Metaphysics, Categories, and the Scope of Comprehension

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In these notes I discuss Kant's position on the intellectual conditions of cognition—the categories—and their role in his conception of metaphysics.

We've seen that if metaphysics is to be a science, it must, like all science, rely on one or more synthetic a priori cognitions. Kant argues that such cognition requires two elements, a set of sensible "forms"—the sensible representations of space and time—and a set of intellectual forms—the conceptual representations Kant calls the categories.

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1. What are "categories"?

The notion of a "category" largely springs from Aristotle, and mainly from three texts: *Categories*, *Topics* I, and *Metaphysics* V. Exactly how Aristotle thinks of a category is controversial (for overviews see here (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-categories/) and here (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/categories/); for the medieval development of his views see here (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/medieval-categories/)). Perhaps the least controversial thing to say is that Aristotle advances a position—call it "categorialism"—which says that any answer to the question "what is there?" must be put in terms of a kind, genus, or category. Hence, to advance categorialism is to advance the claim that existence or being has a structure, and the categories delineate that structure.

For Kant, the categories are *concepts*, albeit special kinds of concepts. They are the most *basic* concepts of an object. So if we think of `<object>` as being the most general or "highest" concept, the categories are the most basic ways in which we specify the content of `<object>`.

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The categories are *non-empirical* or "pure", and are *a priori*. This is to say that neither their content, nor the conditions of their justification, depends on sensory experience. Nevertheless, Kant considers the categories to be acquired rather than innate. Indeed, Kant is explicit that neither the categories nor the forms of intuition are innately possessed by the subject upon its creation (OD 8:222–3). Concerning the categories themselves, Kant speaks of their "givenness" (A728–9/B756–7), as well as the "occasional causes of their generation" (A86/B118). The act through which we acquire the categories (in the sense of coming to have representations with categorial content) Kant terms "reflection" (*Überlegung*). I'll say more about reflection, and the derivation of the categories more generally, in answer to question three, below.

In sum then, the categories are fundamental concepts whose non-empirical and a priori content is acquired in an act of reflection. Kant thinks there are exactly twelve categories, and the twelve divide into four "moments" or groups of three. Any judgment that we make contains a category from one of each of the four groups. These are:

- Quantity
  - Unity
  - Plurality
  - Totality
- Quality
  - Reality
  - Negation
  - Limitation
- Relation
  - Inherence-subsistence
  - Cause-effect
  - Reciprocity of agent & patient (i.e. "Community")
- Modality
  - Possibility
  - Existence/Actuality
  - Necessity

2. How does Kant understand the relationship between categories and metaphysics?

Since `<object>` is the most basic concept that the intellect can employ in its activity, and the categories are the most basic concepts of an object, the categories are essential to the activity of the intellect in any act of understanding or comprehending how things are. Kant thus endorses categorialism, at least in the sense that he construes any answer to the question what is there, that could be understood by finite thinkers such as ourselves, is one that adverts to the categories. This might seem to be a merely epistemological or conceptual claim. But Kant construes the categories to have a genuine ontological upshot.

As Kant puts the point in the second section of the System of the Principles of Pure Understanding, "The conditions of the **possibility of experience** in general are at the same time conditions of the **possibility of the objects of experience**" (A158/B197). So the categories (along with the sensible forms: space and time) are conditions of the possibility of objects of experience (or what is the same, objects of empirical cognition). When Kant speaks of a "condition of possibility" here, he means a condition, not merely of what it is to *think* of an object, but what it is to *be* an object. An "object of the senses" or "phenomenon" is a causally unitary, spatiotemporally persisting substance whose present complex of interrelated properties are a function of its causal nature and its causal history, which is in thoroughgoing law-governed community with other objects, and which is made of stuff that cannot come into or go out of existence absolutely.[1] That is, an object of the senses is what it is in virtue of falling under the ("schematized", or temporally informed) categories. More generally, an *object*, whether of the senses or not, must be something that falls under the categories, even in their "unschematized" or pure non-empirical form. For example, consider the category `<substance-inherence>`.[2]

Nothing can *be* an object unless it is the kind of being that both substands and subsists, which is to say that it is both that in which properties inhere, and which exists independently of (in the sense of not inhereing in) other things. In this sense `<substance-inherence>` is not only maximally general, in the sense that there is no more basic contentful concept than it, but also metaphysically fundamental. Anything that is or could be an object is either a subject of inherence or inheres in some subject. Hence, in applying the category of substance one is employing not only a maximally general way of *thinking about* a being, but also designating a maximally fundamental fact *about being* (i.e. what it is to be) itself. A similar point holds for all of the other categories.[3] The categories are thus *both* the discursively fundamental ways of representing objects, and the ways of representing what is fundamental *about* objects.

3. How does Kant derive the categories?

Sections 9-12 of the first chapter of the Analytic of Concepts in the *Critique of Pure Reason* form what is typically called the "Metaphysical Deduction"—a name which Kant applies to it, though only later in the *Critique* (see B159). The purpose of these sections is to argue for two points. First, that of the a priori concepts we have available to us, some are more fundamental than others. These are the concepts Kant calls the "categories." Second, that the categories derive their content from a non-sensory source—namely, the structure of judgment itself. In making these arguments the basic question that Kant seeks to answer is the question of *which* a priori concepts serve as the fundamental concepts of metaphysical theorizing, and to explain how we are able to think thoughts using those concepts. The MD provides what Kant calls a "clue" (more literally a "*Leitfaden*", or "guiding thread") to the discovery of these concepts. The MD has three sections. These consist of (i) an introduction where the notion of a "logical use" of the faculty of concepts or the "understanding" is set out; (ii) an elaboration of the different logical forms of judgment and a corresponding table of those forms; (iii) an explication of the categories as a priori concepts that correspond to the various logical forms of the table as set out in (ii) by being "reflected" from them.

