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PH506: HISTORY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

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BOX: DO NOT HAVE A BOX

1. *Explain the epistemology and metaphysics of the Continental Rationalists and the British Empiricists.*

## **Rene Descartes**

### ***Epistemology of Rene Descartes***

Rene Descartes' epistemology was driven by his desire for certainty. Unfortunately, he did not find the sort of certainty that he was looking for during his scholastic training at the Jesuit college of La Flèche. The abstract theological debates of his time appeared to yield an intolerable amount of disagreement. In contrast, however, the blossoming fields of mathematics and physics appeared to have the potential for silencing endless controversies. Descartes thought the simple elegance and the clear deductive moves found in the science of mathematics would yield a more promising method of inquiry than he had found in his scholastic training.

Descartes also sought to bring unity to the sciences. Rather than having a diversity of methods for studying different objects, Descartes wanted to streamline the scientific process. His own discoveries were very valuable to his project, for he had shown how geometric figures could be represented in the form of algebraic expressions. If geometric figures could be described in this way, then perhaps everything could be analyzed by means of the same method of inquiry. He hoped that, by universally applying this method, he could bring certainty and unity to the sciences.

Descartes' primary criterion for the truth of an idea was the "clear and distinct" criterion. He thought that, as a general rule, whatever he could perceive very clearly and distinctly was true. For Descartes and other rationalists, the primary source of truth is found inside the mind. One does not find certain knowledge in the ever-changing flux of the senses; rather, one finds certainty by exploring the contents of the mind. But even here, one has to be careful because not all thoughts are equal in their reliability. It is only the very clear and distinct ideas that provide

us with the kind of certainty for which Descartes was looking. His aim was to find a clear and distinct idea that could not be subject to doubt.

Descartes used the method of mathematics and the criterion of clarity and distinctness to search for truth. Since geometry must work from an axiom or starting point, Descartes sought to find a solid starting point from which to begin his philosophical task. However, in order to find a solid axiomatic starting point, he would need a method in order to find it. His method for this task was radical doubt.

Descartes believed that if he used doubt as a method, he could cleanse himself of all his fallible beliefs. To that end, he subjected his most fundamental beliefs to the cleansing effects of his method. He hoped that his doubt would uncover the bedrock idea upon which he might build his philosophy. The bedrock idea which he found was this: "I exist," is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

With this as a starting point, Descartes set out to prove the existence of God. If God existed, he reasoned, God would not deceive him or allow him to be deceived into thinking that an external world existed when in fact it did not exist. Given the fact that our perceptions of the material world appeared to be outside of our control, and given the fact that a good God who would not allow us to be deceived concerning these appearances existed, it followed that our perceptions of the world was caused by material things in the world.

In sum, Descartes doubted his fundamental beliefs to arrive at a certain starting point. He then argued from the fact that he existed as a thinking thing with an idea of God, to the fact that God exists. Since God exists and He would not allow Descartes to be deceived about the external material world, Descartes concluded that he could, in fact, have knowledge of things in the material world.

## *Metaphysics of Rene Descartes*

The way in which he argued for certain knowledge of the material world produced a form of metaphysical dualism. In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes says that the fact that he can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make him certain that the two things are distinct. For Descartes there was the world of the mind and there was the world of inert matter. Since he could clearly and distinctly understand himself as a thinking thing wholly apart from his material constitution, he concluded that this must be due to the fact that there are two separate substances: a mental substance and a physical substance.

As he considered the mind, he realized that its properties are substantially different from the properties of physical bodies. Minds are not extended in space, but physical bodies are. Minds are able to reason and doubt; physical bodies cannot do either of these things. Minds do not operate mechanistically, but the physical world operates mechanistically. As the list of essential differences grew, his certainty that there was a mental substance and a physical substance became solidified.

This separation between mind and matter brought up the question of the relation between two separate substances that have nothing in common. Descartes seemed to think that they could interact. He recognized that what he understood to be the body affected the mind and that what he understood to be the mind affected the body. Even if he could not show *how* the two interacted, he believed that he knew *that* they did interact.

