

PHIL 971 – Kantian Conceptualism

Handout 6 – Transcendental Deduction (II)

10.10.13

1 General Remarks on Synthesis

- A form of mental activity
 - Kant sometimes discusses synthesis as an 'act' [*Handlung*] but this is mildly misleading, as it may suggest that synthesis is a form of intentional action rather than an (at least sometimes involuntary) activity of the mind of which the subject may or may not be aware¹
- Synthesis works on representations by "running through" and "gathering together" discrete representations into one combined and connected whole (A99)
 - Is synthesis a causal process?
 - * No? – would seem to be incompatible with deterministic world
 - * Yes? – realism about intentional states suggests that they have causal powers, and that the causal features and interactions between such states are what provide them with representational content and allow them to track logical relationships²
- Two kinds of synthesized representations
 - i. Concepts
 - * combination of concepts in one judgment
 - * combination of simpler concepts into a more complex concept (cf. A729/B757; Logik Pölitz 24:568)
 - ii. The "manifold" of intuition (either in one intuition or many)
 - * combination of sensations in one intuition (?)
 - this claim is controversial, as it suggests that empirical intuition is constructed via synthesis; it is also unclear what the non-empirical analogue of sensation would be in a 'manifold' of pure intuition
 - * combination of intuitions into a complex intuition

¹ [synthesis] is a mere effect of the of the imagination, a blind though indispensable function of the soul...of which we are only seldom even conscious (A78/B103).

² It's not just that, in a psychology of propositional attitudes, content and causal powers are attributed to the same things. It's also that causal relations among propositional attitudes somehow typically contrive to respect their relations of content, and belief/desire explanations often turn on this. Hamlet believed that somebody had killed his father because he believed that Claudius had killed his father. His having the second belief explains his having the first. How? Well, presumably via some such causal generalization as 'if someone believes F_a , then ceteris paribus he believes $\exists x(Fx)$.' This generalization specifies a causal relation between two kinds of mental states picked out by reference to (the logical form of) the propositions they express...(Fodor (1987), 12).

2 The Threefold Synthesis

- A 'subjective deduction' (?) enumerating the powers of the subject that are necessary if cognition of an object is to be possible

2.1 The Synthesis of Apprehension

- Intuition is complex and we cannot represent this complexity without synthesis³

³ Every intuition contains a manifold in itself, which however would not be represented as such if the mind did not distinguish the time in the succession of impressions on one another; for as **contained in one moment** no representation can ever be anything other than absolute unity. Now in order for **unity** of intuition to come from this manifold (as, say, in the representation of space), it is necessary first to run through and then to take together this manifoldness, which action I call the **synthesis of apprehension**, since it is aimed directly at the intuition, which to be sure provides a manifold but can never effect this as such, and indeed as contained **in one representation**, without the occurrence of such a synthesis. (A99).

- why is intuition complex—i.e. why does it “contain a manifold”?
- * one possibility: any intuition of which we become aware must be composed of a multitude of unconscious representations (i.e. Leibniz’s *petites perceptions*)
- We could not represent a priori the complexity of space or time without a synthesis⁴
 - What complex representation is in play here – the intuition of space/time or the concept?

2.2 The Synthesis of Reproduction

- In any complex representation we represent the complex by first representing its parts
- Not all the parts will be presented as co-present at the same time, so there needs to be a mental faculty capable of reproducing representational parts⁵
- The synthesis of reproduction cannot occur without the synthesis of apprehension and vice versa⁶

2.3 The Synthesis of Recognition in a Concept

- The only explicitly conceptual synthesis
- Claims that the multiplicity of representations, if they are to constitute one complex representation of an object, require a conceptual connection among them—viz. a rule which links them together as states or properties of one thing⁷

3 The Second Step of the Deduction (§§22-6)

- Kant moves from abstract conditions for the application of the categories, to those conditions specifically with reference to our spatial and temporal intuition
- Is the step redundant?⁸

3.1 Intellectual vs. Figurative Synthesis (§24)

- Distinction between the kind of (intellectual) synthesis necessary to generate propositional judgment and the concepts which constitute it, and (figurative) synthesis necessary to generate unitary (complex?) sensible intuitions⁹

⁴ This synthesis of apprehension must also be exercised a priori, i.e., in regard to representations that are not empirical. For without it we could have a priori neither the representations of space nor of time, since these can be generated only through the synthesis of the manifold that sensibility in its original receptivity provides. We therefore have a **pure** synthesis of apprehension. (A99-100).

