

The Kantian Aesthetic

From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde

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1

The Transcendental Deduction: Objective Knowledge and the Unity of Self-Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Kant's aesthetic theory obtains its great strength from two factors. The first is that he provides highly viable characterizations of the logical status of aesthetic and artistic judgements. The second—and it is this factor which gives his theory the *utmost* philosophical depth—is that he is able to link these judgements to the most fundamental aspects of our basic cognitive relationship to the world.

At the heart of this linkage is Kant's recognition that the aesthetic domain enhances the interaction between *understanding* and *imagination*—two logically distinct but phenomenologically inseparable competences. Their reciprocal relation enables objective knowledge of both self and world. The aesthetic is not some, as it were, luxury experience, but one whose grounds engage cognitive competences that are basic to the conditions of knowledge, as such.

Now, whilst Kant's arguments concerning the logical status of aesthetic judgements have been found compelling by many thinkers, his broader linkage to understanding and imagination appear rather more contentious. Indeed, those capacities themselves might be claimed to be little more than an idiosyncratic feature of his mature 'Critical' philosophy, with no validity outwith that context. And it might seem also that this context is *highly* suspect by virtue of a major philosophical problem.

It consists in the fact that Kant holds the understanding and imagination and, indeed, space and time (as forms of intuition) to be *constitutive* of experience. In effect, they *create* the phenomenal world, by giving objective form to a mysterious unknowable realm of 'noumena'.

To say the least, the positing of ‘noumena’ has been found problematic by the great majority of Kant’s interpreters and, even if one were inclined to defend the positing it would raise issues that would require a book-length study in itself, to be dealt with in even the most minimal terms.

However, it is possible to approach Kant in a way which does not necessitate such a problematic engagement. In this respect, one can argue that Kant gets it right in general terms concerning those capacities necessary for *objective knowledge* of the world and the self, but one need not accept the problematic notion that these capacities actually *create* the objectivity of phenomena, as such.

More specifically, this approach holds that *there is a realm of items in space and time that exist independently of their being known, but that if we are to know them the capacities for understanding and imagination, and the unity of self-consciousness described by Kant, are necessary conditions of such knowledge, and are so on very much the lines for which he argues.*

To put this another way, there really are ‘things’ out there, and the explanation of *what enables us to know them as things connected with one another in unified terms* is of the very profoundest philosophical importance. Kantian *epistemology* can provide the requisite explanation without bringing on board the dubious *ontological* commitment that temporal and spatial forms of things should be regarded as no more than aspects of the human cognitive apparatus.

I shall now offer an initial characterization of the general structure of Kant’s philosophical position made with the foregoing qualifications in mind. I will then introduce the complex and special status of the Transcendental Deduction.

At the heart of Kant’s ‘Critical’ philosophy is a distinction between the role of sensibility and the role of the intellect in knowledge. The role of the former is both receptive and mildly active. Through it, particular items (‘intuitions’) are distinguished, arranged in relation to time, and (if they are ‘external’) arranged in relation to space also. The function of the intellect (or ‘understanding’ as Kant more often terms it) is to subsume this manifold of sensible intuitions under concepts, so that it can be recognized *as* a particular item, set of items, event, or sequence of events, or whatever. Sensibility and understanding, in concert, form the *representative power*—the very basis of judgement and knowledge.

The core of the understanding consists of those ‘pure concepts’ or ‘categories’ which are fundamental to objective knowledge. Kant

holds that there are twelve of them. They are unity, plurality, totality, reality, limitation, negation, substance and accident, cause and effect, reciprocity, existence, possibility, and necessity.¹

Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the 'categories' is central to his epistemology. To understand the Deduction, it is worth defining first the meaning of its constituent terms. For Kant, 'transcendental' means those factors which are necessarily involved in knowledge of world and self, or in determining the limits of such knowledge. The term 'deduction' is used by him on an analogy with its legal sense—as the justification of an entitlement. The task of the Transcendental Deduction (in the very broadest terms) is to show that the categories are fundamental in the sense of being *necessary* conditions of any possible experience.

Kant's proof of this claim is enormously complex and takes two very different forms in the first and second editions of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Not surprisingly, this complexity is matched by depth of controversy in the interpretation of what his arguments are intended to show, and what they actually achieve.²

¹ See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London, Macmillan, 1973), B102–B116, pp. 111–19 for more detailed characterizations of these.

² Significant recent readings of the Deduction include Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2004), chap. 7; Paul Guyer, 'The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories', included as chap. 4 in his important edited collection *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). It should be noted that Allison has reservations and Guyer is avowedly sceptical as to Kant's success in the Deduction as such. A complex and in some respects more sympathetic approach can be found in chaps 3–6 of Patricia Kitcher's *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Kitcher's account is one which addresses both A and B arguments in great detail, and is particularly attentive to their historical context as well as to the transcendental psychology itself. Eckart Foster's edited collection *Kant's Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus Postumum* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989) addresses the first *Critique* and other works. For present purpose, see esp. the essays by Dieter Henrich and Paul Guyer, and the reply to Guyer by P. F. Strawson. Dieter Henrich's important paper 'The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction', included in R. C. S. Walker (ed.), *Kant on Pure Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 66–81 has had great influence on interpretations of the Deduction. More specifically, his theory that the Transcendental Deduction involves a single proof in two major steps has found wide acceptance. However, even this influential theory must be approached with caution.

He is, I think, right to favour the second edition (or 'B' version) of the Deduction, if only for the fact that its very existence shows that Kant was not completely happy with his first (or 'A') formulation. What is more problematic is Henrich's account of the supposed steps

My approach will hold that the Transcendental Deduction centres on showing that *the objective unification of a sensible manifold achieved through the categories and the objective unity of self-consciousness* (or, as Kant sometimes terms this latter notion, the ‘pure’ or ‘original unity’ of ‘apperception’) are reciprocally dependent. One cannot have the one without the other.