One final feature of Descartes metaphysics should be mentioned. In his *Meditations*, it is mentioned that he thought that our existence was a sort of intermediate existence. He thought of existence as a spectrum where God was on one end of the spectrum and nothingness was on the other end. This metaphysical position is how Descartes accounted for error in our judgment.

God is perfect in every possible way. As one moves down the spectrum of existence, defects creep into being. Since humans are lower on the scale of existence, humans are able to make errors in judgment. This feature of Descartes philosophy curiously finds itself in later rationalist philosophers.

## **Baruch Spinoza**

### ***Epistemology of Baruch Spinoza***

Baruch Spinoza's philosophy was driven by the desire to build a foundation for ethics. Like Descartes, Spinoza was enamored with the ability of mathematics to demonstrate its principles and conclusions. In particular, Spinoza appreciated geometry, with its clearly stated definitions, axioms, and demonstrations. Armed with the precision of the methods of the geometer, Spinoza sought to build off of and correct Descartes' philosophy.

Rather than starting with the clear and distinct idea of our own self as a thinking thing, Spinoza began his philosophical project with his conception of God and attempted to deduce all truths about the world from *that* clear and distinct idea. What made this starting point so powerful for Spinoza was that he believed that to fully know the cause of a thing was to fully know the effects that proceed from that cause. If God was the cause of all things, as thinkers of that time supposed, then knowledge of the world could be gained through our idea of God.

What is more, Spinoza tied causality and rationality together so intimately that logical relationships ended up being fundamentally the same as causal relationships. Thus if the logic was flawless, one's knowledge of the world was flawless as well. According to Spinoza, if he began with a definition of God and then worked out his system carefully and consistently, then he had done all that was required for him to accurately know the world as it is.

## *Metaphysics of Spinoza*

Spinoza broke reality up into three basic categories. First, there is *substance*. In contrast to Descartes' two substances, Spinoza thought that there was only one substance. As he worked out his definitions, axioms, and demonstrations, Spinoza defined God and substance in such a way as to make his conclusions about God unavoidable. He defined a *cause of itself* as that whose essence involves existence. He defined *substance* as that which is in itself and *conceived through itself*. Given the fact that *cause of itself* and *conceived through itself* meant virtually the same thing for Spinoza, it is easy to see how he concluded that God was the only substance. No finite essence could be said to involve its own existence, and God was defined as an absolutely infinite being. The only being that could be the *cause of itself* and *conceived through itself* would be an infinite being. The only being who is infinite by definition is God. *—Q.E.D.*

Next in the order of Spinoza's ontology are *attributes*. Properly speaking, God is the only being with attributes. In fact, God has an infinite number of attributes, only two of which are known to us. Humans are capable of knowing the attributes of thought and extension. Everything that we know in the world is one of these two attributes in one form or another.

Finally, the different forms or *modes* of the one Substance are what we perceive in the world. According to Spinoza, we mistakenly take the various modes of being to be individual finite substances. But if we transcend our opinions and imaginations by the proper use of our reason, we will come to understand that there is really only one Substance manifested in an infinite number of modes.

Spinoza's view that there is only one Substance led him to hold a very strong form of determinism. Spinoza maintains that things and events cannot be other than they are. All things are determined by the nature of God. While Spinoza holds that God has free will, all he means

by this is that God is not determined to act in a particular way by anything outside of Himself. God is, however, determined by His own nature. In Spinoza's philosophy, God determines everything with necessity. This deterministic conclusion follows of necessity from Spinoza's metaphysics and mathematical method.

## **Gottfried Leibniz**

### ***Epistemology of Gottfried Leibniz***

Leibniz was driven by the search for unity and harmony. He sought to correct the rationalists before him and to ultimately harmonize the political strife between Protestants and Catholics. He rejected the scholastic tradition in favor of the emerging modern view of the world, but he did not fully agree with the methods and conclusions of Descartes and Spinoza. That being said, his confidence in the tools of logic and mathematics lead him to continue in the tradition of the rationalists.

