

Transcendental Aesthetic

Kant explains why his critique of pure reason has to begin with a transcendental aesthetic, focused on sensibility, as follows:

Now insofar as sensibility may be found to contain a priori representations constituting the condition under which objects are given to us, it will belong to transcendental philosophy. And since the conditions under which alone the objects of human knowledge are given must precede those under which they are thought, the transcendental doctrine of sensibility will constitute the first part of the science of elements. (A15/B29 f.)

The reason a transcendental aesthetic is the necessary gateway to Kant's philosophy can perhaps best be appreciated by considering the matter from the point of view laid out in the Copernican experiment. Metaphysics is possible only if there are a priori concepts and these concepts can be demonstrated to apply to objects a priori; but no such demonstration is possible unless objects, merely insofar as they are *given* to us (*appear* to our senses) conform to this same faculty of representation. For if objects, in their *immediate* givenness to the senses in intuition, were not already products of the faculty of representation, in the guise of sensibility, how could this faculty afterwards, in its guise as understanding, *mediately* and *discursively*, by means of concepts in judgment, possibly determine these objects? The understanding is a productive faculty, to be sure; but it is immediately productive only of concepts and thoughts, not appearances; it presupposes senses in order to supply the material (appearances, perceptions) about which it thinks. So, if the sensibility exerted no a priori determinative force on appearances, so that what *seemed* to be *given* to us immediately as appearance were not in fact *produced* by us, then what could the understanding possibly do afterwards to overcome this? The only way the understanding could be constitutive of objects a priori – as the transformation of metaphysics into a science requires – is for it to exert a determinative force *not on the objects, but on sensibility*; but for this to be able to take place, sensibility cannot be not a mere passive faculty of receptivity, but one that actively produces its objects, even though, introspectively, they seem to us to be mere affections, passively received. In short, *understanding can only be constitutive of objects if it furnishes rules which govern the operations of a sensibility, which itself is responsible for producing objects of the senses (appearances).*

The active function of sensibility will turn out to be the pure imagination, synthesizing representations conformably with pure space and time; the imagination generates appearances, and the understanding determines the imagination so that real things – enduring objects, events, states, etc. – are representable by means of perceptions.

But it should be stressed here, right at the outset, that the "Copernican" Kant is advancing a whole new concept of immediacy and the given of the senses that none of his predecessors, empiricist or rationalist, had even so much as thought of and probably would have rejected straightaway if confronted with it, as indeed do most interpreters of Kant who, confronted with the doctrine of transcendental idealism, either dismiss it out of hand and set about salvaging what they believe can be saved from the wreck of Kant's philosophy (e.g. Strawson), or they attempt to explain it away, by turning it into something anodyne (Allison). Why should this be? The reason, I believe, is that a residual dogma of empiricism stands in our way: that it is false or nonsensical to claim that temporal succession, or anything else present to our consciousness prior to all psychological, conceptual, and linguistic determination, is ideal. This antecedent "given", however described (or deemed indescribable), is taken to be criterial of the real so that it would be idle to pretend to question it. In Kant's day, this doctrine tended to be formulated in terms of the theory of ideas, e.g. Locke: "let any *Idea* be as it will, it can be no other but such as the Mind perceives it to be; and that very perception, sufficiently distinguishes it from all *Ideas*, which cannot be other, *i.e.* different, without being perceived to be so." (*ECHU* II/xxix/§5) Also Hume: "since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Every thing

that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to *feeling* appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken." (T.190) Today, it would be formulated in relation to what is anterior (call it "stimulus", pre-intentional content, or what you like) to all conceptual schemes, ways of world-making, inborn cognitivist constraints, and/or culturally inculcated routines that have acquired the status of forms of life.

With this dogma, Kant undoubtedly agreed, but only, I believe, so far as concerns *empirical* consciousness, not the transcendental consciousness considered by the critical philosopher. For him, there is indeed no gap between appearance and reality in immediate consciousness: it is precisely because the empirical given of perception is pre-inferential and utterly indifferent to how we regard it (intentionally, conceptually, linguistically, etc.) that such intuition counts as immediate. But this implies nothing one way or the other where transcendental consciousness is concerned, and, in particular, in no way precludes the possibility that, upon validation of a Kantian-type "Copernican hypothesis", actual proof could be adduced a priori (hence, inaccessible to empirical consciousness) that that confronting us in sense perception is in fact subjectively conditioned (i.e. conforms to the constitution of the representing subject; this manner of reconciling the reality of appearances in empirical consciousness with their ideality, as subjectively conditioned, is clearest at A27-8/B43-4 and A35-6/B52-3). Thus, whereas Humean imagination only enters upon the scene at the point where there are perceptions already in place, its task being confined to separating and combining them, Kant declared that "No previous psychologist has even so much as thought that imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself," that is, insofar as there is a manifold of data present to the mind, yet to be related and associated, and action of imagination is requisite simply to bring this manifold to consciousness; and this is a consequence of the doctrine of the transcendental ideality of space and (esp.) time, which in turn is the gateway through understanding can enter upon its constitutive role with respect to appearances.

