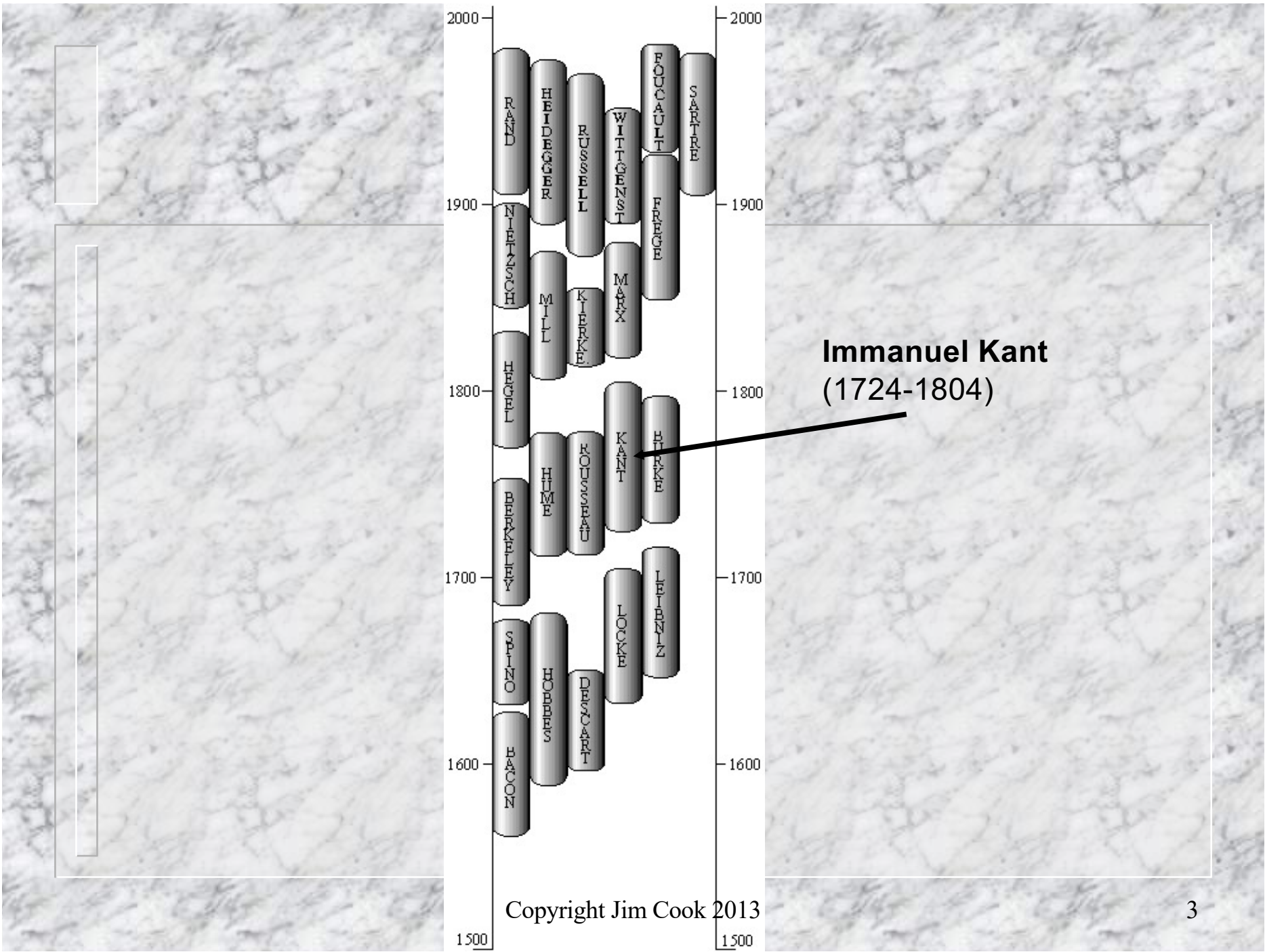


# Kant's Epistemology

## Part I: The Big Picture



# Overview: Part 1

- Pre-Kant Epistemology
- Kant's Epistemology—the big picture
  - His Hypothesis
  - Distinction Between Form and Content
  - Knowledge as a Cooperative Affair
  - The General Problem of Pure Reason