Kant's strategy in the MD is to argue that the categories are the most fundamental concepts in our thought of objects because they are the concepts that are directly linked to (indeed, at times he says "identical with") the various basic operations of which the understanding (the faculty of concepts) is capable. Kant appeals to these forms of judgment to answer two questions: (i) which a priori concepts are fundamental (i.e. the categories); (ii) how do those fundamental concepts get their (non-empirical) content. In order that we properly appreciate why Kant chooses this strategy of appealing to judgment for defending his choice and explanation of categories it helps to look at a prior attempt Kant makes for determining the basic concepts of metaphysics.

The Pre-Critical Strategy

In Kant's "Inaugural Dissertation" (ID) of 1770 (whose formal title is "*On the Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*"), which is his last major work in metaphysics before the publication of the first *Critique* in 1781, he lays out a theory of the manner in which the structure of the rational human mind explains what (and how) it can know of reality. In many ways this work anticipates positions and arguments Kant provides in the 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*. And like that latter work, in the ID Kant seeks to delimit the fundamental concepts of metaphysics (though he does not in the ID call them categories) via an analysis of the faculty of understanding (or "intellect" more broadly). He says,

> the concepts met with in metaphysics are not to be sought in the senses but in the very nature of the pure understanding, and that not as innate concepts but as concepts abstracted from the laws inherent in the mind (by attending to its actions on the occasion of an experience), and therefore as acquired concepts. (ID §8, 2:395; see also ID Corollary, 2:406 and ID §23, 2:411)

Here Kant articulates (or perhaps "gestures at" is more accurate) his view of how the concepts of metaphysics, through which we think of the intelligible world, are acquired. They are acquired by attending to the actions of the mind in course of its having experience. This notion of attending to the actions of the mind is also referred to by Kant as "reflection" (*reflexion*, *Überlegung, /reflexio*). So, in the ID, Kant pursues a method of reflection as the basis for explaining how we acquire contentful concepts for use in metaphysics, and the object of reflection is the mind and its actions.

It is important for Kant's project in the *Dissertation*, as it will be for his project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that his account of the acquisition of the concepts of metaphysics not run afoul of his characterization of those concepts as "intellectual" rather than "empirical" or "sensitive."[4] For this reason they cannot be concepts abstracted from sensible intuition, e.g., in the manner that our concepts of space and time, or of empirical properties are. If they *were* abstracted from experience such concepts would be (merely) empirical or "sensitive on account of their genesis" (ID §5, 2:393). Instead, the concepts of metaphysics are supposed to be derived from the nature of the pure understanding, or as he elsewhere says, "given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself" (ID §23, 2:411). There is, however, some question as to whether, in the *Dissertation* or even in his lectures immediately subsequent to its publication, Kant in fact succeeds in providing an account of the acquisition of the fundamental concepts of metaphysics consistent with his stricture on their intellectual provenance.

The account of the *Dissertation* requires that Kant provide some story as to how we can come to be aware of the mind and its acts, and on what basis this awareness constitutes the acquisition of a non-sensory concept. At this point in his career, Kant has not yet articulated his doctrine of "pure" apperception as distinct from inner sense (more on this in the next set of notes). So it looks as if, given his distinction between intuition and concept and their related faculties, that it must be an *inner intuition* that accounts for the acquisition of the concepts of metaphysics. However, if it *is* inner intuition that is the basis for such acquisition, it looks like Kant will run afoul of his requirement that the concepts of metaphysics be intellectual as opposed to empirical (for even the "pure" concepts of space and time, though free of sensation, are nevertheless *sensitive* on account of being derived from intuition (see, e.g., ID §5, 2:393)).

Perhaps Kant thinks we have a special *intellectual* intuition of the mind and its acts? One recent commentator (Dyck 2016) has argued that Kant is committed in the *Dissertation* to our having intellectual intuitions of our own minds and that he only subsequently, in the later 70s, rejects this position in favor of one according to which it is inner *sense*—and thus empirical psychology—that provides the requisite basis for acquiring metaphysical concepts. Dyck's argument concerning Kant's position in the *Dissertation* hinges on two claims. First, that there are clear texts showing that Kant denies that sensible laws (i.e. of time and space) apply to immaterial substances, including the mind/soul (see , Dyck 2016, 330). Second, that Kant's conception of the acquisition of the pure concepts of metaphysics depends on the existence of intellectual intuition of the mind or soul itself [see @dyck2016, 330-1]. However, neither of these interpretive points are particularly compelling. Against the first, it is relatively clear from the context of Kant's statements regarding immaterial substance that he denies that the principles of the *corporeal* world apply to such substances (ID §27, 2:414). That would mean that principles belonging to substances understood as *bodies* do not apply to the mind. But this is compatible with the conception of the mind as nevertheless governed by other sensible principles, and in particular, by time. Against Dyck's second point, in the *Dissertation* Kant explicitly states that finite beings lack intellectual intuition (ID §10, 2:396-7) and that "the accidents which are not included in the relations of space, such as the thoughts of the mind" are in time (ID Corollary, 2:406). It thus seems unlikely that Kant holds in the *Dissertation* that metaphysical concepts are acquired via intellectual intuition, on pain of explicitly contradicting himself at multiple points.[5]