⁵ If I were always to lose the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the preceding parts of time, or the successively represented units) from my thoughts and not reproduce them when I proceed to the following ones, then no whole representation and none of the previously mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise. (A102).

⁶ The synthesis of apprehension is therefore inseparably combined with the synthesis of reproduction. (A102).

⁷ Without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain. For it would be a new representation in our current state, which would not belong at all to the act through which it had been gradually generated, and its manifold would never constitute a whole, since it would lack the unity that only consciousness can obtain for it. (A103)

⁸ Therefore all manifold, insofar as it is given in one empirical intuition, is determined in regard to one of the logical functions for judgment, by means of which, namely, it is brought to a consciousness in general. 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 (§ 13).⁴¹ Thus the manifold in a given intuition also necessarily stands under categories. (B143).

⁹ The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. (A79/B105).

3.2 Completing the Deduction (§26)

- Kant argues that our representations of space and time themselves “contain a manifold” and thus require a synthesis if they are to be represented as objects
- Since space and time themselves are synthesized by the categories all possible appearances and space and time will likewise be conditioned or “determined” by the categories
 - the crux of ‘conceptualist’ readings of the Deduction depend on an interpretation of the B160-161 footnote according to which it argues that the representation of space and time as pure intuitions depends on a ‘figurative’ synthesis guided by the categories¹⁰

4 The Conceptualist Argument According to Griffith

4.1 Some Key Assumptions

- There is no intentionality without synthesis¹¹
- Intuitions are to be identified with perceptions in roughly our contemporary sense—viz. sensory presentations of objects in space—but this claim about perception is not obviously tracking Kant’s use of the term ‘perception’ [*perceptio/wahrnehmung*]
 - so one reply to the conceptualist argument as Griffith presents it is that it simply misses any claim concerning intuition, and only is successful, if at all, against the higher-order consciousness of particular representations rather than the occurrence of the representations themselves

4.2 The Arguments

The Argument from a Threefold Synthesis

1. Objective perception requires the generation of a ‘perceptual image’¹²
2. Perceptual images are generated via a threefold empirical synthesis
3. The empirical synthesis of sensation depends on the ‘affinity of the manifold’
4. The affinity of the manifold depends on a transcendental synthesis of pure intuition by the categories
5. ∴ All objective perception depends on the categories¹³

Problems:

- no discussion of the transcendental unity of apperception (i.e. where did Kant’s emphasis on self-consciousness go?)

¹⁰ These same properties that, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, are arguments in favor of the *intuitive* rather than *discursive* nature of our representations of space and time, become, in section 26, reasons to assert that these intuitions are made possible by acts of a priori synthesis. And the a priori synthesis that generates space and time as a priori intuitions, also generates the conformity of the manifold of empirical intuitions to the *categories* (Longuenesse (1998), 215; cf. Guyer (2010), 146).

¹¹ Synthesis and intentionality are not logically distinct: only a synthesized intuition is an intentional intuition. (Griffith (2012), 201).

¹² Mere sensibility, it seems, can only supply us with impressions that are ‘dispersed and separate in the mind’, but it cannot, as [Kant] says, ‘bring the manifold of intuition into an image’ (‘das Mannigfaltige der Anschauung in ein Bild bringen’) (A120). Thus, if there is no synthesis to combine a dispersed manifold into an image, then there is no empirical intuition (perception), hence no possible vehicle for nonconceptual content (in the sense we are discussing). (Griffith (2012), 201).

¹³ Empirical intuition requires a rule-guided synthesis of its manifold, which depends on the affinity of the manifold, which presupposes a figurative synthesis of the pure manifold, which in turn is related to the transcendental unity of apperception, the source of the rules for this pure synthesis: the categories. (Griffith (2012), 206).