More precisely, Kant ascribed transcendental reality both to sensation and that in appearances which corresponds to it. In other words, the empirical reality of appearances confronting us in immediate consciousness and the transcendental reality of things as they exist in themselves, independently of our minds, are one and the same *qua* reality; and this reality is indeed given to us, not produced by us. Kant is quite insistent that the cognitive faculty does not create the reality present to its senses, but merely determines it a priori. But what this means is that everything else besides the sensation-based reality of appearances is ideal; that is, we cross the line from reality to ideality as soon as we factor in the formal aspect of appearances, which includes the temporality and spatiality of their *immediate* intuition no less than the categorial features added to them by understanding in judgment by means of mediate, conceptual representation (i.e. their immediate appearance as successive or juxtaposed, is a product of imagination — not, as Hume supposed, a given). Thus, without admitting a reality of appearances distinct from that of (the affections in us of) things in themselves, Kant rejected the empiricist infallibilist connection between appearance and reality, not *within* empirical consciousness to be sure, but by transcendently demarcating empirical consciousness from the acts of the representing subject which, through the imposition of forms, first make such consciousness possible. It is in this sense that, in the *PFM* (Pt. 1, Rem. 3), Kant saw fit to label his idealism *formal* and those of Descartes and Berkeley *material*: the formal aspects of appearances are one and all ideal for him, but not their material aspects, as indicated by sensation, are real — *transcendentally* real.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It may seem astonishing that anyone should object to interpreting a self-described transcendental philosopher and metaphysician of the 18th century as something less than a "good empiricist" by contemporary standards. Yet, this attitude is today widespread and deeply entrenched among interpreters of Kant. In consequence, they convert transcendental idealism into a purely epistemological doctrine far more in keeping, in my view, with the spirit of Hume than Kant's own. For just as Hume did, they limit their focus

With the nature of Kant's theory of intuition in mind, let us turn to the text of the Aesthetic itself. Kant's notion of **intuition** has been the subject of much debate, centering around the two features that seem to be essential to it: singularity and immediacy. What all agree on is that intuition should not be conceived as essentially *sensible*; this is something that has to be discovered and proven, i.e. that all our intuition is sensible is a synthetic judgment, and may not be true of all intuition. It is my view that *singularity* should be treated just like sensible: as a contingent, non-essential feature of intuition, and I want to stress this point since, if I am right, a great deal of misunderstanding can be avoided thereby. For, like particularity and universality, singularity is a *logical* characteristic of representations, not an aesthetic one. A singular representation represents an individual, or, if one takes transcendental idealism seriously, a singular representation and an individual are one and the same thing. The question is whether an intuition, taken just by itself, is such a representation. A careful study of Kant's writings shows, I believe, that it is not, that singularity, as a logical function of judgment is a feature that only concepts have in judgments. Of course, since it is only through intuitions that objects can be given, a reference to intuition is essential if a concept is to represent an individual; but the same is true reversewise: an intuition only becomes a singular representation when combined with a concept and that concept is determined in accordance with the singular logical function of judgment (category). The point is this: given intuition alone we would remain unconscious of individual things; only by means of a concept is such a consciousness possible through intuition. In this sense, intuition leaves us blind to individuals, just as a concept of an individual without relation to intuition is utterly empty.

Accordingly, the only thing we can say of intuitions independently of concepts is that they furnish *immediate* consciousness of objects. The danger we face in reading the Aesthetic surreptitiously to intellectualize sensibility by supposing it to be the source of representations that actually, as we find out later in the book, involve conceptual understanding: this includes images, time-intervals, numbers, and much else besides. We must be careful always to keep in mind that an

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entirely to the story of how we are obliged to *regard* that present before us in perception and take a skeptical position as to what this may be "in itself". But these are *empirical* objects! For Kant, as for Leibniz and Wolff before him, a metaphysics that can say nothing of *these* objects is not deserving of the name. This, I believe, is the import of the Copernican experiment of the B edition Preface: it supposes that appearances and the (material and psychological) objects given through them conform to the constitution of our faculty of representation rather than our representations to the objects. While epistemologizing interpreters do at least succeed in detaching our representations from the objects, they refuse to affirm the one thing that, in my view, Kant deemed essential for the salvation of metaphysics: that the objects themselves conform to the constitution of our faculties of intuition and thought. However unpalatable to the contemporary mind, the evidence seems to me incontrovertible that Kant, in embarking on a metaphysical project, meant it just as he said it: the objects met with in sense perception *really* are, in their very being, matter or thinking being and occupants of the space and time represented a priori in the constructive sciences; but they are so only because *their* constitution conforms to that of our faculty of representation, making them mere representations in us, products of a transcendental synthesis in imagination.

