

Transcendental Imagination and the B-Deduction

In between the two editions of the *Critique* Kant published a short work entitled the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. In a footnote to the “Preface” of this work he responds to a criticism of the Transcendental Deduction (made by Professor Ulrich) and agrees that the account of it is obscure though he states the problem with this exposition concerns “only the manner of the presentation and not the ground of explanation which is correctly given there”. He also suggests that the problem of demonstrating *how* experience is made possible by means of the categories “can be solved almost by a single conclusion from the precisely determined definition of a judgment in general”. Due to the fact that Kant wrote this many commentators have formed the view that the argument of the B-Deduction is quite different to that of the A-Deduction despite Kant’s claim that it is only the manner of presentation that is different. These commentators suggest that the emphasis on *judgment* makes the argument here different. What I will be doing is to suggest that the argument of the B-Deduction is not in fact based on judgment in the way these commentators suggest but that it is rather based on an account of transcendental synthesis and in describing the notion to us of transcendental imagination.

Kant opens the B-Deduction by describing to us the notion of combination which is another name for synthesis. When we have an intuition of something then we are using our senses and so are receiving something. Whilst we know from the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic that the form of sense is an *a priori* intuition the question arises of how this form enables us to comprehend particular intuitions as we do in experience and, just as in the A-Deduction, Kant maintains that this is done by means of a synthesis. Since synthesis is part of the spontaneous, not merely receptive element of cognition, understanding must be at work in organizing

it. There are three elements of synthesis, the manifold, the synthesis itself and the unification of the synthesis. The unity of the synthesis is what has a ground that needs to be discovered. In §16 Kant turns to an account of this unity stating that it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations and that the manifold has a necessary relation to it (B132). However he here then goes on to state that original apperception must be that which *generates* the “I think”. The generation of it is what allows the particular intuitions to come together so that they can all be described as elements of my state. When this occurs we have *one consciousness* and this reference of contents to the form of consciousness in general is stated by Kant to be the basis of thought and all logic.

So there is a necessary element to being able to represent distinct things to myself such that it is possible for me to experience them as distinct. This element is a synthesis under which all representations have to stand: the synthesis of apperception. But for the synthesis of apperception to be possible first requires that the manifold be brought together and brought before the unifying principle and this latter action is the work of the imagination.

It is on the basis of this account that Kant turns in §19 to a description of *judgment*. He now terms judgment “the manner in which given modes of knowledge are brought to the objective unity of apperception” (B141). The thought can be necessarily unified even if what is being thought *about* is merely something contingent. So that the elements of the thought describe something which is necessarily unified together is not required but what is required is that there is a manner in which the contents are governed that allows thought itself to be possible. Judgments are hence now explained as containing in themselves a necessary unity due to their connection with the prime locus of spontaneity, the unity of apperception and

this accounts for the appearance of objectivity that is manifest in logical forms of thought. Hence what Kant has done in §19 is give an account of the transcendental basis of the forms of judgment.

So, the structure of the argument up until §20, is summarized there as stating that the manifold is subject to the unity of apperception, as the unity of apperception is the ground of the unity of intuition. The act of understanding that brings together representations is then stated to be the logical function of judgment and the categories, as we know, are the relation of functions of judgment to synthesis. So the argument would appear to be complete: why does Kant now add another six paragraphs?

In §21 Kant gives one reason why the argument has only begun so far which is that we have not yet attended to the way empirical intuition works. We are aware however that intuition is given independently of the understanding: that is, the givenness of intuitions, is not itself a givenness of synthesis. In §22 Kant distinguishes between *thinking* something and *knowing* it pointing out that thought requires only concepts but that without a connection between concepts and intuitions we can have no *knowledge*. Knowledge would be a description of an object that was in space and time and thus we only have knowledge when we bring together pure concepts and pure intuitions. So when we use concepts without connecting them to intuitions we cannot capture any reference to objects and in this situation the things described in thought could not even be said to be possible or impossible.

This discussion enables Kant in §24 to distinguish between two general kinds of synthesis: the one that relates to the manifold of intuition is termed by him *figurative* as it involves the possibility of figures, shapes and descriptions of the nature of perception. This is different from the synthesis that was described in §§19-20 as involved with judgment and understanding and which Kant now terms

intellectual synthesis as it gave us the reason for thinking that forms of judgment have an objectivity of a sort due to their necessary unity arising from their relation to the unity of apperception. But when we think of figurative synthesis we have a combination that brings the manifold of sense into connection with apperception and since apperception is that which guarantees the unity of the categories brings the manifold into connection with the categories. This is the act of the transcendental synthesis of imagination.

Imagination is what enables us to have an intuitive sense of something that is not presently given to us in perception. Imagination is an expression of the spontaneous element of cognition and its synthesis of intuition is hence one that occurs according to the categories. This synthesis is the primary relationship between spontaneity and receptivity, cognition and its real objects.

If there is a unitary act that enables each empirical intuition to contain unity and enables us to distinguish the elements of each from each other and to combine them together in an experience we term our own then it follows that the act of synthesis must present the connection of space to time. (B154-5: description of a line.) This connection is what guarantees the unity of time in experience. However the fact that it is only when we connect intuitions and concepts together that we have knowledge also means we are incapable of self-knowledge in a fundamental sense as only the appearance of the self is available to us, not a relation to its fundamental form (B158).

