

Kant III

The Transcendental Logic: the Categories of Thought¹

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Reading: 39-49

Structure: Where We Are and What we are Doing There

- Descartes's study of knowledge led to a difficulty: how to explain empirical knowledge.
 - o On his account, recall, the information of the senses corresponds in some rough way to the nature of empirical objects, and reason is capable of perfect knowledge of that nature (i.e., as extended).
 - o However, Descartes is unable to establish a definite relation between mind and external reality. His argument for his hoped-for divine connection succumbs to the Cartesian Circle.
 - o This leaves us with the question, how *do* we know anything about the empirical world?
- Kant picks up this issue and makes the question more particular: How are we capable of synthetic a priori knowledge?
 - o That is, he accepts that we do know a good deal about the empirical world.
 - o In particular, we know various necessary and universal claims to be true, such as the claim that the interior angles of a triangle sum to 180 degrees.
 - o What is striking about such knowledge is that we appear to acquire it a priori – i.e., prior to experience. How is this possible?
 - o Moreover, Kant notes that we have seen no significant progress in metaphysics, in the history of philosophy. Why is this?
- Kant thinks that the failures of metaphysics and the epistemological problems of Descartes are due to Transcendental Realism.
 - o Transcendental Realism is the doctrine according to which the proper objects of empirical knowledge – i.e., the empirical order itself – are a mind-independent order. The objects of sense, the objects investigated by science – these have the properties we experience them to have as a matter independent of human mind.
 - o If this doctrine were true, it would indeed be difficult to explain how the mind could get access to the empirical order. It would be particularly difficult to explain how we could have a priori knowledge of it.
- Kant thinks that Transcendental Idealism is the answer to the above difficulties.
 - o Transcendental Idealism is the doctrine that maintains that the proper objects of empirical knowledge – empirical objects – are not wholly mind-independent. He thinks that they are appearances that conform to the forms of human representation.
 - o This view requires distinguishing empirical reality from in-itself reality. The way the world is in itself, independent of how we think of it, is not what we experience as the empirical order. Empirical reality, rather, is how in-itself reality appears to us.

¹ Think, for a moment, about what this expression means. What are the “categories of thought”?

- In order to understand this view, we must investigate Kant's account of cognition (i.e., experience). How does the mind construct our experience "of" reality?
 - o Last time, we examined one of the two basic components of experience, intuition.
 - o For today, we examine the other, conceptual thought.

In General

- Cognition has two sources: sensible intuition and the understanding (our faculty for conceptual thought; 'thought' for short; i.e., representation in terms of concepts); sensibility is a receptive faculty in which we are affected by objects (ourselves and other things); thought/understanding is a productive faculty ("spontaneous")
- Both elements are essential for experience: without sensibility, no object is given to us; without understanding, no object would be thought. Thought without content is "empty"; intuition without conception is "blind". Each treated separately under T-Aesthetic and T-Logic, respectively.
- Manifold: In general, a manifold is a multiplicity of different elements; used as an adjective, it means "multifarious." The sensations conveyed to us by the senses constitute a manifold. The manifold images etc. are then synthesized in several ways thus becoming bona fide experience.
- Synthesis: Kant's generic term for unification; intuitions are synthetic inasmuch as they are complex unities; judgments are synthetic (in this general sense; not as opposed to "analytic") inasmuch as they bring together disparate representations.

The Transcendental Logic: Analytic of Concepts

In broad terms, what is Kant doing in this part of the Critique?

Logic: analysis of the "rules" of thought/understanding – rules that must be followed if there is to be any thinking/understanding

- General logic: indifferent to content (completely abstracted from all reference to objects); an examination of relations among cognitions (qua conceptual); i.e., examination of the necessary form of thinking, generally
- Transcendental logic: concerned with the rules governing pure thought (as opposed to empirical thought); also concerned with the origin of (the conceptual element of) cognition, inasmuch as that does not derive from objects themselves; a science to determine the origin, range, objective validity of pure thought

The Categories

- Intellectual Conditions of knowledge (cognition): the Categories, AKA, Pure Concepts. These are fundamental to the nature of human understanding. Which are they? That is, in intuition, we have a Pure and Impure distinction. Pure intuition is the very stuff of intuitive representation; impure intuitions are the various particular contents thus represented. A similar distinction is to be found in Concepts.
- Judgment and Concepts
 - o Judgment is the fundamental action of thinking. It is the process of conceptual unification of representations (themselves concept/intuition hybrids).
 - o Determinate thought: must be judgmental in form. I.e., I have no determinate thought unless I bring some representation under a concept. E.g., simply thinking "Socrates" or "man" is not full-fledged thought.

