

The A Paralogisms

The character of the Paralogisms is described early in the chapter. Kant describes them as being syllogisms which contain no empirical premises and states that in them “we conclude from something which we know to something else of which we have no concept, and to which, owing to an inevitable illusion, we yet ascribe objective reality” (A339/B397). Since this involves a movement from something of which there is a notion possible to something of which there is not Kant also labels the mode of argument in the paralogisms as “*pseudo-rational*”. The type of argument Kant is concerned with here is however a kind of invalid transcendental argument as it does involve a transcendental ground of some sort. They in fact all begin from the concept of the *cogito* and are supposed to found a purely rational notion of the soul. In setting out the province of this enquiry Kant as usual follows the guide of the table of the categories and hence divides the enquiry into four parts corresponding to the four headings of the categories. Firstly, the notion of the soul itself as an existent (the view of it as a *substance*, table of relation), secondly its *quality* is said to be simple, thirdly its quantity is said to be *unitary* and fourthly its modality concerns *possible* objects in space.

These concepts lead us to four paralogisms. Kant immediately indicates one of the tacks he will deploy against the view that there exists a pure science of the type stated to exist in traditional metaphysics. This concerns the very notion of the *cogito* which he describes as “a bare

consciousness which accompanies all concepts” (A346/B404). It is important to bear this characterization in mind. Kant rules out any possible extension of the notion of the self involved stating that any further characterization would make use of data of empirical psychology and hence could not claim to be a transcendental doctrine of any sort.

The first paralogism is the only one that Kant bothers to write out in full since all the others take the same form. This concerns substantiality itself (A348). The First Paralogism asserts an identity between the subject of predication and the substance that can be taken to be formally the first or ultimate ground of knowledge claims concerning beings. Thus the assertion is that whatever cannot be taken to be other than the subject of all judgments must be the substantially real. Since the next element of the argument is that I am the absolute subject of all my possible judgments (on the grounds of the Cartesian claim that the “I think” is what can be most truly known) then I am, as that which thinks, the truly real substance. This argument rests on the assumption that the categories have a meaning that can be given an existential form regardless of connection to intuition and hence violates the basic rules established in the Transcendental Analytic. In the absence of reference to a manifold the use of the categories can only be as “functions of a judgment” (A349). So Kant’s basic objection to the assertion put forward in the First Paralogism is that no knowledge of any existential sort can be derived from a purely judgmental use of a category. Thus the assertion that the “I” is a substance can in itself have no other meaning than to say that all

functions of judgment have to related to it. This Kant will concede, effectively therefore not denying what is explicitly asserted in the paralogism but suggesting that what is taken to follow from this does not. What would follow from it would be that there is some special knowledge given of the being of the “I” that is not given of any other being. But a function of judgment in itself can give no existential information and hence in accepting that the I is a substance in this sense nothing can be said about it in experiential terms.

This is why Kant immediately moves from the discussion of substance in this non-schematised sense to the description of substance in the sense that emerged from schematisation, namely as that which is permanent. In doing so what Kant is doing is pointing to what the argument wished to show, namely, that, in being a substance, the I is something permanent (*and hence* immortal). This does not however follow: “The ‘I’ is indeed in all thoughts, but there is not in this representation the least trace of intuition, distinguishing the ‘I’ from other objects of intuition. Thus we can indeed perceive that this representation is invariably present in all thought, but not that it is an abiding and continuing intuition, wherein the thoughts, as being transitory, give place to one another.” (A350) Hence what Kant is pointing out as the error of the First Paralogism is passing off as ontological insight something that is a purely logical point. That everything in being given to thought is given in the medium of awareness is clear and hence that the ultimate basis of judgment is a reference to this is not difficult to accept.

The difficulty comes however in saying that we have thereby uncovered a claim about something (which Kant terms the “substratum” which “underlies this ‘I’”). To have discovered something about this would be a real claim that would impart a fundamental insight about the nature of things but the syllogism as given cannot do that. Hence a logical claim is made into an ontological one. This is the invalidity of this inference.

If the problem with the First Paralogism can be uncovered fairly quickly then it is quite different with the Second Paralogism. Kant’s treatment of this is given at much greater length in the A-edition of the *Critique* than was the case with the First Paralogism and it is retreated in terms of a reply to Moses Mendelssohn in the second edition of the *Critique*. The distinction between the two treatments will be worth attending to but it is worth pointing out immediately that the assertion that is key to this paralogism, namely, that the soul is something that is simple in its being, is a cardinal doctrine of Plato’s *Phaedo* and is one of the connecting points between ancient and modern forms of metaphysics. This will always be sufficient to suggest that shaking this assertion will be more difficult and more important than was the case with the First Paralogism. This is reinforced by the manner of Kant’s first description of this paralogism: “This is the Achilles of all dialectical inferences in the pure doctrine of the soul. It is no mere sophistical play, contrived by a dogmatist in order to impart to his assertions a superficial plausibility, but an inference which appears to withstand even the keenest scrutiny and the most scrupulously

exact investigation.” (A351) These sentences suggest a contrast between the First and Second Paralogisms. The First Paralogism may well have been a “mere sophistical play” whose plausibility was only superficial whilst the Second Paralogism is one that, by contrast, appears well-grounded and hard to shake.

