

I. Kant's (1724-1804) Transcendental Project: The Epistemic Critique of Metaphysics and the Harmonization of Modernist Rationalist and Empiricist Theories of Representation: Summary and Relevance to Islamic Philosophy—Part I: Theoretical Philosophy

Prelude:

This short study succinctly focuses on Kant's epistemic critique of metaphysics based on the transcendental conditions of knowledge. Special emphasis will be laid on how Kant harmonizes modernist rational and empiricist arguments for defending mind-dependent representation as foundation for truth claims. The study will demonstrate how Kant's critical project undertakes this defense through an epistemic limiting of the of the domain of possible knowledge (*erkenntnis*).

The first part outlines an overview of Kant's arguments for the epistemic critique of metaphysics in order to defend a new finite ground of theoretical philosophy and hence, science. This part is mostly based on the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The second part of the essay offers an analytic glossary of Kant's key terminology to assist readers in making sense of Kant's philosophical jargon.

The third part of the essay briefly investigates the relevance of Kant's critical project to discussions of limits of knowledge and scope of metaphysical speculations in the Islamic philosophical tradition in the classical and post-classical stages.

Part I: Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Epistemic Critique of Metaphysics

1. Introductory synoptic remark:

The core of what came to be known as Kant's Copernican revolution in the history of philosophy consists in the meaning of what Kant characterizes as the 'transcendental.' The best way to come to terms with the notion of the transcendental is to try to grasp the philosophical canon to which Kant was reacting. In pre-modern philosophy, the main questions of epistemology, aesthetics and axiology (ethics) were all subordinated to metaphysics or ontology—understood in the scholastic tradition in terms of the Aristotelian formulation of metaphysics as the study of substances in terms of the question of being qua being; i.e., what constitutes the being of every substance *qua* its existence—not qua any other quality or conceptual category. This view was challenged in modern philosophy under the influence of the mechanical world view of Galilean and Newtonian physics, the rise of the interest in individualism coeval with the protestant reformation and the birth, in the Western hemisphere, of a new form of formalistic mathematics as thinkers like Husserl have aptly noted. Interest in epistemological questions and the conditions of making certain, truth claims replaced the ontological question as the central Archimedean point of the philosophical inquiry. In this vein, metaphysics and ontology were either subordinated to epistemology (for instance,

Descartes made clear and distinct ideas made by the thinking cogito, as the conditions of truth claims, the foundation of the ontological determination of substances as God, and *res extensa*). Other modernist thinkers completely relegated the importance of existential claims, such as Hume, who explicitly asserts that the predication of existence does not add anything to any proposition. Kant's transcendental turn arrived on the scene to totally subvert this dichotomy between the epistemological and the ontological. As Sebastian Gardner writes: "The traditional metaphysical/ontological question is suspended by Kant—fully real things are not objects that we can intelligibly seek knowledge of—and the sense of the epistemological question revised accordingly. The transcendental question concerning the conditions under which objects are possible for us is therefore not equivalent to a question about the conditions of being or to a question about the conditions under which objects can be known and cannot be resolved back into either of them."¹ By asserting the distinction between Appearance (*Erscheinung*) and the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*)—best discussed and demonstrated in the *Prolegomena*²—Kant defines the new field of the transcendental in terms of the conditions of the possibility of any appearance becoming an object for rational knowing subject. Knowledge claims no longer extend to the essences of things nor does knowledge rely on ontological assertions and then drive the epistemological conditions, categories, and structures from them. Also, the ontological dimension assumes a radically novel character by being restricted to the sphere of Appearances and so being limited to the mutual establishment of validity of judgment between the subject and the object. This is best explained in Second Part of the *Prolegomena*³ and in the *Transcendental Deduction of the Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴ Gardner summarizes some of the key aspects of the 'Deduction' as follows:

First the subject makes the object possible. The relation of representation to object is, Kant says, constituted by the necessary unity of representations, and this unity is in turn identical with the necessary unity of consciousness" (A 109). This means, in the first place, that the conditions under which self-consciousness is possible are the same as those under which representations can be taken to have objects: 'the unity which the object makes necessary can be nothing else than the formal unity of consciousness' (A 105); objects of experience 'must stand under the conditions of the necessary unity of apperception' (A 110). But it also means, Kant is clear, that the unity of objects derives from the unity of consciousness, that the latter is the ground of the former...Second objects make the subject possible, again through a priori synthesis. Because I cannot become aware of my identity directly by intuiting a single continuing thing, consciousness

¹ Sebastian Gardener, *Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 39-40.

