

# HUME vs KANT



## Metaphysics and Causality

- In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume formalised the Problem of Induction (how we justify our growth of knowledge—where knowledge comes from and how we come to accept facts as real laws of science). While he was the first to formalise it, questions of a similar nature were asked by Pyrrhonists in the Hellenistic period
- Hume believed in causal necessity, i.e. the idea that knowledge requires there to be an interconnected set of ideas—and used the term causality to describe a necessary connection between events
- He felt that causal necessity had no empirical or logical foundation and was an illusion; how one experiences the world is conditioned by the world and how we perceive it—a causal connection could never be proven and is a result of our impressions of constantly conjoined events
- Hume and his empiricism restricted each person's knowledge of the world to their own point of view and one's association of ideas
- He illustrated the concept of causality as observing billiard balls colliding, which he believed was merely a sequence of events that we have observed, rather than an actual push or force
- 'The mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist'
- When one event follows another, we believe the first causes the second, but we cannot prove it
- Overall, his argument was that all human knowledge is derived from experience

- Kant agreed that causal necessity has neither an empirical nor logical foundation, but provided a solution in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): the nature of the world we experience is dependent on the nature of our apparatus for experiencing—in other words, based on a priori knowledge
- He described this as 'the objects of the senses must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition' - his 'Copernican Revolution'
- He believed causality's source was the mind but not a mental habit or trick—he believed our actions are ruled by the causality of reason
- The causality of reason is transcendental, rather than natural (natural causality is the concept of events following particular causal laws—an event occurs in a worldly chain of events and can be predicted)
- Transcendental causality is the concept that causality stands behind all events and outside time, and claims that an act of will follows upon natural causes on grounds that we determine based on our a priori knowledge—i.e. we fit the events into our framework
- What is key is that causal series do not precede action but include it—acts of will do not arise out of natural laws
- Thus, how we experience the world is conditioned by our mind, via understanding, which we apply to objects
- We cannot predict a person's action before it has been performed—it enters a causal series once performed, or we at least put it into one
- Thus, he felt that causal necessity was an a priori mental condition (a priori knowledge being knowledge one has independently of experience), and argued human knowledge is derived from such knowledge



## Metaphysics (among other branches) and The Self

- Hume, like many empiricists, believed in the bundle theory of personal identity, in which the mind is 'a bundle of perceptions without unity or cohesive quality' and is nothing but a bundle of experiences linked by the relations of causation and resemblance—in other words, there is no coherent unchanging self, and we are a constant bundle of impressions and associations
- At 5 years old we are not the same as at 35 years old - the 'I' we use to refer to ourselves is not a permanent thing
- Hume's concept of the self means we can never be aware of ourselves, as we are only aware of what we are experiencing in that moment—although relations between ideas and 'senses' can be traced by memory, there is no real evidence of any connecting core
- The concept of the self is simply a result of our natural habit of attributing unified existence to a collection of associated parts—there is no logical support and it cannot be proven, much like causality

- Kant argued that the mind is not a passive blank slate receiving impressions of sense but is active and actively structures the impressions of sense with fundamental concepts, known as categories, for knowledge to be possible (linking to causality)
- From Kant's standpoint, our self makes experiencing a real world possible by synthesising the data of sense experience into a whole—without this, our experience would be a chaotic collection of senses without coherence or significance
- The 'Unity of Consciousness' is how Kant describes how the thoughts and perceptions of any given mind are bound together in a unity being all contained in one consciousness
- Kant argued you are at the centre of your world and view everything from your own perspective
- Your self is able to do this because, much like causality, the self is not an object located in your consciousness with other objects but is an organising principle behind or outside of sense experience—it exists independently of experience
- Kant felt Hume couldn't find the self because he was looking for it within consciousness, not outside of it

