

Rationalism

Immanuel Kant (philosopher, author)

Was Kant a rationalist?

5 ANSWERS



P.R. Mercado, Contemplative Debaucher

Written May 29, 2012

Immanuel Kant was a transcendental idealist, which means that his philosophy posits the existence of a priori primary intuitions through which unity is imposed upon external reality, i.e. noumenon is parsed by the subject's intuitions, such as space, time, and causality, so that they become phenomenon.

This implies a synthesis of both rationalism and empiricism, insofar as rationalism was shown to be empty if it did not possess a posteriori experience, and itself possessed limits, and empiricism, or the study of the outside world through the sense, requires not merely passage through the sense but also the arranging and parsing power of the intuitions and other faculties of Reason.

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Warren M Tang, language teacher/researcher, father. Zen Buddhist, farmer.

Written Feb 24, 2015

Rationalism believes that **Reason** is the only faculty needed to know the world. Sense experience (**Human and Animal Senses**) is ignored as imperfect by rationalists.

In *The Critique* he starts by talking about space and time as necessary prerequisites so therefore sensory experience is also necessary.

So, in this sense (no pun intended), he can never be a Rationalist.

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Kent Palmer, The Fragmentation of Being and the Path beyond the Void.

Written May 30, 2012

Classically Kant's Critical philosophy goes beyond the duality of empiricism and rationalism of the philosophies to which he was referring that was the context of his work. He believed that Reason produced phantasms on its own without the input of experience. So he believed there was limits to the usefulness of Reason, but still thought that if Reason was used properly, eg. for science, then there was great benefit in it. He was looking for an alternative to either induction (empiricism) and deduction (rationality). It was not till much later that Peirce produced abduction as the third alternative that allowed one to formulate hypothesis in science that would allow the connection between theory and experimentation through the projection of hypotheses. Without that idea, Kant basically held that we were presented with singular a priori syntheses that bridged the gap between a priori deduction and a posteriori induction. These a prior syntheses were the projection of spacetime and the categories. It was these projections that allowed us to locate things in spacetime in our experience and to identify objects causally related in experience and to make out of that an objective story. Basically it was recognizing the limits of the possibility of experience that allowed one to assume a stance toward transcendental realism. His position was that only though transcendental idealism could view of transcendental realism be achieved. Basically we have been operating in science within the boundaries that Kant set ever since.

Kant was a rationalist that recognized the limits of what reason could accomplish on its own. And specified that only reason operating on the basis of experience could be trusted to tell us something important about the world in which we live, i.e. something scientific.

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Paul Pardi, Philosophy News Service

Written Jul 17, 2012

My take on Kant was that he was firmly working within the rationalist framework but developed a philosophical model that pushed post-Kantian philosophy out of that framework and established the groundwork for postmodern thought. He argued that reason has limits but did so using the tools of rationalist thought.

Kant was one of those transitional thinkers that was a practitioner of the tools of his age but developed a new paradigm that changed just about everything after him.

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Anonymous

Written May 26, 2014

I know it's been a long time since this thread was open, but I'd just like to offer a reply in less technical language.

The rationalists who preceded Kant (mainly Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz) believed, in one way or another, that the world, or some aspect of it, was irreducibly mental. The British empiricists, on the

other hand (mainly Locke and Hume), put more emphasis on our experience of the world and on the impressions and ideas we get from that experience.

The rationalists, you could say, start from the "inside," the empiricists from the "outside." This is too simple a way to state the difference, though, because ideas are generally thought to be mental, so there's a mental component to empiricism. Likewise, the rationalists don't wish to deny the reality of the world we live in, at some level. It's the same world for you as it is for me; we just have different, limited perspectives on it.

Descartes was a dualist (saying that both the mental and the physical are real). Spinoza was a parallelist (both the mental and the physical are real, and they track each other in a pre-established harmony, with God atop the whole scene). Leibniz was perhaps the most aggressive rationalist of the bunch. He thought that the most fundamental components of the world, "monads," are mental entities.

But none of Kant's predecessors, whether rationalist or empiricist, was concerned with (or even aware of) Kant's skeptical problem, which took Hume's empiricism as a starting point. Kant said that Hume had awakened him from his "dogmatic [that is, rationalist] slumber." Hume had raised questions about things the rationalists took for granted, such as our knowledge that event A *causes* event B.

Kant bought a lot of what Hume had to say, as far as it went. (The difference between Hume and Kant is probably less than is commonly thought.) But Kant was struck by a new skeptical problem about the origins of our experience: we can't simply say we are experiencing the world as it really is in and of itself, because all our experience involves our senses and our cognitive abilities. These are faculties we're born with, and we can never take a step back and, so to speak, view the world without them.

Our knowledge of the world is mediated by these faculties. Kant's big inference from this fact is that the world we think we know must just be the world *as seen (as heard, as smelled, as tasted, as felt) and as processed* through our cognitive apparatus. Apart from this cluster of in-between steps, we can't make claims about what the world is like ultimately. When it comes to the world of "things in themselves" (the *noumenal* world), if we're being honest we have to admit that we're totally ignorant.

It's often said that Kant unified or synthesized rationalism and empiricism, but in what way? I'd put it like this: We have objective knowledge of the world of the senses (the *phenomenal* world), but it is objective only within the context of the senses and the kinds of thinking and cognition we happen to be capable of.

The phenomenal world is more or less what Hume argues for as the *only* world, because Hume doesn't have Kant's skeptical problem. But behind or beneath the phenomenal world is the ultimately-real, or noumenal, world not represented through our senses. We can only think about *that* world in an empty, speculative way. We can't infer what it might be like, since we're trapped in our phenomenal world of sense and cognition.

What has happened to the rationalist side of the picture?

First, Kant integrates human rationality as a still-essential aspect of the phenomenal world that we cognize and reason about. We do think. Questions about the "mental" as opposed to the "physical" still have all their philosophical allure. But second, Kant debunks the transcendent claims of rationalism by showing that ultimate reality can't be purely mental, nor can it be accessible to reason alone; if it were, we could have knowledge about the noumenal world.

This is a very rough sketch of Kant's position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

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