To establish these claims, I shall in Part 1 of this Chapter offer an analysis of Kant’s arguments as presented in the revised, ‘B’ version of the Deduction. I will then, in Part 2 make some critical points and indicate how these might be dealt with—initially by reference to some insights from Gareth Evans. These will enable me to formulate a three-stage reconstruction of Kant’s major argument, culminating in

of argument in the Deduction. The first step centres on the fact that (in Henrich’s words) ‘wherever there is unity, there is a relation which can be thought according to the categories’ (Walker, *Kant on Pure Reason*, 70). But Henrich then notes that ‘This statement, however, does not yet clarify for us the *range within which* unitary intuitions can be found’ (ibid.). For this reason, a second—generalizing—step in the proof is required so as to show that ‘every given manifold without exception is subject to the categories’ (ibid.). Henrich’s interpretation is provocative and searching, and gives emphasis to the fact that Kant explicitly draws two formal conclusions in sections 20 and 26 respectively. However, the pattern of argument between these sections is much more convoluted than allowed for in the ‘two-steps’ approach. This, in itself, might suggest that the two conclusions just noted are points where Kant, as it were, draws intellectual breath, and are not the substantial points of argumentative gravity which Henrich takes them to be. Indeed, there is a strong case for arguing that Henrich’s approach runs aground through *underplaying* a major factor in the Deduction—namely, the significance of ‘pure apperception’. My difference with Henrich in this respect has been brought out, indirectly, by Henry Allison in the first edition of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*. He points to a distinction between the ‘objective validity’ of the categories and their ‘objective reality’. The former pertains to their role as necessary conditions of objective judgement; the latter pertains to the way in which they exist as actual features of our cognitive framework. In my opinion, Henrich, Allison himself (to some degree), and the bulk of commentators in the Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy unduly privilege the objective validity of the categories. (This is probably because of a mistrust of ‘transcendental psychology’ arising from the legacy of Wittgenstein’s behaviourist tendencies.) I favour the objective reality dimension rather more, if only because claims to validity can only be *enabled* through the exercise of cognitive structures which are basic to being a finite rational subject. Without such structures, we have ambitious assertions and logical connections, but no grounds for justifying their claims to objective validity. Kant’s emphasis on the original unity of apperception and the transcendental imagination is, I would suggest, a tacit acknowledgement that claims to objective validity must be mediated by the objective reality of real cognitive capacities in the subject. This reality is inseparable from the unity of ‘pure apperception’. For the distinction between objective validity and objective reality, see Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, 133–6.

the experiential necessity of the Kantian categories. Detailed avenues of justification for this final stage will form the substance of Part 3 (again making significant use of ideas from Evans). I will then proceed to a Conclusion which looks ahead to future chapters.

PART 1

Kant begins his argument with the claim that

The manifold of representation can be given in an intuition which is purely sensible, that is, nothing but receptivity: and the form of this intuition can lie a priori in our faculty of representation, without being anything more than the mode in which the subject is affected.³

This is, in effect, a re-statement of Kant's major position in the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the first *Critique*. All experience is given in time and (in most cases) space. Time and space are 'forms of intuition', that is to say, receptive structures inherent in subjectivity itself. Through them, the human subject is affected by that which is other than himself or herself. The second step in Kant's argument consists in a preliminary outline of the other major structuring capacity to which the manifold of sensible material must be subjected in order to constitute experience. In this respect we are told that

the combination of a manifold in general . . . is an act of spontaneity of the faculty of representation; and since this faculty, to distinguish it from sensibility, must be entitled understanding, all combination—be we conscious of it or not, be it a combination of the manifold of intuition, empirical or non-empirical, or of various concepts—is an act of the understanding.⁴

Kant further declares that

To this act the general title 'synthesis' may be assigned, as indicating that we cannot represent to ourselves anything as combined in the object which we have not ourselves previously combined . . .⁵

The thrust of Kant's initial statements are clear. In order to have experience, we must be able to receive a manifold of sensible intuitions and combine (i.e., 'synthesize') these through the understanding's

³ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), B.130, 151.

⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Ibid.

spontaneous activity. However, Kant then complicates matters by remarking that ‘the concept of combination includes, besides the concept of the manifold and of its synthesis, also the concept of the unity of the manifold’.⁶ As I read him, Kant’s point here is that in order for the understanding to combine the manifold of sensible intuitions there must exist some further principle of cohesion—the ‘unity of the manifold’ per se. What makes Kant’s position so difficult to interpret is his further remark that

Combination is representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot therefore, arise out of the combination. On the contrary it is what by adding itself to the representation of the manifold, first makes possible the concept of the combination.⁷

He goes on to point out, explicitly, that the unity in question here is not that of the categories, because their application already presupposes ‘combination’. I would suggest that many of the ambiguities and difficulties of the ‘B’ Transcendental Deduction stem from this claim. It seems to imply that the synthetic unity of the manifold is a further *logically independent* condition that is required for knowledge of objects, over and above the having of a sensible manifold, and the connective activity of the understanding.

This is not wholly accurate, in that it turns out that whilst this extra ingredient is indeed a condition of the understanding’s synthetic activity, it is nevertheless—in an extremely complex way—also a function of it. The elaboration of these two aspects constitute, respectively, the third and fourth stages of Kant’s main line of argument. I shall now consider them in turn.

First, the synthetic unity of the manifold as a condition of the understanding’s activity. Kant restates this, initially, as ‘The Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception’. The following passage gives a useful summary of the relation between this and the understanding:

all unification of representations demands unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, and therefore their objective validity and the fact that they are modes of knowledge; and upon it therefore rests the very possibility of the understanding.⁸

⁶ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), B 130, 152.

⁷ Ibid. B 130–1, 152.

⁸ Ibid. B 137, 154.

Here Kant is making the key point that the understanding can only unify a manifold (and thence constitute objective experience) in so far as it is a function of a deeper unity.

The unity in question here is, of course, not the category of unity but rather self-consciousness itself. This mode of consciousness should not be identified with empirical states of self-awareness wherein we are explicitly aware of ourselves as being such and such a person. It is *much* more fundamental; and can be best described as the very *capacity* to ascribe experiences to oneself.

