

Lecture 6: Awakening from the Dogmatic Slumber

Immanuel Kant and the Kantian Revolution

Context: Kant's Turning Point

- **1763**: Kant reads **Rousseau** and **Hume**
 - Rousseau: corrected Kant's prejudice, inspired respect for humanity.
 - Hume: awakened Kant from his "dogmatic slumber" by showing the limits of metaphysics and rationalism.
 - Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 2nd ed. 1787) → landmark text, took 18 years to develop.
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Kant's Goals

- Rescue **science** from Hume's skepticism.
 - Preserve **religion** from Enlightenment rationalist attacks.
 - Provide a new foundation for **morality**.
 - Achieve this through a **philosophical revolution**.
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The Copernican Revolution in Philosophy

- Traditional assumption: **knowledge conforms to objects** (*objectivism*).
- Kant's reversal: **objects conform to our knowledge** (*subjectivism*).
- We do not know reality-in-itself (*noumena*), only **phenomena** as structured by

our minds.

Phenomena vs. Noumena

- **Phenomena:** the world as it appears, structured by human faculties (space, time, causality).
 - **Noumena:** reality as it is in itself — unknowable to us.
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Key Philosophical Moves

- **Space and time** → not external realities but forms of human intuition.
 - **Causality & identity** → not discovered in objects but imposed by the mind.
 - **Science:** possible because our faculties structure experience in regular, law-like ways.
 - **Metaphysics:** limited; cannot know ultimate reality (noumenal).
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Implications for Religion & Morality

- **Religion:** God, free will, and immortality cannot be proven — but cannot be disproven either.
 - Leaves room for *faith*.
 - **Morality:** requires free will → possible in the noumenal realm.
 - Famous phrase: *“I had therefore to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.”*
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Kant’s Ethics

- Humans are not naturally good; morality requires strict principles.

- **Categorical Imperative:**
 - Moral laws must be universal, unconditional, and rationally self-imposed.
 - “Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”
 - Morality = obeying duty **for its own sake**, not for consequences.
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Kant on Politics & Obedience

- Kant complied with **Prussian censorship** → argued subjects must obey authority, even unjust commands.
 - Influenced by religious notions of **obedience** (Eve’s disobedience as archetype of sin).
 - Education: strict discipline; children must learn duty and obedience early (contrasts Locke’s liberal model).
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Legacy & Interpretations

- **Moses Mendelssohn:** Kant as the “all-destroyer” (ended hopes of objective metaphysics).
 - **Hölderlin:** Kant as the “Moses of our nation,” leading to a new promised land.
 - **Hegel:** saw Kant as opening the way to a new German philosophical revolution.
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Review Questions

1. How did Rousseau and Hume each “awaken” Kant?
2. What is the difference between *phenomena* and *noumena*?
3. Why did Kant describe his philosophy as a “Copernican revolution”?

4. How does Kant's view leave room for both science and faith?
 5. What is the categorical imperative, and how does it differ from hypothetical imperatives?
 6. Why did Kant accept political censorship under Prussia?
 7. How does Kant's educational philosophy compare with John Locke's?
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