Some commentators on Leibniz note that he envisioned a world in which scientists openly and freely worked together to promote the overall advancement of human knowledge. To that end, he sought to develop a universal language, based on logic, from which all scientists could work. To create this language, he would (1) break down concepts into their most basic forms, (2) represent those basic forms with mathematical symbols, and (3) develop rules for combining the basic forms so as to arrive at universal language. It was his hope that this universal language would help him attain his overarching philosophical goal.

Leibniz's overarching goal was to find the criteria which would enable us to determine if a judgment is indubitably true. In standard rationalist fashion, he looked to rational principles to ground the truth of universal claims. The most basic rational principle that could not be denied

was the Principle of Identity. It is impossible that something be other than what it is. Nothing could be a more basic and foundational a starting point than the most basic and foundational principle of logic. In the Principle of Identity, Leibniz had found the basic building block he was looking for. All necessary truths would either be derived from this principle or reducible to it.

In addition to laying the foundation for necessary truths, Leibniz also had to account for truths that were not reducible to the Principle of Identity. To do that, he divided truths into “truths of reason” and “truths of fact”. Truths of reason are those truths which are necessary because to state their opposite is to involve oneself in a contradiction. Truths of fact are contrasted with truths of reason in that it is possible to deny them without the involvement of a self-contradiction. Truths of fact are not immediately reducible to the Principle of Identity, but they are based on a rational principle. They are based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason, like the Principle of Identity, is a universal principle. That principle stated that everything must have a sufficient reason for its existence.

Additionally, it claimed that nothing ever happens without a sufficient reason. Ideally, if one knows the sufficient reason for a thing, one may have exhaustive knowledge of that thing. This is because to know the sufficient reason of a thing is to know the essence of a thing. To know the essence of a thing is to know all the properties of a thing. Finally, to know the essence and all the properties of a thing is to know everything that being has done, is doing, and will do.

Leibniz thought that to know the essence of a thing is to know everything about that thing. He thought this because he reduced being to logic. If something was logical, it was true. If it could be “demonstrated” by reason, it was true regardless of our experience of the world. Everything could be known about a thing’s being through our concepts of that being. For example, if John knows the essence of Bill, John will know what Bill has done, is doing, and will

be doing in the future. This is because everything Bill is and does is contained in the concept of Bill.

### ***Metaphysics of Leibniz***

As was mentioned above, to know what a thing is is to know everything about that thing. This is important to know because it is the basis for Leibniz's metaphysics. If two things share the exact same properties, then those two things are identical. One has to remember that for Leibniz, everything that one is and does is contained in one's essence. If one being had the same essence as another being, then there would be nothing to differentiate one being from the other. They would share identical properties, and strictly speaking, be the same being.

To arrive at this conclusion, Leibniz relied on his law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. This law may be stated as follows: if X and Y have the exact same properties, then X and Y are not two beings, but one being. The implication of this principle is that no two beings in the universe are identical. Accordingly, on the most fundamental level, no two substances are alike. Every substance is individual and unique. This view of substance is the opposite of Spinoza's. Rather than everything being a different mode of a single substance, Leibniz maintained that everything is made up of unique dimensionless substances called *monads*.

One may liken this view to an atomism without atoms. Rather than the world being composed of small inert chunks of matter, the entire universe is made up of dimensionless unique substances. Leibniz avoids a dead inert universe by showing that monads are able to perceive each other. In a sense reality, from its most basic constituency, is alive. Each monad, while it does not interact with other monads, carries out its pre-established function. Initially,

God programmed each monad to perform a function, and it is the monads' sole purpose to carry out that function.

Since the most basic constituents of reality (monads) are fully determined by their individual pre-established functions, those things which are made of monads are also determined to act according to a set plan. In essence, Leibniz replaces the deterministic notions of the materialist with a new deterministic view of the universe. However, rather than being determined by physical necessity, all things are determined to act in accordance with the pre-established plan of God.

