

## **Kant V**

### The Antinomies

Reading: 141-145

Why Kant is hard to understand:

1. Because the mind is constructed so as to experience Empirical reality. (Our last three classes have concentrated on Kant's account of how the mind does this.)
2. And, so, when we turn to the mind and its relation to (ultimate, in-itself) reality, we must consider two possibilities:
  - a. The terms that the mind uses to represent empirical reality apply both to itself (the mind and the mind-dependent) and to ultimate, in-itself reality.
  - b. The terms that the mind uses do not so apply.
3. Kant thinks that (b) is correct. (a) amounts to the error he calls Transcendental Realism.
4. However, as we then examine the mind and its relation to ultimate reality, we must continue to fight the tendency to represent these in empirical terms. (This is hard to avoid, since it is the mind's ordinary operating mode.)

Transcendental Realism

- This is the general doctrine that states that the proper object of empirical knowledge is the thing-in-itself.
- This doctrine implies that the experienced qualities of empirical objects are (or can be) qualities of in-itself reality.
  - o E.g., extension is a feature of mind-independent objects. Descartes makes this claim.
- Kant argues that this cannot be correct, for it leads to "antinomy" (as well as to skepticism).

The Central Argument for Transcendental Idealism

- The form of the argument: P or Q, not-P; therefore, Q (disjunctive syllogism)
  1. Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Realism are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of metaphilosophical possibility. (I.e., one or the other must be true, but not both.)
  2. Transcendental Realism is false. (from contradictions demonstrated in Antinomies)
  3. Hence, Transcendental Idealism is the correct metaphilosophical doctrine.
- The Basic Error: applying the *a priori* forms of empirical thought to in-itself reality
- Source of this Error: Transcendental Realism

Here is the argument in the First Antinomy, in brief (A506-7/B534-5):

1. In experience, spatial objects are “conditioned” in space – i.e., they are extended but delimited in space.
2. Space is experienced by us as itself the unconditioned setting of the conditioned. (It’s the “conditionable”, not itself delimited.)
3. If space were a feature of in-itself reality, then “the world” as a whole (i.e., total reality) would have the qualities of empirical reality: specifically, it will be a “cosmological object” of spatial extent. (This is the consequence of Transcendental Realism.)
4. As *spatial*, the world is thus an empirical object. I.e., it is inherently capable of being observed. (Recall that space is a form of representation – it’s a way of experiencing something; so anything spatial will be experienceable, in principle, by humans.)
5. But the world cannot thus be an empirical object, for (a) if finite it must be infinite, and (b) if infinite it must be finite.
  - a. Supposing the world to be finite implies that it is “conditioned” (delimited) and this implies a further unconditioned realm of space (i.e., the infinite).
  - b. Supposing the world to be an empirical object of infinite extent implies that it is capable (in principle) of being observed (since it is an empirical object); but this implies that it must be “conditioned” (i.e., finite).
6. Hence, ultimate reality (the world) is not a cosmological object.
7. Hence, Transcendental Realism is false.

More Generally:

- The antinomies are conflicts reason encounters when it fails to recognize the Transcendental nature of its own forms of thought.
- This sort of mistake is made inevitable by Transcendental Realism. For:
  - o The Transcendental Realist maintains that the proper objects of empirical knowledge are things-in-themselves.
  - o If so, then in-itself reality will have whatever basic features are found in empirical objects, generally.
  - o It is that combination – in-itself reality with empirical features – that generates the antinomies.
- Thus, application of an *a priori* form of empirical thought to in-itself reality results in what Kant calls a “Cosmological Idea.” A Cosmological Idea is representation of in-itself reality (or some portion thereof) in the terms the mind uses to depict empirical reality. Since empirical reality is not (at all) the same thing as in-itself reality, the *a priori* forms of experiencing the empirical do not apply to in-itself reality.
- This mistake is common and understandable. Our basic metaphysical concepts (the “categories”) have the explicit function of representing something as Real, Objective, Mind-Independent, etc. So it is natural to think that the things so-represented should be real, objective, and mind-independent in themselves. But,

- of course, they are not, according to Kant. They are merely ways that we represent things; and in-itself reality happens to appear to us in the same way.
- For example, we represent the empirical world as composed of objects and events. Does this mean that the ultimate world, in itself, is an object or event? According to Kant, the answer is ‘No.’ Neither of these concepts applies to the world in itself. But it is a common error for reason to “extend” itself from transcendental appearance to in-itself reality, so that we tend to think of the world as a big object or big event. Thinking in this transcendental realist way, however, leads to antinomy.
  - This explains the endless (mistaken) disputes over whether the world has a cause; whether the world has a beginning; whether there exists a necessary being; whether an object is composed of atoms or, rather, is endlessly divisible into parts.
  - I.e., here Kant makes good on his promise to resolve certain metaphysical dilemmas: the dilemmas are mistakes of reasoning born of failure to recognize the Transcendental nature of human knowledge. They derive from Transcendental Realism. The solution is Transcendental Idealism.

Again, in other words:

- Descartes presents Kant with some epistemological problems: how is empirical knowledge possible? How, in particular, is synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible?
- In order to answer these questions, Kant conducts an examination of human cognition (experience). His account describes how the basic concepts and sensible intuitions construct our experience of reality. The basic concepts (the categories) and intuitions (space and time) are the very *means* (“modeling clay”) by which we represent reality.
- How does this help with the empirical problems?
- Well, let us reconsider the problems now in light of Kant’s account of experience.
  - Given space, time, and the basic metaphysical concepts (the categories) are *ways* we represent reality, what are we to say of their relation to reality itself?
  - The mind is so constructed as to represent Empirical reality in a certain way (i.e., as spatiotemporal, causal, etc.).
  - Given that this is so, (a) what must the world in-itself be like in order for empirical knowledge to have anything to do with it? and (b) what can we know about that world in-itself?
  - Given that so much of experience is a contribution of mind, the most we can say about in-itself reality is that *it appears* to us in such a way as *to conform to* how we represent it.
    - This is the thesis of Transcendental Idealism: the proper objects of empirical knowledge are *appearances* – i.e., what we know of in-itself reality is how it appears to us.

- And these “ways” that the world appears to us, again, are its being a spatiotemporal realm in which objects causally interact with each other.
    - So, all that we can know of in-itself reality is, roughly, that it “stands” beyond appearances, is their “source” in some sense.
    - BUT: it is not to be mistaken for the forms of appearance themselves. The whole point to Transcendental Idealism is that the way we experience the world is not how it is in itself.
    - (If this seems difficult to understand, RETURN TO THE TOP and reconsider WHY KANT IS HARD TO UNDERSTAND.)
  - Thus: how is empirical knowledge possible?
    - The answer has two parts: what is empirical knowledge, and how is it possible?
      - Empirical knowledge is true understanding. Understanding is application of a concept to an intuition. Understanding is true when the mind-external empirical fact of the matter (the appearance) does in fact satisfy the terms of the individual’s understanding.
      - Empirical knowledge is possible because it is knowledge of *appearances* and not in-itself reality. That is, since appearances are *how in-itself reality appears to us*, they are eminently knowable by the human mind. The human mind represents the world in a certain way. Appearances are how the world appears to us. Since these two things have the same form, it is possible for the one (representation) accurately to depict the other (empirical reality).
  - And how is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?
    - Synthetic a priori knowledge is knowledge of the empirical world prior to experience of it.
    - This is possible for us since the empirical world has a structure produced by the mind. This structure is the result of our a priori (pure) forms of representation, intuition and the categories.
    - Since empirical reality conforms to these forms of representation, we can have knowledge of it prior to investigating it.