

Kant's Paralogisms (I-II)

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1 Empirical v. Rational Psychology

- Empirical psychology is concerned with what may be learned via inner observation of one's mental states¹
- Rational psychology concerns what may be deduced from the a priori knowledge of oneself as a *thinking subject*²
 - provides knowledge of the essence or nature of thinking beings in general
 - provides knowledge of objects that are not objects of a possible experience

¹ If more than the *cogito* were the ground of our pure rational cognition of thinking beings in general; if we also made use of observations about the play of our thoughts and the natural laws of the thinking self created from them: then an empirical psychology would arise (A347/B405)

² **I think** is thus the sole text of rational psychology, from which it is to develop its entire wisdom...because the least empirical predicate would corrupt the rational purity and independence of the science from all experience. (A343/B401)

2 The Paralogisms

- Instance of Transcendental Illusion
- All paralogisms are syllogistic inferences³ with three distinguishing characteristics
 - fallacious categorical syllogism exhibiting an error of equivocation between the major premise and the minor premise⁴
 - formally invalid but has true premises⁵
 - as an instance of TI, must be a plausible and compelling error

³ All basic syllogisms consist of three categorical sentences (e.g. 'S is P'), in which the two premises share exactly one term, called the 'middle term', and the conclusion contains the other two terms, sometimes called the 'extremes'. The 'major' premise is general, the 'minor' premise singular. The 'major' and 'minor' terms figure in their respective premises.

⁴ [A paralogism] arises when the middle concept is taken in different senses in the two premises—when, namely, the *logical* relation (in thinking) in one of the premises is taken as a real one (of the objects of intuition) in the other. (R 5552; 18:218; cf. A402 and B411)

⁵ A **paralogism** is a syllogistic inference that is false as far as its form is concerned, although as far as its matter (the antecedent propositions) are concerned [*bei Vorder-sätzen*], it is correct. (R 5552; 18:218)

1. All M are P—major premise
2. S is M—minor premise
3. ∴ S is P—conclusion

3 The First Paralogism – Substantiality

3.1 A-edition Version (A348)

1. That which is the subject of judgment and cannot be predicated of anything else is substance.
2. I, as a thinking being, am the **absolute subject** of all my possible judgments, and this representation of Myself cannot be used as the predicate of any other thing.
3. ∴ I, as thinking being (soul), am **substance**.

PROBLEMS:

- Premise (1) is not a major premise but rather a definition
- Premise (2) is not sufficiently general

PROOF'S REVISION:

1. Entities whose representation cannot be used as a determination of other things are substances. (All S is P)
2. The self is an entity whose representation cannot be used as a predicate of another thing. (M is S)
3. \therefore The self is a substance. (M is P)

- Premises are plausibly true
 - (1) is a definition
 - (2) is true insofar as 'I' cannot figure in the predicate place of a possible judgment
- Problem: not clearly a paralogism
 - valid & sound if 'determination' is read as 'predicate'
 - notion of 'substance' is merely grammatical – a claim about a representation's use

Substance₀: x is a substance₀ iff the representation of x cannot be used as a predicate in a categorical judgment

- Kant needs a better definition of 'substance' such that a genuine paralogism results

3.2 B-edition Version (B410-11)

1. What cannot be thought otherwise than as subject does not exist otherwise than as subject, and is therefore substance.⁶:
2. Now a thinking being, considered merely as such, cannot be thought otherwise than as subject.
3. \therefore A thinking being also exists only as such a thing, i.e., as substance.

⁶ 'does not' should read 'cannot'?

PROOP'S REVISION:

1. All entities that cannot be thought otherwise than as subjects are entities that cannot exist otherwise than as subjects, and therefore (by definition) are substances. (All M are P)
 2. All entities that are thinking beings (considered merely as such) are entities that cannot be thought otherwise than as subjects. (All S are M)
 3. ∴ All entities that are thinking beings (considered merely as such) are entities that cannot exist otherwise than as subjects, and therefore are substances (All S are P)
- Invalid inference because of an equivocation in the use of 'thought'⁷
 - Premise (1) treats 'thought' as 'conception'
 - * claims that the inconceivability of something as a property/mode entails that it cannot exist as a property/mode
 - Premise (2) treats 'thought' as 'a representation used as the predicate of a possible judgment'
 - The 'logical' use of 'I' is mistaken for a 'real' use in denoting a purely intellectually graspable, 'unschematized' conception of substance.⁸
 - Substance₁: a being whose existence is such that it can never *inhere* in anything else^{9,10}
 - * concept of substance₁ is logically consistent but may be 'really repugnant'
 - * we should remain agnostic as to whether there are any substances₁
 - (Empirical) Substance₂: a being that persists at every moment (A144/B183, A182)