## **John Locke**

### ***Epistemology of John Locke***

John Locke stated that his task was to look into the source, extent, and certainty of knowledge. In contrast to the rationalists, Locke did not think that the source of knowledge was innate ideas in the mind; rather, he turned to the world as his source of knowledge. He was more modest with regard to the extent of our knowledge and with regard to the certainty that we may have of that which is known. The rationalist tended to think that if one was armed with the correct method, one could, in principle, obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the world. Locke was skeptical of our ability, regardless of the method we used, to attain this breadth of knowledge.

To begin with, Locke's epistemology was strongly opposed to the notion that we have innate ideas. He thought that the mind was a blank slate upon which the world was free to write. To Locke, innate ideas are those ideas which should produce universal assent. Accordingly, no one should be able to deny or doubt an innate idea. However, his observations of the world led

him to believe that people do not agree, even on the most fundamental ideas. Hence, there was no good reason to believe in innate ideas.

After casting doubt on the universality of innate ideas, and hence the existence of innate ideas, Locke attempted to replace them with what he called “complex ideas”. Complex ideas are made up of basic atom-like entities called “simple ideas”. The mind passively receives simple ideas like “hard” and “cold” and then actively combines, compares, or separates them to produce complex ideas. Thus, simple and complex ideas come from two different sources. First, the mind receives simple ideas from sensation. For example, photons bounce off of things and enter the eye to produce a sensation. This physical mechanism produces an image in our mind which Locke took to be a simple, unmixed idea. Then the active portion of the mind takes the raw data from sensation, reflects on it, and performs one of the three above mentioned operations.

This mechanistic epistemology gave Locke the ability to set limits on what humans may know. All of our ideas come from sense experience and are produced by the mind when the mind perceives agreement and disagreement among its own ideas. Since the *mind produces* complex ideas and judgments, we cannot be absolutely certain that those ideas completely conform to the way things are. Hence, most of our knowledge is *probable* knowledge. In this way, Locke’s account of the source, extent, and certainty of ideas was radically different from the rationalist school.

### ***Metaphysics of Locke***

John Locke viewed the world in terms of physics. As mentioned above, even ideas were thought of in terms of analogues to atoms. But if everything in the world was made up of small atoms, how does one thing fundamentally differ from another thing? Additionally, what brings

unity to the clumps of atoms out there in the world? His answer to both questions was that there exists a substratum or a substance that differentiates one clump of matter from another, and at the same time the substratum produces a unity in a thing. Locke admitted that we cannot have any experience of substances in themselves, yet he held onto the notion of substance to insure unity and diversity in the world outside the mind.

Ironically, Locke's view of substance takes a Cartesian turn in that he maintains that there are physical substances and spiritual substances. Both substances may be known because we are familiar with ourselves as a composition of both physical substance and spiritual substance. In addition to our familiarity with ourselves as physical / spiritual beings, we are also informed of our constitution by the revelation of God in the Bible. The Bible confirms this dualism by pointing out that man is physical and that we survive the death of the body. Interestingly enough, two philosophers with very different methods and very different starting points ended up with very similar views concerning the substantial constitution of man.

## **George Berkeley**

### ***The Philosophy of George Berkeley***

George Berkeley was driven by the desire to correct the metaphysical problems that arose from a mechanistic view of the world. It is especially difficult to clearly distinguish between the epistemology and the metaphysics of Berkeley. The reason for this is because Berkeley collapses the distinction between the two by understanding the "real" as "that which is perceived". This very counter-intuitive view makes more sense in light of what Berkeley was trying to do.

Berkeley was trying to respond to the problems that stemmed from the modern philosophical project. If the world was a self-sufficient machine, as Hobbes thought, then there would be no place for God and the soul. However, if Locke's dualism was true, then epistemic problems arose concerning the correspondence between ideas and the world. Berkeley thus tried to undercut both problems by denying the existence of matter!

In saying that only ideas exist, Berkeley undercut the reductive materialism of Hobbes and thought he saved theology. He maintained that if Hobbes was correct, the need for God as an explanation of the world would be redundant at best. However, if John Locke's dualism was correct, then Berkeley would have to take up the difficult task of arguing for why we should have confidence that our ideas, which are connected and formed in the mind, actually correspond to real things outside of the mind.

