

CHAPTER VI

Review of Kant's 'Second Demand'

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The question 'How are synthetic a priori judgments possible ?' has occurred several times in Kant's Philosophy and unlike many other philosophical questions it has some peculiarities. It is an important question in philosophy and it is so important that it may be called revolutionary. But it has, as a matter fact, been raised for the first time at a much latter stage of philosophical development. Second, when the question was raised, it was criticised by many as a 'Pseudo question'. Many prominent figures from the rival camps, Empiricism and Rationalism, vehemently opposed the existence of 'synthetic a priori judgments', which are being referred to in this question. Third, though

the question is raised by Kant several times in different contexts, doubt remains as to whether he is asking the same question everywhere. It may be suggested that Kant is asking the same question, though not in the same contexts, and attempts may be made to make this suggestion plausible by producing Kant's own demand that he is using the expression 'synthetic a priori' in exactly the same sense in all his three 'critiques'. But Kant's own practice does not seem to justify this demand. In the first 'critique', Critique of Pure Reason, Kant speaks of a new variety of judgment¹ which is clearly distinct from both analytic a priori judgments and synthetic a posteriori ones. Judgments of this variety are termed by Kant 'synthetic a priori'². Kant demands that this variety of judgments is not a mere possibility but we actually have such judgments³. He demands that some judgments are both synthetic and a priori. In the first 'critique Kant shows how synthetic a priori judgments are possible in the field of theoretical experience. But synthetic a priori judgments are not, Kant holds, confined to this region of experience. He uses the expression 'experience' to include moral and aesthetic experience, too. These two other aspects of experience are dealt with by Kant in his second and third 'critiques'. Kant holds that we have synthetic a priori judgments not only in the context of

theoretical experience but also in the fields of moral and aesthetic experience. From this it is clear that Kant is demanding not only that we have synthetic a priori judgments but also that we have such judgments in different regions of experience in the same sense, otherwise it would have been meaningless to claim that synthetic a priori judgments are not restricted to theoretical experience only.

We thus face two demands : (1) there are synthetic a priori judgments; and (2) in all his 'critiques' Kant is using the expression 'synthetic a priori' in the same sense; in other words, we have synthetic a priori judgments in all domains of experience in the same sense. The demand (2) will be referred to as Kant's second demand or claim. These two demands are not identical, though not unconnected. Moreover, the second demand has, at least, an extra significance in determining what Kant has really explored. It is usually held that Kant has explored a new variety of judgment, called synthetic a priori, but a denial of the second claim may encourage us to change this view for the sake of becoming more precise. We may hold that Kant has really explored a lot of varieties in a new variety of judgment, for the simple reason that his new variety of judgment, called synthetic a priori, fails to maintain an unchanging identity all throughout his 'critiques'.

The claims, however, are not unconnected. The question whether we have synthetic a priori judgments in all the three 'Critiques' of Kant in exactly the same sense can intelligibly be asked only if Kant first recognises such judgments in his 'Critiques'. This question would have been not only irrelevant but also meaningless if Kant had shared a view similar to that of Walsh⁴, Quine or the positivists about synthetic a priori judgments. Again, any affirmative or negative answer that we may please to give to this question will require us to recognise Kant's first claim that there are synthetic a priori judgments.

But these two claims can not be identified. Philosophers like Quine and the Positivists have opposed Kant's thesis that there are synthetic a priori judgments. Their arguments, of course, do not conclusively prove that Kant is wrong in demanding that some judgments are synthetic a priori. An attempt at the denial of the thesis of 'synthetic a priori propositions', however, will be considered successful if we first agree to interpret the term 'necessity' as logical necessity. But why should we prefer a particular interpretation of this term among a lot of interpretations? Moreover, Kant is frank enough to admit that his synthetic a priori propositions are not logically necessary in the sense that their denial will involve self-contradiction. But even if we agree with Kant

on his demand that there are synthetic a priori judgments, we are not thereby compelled to accept his second demand that we have such judgments, in exactly the same sense, in all the three different regions of experience — theoretical, moral and aesthetic — dealt with in his three 'Critiques', 'Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Judgment, respectively. Though these claims are different, Kant is not, probably, well aware that his second claim does not get established by the arguments that we may put in favour of his first claim, 'there are synthetic a priori judgments'. This seems to be the reason why we find Kant try his best to establish his first claim only. He was, perhaps, convinced that the expression 'synthetic a priori' was not accumulating even minute changes as it was rolling down from one 'Critique' to another. Kant, is, however, wrong in connection with this conviction.