Of objects not immediately present to us in or through sense perception nothing can be said since, in perception and experience (including not only physics but Hume-inspired contemporary analytic "metaphysics"), no question is ever asked of them.

intuition is an immediate relation to a yet-to-be-determined appearance, and so the sheer awareness of arrays of manifolds as juxtaposed and successive, nothing more (not determinately juxtaposed or successive, not patterned, not subjected to a rule: this requires concepts, until which intuitions alone leave us blind to all order and determination).

The objects of which we are conscious are termed **appearances**, understood as "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition." Undetermined means *conceptually* undetermined; we are immediately related in intuition to some array of successive or juxtaposed representations, which have yet to be associated or conceived in any determinate way. It is a pre-associative, pre-conceptual relation to the manifold offered by the senses, consciousness of spatial or temporal dispersion, but without the addition of any awareness of how that dispersion (manifold) is supposed to go together, to be connected, either subjective (through association) or objectively (in the object). So, a manifold is simply given, not ordered, related, or determined; this is the job of imagination, in what Kant calls **synthesis of reproduction**, and of discursive understanding in **synthesis of recognition**.

### Pure Intuition

Now, the main thesis of the Aesthetic is that there is such a thing a **pure intuition**. This refers to that in appearances in virtue of which they are *capable* of being related and ordered by understanding to yield images of objects. It is pure because "That in which alone the sensations can be posited and ordered in a certain form, cannot itself be sensation; and therefore, while the matter of all appearance is given to us a posteriori only, its form must lie ready for the sensations a priori in the mind, and so must admit of being considered apart from all sensation." The **matter** of appearance is the sensation-component of an empirical consciousness; the **form** is the non-sensation component. Kant's claim is that form must precede the matter; it precedes sensation, or rather, sensation is given through it insofar as it is perceived as posited and ordered in a certain form (in humans and being constitute like us, successive or juxtaposed). And Kant's claim is that: *a pure intuition of the form of appearance precedes and makes possible the empirical intuition of its matter insofar as that matter may be perceived in a manner that renders it orderable (synthesizable) in accordance with concepts (juxtaposed and/or successive)*. Pure intuition of the form of intuition is a condition for the perception of its sensation-matter as juxtaposed and successive.

I place the stress on 'perception', meaning empirical consciousness, for as formulations of the doctrine later in the text (and in other writings) make clear, it is not in fact *sensations themselves* but only their *apprehension in perception* that is subject to the condition of a pure intuition of the form of intuition. This may seem like a distinction without a difference: what is it to *have* sensations other than to perceive them? But remember: Kant claimed to have been the first to recognize that imagination is a necessary condition of all perception. This means that pure intuition governs not the senses per se, not the affections of sensibility, but our immediate consciousness of them in perception; and since imagination is the faculty responsible for immediate consciousness, it is the imagination, in its synthesis of the manifold to generate perceptual consciousness, that pure intuition conditions, not the manifold itself as such. Pure intuition determines perception by means of the synthesis of imagination, so that the apprehended data (manifold of sensation) is perceived as successive and juxtaposed, and is, as such, fit for conceptual determination by understanding (which determines this formal, imagination synthesized aspect of appearances, i.e. perceptions).

But this is to get too far ahead. After announcing the form of appearance as the object of immediate pure intuition, Kant tells us more what in the present context he has in mind. If you take away everything in experience belonging to sensation (*viz.* everything Locke called secondary qualities), and everything belonging to conception (all objectivity, including being a substance, being divisible, exerting a force, etc.), what is left are extension/figure (i.e. juxtaposition) and duration (i.e. succession): these are what we can represent independently of sensation (hence a priori) and independently of understanding (so still sensibly): *pure yet sensible* intuition.

This abstraction is not, of course, offered as proof or explanation of anything, nor does any of the reasoning that follows depend on it; it is simply to help us understand what he is talking about: not the sensations themselves nor the physical objects and psyches cognized through their perception, but the ordering principles constitutive of our perceptual consciousness of them. All it does is enable Kant to indicate to his reader the field that is the special concern of the science of transcendental aesthetic, which, as its name implies, is concerned with all and only a priori principles of sensibility. It is the task of this science to, firstly, "*isolate* sensibility, by taking away from it everything which the understanding thinks through its concepts, so that nothing may be left save empirical intuition. Secondly, ...separate off from it everything which belongs to sensation, so that nothing may remain save pure intuition and the mere forms of appearances, which is all that sensibility can supply a priori." Now, among the principles of a priori sensibility, there are only two that are principles of a priori cognition, namely, space and time, and the Aesthetic proceeds to analyze them. In the B edition of the *CPR*, Kant saw fit to distinguish a **metaphysical** and a **transcendental exposition** of the concepts of space and time, one designed to explicate the nature of pure sensible intuitions, the other to show that these intuitions are indeed principles of a priori cognition of objects, and so of the first importance to transcendental philosophy.