² See the 'Preface,' 'Preamble' and §§14-16 of the 'Second Part: How Is Pure Natural Science Possible' in: Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (trans. Gary Hatfield; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4:255-4:264; 4:265-4:275; 4:294-4:296.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, 4:302-4:312.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Allen Wood & Paul Guyer; New York: Cambridge University Press, A84-A130; B129-69).

of self-identity can be achieved only through awareness of myself as the source of the synthetic unity of objects: 'the mind could never think its identity in the manifold of its representations...if it did not have before its eyes the identity of the act, whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension...to a transcendental unity, thereby rendering possible their interconnection' (A 108)."⁵

This mutuality between the conditions of knowledge to which every rational subject is bound and the conditions of the givenness of objects sets Kant's transcendental idealism apart from Berkeley's empirical idealism and other forms of reductive idealism. This mutual validation lays the foundation of the whole idea of synthetic a priori judgments that constitute the core of the transcendental project, as we see in the quote cited above.

2. *The Structure of the Critique of Pure Reason:* Against this background we can understand the structure of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason:

1. The First Part of the 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements in the Critique of Pure Reason' is the 'Transcendental Aesthetic.'⁶ In this part, Kant mainly discusses what he calls the two forms of sensibility: space and time. According to Kant, these are forms according to which any object insofar as it is a phenomenal appearance, which as he demonstrates, is the realm of objects to which any rational subject experience is bound. He calls the former, viz. space, the form of outer sense and the latter, viz. time, the form of the inner sense. The reason is that through space objects in the world are represented in as outside of us in terms of extension qualities, distances, etc. However, as rational subjects we relate to them through change, coming to be and perishing away, motion, etc. These modes of comportment towards the object are only possible by relating them to ourselves. Thus, we internalize the spatially phenomenally given in connection with the I-think that is predicated on any such comportment and so we have time as the form of inner sense. In this wake, Kant explains the *a priori* foundations of mathematics. Mathematical judgments are not analytic *a priori* as rationalists, such as Leibniz and empiricist, such as Hume, argued. Mathematical judgments are synthetic *a priori* expression between forms of sensibility (space and time); hence, mathematics is foundational to all sciences natural, social and human because all these sciences study spatial-temporal phenome, since mathematics is only concerned with the formal static and dynamic mode of givenness of objects in experience—without any reference to intuitive content.

2. The second part of Kant's 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements' in the first *Critique* is the 'Transcendental Logic.'⁷ The First division of the 'Logic' is the 'Transcendental Analytic.' In this part, Kant is mainly concerned with the derivation of the categories of

⁵ Gardener, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, 109.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A19/B33-A49/B73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, A50/B74-A83/B116.

our understanding to which we are necessarily bound as subjects of experience, and which are therefore in line with the forms of sensibility he discussed in the preceding part. In other words, that part is concerned with how objects are phenomenally constituted after being represented through the gridlines of the forms of sensibility. Kant introduces the table of the Logical categories of Judgment which are general and belong abstractly to the rational subject of experience, and then he proceeds to drive from it the Transcendental table of the concepts of the understanding which, while it corresponds to the former, shows how those are mapped against the phenomenal in experience—of course in connection with the forms of sensibility. This demonstrates the point of the mutual establishment of the validity pointed out above and how the subjective and the objective are brought together in experience through the transcendental realm. In this respect, Kant distinguishes between the conditions of the objective ‘Judgments of Experience’ from those of the subjective ‘Judgments of Perception.’ In constructing both judgment, the understanding uses its categories to synthesize intuitions; however, in the former, and through repeated experiments, the use of the categories is better verified. By contrast, the judgments of perception do not verify that the categories have been applied properly. In a judgment of perception, I may say “The cause of the driving-wheel of my car getting warmer after leaving my car parked in the sun for three hours is the sunlight’; in a refined judgment of experience, I would rather apply the category of causality as follows: “The cause of that led to raising the temperature of the steering-wheel of my car are infra-red lights to which it was exposed for three hours.”