[II]

There is, of course, a sense in which it may be suggested that in using the expression 'synthetic a priori' in his three 'Critiques' Kant is not making a new stipulation everytime. In the first 'Critique' the judgment 'every event must have a cause' has been recognised by Kant as 'synthetic a priori'. The expression, 'synthetic a priori' is a

combination of two distinct terms, 'synthetic' and 'a priori'. The meanings of these terms have been clarified by Kant in the first 'Critique'. "A proposition is synthetic if its negation is not a contradiction in terms. It is a priori if it is not logically dependent on any proposition which describes sense-impressions"⁵ i.e., if its truth is not affected by any experience that we may have. Here we thus have two negative descriptions of synthetic a priori propositions. These descriptions equally apply to the synthetic a priori judgments of the second and the third 'Critiques' as well as to those of the first 'Critique'. Thus it may be said that Kant is not using the expression 'synthetic a priori' in his subsequent 'Critiques' in a sense which is different from the sense of the first 'Critique'. But this defence of Kant's position is not adequate for various reasons. From the fact that the synthetic a priori propositions are not like this or that we can not exactly grasp what are they like. Under such a situation it is not possible to say that all synthetic a priori propositions mean the same thing.

Again, it may be true that in Kant's Philosophy there is not even a single instance of synthetic a priori propositions to which the above negative descriptions do not apply, but from this we are not warranted to say that by a synthetic a priori proposition Kant simply means that

proposition whose negation is not a contradiction in terms and which is not logically dependent on any proposition that describes sense-impressions. The meaning of a given expression is not necessarily a logical product of the meanings of the constituent terms of that expression. The expression 'synthetic a priori', as used by Kant in the first 'Critique' is a good example of this. The expression 'dog-sleep' is another good example from everyday language. From the fact that somebody fails to understand the expression 'dog-sleep' we can not say that he does not know the use of the terms 'dog' and 'sleep'. In such cases the sense of a given expression can not be inferred just from the meanings of the terms entering into that expression. Such a sense of an expression may be called its technical sense, as distinguished from its literal sense. In the first 'Critique' when Kant calls any judgment synthetic a priori, he uses the expression 'synthetic a priori' in a technical sense. By synthetic a priori judgments Kant here means principles which state the conditions of the possibility of theoretical knowledge. According to Kant, G.J. Warnock holds, there is "a third class of propositions, whose existence none of his predecessors had explicitly recognized - certain propositions that must be true if human experience is to occur at all, propositions that state, in Kant's phrase, "the

conditions of the possibility of experience", or, as we might say, its fundamental defining characteristics ... But if propositions of this class are not analytic and are not contingent, then they are precisely what Hume and the rest had rejected or ignored - namely, synthetic a priori propositions⁶. The principle of causation, 'every event must have a cause' is, Kant holds, a synthetic a priori judgment; for we can not have any form of theoretical knowledge, empirical or a priori, without assuming it to be true. Thus in the Critique of Pure Reason by synthetic a priori propositions Kant means those propositions which state conditions of the possibility of any experience in space and time⁷. The case being so, Kant's second claim that he is using the expression 'synthetic a priori' in exactly the same sense in all his 'critiques' will be entertained only if we can show that the synthetic a priori judgments of the second and third 'Critiques' state conditions of the possibility of experience in space and time, i.e., of theoretical experience. If we, however, aim simply at the refutation and not at the establishment of Kant's second claim, it will be enough to show that the synthetic a priori judgments either of the second or of the third 'critique' do not state conditions of the possibility of theoretical experience.