### Space and Time

Kant begins by introducing the notions of **outer sense** and **inner sense**. These he characterizes as properties of our mind by means of which objects are represented "as outside us and altogether in space" or as inside us and related in time. The issue he wishes to address is framed thusly: "Time cannot be externally intuited, any more than space can be intuited as something in us. What then are space and time? Are they real entities? Are they in fact only determinations, or perhaps relations of things, that, independently of their being intuited, would still pertain to thing in themselves? Or do they belong only to our form of intuition, and so to the subjective constitution of our sensibility, apart from which these predicates cannot attach to any thing?" These three possibilities can be dubbed: the *mathematical* (Newton), the *empirical* (Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume), and the *subjectivist* (Kant); and the remainder of the Aesthetic, and in a sense the remainder of the first *Critique* through the Antinomies of the Dialectic, is devoted to showing that Kantian alternative is the true one, and then showing what must be the case given that it is.

### Metaphysical Exposition

The task of the metaphysical expositions is to show that space and time are sensible, not intellectual, yet nevertheless pure, not empirical. The claim that they are not intellectual is the more important and interesting. Pure intuitions like space and time are *individual* in a sense unique to themselves. According to Kant, all other intuitions of objects, be they completely determinate images in perception or the indeterminate images of mathematics, presuppose a concept; pure intuition of space and time, by contrast, not only precedes but makes possible all conceptual representations of spaces and times (see esp. A24-5/B39-40 [§3 and §4], A31-2/B47-8 [§4 and §5], and B160n.). Hence, whereas intuitions founded on concepts are always, at least in principle, *multiply instantiable*, space and time are *necessarily* one: all particular spaces and times as such are comprised within one prior, presupposed space and time, and no determinate space or time is possible that is not related to every other, either directly or via intervening spaces and times. If a concept were involved in their representation, be it a category or any other, then, like trees, triangles, and years, space and time could be unique only by accident, not necessity; that is, another space or another time, completely isolated and unrelated to ours, would be at least possible. It is only because pure space and time are prior to and independent of all concepts (the categories included — see B160n.) that they are *necessarily* unique, *impossible* multiply to instantiate.

Conversely, they are literally and strictly inconceivable: no concept can ever succeed in representing them. Concepts are partial representations; they represent only what is *common* to many different things that, besides this common element, also contains differences, which makes each unique; so whenever concepts are applied, we exclude these points of difference, introduce

limits, bounds, determination, which allow things to be grouped into kinds. Space and time, having no concept involved in their representation, are therefore, in the strictest sense, utterly indeterminate — determinable, yet, in themselves, indeterminate. They have neither bound nor limit (see A25/B39-40 and A32/B47-8) and are utterly featureless and uniform (“Space is something so uniform and in respect of all particular properties so indeterminate that one will certainly not seek in it a trove of laws of nature,” *PFM* §38). As imperceptible (because pure), they also lack all reality, quality, and real connections as well. Indeed, they are so utterly indeterminate, so wholly opaque to understanding, that Kant saw fit to rank them in his table of nothings (alongside self-contradictory concepts, concepts of absences, and concepts devoid of content — see A291-2/B347-8). So, clearly, any attempt to grasp these will-o’-the-wisps in a concept is futile, since any representation that results will always be of the determination the concept *itself* has introduced, never of pure space and time as such (“*thinking* ... always entails limits,” B71). Consequently, their parts and contents exist only through acts of limitation or other modes of determination, all of which depend on concepts; a pure intuition, though conceptually *determinable*, is thus, in and of itself, utterly *indeterminate*.

The obverse of the claim that all parts of space and time, as well as every object occupying or containing space or time, presuppose concepts that determine and delimit space and time is the thesis that space and time are the presupposed *determinable* whereby this application of concepts is possible; without a space and time there to determine, the concepts would have nothing to determine, and so would lack all application. This means that another important aspect of their peculiar individuality is their status as unbounded, infinite wholes which precede and make possible all their parts, including all objects that occupy or contain them (see A24-5/B39-40 and A31-2/B47-8). How do they do this? Conception is only possible if there is something to determine; since space and time are themselves inconceivable, it cannot be directly to them that concepts are applied. So, how do concepts have application to intuition? Only insofar as they condition and determine a priori our *perception* of appearances, that is, endow them with a formal aspect, as successive or juxtaposed, over and above their sensation matter, do the concepts have something determinable to which they can apply: they apply to the succession or juxtaposition of sensations apprehended in perception conformably to pure intuition, in that they subject these arrays of sensations to determining rules of order (e.g. relations like parts to whole: every appearance can be conceived as the sum of its parts and the part of some greater whole). In short, even if space and time are not themselves conceivable, they render sensations thinkable by adding to them a conceptually *determinable* form.

