

## CHAPTER II

### Implication of Synthetic a Priori Judgment

#### [ I ]

It has been suggested in the previous chapter that Hume's brilliant empirical analysis of universal causal relation worked as a great stimulus to Kant's discovery of 'synthetic a priori judgments'. At some stage of his philosophical development Kant was influenced by extreme rationalism or, what may be called, "pure or ideal rationalism"<sup>1</sup>. This form of rationalism has recognised an unlimited power of reason or thought. Thought by itself is in a position to produce necessary or certain knowledge which is true about this world. But it is Hume's analysis of the causal judgments which succeeds in changing Kant's

faith in the power of reason. Hume's analysis of causal judgments, says N.K. Smith, "awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber, and so ultimately led to the raising of the logical problem in its widest form :- how synthetic a priori judgments, whether mathematical, physical, or metaphysical, are possible"<sup>2</sup>.

The suggestion, of course, is not wrong, but it might be misleading. It might be thought that Hume's analysis of the causal principle logically leads to Kant's thesis that there are synthetic a priori judgments, or that this analysis and Kant's thesis can not be accommodated together. This ambiguity may constitute a good logic for investigating the real implication of Hume's analysis of the universal law of causation in our attempt to realise the significance of Kant's thesis that some judgments are synthetic a priori.

Hume's analysis of causal relation implies not that there is no such relation, not that we have, in fact, no science; but that the causal relation can not mean more than mere concomitance or regularity, that we can not claim for science any superior status than what is enjoyed by the contingent empirical judgments, "that the principle of causality has no possible rational basis"<sup>3</sup>. In the words of Prof. Smith, Hume's position on causal relation may be stated as :

"The principle that every event must have a cause, is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain. So far from there existing a necessary connection between the idea of an event as something happening in time and the idea of a cause, no connection of any kind is discoverable by us"<sup>4</sup>.

Hume is conscious that the universal causal principle, 'every event must have a cause' claims to be necessary and every necessary judgment is a priori. Again, he is also conscious that this causal principle is not analytic but synthetic since it can not be justified simply by logical laws. Thus it may be inferred that though Hume himself did not recognise the existence of synthetic a priori judgments, he could realise what such judgments would have been like, if possible. From this it is not quite unnatural to get at the suggestion that the implication of the admission of synthetic a priori propositions lies in the consequence of the denial of those propositions. And it can not be denied that Hume is obviously right in thinking that the denial of synthetic a priori judgments destroys the basis of science which claims certainty, makes certain knowledge impossible. But Hume was, perhaps, wrong in taking this to be the whole story. The real implication of this denial may be much more devastating than Hume thought it to be. It might be said that the negation of the existence of synthetic a priori judgments destroys not only necessary knowledge or

science but also the possibility of empirical knowledge, which does not claim to be necessary. This is also clear from Prof. Smith's statement when to express Kant's continued belief in the Idealist view of thought he writes : "Though pure thought never by itself amounts to knowledge -- therein Kant departs from the extreme rationalist position -- only through it is any knowledge, empirical or a priori, possible at all"<sup>5</sup>.

[ II ]

The great merit of Kant's thesis 'some judgments are synthetic a priori', it is thought, is that it saves us from accepting some unpalatable consequences, e.g., there is no science, experience is impossible, and so on. From this we might be tempted to assert that Kant's thesis secures everything that we miss by Hume's denial of synthetic a priori judgment, that this thesis implies that Hume was mistaken in his denial of synthetic a priori judgments. We could assert this without hesitation if Hume and Kant had denied and affirmed, respectively, the same thing. But this does not seem to be obvious. Kant himself, of course, believes that Hume has denied exactly what he has affirmed in the statement, 'there are synthetic a priori judgments'. In

other words, if we commit ourselves to Kant's thesis, we are to admit physical science; and if we refuse to admit it, we thereby miss even empirical knowledge, which Hume himself was not ready to deny. This may be taken to be the real implication of Kant's thesis, 'some judgments are synthetic a priori'. Let us see, in what follows, how far it is true that Kant's thesis has this implication, and whether it has this implication without any further assumption; whether the affirmation of Kant's thesis implies the falsity of Hume's denial of synthetic a priori judgments.

