

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF IMMANUEL KANT'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Franklin Hutabarat

Faculty of Religious Studies
Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand

Abstract

In the early days of the growth of the humanities' social sciences, the discussion about the horizon of science in the philosophy of science became a critical debate. When analyzed further, it cannot be distinguished from the epistemological discourse constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries by Immanuel Kant. In these years, science has arisen with definite principles and methods as a universal scientific discipline, which can only be discussed by embracing a philosophical skepticism. The physics paradigm continues to dominate the scientific paradigm of the 17th and 18th centuries because of the degree of certainty and precision of experimental and mathematical study findings because the Newtonian physics paradigm is considered the only real foundation on which to base the progress of science. An identity crisis, especially in philosophy, is the impact of this dominance. Like science, the reflective theory does not have any certainty, so it appears to be considered unscientific. It is in this sense that Kant appears to make changes on the stage of modern philosophy. A revival in the field of epistemology, which has consequences for the growth of the empirical horizon boundary debate in the philosophy of science to legitimize the development of the social sciences, is one of Kant's reforms that greatly influenced the development of modern philosophy.

Keywords: Knowledge, Science, Limits, Humanities and Philosophy

Introduction

The debate about the horizon of science in the philosophy of science has become a crucial debate in the early days of developing the social sciences of the humanities. When examined further, basically, it cannot be separated from the epistemological discourse built by Immanuel Kant in the 17th and 18th centuries. In these centuries, science has emerged as a universal scientific discipline with definite premises and methods which can only be debated by adopting a philosophical skepticism.¹

Since the Newtonian physics paradigm is considered the only valid basis on which to base the development of science, the physics paradigm tends to dominate the scientific paradigm knowledge of the 17th and 18th centuries because of the degree of certainty and accuracy the results of experimental and mathematical

¹ Georges Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Analytical Introduction*, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Analytical Introduction*, 2004, 75.

investigations. The impact of this domination is an identity crisis, especially in philosophy. Reflective philosophy has no certainty like physics, then it tends to be considered unscientific.²

It is in this context that Kant appears on the stage of modern philosophy to make reforms. One of Kant's reforms that greatly influenced the development of modern philosophy is a renewal in the field of epistemology which has implications for the development of the scientific horizon boundary debate in the philosophy of science to legitimize the development of the social-humanities sciences.³

Immanuel Kant's Background

Immanuel Kant is a great philosopher who has appeared in the German Aufklärung era's philosophical thought stage towards the end of the 18th century. Kant was born in Königsberg, a small town in East Prussia, on April 22, 1724.⁴ Kant was born as the fourth child to a poor family. Kant's parents were saddlers and devotees of the Pietist movement. At the age of eight Kant began his formal education at the Collegium Fridericianum, a school based on the spirit of Pietism. At this school, Kant educated with strict school discipline. As a child, Kant was taught to respect his work and duties, an attitude that would be highly valued throughout his life. In this school, too, Kant studied Latin, a language that scholars and scientists often used to express his thoughts.⁵

Early in his life, Kant had few features that were prominent in East Prussian society. His character tended to like a quiet life, so Kant was never as active in politics as Machiavelli or Hegel. Likewise Kant never had the same turbulent and challenging experience as Socrates, Bruno, Spinoza, or Rousseau. Kant also didn't travel much far away, as Descartes or Leibniz. Therefore, it is not surprising that Kant's entire life was spent in East Prussia and preferred to sit and sit, read books and do things related to reflection.⁶

Kant began his formal education at Colosse Fredericianum between 1732-1740. After graduating from Colossae, Kant continued his education at the university in his hometown as well. At this university, Kant greatly admired Professor Martin Knutzen, the lecturer who would later greatly influence him, who taught logic and metaphysics, so that Kant was influenced by Leibniz and Wolff's rationalism and gained extensive insights into Newtonian physics and the metaphysical system that developed at that time.⁷

²Ibid.