## Morality

- Hume's moral theory is based on the idea that reason cannot cause action; thus, morality must be rooted in feelings
- As such, his morality was centred around virtues rather than natural laws
- Hume felt that reason came from our senses and that 'reason is, and only ought to be, the slave of the passions' - i.e. reason is used to find causes of pain or pleasure, and the prospect of pain or pleasure is what causes action, rather than reason
- Hume argued against those that saw reason alone as being able to motivate with his 'is ought' argument—his hypothetical imperative claims it is simple to see why someone acts as they act because they act in order to achieve some goal; it can never follow from a fact, or an 'is' statement, that you 'ought' to pursue a certain course of action
- He believed there was an impossibility of deducing ought from is propositions

- Kant believed in moral laws—laws applicable to all beings that guide how we should act, which he described as you 'ought to act according to the maxim that is qualified for universal law giving', i.e. one should act according to morals that apply to everyone
- Kant's morals are based on reason—whether or not one acted morally depends on reason
- His idea of morality differed from Hume's because Kant believed will as fully autonomous and therefore not needing of external sources of motivation
- Kant criticised Hume's beliefs because if one acts out of hypothetical imperative (rather than categorical/doing it out of duty), they have the ulterior motive of pursuing a certain end, whether this is self interest or not—however he did acknowledge you could act morally and it still give you pleasure, providing you acted out of duty
- Kant's argument also relies on the possibility of the categorical imperative being applied a priori

## Aesthetics

- Hume's essay 'On the Standard of Taste' considers aesthetic remarks, or taste, as one's sentiment (i.e. subjective), rather than objective, like a judgement
- He felt that beauty is simply referring to our sensory perceptions and how an object interacts with the 'faculties of our mind' - he therefore believed there was no one true universal beauty
- However, Hume did argue that there are better standards of sentiment, because of how our organs interact with external senses—one making an assessment on a food's taste or an object's colour could not make a good assessment if their organs were defective
- As a result, there is some element of standard, and so Hume outlines what a 'true judge' would look like: for example, they must have strong sense, i.e. their internal organs must have minimal imperfections, and their senses must be in harmony to create delicate sentiment. They must also have practice, and must be free from prejudice
- Therefore beauty, in Hume's eyes, is not completely subjective
- Hume's view is similar to Kant's in that they both acknowledge beauty as being fundamentally subjective and that there is no one standard of taste
- Both also believe some tastes can be better than others, and therefore there is some element of objectivity to beauty
- Hume's idea of objectivity within beauty comes from assigning qualities of a good critic or tasteful person (rather than there being one standard of beauty that sets out qualities for the object in question)

- Kant addresses beauty in his 'The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement', where he breaks the concept into four moments
- He stated that beauty is a subjective experience felt within one's mind, and in doing so distinguishes beauty from what is agreeable (things that are agreeable would be linked to a desire), what is good (which would link to our moral judgement), and what is beautiful (taste therefore being something more pure, lying between desires and morality)
- He also stated that beauty is free from logical ideas or concepts—there are no personal conditions that can be placed by logic onto the object—beauty does not follow reason
- His third 'moment' explained that beauty is a form of finality and that it is beautiful as a complete thing and not because of any certain characteristic, comprehension, or purpose—it is transcendental
- Finally, he states that beauty, while it might be subjective, exists because it's necessarily universal—for beauty to exist, one must feel everyone ought to agree, even if they do not—Kant believed beauty wasn't theoretically or practically necessary (it does not produce universal knowledge or ethical action), but was a special kind of necessary, and universal
- Kant's four moments can be summarised as the four qualities that define what beauty is: disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness, and necessity (these decide whether or not a given feeling of pleasure is based on one's taste or something else)
- His idea of taste and beauty therefore relies somewhat on the concept of a priori recognition
- Kant differed from Hume because he claimed aesthetic objectivity was in the structures of the mind itself, not in the consensus of good critics—to him, beauty was a subjective universality, and, as mentioned was transcendental

### **Some key differences between Kant and Hume:**

- ***Kant believes in a priori knowledge and in many concepts being transcendental***
- ***Most of Kant's concepts come from the idea of individual subjectivity and us applying our one perceptions and knowledge to the world—he believed in reason guiding how we view the world***
- ***Hume believes in our senses and our observations and associations of random events guiding our views on the world and how we perceive the world***
- ***Both philosophers believe in subjectivity and believe that causality does not have an empirical or logical foundation***