[ III ]

Hume subscribes to the doctrine that all true propositions are either analytic a priori or synthetic a posteriori. Hume's conclusion that there is no synthetic a priori proposition rests upon this dichotomy of judgments. If for the sake of argument we admit this dichotomy, we can not deny Hume's conclusion without contradiction. Again, assuming that Kant is not logically wrong in affirming the existence of synthetic a priori judgments, we can easily draw the conclusion that Hume and Kant have not referred to the same thing when they denied or affirmed 'synthetic a priori judgments'.

The same conclusion will follow even if we proceed in a different way. Both Hume and Kant have admitted that we can deny any synthetic judgment without self-contradiction. They have also admitted that we can not so deny any analytic proposition. As because Hume has denied but Kant has affirmed synthetic a priori judgments, inspite of their fundamental agreement on the meaning of 'analytic' and 'synthetic' judgments, they can not mean the same thing when they deny or affirm 'synthetic a priori judgments'.

If we admit this conclusion, we can not but hesitate to concede to the claim that the affirmation of Kant's synthetic a priori judgments implies that Hume was mistaken in denying synthetic a priori judgments.

#### [ IV ]

Can we hope to find any possible way of showing that Hume will deny what Kant has affirmed by the statement, 'some judgments are synthetic a priori' ? Our answer to this can be affirmative. From what has been already said it is clear that Hume will not admit of any such propositions which state something about the world and yet claim to be necessary in the sense that they are justified simply by logical laws. This is quite justified, but not a bold step at all. We can not expect that the synthetic judgments will

be justified by the law of contradiction if we already define synthetic judgments as those judgments which can be denied without self-contradiction. "The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality"<sup>6</sup>.

Hume will also deny another kind of judgment. He has identified synthetic judgments with the empirical ones and such judgments, according to Hume, are contingent. Now, if any synthetic judgment claims to be more than contingent, it will be impossible for the simple reason that the only justification that Hume could discover for any synthetic judgment, i.e., judgments concerning matters of fact, was experience. Let us state it in Hume's own words :

"When it is asked, what is the nature of all our reasonings concerning matter of fact ? the proper answer seems to be, that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect. When again it is asked, what is the foundation of all our reasonings and conclusions concerning that relation ? it may be replied in one word, Experience"<sup>7</sup>.

Sense-experience can not justify any discrimination between any ordinary empirical statement, like 'grass is green' and any principle of physical science, like, 'every event must have a cause'. In other words, to Hume all

synthetic judgments are of the same status. He will deny all synthetic judgments which pretend to be more than contingent, i.e., not contingent in the ordinary sense of the term — judgments which can not be justified by sense-experience.

Kant's synthetic a priori judgments are of this kind. He holds that there are propositions which state 'the conditions of the possibility of experience', or the fundamental defining characteristics of experience. Such propositions are not analytic for if we deny that there is human experience, no contradiction arises. But again, they are not like ordinary contingent propositions. If the truth of a proposition is the condition of the possibility of experience itself, there is no point in seeking the verdict of experience to know whether it is true or not. Thus if we assume that there is human experience, we can assert those propositions a priori. It is this kind of propositions which Kant calls synthetic a priori, and Hume will definitely deny them. Thus it is not quite unjustified to hold that the affirmation of Kant's synthetic a priori judgments implies that Hume is mistaken in denying synthetic a priori judgments.

[ v ]

Hume has identified synthetic judgments with empirical judgments, and such judgments are, he says, contingent. Thus if any judgment claims to be more than contingent and yet to be synthetic, it is not possible. The judgments of science are of this type and so science is, Hume will say, impossible. The whole gamut of knowledge or judgment is, according to Hume, exhausted by analytic and empirical judgments.