[III]

In the field of moral experience, Kant asserts, we have synthetic a priori propositions. He, of course, does not recognise every individual judgment, which can be called moral, to be synthetic a priori. The supreme principle of morality or the Categorical Imperative⁸ with reference to which a principle or maxim of action is judged to be moral is a synthetic a priori judgment of the second 'Critique'. The proposition "Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁹, is one of the formulations of the Categorical Imperative and it is, Kant holds, synthetic a priori. But why? Does it state any assumption without which we can not have any experience of objects in space and time? Certainly not. Kant is clear enough in asserting that in the second 'Critique' we are not at all concerned with spatial and temporal experience. So the Categorical imperative is not supposed to be a synthetic a priori judgment in the sense of expressing conditions required for the possibility of theoretical knowledge; and Kant himself claims to have given a complete list of such judgments in the first 'critique'. Our experience of the world of objects is not affected by what moral principle we happen to subscribe to.

It may be suggested that in the second 'Critique' the expression 'synthetic a priori' means what it means in the first 'Critique' for here also Kant has used this expression in a technical sense. The categorical imperative is synthetic a priori in the sense that it states conditions for the determination of what we ought to do, in the sense that it supplies a necessary requirement for the determination of obligation or duty.

But this suggestion is not tenable for two reasons. First, it is not the case that the categorical imperative really expresses conditions or assumptions for the determination of what we ought to do. Kant's categorical imperative resembles Mill's so-called 'Inductive Methods',¹⁰ which instead of identifying the cause of a phenomenon under investigation eliminates the claim of something to be the cause of that phenomenon. According to the categorical imperative, actions whose maxims can not be universalised, i.e., whose maxims do not accord with the categorical imperative are such which we ought not to perform. "Basing his argument upon the sole consideration of man as a rational being, Kant is perhaps in a position to lay down what men should not do — namely, they should not adopt principles of judgment or conduct which lead to or involve inconsistency. However, it is by no means clear that this suffices to determine in any positive way what

they should do"¹¹. It may be noted that Kant does not want to say that "all actions which do accord with the Categorical Imperative are ones which we ought to perform"¹². So, why should we say that the categorical imperative states conditions for determining what we ought to do ?

A possible answer to the above question is this. Kant has definitely wanted to say that "there are positive as well as negative duties"¹³. No such distinction between positive and negative duties can be satisfactorily made unless the categorical imperative is of some help to us in identifying a positive duty. So the categorical imperative, it is believed, has the required efficacy in determining what we should do. This belief will be entertained if we assume that a positive duty of the form 'you ought to do X' can be restated as 'Failure to do X is impermissible'¹⁴. But this is an undue assumption, for 'impermissible' and 'obligatory' are not contradictory terms; we can not affirm one on the strength of eliminating the other. Thus Kant's categorical imperative is not a synthetic a priori judgment in the sense of stating an assumption for determining what is obligatory or moral. It may be called a synthetic a priori judgment, in the sense of expressing a test of what is 'impermissible'.

Second, even if, for the sake of argument, we admit that the categorical imperative states a condition for

determining what we should do, it does not follow that it is 'synthetic a priori' in the sense in which the causal principle 'every event must have a cause' is. The causal principle states conditions of the possibility of objects in space and time, whereas the categorical imperative expresses a condition or assumption for the determination of a moral principle and, indirectly, of a moral action or duty. Moral principles are not objects in space and time. Thus the synthetic a priori judgments of the first and the second 'critiques' are not 'synthetic a priori' in exactly the same sense.

[IV]

In the third 'critique' the Critique of Judgment, too, Kant raises the general critical question : How are synthetic a priori judgments possible ? This time, of course, the question is raised with reference to the domain of reflective judgment, i.e., the purposive and the beautiful products of nature and art, and not with reference to theoretical knowledge of objects or with reference to the world of freedom, as done in the first or the second 'critique'. Now, has not the meaning of the expression 'synthetic a priori' changed in this 'critique' with the change of domain ? Can we have

synthetic a priori judgments in the third 'critique' in the sense in which we have such judgments in the first or in the second critique' ?

