial difficulties that delayed until 1749, the publication of his first scientific work, "Thoughts concerning a True Estimation of the Vital Forces". His financial situation also made it necessary for him to serve nine years as a private tutor with various families in the vicinity of Königsberg.<sup>3</sup> During this period, however, Kant not only acquired the social graces that later distinguished him but also accumulated an astounding knowledge in many fields.

He published a few brief papers and in 1755, anonymously, his famous "General History of Nature and Theory of the heavens". In that year, he received his Doctor's degree and became a lecturer at Königsberg. He taught logic, metaphysics, moral philosophy and natural theology<sup>4</sup>. After a long pause in publication, Kant completed in quick succession the great works that became classics in philosophy: "Critique of Pure Reason" (1781); "Critique of Practical Reason" and many others. Immanuel Kant's philosophy is essentially a critical investigation into the nature, the function, and the limit of human reason as faculty for acquiring knowledge<sup>5</sup>. Immanuel Kant died in Königsberg on Feb 12, 1804.<sup>6</sup>

## AN EXPOSE OF KANT'S EPISTEMOLOGY/METAPHYSICS

Immanuel Kant's critique of Pure Reason was to transform the philosophical world, at once bringing the enlightenment to its highest intellectual development and establishing a new set of problems that would dominate philosophy in the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>7</sup>

Before discussing the views of Immanuel Kant, it is apposite to know what informed Kant's philosophical position this could be located within the two epistemological schools of thought: the Rationalists School and the Empiricist school. The basic concern of Immanuel Kant in his critiques of Pure Reason is to examine the nature, function and the limit of human mind and the acquisition of human knowledge. The principal goal of the rationalist is to determine the basis, origin, scope and limit of philosophical knowledge. It is also to examine and justify the rationalist, constituency and adequacy of the foundation of human knowledge.

The rationalists who are represented by the continental philosophers of the seventeenth century, especially Descartes and Leibniz maintained that, in addition to what we know by experience there are certain "innate ideas and innate principles" which we know independently of experience.<sup>8</sup> Given this, it is to know that the mathematical method, adopted by continental rationalists is believed as the only instrument by which the mind can attain the indubitable truth, clear and distinct knowledge without any sensual apprehension.<sup>9</sup>

Though, there were a number of lesser philosophers during the Renaissance, the first truly magnificent philosophical system of the modern period was that of the Frenchman Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes first carved a niche for himself in the pantheon of intellectual giants by discovering Analytical Geometry.<sup>10</sup>

In order to discover a firm foundation of absolute certainty upon which to build his objective system of knowledge, Descartes chose a method of "radical doubt" whose motto was '*De omnibus dubitandum*' everything is to be doubted. So Descartes would doubt away anything which could possibly be doubted, no matter how weak the grounds were for doubting, until he could discover a proposition which was logically indubitable. This proposition if it existed, would be the absolutely certain foundation of all knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

After Descartes has tried the three hypotheses he postulated, that is, the dream hypothesis. Descartes concluded that there was one, and only one thing which was absolutely certain that he existed. Hence, his assertion: I THINK, THEREFORE I AM: was true whether he was dreaming, whether the senses deceived, and whether there was an Evil Genius. Put differently the assertion is absolutely beyond the sceptic reproach.<sup>12</sup>

The contribution of the Cartesian epistemological programme to the advancement of knowledge cannot be over emphasized. One, Descartes bequeathed to his philosophical successors a new mathematically inspired method in which an emphasis was placed on clarity and distinctness of ideas which deduced from self evident first principle. Descartes justifies the cognitive worth of being a founding father of modern philosophy by opening a new chapter in philosophy through a rational principle. It is in philosophy, we are able to witness a new picture of a human being as a composite of two different and separate substances which nevertheless interact.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that this rationalist formulation further raised some complex problem about the nature of man which appears to have created another genesis of philosophical debate in the history of ideas with particular reference to modern philosophy.<sup>14</sup> Another scholar in the rationalist school is Spinoza. Even though all the continental rationalists believe in the supremacy of reason over experience or sensual apprehensions, there are still some epistemological variances among them. In the case of Spinoza, there are three degrees of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Spinoza tried to submit Cartesian metaphysics to a geometrical method even more rigorous than that used by Descartes himself. Like Descartes, Spinoza's philosophy is centered on a definition of SUBSTANCE but Spinoza had detected a contradiction in Descartes' account. Descartes had said, 'By substance we can conceive nothing else than a thing which exists in such a way as to stand in need of nothing beyond itself'. Then Descartes had gone on to say, 'and in truth, there can be conceived but one substance which is absolutely independent, and that is God "which he called "infinite"'.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of this admission that by definition there could exist only one kind of being which was absolutely independent. Descartes (in a contradictory manner, according to Spinoza) proceeded to distinguish between "infinite substance and "finite substance" – the latter were called, corporeal substance (body) and mental substance (mind). This radical dualism led Descartes to his notorious mind/body problem and his universally scorned pineal gland solution.<sup>17</sup>

