

The German Idealists

Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel,
Arthur Schopenhauer

Learning Targets

- Explain the main ideas of the idealists, and how they connect to other philosophical movements.
- Discuss and compare the contributions of three idealists:
 - Kant
 - Hegel
 - Schopenhauer

Origins

- Direct response to the Empiricists, particularly Hume.
- Believed that awareness wasn't limited by experience, but rather people and reality are part of a "transcendent unity."
- Reality is structured by both the mind and the nature of human understanding.
- Troubled by Hume's conclusions about morality.

Transcendent Unity

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that the mind and the rest of reality are part of the same unified picture.
- Used empiricism to show the limits of understanding, but wanted to show that understanding is not limited by experience.
- More optimistic view reality, reason, human nature, and even history.

Kantian Metaphysics

- Hume thought we had to depend on our senses to gain knowledge, but couldn't trust them. Kant thought he was too skeptical.
- We can't trust our senses to tell us directly, but they do tell us about how reality appears.
- That appearance points to a transcendent unity of the way the world SEEMS to us and the way the world ACTUALLY is.

So, what is reality to Kant?

- Phenomena- the appearance of things
- Neumena (the thing in itself)
- We can't know the neumena directly, but we can apprehend it based on the way we perceive the natural world.

Hume Reminder

- Nothing can be known without experience, but we need judgements to make sense of our experience.
- Judgements aren't reliable because they don't come from experience.
 - Habit
 - Convention
 - Human Nature

Hume cont'd

- Judgements depend on the position from which we see them. They aren't true independently of who sees them. (or how)
- Empiricism has limited power to tell us what's true for certain.
 - The mind has to rely on connections that aren't based on real objects.

Kant's Response to Hume

- Flipped Hume, and argued that objects (the noumenal world) must conform to knowledge (the phenomenal world).
- The mind organizes objects.
 - Noumenal world=cookie dough
 - Phenomenal world=cookies
 - You can't know the dough, but you can sure taste the cookies.

Cookie Cutters of the Mind

- All we can know directly are the cookies that have been cut by our understanding.
- Concepts he considered “categories of understanding”
 - Space, time, substance, causality, etc.
 - We have no experience of these, but through them we experience things that we say have substance, exist in time, are caused, etc.

Concepts before experience

- *A Priori* concepts (what comes before)
 - Come before experience
 - Make experience possible
 - Existed before we gave them any thought, but are necessary for us to understand anything.

Kantian Ethics

- Hume argued that we can't draw conclusions about what ought to be based on our knowledge of what exists.
- Kant tried to fix this:
 - Pure reason-reasoning about what exists
 - Practical reason- moral thinking
 - Imperatives-ideas about what we should do that should hold true for everyone.

Imperatives

- Where do atheists get moral rules?
- The categorical imperative (an *A priori* concept, because it holds true prior to experience) makes practical (moral) judgment possible.
 - Universal moral law that should hold true for everyone, always.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

- Applied Kant's ideas about unity of action, understanding and phenomenal reality into a new view of history.
- Drew on Kant's conception of categories of understanding that give shape to reality.
- For Hegel, the categories keep changing and tend to conflict with one another.

Hegel's Dialectic

- The categories work themselves out over time through a *dialectic of history*.
- *Thesis antithesis, synthesis*. An idea comes into conflict with its opposite. Eventually, conflict is resolved.
- Being vs. Nothing=Becoming
- Think of reality as a really big mind, trying to figure itself out.
- Saw the history of human thinking as people trying to figure out just what their problem is.

Alienation

- In Hegel's dialectic, the universe will eventually figure itself out and become free.
- Until then, we experience suffering and alienation.
 - When ideas become fragmented and distance themselves from other ideas.
 - When an idea doesn't see itself as part of the big picture, but becomes cut off from the rest of idealized reality...alienation.

Example? Example.

- God is unknowable and separate from humanity.
- Because they believe in a god that is separate from them, people feel cut off from reality, rather than an integral part of it.
- Example 2: “The Master and the Slave.”