³Michelle Grier, "Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason," in *Central Works of Philosophy Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century*, 2010, 89.

⁴Frederick Copleston, "A History of Philosophy. Vol. 3. Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy," *Doubleday* (1993), 90.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Irfan Habib, "The Philosophy of History," *Diogenes*, 2011, 144.

⁷Ibid.

At the end of his intellectual career, Kant called his philosophy “criticalism”, because he was updating previous dogmatic philosophies. Therefore, Kant's intellectual journey as a philosopher can be divided into two periods. First is the pre-critical period, a period where he still adheres to Leibniz and Wolff's dogmatism. The second is the critical period; a period where he built a synthesis that produced a new way of philosophy that became a foothold in modern philosophy.

However, it is difficult to know exactly when Kant ended his first period and began his second period. It is generally thought that the transition occurred since Kant was confirmed as Professor in 1770, when he once said that Hume had awakened him from his “dogmatic sleep”. At that time, to be precise in 1781, Kant published his first book *Kritis der Reinen Vernunft* (Criticism of Pure Ratio), and then in 1788 published the book *Kriti der Praktischen Vernunft* (Criticism of the Practical Ratio), and in 1790 published the book *Criticism der Urteilkraft* (Criticism of Judgment).⁸ On February 12, 1804, Kant died at the age of eighty and was buried in Konigsberg (now Kaliningrad), East Prussia.⁹

Transcendental Philosophy

Within the framework of the history of Western philosophy, Immanuel Kant lived in a time when the natural sciences pioneered by Newton reached their highest level of prestige, but the rapid advancement of science could not be matched by philosophy. This, for Kant, is a riddle that must be answered. How is that possible? Does science, especially natural sciences, have a solid enough foundation to follow? Meanwhile, in the realm of the world of philosophy, there are two schools of thought that continually dwell on differences, namely Leibniz-Wolff-style rationalism and empiricism, especially those developed by David Hume. The main problem with which these two philosophical schools contradict is the “objectivity of knowledge”. Is truly objective knowledge derived from reason or from experience?¹⁰

This clash forced Kant to think about which elements in human thought came from experience and which elements were already present in the human ratio. On the one hand, Leibniz argues that the source of human knowledge is the ratio alone, and not experience. From this source of knowledge, general and necessary truths can be “derived”.¹¹ While on the other hand, Hume taught that experience is the source of that knowledge. Rational knowledge about something occurs after something is experienced first. For Kant, both views are one-sided. Although Kant admired the thought of Hume, the philosopher who had awakened Kant from his

⁸Dicker, *Kant's Theory Knowl. An Anal. Introd*, 47.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Jauhan Budiwan, “KRITIK IMMANUEL KANT TERHADAP FAHAM RASIONALISME DAN EMPIRISME,” *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama* (2016), 37.

¹¹Robert Merriiiew Adams, “The Journal of Philosophy,” in *Particulars, Actuality, and Identity Over Time*, 2013, 34.

“dogmatic sleep,” he could not accept Hume's schipticism, namely Hume's view that “in science there is no certainty.”¹²

Kant's position, in this contrast, is not merely to take over and combine the two schools of thought into one system. For Kant, following one of the schools of thought above is not solving problems. Both are considered wrong; the fallacy of rationalism is its neglect of the important position of experience and more concerned with reason, understanding and static aspects. Meanwhile, empiricism is more concerned with experience and dynamic aspects, but does not have a concept to describe experience.¹³

In such a context, on the one hand, Kant wanted to maintain the objectivity, universality and inevitability of understanding; and on the other hand, Kant accepted that a starting point of understanding of phenomena, and could not exceed its limits. Therefore, Kant wanted knowledge to be achieved through a combination of concept with experience. That is, Kant attempted an a priori synthesis, which leads to a transcendental analysis of human knowledge. Kant emphasized the presupposition in human reason that must be accepted so that scientific conclusions can be justified.