Spinoza avoided this embarrassment by accepting Descartes definition of substance (as that which is absolutely independent) and taking deadly seriously the inference that there could be only one such substance. (if there were two, they would limit each other's independence).<sup>18</sup> Spinoza and Descartes both hold to the efficacy of reason as the only source of our knowledge, and God as the only living substance.

On the other hand, the British empiricists following the line of Francis Bacon maintained that the only genuine source of knowledge is sense experience. Empiricist claims that all our knowledge begins with experience, meaning that we cannot have genuine knowledge of things that cannot be empirically observed. The British empiricist includes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume.<sup>19</sup>

John Lokcke (1632-1704) was the first of the classical British empiricists. Empiricists were hostile to rationalistic metaphysics, and particularly to its unbridled use of speculation and its epistemology grounded in innate ideas. In his *Essay concerning Human understanding*, Locke began his attack on Descartes 'Innate ideas' by threatening them with Occam's razor. Occam Razor is a principle of simplification derived from William of Occam. It cautions, "do not multiply entities beyond necessity." Given two theories, each of which adequately accounts for all the observable data the simpler theory is the correct theory.<sup>20</sup>

If Locke could account for all human knowledge without making reference to innate ideas, then his theory would be simpler, hence better than that of Descartes, he wrote, let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters without any ideas. Experience, according to Locke, is of two sorts: sensation and reflection.

Sensation refers to the experience of our external sensations which provides us with primary qualities, such as cannot be separated a material secondary qualities (those which are merely sensations in us as colour, sound, table etc).<sup>12</sup> Reflection on the other hand is conceived as the notice the mind takes of its own operations which enables us to get new ideas which could not have been from things without the operations of the mind like perception, thinking and all different actions of the mind.<sup>22</sup>

As a matter of fact, ideas are of two sorts namely simple and complex. There are various degrees of simple ideas according to Locke. However, simple ideas according to Locke are impressions directly caused by things outside our minds and they do in turn resemble their causes and correspond to them. By Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, we are able to recognize the qualities of what the ideas in our minds represent or copy. According to Locke, primary qualities are those qualities which are really intrinsic in the objects and they are inseparable from them. Examples of such are solidity, figure. On the other hand, secondary qualities are those things which are really in the objects of perception but are only powers in objects which they impress on our senses. Examples of such secondary qualities are colour and taste.

Epistemologically, Locke affirms that there are some things we cannot know. One of such things is the "thing-in-itself". In other words Locke argues in his representational theory that we cannot know substance or the material substratum which gives support to qualities. Why? This is because the immaterial substratum is not perceivable. What, then, can we know? According to Locke, we can only know or perceive qualities, ideas, and the impressions they leave on our minds the empiricism of Locke enters into a complex state and therefore goes beyond the limit of experience when he rests the argument for the existence of self, God and external world on demonstration and intuition which appear contradictory to empiricist methodology.

Having discussed the two epistemological schools of thought, that is, the rationalist and the empiricist, we can now move on to what inspires the writing of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. The basic concern of Immanuel Kant's in his Critiques of Pure Reason is to examine the nature, function and the limit of human mind and the acquisition of human knowledge.

### **IMMANUEL KANT'S CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON**

However, Immanuel Kant agrees that knowledge begins from experience, but he disagrees with the empiricists that all knowledge is derived from experience. He also agrees with the rationalists that there is a prior knowledge but disagrees that all knowledge are a priori. He is, therefore, taking a media course between rationalism and empiricism.<sup>24</sup> According to Kant, there is such or thing as a SYNTHETIC A PRIORI TRUTH, a meaningful statement about reality whose truth is known independently of observation.

