

KANT by Manuel Velasquez

If Hume's radical empiricism is accepted, then we can never hope to learn the truth about ourselves, God, or the universe. Kant claimed to have found a way around Hume's skepticism and who, in doing so, revolutionized our views about knowledge and truth. This is the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Immanuel Kant is regarded by many as the greatest of all philosophers, especially in the field of epistemology. His unique contribution was to argue that the world of our experience is a world that our own mind constructs. Our mind can indeed know the truth about the world around us, he argued, because that world is constructed by the mind itself. We showcase Kant in this chapter because of the radical and profound contributions he made to our conceptions of knowledge and truth. But reading Kant also allows us to see how his revolutionary views about knowledge influenced his views on morality and God. Kant is a good example of how our epistemological views affect our positions on other philosophical issues.

Although he revolutionized philosophy, Kant lived a very ordinary life. He spent all of his eighty years (1724–1804) in the small town in which he was born: Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia). There he grew up, and there he went to college, supporting himself in part by his winnings from playing pool with other students. Kant remained in Königsberg after graduating, eventually becoming a teacher in the local university. As a teacher, Kant came to schedule his activities so precisely that neighbors used to set their clocks when he passed their houses on his daily afternoon walk. Although Kant remained a bachelor all of his life, he had a number of close women friends and had a reputation for being a funny, witty, and entertaining host at the dinner parties he frequently had.

The Problem of Synthetic A Priori Knowledge

Although Kant never left his birthplace, his books put him in touch with all the intellectual currents of the eighteenth century. He was well acquainted with the tremendous new discoveries in the natural sciences and was especially impressed with Newton's discoveries in physics. But when Kant came across the writings of Hume, these discoveries seemed threatened. For Hume argued that our so-called scientific knowledge is not rationally justified. In particular, he pointed out that the cause-and-effect laws of science go beyond the evidence scientists have for them. Scientists observe a few times that certain events have been conjoined in the past, and they conclude that those kinds of events must always cause each other in the future. But how do scientists know that events must always be causally connected in the future as in the past?

Kant realized that Hume's objection was devastating. If Hume was correct, then all our scientific knowledge was unjustified. Moreover, Kant soon discovered that other areas of knowledge also contained judgments that went beyond the evidence of our senses:

I openly confess that my recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction. I was far from following him in the conclusions at which he arrived. . . .

I therefore first tried to see whether Hume's objection could not be put into a general form. I soon found that the concept of the connection of cause and effect was by no means the only concept by which the understanding thinks the connection of things a priori [that is, independently of experience].¹

Kant found three areas of knowledge in which our statements about the world go beyond the evidence provided by our sensory experience:

1. In the sciences of geometry and arithmetic. For example: “The shortest distance between two points must always be a straight line.” “The square of the hypotenuse of a right-angle triangle must always equal the sum of the squares of the other two sides.” “The sum of 798 and 857 must always equal 1655.”

2. In the natural sciences. For example: “All events must always have a cause.”

3. In philosophical metaphysics. For example: “There must exist a God that causes the universe.” Kant termed these synthetic statements to indicate that each gives us genuine information about the world around us. For example, geometry tells us that the world will always obey the law that the square of the hypotenuse of right triangles equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides, and the natural sciences tell us that all events must have a cause. By contrast, Kant used the term analytic to refer to statements that merely give us information about the meanings of words, such as “Bachelors are unmarried males.”

Kant also called the statements in the list a priori, pointing out two features of such statements: First, as Hume said, these statements go beyond what we can establish through our sensory experience. For example, we could never check all right triangles, yet geometry says the square of their hypotenuses always equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Second, we establish that these statements must be true by relying on our thought processes. The laws of geometry, for example, are established in the mind. A priori statements, then, are necessary and universal: They state something that we know by mental processes must be true and that always holds. By contrast, Kant used the term a posteriori to refer to statements that can be established by sensory observations, such as “This room is empty” and “The sky above is blue.” A posteriori statements are neither necessary nor universal. But how can we know a priori propositions about the world without going outside of our minds? For example, how do we know that the outer world must always obey the laws of geometry when we can establish these laws completely within the mind? How do we know that every event must always have a cause when we have not examined every event? Is Hume correct in saying that such synthetic a priori statements are unjustified?