Aesthetic judgment or the judgment of taste is one of the two forms of reflective judgments discussed by Kant in the third 'critique'. According to Paul Guyer, Kant argues that 'aesthetic judgment is a variety of synthetic a priori judgment, so that the problem of a deduction of aesthetic judgment may therefore be considered "part of the general problem of transcendental philosophy ; How synthetic a priori judgments possible ?"¹⁵. From the expression 'a variety of' it may be guessed that Kant did not use the expression 'synthetic a priori' with reference to aesthetic judgments in exactly the same sense in which he used it in the other two critiques. And in fact this is the case. No aesthetic judgment can be synthetic a priori in the sense in which we have such judgments in the first or in the second 'critique'. The judgment 'every event must have a cause' is a synthetic a priori judgment of the first 'critique'. It states conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. In the second 'critique' the categorical Imperative, which is recognised by Kant as synthetic a priori, states the condition of the determination of what should not be done. In both the cases a synthetic a priori judgment states an objective condition

or criterion of something, though not of the same thing. An aesthetic judgment, say, 'the rose is beautiful' is neither a theoretical cognitive judgment nor a practical cognitive judgment, but a reflective one. A reflective judgment is peculiar in the sense that it does not use any determinate concept. An aesthetic judgment resembles a judgment concerning the pleasant in being subjective, since it does not state anything in the object but our private feelings that we take in the object. Hence, an aesthetic judgment is unable to state any objective condition or criterion of anything whatever. This means that if an aesthetic judgment is at all synthetic a priori, it must be so in a different sense.

Kant has given four definitions of beauty. Regarding the logical status of these definitions Kant is completely silent. He does not state whether the definitions are analytic, or synthetic a priori or a posteriori. But he clearly holds that a particular aesthetic judgment has both an empirical and an a priori elements. He recognises the particular aesthetic judgments like, 'the rose is beautiful' or 'the statue is beautiful' to be synthetic a priori. It is clear that unlike the synthetic a priori propositions of the first and the second 'critiques' a particular aesthetic judgment, say, 'the rose is beautiful' is a singular judgment considered from the logical point

of view, since an aesthetic judgment does not join the predicate of beauty to the concept of an object taken in its entire logical sphere. It is also obvious that the judgment 'the rose is beautiful' does not state an assumption for the constitution of objects of experience, or a condition for the determination of what should or should not be done. It is not at all concerned with spatial and temporal objects or moral actions. It is rather concerned with our private feeling that we have in representing an object to ourselves, the feeling of pleasure. But inspite of this we may characterise an aesthetic judgment as 'synthetic a priori'. A synthetic judgment is that in which the predicate goes beyond the subject or in which the predicate can be denied of the subject without any contradiction. An aesthetic judgment is synthetic for its predicate, i.e., the pleasure connected with the representation of the object, is not implicit in the concept of the object. When we assert that we take pleasure in the object, we do so 'irrespective of any concept'. "It is easy to see, that judgments of taste are synthetic judgments, for they go beyond the concept and even the intuition of the object in order to add as predicate to that intuition something that has no reference to knowledge, namely, the feeling of pleasure or pain"¹⁶.

An aesthetic judgment may be called a priori, too. In the first 'critique' Kant has mentioned universality and necessity as marks of a priority. In the third 'critique', in his analysis of the 'beautiful' from four different standpoints or 'moments' Kant asserts that a judgment of taste is universal and necessary. Kant makes an important distinction between an aesthetic judgment, 'the rose is beautiful' and a judgment about the pleasant, 'hot-bath is pleasant' with reference to this feature of universality and necessity.

Here it may thus appear that there is a sense in which Kant may be said to use the expression 'synthetic a priori' in the same sense in all his 'critiques'. Like the aesthetic judgments of the third 'critique' the synthetic a priori judgments of the first two 'critiques' are universal and necessary. Moreover, these two forms of synthetic a priori judgments also may be called synthetic in the sense in which the aesthetic judgments are synthetic. The synthetic a priori judgments of all the three 'critiques' are universal, necessary and synthetic. Thus if by a synthetic a priori judgment we mean a judgment which, though universal and necessary, can be denied without contradiction, the expression 'synthetic a priori' may be said to mean the something in all the 'critiques' of Kant.