What makes this capacity for self-ascription so decisive is that we have many experiences without being explicitly self-conscious of the fact that we are having them. These moments, however, do not function as gaps or fissures in self-consciousness. For, even if we were not explicitly aware of ourselves in the course of such moments, we could have become so aware. Every normal conscious state of a person admits the possibility of being prefixed with a thought to the effect 'I am thinking/perceiving/imagining this'.

The original unity of apperception, then, is the sheer capacity to ascribe experiences to oneself. Without this capacity, the understanding could not synthesize manifolds. Intuitions can only be collected and combined in a unity; in so far as the agent of combination (i.e., the human subject) itself has unity of consciousness. The capacity for self-ascription of experiences is the basis of this unity. Now the question arises as to how this capacity is itself possible. This brings us to the fourth major stage in Kant's Transcendental Deduction. It centres on the claim that the

act of understanding by which the manifold of given representations (be they intuitions or concepts) is brought under one apperception, is the logical function of judgment . . . All the manifold, therefore, so far as it is given in a single intuition, is determined in respect of one of the logical functions of judgment, and is thereby brought into one consciousness. Now the categories are just these functions of judgment . . .⁹

Kant's point here is that the capacity to ascribe experiences arises fundamentally through the application of the categories. But *why* should this be so? Unfortunately this key question is answered only indirectly by Kant. However, his previous and subsequent observations point in the following direction. The subsumptive and discriminative functions

⁹ Ibid. B 143, 160.

of judgement per se involve a synthesis of representations according to rules. But, in order for rules to be followed it is presupposed that they be situated in a context which allows operational stability.

This is the function of the categories. They are a framework whose embodiment in particular judgements unifies and stabilizes the manifold in general terms, as well as in terms of the specific representations involved. Whether one is explicitly aware of it or not, a judgement can only be made in so far as it embodies some aspect of this general unity. The categories are basic conditions for knowledge of objects.

Now the key point which must be added to this is that, as pure principles of the understanding, the application of the categories is a 'spontaneous' act of the subject (i.e., produced by he or she rather than derived from some external source). This means that in unifying the manifold through the categories the subject engages in activity which continuously affirms its own identity *as* subject. The self, in other words, becomes aware of its own unity only in so far as it can systematically exercise its capacity to unify the manifold; and this necessarily centres on the use of the categories.

The first four stages of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, then, culminate in the following position. All experience presupposes original synthetic unity of apperception (i.e., the capacity to ascribe experiences to oneself) and this is tied to the understanding's capacity to unify manifolds through the application of the categories.

Now earlier on I noted that many of the Deduction's puzzles stem from Kant's treating the original synthetic unity of apperception as logically independent—that is, a requirement over and above the synthetic activity of the subject. In the most general philosophical terms, it is. For at various points in the Deduction Kant countenances the possibility of an intuitive intelligence: 'An understanding which through its self-consciousness could supply to itself the manifold of intuition—an understanding, that is to say, through whose representation the object of the representation should at the same time exist.'¹⁰ An understanding such as this would not need the capacity to ascribe experiences to itself, since everything it was conscious of would simply be the product of its own cognition. *For a finite subject such as a human being, however, matters are radically different.* Here the business of understanding is not to produce representations but to organize what, through sensibility, is

¹⁰ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), B 138–9, 157.

given to it from an external source. Self-consciousness, in other words, is only possible in so far as the unifying subject, through its activity, distinguishes between that which is its own, and that which is external to it or which exceeds its cognitive purview.

In the context of a finite subject, however, this capacity to ascribe experiences to oneself and the capacity to give objective unity to manifolds are (in ways to be described) *reciprocally dependent* on one another. It is only in a more general philosophical context of intuitive intellects, that they can be regarded as separate.

At this point, then, Kant holds that, in the most general terms, the capacity to ascribe experiences to oneself, and the capacity to unify manifolds through the categories, are, in a finite subject, directly correlated. Put in even more general terms, the unity of the self and the objective world are ontologically reciprocal. One cannot give a full definition of the one without giving a full definition of the other. This is the point of far-reaching philosophical significance which the Deduction is striving to establish.

Interestingly, however, whilst Kant has gone through what I have identified as the four main stages of his arrangement by §21, he does not begin to draw appropriate conclusions of the kind just noted until §§26 and 27. The reason for this is that the trajectory of Kant's arguments is extremely general. He is addressing the objective dimension of the self and the world's structural correlation. In §§24 and 25, he fills in the gaps by a fifth stage of argument which looks much more closely at the subjective aspect of this correlation. Specifically, he is concerned with the question of exactly *how* the application of the categories determines the subject's sensibility.

At first sight, this strategy may seem puzzling. For, given that experience is a function of the understanding's unifying of manifolds presented by sensibility, what more really needs to be added to the account which Kant has already offered?

The answer is *much more*. Kant's organization of the first *Critique* is one which expounds the structure of sensibility and that of the understanding successively. This sometimes gives the impression that the function of these faculties is, ontologically speaking, that of different stages in a process. Of course, they are not. Kant needs, therefore, to explain the real ontological ground of the unity of finite consciousness in more detail, by describing how the application of the categories not only unifies the manifold, but does so by (at the same time) determining

the conditions under which the manifold is presented—that is, the subject's own sensibility.

Kant's means of showing this centre on the 'transcendental synthesis of imagination'—or, as he sometimes terms it, the 'figurative synthesis'. By reference to the transcendental role of imagination, Kant is able to distinguish between the logical and ontological status of the categories. At the level of theory, they are simply intellectual or logical entities—essential rules for the unifying of manifolds. However, at the level of practice or concrete cognition, synthesis cannot take place in logical terms alone. It must be mediated by further capacity: that of imagination.

For Kant, imagination is not simply a capacity for reproducing images of items or events on the basis of recollection or association. Rather, it is the very capacity to produce and use imagery itself. Kant describes this generative power as 'the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is *not itself* present'.¹¹ The reason why Kant regards this as so important is that through mediation by the imagination the understanding's synthetic activity is made 'figurative' or concrete. It is able, as it were, 'to get a hold on' the manifold of intuition by directly determining the subject's sensibility, or, more specifically, his or her 'inner sense' of time.