Upon reading Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and others, he realized that there was a difficulty in trying to understand how the mind interacts with the world. Rather than continuing to suppose that there was a physical world, Berkeley spent a good deal of time refuting the notions of absolute natures, real existence in addition to our ideas of things, material substance, and the sensible world. In attacking these notions, he was not building a case for skepticism; rather, he saw his task as the clearing away of the notions that produce skepticism.

## **David Hume**

### ***Epistemology of David Hume***

Like Berkeley and Descartes, Hume tried to clean up the problems he saw in philosophy by the use of skepticism. However, unlike Berkeley and Descartes, Hume did in fact become a skeptic. More specifically, Hume was skeptical of metaphysical claims. He began his theory of

knowledge with an analysis of perception and concluded that it is impossible to have metaphysical knowledge.

Hume divided perceptions into two different kinds. These two kinds of perceptions, very roughly speaking, correspond to Locke's simple and complex ideas. The first kind of perception is an impression. Impressions are vivid and lively sensations that come to the mind through the senses. An impression occurs only while it is being directly experienced. For example, one has an impression of a rose *only while looking at it*.

In contrast to the impression is Hume's second kind of perception. When one looks at the rose one has an *impression* of the rose, but when one recalls the rose one has an *idea* of the rose. In Hume's epistemology, ideas are those perceptions which are remembered impressions. They are less vivid copies of the original impression. The two mental operations that correspond to these two different kinds of perceptions are thought and sensation. The mind passively receives impressions via *sensation* and it actively thinks with *ideas* and about ideas.

This division of perceptions eventually leads to Hume's division of reason itself. He divides reason into *matters of fact* and *relations of ideas*. Propositions which are matters of fact refer to those impressions which come to the mind by way of the senses. Propositions that express a relation of ideas refer to the connecting of ideas that exist in the mind. Certain relations in the mind are necessary relations. In particular, a proposition that expresses a relation of identity is a necessary relation. An example of this kind of relation of ideas would be the proposition "All triangles are three sided figures."

What produces skepticism for Hume is that matters of fact can never yield certainty, and relations of ideas cannot tell us anything about the external world. We are left with either indubitable truths that do not inform us about anything in the outside world, or probable truths

that confusedly inform us about the outside world. This huge epistemic problem leads Hume to be very critical of the ability of reason to profit us in our normal lives.

Interestingly enough, Hume is not bothered by this position. In order to live life one does not need to rationally demonstrate the validity of principles like causality. As humans we are quite capable of living life by the laws and rules of our psychology. Our mind produces an association of ideas and that is, practically speaking, all that is required for our survival. For Hume, problems in philosophy have persisted because we keep trying to do something that we are unable to do (i.e. demonstrate the validity of the principle of causality). Like it or not, the human mind is not able to prove very much. Hume recommends that rather than trying to force the mind to do something it cannot do, we should relax and accept the fact that we cannot rationally describe the world.

### *Metaphysics of David Hume*

The irony in explaining Hume's metaphysics is that Hume explicitly rejects the discipline of metaphysics. Rather than offering any account of what substance is, Hume says that substance is an empty concept because it cannot be traced back to an impression. In this regard he was a more thorough empiricist than Locke. Locke claimed that there is a substratum, even though we don't have any ideas of it, which underlies objects in the world. Hume takes this assumption and asks why we should posit an idea of substance if we do not have any good reasons for doing so.

For Hume, the rational is reduced to the psychological. Consequently, the two-world problem caused by the rationalists and perpetuated by Locke is unnecessary. All that exists is the material world and our psychological habits which form our thinking. The mind, rather than

being guided by the immaterial laws of logic, is moved and pushed about by passion and habit. It is meaningless to speak of the mind as the “self”, for in the mind there are only impressions and ideas formed from impressions.