# I. Pre-Kant Epistemology

- Two sides of the philosophical discussion: the rationalists (Descartes) and the empiricists (Locke & Hume)
- What the Descartes (rationalists) and Locke (empiricists) **had in common** (but not with Hume)
  - Reality existed “out there” independent of minds and opinions
    - Descartes thought there were two substances: mind and matter
      - “thing”-language & metaphysics; things having properties
    - Locke . . . .
    - **They were both metaphysical realists in this respect**
  - They held a form of the correspondence view of truth

# I. Pre-Kant Epistemology

- Two different epistemic approaches
  - 1) Descartes & Continental **Rationalists**
    - Aimed at certainty—mathematics as the ideal of all knowledge
    - But Hume pointed out, the indubitable knowledge obtained consisted merely of implicatory relations holding among propositions
    - Writing off perception, as they did, as mere confused thinking, left them only with speculation incapable of being verified or refuted
  - 2) Locke and the **Empiricists**
    - Less concerned with certainty than with “actual” (or perceptual) world
    - We have access to the actual world in sense perception
    - But, according to Hume, if we start from the assumption that what people are aware of are their own mental states, this is precisely where we remain
    - We do not know an external world; we know only our own ideas

# I. Pre-Kant Epistemology

- Result: Either way one goes—rationalism or empiricism—you ended up in skepticism
- At the same time the working scientists, unperturbed by philosophical doubts about the nature of their subject had been making advance after advance—the Hobbesian vision of a world that was thoroughly mechanistic seemed about to be fulfilled in detail

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- Two main concerns of Kant's project
  - Show real knowledge of matters of fact is possible
  - Give an account of the values that he believed lay outside the field of scientific, matter-of-fact knowledge
- Led to Kant's hypothesis
  - Kant's view of the scientific method
    - Asserted Cartesian view didn't realize that scientific method involved both an empirical factor and a rational factor
    - Galileo, in Kant's view, was a watershed—agreement on a “common plan or procedure.”