Since the Second Paralogism asserts the simplicity of the soul it involves a clear distinction between simple and composite substances. The basic thrust of it is not difficult to seek since the composite nature of bodies is a clear element of perception. By contrast it would appear that the mind must be something simple as “representations (for instance, the single words of a verse), distributed among different beings, never make up a whole thought (a verse), and it is therefore impossible that a thought should inhere in what is essentially composite” (A352). The condition of thought would appear to be that it belongs to something that is unified and incapable of division. For if what occurs in thought were divided amongst distinct subjects then there would be no way that thoughts could be said to hang together and therefore no move could be made from one thought to another thus preventing coherence of representation in general. For these reasons in fact Kant argued in the Transcendental Deduction for the transcendental unity of apperception. Hence in contesting the argument of the Second Paralogism Kant is confronting the question of the status of the transcendental unity of apperception.

The nature of Kant's response to the Second Paralogism is complicated however by the number of considerations he adduces. Firstly he appears to suggest that the difficulty with the Second Paralogism is that it attempts to introduce the need for an absolute unity of consciousness purely by relating concepts to each other and hence that the difficulty is of a similar type as that stated to apply to the First Paralogism of making ontological conclusions follow from merely logical points. This impression is conveyed by his denial that the assertion "A thought can only be the effect of the absolute unity of the thinking subject" can possibly be analytic (A353). The point here however, unlike with the First Paralogism, is that there is not even a logical rationale to the effect that a singular substance must be regarded as what is required for the *production* of thought. Thoughts could be the effect of several substances interacting. But if there is no analytic rationale for thinking that the generation of thoughts requires reference to one substance then what is the reason for thinking that one substance is the necessary ground of all thought? Kant now repeats the point on which he agrees with Hume, namely that necessity of connection cannot be shown from reference to experience alone if by experience we mean the derivation by constancy of conjunction of a necessary connection.

Hence the first point seems to concern the logical status of the notion that a simple subject is required for thought. But in interrogating this Kant has shifted the ground from the mere assertion that it is a condition for how thoughts have to be understood (as requiring a unitary holder of them in

order for them to be coherent) to how they have to be regarded as *produced*. What is the reason for this shift in the status of the unitary subject? The former is something that we can assert to be part of what Kant terms the *subjective condition* of knowledge. In order to comprehend anything I have to connect it to myself in judgments. This is the rationale for the assertion of the First Paralogism to the effect that I am a subject of predication. The question thus appears to turn again on the question of whether there can be a move from recognition of this element of the subjective nature of knowledge to one that conveys some existential-ontological import. Kant supports this interpretation of the discussion of the Second Paralogism when he writes: “ ‘*I am simple*’ means nothing more than that this representation, ‘I’, does not contain in itself the least manifoldness and that it is absolute (although merely logical) unity.” (A355)

The logical condition of the understanding of the way thoughts belong together is connection of them to a subject of predication but whilst this subject of predication is necessarily simple this is a pure requirement of the understanding of how subjects and predicates belong together. It alone tells us nothing of the nature of that which is invoked in the logical structure of predication as a possible being. The key question is however clearly once again, as with the First Paralogism, of an existential-ontological sort as the assertion of the simplicity of the substance of mind would not be made at all unless it was thought that something clearly followed from it. A classic example of what was thought to follow from it was that whilst body is

something composite, mind is not and that the simplicity of mind was hence in some sense a *quality* that distinguished it from body. Thus, as with the First Paralogism, so with the Second, Kant focuses attention on the implication of the assertion that the soul is simple after having shown that the strict sense of it could not be taken to mean anything very much.