Now the proper problem of pure reason is contained in the question: How are a priori synthetic judgments possible? . . . Among philosophers, David Hume came nearest to envisaging this problem, but still he was very far from conceiving it with sufficient definiteness and universality. He occupied himself exclusively with the synthetic proposition regarding the connection of an effect with its cause, and he believed himself to have shown that such an a priori proposition is entirely impossible. . . . If he had envisaged our problem in all its universality, . . . he would then have recognized that, according to his own argument, pure mathematics, which certainly contains a priori synthetic propositions, would also not be possible. . . .

In the solution of our above problem, then, we are at the same time deciding as to the possibility of the employment of pure reason in establishing and developing all those sciences which contain a priori knowledge of objects, and have therefore to answer the questions: How is pure mathematics possible? How is pure science of nature possible? . . . How is metaphysics . . . possible? and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.²

But Kant noticed something Hume had missed. It is true that all we receive from the senses are the sensations within us. Yet we do not experience a mere display of sensations within us. When I open my eyes, I do not experience changing sensations of light and colors playing in my vision. Instead, I see objects that appear to be outside of me. For example, when I look down, I see not a squarish blob of whiteness but the white page of a book a few inches away. Somehow, the sensations (colors and shapes) that continually play in my vision appear to me as objects outside of me.

The same is true of my other senses. They, too, provide only a stream of sensations within me. But I experience them as belonging to particular objects outside of me. For example, I do not merely sense ringing, booming, rustling sound sensations in my hearing. Instead, I hear noises that seem to come from some particular place in the room: perhaps a rustling noise from the pages of my book or a voice from a particular person in front of me. Each sensation

of sound, feel, and smell appears to be the sound, feel, and smell of objects outside me.

Kant argued that somehow our mind takes these many separate sensations and organizes them into objects that appear to be outside ourselves, in space. It is as if my mind carries within it a three-dimensional representation of space, and every sensation is given a position in this mental image of space.

In fact, Kant argues, we could not experience objects as being outside of us without this three-dimensional representation of space in our minds. Even to perceive objects as outside of ourselves, we already have to know what outside is—that is, we have to know what space is. Moreover, although we can imagine an empty space without objects, we cannot imagine an object that is not in space. This also proves, according to Kant, that our mental representation of space has to be in our minds prior to our experience of objects:

Space is not an empirical concept, which has been derived from outer experiences. For in order that certain sensations be referred to something outside me (that is, to something in another region of space from that in which I find myself), and, similarly, in order that I may be able to represent them as outside and alongside one another, and . . . as in different places, the representation of space also must be presupposed. The representation of space cannot, therefore, be . . . obtained from the relations of outer . . . [experience]. On the contrary, this outer experience is itself possible at all only through that representation.

Space is a necessary a priori representation, which underlies all outer perceptions. We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think of it as empty of objects. It must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of . . . [sensory experiences], and not as . . . [something] dependent on them.⁴

Space, then, is merely a mental representation that helps us organize our sensations so that they appear to us to be objects outside of us. There is nothing more to space than this mental image. Space does not exist independently of us outside our mind:

Space does not represent any property of things in themselves, nor does it represent them in their relation to one another. That is to say, space does not represent any determination that attaches to objects themselves and which remains even when abstraction has been made of all the subjective conditions of perception.

It is therefore solely from the human stand-point that we can speak of space, of extended objects, etc. . . . This predicate can be ascribed to things only insofar as they appear to us, that is, only to objects of sensibility [of the senses].⁵

Kant's view—that space does not exist outside the mind—may seem strange. But his view provides the key to one of his major questions: How do we know that the laws of geometry must hold true for all objects in the world even though these laws are established within the mind? Kant's solution is simple and brilliant.