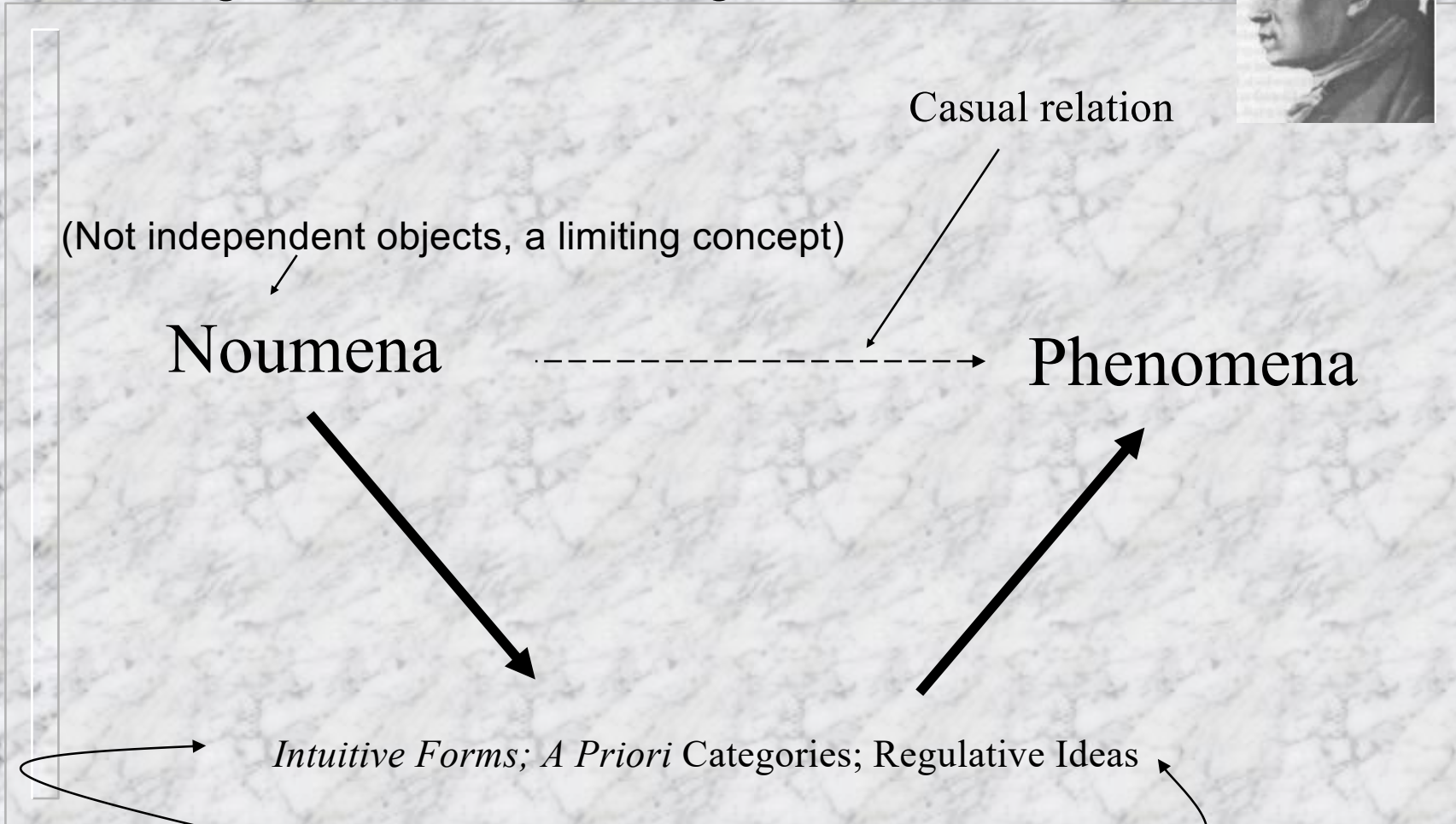
## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- “Hitherto it has been assumed that all our **knowledge must conform to objects** . . . this assumption ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that **objects must conform to our knowledge**.”
  - The first part implies that when our knowledge conforms to the object, then we know the truth
  - The second part implies that all our sensory input is **mediated** or we wouldn't be able to “know it.”
- Kant thought of this as his Copernican revolution
- “For experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves **understanding**; and understanding **has rules which I must presuppose** as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being *a priori*.”



# Rough & Ready

Kant's Revolution:  
Things in Themselves; Things to Me



Rules of understanding  
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## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- Two points emerge from this view:
  - If the test of truth is agreement of the mind with an external object, only particular truths can be known (we can never know *all* particulars because we cannot observe all bodies)
    - So Kant thought agreement of the mind with its objects **CANNOT** be the test of truth—at least as far as *universal propositions are concerned*
  - **But our perceptions have a necessary (universal) sense to them—for instance all our perceptions “have” or come with space & time**
    - So Kant tried his new Copernican hypothesis—the mind is not passive; it is active (contra Locke)

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

### ■ Distinction Between Form and Content

- Realism applied to particular objects (agreement with idea in mind and an external state of affairs)
- All judgments we make fall into certain classes, depending on their form
  - All judgments we make fall into certain classes, depending on their form (e.g. “This rose is red”)
  - There is a kind of putting together that consists in attribution; there is another kind of putting together that consists in causation; and so on.