The skeptical conclusions of Hume setup many philosophical problems that last to this day. Philosophers are not content to do away with reason because the philosophical mind seeks to answer ultimate questions. If Hume’s criticisms of causality and induction ended up being sound, then philosophers would have to put away their books and take up another profession. However, if no one could answer Hume, even scientists would have to find another profession. Someone needed to answer Hume’s criticisms of reason. Immanuel Kant would later take up this very task.

2. *Explain how Kant synthesized empiricism and rationalism which resulted in agnosticism.*

Like many of the modern philosophers, Immanuel Kant became disillusioned with the philosophers before him. During his early years he was very sympathetic to the Leibnizian school. Eventually he was exposed to the writings of David Hume, and this helped him to see the weaknesses of rationalism and the importance of the empirical approach to philosophy. Rather than accepting the skeptical conclusions of Hume, Kant sought to save science and philosophy. He did not want to see the entire modern philosophical and scientific projects demolished.

Kant admired the certainty found in mathematics, but he also admired the scientific advances in physics (championed by Sir Isaac Newton). He realized that if he sided with the rationalists, he would have to minimize the importance of the physical sciences and hence the importance of the advancements made by recent scientists. If, on the other hand, he sided with the empiricists, he would have to give up certainty along with God and morality. Rather than siding with one school or the other, Kant created his own “Copernican Revolution” in philosophy.

***Problems with the Rationalist***

Immanuel Kant’s early philosophical career was dominated by a desire to search out the foundations of metaphysics. He participated in discussions and debates between the Cartesian school and the Leibnizian school concerning the motion of bodies. His contributions to the debate involved a defense of the existence of monads and an exposition on the fundamental laws by which they are governed. However, in seeking a firm foundation for metaphysics, and ultimately for science, he came to realize that the rationalists were not able to prove their own

principles of demonstration. The very rules by which they built their elaborate metaphysical systems had been left without justification.

Kant's main blow to rationalism is found in his criticism of one of their major assumptions, namely that the law of identity can be the basis for the law of causality. Leibniz and Spinoza maintained that all propositions were analytic; that is, they are known to be true by virtue of the predicate being somehow contained in the subject. Kant argued that the principle of causality could not be reduced to the principle of identity. In essence he was making a distinction that the rationalists had not made. He claimed that the rational is not identical with the real and the real is not identical with the rational.

A major implication of this distinction is that one could not simply deduce all truths about the world from pure reason alone. Even if one were to set forth axioms and carefully use the deductive method to work from those axioms, one is not assured that one's philosophy will accurately accord with the world. His aim was to humble the dogmatic rationalist by helping him realize the limits of reason. Reason could not produce knowledge apart from the senses. Kant wanted to show the rationalists that empirical observation is indispensable.

### ***Problems with the Empiricist***

Kant accepted the empiricist notion that we should not entertain ideas that transcend the bounds of human experience. It was from this empiricist principle that he mounted his attacks against rationalism. However, Kant was not satisfied with empiricism either. If dogmatism was the problem that plagued the rationalist, skepticism was the problem that plagued the empiricist. The rationalist thought that reason could solve all philosophical problems. The empiricists, on

the other hand, would eventually fall into skepticism because he had little or no confidence in reason's ability to yield certain and necessary truths.

Kant did not accept the skepticism of David Hume which reduced reason to psychology. He maintained a strong conviction that reason could produce some knowledge. However, nothing in the epistemology of the empiricists allowed for certain and necessary knowledge. The mind simply did not have the faculties for turning the raw data of experience into reliable knowledge. For the empiricist, knowledge was constructed by the mind out of mental atoms or impressions. There were no compelling reasons for thinking that we reliably ordered our impressions into true concepts and judgments. Kant therefore saw empiricism as a failure in that it could not establish the rules for thinking, nor could it provide a basis for certain knowledge.

### *The Kantian Synthesis*

Kant wanted to maintain both the integrity of reason and the validity of empirical observation. However, to do this he would need a new method and a new conception of knowledge. The rationalist relied on deductions, but those deductions naïvely carried empirical content with them. The empiricists relied on the inductive method, but they could never have certainty of general conclusions. This was unacceptable to Kant because he was searching for a solid foundation upon which science could flourish.

