

Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)

German philosopher and scientist; as a scientist developed ideas of the evolution of solar system from a gaseous nebular, retardation of Earth's rotation by the tides, the concept of a Universe composed of Galaxies, thus playing important role in shaping the view of Nature as developing according to its own processes. In philosophy he was the founder of the "Critical Philosophy"; immediate precursor of Hegel. Kant confronted the problem posed by [Hume](#) showing that if knowledge could only be derived from experience, then in fact there could be no knowledge of a world "beyond sensation" - and yet positive knowledge clearly did exist. In studying the forms of cognition and its limits, Kant developed a philosophy riddled with contradictions which provided the material upon which Hegel was able to build. Kant held that "things-in-themselves" (beyond sensation) were in principle unknowable - only "phenomena" are knowable. Showing that opposite propositions about the nature of reality can be proved, Kant held that these contradictions are only "seeming" and knowledge of "things-in-themselves" is accessible only by Faith. The influence of Kant is still far more extensive than that of Hegel among today's philosophers and social theorists.

The philosophical world into which Immanuel Kant entered was one riven by apparently irresolvable contradictions. The period from Kant's beginning work on his major work, **Critique of Pure Reason**, in 1769 and the publication of its authoritative second edition in 1787 was the period of the immediate gestation of the French Revolution. But the Revolution was not bringing forth a clear new philosophical view of the world. On the contrary, supporters of the Revolution adhered to diverse schools of philosophy, hardly even able to speak the same philosophical language.

Kant lived in the [Prussia](#) of Frederick the Great, an absolutist monarch who raised Prussia to the status of a European power in which the arts and sciences flourished, but where political life was virtually totally absent. A

contemporary of Goethe, the great composer, scientist and philosopher, Kant was in his earlier years also absorbed with scientific problems and developed important ideas of the evolution of the Solar System, Galaxies, and the retardation of the rotation of the Earth by the tides. During this period he tended towards empiricism and was influenced by the Scepticism of David Hume.

However, from when he began work on what was to become the **Critique of Pure Reason** (his later works were **Critique of Practical Reason** and **Critique of Judgment**), Kant became intensely dissatisfied with the state of war which seemed to exist in philosophy, and took upon himself the task of resolving this conflict.

Three readings from the **Critique of Pure Reason** are included in the Reference Archive:

From the last section, *Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, a short piece is included which gives a glimpse of the genesis of Kant's views, including a concise criticism of his former mentor, David Hume: *[The Impossibility of a Sceptical Satisfaction of Pure Reason.](#)*

From the Introduction, the opening pages, in which Kant unfolds the principle concepts of his system: synthetic and analytic judgments, a priori and a posteriori, etc.: *[Of the difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge.](#)*

From about a quarter of the way through the **Critique**, the section entitled *[Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding](#)*, where the consequences, so to speak, of Kant's approach are brought out. For instance, you might look at the section entitled: *[The Category has no other Application in Knowledge than to Objects of Experience.](#)*

Kant's achievement was enormous: he established a system of categories and concepts of philosophy which was the basis for the stunning development of Classical German Philosophy (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Feuerbach) and later Marxism over the 50 years following the **Critique of Pure Reason**, and it remains the point of reference for all schools of philosophy which pretend to the status of science, up to the present.

In focussing attention of the *Categories* of knowledge, Kant set the direction and provided invaluable tools for the resolution of the crisis of philosophy which he attempted, even if he did not himself achieve this resolution.

See [Hegel on Kant in his *History of Philosophy*](#), Hegel's assessment of Kant in the [footnote](#) in the **Science of Logic**, extended critique of Kant in **The Critical Philosophy** and other assessments in the [sampler](#).

Further Reading: **Critique of Pure Reason**.

Kant is possibly even more influential today as a result of his [Moral Philosophy](#). See [Kant Archive](#).