The links which Kant makes between this figurative synthesis and temporality are, unfortunately, not set out in the requisite detail. I shall, however, now try to develop them more fully. A useful starting-point is Kant's observation that 'Inner sense . . . contains the mere form of intuition, but without combination of the manifold in it, and therefore so far contains no determinate intuition'.¹²

The point here, one presumes, is that a manifold presented in time alone would be a mere heterogeneous flow. There would be no specific sense of moment, or of intelligible succession. To generate such order requires connective activity from the understanding; but, more than this, it requires a capacity to recall what has been and project what might yet come. Without this ability to draw on what is not immediately present, there could be no awareness of the present itself. There could be no *attention*.

Imagination therefore is a precondition of experience. Now, Kant holds that when the categories are applied they do so through the mediation of imagination. They are able to unify the manifold through, at

¹¹ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), B 151, 165.

¹² *Ibid.* B 154, 166.

the same time, unifying the conditions under which the subject receives it—i.e., his or her sense of time. Kant's descriptions of this (whilst following the broad trajectory described in the previous paragraph) are, however, somewhat difficult. Consider the following crucial footnote.

Motion . . . considered as the describing of a space, is a pure act of the successive synthesis of the manifold in outer intuition in general by means of the productive imagination . . .¹³

It is clear from the main text that the 'describing of a space' which Kant mentions here can be a perceptual process, and involves the understanding and (therefore) the categories. This suggests that its synthetic activity, the understanding, stimulates and draws on the imagination. It can only carry out its identificatory and discriminatory functions in so far as it generates a temporal framework of ordered succession or continuity. Through this, intuitions are able to endure from moment to moment in an intelligible schema of encounterability and re-encounterability. Imagination, in other words, provides a capacity for attention, recall, and projection—a tracking procedure—whereby the categories can temporally stabilize intuitions and thence enable the identification of patterns of sameness and difference amongst them so as to confer objective unity upon the sensible manifold.

Now, if this was all that Kant was wishing to establish through the transcendental synthesis of imagination, the last substantive arguments of the *Transcendental Deduction* would, in effect, be a kind of general prologue to the schematism section. (There Kant considers the function of imagination in relation to the application of particular concepts—most notably, of course, the individual categories. I will discuss this in great detail in the next chapter.)

However, the transcendental synthesis of imagination is much more than such a prologue. The reason why is that it is not only central to the general application of the categories, but also to the pure synthetic unity of apperception. The decisive passage is as follows.

I exist as an intelligence which is conscious solely of its powers of combination; but in respect of the manifold which it has come to combine I am subjected to a limiting condition (entitled inner sense), namely that this combination can be made intuitable only according to relations of time, which lie entirely outside the concepts of understanding, strictly regarded. Such an intelligence,

¹³ Ibid. B 155, 166.

therefore, can know itself only as it appears to itself in respect of an intuition which is not intellectual . . .¹⁴

Kant's point here is that human subjectivity does not consist purely of understanding. It consists rather of the understanding's combination of a manifold external to the subject, and involves, therefore, both understanding *and* sensible receptivity. Hence, if human self-consciousness is a function of the subject's connective activity, then it must be generated, specifically, by the understanding's action on sensibility's most fundamental mode—inner sense. This, as we have seen, is precisely what is involved when the understanding engages the transcendental synthesis of imagination. Through it, the subject is able to intuit itself *as* subject.

It is important to be clear about the scope of intuition used in this context, in so far as it has both conceptual implications, which Kant does not develop, and ontological implications, which he does. First, the conceptual implications. As I have already argued, the importance for the transcendental synthesis of imagination is that, through it, the understanding is able to stabilize the temporal flow of intuitions in terms of successiveness and continuity. Now, although Kant does not remark upon the fact, similar considerations must apply in relation to the pure synthetic unity of apperception. For we could not ascribe experiences to ourselves if we did not have a clear sense of our relation to present, past, and future.

Again, this is precisely what is achieved through the understanding's determination of inner sense through the transcendental synthesis of imagination. At the heart of the 'I think' in the finite subject is an intuition involving a present attentiveness to an object of thought or perception; and this is only definable in so far as the subject can, through imagination, recall its past and project its possible future perceptual positions in relation to this and other such objects. Imagination, in other words, is the basis of that sense of temporal continuity which makes self-ascription of experiences possible.

In the second version of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant does not develop these conceptual points. Rather, his orientation is much more ontological. Specifically, he emphasizes the causal effect of understanding upon inner sense. Consider the following passage.

Now in order to know ourselves, there is required in addition to the act of thought, which brings the manifold of every possible intuition to the unity

¹⁴ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), B 158–9, 169.

of apperception, a determinate mode of intuition, whereby this manifold is given; it therefore follows that although my existence is not indeed appearance (still less mere illusion), the determination of my existence can take place only in conformity with the form of inner sense, according to the special mode in which the manifold, which I combine, is given in inner intuition.¹⁵

Kant's point here is that whilst (in terms of his broadest philosophical position) the finite self is not mere appearance, it can only know itself *through* its appearances; or more specifically, by means of the production of appearances through inner sense. The action of the understanding's synthetic activity upon the subject's sense of time is, of course, the foundation of this. As Kant puts it 'we intuit ourselves only as we are inwardly affected by ourselves . . .'¹⁶

The concept of inward affection is decisive for Kant's notion of the self. It provides a kind of criterion of *belonging*, wherein that which defines discursive subjectivity per se—the understanding—is inseparably bound up with the special condition of finite human subjectivity—i.e., inner sense. One could say that through the 'I think' as such we know *that* we are, and that through the understanding's determination of inner sense this thought is tied to intuitions which convey a full sense of *what* we are.

