Transcendental Deduction (A): The Role of Transcendental Apperception

The basic question of the Transcendental Deduction is how pure *a priori* concepts relate to experience and its central argument aims to show that the manner in which they do so is by serving as the *a priori* conditions of possible experience. To show that they do this would be also to show what the *a priori* conditions of possible experience are that they are the explications of. In a sense the basic form of the answer would have to tell us what enables us to have the experience of relating to *objects* at all (A97). However, in addition to this task of uncovering the basis of the reference to objects of experience in a deduction of the categories Kant also mentions, in the preface to the first edition, that the argument of the deduction also has another side. This other side concerns, he states, “the pure understanding itself, its possibility and the cognitive faculties upon which it rests” (Axvii). The second side is stated to be less important than the first by Kant himself and is viewed as a “subjective” deduction, in terms of explicating the conditions of subjectivity, rather than the conditions of objectivity. There are three questions concerning the argument of the deduction in the first edition: 1) what does the “objective” deduction here consist in?; 2) what does the “subjective” deduction consist in?; 3) how do the two sides of the argument relate and is Kant right to think that they can be separated?

Many commentators on Kant have taken the view that the two sides of the argument cannot be separated or at least if they can not so easily as Kant has suggested. The argument to the effect that they cannot be has one of two forms: it either centres on looking at the nature of synthesis (and this would be, for example, Heidegger’s reading) or it looks at the nature of subjectivity itself in the form of the transcendental unity of apperception. Today I will address the argument of the A
deduction and present an account of the view that relates this argument to the transcendental unity of apperception.

The argument of the A-deduction is presented twice, once in a “preliminary” style and the second time in a manner that Kant thinks we will be ready for once we have grasped the preliminary argument. The preliminary argument begins at A98 and concludes at A114. The second argument then picks up at A115 and runs to A128 (with a short conclusion following at A129-30). In the preliminary argument Kant opens with the description of what enables the knowledge that is “experience” to be possible and he describes a threefold synthesis as its ground, which he expounds in three parts that are then drawn together. The first part concerns the synthesis of apprehension. In introducing this Kant reminds us of a point we have taken from the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic, namely that all our knowledge is subject to time, as time is the condition of “inner sense” and that this shows that the order, connection and relation, of all parts of our knowledge must be temporal.

Having reminded us of this Kant looks at what is occurring when we are aware of something as a distinct intuition stating to become aware of any sensory element and distinguish it from any other is to separate at least two moments from each other. So, if we are able to see two things as occupying distinct regions of space, we have a temporal moment that must logically precede the spatial distinction and which is its ground. This initial necessary temporal act that grounds the possibility of spatial awareness at all is what Kant terms the synthesis of apprehension.

However, this synthesis of apprehension is intimately related to and effectively itself dependent upon another synthesis, that, namely, of imagination. What Kant puts under the heading of the synthesis of imagination is the ability to hold together an impression from the past with one in the present. The awareness of
distinct temporal moments requires the reference to moments that are no longer (A101-2). This requirement, when added to the necessity of temporal awareness as the condition of spatial conceptions points to the need for cognition to be governed by temporal rules.

The third moment that is then distinguished from these first two is termed the synthesis of recognition and this third one is what is stated to require concepts. The previous two moments have related to intuition and have shown the basic requirements of intuitive grasp of something but the point that is now added is a reference to consciousness as without consciousness that we have maintained a connection between distinct moments the reproduction of imagination would retain nothing. Conscious recognition of the continuing reproduction is the ground of conceptual distinction between the moments and unless this is present then the distinct moments are not united together. However, notoriously, the understanding of the self in experience is one that is as much in flux as anything else, so that the notion of the self of empirical awareness can be effectively identified with flux itself.

There must be a condition for my awareness of both myself and all that is represented to me. This condition would be transcendental, it must precede the awareness of all particulars, and be what enables my awareness to be one that is of particulars. This would be, states Kant, “pure original unchangeable consciousness” which is what is named by him transcendental apperception (A107). The reference to it is meant to fulfil two functions in Kant’s argument with regard to awareness of objects. Firstly, it is meant to show that awareness of any given particular is dependent on something universally necessary. Secondly, it is meant to supply the ground that connects together awareness of all distinct particulars. “For 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…to a transcendental unity” (A108).

The second function of the reference to the notion of the transcendental unity of apperception is related to the conception that Kant has of “experience”. Experience is presented by him as a unified whole and in a sense it has to be if intuitions, the formal condition of sensibility, are always given as singulars. Since the form of intuitions give us one of the two parts of the whole of experience and they are given as unitary wholes so experience itself must be a unitary whole but this requires that the conceptual unity of experience must be as complete as the intuitive one. But if the unity of conceptual recognition is described by reference to the transcendental unity of apperception then this transcendental unity must also have an essential connection to the categories if the latter are to supply the *a priori* conditions of possibility of awareness of sensible objects. The way in which this will be shown would have to be by means of demonstrating the essential conditions of conceptual representation being of a piece with the very possibility of conceptual recognition in general.

The second and definitive argument of the A-Deduction begins from pure apperception in order to explain its relation to the three elements of synthesis. Intuition means nothing to us unless we are aware of it and becoming aware of something is becoming conscious of it. Pure apperception is the principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold but it seems to presuppose “or include” a synthesis (A118), the pure synthesis of imagination. The synthesis of imagination is what we have seen relates the moment of sensory awareness to each other but the unification of the moments in recognition would seem to require the categories (A119). The nature of the reference to the categories is still here obscure although Kant goes on to refer
subsequently to the need for them to grasp pure intuitive objects such as triangles. There has emerged as a consequence of his argument the awareness that sensibility and understanding are two extremes of cognition between which it would appear that imagination mediates. This mediation has some way of bringing pure concepts together with distinct intuitive moments in order for the form of experience to arise but this form of experience must be essentially the same as the form of possible awareness of anything so that it would appear that pure imagination and pure apperception are two sides of the same fundamental cognitive action. “Now to assert in this manner, that all these appearances, and consequently all objects with which we can occupy ourselves, are one and all in me, that is, are determinations of my identical self, is only another way of saying that there must be a complete unity of them in one and the same apperception.” (A129)

To return to our opening questions: 1) the objective deduction states that awareness of distinct objects is based on the conditions of intuitive awareness at all but that this in turn requires reference to the condition for awareness of concepts; 2) the subjective argument states the same: namely that pure imagination is the basis of awareness of empirical intuitions and pure apperception the ground of awareness of concepts; 3) therefore the two arguments are not distinct in principle as Kant suggests but essentially interconnected.

Next week we will look at the B-Deduction with the nature of transcendental imagination coming before us more strongly than today and in the seminar today we will look at other accounts of transcendental apperception.