Importance Of Metaphysics And Immanuel Kant's Ideas Nowadays

“Happiness is not an ideal of reason, but of imagination.” - Immanuel Kant

My philosopher of choice is Immanuel Kant. Kant was a German philosopher and thinker in the early modern period (1469 – 1527). He was born and lived at a time in the history of western Philosophy when two schools of thought, namely Empiricism and Rationalism, were dominant (Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics, n.d.). Empiricism, also known as posterior or experimental reasoning, makes inferences of what's real and what is not, based upon observations or experiences in the natural world. On the other hand, Rationalism, also referred to as prior or non-experimental reasoning defines knowledge of what exists based on already preconceived ideas, structures of thought, and concepts. Kant sought to disprove the sufficiency of Empiricism and Reason in explaining the Metaphysical realm. The titles of two of his remarkable works: A Critique of Pure Reason as well as A Critique of Practical Reason are indeed self-explanatory. In the former, he takes on some of the contemporary philosophers of the day such as John Locke, Bishop Berkeley, and David Hume, and disputes their views regarding the validity of using Empiricism and Reason to argue for the existence of Metaphysical phenomena such as the existence of a God (Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics, n.d). Aside from the field of Metaphysics, Kant was also influential in epistemology (what constitutes knowledge – i.e. the distinction between evidence-based facts and mere opinion), ethics (particularly, his famous deduction of morality in the “Duality of the Human Situation”), and aesthetics. I chose Kant because I am more familiar with him as a Philosopher; we studied about him in a Philosophy course (Ethics and Social responsibility: PHIL 1404) which I previously enrolled for here at the University of the People.

Kant was a product of his times, in the sense that his philosophy was born out of the necessity to counteract the dogmatic Empiricism and Rationalism of the day (Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics). In our day it may seem perfectly sensible to us that Science and Logic cannot predict realities in the Metaphysical realm, but traditional metaphysics sought to understand metaphysical phenomena within the limited confines of Science and mathematics. The idealization of logic during and after the Enlightenment era in Western Europe led to certain improvements such as the dispelling of unfounded superstitions, but it, unfortunately, overstepped its mark. Remarkable philosophers of the preceding age like René Descartes, from whom comes the famous cogito quote: “I think, therefore I am,” had initiated this school of thought. But the schools of Rationalism and Empiricism, in Kant's view, fell short of adequately explaining the metaphysical. “Knowledge is not really knowledge... but knowledge of our own mental makeup, knowledge of how we will react under certain circumstances” (Boyajian, 1944). He criticizes Locke's tabula rasa (blank slate) theorem, Berkeley's idealistic materialism, and Hume's continuous cause-effect chain of existence as being inconsistent descriptions with metaphysics. The answer to these inconsistencies, according to Kant is what he termed as synthetic a priori, a combination of synthetic truth and a priori knowledge (Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics, n.d.; Boyajian, 1944). In summary, Kant argues that all our interpretation of reality is subjective, and reality itself keeps eluding us since all we consider real is merely an

appearance or result of perception by our senses. The real paradox then boils down to how a human brain consisting of physical matter is able to think intelligently and act purposefully.

Kant embarked on a mission to demarcate the field of metaphysics as a recognized science in its own right. Up until now, we had not yet concerned our self with the actual definition of metaphysics. This is because my intention was to gradually build upon your understanding up until this point, so that you could begin to conceptualize metaphysics clearly as it really is, despite the many prevailing misconceptions of what metaphysics is. Metaphysics literally means “after” or “beyond” Physics. Metaphysics seeks to find the evidence for Physics or the perceivable, measurable, deductible world (Boyajian, 1944). How do you know that what we consider reality is real. “Is the truth that you believe really real?” In modern courts of law, metaphysics would be the judge overseeing the court case, and Physics (or just about any conceivable objective science or mathematical discipline) would be the defendant in the dock. In the “Duality of the Human Situation”, Kant attempts to present a strong argument for morality in an apparently physical world that appears to be only influenced by physical factors. In his conception of “Transcendental Realism”, Kant argues that our reality is defined only within the confines of time and space and that Metaphysics is in line with the possibility of the existence of God: a Divine Being residing outside of time and outside of space.

In conclusion, being a Christian, I think Metaphysics as a branch of Philosophy and Immanuel Kant's ideas are still relevant today. The definition of reality still eludes modern-day scholars. Our conception of perceived reality through our physical senses demands further proof to this day in order to be classified as purely objective truth. In my opinion, Kant's ideas are mentally cumbersome on the whole - even more than those of preceding scholars such as Descartes, but they hold a greater extent of truth when it comes to our understanding of what constitutes reality, and, thankfully, permit us to look beyond ourselves to a Greater Reality and Infinity. “In endless seeking and finding of better and better constitute our life, happiness and highest good...” (Kant & Kroeger, 1882).