Kant unfortunately does not say much more about what these intuitions amount to, at this point. This is why (a little earlier) I spelt out the logical implications of his use of the term intuition. These, we will recall, centre on the importance of temporal continuity—the subject's ability to define a present through reference to its own past and possible futures. One presumes, therefore, that to have an intuition of oneself involves continuity in our representations—a continuity which, as we have seen, is a function of the understanding's determination of inner sense through the transcendental synthesis of imagination.

Let me now briefly summarize the stages and substance of Kant's Transcendental Deduction. The first stage is his reiteration of the position established in the Transcendental Aesthetic—namely, that all experience is given in temporal and (usually) spatial terms, and that these forms of sensible receptivity are characteristics of subjectivity—rather than things in themselves.

The second stage consists in the claim, that, in order for experience to be constituted, a further element is required—namely, the connective synthesis performed by the spontaneous activity of the understanding.

¹⁵ Ibid. B 157–8, 168–9.

¹⁶ Ibid. B 156, 168.

Kant's third stage of argument is much more complex, for he claims that, in addition to the synthetic activity of the understanding, experience presupposes a further feature. He characterizes this as 'The Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception'—i.e., the capacity to ascribe experiences to oneself.

What makes Kant's exposition especially difficult is that having initially stated this as though such unity of self were a condition of the understanding's activity, it turns out, in the fourth stage of his argument, that this relation is, in fact, one of ontological reciprocity. One can only unify a manifold in so far as one is a unified self, but one can only be unified in so far as through the categories one can engage in spontaneous acts of intellectual unification. The two capacities are correlated. One cannot have knowledge of an objective world without unity of self-consciousness, and one cannot have unity of self-consciousness except through knowledge of an objective world.

The fifth and final stage of Kant's argument involves a phenomenological analysis of what is involved in such exercise. Specifically, he identifies the transcendental synthesis of imagination as a mediating capacity which enables the understanding to determine inner sense. Through imagination, we can recall the past, project the future, and thus define a present object of attention. In this way a framework of linear temporal continuity is generated. Understanding is, thereby, able to unify the manifold, and, in so doing, intuit itself as the ongoing activity of a unified self.

We are thus led to Kant's formal conclusion concerning the Transcendental Deduction: §26 is headed in such a way as to make one accept that a conclusion is about to be given. However, in practice Kant largely reiterates previous arguments and worries, giving some emphasis to the notion of apprehension (which is, in fact, much more adequately described in the first version of the Deduction, as the means whereby the manifold is 'run through, and held together'¹⁷). It is only in the 'Brief

¹⁷ Ibid. A 99, 131. For a succinct review of issues pertaining to Kant's theory of imagination, see J. M. Young, 'Kant's View of Imagination', *Kant-Studien*, 79 (1988), 140–64. A comprehensive and interesting approach can be found in Sarah Gibbon, *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgement and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). This book explores the role of imagination throughout Kant's Critical corpus. Rudolf A. Makkreel achieves a similar level of comprehensiveness but manages also to negotiate with broader philosophical issues in the outer chapters of his book *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Outline' at the end of §27 that Kant offers his (awkwardly expressed) substantive conclusion. As he puts it

The deduction is the exposition of the pure concepts of the understanding . . . as principles of the possibility of experience—the principles being here taken, as the *determination* of appearances in space and time *in general*, and this determination, in turn, as ultimately following from the *original* synthetic unity of apperception, as the form of the understanding in its relation to space and time . . .¹⁸

On these terms, therefore, the categories—as pure principles of human understanding—are conditions of any possible experience. This is because their exercise determines appearance objectively in respect of space and time in accordance with the original synthetic unity of apperception. This unity in turn, however, just *is* the understanding in active relation to space and time through (though, to his discredit, Kant does not specifically mention it here) the mediation of imagination.

Putting all this in even more general terms, the upshot of Kant's Deduction is that the experience of an objective world and the unity of subjective experience are ontologically reciprocal. We cannot have the one experience unless we are also able to have the other. Without the exercise of the categories, in other words, there could be no object or subject of experience.

PART 2

I shall now make some critical points. A great weakness in Kant's account is the level of generality at which the Deduction is conducted. As well as opening up all sorts of interpretative ambiguities, it has a very worrying lack of specificity in terms of what roles are played by individual categories in that general correlation of objective and subjective which is at the centre of Kant's arguments. In the 'Metaphysical Deduction' (which comes a little earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) Kant deduces his twelve categories on the basis of an Aristotelian conception of the forms of judgement. Even overlooking the limitations of the Aristotelian conception of judgement *and* its use in this context, many of Kant's

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 169, 175.

commentators have also been struck by the artificiality of his exact application of the model.¹⁹

Given, then, that the Transcendental Deduction offers no further clarification of the individual categories, it seems that we have a theory concerning the logical dependence of object and subject of experience, and some account of the elements involved, but nothing which might give a compelling justification of how these elements function individually, and in concert. Indeed, because of the weakness of the Metaphysical Deduction concern must also arise as to the entitlement of some of the Kantian categories to be assigned a transcendental role at all.

There is a further area of significant difficulty which must be mentioned. It is clear that if the categories are to give objective unity to a sensible manifold, then they must indeed operate within stable temporal conditions. But, why should we accept Kant's insistence that in order to create such stability the categories must also bring about unity of self-consciousness? An 'official' Kantian answer would be that since time is the form of inner-sense in the subject and has no existence 'in itself' then it follows that to unify time just is to unify the subject's consciousness of itself. And, since the means of this unification is imagination, this is, accordingly, a further way in which the categories give unity to subjective consciousness.

This, however, raises the following problem. Even if we overlook the unfortunate lack of detail in Kant's account of the foregoing, it would appear that in order to 'buy into' the central claim of the Deduction, we must also accept the hugely problematic notion of the ideality of time. This might not be an issue for Kant, but if we are searching for a generally viable philosophical outcome to the Deduction, then it is an extreme difficulty.

Given these various problems, we may suspect that Kant's central argument is too restricted to have any broader philosophical worth. This would be a mistake. To see why, consider, in the first instance, the following brilliant passage from Gareth Evans.