But even if Kant does not directly contradict himself in the *Dissertation*, Dyck's discussion helps point us to a clear tension, and perhaps fatal ambiguity, in Kant's pre-critical view. One might, therefore, have hope that Kant's remarks in lectures and notes subsequent to the publication of the *Dissertation* clarify his position. However, the lecture texts we have from the 1770s only make matters more complicated. For example, in

lectures shortly after the *Dissertation* Kant says, "We have no intuition in the whole world except the intuition of our self; all other things are appearances" (*Anthropologie Collins* 25:15 (1772-3)). Kant's point here is *not* that we have only one intuition—viz. of ourselves. Rather, it is that all of our *outer* intuitions are of appearances, while our inner (and non-intellectual!) intuitions present ourselves as we really are (and not merely as we appear). In a reflexion also from the early-to-mid 1770s Kant says that "The I is the intuition of a substance" (R4493, 17:571 (1772-5)). In the *Metaphysics L_1* lectures, from roughly the same period, Kant contrasts consciousness of external objects with consciousness of the self. One intuits oneself immediately, but the same is not true of external objects (28:206-7, 224). The self (as intelligence) so intuited is substantial, simple, and immaterial (28:224-5).

In a note (R4674) from the *Duisberg Nachlass* of 1775-6, which is Kant's first attempt at what will become his deduction of the categories, he writes that an (external) object may be represented only "according to its relations", i.e., only according to the properties, and relations between those properties, that are presented in sense experience.[6] And, as he does in the lecture material cited above, Kant *contrasts* our position with respect to intuition of external objects with the special access we have to ourselves. The inner intuition of oneself is of an object whose properties are not presented, as outer things are, merely in terms of relations.[7] The language Kant uses in R4674 is also echoed in other texts from the mid-70s, For example, Kant states that the 'I' is the "original concept" of substance which we "borrow" for use in our conception of other substances (*Metaphysics L_1*, 28:225-6). Relatedly, he remarks that "the I expresses the substantial; for that substrate in which all accidents inhere is the substantial. This is the only case where we can immediately intuit the substance" (*Pölitz Metaphysik* 28:226 (1777-80)).

The view that emerges from these texts, and that may in fact already be present in Kant's *Dissertation*, is one according to which inner sense provides a privileged epistemic relation to oneself. In inner sense one is presented not merely as a set of relations, as in outer sense, but as a *subject* of properties, as what Kant sometimes describes as an intelligence or "thinking substance" (e.g. *Metaphysics L_1* 28:224-5). The self is thus the "original of all objects" in the sense that, as Allison Laywine puts it, "we somehow transfer our representations of the one true subject and apply it derivatively or by analogy to our thought of anything else."[8]

Unfortunately, Kant never clarifies how this position concerning the epistemically and representationally privileged and peculiar role of inner intuition is consistent with his general doctrine of sensible intuition, or how it is consistent with the *Dissertation's* position that no pure intellectual concept can be derived from the content of sensible intuition. Instead, the overall impression of Kant's position based on his remarks in the Dissertation, and subsequently in the lectures, is that of a steadfast commitment to roughly the following position. Introspection (via inner intuition) provides a form of acquaintance with the self as a metaphysical subject, and it is via this acquaintance that we can then form by analogy the representations of objects (construed as metaphysical subjects of properties) distinct from us. But how this position is ultimately supposed to cohere with Kant's other commitments in the 70s is, at best, unclear. It in fact seems reasonable to suspect that Kant's various commitments in the 70s *don't* cohere, and that this resulting tension in his view is part of what pushes him towards the critical distinction between inner intuition and pure apperception. We'll talk about this distinction further when we discuss the argument of the Transcendental Deduction. In the next section I talk about Kant's revision of his *Dissertation* strategy for the argument of the MD in the first *Critique* .

The Critical Strategy

In the *Dissertation* Kant distinguishes between what he terms the "logical" and the "real" uses of the understanding (ID §23, 2:410–11). He says,

> in pure philosophy, such as metaphysics, the use of the understanding in dealing with principles is real; that is to say, the fundamental concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves, are given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself; and, since they are not intuitions, they are not immune to error.

In the first *Critique* Kant maintains the view that the concepts of metaphysics come from the understanding. In this sense the understanding has a "real use". However, Kant significantly alters the method by which these concepts are derived from that which he used in the *Dissertation*. Specifically he now closely links the categories with the logical forms of judgment. Indeed, Kant often goes so far as to say that the latter are not just a "clue" to the organization of the table of categories (as the title of the section indicates), they *are* the categories, at least in their "logical" use. The central texts making this plain are as follows.