- Kant drops talk of the “transcendental affinity of the manifold” in the B-edition Deduction
- Kant seems to allow in various places that non-rational animals have forms of reproductive association while nevertheless lacking capacity for apperception¹⁴
- against premise (1) – Kant seems to deny both that:
 - i. we think in terms of images¹⁵
 - ii. we infer from the existence and character of images to the existence and character of their causes¹⁶

The Argument from the Unity of Pure Intuition

1. There is no synthesis of apprehension without the unity of pure intuition
2. The unity of pure intuition depends on the categories—viz. the categories of quantity
3. ∴ the synthesis of apprehension depends on the categories [1, 2]
4. Perception depends on the synthesis of apprehension
5. ∴ Perception depends on the categories [3, 4]

Problems:

- We cannot make sense of Kant’s arguments concerning pure intuition in the Transcendental Aesthetic if pure intuitions of space and time depend on synthesis according to the categories of quantity¹⁷
 - Synthesis is an iterative form of construction of wholes in terms of parts, but the mereological structure of pure intuition defines the parts in terms of the whole
 - Kant consistently characterizes the nature of the understanding’s activity as limited to grasping wholes in terms of their parts, which is in contrast to the intuitive intellectual grasp of wholes prior to their parts characteristic of God¹⁸

5 Further References:

1. Allais, Lucy. 2009. “Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (3): 383–413.
2. Fodor, Jerry A. 1987. *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
3. Ginsborg, Hannah. 2006. “Kant and the Problem of Experience.” *Philosophical Topics* 34 (1&2): 59–106.
4. ——. 2008. “Was Kant a Nonconceptualist?” *Philosophical Studies* 137 (1): 65–77.

¹⁴ all sense data for a possible cognition would never, without those conditions [exemplified by the a priori categories], represent objects...They could still (if I imagine myself to be an animal) carry on their play in an orderly fashion, as representations connected according to empirical laws of association, and thus even have an influence on my feeling and desire, without my being aware of them (assuming that I am even conscious of each individual representation, but not of their relation to the unity of representation of their object, by means of the synthetic unity of their apperception) (C 11:52; cf. A112, A116, A121, B142, B152; *Metaphysik Dohna*, 28:698–90.).

¹⁵ In fact it is not images of objects but schemata that ground our pure sensible concepts. No image of a triangle would ever be adequate to the concept of it. For it would not attain the generality of the concept, which makes this valid for all triangles, right or acute, etc., but would always be limited to one part of this sphere. (A140–1/B180).

¹⁶ Thus the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist, and grants to matter, as appearance, a reality which need not be inferred, but is immediately perceived. (A371).

¹⁷ First, one can only represent a single space; and when one speaks of many spaces, one means by that only parts of one and the same unique space. Nor, second, can these parts precede the one all-encompassing space, as its constituents, as it were (from which it can be assembled); rather, they can be thought only as in it. Space is essentially one; the manifold in it, and hence also the universal concept of spaces as such, rests solely on limitations (A24–5/B39).

¹⁸ We can also conceive of an understanding which, since it is not discursive like ours but is intuitive, goes from the synthetically universal (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts, in which, therefore, and in whose representation of the whole, there is no contingency in the combination of the parts, in order to make possible a determinate form of the whole, which is needed by our understanding, which must progress from the parts, as universally conceived grounds, to the different possible forms, as consequences, that can be subsumed under it. (CJ 5:407).

5. Griffith, Aaron M. 2012. "Perception and the Categories: A Conceptualist Reading of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason." *European Journal of Philosophy* 20 (2): 193-222.
6. Grüne, Stefanie. 2009. *Blinde Anschauung*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
7. Guyer, Paul. 2010. "The Deduction of the Categories: The Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 118-150. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Hanna, Robert. 2005. "Kant and Nonconceptual Content." *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2): 247-290.
9. ——. 2008. "Kantian Non-Conceptualism." *Philosophical Studies* 137 (1): 41-64.
10. Longuenesse, Béatrice. 1998. *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
11. McLearn, Colin. 2011. "Kant on Animal Consciousness." *Philosophers' Imprint* 11 (15) (November): 1-16.
12. ——. Forthcoming. "Two Kinds of Unity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.