

Class #27: Apperception, the Application of Concepts, and the Transcendental Deduction  
Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, from the Transcendental Analytic (AW 737-756)

I. The Categories

The Transcendental Analytic contains Kant's transcendental derivation of the concepts we impose on appearances given in intuition.

The transcendental method starts with our cognitions and works backwards towards the conditions that must exist in order for us to have those cognitions.

Kant presents what he takes to be a complete table of concepts, dividing them into four classes.

In presenting the table of categories, he recalls Aristotle's work on the categories.

Aristotle delimited ten categories of being

- A1 substance (e.g. man, horse)
- A2 quantity (e.g. four-foot)
- A3 quality (e.g. white, grammatical)
- A4 relation (e.g. double, larger)
- A5 where (e.g. in the market)
- A6 when (e.g. yesterday)
- A7 being-in-a-position (e.g. is-standing)
- A8 having in addition (e.g. has-hat-on)
- A9 doing (e.g. cutting)
- A10 being affected (e.g. suffering, passion)

For Aristotle, all language, indeed all thought, belongs to one of these categories.

When we say, or think, something, we combine instances from two or more of the categories.

If Aristotle's list were complete, we could adopt it as a fundamental theory about our thought.

If, further, this list were not merely accidentally complete, but necessarily complete, we might see it as indicating *a priori* conditions of human cognition.

Kant does not adopt Aristotle's categories uncritically, in large part because he wants to make sure that the list is complete.

He adjusts and organizes Kant's list.

Moreover, he argues that his list is not derived from observation.

It is a transcendental deduction of preconditions gathered by examining all possible forms of judgment and the ways in which any judgment must presuppose such conditions.

The categories are logical laws of thought.

[The categories] are concepts of an object in general whereby the object's intuition is regarded as *determined* in terms of one of the *logical functions* in judging (B128, AW 745b).

Kant's logic is thus a psychological program.

Kant provides four conditions for the transcendental analytic.

- (1) The concepts must be pure rather than empirical.
- (2) They must belong not to intuition and sensibility, but to thought and the understanding.
- (3) They must be elementary concepts, and must be distinguished carefully from concepts that are either derivative or composed of such elementary concepts.

- (4) Our table of these concepts must be complete, and the concepts must occupy fully the whole realm of the pure understanding (A64/B89, AW 737b).

On this basis, Kant develops twelve categories in four classes:

Quantity	Relation
Unity	Inherence and Subsistence (substance)
Plurality	Causality
Totality	Community (Interaction)
Quality	Modality
Reality	Possibility and Impossibility
Negation	Existence and Non-Existence
Limitation	Necessity and Contingency

In developing these categories transcendently rather than empirically in what is called the metaphysical deduction of the categories, Kant distinguishes his work not just from Aristotle.

Hobbes, Locke, and Hume produced rudimentary results about the structure of our psychology empirically.

Hobbes discusses the train of our thoughts, dividing them into regulated and unguided mental discourse in Chapter 3 of *Leviathan*.

Locke discusses ideas of reflection and isolates our ability to abstract as an important psychological capacity for philosophical purposes.

For Hume, connections among ideas are either resemblance, contiguity, or cause and effect relations.

None of these earlier philosophers insist that these categories are comprehensive.

All of them proceed empirically, looking at our psychological processes and generalizing.

Kant insists that such empirical deductions could never yield the necessity that underlies synthetic *a priori* reasoning.

Experience contains two quite heterogeneous elements: namely, a *matter* for cognition, taken from the senses; and a certain *form* for ordering this matter, taken from the inner source of pure intuition and thought. It is on the occasion of the impressions of the senses that pure intuition and thought are first brought into operation and produce concepts. Such exploration of our cognitive faculty's first endeavors to ascend from singular perceptions to universal concepts is doubtless highly beneficial, and we are indebted to the illustrious *Locke* for first opening up the path to it. Yet such exploration can never yield a *deduction* of the pure *a priori* concepts, which does not lie on that path at all. For in view of these concepts' later use, which is to be wholly independent of experience, they must be able to display a birth certificate quite different from that of descent from experiences (A86-7/B118-9, AW 742b-743a).