First, he argues, the laws of geometry are nothing more than the laws of the mental image of space that is in our minds. That is why we can establish the laws of geometry by simply examining our inner image of space without having to examine the outer world.

Second, Kant points out, the mind puts every object we experience into this mental representation of space. All our sensations are organized by the mind into objects within its representation of space so that they appear to us as if they exist in space outside. Every object we experience will have to appear within this mental image and therefore must obey its laws. Because the laws of geometry are the laws of our mental representation, every object we experience will have to obey the laws of geometry.

Thus, Kant provides a solution to the problem that had puzzled philosophers for centuries: How do we know without going outside our minds that all objects obey the laws of geometry? The only solution, Kant held, is that we establish the laws of geometry completely a priori by simply looking within our own minds' three-dimensional image of space. We know all the objects we perceive will obey these laws because the mind places all objects within this mental image so that for us they are in space.

Using similar arguments, Kant showed that all our experience must obey the laws of arithmetic. The laws of

arithmetic, he said, are the laws of time: They are laws about how units follow one after another, just like numbers follow one after another.

But where do we get our image of time? Just as we organize sensations by inserting them in space, we also organize them by inserting them in time. So, time is also one of the structures of the mind. Time is like a long filing system we use to organize our sensations by placing each one at a certain point in the system. Because the image of time is within us, we can know its laws just by examining it. And because the mind makes everything we experience appear to be in time, everything must obey the laws of time. And these laws are the laws of arithmetic.

So the synthetic a priori statements of geometry and arithmetic are justified. Although these statements give us information about the structure of the world, we do not have to examine every object in the world to know these statements hold true of everything we will ever perceive. The synthetic a priori statements of geometry and arithmetic can be established by simply examining our inner images of time and space. Space and time are merely structures within the mind in which we position the objects our mind makes out of the sensations it receives so that to our minds these objects exist in space and time.

Our Unified Mind Must Organize Sensations into Changing Objects

But Kant also had to show that the synthetic a priori statements of the natural sciences were justified. In particular, he had to show that the causal laws of science were justified. How did he do this? Kant's solution to this problem is remarkably similar to his solution to the problem of geometry and mathematics. Kant points out that the mind organizes its sensations so that they appear to us as objects that change through time. How does the mind do this? The mind organizes its sensations into such independent objects by using twelve rules or "categories." The most important of these rules or categories turns out to be the basic law underlying the natural sciences: that all perceived events must have a cause. So, just as we know that every object we experience will be organized in space and time, we can also be sure that every event we experience will be causally related to other events. How exactly did Kant prove this? Kant's argument is difficult, but with a bit of work it can be understood.

Kant first points out that our sensations appear to us to be of independent objects that last through time and that change. For example, during the time I look at a book, I believe that I continue seeing the same book. My sensations appear to me to be of an object that lasts through time. And as I turn its pages, the same book appears to me to be changing.

To make my sensations appear to be changing objects, Kant says, the mind has to bring its sensations together in three ways. First, the mind has to receive or "apprehend" the many separate sensations provided by the senses. For example, each separate moment I look at the changing white book, my senses produce new and different sensations of white color. To keep perceiving the book, then, I have to keep receiving all of these separate sensations. Second, the mind has to remember the past sensations. For example, in perceiving the book, I have to keep in mind the past sensations of white as I receive new sensations. If I continually forgot the past sensations, it would be as though a new book were continually appearing before me each moment. Third, the mind has to connect or relate the later sensations to the earlier ones. That is, the mind has to recognize that the earlier sensations and the later ones are sensations of the same object. For example, I must recognize that my later, slightly different sensations of the book are sensations of the same book I saw earlier. Otherwise, the earlier and later sensations would appear to me as many separate images

of different books floating in my memory. This recognition or connection of earlier and later sensations is what finally makes me believe that I am seeing the same book but that it is changing through time:

Each perception [of an object] is made up of a multiplicity [of sensations]. . . . In order to change this multiplicity [of separate sensations] into a single thing [an object], it is necessary first to run through and collect the multiplicity [of sensations]. This act I call the “synthesis of apprehension.” . . .