Kant is convinced that there are synthetic a priori judgments in mathematics and logic; and so, he argues, science is possible. This means that the existence of synthetic a priori judgments makes science possible. But we should rather say that if the judgements of sciences are such that they claim more than to be contingent in the ordinary sense but less than to be logically necessary, then the recognition of synthetic a priori judgments implies the existence of science. This is, no doubt, an important fact about the synthetic a priori judgments. But what is more fundamental about them is something different. It is this that if we exclude synthetic a priori judgments from the class of judgments, the class of judgments will thereby be rendered empty. It is not simply false that all synthetic

judgments are empirical, but that it is absurd. It is not possible to have empirical judgments without recognising a different type of synthetic judgments, which are not as contingent as the empirical ones. They are, what may be called, Kant's synthetic a priori judgments.

But how is it that empirical judgments require some other judgments which are not themselves empirical? This is not unnatural. There must be, according to Kant, an element of compulsion, some kind of necessity, a universal element, which distinguishes a judgment from a fiction or mere opinion, from a psychological association of ideas. Judgment is not a matter of caprice. In B.143, Kant has made a clear distinction between a psychological association of ideas, and objective unity of given representations or judgment. In a psychological association the relation between the ideas is casual and contingent; but in judgment this relation is no longer arbitrary. It is governed by a law that is linked with the unity of the self. This relation is necessary even when the judgment is not concerned to assert the relation as necessary. In other words, it holds good even if the judgment is empirical. The empirical judgment, "all bodies are heavy" does not assert that if we support a body, we feel an impression of weight, it does not assert that this impression may be different for different persons at different times. It asserts that the

impressions of 'body' and 'weight' are combined in the object itself. I combine them not simply because I am pleased to do that, but because I feel some sort of compulsion. This implies that there are some principles or laws behind the organisation of the sense-impressions into a unity. This is, perhaps, true even in the case of the so-called emotive judgments, which may not be called judgments if judged by the more or less well accepted criterion of 'truth-claim'. This principle of organisation can not be supplied by the brute facts of experience; it is to be imported from outside of experience. This should be obvious from the fact that a principle of organisation can not itself be one of the items to be organised; from the fact that in a logical argument no principle of that argument can be a conclusion of that argument. Moreover, if the principles are to be received from the impressions themselves, any organisation will be as better as the other. There will be no intelligible way of distinguishing between a mere psychological association of ideas and a judgment; a mere opinion and knowledge. The principles are to be a priori. Again, the principles are not analytical. They have no intrinsic necessity. They would have possessed intrinsic necessity if it were impossible for human experience not to occur. But this is not the case. They can not, of course, be denied if there is human experience

or knowledge; but the denial of human experience does not involve any self-contradiction. Thus with reference to human experience these principles are both a priori and synthetic. These principles are the conditions of the possibility of experience and we have already seen that Kant's synthetic a priori judgments express such conditions. Thus the synthetic a priori judgments are to be recognised not only for the sake of a special type of experience called science, which claims to be necessary or, at least, more than contingent; but also for empirical knowledge, which does not so claim. This is thought to be the full implication of synthetic a priori judgments, and, perhaps, Hume would not have denied them if he could realise this full implication.

[ VI ]

In connection with what has been stated as the full implication of synthetic a priori judgments two issues might be suggested. It is true that for the validity of the statement, "no forms of knowledge, even empirical one, is possible without synthetic a priori judgments" we need not know whether anybody happens to admit it or not.