Consider causation.

In particular, consider the difference between an instance of causal connection, say a massive object falling to the surface of the Earth, and accidental conjunction, like my checking my mail and then having lunch at the diner.

The causal relation has an element that necessitates the effect; the massive object must fall.

The accidental relation has no such aspect; I could check my mail without going to the diner and I could have lunch without checking my mail.

If the world were Humean (i.e. a world of conjunction rather than connection), then all relations among events would be like that between the mail and diner.

But, Kant claims, the world is full of causal connections.

This concept [causation] definitely requires that something, A, be of such a kind that something else, B, follows from it *necessarily* and according to an *absolutely universal rule*. Although appearances do provide us with cases from which we can obtain a rule whereby something usually happens, they can never provide us with a rule whereby the result is *necessary* (A91/B124, AW 744a).

Kant may be a little too generous with Hume's account of causation here.

If we had no *a priori* knowledge of causes, I'm skeptical that we could even infer rules about things usually happening.

The entire world could seem loose, unconnected, haphazard.

Locke thought that he could abstract the requisite concepts from experience.

Hume and Berkeley showed that such abstraction was not justified on the basis of experience.

Hume agrees with Kant that an empirical deduction of our psychological capacities could never yield the necessity that we need for metaphysics and science.

Thus Hume yields to skepticism.

Kant's Copernican revolution consists of the rejection of skepticism, the embrace of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, and, consequently, the transcendental deduction of the categories.

## II. The Transcendental Deduction: An Overview

We have seen that intuition presents us with bare appearances.

Kant calls the raw data of experience the manifold of representation.

These bare appearances have to be structured in order to be thought.

Without conceptual structures, the manifold is unintelligible.

We would see the world as a baby might: chaotic, arbitrary, and magical.

In order to think about what is given, we impose concepts on the manifold which give it structure and thus intelligibility.

To this point, we have been setting up the deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding, describing the role of the concepts, without discussing Kant's argument for their subjective and objective validity.

Now, we have reached the deduction.

We can describe the goal of the deduction as to show that the categories necessarily apply to the manifold given in intuition.

The deduction is Kant's attempt to show how the sensible and intellectual functions of our cognitive capacities align.

The deduction is divided into two stages.

In the first stage, §15-§21, Kant argues that the categories apply to any being with sensible intuition.

In the second stage, §24-§26, Kant argues that they apply to any being with human sensible intuition, i.e. with our sensory apparatus.

While Kant argues that the categories apply to any being with an intuition that is separate from its thought, he does not argue that any being would have to be subject to the categories.

The categories are used to unify, through synthesis, the manifold given in intuition.

They apply only to creatures whose relation with the world essentially involves representation.

For if I were to think of an understanding that itself intuited (as, e.g., a divine understanding that did not represent given objects but through whose representation the objects would at the same time be given or produced), then in regard to such cognition the categories would have no signification whatever. The categories are only rules for an understanding whose entire faculty consists in thought, i.e. in the act of bringing to the unity of apperception the synthesis of the manifold that has been given to it from elsewhere in intuition (B145, AW 750a-b).

Kant rewrote the deduction significantly in the B version of the *Critique*.  
Ariew and Watkins present only the B version, which we will follow.

Kant presents a summary of the first stage of the deduction in §20, AW 749b-750a.  
James van Cleve, who compares the deduction to a tropical jungle, clears away the growth and reduces it to the following argument:

1. *The Unity Premise*: All representations of which I am conscious have the unity of apperception.
  2. *The Synthesis Premise*: Representations can have such unity only if they have been synthesized.
  3. *The Category Premise*: Synthesis requires the application of Kant's categories.
- Conclusion*: The categories apply to all representations of which I am conscious.

I'll roughly follow van Cleve but not in detail.