> The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts…also brings a transcendental content into its representations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general…(MD §10, B105)
>
> [The categories] are concepts of an object in general, by means of which its intuition is regarded as determined with regard to one of the logical functions for judgments. (TD Transition, B128)
>
> That action of the understanding…through which the manifold of given representations (whether they be intuitions or concepts) is brought under an apperception in general, is the logical function of judgments. … But now the categories are nothing other than these very functions for judging, insofar as the manifold of a given intuition is determined with regard to them (TD §20, B143)
>
> In the metaphysical deduction the origin of the a priori categories in general was established through their complete coincidence [*völlige Zusammentreffung*] with the universal logical functions of thinking (TD §26, B159)
>
> the pure concepts of the understanding are, of themselves, nothing but logical functions, but that as such they do not constitute the least concept of an object in itself but rather need sensory intuition as a basis, and even then they serve only to determine empirical judgments (Pr §39, 4:324)

These texts communicate two important points. First, they indicate Kant's pursuit of a strategy for explaining how the pure categories, or fundamental concepts of metaphysics, arise from the intellect. This strategy avoids commitment to any form of content nativism, and it avoids the problem that we saw plagued Kant's account in the *Dissertation*—viz. explaining how the pure categories are "pure" in the sense of being traceable only to the intellect, without thereby implicating either intellectual intuition, which he denies, or sensible (inner) intuition, which would undermine their claim to purity.

Pursuit of this strategy means that, second, the very logical functions for combining representations (concepts) in judgment, and which constitute the basis of study in what Kant calls "pure general logic", are also the functions for combining representations (intuitions) in our experience of objects. Thus for the understanding as a faculty of judging (A69/B94), each logical function of thinking (e.g. categorical judgment), when applied to a multiplicity (or "manifold") of intuitions, results in a distinctive way of relating to, or "experiencing" in Kant's technical sense, an object e.g. a substance.

Thus, Kant has a much more coherent strategy than he did in the *Dissertation* for explaining how we come to grasp the a priori concepts necessary for doing metaphysics. The notion that we can analyze our logic and determine which are the basic logical forms is plausible and does not require appealing to some privileged access we might have to ourselves in introspection (i.e. inner sense).

However, for this strategy to ultimately succeed, Kant must provide substantial arguments for several controversial claims. First, he must show that he has successfully given a complete analysis of the logical forms of judgment; second, he must show that the metaphysical concepts derived from these logical forms (i.e. the categories) really provide the complete basis for doing metaphysics; third, he must show that the content of the categories does not include material absent from the purely logical forms—if there were such "extra" content in the categories, then it is not clear how they are supposed to be "identical" with the logical forms, as Kant sometimes indicates that they are.

Unfortunately Kant fails to meet any of these requirements in the MD. There is no formal demonstration of the completeness of either the table of judgment or, correspondingly, the categories. There is likewise no demonstration provided that shows that all and only these categories provide the basic materials for metaphysics. Finally, it is not obvious that the content of the categories is simply "identical" with that of the forms of judgment.

To take just one example, Kant construes the category of substance—more precisely, `<subsistence–inherence>` —as related to the form of categorical (i.e. subject/predicate) judgment. The purely logical or grammatical notion is thus of a term or concept that can only occupy subject position and never predicate position. However, this notion does not adequately capture central ways in which Kant uses the concept `<substance>` . More specifically, Kant construes a substance as substanding and subsisting. This means that (i) substance is a being in which things "*inhere*" and (ii) substance does not itself inhere in anything else (in this circumscribed sense substance is an independent being). Kant construes inherence as a real (that is, non-logical) asymmetric dependence relation between a subject of inherence (the substance) and its properties or modes (i.e. the way or ways in which the subject exists). The purely logical or grammatical conception of substance as a subject term that is never a predicate term fails to properly capture this dependence relation, for it fails to show how a predicate term might asymmetrically depend on a subject term in a manner that models the metaphysical relation between substance and mode.

In the end then, while Kant's strategy in the MD is a clear improvement over his prior attempt in the *Dissertation*, it is not at all clear that he successfully defends his claim to have provided a principled and a priori basis for exhaustively determining which are the fundamental concepts, nor how they get their content. Kant says categorialism in metaphysics requires a formulation of the categories that,

> has not arisen rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the completeness of which one could never be certain, since one would only infer it through induction, without reflecting that in this way one would never see why just these and not other concepts should inhabit the pure understanding. (A81/B106-7)

Kant does not provide convincing proof of this position in the MD. Whether such a proof could be given in Kant's terms is, perhaps, another story.[9] In any case, we shall see that the issues with which the MD is concerned become a central point of contention and revision in subsequent post-Kantian German Idealism. Fichte and Hegel, in particular, present alternative ways to think about the derivation of categories and their content, as well as the ways in which Kant's "reflective" method itself may beg important questions concerning the possibility of metaphysics. We'll talk about these issues in subsequent weeks.

4. How does Kant justify their application (or

APPLICABILITY)?

Kant thinks that possession of a particular privileged set of "pure" a priori concepts—i.e. the categories—is necessary for knowledge of the empirical world. But this raises a problem. How could an a priori concept, which is not itself derived from any experience, be nevertheless legitimately applicable to objects of experience? To make things even more difficult, it is not the mere possibility of the application of a priori concepts to objects of experience that worries Kant, for this could just be a matter of pure luck. Kant requires more than the sheer possibility of their application, for he wants to show that with regard to a privileged set of a priori concepts, they apply necessarily and universally to all objects of experience and do so in a way that we are in a position to know a priori.

