

## KANT AND HOW YOU KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW

Kant believed we cannot really sense or know things as they really are. In that way at a stroke he turned philosophy into psychology.

For Kant, you know what your eye is telling you but not if what your eye is telling you is right or exact. There could be a bigger or lesser difference between what you perceive and the truth. For that reason if you agree with Kant then you may argue that the Bible could not be a direct revelation from God. Even if you do disagree with Kant, you will agree that your inner sense that God has revealed something or is living in you is far less reliable than what your eyes and ears tell you. Two men can see a tree but two men cannot see in their hearts what doctrines and prayers God is present in. The Islamist sees God in war and the New Age sees him in flowers.

Here is a Kantian argument. You look at a tree. You touch it and smell it and climb it. Do you know what the object is like? No - you do not know it in itself. Your mind and senses form information about it. But it is not direct knowing. It is indirect. It is like you know it by hearsay. You touch the tree but each moment is so fast that by the time you process it you have only what was processed. For all you know, it could have been an illusion. It is not as good as actually touching the tree.

So instead of knowing the tree you know phenomena about the tree. You know what the tree seems to be through the filters of your limited senses and mind.

Is Kant contradicting himself by saying that a tree is unknowable in itself and then saying that he knows it is unknowable? No for you know that you are not the tree and cannot know it as you do yourself. And you know your senses never give direct information. Kant is accused of saying that the truth about the world there are no truths about the world. No he is saying truth is real but we have no 100% way of getting at it. The fault is with us not truth.

How can Kant know that all he learns is what his brain and senses tell him about the outside world and not the outside world? Surely to know that you would need to be able to get beyond brain and sense data? If all you see is pink that does not mean there are no other colours out there. But if you have no way of seeing outside your room but a camera you only believe what the camera tells you. It could be totally misleading you. It is obvious then that Kant is right to say nobody knows the outside world.

Even if Kant were wrong to say that you do not know what you know, what happens after you know it? All you have is memory. If you learn through your memory then you are learning about nothing in itself but only what memory says about it.

For Kant, you know phenomena - phenomena means how the mind preprocesses things - but you do not know the real things (noumena was his name for the real world).

Some say that you do know the tree for your mind does not mold the tree but the tree molds your mind. You gain knowledge about the outside world from your senses and you are looking at the world not your senses. Kant's idea is that you are looking at the work of your senses not the world.

It is wise to assume the tree is moulding your senses but it might not be. You can still doubt.

If we have such difficulties with the things that surround us, imagine how likely it is that God and religion and spirituality are just fantasies?