### III. The Transcendental Deduction: Stage One

Kant begins the first stage by recognizing that the application of categories which results in a thought presupposes more structure and organization than is given in bare, thin, messy intuition.

Kant calls the imposition of concepts on the manifold of representation by the understanding combination.

Raw appearances come to us as an unordered, unstructured, mess.

The imposition of concepts on that manifold turn that mess into an orderly thought.

More precisely, we must apply the categories on a representation which is already synthesized and orderly.

So a representation must be synthesized (or combined) in order even to be a thought.

Combination is representation of the *synthetic* unity of the manifold. Hence this unity cannot arise from the combination; rather by being added to the representation of the manifold, it makes possible the concept of combination in the first place... Hence a category already presupposes combination (B131, AW 746b).

A thought has a cognizer, something which performs the combination, as an implicit component.

The implicit thinking is what Kant calls apperception.

Apperception has to unify the messy manifold into an orderly cognition.

As it does so, it presupposes a particular thinker or apperceiver.

For the manifold representations given in a certain intuition would not one and all be *my* representations, if they did not one and all belong to one self-consciousness (B132, AW 746b).

We proceed from a diverse manifold given in intuition to a single thought of a single, conscious person. When we do so, we combine (either by synthesis or otherwise) the manifold. This combination is an active function of our cognition in contrast to the passivity of intuition. We act on the manifold in intuition, unifying it and subjecting it to the conditions of the [synthetic unity of apperception](#).

The understanding is nothing more than the faculty of combining *a priori* and of bringing the manifold of a given intuition under the unity of apperception - the principle of this unity being the supreme principle in all of human cognition (B135, AW 747a-b).

Since our synthesizing action is subjective, the application of the conditions of unity are also subjective. When we determine an intuition, we make it ours. An empirical unity is subjective; everyone's individual experiences are independent.

The empirical unity of apperception...is only derived from the original unity under given conditions *in concreto*, has only subjective validity. One person will link the representation of a certain word with one thing, another with some other thing; and the unity of consciousness in what is empirical is not, as regards what is given, necessary and universally valid (B140, AW 749a).

But the unity is also objective, since it determines objects for us. Kant contrasts 'if I support this body, then I feel a pressure of heaviness' with 'this body is heavy'. Or consider, "[These lines](#) look like they differ in length, but they are actually the same length." Since we have some knowledge of physical laws, we are able to make the latter claim. But, unless the subjective unity of apperception were also objective, we could only make the former claims. The relation among appearances is not merely arbitrary or accidental. Even Hume marveled at the regularity in nature. We know of causal relations, Kant says. Thus, we must be able to make objective claims about the world, not merely subjective claims. Moreover, every act of cognition presupposes the synthetic unity of apperception as an *a priori* condition of judgment. It is only by combining representations objectively that relations can hold *a priori* or necessarily.

Bodies are heavy. By this I do not mean that these representations belong *necessarily to one another* in the empirical intuition. Rather, I mean that they belong to one another *by virtue of the necessary unity* of apperception in the synthesis of intuitions; i.e., they belong to one another according to principles of the objective determination of all representations insofar as these representations can become cognition - all of these principles being derived from the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception (B142, AW 749b)

Intuitions become objects for an individual through the synthesis of the manifold. But they are still objects. We can distinguish between fantasies and appearances and between merely empirical judgments and objective *a priori* ones.

So all of our cognitions have these two aspects, the matter given in intuition and the structure imposed by the understanding (on what is combined in apperception). The matter may be pure and *a priori*, as when we reflect on the structure of intuition itself, or it may be

empirical, as when we have an ordinary sense experience.

The imposition of concepts by the understanding presupposes a self which unites the raw matter and, by doing so, makes it objective.

The process of turning pure intuition into conceptual content is precisely the application of the categories.

Any creature that uses intuition, that represents the world, will necessarily apply the categories in order to have experiences.

An infinite mind might, in contrast, work not by representation but by direct awareness.

That mind would have no use for the categories.

Moreover, we can not explain why we are constructed as we are, with these two aspects of cognition or with these particular categories of understanding or forms of intuition.

