

## The A-Deduction

Kant's transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of understanding exists in two different versions and this week we are going to be looking at the first edition version. After completing the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic that justifies the view that there are *a priori* elements of sensibility Kant turns for the majority of the rest of the *Critique* to what he calls "transcendental logic" which involves first attempting to uncover the positive claims of reason with regard to experience (Analytic) and then exposing its negative ones (Dialectic). The first step of the positive enquiry is given by an examination of the role of concepts. Concepts, states Kant, are used to form judgments (A68/B93). On the basis of this claim Kant lays out a table that describes the different forms of judgment he believes to exist (A70/B95) and then, derives from this table of judgments a parallel table of the concepts that appear not to be derived from experience, concepts that Kant terms "categories" (A80/B106).

The claim that the categories are *a priori* concepts that nonetheless in some sense relate to experience is what Kant has to justify. The first step in attempting this is the argument of the transcendental deduction where Kant refers to the question of right with regard to these concepts (what right do we have to use them: A84/B116). However, whilst this question is part of the point of writing the transcendental deduction, it is not so clear that the transcendental deduction alone answers it. Furthermore, in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique* Kant also mentions a second enquiry that will be

undertaken in the transcendental deduction, an enquiry into “the pure understanding itself, its possibility and the cognitive faculties upon which it rests” (Axvi-Axvii). Kant describes the enquiry into the justification of the categories one into their objective validity and he contrasts this with the “subjective” focus on the understanding. This has led to commentators distinguishing between an objective and a subjective deduction. Kant himself suggests that the former is “essential” to his purposes whilst the latter, although of “great importance”, is declared not to be “essential”. The reason he gives for the difference is that the chief question concerns what can known independently of experience not how it is possible to think at all. However, the division between the two has encouraged some, mainly analytic interpreters of the *Critique*, to suggest that it might be possible to formulate a version of its argument that abstracts entirely from the subjective deduction. One of the questions in assessing its argument then is whether it is really possible to distinguish between the success of one element and that of the other.

When Kant opens the specific argument of the transcendental deduction in the first edition he refers to the problem of discovering how pure concepts of understanding are possible and indicates that to comprehend them we need to enquire into the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience, referring here to the question of what remains as the ground of experience when everything that can have arisen *from* experience is abstracted from appearances. This point would lead us to

expect that Kant will begin from the *a priori* intuitions he has already justified and we will discover that he does this to a degree. The categories are subsequently described as concepts that “contain *a priori* the pure thought involved in every experience” (A96) so that all that is needed to justify them is to show that we could not think objects without them. However, having made this point Kant then proceeds to address the question of understanding in general and states that its condition will be found in the subjective sources “which form the *a priori* foundation of the possibility of experience” (A97).

In turning to laying out the subjective sources Kant mentions the difference between being receptive (as we are with regard to sensibility) and having a spontaneous capacity for cognition and indicates that knowledge can only arise from their combination. Spontaneity is the ground of the threefold synthesis that he takes to be present in all knowledge and which relates back to the *a priori* basis of sensibility. Kant now lays out in two formats the deduction that will concentrate on these subjective elements of knowledge, the fact that two formats are involved is due, he states to the “extreme difficulty” of the subject that requires that first we have a preliminary exposition prior to the systematic one that is fuller.

The preliminary exposition opens with a reminder that all our knowledge is subject to time as time is the formal condition of inner sense so all representations must be “ordered, connected, and brought into relation” (A99) in time, an observation that Kant tells us we should bear in

mind as “quite fundamental”. After making this point Kant turns to intuition and suggests that the manifold that is given to intuition can only yield distinguishable elements inasmuch as the time of distinct impressions is separated from each other. For unity to arise out of the manifold and hence for us to be able to represent space we first “run through and hold together” the elements of representation (A99). This is what Kant terms the synthesis of apprehension which enables a single representation to emerge from the manifold but this is not to be understood as only an empirical act since it is by virtue of a pure form of such synthesis that we are able to represent space and time themselves.

If the synthesis of apprehension enables the distinction between moments there is yet a need for relating this to the ability to reproduce a relationship between moments. Empirically this occurs through the mechanism of association but Kant points to a problem with understanding reproduction to be only a product of such a mechanism. The problem is that such reproduction itself requires certain rules that enable it to operate with constancy, rules that relate both to the reproductions themselves and to the names we give to what is reproduced. “There must then be something which, as the *a priori* ground of a necessary synthetic unity of appearances, makes their reproduction possible.” (A101)

Just as we suggested that the pure synthesis of apprehension was necessary for space and time themselves to be represented so Kant now adds to this a requirement that reproduction of the elements of moments in

combination must also involve a pure synthesis. This is the synthesis of imagination (A102) which, as a transcendental faculty, we shall discover, is of immense importance. But whilst the synthesis of imagination is, as Kant puts it, “inseparably bound up” with the synthesis of reproduction, it is still not sufficient to provide us with the notion of knowledge. The point is that that reproduction itself will not stability unless there is *consciousness* that what is thought at one moment is the same as what is thought at the next. Without such consciousness there will be no continuity between representations as each one will still appear as completely new and not gradually related to the previous one. This can be clearly seen with mathematics where “unity of synthesis” is required for a concept of number to make sense.

