

General Questions, §§4–5

According to the *Preamble*, the exclusive question of metaphysics is whether there could be synthetic *a priori* judgements (cf. §2, 4:269). But in pure mathematics and pure natural science, such judgements are not only possible, but also actual. So, given the analytical method, the question is not *whether* metaphysics is possible, but *how* it is possible. Hence the general question: how is synthetic *a priori* cognition possible (4:276)? The *Introduction* to the *A Critique* roughly matches the content of §§1–5.

1. What is Kant's assessment of earlier attempts to gain metaphysical knowledge? (§4, 4:271–4)
2. In contrast to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, what is the aim of the *Prolegomena*? (§4, 4:274–5)
3. How would you describe the analytical procedure? (§4, 4:275: but see also the note in §5, 4:276)
4. What is the central question, or the problem on which 'everything hinges', that decides the possibility of metaphysics? (§5, 4:276)
- 5.★ In §5 (4:277) Kant mentions Hume again at: what is the point he makes about him?
6. What is the main role of transcendental philosophy, and why does it have to 'precede' metaphysics? (§5, 4:279)

Background. (a) When discussing scepticism, Kant mentions the 'tranquility of a permitted ignorance' (§4, 4:274). This is an allusion to ancient scepticism, which has the tranquillity of the soul (*ἀταραξία*, *ataraxia*) at its heart: "Suspension of judgement [*ἐποχή*, *epoche*] is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything. Tranquillity is freedom from disturbance or calmness of the soul. [...] But when they suspend judgement, tranquillity follows as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body."¹ Like Kant, Hume thinks that such (excessive) scepticism, which holds, roughly, that knowledge is impossible or unattainable, is unconvincing (see, e.g., *Enquiry* §XII). Yet, again like Hume, he thinks that the key insight of scepticism is a sort of epistemic modesty. (b) Kant mentions David Hume in §5 (4:277), providing a succinct summary of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748; German translation 1755), §IV ('Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding') and §V ('Sceptical Solution of these Doubts'). Hume lays out the problem of induction, and then argues that while indispensable for human thinking, induction cannot be rationally justified. This relates to similar praise in relation to causation, which Kant mentions in the 'slumbers' passage (*Preface* ¶¶9ff., 4:257ff.). Hume's *Enquiry* is available online at davidhume.org. For some further background, see handout 4.

1 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. J. Annas & J. Barnes (2000), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Bk I, §§ 29.