The genius of Immanuel Kant was in how he solved this dilemma. He thought that the problem with both the rationalist project and the empiricist project was that they both thought that they could have knowledge of the objective world as it is in itself. Both schools of thought naïvely assumed that the object of their knowledge was the world. Accordingly, he faulted both

for not understanding the proper object of knowledge and for not adequately accounting for the mind's role in knowing.

To correct this problem, he claimed that the proper object of knowledge is the *phenomena*. The phenomena are the result of the mind's putting together all the elements of knowing. He maintained that both the mind (pure understanding) and the world (sensation) contribute to the construction of the realm of the phenomena. His task was to elucidate the place of both of these faculties in the formation of concepts and judgments. However, in the process of elucidation, Kant placed reason (pure understanding) in one box and sensation in another box.

This dichotomy was latent in his philosophy before he even began his work because it was latent in the modern philosophers before him. Modern empiricist philosophers viewed sensation as disjointed episodes of sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. Since sensations arrive to us in a disorganized fashion, Kant reasoned that there must be something other than sensation that orders sensations. The faculty responsible for producing order from chaos is the pure understanding. In Kant's philosophy, sensation and understanding are two radically different contributions to the phenomena that come together to produce the proper object of knowledge. Ironically, in order to unify the object of knowledge (the phenomena), Kant dichotomized the human faculties that produce that knowledge.

Kant became an agnostic as soon as he located the object of knowledge within the mind. Rather than trying to prove that he could know the outside world, he simply redefined knowledge in order to make "knowing" possible again. Semantically speaking, Kant did think that man can have knowledge; however, he had to obliterate real knowledge in order to make his claim. Because of this, his form of agnosticism is not the overly skeptical form held by the modern nihilist. Instead, he takes away knowledge of the world and replaces it with "knowledge" of the

phenomena. Perhaps it is appropriate to call this kind of agnosticism an optimistic kind of agnosticism because it seeks to replace what it has taken away.

3. *Offer a critique of Kant and a defense of the knowability of God. In your critique show how Kant's gulf between the noumena and phenomena will eventually lead to the rejection of reason.*

### ***Kant and the Theistic Arguments***

Immanuel Kant thought that arguments for the existence of God fell into one of three categories. Logically speaking, all classical arguments could be reduced to a form of the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, or the teleological argument (physico-theological argument). His rejection of the first two arguments was primarily due to his rejection of the ontological argument. He maintained that the cosmological argument depended on the ontological argument, such that a destruction of the ontological argument entailed the destruction of the cosmological argument.

Kant's refutation of the ontological argument stemmed primarily from a single criticism. He denied that existence added anything to the essence of a thing. In other words, the concept "exist" does not contribute to one's knowledge of what that thing is. The defenders of the ontological argument thought that God must have all positive perfections, including the perfection of existence. Kant rejected this because he thought that what a thing is may be properly understood without illicitly adding the property of existence. This meant that, even if the idea of God necessarily entailed the possession of all positive perfections, existence itself could not be listed among those positive perfections.

Kant found the teleological argument to be the most plausible argument, but he rejected this argument as well. Hume had viciously attacked the argument and Kant accepted many of Hume's criticisms. Moreover, even if the argument were sound, it would not yield the God of the Bible. At best, it would imply a grand organizer, but even then the argument would have to

be supplemented with an invalid cosmological argument in order to produce a designer who could cause the existence of the universe.

If it is sound to reject these arguments, then the proposition “God exists” cannot be held as a dogmatic doctrine, but only as a practical postulate. This is, in fact, the route that Kant took. He held that belief in God was necessary for the proper functioning of the practical intellect. In other words, when he turned his attention to the practical intellect, he found it necessary to postulate God in order account for the reasonableness of moral action. In positing God as merely a necessary requirement for objectively right and wrong moral action, he reassigned God’s place in our thinking. In essence, Kant gave philosophical backing to the notion that religion’s primarily usefulness is found in its ability to make people conform to moral standards.