¹⁹ Allison usefully summarizes central areas of concern in his remarks that 'it fails totally to explain how one could "deduce" the pure concepts of the understanding from the table of logical functions'; and that 'it is difficult to see what sense can be given to Kant's claim to have demonstrated the completeness of the list of categories or to have shown "why just these concepts, and no others have their seat in the pure understanding"' (Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 124 and 128–9 respectively). Interestingly, in the second edition of *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (n. 4), Allison takes a rather more sympathetic approach, devoting an entire chapter to the Metaphysical Deduction.

The capacity to think of oneself as located in space, and tracing a continuous path through it, is necessarily involved in the capacity to conceive the phenomena one encounters as independent of one's perception of them—to conceive the world as something one 'comes across'. It follows that the capacity for at least some primitive self-ascriptions—self-ascriptions of position, orientation, and change of position and orientation and hence the conception of oneself as one object amongst others, occupying one place amongst others, are interdependent with thought about the objective world itself.²⁰

Without referring to Kant, Evans here identifies, in effect, what I have shown to be the basic thrust of argument in the Transcendental Deduction. To understand the world, qua objective, logically presupposes that one has a sense of one's own subjective position and movements as one object in relation to others. Knowledge of an objective world and the unity of self-consciousness, in other words, are reciprocally dependent.

Evans' refreshingly practical emphasis on the subject's positioning and movement allows us to compensate for some of Kant's difficulties. In fact, it allows us to give real substance to the Transcendental Deduction by broadly reconstructing it through three steps of argument.

This is made possible by two enabling points. The first is that (as I have shown elsewhere²¹ and as we shall see, in detail, in the next chapter) self-ascriptions of position, etc. *must* involve, at some stage, concept-guided exercises of imagination. Such exercises serve to organize our experience of time, but do not entail that time *itself* must be interpreted as ideal. A key problem is thus eliminated.

The second enabling point is that Evans' way of putting things highlights and fills out a point in Kant's account that is easy to lose track of. This is the fact that the unity of self-consciousness is not just a unity, but is, at least in part, an *objective* one. The 'I think' is a function not just of thought and imagination acting on time per se but coheres as a unity through both the application of the categories and the amenability of phenomena (including the subject's own body) to be understood in orderly and regular terms. In applying the categories, the subject, qua embodied, comprehends itself as a specific finite agent within the objective field of phenomena. On these terms, the subject

²⁰ Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 176. The reference occurs in the context of a discussion of 'Demonstrative Identification' that has only one passing (and unrelated) reference to Kant.

²¹ See 'Imagination and Objective Knowledge', chap. 4 of my *Philosophy After Postmodernism: Civilized Values and the Scope of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2003).

applies the categories (where appropriate) to itself and in this sense it has objective unity.

With these points in mind, the Deduction can then be made as follows:

- (a) knowledge of objects qua objects is only possible through the understanding's structuring of imagination;
- (b) this structuring centres on the way in which present attention to an object is informed by the imagination's capacity to project the body's previous relations with this and other objects and states of affairs, and by its anticipations of future or counterfactual possibilities of such relations (this is the objective unity of self-consciousness);
- (c) the structuring factor in (a) and (b) is the application of the categories.

Making due allowance for my references to supporting material outside this chapter, points (a) and (b) can be taken as provisionally established. This leaves the task of justifying point (c)—why the structuring activity of the understanding should be identified specifically with Kant's categories.

Some justification can be offered. It will not have the absoluteness or comprehensiveness aspired to by Kant but it will at least make my three-stage reconstruction of his argument broadly viable. It is to this I now turn.

PART 3

What kind of a thing in general is a category? As noted earlier, in strict Kantian terms a category is a concept and, as such, is the kind of thing which is applied in judgement. But, for Kant, the category is, in fact, also a basis of (as it were) *orientation* in judgement—that is to say, it allows judgements to be directed towards definite objects. In his words, it involves 'the *determination* of appearances in space and time in general'.²²

This implies that whilst we might use categories explicitly as concepts (e.g., when we assert that '*a* is real') their role is much deeper than this, and must, in large part, be *pre-reflective* (though Kant does not, as far as I

²² Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, B 169, 175.

know, put it like this). This means that they can be learned and employed in a basic way without us always being overtly aware of them *as* concepts. And, it is only by virtue of this pre-reflective categorial competence being put in place alongside our learning of empirical concept application that this latter application can be objectively contextualized (a point which I shall return to a little further on).

By exploring this notion of the categories as modes of pre-reflective cognitive orientation, in relation to Evans' emphasis on practical subject-positioning, it is possible to work towards a justification of the claim that it is the categories which must structure the objective unity of the world and self-consciousness.

To show this, I shall first develop Evans' emphasis on the mobility of the embodied subject. This points towards human cognition being understood as a function of sensorimotor capacities co-ordinated as a unified but constantly reconfiguring field. On these terms, the structure of the phenomenal field is correlated with the body's growth and movement, and the acquisition of language.

It is worth emphasizing that, in recent years, significant and sustained empirical evidence has shown that, even in the very earliest stages of infancy, basic cognitive competences are already in place.²³ Shaun Gallagher's important philosophical work has interpreted this (and other evidence) as showing important correlations between these competences and the neonate's having a basic sense of its own body-orientation.²⁴ However, these cognitive factors are present only in the most very basic terms. Their full correlation requires subsequent experiential development.

In this respect, for example, the child correlates its cognitive capacities by such activities as tracking changes in its perceptual field, and by moving towards stimuli, or by negotiating the way in which they withdrew from reach and/or view.

²³ This is most strongly pronounced in relation to visual cognition. See, for example, the study 'Development of Basic Visual Functions', by J. Atkinson and O. Braddick, in A. N. Slater and G. Bremner (eds), *Infant Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1989), 7–41 and, in the same volume, Slater's 'Visual Perception and Memory in Early Infancy' (pp. 43–71). A more general informative discussion is Daniel L. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). See esp. chap. 3, pp. 37–68. In what follows, I develop the implications of this material in an existential (loosely Merleau-Pontian) sense. For a link between Kant's transcendental strategies and more 'classical' theories of developmental psychology, see Onora O'Neill, 'Transcendental Synthesis and Developmental Psychology', *Kant-Studien*, 75 (1984), 149–67.