In suggesting that the soul is simple then the traditional doctrine meant to show that the possession of such simplicity guaranteed in some way the incorruptibility of soul as opposed to dissolution to which all matter was subject. Kant now proceeds to connect to this line of thought the additional argument that thoughts do not appear in outer intuition and hence on the ground that thought is the basic attribute of mind and that thought requires unity that this unity and simplicity of thought point to a unitary and simple being which is the possessor of them and which must be different in kind to body. Now at this point Kant raises the stakes by pointing out that just as all attributes of bodies have been shown by the argument concerning the transcendental ideality of space and time to belong only to appearances and not things-in-themselves so also it follows that whilst the attributes of thoughts do not belong to appearances of outer intuition that this in itself does not show that they do not belong to the same “substratum” as do all material elements of appearances. “I may further assume that the substance which in relation to our outer sense possesses extension is in itself the possessor of thoughts, and that these thoughts can by means of its own inner sense be consciously represented. In this way, what in one relation is

entitled corporeal would in another relation be at the same time a thinking being, whose thoughts we cannot intuit, though we can indeed intuit their signs in the [field of] appearance.” (A359)

The key point that Kant wishes to reach after venturing this hypothesis is that the nature of the subject that thinks is not knowable due to the fact that it cannot be equated with any predicates which we attach to the subject in experience. Therefore there is no experience of any such subject, just of the subject of appearance and this entails that we cannot say anything concerning the nature of that which ultimately is responsible for thought for we have no grounds to appeal to with regard to it.

The argument of the Third Paralogism is closely related to that of the Second. The rationale for thinking of the soul as simple was first stated there to reside in the difficulty of otherwise conceiving of unity, i.e. in reference to the transcendental unity of apperception. But the assertion of simplicity could effectively not be shown to be based upon unity. The Third Paralogism is distinct from the Second in trying to build a comprehension of personal identity on the conviction of the unity of self-ascriptive statements. With regard to outer sense the notion of unity relates to the continuance of something in terms of spatial reference, as was shown in the description of intentionality we uncovered in the Second and Third Analogies. By contrast the conception of unity that is involved in self-ascriptive statements is one that connects to inner sense, the form of which is time. With regard to the assumption that there is such a notion as personal identity therefore what

must be meant, states Kant, is the continuing reference to statements over time to one subject: “For it really says nothing more than that in the whole time in which I am conscious of myself, I am conscious of this time as belonging to the unity of myself; and it comes to the same whether I say that this whole time is in me, as individual unity, or that I am to be found as numerically identical in all this time.” (A362) Once it is put this way however the notion involved seems to be a merely analytic statement. If it is thought through indeed it appears unclear whether the unity of myself is something that I have as a property or whether on the contrary the time in question is unified and as an effect of it I am.

Kant then moves from my awareness of my own identity to what would appear concerning it for an outside observer pointing out that someone viewing me from without would draw no conclusion concerning the “objective permanence of myself” (A363). This points to the problem of personal identity, namely, that whilst at any given time it is a purely logical requirement that statements of self-ascription point continuously to one subject that this in itself gives no licence to the assurance that there is a constant subject actually existent. This brings out that the discussion of the Third Paralogism is connected not only to the Second but also to the First. John Locke also recorded this point prior to Kant. If the assumption of continuity of identity cannot be located to refer to a substance then the problem of the permanence arises due to the fact that memory transfer and similar switches cannot be theoretically ruled out and hence problems of

personal identity can soon appear to be substantively difficult to resolve. As Kant puts it: “Despite the logical identity of the ‘I’, such a change may have occurred in it as does not allow of the retention of its identity, and yet we may ascribe to it the same-sounding ‘I’, which in every different state, even in one involving change of the [thinking] subject, might still retain the thought of the preceding subject and so on hand it over to the subsequent subject.” (A363)

From the data of consciousness alone there follows no clear representation of a continuing “I” that is *actually* and not merely *logically* shown to be self-identical. Whilst at each moment I necessarily identify myself with what says “I”, that which states it could be constantly changing between each moment of its statement. All that can be said with certainty is that *something* continues to state this but not that it is constantly *the same thing* at each distinct moment of time. At this point the reference to the fact that the intuition of inner sense is only temporal becomes significantly important for the first time. On the grounds of reference to time alone no notion of even phenomenal substance can be built. With regard to this latter we require also spatial intuition. To fully demonstrate this and its implications will require discussion of the Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation of Idealism but we can already see the nature of the problem with the suggestion that there is anything of ontological import revealed by the immediate reference to a unitary “I” in self-ascriptive statements.

This is a further proof of the fact, the same thing which underlies all the paralogisms, that no form of *reality* can be proved to attach to the soul by means of them. The Fourth Paralogism by contrast treats the argument, as given by Berkeley and Descartes, that the knowledge of outer relations beyond the soul is in fact based only on it (and was re-written in the B edition as the Refutation of Idealism). We can however sum up the whole of Kant's attitude to the notion of the pure science of soul by pointing to a passage in which he distinguishes the attempt to assert *a priori* knowledge of it from the parallel attempt he has made to provide us with a body of synthetic *a priori* truths about bodies: "In the latter science there is much that is *a priori* can be synthetically known from the mere concept of an extended impenetrable thing, but in the former nothing whatsoever that is *a priori* can be known synthetically from the concept of a thinking being." (A381-2: lengthy citation) [Next week: Fourth Paralogism and Refutation of Idealism.]