Kant's strategy for demonstrating how this is possible hinges on showing that the experience of objects that he thinks all would agree that we have nevertheless depends on the application of a priori concepts—the categories. Kant makes this clear in his elaboration of his 'Copernican Turn' in philosophy:

> because I cannot stop with these intuitions, if they are to become cognitions, but must refer them as representations to something as their object and determine this object through them, I can assume either that the concepts through which I bring about this determination also conform to the objects, and then I am once again in the same difficulty about how I could know anything about them *a priori*, or else I assume that the objects, or what is the same thing, the *experience* in which alone they can be cognized (as given objects) conforms to those concepts, in which case I immediately see an easier way out of the difficulty, since experience itself is a kind of cognition requiring the understanding, whose rule I have to presuppose in myself before any object is given to me, hence *a priori*, which rule is expressed in concepts *a priori*, to which all objects of experience must therefore necessarily conform, and with which they must agree. (CPR Preface, Bxvii)

Kant's strategy is thus to show how a priori concepts legitimately apply to their objects in virtue of being partly constitutive of the objects of experience, rather than the traditional view in which the objects of experience are the ground of our concepts. Now, what exactly this means is deeply contested, at least partly because it is rather unclear what Kant intends us to understand by his Transcendental Idealism. For example, does Kant intend that the objects of experience are *themselves* nothing other than representations? This would be a form of phenomenalism similar to that offered by Berkeley (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berkeley/). Kant, however, seems to want to deny that his view is similar to Berkeley's, asserting instead that the objects of experience really exist independently of the mind, and that it is only the *way* that they are experienced that is mind-dependent.

> the fact that I have myself given to this theory of mine the name of transcendental idealism cannot justify anyone in confusing it with the empirical idealism of *Descartes* (although this idealism was only a problem, whose insolubility left everyone free, in *Descartes*' opinion, to deny the existence of the corporeal world, since the problem could never be answered satisfactorily) or with the mystical and visionary idealism of *Berkeley* (against which, along with other similar fantasies, our *Critique*, on the contrary, contains the proper antidote). For what I called idealism did not concern the existence of things (the doubting of which, however, properly constitutes idealism according to the received meaning), for it never came into my mind to doubt that, but only the sensory representation of things, to which space and time above all belong; and about these last, hence in general about all *appearances*, I have only shown: that they are not things (but mere ways of representing), nor are they determinations that belong to things in themselves. (*Prolegomena* §13, Note III; 4:293)

I'm mostly going to set Kant's idealism to the side in what follows. But the issue of idealism is important to consider, insofar as Kant takes himself to be replying to the arguments of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume about the nature of the empirical world and the nature and extent of our knowledge of it.

What Is a Transcendental Deduction?

In order to prove that there are pure a priori concepts which legitimately apply to the objects of experience, Kant articulates a special sort of argument (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-transcendental/), which he calls a 'transcendental deduction'. As (Henrich 1989) points out, the notion of a 'deduction' that Kant uses, is a legal one intended to provide a historical justification for the legitimacy of a property claim. In Kant's case however, it is transformed into a justification of the applicability (in the sense discussed above) of the a priori concepts Kant calls the 'categories'. These are the concepts given in Kant's 'Table of Categories' (A80/B106): `<Unity>`, `<Plurality>`, and `<Totality>` (the Categories of Quantity); `<Reality>`, `<Negation>`, and `<Limitation>` (the Categories of Quality); `<Inherence and Subsistence>`, `<Causality and Effect>` and `<Community>` (the Categories of Relation), and `<Possibility–Impossibility>`, `<Existence–Nonexistence>`, `<Necessity–Contingency>` (the Categories of Modality).

With regard to each category, Kant's aim is to show that it has 'objective validity'—i.e. legitimate applicability to the objects of experience. Disputes concerning various members of the table should be familiar. Hume famously disputes the legitimacy of our concept of `<cause–effect>`. Hume thinks (in Kant's terms) that no 'empirical deduction' of the concept is possible—i.e. that the concept cannot be traced to the occurrence of a corresponding impression. Kant concurs with Hume on this point—that there can be no empirical deduction—but argues that this doesn't show that the concept is illegitimate, for it may be both a priori and legitimately applied in virtue of being a necessary condition of experience.

For Kant then a 'transcendental deduction' starts from a premise concerning some feature of human experience, a premise which reasonable interlocutors might be expected to endorse, and then argues to a substantive philosophical conclusion concerning the presuppositions or necessary conditions of the truth of that premise. Since Kant's concern here is the a priori categories, his aim is to show that a presupposition or necessary condition of some relatively uncontroversial feature of experience is the applicability (or successful application) of the a priori concept(s) in question to the objects of experience.

Experience & Cognition

Kant is concerned with how we might explain and justify the application of a priori concepts to objects of experience. But this question, as it stands, requires still sharper focus. We've seen what Kant means in his question concerning the *legitimacy* of concepts in their application to the objects of experience. But what does Kant mean by "*experience*" [*Erfahrung*]? Our problem is that the notion of "experience," both in German and in English, is ambiguous and can mean any number of a variety of things—anything from the mere occurrence of sensation all the way to empirical judgment.[10]

For Kant, "experience" is a technical term that is closely related to *empirical cognition* [*empirische Erkenntniss*]. He makes this clear at several points, both in the Deduction and elsewhere in the first *Critique*. However, in what exactly the relation between the two notions consists is somewhat problematic. For example, Kant says that

> Such cognitions [i.e. those that are independent of any sense impression] are called *a priori* cognitions; they are distinguished from empirical cognitions, *whose sources are a posteriori, namely, in experience* [*Erfahrung*] (Introduction, B2; my emphasis).

Here we see Kant saying that the *source* of empirical cognition is experience. However, Kant also quite explicitly *identifies* empirical cognition with experience (or treats the terms synonymously).