### ***Critique of Kant***

Immanuel Kant’s criticisms of the theistic arguments relied on several problematic starting points, only one of which will be presently explored. *Kant took the principle of causality to be a category of the pure understanding.* As a category of the pure understanding, causality is simply an organizing principle of the mind. The senses present disorganized sensations to the mind and the pure understanding structures that knowledge in order to produce the object of knowledge: namely the phenomena. If this view of causality is true, then one cannot talk about an infinite regress of causes in the world as it is in itself because causality is not occurring outside of the mind. This is why Kant saw the cosmological argument as misguided. The cosmological argument relied on causality as something that occurred in the world, apart from our knowledge of it.

However, Kant is not correct in thinking that causality is merely an organizing feature of the mind. If realism is true, then causality is something that happens outside the mind and is graspable by the mind. Kant took the cosmological argument to be the result of the mind's employment of causality beyond all actual or possible human experience. However, he arrived at the category of causality transcendently because he thought that it was impossible to arrive at necessary statements like "Every event needs a cause" by empirical means. But he arrived at this method and these conclusions because he saw sensations as disorganized raw data.

The moderate realist's rejection of Kant's methods and conclusions is due to a rejection of Kant's view of sensation. Rather than the senses simply presenting disorderly pictures to the mind, the moderate realist insists that organized forms are conveyed to the mind through the senses. If organization may be abstracted from the world, then there is no need to turn inward to the mind to account for the organization of that which is derived empirically. Kant may be correct in thinking that the mind has some organizing potencies, but he went too far in thinking that the world does not contribute anything to our notion of causality.

If the moderate realist is correct, then not only is the cosmological argument back on the table as a viable argument for God's existence, but the entire collection of theistic arguments are back on the table because they are not all based on the ontological argument. If the theistic arguments are to be refuted, they will have to be refuted individually. Kant was able to reduce all arguments to the ontological argument because he thought the necessity in all theistic arguments was given by the mind. However, if one may know the world, then the grounds for the ontological argument and the cosmological argument become distinct. The ontological argument is now based on the idea of God, and the cosmological argument is based on what is

known about the world as it is in itself. Therefore, the rejection of one argument does not entail a rejection of both arguments.

### ***Kant and the Rejection of Reason***

One of the more ironic results of Kant's philosophy is that it naturally leads to the rejection of reason itself. This is ironic because Kant was trying to save reason from the skeptics. He rightly saw that the empirical philosophies of Locke and Hume lead to a pessimistic view of man's knowledge of the world. Kant's response to the Hume's pessimism was to redefine knowledge.

The problem is that Kant's redefining of knowledge fixed a permanent gulf between the world as it is in itself (the *noumena*), and the world as it appears to us (the *phenomena*). He taught that what we know is the thing as it appears to us, and that world as it is in itself cannot be known. This turned knowledge into a kind of psychology. What we know is in the mind. How we know what we know is discovered transcendently by looking at what the mind must be able to do in order for us to have knowledge.

Since everything known is in the mind, one must remain an agnostic concerning the true nature of the world. The world cannot stand as an objective arbiter between two disputants because the mind itself regulates what we know. What if two different minds regulate sensation in different ways? Who is to say that one mind's way of regulating sensation is right and the other wrong? On what objective grounds may one respond to Kant's categories of the pure understanding? If there is disagreement concerning the number of categories or concerning the meaning or functions of the categories, how does one objectively settle the matter?

Given Kant's own system it is impossible to settle these kind's issues objectively. If philosophical issues cannot be objectively arbitrated, then philosophy inevitably leads back to Hume's predicament. Reason must be replaced by descriptive psychology. Some people took this view continued the line of reasoning in the following way: If reason is replaced by psychology, then a person's philosophical view ends up being reduced to that person's biology. If a person is reduced to their biological makeup, then that person's biology is reducible to physics. Ultimately, every aspect of man is determined by the natural laws of physics. In giving up reason, man gave up gave up free will, God, morality, purpose, and fulfillment.