The chief consequence of these features of pure intuition is to reduce everything subject to them to a kind of systematic unity, to unify all the manifold in relation to a single representation. Concretely, this is just to say that we can never conceive or imagine any particular space and time that is not relatable to every other space or time, either directly or indirectly (by means of intervening spaces and times). There are no isolated spaces or times, unconnectable to each every other; instead, all together form a systematic unity. To say space and time are prior to appearances is only to say that they are the *principles* of this systematic unity: every representation synthesized in imagination is *ipso facto* subjected to these principles, that is, endowed with a form in virtue of which it can be related in one consciousness to every other representation it synthesizes. Thus, result, is what Kant will later call **synthetic unity of apperception**, which, when fully expanded and developed by means of judgments, will become an order of independent, yet, dynamically interconnected exists, fit to be called ‘nature’, or ‘the world’.

### **Transcendental Expositions**

Here Kant asserts that only the ideality of space and time can explain how geometry, arithmetic, and pure principles of natural science are possible and can have application to appearances. For example, geometry determines properties of space synthetically, yet a priori. So, "what then must be our representation of space, in order that such cognition of it may be possible?" It must be intuition, since through concepts alone no new cognition is possible, only analysis of that

we already have. Further, the intuition must be pure; for only the pure can have the universal, apodeictic validity essential to geometrical demonstration. If this is accepted, then the only possibility is that space is a pure intuition that has its seat in the subject, and to deny this is to deprive geometry of both its cognizing power and its apodeicticity.

More broadly, pure space and time serve two purposes in the *CPR*:

(i) if it is accepted that geometry involves the pure determination of space, and the science of number the successive synthesis of units possible only through intuition in accordance with pure time, then it is only if space and time are pure intuitions that geometry and number theory can count as *pure* sciences, and so claim necessity and universality for their conclusions (and it is only if pure space and time are intuitions that their cognitive power a priori can be understood — for if the propositions of mathematics are synthetic, and so not verifiable or falsifiable through the principles of identity and non-contradiction, then only by reference to a pure intuition could we hope to comprehend how mathematical cognition, if synthetic, is possible a priori; otherwise it would depend on experience, which though consistent with its being synthetic, would conflict with the strict universality and necessity of its claims, that is, its a priority).

(ii) The second role performed by space and time in respect of mathematics concerns its application: it is only if pure space and time precede and make possible all perception and conception of appearances that mathematical determinations of pure intuition can gain objective validity in respect of appearances (i.e. have the capacity to be either true or false of appearances). In other words, appearances must be shown to be subject to pure space and time if they are to be known to be subject a priori to the determinations of mathematics (this is what is shown in the Axioms of Intuition). For from this it follows that mathematically expressible laws must be true of appearances; we cannot know a priori which formulæ express those laws (e.g. whether the inverse square law is true, or an inverse cube law, or some other), but we can know a priori that *some* such laws *must* hold of appearances, since we can determine a priori that appearances are subject to space and time, and so determinable in the same kinds of ways our pure intuition in imagination is.

### Transcendental Idealism

The remainder of the Aesthetic, along with the bulk of Pt. I of the *PFM*, is concerned with **transcendental idealism** which Kant couples with **empirical realism**, as inseparably bound up with it, and to which he opposes **transcendental realism/empirical idealism** (other important texts are the Refutation of Idealism at B275ff. and the Fourth Paralogism from the A edition Paralogism at A367ff.). Kant himself deemed transcendental idealism/empirical realism, which dates back to the 1770 *Dissertation* in all but name, a breakthrough of the first magnitude, a departure from the past so radical and complete that, whatever differences may have separated his philosophical predecessors pale into insignificance when measured by their gulf from him. Also, if any single thing that can be said to be definitive of Kant's philosophy, it is this: "The system of the critique of pure reason turns on two cardinal points: as system of nature and of freedom, one leading with necessity to the other. —The ideality of space and time and the reality of the concept of freedom, the first leading inexorably and analytically to the second. According to the one, synthetic-theoretical cognition a priori; according to the other, synthetic-practical, likewise completely a priori." (AA 18, §6351 (1796-8))

The gist of the doctrine is contained in the sections of the Aesthetic entitled "Conclusions from the above concepts" and "Elucidation". Space and time are empirically real because all appearances as such conform to them, both in their mere perception and their experience (experience defined as a unity of diverse perceptions through a concept of an object); thus, everything that is real in experience has its existence determined in respect of space and time, that is, really *occupies* and *contains* space and/or time; which is just another way of saying that matter and psyche are genuine realities (by contrast with the skepticisms of Leibniz, Berkeley and Hume). But since space and time are objective only in the sense that they precede and make possible perception and experience – something they can do only insofar as they are merely subjective representation, existing in and through our own faculty of intuition – it follows that, apart from

such perception and experience, they are ideal. In other words, nothing existing in itself exists in space and time or has spatial and temporal relations; space and time are simply the particular forms in accordance with which we order our sensations in imagination and understanding, and have no other meaning, nor possible application to anything except the apprehension of sensations in empirical consciousness.