> Empirical cognition, however, is experience (B166).
>
> Experience is an empirical cognition, i.e., a cognition that determines an object through perceptions (A176/B218).
>
> Therefore experience itself—i.e., empirical cognition of appearances—is possible only inasmuch as we subject the succession of appearances, and hence all change, to the law of causality (A189/B234).
>
> it [the presentation "I am"] is not yet a cognition of that subject, and hence is also no empirical cognition – i.e., experience – of it (B277).

These passages all identify experience with empirical cognition. But if they are synonymous notions then how could experience be the *source* of empirical cognition, as he says in B2? A relatively simple resolution of this problem is to distinguish two notions of "experience"—between "experience" as the sensory result of affection by external objects (via outer sense) and oneself (via inner sense) and "experience" as the result of structuring sense perceptions via the categories. Call the latter, categorically structured state, "complex experience" (or "C-experience") and the former state "simple experience" (or S-experience). We can then read B2 as saying that empirical cognition, which is identical with C-experience, has its source in S-experience, the material (sensation, intuition, perception) out of which complex experience is constructed.

This also helps us make sense of B1, where Kant says,

> There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into *a cognition of objects that is called experience*? (my emphasis)

All cognition begins with *simple* experience, which is "worked up" into cognition of objects (i.e. empirical cognition) or (as I've called it) complex experience.

In §17 of the B-deduction Kant specifies that a cognition consists in the "determinate relation of given representations to an object" (B137). I take this to mean that S-experience—the contents of a sensory intuition—provides consciousness of 'appearances' [*Erscheinungen*] or 'undetermined objects' [*unbestimmte Gegestande*] (A20/B34)—which is then made 'determinate' via the activity of the intellect. The result is *empirical* cognition of an object. And it is this empirical cognition of objects (and ultimately all cognition of objects whatsoever) that it is the aim of Kant's Deduction to legitimate, for it is this cognition that depends on the categories.

> all empirical cognition of objects necessarily conforms to such concepts [i.e. the categories], because nothing is possible as object of experience unless these concepts are presupposed A93/B126).

Hence, to show that the categories are "objectively valid" or legitimate in their application to any and all objects of possible experience, is for Kant to show that the categories are necessary for empirical cognition of objects, or complex experience. One thing to think about as we move through the argument of the Deduction is whether

Kant's conception of C-experience corresponds to anything in the positions of empiricists like Locke and Hume. Do empiricists need to concede the existence of the kind of experience for which Kant thinks the categories are necessary?[11]

Kant's demonstration of the validity of the categories attempts to wind its way between two poles which he terms the *enthusiasm* of Locke and the *skepticism* of Hume (A94/B127). Locke's enthusiasm lies in his attempted derivation of all our concepts from the structure of appearances (whether we interpret these appearances as objects or merely as subjective representations or "ideas" in Locke's terminology). But this derivation is, according to Kant, inconsistent with the conditions for the manifestation of appearances and leads us to improperly apply our concepts beyond their sphere.

In contrast to Locke, Hume denies that the a priori concepts have any application whatsoever, and thus Hume presents a sort of skeptical alternative to Locke. Kant's third way argues that the structure of C-experience and the structure of our concepts are interconnected. His strategy for showing this is to show that the structure of C-experience and the structure of propositional judgment have a common root—viz. the unifying activity of the understanding. The Transcendental Deduction is thus an attempt "to try to find out whether we cannot provide for human reason safe passage between these two cliffs, assign to it determinate bounds, and yet keep open for it the entire realm of its appropriate activity" (A95/B128). How exactly Kant does this requires explication of the argumentative structure of the Transcendental Deduction, to which we'll now turn.

Structure of the Deduction

I take the structure of the (B or second edition) Transcendental Deduction to consist of two steps; the first starts at §15 and concludes with §20 (§21 being essentially a recap of the preceding argument). The second step begins with §22 and concludes with §26 (with §27 also being a recapitulation). This "two-step" interpretation is not new, though interpretations of the content of each step and their relation(s) to one another differ widely.[12]

The first step of the Deduction (§§15-21) argues that what Kant calls the *combination* of representations cannot be given to the subject via the senses, but is rather something that the subject does. In order that the combination of representations result in cognition, Kant then argues that there must be a unitary subject, or *combiner* of those representations. The unity condition is satisfied by what Kant calls, in §16, the "original synthetic unity of apperception." In the next three sections (§§17-19) Kant argues that this unity of apperception requires a kind of activity, and that this activity is fundamentally that of the functions of the understanding or the "categories." He concludes in §20 that (i) since all complex unities require combination; (ii) combination requires the original synthetic unity of apperception; and (iii) the unity of apperception is or essentially requires a kind of categorial activity; that (iv) all (complex) unity, including intuition of determinate objects, depends on, or "stands under" (B143) the categories.

The second step of the Deduction (§§22-7) discusses both positive and negative points raised by the first step. Negatively, Kant argues that the categories are limited to *empirical cognition* – i.e. to the cognition of appearances, not things in themselves. This importantly includes even our cognition of *ourselves* as subjects of consciousness. Positively, Kant argues in §26 that not only does all cognition rest on the application of the categories, but that one and all, appearances *are necessarily* categorial. He does this be showing that (i) we have a priori cognition of space and time themselves as objects, (ii) that this is only possible via the categories, (iii) and that since all appearances are governed by space and time, any appearance in space and time must also be categorially structured. This means that there is no possibility of an object's appearing (i.e. being "given) that is not susceptible to determination by the categories. If this argument is successful then Kant will have demonstrated both that if we have cognition ("experience" in Kant's technical sense) then it depends on the categories, and that we *do* have such cognition, since mathematical cognition preuspposes that we cognize space and time as objects.