But there is a difficulty. An aesthetic judgment can

not be universal and necessary in the sense in which a logical judgment, or a synthetic a priori judgment of the first or the second 'critique' can be. In the first 'critique' Kant identifies universality or necessity with objective validity. The synthetic a priori judgments of the second 'critique', too, have been recognised by Kant as objectively valid, though, to be precise, this objective validity is not identical with the former. Objective necessity is the necessity that any determinate concept be predicted of a particular object. An aesthetic judgment refers to the subject and his feelings. When we say that 'the rose is beautiful', we are not concerned with an object 'rose', i.e., the concept of rose and we do not ascribe a property to that object. We are concerned with the pleasure or pain which we feel in representing the object to ourselves. Thus an aesthetic judgment does not and can not claim objective validity. It is universal and necessary in a quite different sense. An aesthetic judgment does not affirm the predicate of beauty of an object taken in its entire logical sphere. It is universal and necessary in the sense that it extends this predicate over the whole sphere of judging subjects¹⁷. This universality is subjective. .

Even if it is taken for granted that the aesthetic judgments are objectively valid, it can not be said that

an aesthetic judgment is synthetic a priori in the sense in which the synthetic a priori judgments of the first or the second 'critique' are; for an aesthetic judgment states neither the condition of the possibility of objects in space and time nor the condition of the determination of what should not be done. An aesthetic judgment does not at all state a condition or an assumption of anything, for it is independent of all determinate concepts whatever.

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It may be said that though a particular form of reflective judgment, aesthetic or teleological, does not express an assumption or a requirement of something and so can not be a priori in the sense in which a synthetic a priori judgment of the first or the second 'critique' can be, the general principle of reflective judgment does express an assumption. The judgment 'nature itself is systematic' is, Kant holds, the general principle of reflection. This judgment is synthetic in the sense that the negation of it does not involve us in any self-contradiction. It is a priori in the sense of stating an assumption for constructing a system of interrelated laws, i.e., a system of experience. So there is no fundamental difference between the universal principle of causation

'every event must have a cause' and the general principle of reflection 'nature itself is systematic'.

The last statement is not tenable. The universal principle of causation is objectively valid, it is a constitutive principle. It is a priori in the sense that it is the very condition for there being any object at all. The principle of reflective judgment, on the other hand, is subjective¹⁸. It is not a constitutive but a regulative principle. It does not attribute at all to the object, it only concerns our mode of reflection of it. It is not a presupposition of the possibility of experience itself, but of the possibility of a system of such experiences. Thus though the universal law of causation, the categorical Imperative and the general principle of reflective judgment are alike in stating a condition of something, they do not state a condition or an assumption of the same thing. The first states the condition of experience itself, the second of the determination of what is impermissible and the third of the systematic investigation of experiences, already obtained by the first. Thus it can not be said that we have synthetic a priori judgments in all the three 'critiques' in exactly the same sense.

[VI]

The same conclusion, reached in section [V], is also suggested from other considerations. Kant's synthetic a priori judgments are different from the ordinary synthetic judgments, called a posteriori, in being 'independent' of experience. Independence of experience is the defining characteristic of a priori in Kant's philosophy. This characteristic does not mean the same thing in the contexts of, say, the universal principle of causation and the supreme principle of morality, i.e., the synthetic a priori judgments of the first and the second 'critiques'. The judgment 'every event must have a cause' is not independent of experience in the sense that experience is irrelevant to its truth. The judgment will be rejected if a single instance of events, which has no cause, is recognised. But this is not the case with the principles of morality. A judgment which states what we ought or ought not to do remains unaffected by experience in the sense that experience is quite irrelevant to its validity. The principle that 'we ought to speak the truth', for example, may be valid even if nobody in fact speaks the truth.

However, this notion of independence is difficult to understand. We can not determine this 'independence' of a synthetic a priori judgment by a law of logic or by experience. It is only an analytic proposition, holds Kant, which can be logically independent of experience. Again, the question of determining this independence by

experience does not arise for the simple reason that in that case the judgment will cease to be independent of experience.

Perhaps, Kant was aware that he might be misunderstood and so he gave us two marks of 'a priori', over and above a definition of it. These are necessity and universality. As Kant considers each one of them to be a sufficient and necessary mark of a priority, let us consider necessity only.