Kant developed the above synthesis through the question whether metaphysics is possible. To answer this question, Kant tried to use a systematic critique of human reasoning and reason. He tried to explore not only all scientific beliefs, but also all beliefs. Its purpose is to ascertain what is depicted in the act of belief itself. Contrary to what medieval thinkers did, Kant's starting point was more on epistemology than metaphysics. Kant's aim was to analyze the validity of science, test its operability, and determine the limits of science itself.

This reconstruction effort was what Kant called the “second Copernican revolution”. That is, until Kant's time, there was a general assumption that it was the notion of man that had to conform to the object of the object, but in Kant’s hands, it was the objects that had to conform to human notions. Kant himself did not actually use the term “Copernican revolution”, but it is more of an analogy with "revolution in thinking" (revolution der denkart).¹⁴

That is why Kant called his philosophy "transcendental philosophy". The aim of transcendental philosophy is to discover in what way the mind deals with the objects of the external world. In addition, this philosophy aims to put forward a priori principles as fundamental in the investigation of epistemology.¹⁵

Types of Decisions

Before discussing his theory of critical knowledge, Kant in *Der Reinen Vernunft's Criticism*, distinguishes three kinds of decisions. To formulate the three types of decisions, Kant distinguished two kinds of decisions, namely a priori

¹²Copleston, “A History of Philosophy. Vol. 3. Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy,” 66.

¹³Dicker, *Kant's Theory Knowl. An Anal. Introd*, 53.

¹⁴Grier, “Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason,” 109.

¹⁵Copleston, “A History of Philosophy. Vol. 3. Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy,” 77.

analytical judgment and a posteriori synthesis decision.¹⁶ In an a priori analytical decision, each judgment consists of a statement that the predicate B has been included in subject A, although it is still vague. In making, this decision we do not have to seek understanding through experience. We only need to use the principle of contradiction to reach the decision, because subject A has already included all the predicates. B Kant calls this kind of decision a “decision that clarifies” our understanding. However, on the other hand, it is also seen that with a decision like this we will not be able to expand our knowledge, because there is no new understanding that we get, other than what is already contained in the definition of subject A. Kant revealed this: Because it is not correct to base analytical decisions on experience, precisely because I do not need to go beyond my understanding to compile that decision, and thus the evidence from experience here is not useful.¹⁷

While in the synthesis decision which is a posteriori, the predicate B is beyond the meaning of subject A, then the meanings in the relationship between A and B can only be seen through our experience of thing A. Thus, thanks to our experience of thing A that our knowledge becomes getting wider. For example: all things are heavy. To get the weight, Kant says the following: Now I am expanding my knowledge, and while looking back at the experience from which I derive knowledge of this object, I find also its 'weight' whenever it is associated with the above property. So I synthetically add this 'weight' as a predicate to that knowledge. Experience also underlies the possibility of a synthesis between the predicate “weight” and my knowledge of the object; for that knowledge, even though one does not contain the other, is mutually part of one whole, namely experience which is itself a synthetic relationship of the senses even though it is only by chance.¹⁸

Furthermore, Kant revealed that there was another decision from the two decisions above, namely the priori synthesis decision. This decision is a synthetic decision, which is inevitable and generally accepted. In this case the help of experience is no longer useful, precisely because in the decision there are elements of “general” and “necessary”. Kant said that this is not an experience, because general behavior but also a statement of its inevitability do not only accompany the principle quoted earlier (the principle that everything that happens has a cause). So it becomes completely a priori and comes from just understanding.¹⁹

Decisions of this kind are the rests of exact science. At the basis of this kind of synthetic judgment, which is the principle for expanding knowledge, lies the entire ultimate goal of all our a priori speculative knowledge, which includes philosophy. For even though the analytical decision is very useful, it only comes to the clarification of knowledge, even though our clarified knowledge will be of great use to form a definite and broad-based synthesis, which is a truly new discovery.