5. What is the relation between rational comprehension & categories?

We've seen from the discussion of Kant's critical project that he conceives of reason as a capacity for comprehending something from its ground(s). Metaphysics (both special and general) concerns just such comprehension. We've also seen that Kant construes such comprehension, and thus metaphysics, as limited to what may be possibly experienced.

An important question for this position—which I won't pursue very far here, but that will rearise in the context of discussion of Fichte and Hegel—concerns whether the structure of Kant's "reflective" method of deriving the categories ends up begging important questions for the possibility of a metaphysics of the "in itself", or reality as such (and not simply as it appears to us).

There are two issues of concern here: one is the derivation of the categories, and the other is the conception of the discursive intellect with which this derivation is connected. We've seen that Kant construes the categories as linked to, or perhaps even identical with, forms of judgment, and that comprehension of reality is the linking together of such judgments in rational inference, so as to cognize the grounds of some actuality or fact.

But Kant *also* thinks that the concept of a discursive intellect (i.e. our kind of mind) brings with it a contrast case, that of a *non-discursive* intellect, or as Kant calls it, an intuitive intellect or intuitive understanding. For this kind of mind, in contrast with ours, intellectual intuitions *are* possible. This is Kant's conception of the intuitive intellect.[13] Kant construes the intuitive intellect as a non-discursive intellectual faculty—"an understanding which should cognize [*erkennen*] its object, not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition" (A256/B312). There are four key features of the intuitive intellect—viz. it is (i) intellectual, (ii) comprehensive, (iii) productive, and (iv) non-discursive. Let's examine what each of these means.

Let me say a few things about the nature of an intuitive intellect, as Kant conceives of it. First, a non-sensible intuition, as *intellectual*, would be entirely actively produced, its intellectual representations a product of its "absolutely spontaneous" pure "self-activity" (*Selbstständigkeit*). This means that the intuitions of an intuitive intellect would be self-produced rather than derived from affection by independent beings (or distinct faculties of onself, as with affection in inner sense; see B72).

Second, being perfectly active in this manner the intuitive intellect would also thereby be perfectly *comprehensive*, in cognizing all things from their grounds or causes rather than their effects, for only a receptive faculty would cognize something from its effect(s) (*Religion Pölitz* 28:1111 (1783/84); JL 9:65).[14]

Third, the intuitive intellect is *productive* of its objects. The productivity of the intuitive intellect is a correlate of the two features just discussed. Since the intellectual intuitions of the intuitive intellect are purely a function of its spontaneous self-activity, and intuition is defined by Kant as a relation to an actuality (Pr 4:481-2),[15] the intuitive intellect must be able to produce the very beings it intuits. And since this intuitive intellect would be completely comprehensive and creative, the things (actualities) it represents would be represented entirely from their grounds rather than their effects, and indeed as being grounded in the intuitive intellect itself. As Kant reportedly puts it,

> God cognizes all things by cognizing himself as the ground of all possibility (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1052; cf. /Metaphysik L_1/ (mid-1770's), 28:328-9; *Metaphysik L_2* (1790/1), 28:606).[16]

In cognizing things from their very grounds of possibility, the intuitive intellect would represent what is essential to any thing—i.e. in terms of that essence or nature that grounds all of a thing's other possible properties. Moreover, in representing created things from their essences, the intuitive intellect represents those things as they are in themselves. Kant therefore plausibly thinks that the only being that might have such an intellect is

God. God would thus intuit reality as it is in itself. Indeed, Kant often characterizes God's intuition in this manner in his lectures—e.g., "God cognizes things in themselves" (29:833; cf. B71-2; A256/B311–312; A279–280/B335–336).

Finally, an intellect capable of non-sensible intuition would also be *non-discursive*. What does this mean? Kant characterizes intellectual activity as 'discursive' to denote the manner in which our discursive understanding acts —viz. moving to and fro, from part to part, in building a whole—rather than merely as a synonym for 'conceptual', 'linguistic', or 'rational'.[17] It is this notion he means to indicate in his characterization of the discursive intellect's activity as that of "running through" and "gathering together" (A99) representations. A non-discursive intellect, in contrast, exhibits a whole-to-part grasp of its representations.[18] This means that in an intellectual intuition the content of any representational component is determined by the content of the whole, which the intuitive intellect apprehends "all at once" (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1051) via grasp of what Kant sometimes calls a "synthetic universal" (CPJ 5:407; cf. RP 28:1267; *Metaphysik* L_1 28:328; R 4270, 17:489 (1769–76); R6174 18:478 (1780s)). So the intuitive intellect is non-discursive because it would not engage in the manner of part-to-whole unification characteristic of discursive activity, instead representing all things via its holistic comprehension of the synthetic universal.

The upshot is that such a radically different kind of mind *would* comprehend reality as it genuinely is and not merely as it appears. Moreover, it would do it in a way that is entirely independent of the categories. This raises a serious question for Kant: does his conception of the discursive nature of our mind foreclose the very possibility of the kind of comprehension that a genuine metaphysics requires? This will be a central issue, especially for Hegel.