²⁴ This theme is explored throughout his acclaimed book *How Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). See esp. pp. 65–85.

A decisive factor in this process is when the child learns that by changing its own physical position it can gain access to certain stimuli, either by creating them as a result of its actions, or by coming across them. Likewise, it will get a sense of certain stimuli being beyond its control, or dependent on certain sequences of events in order to be encountered. In this way, it will learn what items or states of affairs are stable and independent of the will, which items or states of affairs are not, and the different ways in which these characterizations can be made. The categories emerge, in the course of these practical activities, through the gradual habituation of sensorimotor coordination to the demands made by specific forms of stimuli.

Consider, for example, a simple and repeatable activity such as playing with bricks. The child learns to assemble the *plurality* of parts into the *unity* of a whole structure or edifice, and to disassemble it into its components (i.e., *negate* the achieved whole). As its ability develops, it will form a basic understanding of what is *possible* and what is *not possible* in this activity. It may also learn to face such challenges as using the *total* number of bricks available in the process of construction, or in arranging the elements in such a way that, at some point, it will *cause* the whole edifice to collapse.

Of equal importance in the correlation of subject and objective world is the child's gradual recognition that human beings are significantly different from other material bodies and creatures, and can *reciprocate* its attention and gestures in many different ways.

In all these different cases, repeated interchanges between the child and its environment not only bring about an achieved coordination of the objective and subjective dimensions of experience, but also, by means of this, engage and articulate the child's appetitive being and desires. Through concrete interactions, the child learns the physical and social world, and its own being, in terms of possibilities and impossibilities of realization.

Now the accumulation of these processes involves a gradual learning of the salient characteristics of reality through practical exploration. Such competences are learned through rote and habit as ways of dealing with the world and other people. They embody, I would suggest, many of the Kantian categories in their fundamental pre-reflective form. In negotiating change and habituating oneself to what is enduring and what is subject to the will and what is not, one habituates oneself to the nature of the real, without having explicit 'lessons' about the nature of reality qua reality.

As the examples and points above should have indicated, notions such as substance, cause and effect, existence and non-existence, possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency, unity, plurality, and totality, and reciprocity are learned not *as* concepts, in the first instance, but as cognitive regularities and expectations arising from repeated practical explorations and interaction with a variety of environments. Indeed, as will be shown in detail in the next chapter, the categories' emergence and application are inseparable from the transcendental schemata of imagination. These schemata enable intuitions to be tracked and anticipated, and provide a pre-reflective *objective orientation*. Through this, basic recognition and then concept formation and application in a fuller sense, get a purchase.

It is, of course, vital to stress that the learning of such competences and the emergence of the categories through them proceed alongside initiation into language. Suppose, for example, that a child learns the word 'dog' and can successfully apply it when an appropriate creature comes in view. In such a case, it is one thing to use a general term and another thing for this to amount to concept-use in a complete sense. For the latter to happen it is surely required that *the general term is understood as applying to appropriate instances in other places and times as well as to those which are given as immediate stimuli*. We need evidence, in other words, that the term has been contextualized in that broader network of factors which determine the *general* character of reality (a point to which I will return in some detail further on).

I would argue that it is the transcendental schemata and categories qua pre-reflective cognitive competences rather than as explicit concepts which initially provide this. They are that layer of learning 'between the lines', as it were, whereby we habituate ourselves to the general character of the real. They are a mode of stabilized orientation which our initiation into language is able both to build upon and to refine.

In terms of the former, for example, in order to follow those rules which are the basis of language acquisition it is presupposed that the child and teacher share some already stabilized communicative terrain—enough, at least, to allow recognition of correct and incorrect ways of rule-following. In terms of refinement, the developed rule-following involved in the acquisition of language allows the categorial competences to be further articulated—to the stage where they themselves can be explicitly formulated and applied *as concepts*.

There is a vital point here which will be returned to in future chapters. The kind of activity wherein the categories gradually emerge

as fully achieved competences clearly involves a great deal of trial, error, and experimentation in how the child engages with and comes to comprehend things and events. In fact, the best way of describing this process is as one of *play*.

Play is something that enables the child to try out different avenues of cognitive exploration in a leisurely way. It is something that achieves a deepening cognitive grasp of things and events without this being driven by the pressures of practical goal-orientated activity. And, if play is integrated in processes of learning directed by adults, it does not lose entirely its sense of something that is pleasurable to do apart from any practical ends. *It is something that can be enjoyed for its own sake, and, through this, can be assigned a basic aesthetic character.*

More exact criteria of the aesthetic will be formulated as this book progresses. But, even now, we have enough before us to make an initial connection between the aesthetic qua play and the process whereby the categories are achieved as fundamental cognitive competences. This means that the aesthetic at its most crude and basic level is implicated in the correlated emergence of our objective knowledge of reality, and of the self. Through play we become familiar with objects and events by means of their re-encounterable and/or recurrent aspects, and through the gratification of engaging with or anticipating these aspects we, at the same time, achieve a unified sense of self.

Now it might seem that the processes just described offer, at best, a kind of illuminating ontogenetic descriptive support to Kant's categories in so far as they explain how the categories are acquired as fundamental concepts. However, the description has also further interesting conceptual implications. These serve to justify point (c) in my earlier reconstruction of Kant's argument. For, without the categories as *achieved* competences, there would be no broader context of cognitive generality in which *empirical* concepts could be embedded so as to function objectively. The formation and application of such concepts presuppose that a stable context—a *horizon of mastered 'thingliness', eventfulness, and causality*—is also in place.

To complete the argument, therefore, we must question Kant's categories in more-individual terms. This means asking first whether the list is comprehensive, and second whether each of the categories identified by Kant has the a priori significance which he assigns to it. The criterion for answering both questions centres on whether the horizon of 'thingliness', eventfulness, and causality just described is intelligible without bringing in such an individual category.