Kant believed that only by demonstrating the existence of such truth could Hume be refuted and philosophy, science and common sense be made respectable again. Kant began by dividing the mind into three 'faculties' – intuition (i.e perception), understanding and reason and then performing what he called a "transcendental" analysis of each faculty. To Kant, in whatsoever, or by whatsoever means our knowledge may relate to objects, it is at least quite clear that the only manner in which it immediately relates to them is by means of intuition.<sup>25</sup>

Sensibility is the capacity of human mind to receive the contents of sense perception, which are the representation of object.<sup>26</sup> Sensibility according to Kant, is the passive receptivity, at this level, our sense organ merely furnishes us with impressions, the mind is inactive, it only receives information and it plays no active part. But understanding refers to the power of the human mind to think, analyze, and synthesize the raw idea presented to it by the sense organ and at this level, the human mind is active.<sup>27</sup>

Kant first dealt with faculty of intuition. Here the primary question which concerned Kant was not 'what is perception? Rather it was 'How is perception possible? That is, he began with the common sense view that we do perceive the world, and asked what conclusion must hold for that to be possible. For example he wanted to know how it was possible that we are able to utter true sentences about the height of the matter horn, if the empiricists were right to say we never perceive SPACE, only sense data.<sup>28</sup>

Kant wanted to know how it was possible that we are able to utter true sentences about the amount of time it takes to get to Berlin if the empiricists were correct to say we never perceive TIME only sense – data.

Kant's solution was to demonstrate that SPACE and TIME are the synthetic a priori foundations of the faculty of perception. An a posteriori sentence like "the cat is on the mat" presupposes the truth of the sentence, objects exist in space and time. According to Kant, we sometimes know the first sentence to be true, yet it cannot be true unless the second is also true.<sup>29</sup> The latter is not analytic and is not a posteriori (there is no sense datum of space or time) Hume was right about that so it must so be a synthetic a priori truth.

According to Kant, knowledge arises from both sensibility and understanding. External or physical object cannot be known in themselves but as they appear to us in sensation. Only phenomena object can be known according to Kant and if object do not appear in space we cannot have impression of them. Space is an infinite thing and space is not a characteristic of object. His concern is to fight against pure empiricism and pure rationalism and to find a middle course for the two that is synthetic a priori truth and this leads to Copernican revolution. The impression of people is that objects are there, it's now left for us to attain the impression of this object.

Instead of mind revolving round object, let us argue that it is the object that conforms to human mind that is – understanding – power of cognition. Physical object cannot be known in them, they can only be known as they appear to us. Example of a man with a blue spectacle. Kant is now replacing the human mind with a spectacle. If one puts on a blue spectacle everything one sees will look blue but it's not the case that everything in reality is blue. This is just the same way that the blue spectacle cannot attain true knowledge. We cannot know object in themselves. According to Kant, because there are limit to which our mind can attain knowledge only as they appear to us. Knowledge to Kant does not only contain in sensibility but both in sensibility and understanding<sup>7</sup>.

According to Kant, there are two frame works in which perceptions take place, and these are space and time. There can be no sense perception except in space and time. Space and time are the prior necessary condition of sense perception.<sup>30</sup> Kant argued that space and time are basic forms of intuition, meaning that every sensation must bear the imprint of temporal, and sometimes of spatial organization. The human mind is structured in such a way that no object can appear to us except in space and time.

Moreover, just as space is the a priori necessary condition and forms of all our external experience, so is time the a priori necessary condition and forms of all our internal experience.<sup>34</sup> Time is nothing else than the form of the internal sense, that is, of the intuitions of self and of our internal self. Furthermore just as things can be represented to us in space only if they are phenomenon so also things cannot appear in time unless they are *noumenon*.