In §26 we get the core argument of the B-Deduction which is an account of the nature of empirical intuition and to do this Kant reprises the account of the three syntheses that was given in the A-Deduction. Firstly, he states that the synthesis of apprehension conforms to the forms of intuitions but also presents to us an intuition of

these forms. The condition of the unitary apprehension of space and time is the relation of the manifold to transcendental apperception and transcendental apperception as the form of all conceptual unity brings with it the categories. So to perceive even a moment of intuition, given that it requires reference always to the singularity of the whole, is to involve the categories and perception is thus dependent on the cognition of concepts. (Two examples follow: intuition of a house (B162) and of freezing of water (B162-3).)

So the summary of the argument in §26 follows after these examples and states the following. The unity of the synthesis of apprehension is based on the unity of the synthesis of imagination so that the synthesis at work in experience with regard to empirical intuitions is dependent on a transcendental synthesis that brings together the forms of intuitions and concepts.

In §27 Kant adds to this demonstration the point that *a priori* knowledge is hence always and only knowledge of sensible objects. This knowledge is thus limited to experience but not derived from it.

Accounts of Transcendental Imagination in Secondary Literature

1. Strawson: (This account is found in his “Imagination and Perception” in Strawson (1974) *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Methuen & Co: London). Imagination involves *recognition* of *types* and combination of perceptions together over time. If the latter is to occur then we must have a conception of what is being perceived separately from the given elements of perception themselves (an intentional object). Perceptions are conceptually laden but the connection of this thought to transcendental apperception is not laid out.
2. Sellars (See” “The Role of Imagination in Kant’s Theory of Experience”, <http://www.ditext.com/sellars/ikte.html>): perception has a *content* and an *object*. The content would be the particular sensory impressions, the object would be what the impressions were *of*. To this he adds another element when he suggests that part of the experience of an apple is a relation to the white inside even before it has been bitten into as we *imagine* the whiteness. On this view imagination gives us sense-image models of external objects. The

problem with this view is that it requires us to think of synthesis as based on “sheer receptivity” where this latter is a kind of primitive simple intuition. Kant surely does not present us with this notion.

3. Heidegger:(see *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* §§16-18 and §§27-34 + *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* §§23-26) like Sellars thinks there is an immediate unity of intuition separately from combination and describes this as *syndosis*. Heidegger thinks this is necessary for space and time to be themselves intuited, a possibility he thinks makes geometry possible rather than being something described by means of it. So primary intuition is something completely independent of spontaneity. He separates the transcendental synthesis of imagination from connection with the categories and sees it as an account of “original time”. Hence Heidegger’s reading marginalizes transcendental apperception and conceptuality.

The following provides a table of the arguments of the two versions of the transcendental deduction:

A Basic Outline of the Transcendental Deduction

Characterizations of the task and nature of the Deduction:

- I) A edition claims. Axvi-Axvii: 2 sides of the deduction distinguished with the claim that there are “subjective” and “objective” aspects. The latter are key and refer to the objects of the pure understanding, the former to its possibility. Refers here to A92-3 as sufficient account of the latter.
 - A 92-3: distinguishes between empirical and transcendental account of synthesis and determines the latter in terms of pure intuitions and pure concepts and suggests that pure concepts are necessary for the objects of experience.
 - A94: 3 sources of experience distinguished.
 - A97-8: these 3 sources make possible the understanding.
 - A99: all cognitions subject to the formal condition of inner sense.
 - A99: unity of intuition based on synthesis of apprehension.
 - A102: synthesis of imagination bound up with synthesis of apprehension.
 - A107: even the unity of intuition is only possible through the relation of intuitions to the unity of apperception.
 - A114: radical faculty of cognition is the unity of apperception.
 - A116: unity of apperception brings syntheses together.
 - A118: synthesis of imagination said to be prior to unity of apperception and to be the ground of all cognition.
 - A119: the understanding is the relation of imagination to the unity of apperception.
 - A119: the understanding contains that which gives necessary unity to the imagination and this is the categories.
 - A120-2: the synthesis of apprehension said to depend for its rule on affinity and this latter to be based on nothing other than the unity of apperception.
 - A124: Imagination brings into combination the manifold with the unity of apperception.

- II) Shared elements in A and B:
 A84/B116: emphasis on the *quid juris*.
 A89-90/B122: it is necessary to show how subjective conditions of thought have objective validity.
- III) *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* claims about the deduction.
 Ak. 4: 474_n: the deduction shows *that* but not *how* the categories apply to objects of perceptual experience. Ak. 4: 475_n: deduction could “almost” be given by a single move from the “precisely determined definition of a judgment in general”.
- IV) B deduction.
- B130: distinction between three parts of combination.
 B131: categories based on logical form of judgment but these already contain a unity of combination the grounds of which has to be found.
 B131-2: ground of this unity is the “I think”.
 B136: all representations have to stand under the synthetic unity of apperception but also have to be brought under it by means of a further synthesis.
 B140: pure intuition of time stands under the condition of the unity of apperception.
 B141: judgments are merely the relation of cognitions to the unity of apperception.
 B143: the manifold is brought under the unity of apperception by means of the logical form of judgments.
 B143: the categories are the manner in which the logical form of judgments determine the manifold.
 B152: synthesis of imagination is carried out in accordance with the principle of the unity of apperception and hence in accordance with the categories.
 B153-4: the understanding exercises the synthesis of imagination on empirical apperception.
 B155: the combination of inner sense is produced by the understanding through the synthesis of imagination.
 B161: unity of the manifold is the condition of the synthesis of apprehension.
 B161: this unity is no other than the combination of intuition in general with the unity of apperception in agreement with the categories.
 B161: hence all synthesis stands under the categories.
 B164: synthesis of imagination connects the manifold together but depends on understanding for the unity of its intellectual synthesis and on sensibility for the manifold.
 B164-5: all perception depends on the synthesis of apprehension but this in its turn on the categories, hence all combination depends on the categories.