But if I were always to drop out of thought the earlier sensations . . . , and did not reproduce them [in my memory] while advancing to the next ones, then a complete perception [of an object] would never form. . . . The synthesis of apprehension is therefore inseparably connected with [what I will call] the “synthesis of reproduction.”

[Moreover,] if we were not conscious that what we are thinking of now is the same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of perceptions would be in vain. Each perception would . . . be a new one. . . . The multiplicity could never form a whole, because it would not have that unity that [my] consciousness alone can give it [by recognizing that what I perceive now is the same as what I perceived earlier].⁶

But the mind’s ability to collect sensations into unified objects that change through time would not be possible unless the mind itself also lasted through time. For example, suppose that I am looking at a book and receiving new sensations of white color each passing moment. If the later sensations are to be connected to the earlier ones, the same mind has to receive the earlier and the later ones. This means my mind has to last through time: It has to last through the earlier and later sensations. Thus, the process of receiving, remembering, and connecting sensations into objects that last through time requires a mind that also lasts through time. The unification of sensations into objects requires a “unified” mind that connects sensations:

[But] there can be in us no kind of knowledge, no connection or unifying of one bit of knowledge with another, unless there is a unified consciousness which precedes all the data of perception. . . . This pure original un- changing consciousness I call “transcendental apperception.”⁷

The mind, then, is a single consciousness that re- mains the same through time, contrary to Hume’s claim that the mind is only a bundle of disconnected sensations. In fact, Kant argues, the mind must connect its sensations because it must bring all these separate sensations into itself:

If we want to discover the internal foundation of this unifying of perceptions . . . , we must begin with pure [transcendental] apperception. Sensations would be nothing to us, and would not concern us in the least, if they were not received into our [unified] consciousness. . . . Knowledge is impossible in any other way. We are conscious a priori of our own enduring identity with regard to all perceptions we know. Our enduring identity is a necessary condition for us to have these perceptions. For perceptions could not be perceptions of anything for me unless they . . . could at least be connected together into [my] one consciousness. This principle stands firm a priori, and may be called the “transcendental principle of the unity” of all the multiplicity of our perceptions (and therefore also of sensation).⁸

What Kant is saying here is that our mind connects and unifies its sensations because it has to. It has to connect them together because the many sensations my senses produce must all enter one mind: my own single mind. But to enter into my one mind, they have to be brought together into one.

As Kant says, this point—that the mind has to unify its sensations—is crucial. If the mind has to unify its sensations into objects, then we know that the connections the mind imposes on objects are necessary.

What kinds of connections does the mind make between objects? Kant argues that there are twelve kinds of connections or “categories” that the mind must impose on its sensations. Only the most important of these, the relation of cause and effect, concerns us here.

Causality Is in the World as We Experience It

Kant tries to show that the mind must impose causal relationships on its sensations if they are to appear as

objects that change independently of us. Kant begins his argument by pointing out that changes we perceive can follow one another in an order that I can determine or in an order that is fixed. But changes whose order I determine are not changes in independent objects outside of me; they are merely changes in me. For example, if I look first at the roof of a house and then at the windows, the order of my perceptions is determined by my own will. I can change the order by simply looking first at the windows and then at the roof. So, these changes in my perceptions are merely changes in me. They are not independent changes in the objects outside of me. On the other hand, changes whose order is fixed or “necessary” are changes that I see as changes in independent objects outside of me. For example, if I see a boat being carried down a river by the current, I will first perceive the boat upriver, and then I will perceive the boat downstream. The order of these perceptions cannot be determined by my own will: I cannot change the order. So, I know that the changes in my perceptions of the boat are changes in the objects outside of me, not merely changes in me. And I know this only because the order of these changes is fixed by necessary causal laws and not by me. If our sensations are to appear as objects that change independently of ourselves, they must be related by causal laws:

The Principle of the succession of time, according to the Law of Causality: All changes take place according to the law of connection between cause and effect.