More precisely, the objectivity of space and time is grounded on their serving as a bridge linking appearances of the senses to the understanding, in which the pure concepts of the understanding – the categories substance, cause and effect, et al. – have their source; for it is only because pure space and time precede and make possible the intuition of appearances, that they can serve as a middle term joining the categories to appearances, and permit the former to determine the latter a priori: which is exactly what was required for setting metaphysics onto the secure path of a science. This occurs in the chapter on schematism: space and time are determined in accordance with the categories by pure imagination, and through space and time, everything in them is determined as well. This mediating position between appearances and the pure understanding is what lies behind the objectivization, and empirical reality, of space and time.

### **Lamber/Mendelssohn objection**

One of the principal points to take to heart and try to make sense of is that time is no less transcendently ideal than space. Kant, sensitive to how difficult it is for a reader to believe that this is really what he is saying, offers an elucidation of his theory. It was prompted by criticisms directed at the portion of the *Inaugural Dissertation* that dealt with the sensible world by Johann Lambert and Moses Mendelssohn: A37/B54. To this day people doubt that Kant means what he says, or suppose that he means something other than what he seems to be saying, something more anodyne. But no: Kant *is* saying that space and time have to be understood in exactly the same way. In particular, alterations of my mental state internally perceived are empirically real, but transcendently ideal: they *are* as they are *intuited* to be; but remove the pure condition by which the states are successively perceived, and there is no succession; hence, their succession is *transcendentally ideal* – it exists only in and for perceptual consciousness, and this, according to Kant, is imagination, i.e. it exists only in and for imagination.

This is just what it seems: a denial of the Lockean/Humean account of succession. Against the Aristotelian notion of time as motion, Locke argued that it is not enough that there be alternation in one's sensory fields, e.g. something moving across one's visual field, in order for succession to be perceived; it is only if that motion stimulates a succession of ideas in the understanding, that is, consciousness of the change of position. So, even if nothing at all is happening in one's sensory fields, one has only to run through a train of thoughts to be able to perceive succession, whereas if one is not running through a train of thoughts, then no matter how rapid and chaotic the changes in one's sensory field, no succession will be perceived. Thus, "Tis evident to any one who will but observe what passes in his own Mind, that there is a train of *Ideas*, which constantly succeed one another in his Understanding, as long as he is awake. *Reflection* on these appearances of several *Ideas* one after another in our Minds, is that which furnishes us with the *Idea of Succession*: And the distance between any parts of that Succession, or between the appearance of any two *Ideas* in our Minds, is that we call *Duration*." (ECHU II/xiv/§3)

Now, on such a conception, the only way succession can be perceived is for succession to really happen; that is, it is only if ideas really do succeed one another in my understanding that I am able to perceive a succession in my sensory fields: the consciousness of succession entails a succession of states of consciousness (in Kantian language: an apprehension of succession entails a succession of apprehensions). So, is Kant denying this? You bet he is. It is precisely this supposed succession of states of consciousness that make possible the consciousness of succession which he is claiming to be transcendently ideal. Whatever it is that makes it possible for us to perceive succession, it is not itself, transcendently considered, successive. For the subject in which space and time have their origin cannot itself be in space and time (B422).

Here one needs to distinguish transcendental philosophy from empirical psychology. In the latter, we cognize an object in the normal way we cognize any object; in this case, it is the object of inner sense, called the mind, the person, the self, or what have you. This object is a temporal



existent; it has states and these states undergo successive alteration. All of this is true, empirically real. In addition, it is a perfectly legitimate exercise in empirical psychology to try, as Locke did, to account for the perception of succession by reference to this alteration of states. But in no sense does this empirical reality translate into a transcendental reality: the object called the mind (psyche), just like any object of the external senses, is nothing over and above our concept of the unity of the synthesis in imagination of the manifold offered by the senses; it thus exists only in and for conceptual consciousness. Neither the empirical psyche, nor its states, nor their alterations, have transcendental reality; even the immediate, non-objective succession empirically apprehended is made possible only through a pure intuition of time, and so exists only in and for pure imagination.

On this basis, Kant claimed to have refuted the idealism of Descartes and others who suppose that the inner is better known than the objects of outer sense; and indeed, Kant goes on to show that the cognition of objects of the senses by means of concepts requires that spatial objects be cognized in order that an empirical psyche be cognized (for such cognition demands the objective validity of the category of substance as something permanent in time; but this, Kant claims, is possibly only in space, since time itself is always in flux; hence, cognition of substances in space is presupposed for awareness of the self as an enduring existent; i.e. personal identity presupposes the identity of bodies).