¹⁶Grier, “Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason,” 89.

¹⁷Marcel Becker, “Ethics in the Big Data Era: Privacy as Autonomy and Privacy as Dignity,” *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* (2018), 42.

¹⁸Grier, “Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason,” 14.

¹⁹Will Dudley and Kristina Engelhard, *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts, Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts*, 2011, 88.

At this point, the problem confronting Kant's mind is to investigate the possibility of a priori synthesis decisions. In the introduction to Critique, Kant has stated: "How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?" and according to Kant, this question is a "general problem in the pure ratio."²⁰ It was from here that Kant began to do "Critique of Pure Reason: In this case, Kant distinguishes three levels of recognition, namely recognition of the level of senses, recognition of the level of reason, and recognition of the level of mind."²¹

Human Knowledge

According to Kant, there are three levels in the process of human knowledge. The first and lowest level is sensory perception. The next or second level is the ratio level. Last or third is the highest level in the process of knowledge, that is, the level of intellect or intellect.

According to Kant, knowledge is a synthesis of a priori elements with elements that existed before experience, namely a posteriori elements. As for the a priori elements, according to Kant, they already exist at the stage of sense perception. There are already two forms a priori, namely space and time. Kant's understanding of space and time differs from that of Newton's view of space and time. If Newton put space and time "outside of man," Kant said they were both a priori sensibilities. Kant meant that both were rooted in the structure of the subject. Space is not empty space, into which an object can be placed; space is not "space in itself" (raum an sich). Meanwhile time is not a fixed stream, in which the senses take place.²² For Kant, space and time are the "formal form" of sensing. In sense perception, we organize our impressions or perceptions of our observations in time and space. The form of observation within us called space and time makes it possible to sense something. The form regulates or forms outward sensory impressions or perceptions, while the form of time regulates or forms inner sensory impressions or perceptions. These two meanings of space and time precede a posteriori sensing, and embody a priori forms of sensing.

The implication of Kant's statement above is that there is indeed a reality that is independent of the subject. According to Kant, there are indeed "things in themselves" (das Ding an sich), but this reality cannot be observed or investigated. What can be observed and investigated is only the phenomena or appearances (erscheinungen) of that reality, which is always a synthesis between the elements that come from outside as matter and the a priori forms of space and time in the structure of human thought.

Together with sensory observation, the ratio (verstand) operates spontaneously. The task of ratio is to compile and relate sensory data, to produce decisions. In this case, the ratio works with the help of its fantasy power (einbildungskraft). However, in Kant's view, this decision is not yet a knowledge of

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Jill Vance Buroker, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction*, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction*, 2006, 76.

²²Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, 2009, 24.

reason. According to Kant, rational knowledge is obtained when intermediate synthesis occurs sensory data with a priori forms that Kant named as "categories", namely innate ideas in the form of "main concepts" which have an epistemological function in humans.²³

According to Kant, there are twelve categories in ratio. The fundamental categories are those which indicate quantity (unity, plurality, wholeness), quality (reality, negation, limitation), relations (substance and accident, cause and effect, interaction), modality (possible / impossible, existing / nothing, need).²⁴

In applying these categories, the ratios work in such a way that they match only recognized data. For example, there is an incident that after heating with fire, the water in the vessel boils. Therefore, the ratio will work by applying the category of causality to the phenomena; and then making the statement "the water in the vessel was boiling because it was heated by fire". Thus, it happened a synthesis between a posteriori elements, namely sensory data which function as matter (fire burns a vessel filled with water, and the water boils), and a priori elements which function as forms (category of causality).

