

Reflection & Regress

PHIL 971 Kant Seminar

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1 Explaining the Synthetic A Priori

- Q: Does Kant think that *every* case of synthetic a priori cognition requires explanation?

Regress Puzzle: Any successful explanatory claim for a synthetic a priori cognition must itself be a priori. If it is analytic, it cannot provide a genuine explanation. If it is synthetic, then it too stands in need of explanation.

- The Puzzle cannot be avoided by
 1. restricting Kant's argument to conditions of the possibility of experience
 2. denying the exhaustiveness of the analytic/synthetic distinction

2 A Direct Argument for the Regress Puzzle

- There are claims that Kant makes in the course of his argument that are:
 1. basic to his philosophical system
 2. a priori
 3. not analytic
- Two Examples of Basic Claims
 1. The principle of contradiction
 2. The distinction between intuitions and concepts

2.1 The Principle of Contradiction¹

- Reasons for thinking it isn't analytic
1. The principle does not quite meet the form-based criterion for analyticity.² It quantifies over predicates as well as objects. This extra quantifier means that it is not an instance of the same form, so if all negative analytic judgments have the 'no (a+b) is non-(b)' form, the principle of contradiction is not an analytic judgment. (Marshall 2014, 555)
 2. Its truth is not explicable via appeal to concept containment
 3. Analyticity is grounded in the principle, and grounding relations are ir-reflexive.³
 4. Jäsche claims that it remains open whether the principle is self-evident or requires some further justification⁴

¹ no predicate pertains to a thing that contradicts it (A151/B190)

² for any predicate P, nothing that is (P + . . .) is non-(P) (Marshall 2014, 554)

³ [a]ll analytic judgments rest entirely [*beruhen gänzlich*] on the principle of contradiction (*Prolegomena*, 4:267)

⁴ [Kant] recognized and treated the principle of contradiction as a proposition that has its evidence in itself and requires no derivation from a higher principle...But now whether the logical principle of identity and of contradiction is really incapable of or does not need any further deduction, in itself and without qualification, that is of course a different question [which Fichte and Schelling both deny] (JL 9:6-7)

2.2 *The Distinction Between Intuitions & Concepts*

- The distinction is essential to Kant's whole system, and he never provides any systematic or extensive defense of the distinction
- The distinction must be a priori, given its modal force (what isn't a priori is whether we have any representations that count as concepts or intuitions)
- The distinction allows for the derivation of "substantive conclusions", including Kant's criticisms of Locke and Leibniz. This suggests that the distinction cannot be an analytic one.

3 *Two Problematic Ways to Resolve the Regress Puzzle*

1. Kant's explanations are purely analytic⁵
 - A. Kant explicitly states that "synthetic judgments...can by no means arise solely from the principle of analysis" (*Prolegomena*, 4:267).
 - B. Discovering "the limiting features of any notion of experience we can make intelligible to ourselves" is itself more than mere conceptual analysis⁶
2. Kant's explanations are at least partly a posteriori⁷
 - A. Kant's way of contrasting his approach with that of the empiricists (e.g. A85–86/B117–19; *Prolegomena*, 4:257). That contrast is based on Kant's view that the content of empirical claims is too limited to ground the relevant synthetic claims.
 - B. Even via Pereboom's strategy of distinguishing genetic from justificatory questions, the view is implausible, as it is e.g. difficult to see how any amount of experience could justify the claim that space and time are our only possible forms of intuition
 - Objection: where does Kant say that S&T are only possible forms?

4 *In Favor of Basic Synthetic A Priori Claims*

- Kant seems to recognize that at least some claims concerning the nature or structure of our cognitive faculties cannot be further explained^{8,9,10}
- What Kant seeks to explain are not a priori cognitions generally, but rather a priori cognitions of mind-independent objects

The Distance Problem the realm of the a priori is cut off from representation-independent objects, which makes it difficult to understand how we could have any substantive knowledge about them (Marshall 2014, 563)

- Q: Is the distance problem actually meant to be solved by Kant's critical philosophy?

⁵ Kant attempts to show what the limiting features must be of any notion of experience which we can make intelligible to ourselves (Strawson 1966, 24)]

⁶ merely showing that something is a feature of our current concept of experience is a long ways from showing that it is a necessary feature of any notion of experience. (Marshall 2014, 557-8)

⁷ transcendental philosophy is a priori because its justification depends only on empirical information derivable from any possible human experience. (Pereboom 1990, 46)

⁸ for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception a priori only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition. (B145–46; cf. *Prolegomena*, 4:318)

⁹ in the *Critique of Pure Reason* I worked on this question ["is metaphysics possible at all?"] synthetically, namely by inquiring within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use, according to principles. This work is difficult and requires a resolute reader to think himself little by little into a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact [*Factum*] whatever. (*Prolegomena*, 4:274)

¹⁰ [The critique of reason] cannot be terribly extensive, for it does not deal with objects of reason...but merely with [reason] itself, with problems that spring entirely from its own womb, and that are not set before it by the nature of things that are distinct from it but through its own nature; so that, once it has become completely familiar with its own capacity in regard to the objects that may come before it in experience, then it must become easy to determine, completely and securely, the domain and the bounds of its attempted use. (B23)

5 Short-Range Rationalist Reflection

Short-Range Reflection The a priori method of attending to the formal features of one's representations or mental activity¹¹

5.1 Features of Short-Range Reflection

1. A priori¹²

- Involves a specifically *genetic* sense of the a priori

2. Justificatory not explanatory¹³

- The justification that is provided does not require even *cognition* of the subject, since cognition requires determinate representation and such representation requires both matter and form (A266–68/B322–24). But reflective self awareness is merely awareness of formal not material elements of the mind (see (Marshall 2014, 572))

3. Provides an awareness of necessity/modal status¹⁴

4. Provides the “tertium quid” necessary for synthetic cognition¹⁵

5. Only available to a subject via pure apperception

- Q₁: How does reflection justify basic synthetic a priori claims?
- Q₂: What is the status of the claim that we can engage in such reflection?