- Concepts are the result of judgments unifying further concepts; but this cannot be an infinitely regressing process. Certain concepts are basic to judgment and not themselves the product of prior judgments. These are the Categories, the Pure Concepts.
- The Categories are necessary conditions of judging (as the most prior of concepts); that is, necessary conditions of thought (inasmuch as this simply consists in judgment). We can determine which concepts are the Pure ones by considering the general structure of judgment.
- The Forms of Judgment
 - Judgments can be viewed as unity functions for (determinate) representations. That is, the various ways of forming a determinate (coherent) judgment constitute the various ways of unifying multiple concepts into a single thought.
 - Different forms of judgment will unify representations in different ways. Compare: “The ball is red.” “All balls are red.” “The ball is not red.” “If the ball is red, then the ball is not yellow.” Etc.
 - The Table of Judgments is intended to illustrate the different forms that judgments can take. Every judgment employs a form from each of the four groups. E.g., ‘The ball is red’ is singular, affirmative, categorical, assertoric. ‘All balls are red’ differs in being universal instead of singular.
 - This Table is not widely regarded as correct; but it serves to illustrate Kant’s point here: given that there are forms of judgment, there will be corresponding forms of thought; i.e., certain basic ways of thinking about reality; i.e., foundational concepts; i.e., the Categories.
 - I.e., to each form of judgment there corresponds a fundamental “rule of thought” or way of thinking – a category.
- Example: the relation of Substance and Property.
 - This relation corresponds to the categorical form of judgment. In this form, the basic structure of judgment is “A is B” – that is, the simple subject-predicate construction. E.g., The cow is brown.
 - The transcendental meaning of this logical form is the substance-property relation. That is, when we use the *A is B* form of thought construction, we represent a reality in terms of some substance (object) having some property. E.g., the cow has the property of being brown.
 - Similarly for the other categories; cf. especially the relationship between if-then logic and the category of causality.

Unity of Thought

- Again, the faculty of understanding is a faculty for synthesis, unification of representations. The functioning of this faculty can be analyzed at two different levels, corresponding to two different levels at which we may understand representations: a general logical level, and a transcendental level. In terms of the former, synthesis results in *analytic unity*; in terms of the latter, *synthetic unity*.
 - **Analytic Unity**: this refers to the “successful” result of satisfying the requirements of logical form. I.e., a properly-constructed thought. The words ‘Cow all the browns’ do not meet the requirements of analytic unity; they do not form a logical unit.
 - **Synthetic Unity**: this refers to the “successful” result of satisfying the requirements of transcendental form. I.e., a thought that actually depicts some

reality. The words ‘Cow all the browns’ do not meet the requirements of synthetic unity; they do not compose a thought *about anything at all*.

- A properly-formed thought, then, will be unitary in both a simply logical or structural sense, as well as in the sense of being a coherent thought about something.
- Pure Synthesis: a successful conceptual representation of reality independent of all particular empirical content. Aka a priori or pure thought; aka thought at the level of the categories of thought. Note that we do not ordinarily if ever think in pure terms alone, since such thought would be about nothing in particular.
- Impure Synthesis: a conceptual representation of a particular empirical object. Where pure thought involves only the categories, impure thought employs particular concepts about particular experiences, such as ‘cow’, ‘brown’, ‘hedgehog’, etc.

Understanding

- First, a few more words about concepts.
 - Concepts have an “intension” and an “extension”.
 - The intension of a concept is what it “means” to you, what it signifies.
 - The meaning of a concept ultimately is expressed in terms of intuition. Thus, Kant speaks of the “marks” which concepts contain, marks, that is, of possible intuitions.
 - ‘Brown’, for example, means, roughly, the experience I have when I see something brown. Note that the actual visual sensation here is what ‘brown’ refers to.
 - Note, too, that intension is nevertheless *conceptual*. That is, the concept of *brown* is the *thought* of brown, not the sensation of it. What the concept of brown means, of course, is just that very sensation.
 - The extension of a concept is whatever it applies to. Thus, the extension of the concept of *brown* is all the brown things in the world.
- Understanding is recognition that the “marks” of a concept are satisfied in an intuition.
 - E.g., to understand what ‘brown’ means is to realize that your sensation of brownness is exactly what the thought of ‘brown’ means.
- Understanding is basic to experience. To have experience (cognition), one must *understand* what is going on in one’s intuitive manifold. In order to do so, one must realize that what one is seeing is a wall, for example, or a brown blackboard. Without this conceptual recognition of the elements of intuition, you aren’t having full experience. The “lights are on” but you aren’t making sense of what you are seeing (hearing, etc.)
 - In impure terms, again, my intuitive representation of the color of black satisfies what my concept of black means. Seeing this, I understand what black is.
 - In pure terms, anything that I can isolate in my experience as an object satisfies the pure concept of “substance” (aka object). The objects of experience (empirical objects) are just what I mean by ‘object’.

Experience

- Experience, then, is the joint product of intuition and conception.
- In order to have experience, I must be actively engaged in understanding my intuitive manifold by the application to it of concepts.
 - At the pure level, this amounts to realizing that the content of my intuition is *real*.

- At the impure level, this amounts to realizing that I am, e.g., seeing a (real) lion (really) eating a (real) gazelle.
- Thus, we can put experience in any of the following terms:
 - Understanding intuition in terms of conception.
 - Bringing the manifold of intuition under conception.
 - Synthesis in thought of the manifold of intuition.
- Note, again, that pure thought and pure intuition together make up the *framework* of experience. They are the “stuff” or “modeling clay” we *use* to *make* experience happen in our heads.
 - These are my basic ways of representing reality.
 - In conception, I employ the pure thoughts, the categories.
 - In intuition, I employ the pure intuitions space and time.
- Impure thought and impure intuition make up the *content* of experience.
 - These are my ways of representing specific realities.
 - In conception, I employ impure concepts, such as *cow*, and *brown*, etc.
 - In intuition, I employ impure intuitions, the various colors, shapes, sounds, etc., that I correctly label in thought as mooing brown cows, etc.