Proof: The apprehension of the multiplicity of phenomena is always successive. The perceptions of the parts [of objects] follow one upon another. . . . Thus, for instance, the apprehension of the multiplicity in the phenomenal appearance of a house that stands before me is successive. . . . Every apprehension of an event is [similarly] . . . a perception following on another perception. But as this applies to all synthesis of apprehension, as in the phenomenal appearance of a house, that apprehension would not be different from any other.

But I observe that if in a phenomenon which contains an event I call the antecedent state of perception A, and the subsequent B, B can only follow A in my apprehension, while the perception A can never follow B, but can only precede it. I see, for instance, a ship gliding down a stream. My perception of its place below follows my perception of its place higher up in the course of the stream, and it is impossible in the apprehension of this phenomenon that the ship should be perceived first below and then higher up. We see, therefore, that the order in the succession of perceptions in our apprehension is here determined, and our apprehension regulated by that order. In the former example of a house my perceptions could begin with the apprehension of the roof and end in the basement, or begin below and end above; they could apprehend the manifold of the empirical perception from right to left or from left to right. There was therefore no determined order in the succession of these perceptions. . . . [But] in the apprehension of an event there is always a rule which makes the order of successive perceptions necessary. . . . Thus only can I be justified in saying, not only of my apprehension, but of the phenomenon itself, that there exists in it a succession, which is the same as to say that I cannot arrange the apprehension otherwise than in that very order. . . .

If therefore experience teaches us that something happens, we must always presuppose that something precedes on which it follows by rule. Otherwise I could not say of the object that it followed, because its following in my apprehension only, without being determined by rule in reference to what precedes, would not justify us in admitting an objective following. It is therefore always with reference to a rule by which phenomena as they follow, that is as they happen, are determined by an antecedent state, that I can give an objective character to my subjective synthesis (of apprehension); nay, it is under this supposition only that an experience of anything that happens becomes possible.⁹

Thus, Kant proved that all events in the world we experience have to be causally connected. Let us review the steps of his argument. First, Kant showed that the mind connects (“synthesizes”) its sensations into objects that last through time. It does this through apprehension, reproduction, and recognition. Second, this connecting of sensations into objects shows that our mind is unified. Third, because the mind is unified, it must connect its sensations together. Fourth, one of the connections the mind must impose on its sensations is the connection of cause and effect, for our sensations would not seem to us to be sensations of independently changing objects unless they were causally connected to one another.

Hume, then, was wrong. Hume said that the laws of the sciences are not well founded, in particular the laws of causality: We have no evidence that events must always be causally connected to one another. However, Kant proved that all events we experience in the world, outside of us must be connected by causal laws. For that world is a world that the mind puts together out of its sensations by bringing these sensations together into a single mind. To bring sensations together so that they seem to be sensations of independently changing objects, the mind must connect

them by causal relations. The mind, that is, must use the category of cause and effect to connect our sensations so that they appear to us as the independently changing world of trees, oceans, mountains, and stars that we see around us. Only by recognizing that we construct the world in our mind in this way, Kant says, can we escape Hume's skepticism about the causal laws of science.

Kant called the world as it appears in our minds the phenomenal world and distinguished it from the noumenal world. The noumenal world is the collection of things as they exist in themselves apart from our perception of them in our mind. Clearly, we can never know what the noumenal world is like: All we can know is the phenomenal world of things as they appear to us after they have been organized by the mind.

What about Hume's skepticism about God? Reluctantly, Kant agreed that we cannot prove that there is a God. The cosmological proofs for God, Kant pointed out, say that God must exist because God had to "cause" the universe. But the only causality in the universe is the causality our own minds put there; the concept of a cause is merely a category of the mind, nothing more. So, we cannot appeal to causality to prove that God exists. Other metaphysical arguments for the existence of God, Kant held, make similar illegitimate use of concepts that are merely categories of the mind. None of these metaphysical arguments are valid proofs of the existence of God.

But Kant's views on God do not end here. Kant attempted to show that the existence of God should be accepted on the basis of our moral commitments. To understand this aspect of Kant, we must examine his views on morality.