Are the universal law of causation, 'every event must have a cause' and the categorical Imperative necessary, i.e., 'a priori' in the same sense? This question arises because Kant himself has recognised, at least, three different kinds of necessity - logical, transcendental and unconditional, logical necessity is the necessity which can be explained with reference to the logical laws. It is only the analytic propositions which have this kind of necessity. The synthetic a priori judgments of the first 'critique' have only transcendental necessity. Their necessity consists in the fact that we must recognise them if we want to have experience that we actually have. This necessity is conditional, since its recognition depends upon the condition that human beings desire for experience. It is hypothetical in nature. This necessity is not intrinsic

but extrinsic¹⁹. It does not come up from the necessities of thought, for it is not necessary that a human being must desire for experience.

But the categorical Imperative is necessary in a different sense. To distinguish this necessity from the transcendental one Kant makes a clear distinction between hypothetical imperatives, on the one hand, and the categorical Imperative, on the other. The necessity of the Categorical Imperative does not refer to our private desires and inclinations or any ends to be achieved, for in that case it will be hypothetical in character. It is not dependent on any external factor but upon the concept of man as such. Just from the rationality of a man it can be shown, Kant holds, that he will obey the categorical imperative. Rational and moral behaviours are identical. So this necessity is intrinsic and unconditional. It is this characteristic of 'unconditionality' which makes the categorical imperative a priori or independent of experience. As the universal law of causation and the categorical imperative are not a priori or independent of experience in the same sense, the expression 'synthetic a priori' does not mean exactly the same thing in all its occurrences in Kant's philosophy.

[VII]

Each of Kant's three 'critiques' is concerned with a different cognitive faculty, and each cognitive faculty has some a priori principles of its own. The first 'critique' deals with understanding, the second with Reason and the third with Judgment. Kant's synthetic a priori judgments are a priori principles of these cognitive faculties. The synthetic a priori judgments of all the three 'critiques' of Kant can not be said to mean exactly the same thing, for there is a considerable difference in the status and implications of these a priori principles. Let us consider, for example, the a priori principles of the understanding and reason. Kant holds that human understanding has to become operative if experience, i.e., perceptual knowledge, is to be possible. Knowledge is not just a passive manifestation of the given. The objects of knowledge are not given, they are yet to be made possible by the understanding. Understanding, Kant asserts, makes nature. In this respect Kant anticipates the stand of the Gestalt Psychologists who hold that the objects of perception are actively organised by the mind in accordance with some organising principles. The objective validity of these principles of the understanding is guaranteed by the fact that we can not have any object of knowledge without them. Each principle states a condition of the possibility

[VII]

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just a rule or principle which organises the particular but is such that it 'actually produces the particulars which are judged to be instances of the universal rule'. A particular moral action, so Kant believes, is fully determined by the universal moral concepts. The status of the synthetic a priori moral judgments, thus, gets differentiated from the status of those of the first or the third 'critique'. If we are allowed to say as Kant has really said, that a synthetic a priori moral judgment expresses a condition or test of a moral principle and indirectly of a moral action, we should say that it expresses not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition thereof. Thus the synthetic a priori moral judgment implies that our intellect has a 'real use' which is opposed by Kant in the first 'critique'.

There is another difference in implication. Kant's synthetic a priori judgments of the first 'critique' do not require us to cross the limit of the phenomenal world, they rather imply that we are confined within the world of appearance. They state conditions not of objects as they are, but of objects in space and time. Though Kant recognises the synthetic a priori judgments, like, 'every event must have a cause' to be objective, they are objective only in the epistemological sense and not in the ontological sense of the term. They are objectively valid since we

must take them for granted if we are to know physical objects.

The synthetic a priori judgment of the second 'critique', the categorical imperative, on the other hand, requires us to go beyond this world of appearance. The first formulation of the categorical imperative states ; 'Act on that maxim whereby you can will it to be a universal law'. It is quite clear that we can apply such a test only if we presuppose that a man is morally free. It is also clear that a self which is to be regarded as free to choose between alternative courses of action must be distinguished from a self which, like other phenomenal events, is conceived to be governed by causal laws. This free self, the autonomous self of Kant's moral theory, falls in the noumenal realm, and it can not be an object of theoretical knowledge. Thus it is unplausible that the synthetic a priori judgments of Kant's three 'critiques' having considerable differences in status and implications among themselves, are 'synthetic a priori' in exactly the same sense.

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