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

### ■ Knowledge as a Cooperative Affair

- Kant's hypothesis did not concern particular judgments (e.g. "This rose is red")

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- It concerned the various types of putting together (for example, attribution)
  - Mind contributes the relations while objects contribute the *relata*
  - Mind does not contribute the *particular* relations
  - What the mind contributes are things like the spatial relationship (among others) common to *all* these particular situations
  - Thus attribution is one of the types of questions that the mind asks nature and in terms of which accordingly nature answers
  - The necessary part of experience is that the experience be organized into things-having properties because this way of perceiving things proves to be one of the universal forms of human experience
    - So substance (which has attributes) exists in phenomena, but not in noumena
    - Hence Hume's attack that there does not exist a "necessary connection" among matters of fact—between particulars—does not touch Kant's solution: there is a "necessary connection" or structure that organizes experience into an "A-is-B" type

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- This implies that if we know the nature of an ordering principle we can know *a priori* the characteristics of order imparted by it to the things it orders

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

### ■ The General Problem of Pure Reason

- How are *synthetical a priori* judgments possible?
- He introduced technical language to deal with the problem in his study of the nature of the scientific method, between the content of an experience and certain standard forms, or ways, of organizing that experience
  - Kant called the empirical “*a posteriori*”

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- A kind of judgment that is “independent of all experience” like Euclid's definition of the nature of a triangle is called pure or “*a priori*”
  - Two characteristics that distinguished this from “*a posteriori*”
    - If it is thought as a necessary, then it is *a priori* judgment
    - If a judgment is thought so that no exception is allowed as possible it is not derived from experience, but is valid absolutely *a priori*



## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- **Analytical** judgment: the predicate is covertly contained in the subject and may be obtained by analysis of it (e.g. “Roses are flowers.”—flowers is part of the definition of roses)
- **Synthetical** judgment: the predicate is not contained in the subject. (e.g. “Some roses are red.”—red is not a part of the definition of a rose)
- Their relationships can be visualized as follows:



*a posteriori*

*a priori*

Analytical

1 analytical *a posteriori*

2 analytical *a priori*

Synthetical

3 synthetical *a posteriori*

4 synthetical *a priori*

Analytical

1 null

2 warranted by law  
of contradiction

Synthetical

3 warranted by experience

4 ?

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- Hume thought there could only be warrant for quadrants 2 & 3 but not 4
- Kant thought the fourth quadrant poses “the general problem of pure reason”
- Kant divided the problem into 3 sub-questions
  - How is the synthetical *a priori* possible in mathematics?
  - How in natural science?
  - How in metaphysics?

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- Kant agreed with Hume that synthetic *a priori* judgments are not possible in metaphysics
  - He conceded a disposition to ask and to try to answer metaphysical questions
- He agreed with Hume that most judgments in natural science are *a posteriori*, **but he denied that all are *a posteriori***

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- The proposition “Every event has a cause” is *a priori*.” Kant held it to be necessarily true—necessary in the sense it is necessary for one to have ordered experience
- This is key, according to Kant, in that this and certain other basic propositions in physics which are also *a priori* means that inductive inference is validated
- Kant thought there was a *prima facie* case in favor of synthetic *a priori* judgments in mathematics and natural science
  - Some philosophers think Kant held that notion that synthetic *a priori* judgments were “innocent until proven guilty”
  - Some think that Kant was merely reaffirming what Hume denied—Kant was assuming what was at issue between he and Hume

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- What Kant thought was that it was necessary only to show that Hume's suspicion of these judgments was based upon a mistake, namely, **the mistaken belief that the only possible basis for making a connection in synthetical judgment is experience**—Kant thought the connection was *not* to be found in experience

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- Kant thought that synthetic *a priori* judgments were warranted neither by experience nor by the law of contradiction, but by an organizing principle of the mind
- If this can be shown, then the problem of pure reason is solved
  - Then “all our knowledge *begins* with experience” as Locke had insisted
  - But it does not follow, as they supposed, “that it all *arises* out of experience”

## II. Kant's Epistemology—The Big Picture

- So far Kant has not proved that there is any necessary synthetic *a priori* knowledge
- He would need to show the basis for thinking that all the objects of knowledge were connected by certain basic types of putting together
- He proposed to show that there are certain basic types of putting together in mathematics and physics but not in metaphysics
- He thought that by looking at these questions in mathematics and physics would dispose of the possibility of there being knowledge of metaphysical objects
- That leads us to our next presentation—the synthetic *a priori* in mathematics 2.