Such questions are unanswerable and any attempt to provide answers extends reason beyond its bounds.

But why our understanding has this peculiarity, that it brings about unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the categories, and only by just this kind and number of them - for this no further reason can be given, just as no reason can be given as to why we have just these and no other functions in judging, or why time and space are the only forms of our possible intuition (B145-6, AW 750b).

All we can do is describe our experiences and their *a priori* preconditions.

Such descriptions will have limits.

They will only describe our experiences and our possible experiences.

Since the categories only apply to those with some sort of intuition, any pure concepts will only apply to objects of possible experience.

Mathematical propositions, for example, are not claims about a transcendent world.

They hold only for objects of possible experience.

The pure concepts of the understanding, even when they are (as in mathematics) applied to *a priori* intuitions, provide cognition only insofar as these intuitions...can be applied to empirical intuitions... Consequently the categories cannot be used for cognizing things except insofar as these things are taken as objects of possible experience (B147-8, AW 751a).

Even my own existence is known only through the categories and so only as an appearance, not as it is in itself (or noumenally).

Although my own existence is not appearance (still less mere illusion), determination of my existence can occur only in conformity with the form of inner sense and according to the particular way in which the manifold that I combine is given in inner intuition (B157-8, AW 752b).

These are just facts about our cognition, ones we can discover by transcendental analysis (or deduction) and ones which must apply to any cognizer with a separation between intuition and understanding.

#### IV. The Transcendental Deduction: Stage Two

In the second stage of the transcendental deduction, mainly §26, Kant shows that the categories necessarily apply not merely to any cognizer with intuitive and conceptual functions, but specifically to

human sensibility.

It might be possible, one supposes, to imagine creatures who also have both intuitions and conceptual cognition, but with different forms of intuition.

We experience the world in space and time.

All of our cognition presupposes these forms.

Anything not in space and time is not an object of our possible experience.

Our concepts might apply to another kind of intuition.

They are mere forms of thought, after all.

But we could not cognize such an object.

So beyond merely showing, as Kant does in the first stage of the deduction, that we have some conceptual categories which we impose, *a priori*, on some intuitions, Kant wants to show how these particular categories apply to our particular intuition to create a world which is both objective and knowable.

We must now explain how it is possible, through *categories*, to cognize *a priori* whatever objects *our senses may encounter* - to so cognize them as regards not the form of their intuition, but the laws of their combination - and hence, as it were, to prescribe laws to nature, and even to make nature possible (B159-60, AW 753a).

Notice the strength of Kant's claim: we make nature possible.

We do not make the noumenal world possible.

But nature is not a property or aspect of the noumenal world.

It is a result of our structuring the raw data of experience that we are given in intuition.

We intuit the world in space and time.

Space and time do double duty.

Besides being forms of intuition, ways in which we are presented with the raw data of experience, they are themselves available for intuition.

Space and time are represented *a priori* not merely as *forms* of sensible intuition, but as themselves *intuitions* (containing a manifold), and hence are represented with the determination of the *unity* of this manifold in them... (B160-1, AW 753b).

Since space and time are pure forms of intuition, they are presupposed in all experience.

Since any experience is already structured, or determined, space and time, as we experience them, are deeply embedded in those experiences.

Since any experience also presupposes the application of the categories, space and time themselves must be subject to the categories.

(This is pretty trippy, right?)

When I turn the empirical intuition of a house into a perception by apprehending the intuition's manifold, then in this apprehension I presuppose the *necessary unity* of space and of outer sensible intuition as such; and I draw, as it were, the house's shape in conformity with this synthetic unity of the manifold in space. But this same unity, if I abstract from the form of space, resides in the understanding, and is the category of the synthesis of the homogeneous in an intuition as such, i.e. the category of *magnitude*. Hence the synthesis of apprehension, i.e. perception, must conform throughout to that category (B 162, AW 754a).

Kant presents a parallel example, apprehending the freezing of water, to illustrate the applicability of the

categories to representations given in inner sense (time).