3. The second division of Kant’s ‘Transcendental Logic is the ‘Transcendental Dialectic.’⁸ This part is mainly concerned with the power of Reason (*Vernunft*). In the previous two sections, Kant managed to delineate the domain of understanding and demonstrated how its transcendental concepts, to which the judgments of any rational subject in experience is bound, is responsible, exclusively, for making truth claims and hence, for constructing knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) through the synthesis of concepts with intuitions. Nonetheless, reason which always desires to know the unconditioned condition of every condition, or to know the thing in itself, due to its very nature—Kant discusses that in his introduction to the *Critique*. In this context, Kant introduces what he calls “the transcendental ideas of reason” or what may be better called “the transcendent ideas of reason”: The Psychological Idea of the ‘Self’, The Cosmological Idea of the ‘World’ and the Transcendental Ideal of Theology ‘God.’ Those ideas are what constitute the noumenal realm versus the phenomenal realm which is necessarily—and indeed mechanically—governed by the understanding. The transcendent ideas, serve to define the limits of knowledge and simultaneously enable rational subjects to be moral and religious subjects, and not merely knowing subjects, through their regulative use. While the ideas must regulatively be used by reason beyond the legitimate domain (*Gebiet*) of knowledge the understanding spontaneously constructs, they can be used to define the moral and affective realms of the human subjectivity. This is the role, according to Kant,

⁸ Ibid., A293/349-A704/B732.

the ideas of reason should place. They should not be dialectically used in knowledge judgment about spatial-temporal phenomena as they have been used in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy. This dialectical use, as Kant argues, deludes us into metaphysical chimera as he points out.

As indicated above, these ideas are subsumed under three categories: rational psychology (the idea of the self), rational cosmology (the idea of the world) and the rational theology (the idea of God). As Kant demonstrates, the interplay of the three ideas defines the moral realm and helps respond to the false allegations of fatalism, naturalism, and materialism.

Part II: Analytical Glossary of Key Kantian Terminology:

I. Judgments:

A. Definitions of Judgment in *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Judgment as representation:

Judgment is ... the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it. In every judgment there is a concept that holds of many [representations], and that among this many also comprehends a given representation, which is then immediately referred to the object.⁹

We can trace all actions of the understanding back to judgments, so that the understanding in general can be represented as a faculty for judging. For according to what has been said above it is a faculty for thinking. Thinking is cognition through concepts. Concepts, however, as predicates of possible judgments are related to some representation of a still undetermined object.¹⁰

Judgment as the faculty of thinking:

“The faculty for judging (*Vermögen zu urteilen*) is the same as the faculty for thinking (*Vermögen zu denken*).”¹¹

⁹ Ibid., A68/B93.

¹⁰ Ibid., A69/B94.

¹¹ Ibid., A81/B70.

Judgment and Synthesis:

A judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception. That is the aim of the copula **is** in them: to distinguish the objective unity of given representations from the subjective.¹²

[Pure general logic] deals with **concepts, judgments, and inferences**, corresponding exactly to the functions and order of those powers of the mind, which are comprehended under the broad designation of understanding in general... If the understanding in general is explained as the faculty of rules, then the power of judgment is the faculty of **subsuming** under rules, i.e., of determining whether something stands under a given rule (*casus datae legis*) or not.¹³

B. Determinant Theoretical Judgment

What is 'determination' for Kant:

As far as knowledge/experiential claims are concerned determination (*bestimmen*) is the determination of an empirical empty concept through schematic synthesis with an empirical content. In other words, it is the capacity to make ampliative claims about the empirical content (and in doing so constructing knowledge and having experience).

C. Division of Determinant Judgments According to Content

1. **A Priori Judgment:** Defines what is experientially prior; in other words, what in judgment is prior to experience. This, according to Kant, is only realized in experience and not before it—it is not temporal priority.
2. **A Posteriori Judgment:** Defines what is experientially posterior; in other words, what in judgment is posterior to experience and based upon it.

D. Division of Determinant Judgments According to Form

1. **Analytic Judgments:** Analytic judgment are judgments where the semantic dissection of the subject of the judgment yields its predicate and vice versa. The truth value strictly follows the law of contradiction.
2. **Synthetic Judgment:** Synthetic judgments are judgment whose meaning is determined through the synthesis of the meaning of the subject and the predicate. Its truth value is empirical and only follows the law of contradiction as much as empirical verification justifies it.

¹² Ibid., B 141.