5.2 Reflection & Justification

- How is justificatory force provided by reflection?
- Two readings of ‘presses itself’
 - i. Phenomenological reading
 - ii. Incapacity reading¹⁶
- Marshall advocates phenomenological reading¹⁷
 - Q: Is it plausible that there could be phenomenal characteristics present in pure apperceptive self-consciousness?
- Incapacity reading fits with Kant’s endorsement of ‘ought’ implies ‘can’
 - i. Susceptibility to a rational requirement depends on possession of the capacity to do as the requirement proscribes
 - ii. ∴ Lacking the capacity to $\neg\phi \rightarrow$ being entitled to ϕ
 - iii. Reflection reveals that in particular kinds of cases we lack the capacity to make certain kinds of mental transitions
 - iv. ∴ Reflection reveals our epistemic entitlements to particular kinds of mental transitions and related claims concerning features of those transitions

¹¹ [T]his happens [i.e. aesthetic judgment] by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging; which is in turn accomplished by leaving out as far as possible everything in one’s representational state that is matter, i.e., sensation, and attending solely to the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state. (CPJ, 5:294; Marshall’s emphasis)

¹² the reason Kant takes the method to be a priori seems to be that it uses a priori equipment to isolate a priori representations. Empirical representations can be involved, but their content does not inform the claim we reach on the basis of the method, since the method hinges on abstracting away from them. (Marshall 2014, 566)

¹³ the act that reveals these formal features does not give us a deeper explanation of the relevant claims (it does not show us why our minds are the way they are), but it does justify us in making them. (Marshall 2014, 566)

¹⁴ Gradually remove from your experiential concept of a body everything that is empirical in it—the color, the hardness or softness, the weight, even the impenetrability—there still remains the space that was occupied by the body (which has now entirely disappeared), and you cannot leave that out... Thus, convinced by the necessity with which this...presses itself on you, you must concede that it has its seat in your faculty of cognition a priori [Ihr müßt also, überführt durch die Nothwendigkeit, womit sich dieser Begriff euch aufdringt, gestehen, daß er in eurem Erkenntnißvermögen a priori seinen Sitz habe]. (B5; cf. A24/B38–39; Prolegomena, 4:283)

¹⁵ What, then, is the “third thing” for these basic synthetic a priori claims? it would seem to be a state of awareness of our own minds. This awareness it not, I think, an intuition. ... I propose that the basic synthetic a priori claims that Kant implicitly sets aside in these passages neither demand explanation nor take intuition as their third thing. The awareness of the mind that justifies them is not easily placed in Kant’s normal taxonomy of representation (it is immediate, and yet reveals general features of the faculties of all human minds as such, which seems to disqualify it from being either an intuition or a concept). Regardless, the passages I have quoted make it hard to deny that Kant thinks it is real and crucial to his philosophy. (Marshall 2014, 569)

¹⁶ Space is a necessary representation, a priori, that is the ground of all outer intuitions. One can never represent that there is no space, though one can very well think that there are no objects to be encountered in it. (A24/B38)

¹⁷ on my reading, Kant is at least as much a phenomenologist as an analytic philosopher. (Marshall 2014, 573)

6 Questions

1. To the extent that Kant's reflective method relies on phenomenological considerations has he undermined the distinction between inner sense and pure apperception?
2. Does Kant's reflective method require postulating a distinct kind of representational state (e.g. intellectual intuition)?
3. Does Kant's reflective method run afoul of his criticisms of his German predecessors?¹⁸
4. Is Kant's reflective method untenable from a contemporary standpoint?

7 Some Varieties of Reflection

- Kant construes reflection generally as capacity of the mind to attend to itself and its representations for purposes such as comparison or abstraction¹⁹

Reflection: the capacity to attend to an act or state of the mind or the ground (capacity/power) by means of which it occurs

- **Q:** Is short-range reflection the genus of which transcendental and logical reflection are species?²⁰

1. Transcendental reflection
 - reflection on the relation between a representation and its faculty of origin
2. Logical reflection
 - reflection on the relation between representations, as is necessary for concept generation

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¹⁸ This celebrated man [viz. Crusius] proposes setting up a supreme rule to govern all cognition and therefore metaphysical cognition as well. The supreme rule is this: *what cannot be thought as other than true is true*, etc. However, it can easily be seen that this proposition can never be a ground of the truth of any cognition. For, if one concedes that there is no other ground of truth which can be given, apart from the impossibility of thinking it other than true, then one is in effect saying that it is impossible to give any further ground of truth, and that this cognition is indemonstrable. Now, of course, there are many indemonstrable cognitions. But the feeling of conviction which we have with respect to these cognitions is merely an avowal [*Geständnis*] not an argument establishing that they are true (Inquiry, 2:295)

¹⁹ To reflect (to consider) [*Reflectiren Überlegen*], however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one's faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible. (CPJ 20:211)

²⁰ Our understanding is the power [*Vermögen*] to reflect, and pure concepts of the understanding (transcendentale) are mere abstract concepts of reflection. (Refl. 409 (1772–1779?), 15:165–6; see also Anonymous-Pölitiz₁ 28:233–4 (1777–80); *Prolegomena* 4:288)

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