In Kant's view, there are two elements in knowledge. These are sensation and thought. In sensation, we are passive: we are active. The mind works up the raw material of knowledge from an outside space. In thought we are active; the mind works up the raw materials of sensation into knowledge. Thus knowledge is neither the fruit of the subject nor that of the object but synthesis or the combination of both.<sup>35</sup> Bertrand Russell's comments on Kant clearly portrays this:

*He (Kant) considers that this crude materials given in sensation the colour, hardness etc is due to the object and that what we (the subject) supply is the arrangement in space and time.*<sup>36</sup>

This implies that space and time are conditions of all experience. We cannot, for instance, conceive this table existing except on the condition that it exist in space, but we can easily picture the space without any object at all. We cannot destroy the space in imagination and yet retain the object. Hence, the cognition of space and time is prior to existence. It is the form of all possible experience. This view led Kant to say that the physical object which he calls in-itself (*noumenon*) is essentially unknowable, what can be known is the subject as we have it in experience, this he calls phenomenon, a joint product of us and the thing – in itself.<sup>38</sup> transcendental syntheses of the two would be impossible. Understanding is also known as the power of thought while the function of the faculty of thought is to synthesize the content of sense perception.<sup>41</sup>

## **A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF IMMANUEL KANT'S POSITION**

Having exposed Kant's philosophical view, we can now do a critique of his work. Understanding can be referred to as the faculty of concept. Since concept has to be applied in judgment, this faculty, unlike sensibility is active. It is a mistake of empiricism, Kant argued, not to have understood this crucial point, and to have construed all concepts, of the understanding on the model sensation. Thus, for Hume, a concept is simply a faded relic of the "impression" from which it is derived.<sup>42</sup>

The corresponding mistake of rationalism is to think of sensation as a kind of confused aspiration towards conceptual thought. Thus, Kant summarized the famous dispute between Leibniz and Locke in the following way: Leibniz "intellectualized" appearances, just as Locke sensationalized the concept of the understanding.<sup>43</sup> Judgment requires the joint operation of sensibility and understanding, hence Kant's position was meant to represent a compromise between those of the rationalists and the empiricists. His famous assertion, "thoughts without contents are empty, and, intuitions without concepts are blind," was meant to grant

to the rationalists that sense data alone could not provide knowledge, and grant to the empiricists that there could be no knowledge in the absence of sensorial contribution.

Kant's solution seemed to many to be successful; however it had the consequence of putting him in the disconcerting position of admitting that there does exist some kind of ultimate reality (what he called "the noumenal world, or the thing-in-itself") but that the Hume mind is incapable of knowing it. Rather, we humans are limited to knowledge of what Kant called "the phenomenal world" - the world as perceived, conceived, imagined, interpreted, analyzed and theorized about by the human mind. That is we can only know a world which has passed through the human mind, through grid work of space and time and the categories of the understanding.<sup>44</sup> A mind without concept will have no capacity to think; equally a mind armed with concepts but with no sensory data to which they could be applied would have nothing to think about.

However, for the human to be able to synthesize sense perception, there should be a framework through which we can organize our thoughts, a framework through which we refer to issues. Understanding can take place given a priori conditions. It is these conditions that Kant, referred to as "categories"<sup>46</sup>. According to Kant, we can reduce all operations of the understanding to judgment so that understanding can be represented as the power of judging... judgment in this context is not to be linked to the judgment of the court of law.

There are things which sensibility will acquire and each concept is given a title. It is now left for human mind to synthesize the contents, bring out the similarities and differences and organize components and give each group appropriate name so that easy reference can be made to them.<sup>47</sup>

However, it is only through "categories that any object can be thought about or know, and it is the only way knowledge can be acquired about object. In other worlds, the categories must first be applied to objects before it can be understood or know. But the categories can only be applied to objects of sense perception and only phenomena that appear in space and time are objects of sense perception. Understanding cannot be applied to reality outside space and time; such reality cannot be object of human knowledge. In other words, things as they are in themselves cannot be objects of human knowledge. In other words, things as they are in themselves cannot be objects of human knowledge because they are outside the human understanding and knowledge.

Conclusively, we can only know things as they appear to us, and the categories of understanding cannot be applied to things in themselves because they are not objects of sense perception.<sup>48</sup>

## II. CONCLUSION

From all we have discussed so far the logical conclusion is to argued with Immanuel Kant. As we have examined in the body of the paper, both the rationalist and the empiricist schools of thought seemed to have a somewhat myopic, view of the knowing process. They failed to realize that neither the senses nor reason alone can generate knowledge without the input of the other. However, it took the genius of Immanuel Kant to recognize and explicit state his fundamental points or facts. And, even empirical evidence supports. Immanuel Kant argued that both the senses and reason jointly work to generate knowledge for the uplifting of men in society. This being the case, we cannot but aver that Immanuel Kant's position on the knowing process is a step ahead of those of the rationalist and the Empiricist schools of thought.

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