In this case Kant explains the following: Reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan its own, and that it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading strings, but must itself show the way with principles of judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to answer questions of reason's own determining.²⁵ Accidental observations, made in obedience to no previously thought-out plan, can never be made to yield a necessary law, which alone reason is concerned to discover. Reason, holding its principles in one hand, according to which alone concordant appearances can be admitted as equivalent to laws. In the other hand, the experiment, which it has devised in conformity with these principles, must approach nature to be taught by it. However, it must not do so in the character of a pupil who listens to everything that the teacher chooses to say, but of an appointed judge who compels the witness to answer questions, which he has himself formulated.²⁶

In this case, causality is very important. It is only based on the difference between what is lawful and arbitrary or unregulated that we distinguish between the objective and the subjective. The objective vehicle is the vehicle for regular phenomena.²⁷ Thus, Kant also explained the validity of natural science and placed the subjectivism element as a new interpretation of the philosophical conflicts of that century.

²³Dicker, *Kant's Theory Knowl. An Anal. Introd*, 90.

²⁴Lucas Thorpe, "Kant on the Relationship between Autonomy and Community," in *Kant and the Concept of Community*, 2011, 97.

²⁵Avery Goldman, *Kant and the Subject of Critique: On the Regulative Role of the Psychological Idea*, *Kant and the Subject of Critique: On the Regulative Role of the Psychological Idea*, 2012, 56.

²⁶Grier, "Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason," 79.

²⁷Ibid.

What Kant means by virtue or intellect (*vernunft*) is the creative power of pure meanings or absolute necessary understandings, which are not obtained from experience but overcome the experience itself. One of them is the idea of God. In contrast to the ratio that contains the category of categories, intellect or intellect with these ideas do not participate in composing knowledge human. These ideas are only “vague indications”, clues for thinking. The mind or intellect task is to conclude from statements at the lower level, namely the ratio and sense perception level. In other words, the intellect with ideas makes arguments. According to Kant, there are three transcendental ideas. First, the psychological idea (soul) which is an absolute idea that underlies all mental symptoms. Second, the idea that unites all external phenomena, namely the cosmological (world) idea. Third, the idea that underlies all phenomena both external and internal, which is contained in an absolute person, namely God as a theological idea. These three ideas do not include experience, so there can be no knowledge of reason, be it philosophy, metaphysics, or any other science.²⁸ According to Kant, experience only occurs in the phenomenal world, even though the three ideas are in the phenomenal realm, the world of ideas, and the inner world. The ideas of the soul, the world, and God are not notions of sensory realities, not “things in themselves”. These three ideas are postulates or epistemological axioms which are beyond the reach of proving scientific knowledge. At this point, Kant has a basic epistemological principle that all human knowledge begins with experience.

According to Kant, although we are in direct contact with worldly objects, our minds cannot directly relate to entities as they are in themselves (as they are in themselves). We have a priori knowledge only regarding “appearances”, not “things in themselves” (things as they are in themselves).²⁹

From this assumption, Kant developed a theory about the “two worlds”, namely the phenomenal world and the world of noemata. The world of phenomena is the world that exists before us, which is determined by the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding as a starting point for the shift of the pendulum of modern human paradigm from object to subject. In Kant's context, not only radicalized Descartes' emphasis on the subject, it also showed the conditions of possibility of human thought. The discovery of the limits of the mind reveals a boundary for both knowledge and science.

Therefore, it is not surprising that after Kant, Kant's synthesis gave birth to a new stream, namely positivism. The school with its main characters Auguste Comte (1789-1857), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), was born to continue Kant's thought about the well-known dictum that “what can be investigated is only phenomena- a mere phenomenon”.

In Kant's philosophy, the natural sciences became a normative assumption even though Kant still recognized the existence of other forms of science, such as ethics and aesthetics. However, it needs to be emphasized here, that Kant implicitly tried to place the natural sciences as the norm and scientific research as a valid knowledge activity.³⁰ Such a construction of thought became increasingly radical and

²⁸Adams, “The Journal of Philosophy.” 77.

²⁹Dudley and Engelhard, *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts*, 35.

