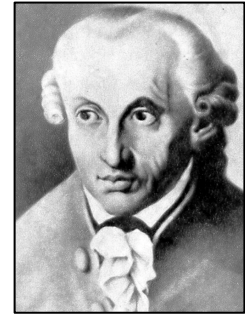




## Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804)



Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, in 1724. He attended the Collegium Fridricianum at the age of eight, a Latin school that taught primarily classicism. After over eight years of study there, he went into the University of Königsberg, where he spent his academic career focusing on philosophy, mathematics and physics. The death of his father had a strong effect on Kant, and he had to leave the university to earn a living as a private tutor. However, in 1755 he accepted the financial help of a friend and resumed study, receiving his doctorate in 1756.

Kant taught at the university and remained there for 15 years, beginning his lectures on the sciences and mathematics, although over time he covered most branches of philosophy. In spite of his growing reputation as an original thinker, he did not gain tenure at the university until 1770, receiving his professorship of logic and metaphysics. He continued writing and lecturing at Königsberg for the next 27 years, drawing many students there owing to his rationalist and hence unorthodox approach to religious texts. This led to political pressure from the government of Prussia, and in 1792 he was barred from teaching or writing on religious subjects by the king, Fredrich William II. Kant dutifully obeyed the injunction until the death of the king five years later, whereafter he returned to the writing and lecturing of his ideas. The year following his retirement, he published a summary of his views on religion. He died in 1804.

Kant devised a model, an individual epistemology, by examining the basis of human knowledge and its limits. He brought together the ideas of rationalism, influential thinkers such as Leibniz and Wolff, and empiricism as proposed by David Hume. Kant's critical philosophy is presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); the idea of critique is to establish and investigate the legitimate limits of human knowledge. Knowledge of sensible objects must form itself in advance to the structures of the mind's ability to reason, and therefore all objects conform themselves *a priori* in such a relation - legitimate knowledge of objects is limited to how they appear for us.

Kant's logic creates a division and complex interplay of judgments - *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments and analytic or synthetic judgments. A judgment is analytic if the subject of its proposition is contained within its predicate, i.e. "Sound theories are theories". To state the reverse would be a logical absurdity. The judgment is considered analytic because the truth of the proposition lies in the validity of the concept itself. All analytic judgments are *a priori* and thus, as is the case for all *a priori* judgments, they are independent of experience. However, judgments about empirical knowledge can only be made upon experience, are synthetic, *a posteriori*, and can be reversed without such a contradiction, i.e. "The theory is sound".



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Here unfolds three classes of judgments: (a) analytic a priori, (b) synthetic a posteriori, and (c) synthetic a priori. The particular concern for Kant was the synthetic a priori, for the sciences and mathematics are as such, existing independent of experience and yet as syntheses of previous judgments (knowledge). The question as to the origins of judgments becomes necessary. Metaphysics describes a science concerned with this inquiry, a solution to unsolvable problems set by pure reason itself, namely the concepts of God, *freedom* and *immortality*.

Kant developed a system of ethics in *Metaphysics of Ethics* (1797), in which he places reason as the fundamental authority for morality. Any action born of a mere expediency or servitude to law, politic or custom could be considered as moral, a sense of duty must arise solely as prescribed by reason. Reason dictates two imperatives: the hypothetical and the categorical. In the case of the former, a course of action to accomplish a specific task is presented, and in the latter a course of action that presents itself as appropriate, and necessary. The categorical is the basis for the ethical. This structure defends a fundamental freedom of the individual; that each one be responsible for their own ability, through reason, to obey consciously the laws of the universe.

Kantian philosophy was to have an enormous impact on modern philosophy as well as the fine arts and literature. Hegel was to develop the dialectical method based on elements within the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which in turn functioned as an underlying structure in Marx's philosophy.

Source: Adapted from the *European Graduate School (EGS)* Library holdings ([www.egs.edu/library/](http://www.egs.edu/library/))



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