A detailed investigation cannot be offered here, but some light can be cast on both questions. In terms of comprehensiveness, there is at least one glaring omission from Kant's categorial table—namely, the 'identity and difference' pairing (which, for him, counts as a 'concept of reflection'). If concept-formation and application of any kind are to take place, it is difficult to see how it could be made sense of in the absence of a capacity to recognize sameness or difference between intuitions. Indeed, one might argue that to recognize *as such* (whether on the basis of categorial or empirical concepts) just *is* to articulate sameness or difference in the sensible manifold. The identity/difference pairing, in other words, is as much involved in giving form to the manifold as are the official categories. It is a major principle of synthesis.

In terms of the a priori credentials of the individual categories, there is at least a case, *prima facie*, for arguing that unity, plurality, totality, existence and non-existence, possibility and impossibility, substance, and cause and effect, are necessary to the intelligibility of the aforementioned empirical processes. If they cannot be excised from the account without rendering it unintelligible, then their case for transcendental status is indeed justified.

The link between generality and objectivity offers a further avenue of justification of the experiential necessity of Kant's categories. Again, it involves deploying a notion from Gareth Evans. The notion in question is that of a 'Generality Constraint' which determines the 'structuredness' of thought. As Evans puts it, a structured thought of the form *a* is *F* should be interpreted as lying at the intersection of two series of thoughts: on the one hand, 'the series of thoughts that *a* is *F*, that *b* is *F*, that *c* is *F*. . . and, on the other hand, the series of thoughts that *a* is *F*, that *a* is *H*. . .'²⁵

It is important to emphasize that the 'series' just mentioned are not phenomenological descriptions of actual thought processes, but rather further implications which are entailed when the thought is formulated in a structured way. A thought has this character when its thinker understands that what is predicated of a subject can also be predicated of other subjects, and that the same subject can be the bearer of many different predicates.

Now, whilst Evans does not raise the point, it would follow that a person whose thought was 'structured' in this sense is one whose use of object and concept terms was informed by a comprehension of

²⁵ Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 104.

their *general ontological and extensional scope* (respectively) and also some key aspects of their interrelation. This is a logical indicator that such comprehension has attained at least the rudiments of objective thought.

There is a correlated insight concerning the self-conscious subject. To put it in Evans' terms, a structured thought of the form 'I am *F*' must lie at the intersection of two series of thoughts to the effect that, on the one hand, 'I am *F*, and John is *F*, and Jane is *F* . . .', and, on the other hand, that 'I am *F*, I am *G*, I am *H* . . .' ²⁶

Here, in other words, the subject's *self-understanding* attains a basic objective level of unity when he or she recognizes that other persons can have the same kinds of experiences that they have, and that he or she can be the subject of different kinds of such common experiences. This means, in effect, that the subject becomes conscious of its status as a member of a class of sentient objects who experience the world on broadly similar terms.

On these terms, therefore, the structuredness of thought would be a logical sign of a person having understood the basis of both objective knowledge and the objective unity of self-consciousness. We can then use this as a test of the transcendental status of the individual categories, by inquiring whether or not they are entailed in thought structured by the Generality Constraint. It could be argued, for example, that such understanding directly exemplifies basic categorial competence in a number of areas indicated by Kant (such as unity, plurality, possibility, and substance and accident) and would also involve others (such as cause and effect) as broader contextual factors.

In this section, then, I have completed the three-stage reconstruction of the Transcendental Deduction, by showing how the majority of the categories are implicated in objective knowledge and the objective unity of the self.

CONCLUSION

Now, a summary of the trajectory of this chapter as a whole. I have argued at length that Kant's B version of the Transcendental Deduction attempts to show that our objective knowledge of the world must involve an application of the categories which also brings about the

²⁶ For an example of Evans' own use of the Generality Constraint in relation to self-identification, see *ibid.* 256.

objective unification of self-consciousness. As joint functions of this application, the objective unity of the phenomenal world and the unity of self-consciousness are necessarily connected to one another. They are implicated in one another's full definition.

Kant's insufficient attentiveness to the categories in their specific characters and interrelations, however, makes this central pattern of argument less than compelling. Despite this, I was able to propose a way in which it might be made more viable by following a clue from Gareth Evans. This consists in the fact that to have knowledge of an objective world that one 'comes across' one must be able to ascribe experiences to oneself concerning one's positions (and changes of position) as one material body amongst others. On the basis of this, I was able to eliminate one of Kant's problems and to give emphasis to the unity of self-consciousness's objective character.

I then set out a three-stage reconstruction of the Transcendental Deduction. This led to a reinterpretation of the categories as pre-reflective cognitive competences. It was argued that they constitute a fundamental orientation towards the world without which empirical concept application is not possible.

A second means of justifying the experiential necessity of the categories was then proposed—again following Evans. This involved identifying his 'Generality Constraint' as a basic logical criterion for objective knowledge of the world and the self, and then suggesting that the majority of Kant's categories are entailed when the Constraint is operative.

Before drawing some broader conclusions, a qualification must be made. My development of Kant's position in this chapter has no aspirations to exhaustiveness. It indicates how at least *some* (perhaps the majority) of his categories might be entitled to the kind of significance which he assigns to them in the Transcendental Deduction. To establish the case in stronger terms would necessitate a much more detailed consideration of the individual categories, discussion of alternative contender-concepts which do not figure in Kant's theory, and a more sustained exposition of the ontogenetic theory of the mobile subject's cognitive development. The link to Evans' Generality Constraint would also need to be filled out in rather more detail (especially in terms of how the individual categories were implicated in it).

This being said, the approach is, I think, one which genuinely follows Kant's major argument and which does show how it might be modified so as to be philosophically viable.

In my reading of the Transcendental Deduction's structure of argument, I have given some emphasis to the subjective dimension, and, in particular, the transcendental synthesis of imagination. Having, therefore, formulated a viable reading of the categories in this chapter, in the next one I will look at Kant's treatment of imagination in the schematism section of *The Critique of Pure Reason* in much more detail. This will show, in particular, how the categories are able to engage with reality.