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1. (Allais 2009, 405). ↩

2. Kant is reported to have said that `<substance>` is the “most preeminent” of the categories and “thus the basis of all other cognition” (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:769–70). ↩

3. The modal categories are the exception since, as Kant indicates, they are “merely subjectively valid for the human understanding” and “are not valid of objects in general” (CPJ 5:402); see also (Stang 2016, chap. 10; Kohl 2015). ↩

4. What are the “concepts of metaphysics” for Kant? Certainly they include the concept `<God>`, as well as `<soul>` and `<world>`. These all presuppose possession of the concept `<substance>`. Presumably also on the list are other concepts one would find in, e.g., Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, such as `<possibility>`, `<necessity>`, `<accident>`, and so forth. ↩

5. For consideration of the problem of self-consciousness in the 1770s more broadly, as well as Kant’s rejection of intellectual intuition, see (Klemme 1996, 118–26). As (Mohr 1995, 32–36) points out, Kant does speak of an intellectual (not inner) intuition of freedom in *reflexionen* from the early-to-mid-1770s (e.g. R4336 17:509 (1769-75)) But Kant also speaks of apperception as opposed to intuition in the mid-1770s (e.g. R4723 17:688 (1773-5); R6860 19:183 (1776?-91?)). It is clear that he is struggling to express the nature of the awareness we can have, as rational beings, of our own activity (e.g. R4220 17:462 (1769-70)). ↩

6. For discussion of Kant’s view that the objects of sense consist entirely of relations, or relational properties, see (Pereboom 1991; Langton 1998, 2006; McLear 2018). ↩

7. There is also indication in the *Duisburg Nachlaß*, as there was in Kant’s lectures, of his endorsement of the rational psychology he would later come to criticize. For example, in the *Nachlaß* Kant says that “I would not represent anything as outside of me and thus make appearance into experience (objectively) if the representations did not relate to something *that is parallel to my I*, through which I refer them from myself to another subject” (R4675, 17:648 (1775); my emphasis). For discussion see (Guyer 1987; Carl 1989b, 1989a; Serck-Hanssen 2001; Laywine 2005, 2006; Kitcher 2011). ↩

8. (Laywine 2005, 9); see also (Carl 1989a, 91–92, 97; Kitcher 2011, 73–74; Wuerth 2014, 104; Dyck 2016, 335–38). For criticism of Carl’s, and to a lesser degree Laywine’s, position see (Allison 2015, 121–30). ↩

9. There are a variety of prominent attempts to defend Kant's position here. See (Reich 1992; Brandt 1995; Wolff 1995; Longuenesse 1998). ↩

10. For a helpful discussion of different ways "experience" might be interpreted see (Pp. Van Cleve 1999, 73–76). See also the discussion of kinds of experience in (Beck 1978) and the sources cited therein. ↩

11. For a related worry about triviality see (Ginsborg 2006). ↩

12. The *locus classicus* for the two-step interpretation is (Henrich 1969). Note that I am not endorsing any of the specifics of Henrich's account, e.g., that the second step of the Deduction consists in the comparatively trivial reminder that since human forms of intuition are spatio-temporal, the categories must be know to apply only to spatio-temporal objects. ↩

13. For discussion of the German rationalist conception of an intuitive intellect see (Winegar 2017). ↩

14. God's representation of all things is thus a priori in the "archaic" sense of representing a thing from its grounds. The influential *Port Royal Logic* of Arnauld and Nicole includes a definition of the a priori in terms of the 'demonstration of effects by their causes' (, Arnauld and Nicole 1683, 233). A version of this view arguably is accepted by Leibniz (, Adams 1994, 109; cf. Smit 2009; Hogan 2009, 53–54). Closer to Kant, Wolff provides a general definition of ground in terms of 'that through which one can understand why something [i.e. what is grounded] is the case' (, § Wolff 1720, 29). Moreover, Kant's pre-critical conception of an antecedently determining ground, as articulated in the *New Elucidation* and elsewhere also seems connected with these older notions (For discussion see Longuenesse 2001, 69–70; Hogan 2009, 53). For extensive defense of the critical Kant's acceptance of an "archaic" explanatory requirement on the notion of an a priori ground see (Smit 2009, 191–217). ↩

15. For defense of this point see (McLear 0BC). ↩

16. The conception of God as the ground of the very possibility of any actual being is a tenet faithfully held by Kant at least from his 1763 *Bewesigrund* essay on the existence of God. For discussion see (Fisher and Watkins 1998; Adams 2000; Chignell 2009; Yong 2014; Stang 2016). ↩

17. So, *pace* (Westphal 2000), Kant's conception of the intellect (or the understanding in particular) does not require conceiving of it as a faculty for *concept* generation. Only discursive faculties are faculties for concept generation (and, correspondingly, for judgment and inference); cf. JL 9:36; CPJ 5:406. ↩

18. Kant understands the whole-to-part merelogical structure of representation as a distinguishing feature of intuition as opposed to conceptual representation, which is part-to-whole. See (Aquila 2001; McLear 2015; Onof and Schulting 2015; McLear and Pereboom 0BC) for discussion. As we'll see, I take the intuitive understanding, or intellect, as a faculty for generating intellectual intuitions. For an alternative reading of Kant that sees these as two distinct faculties see (Ch. Förster 2012, 6). While I give reasons for thinking of these as a single faculty, it won't matter for the purposes of understanding Hegel's objection. ↩

←Previous (http://localhost:1313/notes/kants-critical-project/)