4 The Second Paralogism – Simplicity

1. That thing whose action can never be regarded as the concurrence of many acting things, is simple. (All A is B)
 2. Now the soul, or the thinking I, is such a thing. (C is A)
 3. ∴ The soul is a simple thing (substance). (C is B)
- Known as the 'Achilles' argument¹¹
 - Paralogism consists in the confusion in the use of 'thing' (logical vs. real)

⁷ 'Thought' [*Das Denken*] is taken in an entirely different meaning [*Bedeutung*] in the two premises: in the major premise, as it applies to an object in general (hence as it may be given in intuition); but in the minor premise only as it subsists in relation to self-consciousness, where, therefore, no object is thought, but only the relation to oneself as subject (as the form of thinking) is represented. (footnote, B 411-12)

⁸ the first syllogism of transcendental psychology imposes on us an only allegedly new insight when it passes off the constant logical subject of thinking as the cognition of a real subject of inherence, with which we do not and cannot have the least acquaintance, because consciousness is the one single thing that makes all representations into thoughts, and in which, therefore, as in the transcendental subject, our perceptions must be encountered; and apart from this logical significance of the I, we have no acquaintance with the subject in itself that grounds this I as a substratum, just as it grounds all thoughts.

⁹ something can exist only as **subject**, not as mere determination of other things, i.e., can be substance (B288)

¹⁰ the I that I think can always be considered as **subject**, and as something that does not depend on thinking merely as a predicate...does not signify that I as **object** am for myself a **self-subsisting being** or **substance**. (B407)

¹¹ This is the Achilles of all the dialectical inferences of the pure doctrine of the soul, nothing like a mere sophistical play that a dogmatist devised in order to give his assertions a fleeting plausibility, but an inference that seems to withstand even the sharpest testing and the greatest scruples of inquiry. (A351)

REVISED VERSION:

1. The subject whose action can never be regarded as the concurrence of many acting things, is simple. (All A is B)
 2. The self is such a subject. (C is A)
 3. ∴ The self is simple. (C is B)
- Confusion hinges on logical vs. real notion of 'subject'
 - 'Logical' sense of subject appeals to First Paralogism argument of a representation that could never function as a predicate
 - 'Real' sense of subject as something like a substance₁

THE 'NERVUS PROBANDI' OF ACHILLES:¹²

(UC): if a multiplicity of representations are to form a single representation, they must be contained in the absolute unity of the thinking substance. (A352)

- RP depends on the inference from unity of thought to 'absolute' unity of thinker
- 'absolute unity' refers to a thinker which has no proper parts
- Kant: why think that the structure of a thought, as a complex, isn't mirrored by the structure of the entity, as a complex substance, which thinks it?¹³
 - (UC) isn't analytic
 - (UC) isn't synthetic a priori¹⁴

References

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¹² Every composite substance is an aggregate of many, and the action of a composite, or of that which inheres in it as such a composite, is an aggregate of many actions or accidents, which is distributed among the multitude of substances...[Now] suppose that the composite were thinking; then every part of it would be a part of the thought, but the parts would first contain the whole thought only when taken together. Now this would be contradictory. For because the representations that are divided among different beings (e.g., the individual words of a verse) never constitute a whole thought (a verse), the thought can never inhere in a composite as such. Thus it is possible only in one substance, which is not an aggregate of many, and hence it is absolutely simple. (A351-2)

¹³ For the unity of the thought, which consists of many representations, is collective, and as far as mere concepts can show may relate just as well to the collective unity of different substances acting together (A353)

¹⁴ Nor will anyone venture to assert that this proposition allows of being known synthetically and completely *a priori* from mere concepts - not, at least, if he understands the ground of the possibility of *a priori* synthetic propositions, as above explained. (A353)