### **Kant's Refutation of Berkeleyan Idealism**

But even granted that Kant set the inner on a par or worse with the outer, how different really, in the end, is Kant's idealism from that, say, of Berkeley? Kant adamantly denied that his idealism was anything like that of Berkeley, and in a sense he was right. Kant neither ignored nor objected to the critique of abstraction advanced by Berkeley and endorsed by Hume. What he objected to in Berkeley was not his denial of the distinction between ideas of primary qualities and ideas of secondary qualities, but rather his claim that it is impossible to separate the existence of an object of the senses from its presence to the mind in sensation ("the existence of the thing that appears is thereby not destroyed, as in genuine idealism, but it is only shown that we cannot possibly cognize it by the senses as it is in itself"). In the *Principles*, Berkeley formulates this thesis in a remark directed against "vulgar" materialism, but employs also in some of his arguments against "learned" varieties as well, and, in my view, it is the true cornerstone of his entire case against materialism:

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived... If we thoroughly examine this tenet, it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*. For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? For my part I might as easily divide a thing from itself. I may indeed divide in my thoughts or conceive apart from each other those things which, perhaps, I never perceived by sense so divided. Thus I imagine the trunk of a human body without the limbs, or conceive the smell of a rose without thinking on the rose itself. So far I will not deny I can abstract, if that may properly be called *abstraction*, which extends only to the conceiving separately such objects as it is possible may really exist or be actually perceived asunder. But my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception. Hence, as it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, so is it impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it. (PHK, I, 5)

In Berkeley's view, just as it is impossible for me to form the idea of any object (conceive, imagine anything) except by means of contents supplied to me by the senses (= empiricism),<sup>2</sup> so too its

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<sup>2</sup>"For nothing enters the imagination which from the nature of the thing cannot be perceived by sense, since indeed the imagination is nothing else than the faculty which represents sensible things either actually existing or at least possible." (*De Motu*, 53; see also *The New Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, 10)

*presence in sensation* is the only concept I can form of its *existence* (just as the presence of actual thinking is the only way I am able to conceive myself as existing: *cogito ergo sum*). So, when the object ceases to be present in sensation, it forthwith ceases to exist; nor is it possible for me to conceive of its existence independently of its presence in sensation except by means of the most egregious abstractionism.

Kant's transcendental idealism, however, furnishes a means to distinguish the existence of a sensible object from its presence in sensation, without recourse to abstraction. Insofar as forms of intuition (pure time and space) are essential for the perception (empirical consciousness, presence to the mind) of the manifold of sensation, I have only to posit the loss of these forms to render perception impossible, without thereby being obliged to suppose that the manifold of sensation itself ceases to exist. In other words, the elimination of the form of appearance suffices to eliminate appearances, but not their sensation matter; I can therefore suppose, without recourse to abstraction, that sensation may exist even in the absence of any perceptual consciousness to which it appears as a manifold "ordered and situated in a certain form." (A20/B34)<sup>3</sup> Time is a case in point: "Since time is only the form of intuition, hence of objects as appearances, that in these which corresponds to sensation is the transcendental matter of all objects as things in themselves (thingness [*Sachheit*], reality)." (A143/B182) Sensation, which exists already in synopsis, prior to and independently of pure intuition and perception,<sup>4</sup> has no ideality (see A28-9/B44); accordingly, that in appearances which corresponds to sensation cannot be regarded otherwise than as "the transcendental matter of all objects as things in themselves." So, although in the absence of the pure forms of appearances, space and time, inner and outer *appearances* would be totally annihilated, *sensation* (the manifold given in synopsis) would not, nor would the transcendental reality that corresponds to it be in no way concerned. And this really all it takes to counter Berkeley: for if, when perception (appearance, intuition, empirical consciousness) ceases, the manifold of sensation does not, it follows that the existence of the manifold of sensation, and so too that of the transcendental matter corresponding to it, is distinct from its presence to the mind in perception.

Yet, even if we grant that the existence of sensation does not end when perception ceases, this may not be thought sufficient to warrant the affirmation of things in themselves. Kant's affirmation of the existence of imperceptible, uncognizeable, inconceivable things in themselves

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<sup>3</sup>The conclusion requires that there be some real difference (not just a conceptual one) between sensation and perception, and Kant's attribution of perception (synthesis of apprehension) to imagination satisfies this condition (since it then takes an addition ingredient - synthesis in imagination - to produce an empirical consciousness of the manifold sensation). Since Kant also maintains that pure space and time involve a pure synthesis in imagination (see A99-100), there is the same kind of real difference between appearance (whose form is space or time) and sensation as such (which involves no form, and so is prior to and independent of the imagination).

