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Philosophy

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Seeking Truth

To understand Kant's and Hume's perspective about truth and knowledge, this essay will examine the difference in philosophical foundations on which Hume and Kant built their arguments. It will then focus on how Kant responds to Hume. Hume was an empiricist, regarding knowledge, empiricists usually give importance to experience through senses, and underestimate the role of reason. Hume says that there are only two kinds of knowledge: Knowledge regarding relations of ideas and knowledge regarding the matter of facts (Noonan). There is no third kind of knowledge. Hume argues that knowledge regarding the matter of facts can occur only through perception and don’t follow from the rules of logic, such as the law of contradiction. Whereas, knowledge concerning relations of ideas is not dependent on perception, but since refuting those leads to a contradiction, they are accepted as true (Noonan). But since this knowledge results from a logical analysis of the given ideas, no new knowledge apart from those given ideas is possible. And also, this analysis cannot say anything regarding truth or knowledge of the given ideas.

Kant is considered to be the father of the ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy, as he highlighted the mind’s active role in organizing the concept of reality (Prichard). Before Kant, rationalists and empiricists argued for the mind’s passive interaction with objects of knowledge. Rationalists argued that the mind has innate ideas, and all knowledge follows from logical implications from these ideas. Empiricists considered the mind to be a blank slate, and in its ideas of objects are received from experience, which forms the basis of all knowledge. In both cases, the nature of the mind’s own active contributions to the structure of knowledge is disregarded. Kant rejects both these conceptions of knowledge. According to him, 'understanding makes nature', i.e. mind's structure makes experience possible (Prichard). Thus, the mind plays an active role in understanding and structuring objects of knowledge. To deduce the mind’s role in knowledge, Kant devised a methodology, known as inspirational argumentation. In normal argumentation, people deduce conclusions from given premises. Whereas, in transcendental argumentation, on the basis of given experiences, necessary presuppositions make experience possible. Hume says that among the principles of association, the connection is the toughest opinion. But Hume considers these principles as not contributing anything to knowledge. For him, they are merely part of human nature.

So, if knowledge of causality is possible, it should constitute knowledge regarding either relation of ideas, or matter of facts. If causality is to be knowledgeable regarding the relation of ideas, then the idea of effect should be deducible from ideas of its causes, i.e. the idea of effect should be contained within the idea of the cause. The negation of this should lead to a contradiction, but this is not so. Similarly, if it is to be knowledgeable regarding the matter of facts, then it must correspond to some sensitive data. But, we don’t have any perception of causality; we merely have a perception of a series of events (Prichard). Thus, knowledge of causality is impossible. Kant agrees with Hume that causality neither can be deduced from the analysis of ideas, nor can it be perceived from experience. But, he rejects Hume's conclusion that knowledge of causality is impossible. He proposes a third kind of knowledge apart from the relation of ideas and matter of facts, which he calls synthetic a priori judgments. Kant considers the knowledge of causality to be a kind of synthetic a priori judgment. Knowledge of causality is synthetic because the idea of effect is not contained within the idea of the cause. Furthermore, it is a priori because it is a necessary presupposition that makes the experience of the temporal sequence of cause and effect possible.

**Works Cited**

Noonan, Harold. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Knowledge*. Routledge, 2002.

Prichard, Harold Arthur. *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*. Clarendon Press, 1909.