³⁰CHONG-FUK LAU, “KANT’S TRASCENDENTAL FUNCTIONALISM,” *REVIEW OF METAPHYSICS* (2014), 79.

culminated in Auguste Comte's positivism which emphasized sensory knowledge as a norm and instead became the only norm for knowledge activities.³¹

Therefore, the emergence of positivism as a constructive response to Kant's thought about "what can be investigated are mere phenomena", has an impact on the end of the epistemological discourse itself and the start of the philosophical discourse of science that focuses on methodological research.³²

In the study of the philosophy of science, the tendency which is then overly embraced by the appearance of positivism is "objectivism". Objectivism not only copies objective facts but also empties everything in the subject in such a way that it becomes objective and mechanical functions. In modern psychology, which is based on empirical observation, concepts such as anxiety, guilt, behavior, and thinking, are formalized and impoverished until they become functions of a broader objective system. Likewise, in the sciences concerning humans, humans are observed on their objective surface. What is found in the human objective dimension is generalized into its subjective dimension.³³

Conclusion

From the discussion that has been presented above, there are two contradictions in Kant's philosophy. On the one hand, Kant managed to reconcile two epistemological conflicts. On the other hand, Kant was trapped into a narrow view of the scope of the horizon of modern science. It is as if Kant has contributed to the issuance of the social-humanities sciences as part of the scientific family, unless these sciences follow positivism principles.

The above statement by Kant implies that there is a truth that is independent of the subject. According to Kant, there are also 'things in themselves' (das Ding an sich), but this fact can not be detected or examined. Only the phenomena or appearances (erscheinungen) of that reality, which is often a fusion between the elements that come from outside as matter and the a priori aspects of space and time in human thought's structure, can be observed and investigated.

The tendency, which is then excessively adopted by the emergence of positivism, is 'objectivism' in studying science's philosophy. In addition to copying objective truth, Objectivism also empties everything in the topic so that it becomes objective and mechanical functions. Concepts like fear, shame, actions, and reasoning are formalized and impoverished in mainstream psychology, which is focused on empirical observation until they become functions of a more massive objective structure. Similarly, in human sciences, humans are studied on their aim surface. In its subjective dimension, what is found in the individual objective measurement is generalized.

31Budiwan, "KRITIK IMMANUEL KANT TERHADAP FAHAM RASIONALISME DAN EMPIRISME," 15.

32Adams, "The Journal of Philosophy," 99.

33 Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Robert Merriiiew. "The Journal of Philosophy." In *Particulars, Actuality, and Identity Over Time*, 2013.
- Becker, Marcel. "Ethics in the Big Data Era: Privacy as Autonomy and Privacy as Dignity." *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 2018.
- Budiwan, Jauhan. "KRITIK IMMANUEL KANT TERHADAP FAHAM RASIONALISME DAN EMPIRISME." *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, 2016.
- Buroker, Jill Vance. *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction. Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction*, 2006.
- CHONG-FUK LAU. "KANT'S TRASCENDENTAL FUNCTIONALISM." *REVIEW OF METAPHYSICS* (2014).
- Copleston, Frederick. "A History of Philosophy. Vol. 3. Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy." *Doubleday*, 1993.
- Dicker, Georges. *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Analytical Introduction. Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Analytical Introduction*, 2004.
- Dudley, Will, and Kristina Engelhard. *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts. Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts*, 2011.
- Goldman, Avery. *Kant and the Subject of Critique: On the Regulative Role of the Psychological Idea. Kant and the Subject of Critique: On the Regulative Role of the Psychological Idea*, 2012.
- Grier, Michelle. "Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason." In *Central Works of Philosophy Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century*, 2010.
- Guyer, Paul. *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume. Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, 2009.
- Habib, Irfan. "The Philosophy of History." *Diogenes*, 2011.
- Thorpe, Lucas. "Kant on the Relationship between Autonomy and Community." In *Kant and the Concept of Community*, 2011.