Two Versions of the Categorical Imperative of Morality

Kant argued that a person is moral to the extent that he or she follows a principle he called the categorical imperative: "I ought never to act unless I can will my maxim to serve as a universal law." For Kant, a "maxim" is the reason a person has for doing something. And a maxim "serves as a universal law" if every person consistently acts on that reason. So, the categorical imperative is the moral principle that whenever I do something, my reasons for doing it must be reasons that I would (and could) be willing to have everyone act on. For example, suppose that I wonder whether I should help the needy, and my reason for being reluctant to help them is simply that I do not want to take the trouble. According to Kant, I must ask myself this: Would I be willing to have everyone refrain from helping others when they did not want to take the trouble? Clearly, I would not be willing to have everyone do this because I myself might need the help of others in some situations. Therefore, it would be wrong for me to refrain from helping those in need. Kant claims that sometimes it is absolutely impossible for everyone to act on the immoral reasons we are tempted to act on. In such cases, it is absolutely immoral to act on those reasons:

The ordinary reason of humanity in its practical judgments agrees perfectly with this, and always has in view the principle here suggested. For example, suppose that I ask myself: Would it be morally permissible for me to make a promise

I do not intend to keep when I am in trouble? . . . The shortest and most unerring way for me to discover whether a lying promise is consistent with duty is to ask myself: Could I will to have my maxim (that is, the principle, "I will get out of my difficulties with false promises") serve as a universal law, for myself as well as for others; and would I be able to say to myself, "Everyone may make a false promise when he finds himself in a difficulty that he cannot escape in any other way"? As soon as I ask myself these questions, I become aware that although I might desire to lie, I could not will to have lying become a universal law. For if lying promises became the rule, there would soon be no promises at all. There would be no promises because people would stop believing each other when they said that they intended to keep their promises; and if one person over hastily accepted the lying promise of another, that person would soon learn to do the same thing to others. So as soon as my maxim became a universal law, it would destroy itself.

I do not, therefore, need any great genius to see what I have to do so that my will can be morally good. Even if I have very little experience of the world, even if I cannot prepare for all contingencies ahead of time, all I have to ask myself is this: Could you will to have your maxim serve as a universal law? If not, then you should not act on that maxim.¹⁰

How does Kant argue for the categorical imperative? For Kant, moral right and wrong depend on the interior motives on which the person acts. Kant argues that to the degree that a person is interiorly motivated merely by self-interest or by the pleasure he gets from an action, the action “has no moral worth.” A person’s behavior has moral worth only to the extent that the person is motivated by “duty”— that is, by the belief that all human beings ought to act this way. Consequently, an action has moral worth only to the extent that the person is motivated by reasons that he or she feels everyone else can and ought to act on.

Kant claimed that the categorical imperative could be expressed in a second way: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” Never treat people only as means but always also as ends. By this, Kant means that we should never treat people only as tools to be manipulated or forced into serving our interests. Instead, we should always treat people as ends—that is, as free, rational persons who must be given the opportunity to decide for themselves whether they will go along with our plans:

A man who is thinking of making a lying promise will realize that he would be using others merely as means because he would not be letting them participate in the goal of the actions in which he involves them. For the people I would thus be using for my own purposes would not have consented to be treated in this way and to that extent they would not have participated in the goals to be attained by the action. Such violations of the principle that our humanity must be respected as an end in itself are even clearer if we take examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. It is obvious that the person who violates such rights is using people merely as means without considering that as rational beings they should be esteemed also as ends; that is, as beings who must be able to participate in the goals of the actions in which they are involved with him.¹¹

According to Kant, this second way of expressing the categorical imperative is really equivalent to the first. The first version says that what is morally right for me must be morally right for others, or that everyone must be treated the same. The second version says that just as I give myself the opportunity to decide what I will do, I must also give others the same opportunity or, again, that everyone must be treated the same. However, unlike the first version, the second version emphasizes that morality requires us to respect the freedom of all rational persons.