Hence, we can avoid the discussion of the question as to whether Hume would not have denied synthetic a priori judgments if he could realise its full implication. But the validity of that statement requires a certain conception of knowledge and this conception of knowledge does not enjoy universal consent. It requires that knowledge is always judgmental. Judgment is systematisation; it involves organisation or interpretation which requires synthetic a priori principles. One such principle recognised by Kant is, "every event must have a cause". But it might be said that we can have knowledge which is not discursive. It might be claimed that we have knowledge even when our awareness is simply an awareness of an existence, and not of an existence of a certain sort. The indeterminate or "Nirvikalpaka" perception recognised by the Nyāya philosophers may be used to substantiate this claim. It is, of course, not necessary, for our purpose, to establish or destablise this claim. But what is important is that the view, "even empirical knowledge is not possible without synthetic a priori judgments" can not be accepted without reservation; for its validity will be affected by the existence of indeterminate perception, if there is any. Thus we should rather say that no forms of knowledge, even empirical, is possible without the recognition of synthetic a priori judgments, provided

judgment is the unit of knowledge.

Another issue, which is not unrelated with the investigation of the implication of synthetic a priori judgments deserves attention. We have seen that judgments require some principles of organisation, and we have also seen that these principles are to be synthetic and a priori. These principles are Kant's synthetic a priori judgments. Kant's efforts are directed to establish that there are such principles, but he has not established that these principles are judgment. Moreover, there are definite objections against describing them as judgments. The most reasonable objection, perhaps, is that a principle which makes judgment possible can not itself be a judgment, for in that case we shall have to admit that for judgment to be possible there is no need of any such principle. Walsh writes "synthetic a priori judgments fall in a class of their own, and it may even be suggested that they are not judgments at all"<sup>8</sup>.

The relation of this issue with the investigation, here undertaken, is that if these principles are not judgment, the investigation loses its meaning and Kant's very problem of "synthetic a priori judgment" is reduced to a pseudo-problem.

## [ VII ]

No form of knowledge is possible, we have seen above, without the recognition of synthetic a priori judgments. Synthetic a priori knowledge, in its turn, requires a new conception of mind. According to Kant, we can not have synthetic a priori knowledge if we conceive human mind after the fashion of the empiricists or the rationalists. According to them, knowledge is mere analysis - either analysis of universal a priori laws or analysis of the manifold of experience revealed in sense. For both of them, mind is passive in knowledge. But for Kant, mind is not simply a "clean slate" upon which experience writes the whimsical wills. Our mind supplies the required principles for organising the discrete sense-manifolds into experience. Thus the existence of synthetic a priori judgments implies a conception of mind, different from those of the rationalists and the empiricists. "If we assume that the human mind is purely passive in knowledge, we can not explain the a priori knowledge which we undoubtedly possess"<sup>9</sup>.

The existence of synthetic a priori judgments implies a second change also - a revolutionary change in our outlook - a change which is not unrelated with the change in the conception of mind. We can not have synthetic a

a priori judgments, i.e., judgments expressing conditions of experience if such conditions are to depend upon the world we experience rather than upon our own faculties that we employ in experiencing the world; for in that case the synthetic a priori judgments, according to Kant, will be reduced to contingent empirical judgments. Hence, the existence of synthetic a priori judgments implies a fundamental change in philosophical method. We should no more stick to the long cherished idea, "our knowledge must conform to objects" but subscribe to a new one, "objects must conform to our knowledge" instead. This revolutionary change has been described as 'Copernican revolution' by Kant himself. By this revolution Kant does not suggest that mind can create things, as far as their existence is concerned, by thinking them. "What he is suggesting is that we can not know things, that they can not be objects of knowledge for us, except in so far as they are subjected to certain a priori conditions of knowledge on the part of the subject"<sup>10</sup>.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. F.Copleston : A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY,  
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2. N.K.Smith : A COMMENTARY TO KANT'S  
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edn., p.592.
3. " : Ibid, p.594
4. " : Ibid, p.593
5. " : Ibid, p.606
6. David Hume : AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN  
UNDERSTANDING, Sec.IV, Part I

7. David Hume : Ibid, Sec.IV, Part II
8. W.H.Walsh : REASON AND EXPERIENCE, p.51
9. F.Copleston : A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY,  
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10. " : Ibid, p.225