At this point we have a sense of the account of synthesis beginning to form but Kant now moves away from concentration on the ability of synthesis to the question of what is happening when we form an “object” of representation. When we make a claim of knowledge we suggest that there is something that is distinct from the act of knowing although we also intimate at the same time that this thing somehow corresponds *to* the act of knowing in order for it to be the object *known*. “It is easily seen that this object must be thought only as something in general =  $x$ , since outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as something corresponding to it.” (A104)

This is the first part of the sense of the object that is known but the second part is that it must include in it something that is in some sense necessary as our representations have to come together (as we have pointed out in the notion of “synthesis”) in order that the object is known and this coming together is what is involved in the unitary conception of the object. Having begun by bringing out the qualities that must be involved in the conception of the object Kant now points out that the something in general = x is, as something distinct from all our representations, nothing to us and what is something to us must first of all be the formal basis of unity in our representations themselves. This is specified by Kant in terms of a *rule* by which the manifold’s reproduction is governed necessarily through a concept that unites it. Concepts in their general form are universals but for them to have necessity requires that their transcendental condition be uncovered. Kant terms this the transcendental unity of apperception.

In introducing this notion Kant distinguishes two different senses of self-identity. Inasmuch as a sense of self-identity emerges from inner sense alone then it is one that cannot escape flux and variation so this notion could not supply us with a necessary sense of unity of consciousness as such a sense would have to precede all the variable data of experience and make its combination possible. So we have to distinguish inner sense from the transcendental unity of apperception as the latter requires, as Kant puts it, “identity of function” of synthetic combination or, as he puts it more fully: “the mind could never think its identity in the manifoldness of its

representations, and indeed think this identity *a priori*, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its act, whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, thereby rendering possible their interconnection according to *a priori* rules” (A108).

If we now turn back from the condition of being able to represent objects to the conception of the object itself we can distinguish two modes of understanding it. On the one hand there is the appearance and then there is the object that emerges as the representation of the appearance. This representation in turn can become the object of a further representation but the ultimate ground of all appearances would be a reference to a further object that we do not and cannot intuit and this would be the transcendental object = *x* (A109). The pure concept of this transcendental object has to remain constant as does the sense of the transcendental unity of apperception but it does so by containing no determinate intuition. So the relation to the transcendental object on a transcendental law to the effect that all appearances must stand under the *a priori* rules of synthetic combination in order for knowledge to be possible at all. The product of this analysis is that there is a single experience in which all perceptions are ordered just as there is only a single space and time in which they can be ordered. The conclusion of the preliminary argument follows from this (A111). However, not only does Kant here assume he has provided an account of the understanding of the object but he has likewise required that the necessity of the categories describing the object rest upon the

transcendental unity of apperception. The preliminary argument is now completed and we can turn to the systematic exposition that Kant stated was fuller.

This second stage of the argument brings together all the elements that were separately presented in the first stage of the argument. All of the three elements of synthesis have an empirical and a transcendental aspect. But the “inner ground” as Kant now terms it for experience in general is nothing other than the transcendental unity of apperception. It provides *unity* to the manifold, thus to all intuition. But the unity of apperception is also said to presuppose or include a synthesis and since the transcendental unity of apperception is a necessary unity this synthesis is an *a priori* synthesis. This synthesis is none other than that of imagination: “the principle of the necessary unity of pure (productive) synthesis of imagination, prior to apperception, the ground of the possibility of all knowledge, especially of experience” (A118). So the pure form of all possible knowledge is provided by the transcendental synthesis of imagination.

We could also look at the result of the argument the other way, that is, not by starting from the highest point, but rather beginning with the most basic data. This is that there are appearances and when we are conscious of them we say we have perceptions. Each appearance includes a manifold and so each intuition presents only some particular that is given separately from others. Combination does not arise simply from receptivity to sense

impressions, that way we would only have the sense of separate particulars. Thus to get a sense of something beyond this requires that there is spontaneous synthesis and this is what is brought about by imagination. Imagination enables us to form images of the appearances and by means of these images we bring about connections between them. The ground of the connection is not just associative as by means of that we would never arrive at rules for the combination of the appearances that had any necessary stability. The connection appearances thus, on the ground of association alone, would only be contingent. Further, we would have no clarity by reference to such contingent connection as to whether the appearances that we were thus related to were inclusive of all given to us and whether, on the other hand, there might not be a whole of appearance that we had no real sense of.

To overcome these problems we require reference to a necessary ground of unity and this is provided by the transcendental unity of apperception: “According to this principle all appearances, without exception, must so enter the mind or be apprehended, that they conform to the unity of apperception” (A122). This unity of apperception is a transcendental mode of consciousness that Kant terms “all-comprehensive” and which he relates to the pure intuition of time. Between the pure notion of understanding as the seat of concepts on the one hand and sensibility as the area of sensation and variability on the other the pure imagination stands as an intermediary. Nature, understood as an ordered whole, is the product

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of the synthesis that has been described as the understanding, as a faculty of rules, produces it. (It is “the lawgiver of nature” (A126).)