The Moral Argument for God’s Existence

Kant points out that if the categorical imperative defines morality, then morality and happiness do not necessarily coincide. For the morally good person is the one who follows the categorical imperative even when this is not in her self-interest and even when she takes no pleasure in doing so. Consequently, morally good people often suffer and fail to get what is in their self-interest. On the other hand, evil people who consistently pursue their self-interest and pleasure, even by taking advantage of others, often prosper. In this world, good people who deserve happiness often do not receive it, whereas evil people who do not deserve it do receive it.

This mismatch between morality and happiness is wrong, Kant holds, and all of us believe that it ought not to be this way. In fact, we feel an obligation to seek a world where the good prosper and the evil do not, and our sense of obligation requires us to believe that such a world is possible. Kant calls such a perfect world a *summum bonum*, the supremely good state of affairs. But, he says, only a good God could bring such a perfect world into existence (perhaps in another life). So, if we believe such a world is possible (and we have an obligation to believe it is), we must assume that God exists. Thus, although we cannot prove that God exists, morality forces us to assume so:

We ought to endeavor to promote the *summum bonum*, which, therefore must be possible. Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature itself, and containing the principle of this connection, namely the exact harmony of happiness with morality, is also postulated....The *summum bonum* is possible in the world only on the supposition of a Supreme

Being having a causality corresponding to moral character. Now a being that is capable of acting on the conception of laws is an intelligence (a rational being), and the causality of such a being according to this conception of laws is his will; therefore the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the summum bonum, is a being which is the cause of nature by intelligence and will, consequently its author, that is God.... Now it was seen to be a duty for us to promote the summum bonum. Consequently it is not merely allowable, but it is a necessity connected with duty as a requisite, that we should presuppose the possibility of this summum bonum. And as this is possible only on condition of the existence of God, it inseparably connects the supposition of this with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.¹²

Thus, Kant shifted the argument for God's existence away from metaphysics, where every other philosopher had placed it. Other philosophers had assumed that God's existence had to be proved by relying on metaphysical concepts such as the concept of causality, and such arguments had been ruthlessly demolished by the skepticism of Hume. Kant tried to show that these arguments had to fail because metaphysical concepts are merely categories in our minds; they can tell us nothing about things as they are in themselves. Instead, Kant claimed, we must believe in God on the basis of our moral commitments: Morality forces us to hold that God exists. For morality tells us that good people must be rewarded and evil ones punished, and only a God could bring about such a summum bonum. By thus placing belief in God in the realm of morality, Kant hoped, belief would be secure from the attacks of Humean skepticism.

Despite his very ordinary life, then, Kant's philosophy was truly revolutionary. Kant taught us to believe that the world conforms to the categories of the mind, whereas we had always assumed that the mind must conform its categories to the world. He taught us that morality requires us to respect the freedom of others whether or not this pleases us and, consequently, that being moral and being happy may not coincide in this life. And he taught us to believe in God on the basis of morality instead of on the basis of metaphysical arguments. These were truly new ways of looking at the universe, new ways of thinking about ourselves and the world in which we live. It is hard to imagine a more revolutionary view of our situation.

Endnotes

1 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 8.

2 & 3 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1929; original work published 1781), B19, B22.

4 Kant, *Critique*, B38, B39. (Note that the word intuition has been replaced here and elsewhere in the translations that follow with the much more familiar term perception.)

5 *Ibid.*, B42–B43.

6 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik Reinen Vernunft [Critique of Pure Reason]* (Leipzig, Germany: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1981), A99–A103. Translation by Manuel Velasquez.

7 *Ibid.*, A107.

8 *Ibid.*, A116

9 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Friedrich Max Müller (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 774, 155–160.

10 Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals]*, in *Immanuel Kant Werkausgabe*, vol. 7, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt, Germany: Insel Verlag Wiesbaden, 1956), 28–30. Translation by Manuel Velasquez.

11 *Ibid.*, 62.

12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Abbott (London: Longmans Green, 1927), 220–222.