¹³ Ibid., A130–132/B170–172

E. Taxonomy of Theoretical Determinant Judgments:

1. **Analytic A Priori Judgment:** For example, “a bachelor is an unmarried man.” Dissecting the concept of bachelor, I immediately realize that the predicate is necessarily connected with the subject since the denial of it would lead to the denial of the subject. Thus, the judgment is **A priori** because in experience I analytically realize that I do not need to have recourse to experience.
2. **Synthetic A Posteriori Judgment:** For example, “The length of the table is two meters.” In order to reach the judgment, I realize in experience that I need to resort to the experience of measuring and through it synthesize the concepts of length, table, and meters to come up with it.
3. **Synthetic A Priori Judgment:** This species of judgment is Kant’s innovative contribution to the theory of judgment. It is a judgment that is necessary because it binds the subject of experience in the sense that the rational subject cannot experience the world of objects except through it but is synthetic because it synthesizes two or more concepts in order to formulate it. For example, “ $5+7=12$ ”; I need to synthesize a pure intuition of 5 formal object and 7 formal objects and put them together in order to see how addition as an operation leads to them being equal to 12 formal objects. So, it is synthetic but a priori in the sense that does not need to resort to any empirical content of experience.

II. Intuitions:

1. **Pure Intuition:** A formal object constructed according to the forms of sensibility without any resort to empirical intuitive content. For example, the form of the triangle versus any drawn triangle.
2. **Empirical Intuition:** A sensually given aspect of a possible object. For example, a red side of a cube. The synthesis of all the empirical intuitions of the six sides of the cube through the condition of the possibility of knowledge according to the categories of the understanding is what makes possible the knowledge of that cube.

III. Categories/Concepts versus Ideas

1. **Categories or Pure Concepts:** The concepts that define the domain of the understanding and according to which any subject of experience can possibly experience a world of objects. They constitute what Kant refers to as the transcendental table of concepts which we realize in experience and which correspond, as mentioned above, to the general logic, concepts.

2. **Transcendental Ideas of Reason:** Ideas that reason project due to its strive for completion beyond the realm of the phenomenal appearance. They constitute the noumenal realm or the thing in itself to which we, as rational subjects, have no epistemological access. There are three noumenal ideas: the idea of the world, the idea of the self, and the idea/ideal of God.
3. **Transcendent versus Immanent:** Transcendent means transcending the sphere of experience, like the idea. Immanent means pertaining to and necessarily bound to experience like the concepts of the understanding.

Part II: The Relevance of Kant's Epistemic Critique of Metaphysics to Islamic Philosophy

The relevance of Kant's critique of the boundaries of logical and metaphysical rational claims based on the conditions of legitimate knowledge are numerous. The Ash'arī commitment to the critique of idealist and speculative rational claims based on the limits of finite knowledge could be seen as a forerunner of Kant's interest. Al-Ghazālī's critique of the logical and theoretical claims of Peripatetic and Neo-Platonic metaphysics in the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* is a good instance of this Asharī interest. For instance, in the fourth 'Introduction' to the *Incoherence*, al-Ghazālī asserts the importance of distinguishing the domain of judgments pertaining to the physics versus that of metaphysics praising the importance of Aristotle's physics and censuring the unwarranted claims of his metaphysics. While al-Ghazālī, like al-Rāzī and many Ash'arī thinkers after them, are committed to a demonstrative view of science, they clearly distinguish between demonstrative judgments about finite phenomena in space and time versus judgments about concepts/ideas transcendent^{al} to the domain of physics, like God's relationship to the world. Many instances attest to this tendency in the four refutations al-Ghazālī put forward of Peripatetic arguments for the eternity of the world. In this vein al-Ghazālī, makes arguments about how temporal references are related to finite experience and hence, cannot be extended logically or metaphysically to claims about the causal claims related to the relationship between God and the world. Similarly, in the third and fourth refutations of the eternity of the world, al-Ghazālī makes it clear that modal categories are mind-dependent operators. In the application of these categories to actual objects in experience, a clear distinction must be made between their use in a formal abstract sense, versus, their use when applied to finite material objects. This distinction anticipates the distinction between the formal use and the transcendental use of logical categories in application to actual objects in space and time.

Similarly, Averroes clearly explains in his commentary on Book λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that both Avicenna and Alexander of Aphrodisias were incorrect in confusing the role of metaphysics and the role of physics. The study of substances in, for instance God or the unmoved mover as eternal non-sensible substance is different in physics than it is in the metaphysics. Demonstration (*burhān*) is allowed in metaphysics

since it deals with God or the Necessary Existent as a purely rational idea on a strictly abstract level. In physics, God is posited as a ground for the causal, conditional connections between phenomena in space and time. However, God, as an unmoved mover, cannot be demonstrated based on physical induction. The interest of al-Ghazālī and Averroes persist in the metaphysics of later post-classical Muslim philosophers like Isma'il Gelenbevi (d. 1791).