When I perceive the water changing states, I presuppose time, in order that I can represent change.

This synthetic unity, as an *a priori* condition under which I combine the manifold of an *intuition as such*, is - if I abstract from the constant form of *my* inner intuition, i.e., from time - the category of cause; through this category, when I apply it to my sensibility, *everything that happens is, in terms of its relation, determined by me in time as such*. Therefore apprehension in such an event, and hence the event itself, is subject - as regards possible perception - to the concept of the *relation of effects and causes*; and thus it is in all other cases (B163, AW 754a).

In other words, not only do the categories apply to any intellect which receives appearances in intuition. They apply specifically to our intuition which is sensible in the forms of outer sense (space) and inner sense (time).

Abstracting space and time, we find that the categories were presupposed.

We do not, via abstraction, create the categories.

We discover them already imposed on our experiences.

The *possibility of experience* is what provides all our *a priori* cognition with objective reality. Now experience rests on the synthetic unity of appearances, i.e., on a synthesis of appearances in general performed according to concepts of an object. Without such synthesis, experience would not even be cognition, but would be a rhapsody of perceptions (A156/B195, AW 761a).

I mentioned earlier that one way of putting the goal of the transcendental deduction was to show how the sensible and intellectual functions of our cognitive capacities align.

Appearances conform *a priori* both to the forms of sensible intuition and to the categories of the understanding which combine the manifold.

Kant's idealism may, at this point, seem prominent.

Just as appearances exist not in themselves but only relatively to the subject in whom the appearances inhere insofar as the subject has senses, so the laws exist not in the appearances but only relatively to that same being insofar as that being has understanding (B164, AW 754b).

The forms of intuition meet up with the categories of the understanding in large part because they are both *a priori* impositions of the subject.

We don't know about the conditions in the noumenal world.

There may be some lawlike connections.

Things in themselves would have their law-governedness necessarily, even apart from an understanding that cognizes them (B164, AW 754b).

But our representations of laws hold for our structured cognition.

For us, experiences (i.e. appearances of objects in nature) must have certain abstract features.

What connects the manifold of sensible intuition is imagination, and imagination depends on the understanding as regards the unity of its intellectual synthesis, and on sensibility as regards the manifoldness of apprehension (B164, AW 754b).

The laws of cognition are very general.

Kant's claim is not the overly dogmatic and implausible claim, held by Descartes, that the laws of nature



are innate.

Instead, Kant argues that some laws of nature are synthetic *a priori*, arising from the general conditions for experience.

Nature (regarded merely as nature in general) depends...on the categories as the original basis of its necessary law-governedness. But even the pure faculty of the understanding does not suffice for prescribing *a priori* to appearances, through mere categories, more laws than those underlying a *nature in general* considered as the law-governedness of appearances in space and time. Particular laws, because they concern appearances that are determined empirically, are *not completely derivable* from those laws... (B165, AW 754b-755a).

Kant argues that only the most general laws of nature, those which arise from structuring our experience, can be known *a priori*.

So the categories make experience possible.

Our experience is not whimsical or rhapsodic or fantastic.

It is ordered and structured and lawlike.

Such experience presupposes certain cognitive faculties as conditions, both intuitions and conceptual structure along with a unifying self which we can know, like everything else, only as an object of possible experience and not as it is in itself.

After the Deduction in the *Critique*, Kant explains, or transcendently deduces, all of the particular categories.

Then, he shows in greater detail how his transcendental idealism applies to a variety of traditional philosophical problems and paradoxes, including the question of the existence of an external world, whether space and time are absolute or relational, and whether we have free will.

In some cases, Kant sides with the rationalists, claiming that we have knowledge.

For example, Kant argues for the certainty of mathematics and knowledge of an external world.

In other cases, Kant finds the rationalists' claims overly dogmatic, exceeding the limits of pure reason.

We are going to look at two of Kant's arguments from later in the *Critique*.

1. The antinomies
2. The ontological argument for the existence of God