Immanuel Kant's Copernican Revolution

Immanuel Kant's Copernican Revolution is a synthesis of two major philosophical thoughts; namely, rationalism and empiricism. Rationalists such as Plato and Descartes believed that reason and reason alone creates knowledge that is true. Human sensibility should not be relied on in order to create knowledge because human senses have the ability to deceive. Kant, who was a rationalist too, believed, like the rest of the rationalists, that true knowledge can only be created through reason. He also believed, like the rest of the rationalists, that even though true knowledge is created through reason, there still exists within us some innate forms of knowledge which aids in the formation of further knowledge—for instance, Plato's Forms and Descartes's Concept of the self.

When Kant was introduced to the paradigm of the empiricists, especially through readings of Humes, he was struck by his argument to the extent of accepting the rational that creation of knowledge is a posteriori—knowledge follows experience, which is the entire premise of the empiricists.

Empiricists such as Aristotle and Hume, believe that it is only through our sense and consequently experiences that we can gather any knowledge of the world around us. It is only through our experiences that knowledge is created. Hume's philosophy forms the basic premise of the scientific research; namely, experience and observation. All knowledge, for it to stand true has to be falsified or verified by experience and observation. Therefore, implying that tangible and measurable proof of truth is important in the paradigm of empiricism.

Kant, on the other hand, having been shaken from his rationalist leanings to embrace empiricism, essentially concluded that both rationalism and empiricism assume that the human mind always as the ability to uncover the knowledge of reality, whether a priori or a posteriori. Kant's proposed that this is not to be assumed so simply. He states that the human mind is actually quite limited in scope of meaning making and the reason for that is due to the preexisting categories/constraints that are innate to our own existence. These constraints can exist in our brain as both in synthetic form as well as a priori. In other words, when our mind encounters a stimulus we start making meaning of it based on the categories and constraints already existing on our brains—these are the a priori constraints. Having made meaning of the observed stimulus, we create further categories of constraints in our brain which then help up unravel the reality of knowledge when we make further observations—these are the synthetic constraints. To put it in simpler terms, Kant claims that we make meaning of the world around us based solely on our experiences that are bound and created by the categories/constraints in our minds. Kant further argues that due to the nature of our experiences, the kind of knowledge that we decipher can be broken up into two categories: namely, phenomenal (the apparent, tangible world), and the noumenal (the real, intangible world).

The world of Hume is the world of empiricism and empiricism states that the validity of our knowledge can only be ratified through our senses. Therefore, when Kant explores and elucidates how knowledge about the phenomenal world, due to the nature of the world, is dependent on our senses, he supports Hume's arguments. However, when Kant's explores the notion of interpreting the noumenal world, he refutes Hume's premise and instead gravitates towards that the rationalists who side with the concept of the existence of "innate ideas". However, Kant's rationalist leanings are more in-line with the rationalism of Descartes (argument of the wax) where unraveling the truth is not dependent of reason, but also tied in with imagination and sense. Therefore, in a way, Kant expands on Hume's empiricism and takes it to a level where in order to make meaning of the world around us, we depend not only on
our senses, but also on our innate ideas which encompass imagination and reason.