<sup>4</sup>Keeping in mind that, by "pure intuition and perception," we must understand pure and empirical synthesis of apprehension, both of which Kant attributed not to sense but to imagination. Sensation, as such, involves only synopsis (see A97; also A94), not synthesis. The originality of Kant's theory of perception (claimed at A120n.) lay not in the notion that apprehension is a synthesis but rather in the notion that it, and so all synthesis without exception, involves imagination. This synopsis must never be confused with apprehension, for it is not an empirical consciousness of the manifold (perception, appearance) at all. For further discussion see KMM, esp. chapter 6.

has been the target of more censure than perhaps any other component of his philosophy.<sup>5</sup> In the eyes of many,<sup>6</sup> it appears to involve a violation of the very bounds of sense he himself imposed on the objective employment of the categories, namely, their limitation to possible experience. For the affirmation of the existence of things in themselves has every appearance of being an inference from the existence of sensation to that of a transcendental cause (see A288/B344, A387, A393, A494/B522-3, A539/B567, and A546/B574).<sup>7</sup> Yet, the true, immanent basis of Kant's affirmation

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<sup>5</sup>Some (e.g. Nicholas Rescher) question that Kant ever actually affirmed the existence of things in themselves, but any doubts should be allayed by B308-9, and passages like the following, from *On a Discovery*, AA 8, 215: "'choose what we may, we come to *thing in themselves*.'" Now, this is exactly what is the constant contention of the *Critique*... It says: the objects as things in themselves give the material to empirical intuitions (they contain the ground of the determination of the faculty of representation conformably to its sensibility), but are not that material." Some commentators (e.g. Gerold Prauss, Allison) water down the affirmation into something to which no exception need be taken. Yet, the uncomfortable fact remains that things in themselves cannot be identified with anything that is ever present to us in or through intuition or experience (see A30/B45 and A545-6/B573-4). That is, it cannot be identified with that which is present to us immediately, available for ostension but totally independent of all interpretation and description, since *that* is just the appearance, and this, according to Kant, is a mere representation in us; nor can it be identified with any causes or grounds that may be thought through appearances, since such inferences are possible only under the categories, and these have validity only with respect to objects of possible experience, which the thing in itself decidedly is not.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Waxman, KMM, pp. 289-90.

<sup>7</sup>In the case of the transcendental object, Kant speaks of a "substratum" of sensibility (A251). The relation between Kant's various denominations for the mind-independent realities he wishes to affirm is far from clear. These include 'thing' (*Ding*) or 'object (*Gegenstand*, *Sache*) in itself', 'transcendental object', (positive and negative) 'noumenon', 'intelligible ground', the 'supersensible', and 'the object of a transcendental idea'. One thing that is clear is that Kant felt the need for a new appellation suited to each distinct segment of critical philosophy. For example, the thing in itself seems to belong to transcendental aesthetic, as the correlate to empirical intuition; the transcendental object (despite a mention in the Aesthetic) appears to correlate with apperception and the representation of an object through concepts in the Analytic of Concepts (see A108-10); the noumenon belongs to context of the subsumption of objects under concepts, that is, the Analytic of Judgment; whereas the objects of transcendental ideas correlate with the productions of pure reason. Nevertheless, Kant did not hesitate to use the terms interchangeably, indicating that their "reference" and the warrant for using them is the same. The reason I am restricting my focus to the thing in itself is that, in my view, the only basis for the affirmation of a truly supersensible, mind-independent reality beyond representation (including its sensation matter) is to be found in transcendental idealism, the doctrine of the

of things in themselves is not anything having the form of a causal inference, but an implication that, in his view, falls immediately out of transcendental idealism. According to transcendental idealism, it follows immediately from the thesis that appearances presuppose pure intuitions grounded in the subjective constitution of the mind that they are mere representations, not things in themselves (see A249-52 and B306-7). That is, since the determination of appearances as representations immediately implies that they are not things in themselves, it is clear that the terms 'representation' and 'thing in itself' are mutually exclusive, coordinate terms in Kant's system. So, if the affirmation of things in itself is to have any grounding at all, it can be found only in transcendental idealism and, in particular, through considerations relating to the subjective constitution of the faculty of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*).

To affirm the existence of things in themselves, it is necessary to distinguish, in sensation, the *existence*, or *reality*, signified by its presence in us from its *qualitative* character (color, odor, flavor, etc.) by showing that the former, but not the latter, is independent of the subjective constitution of sensibility.<sup>8</sup> Now, what first has to be noted, with an eye to making this distinction, is that, if our sensory constitution were different, the quality of our sense experience would be utterly different as well, whereas the existence, or reality, signified by the presence of sensation would remain the same; for whether the affection of our senses results in colors or in schmolors is irrelevant to the existence of that affection. The qualitative element of sensation, grounded in the peculiar constitution of our particular faculties of sense (sight, touch, hearing, et al), is thus a matter of complete indifference so far the affection of sensibility is concerned. If so, however, then, were we suppose that through some defect in our sensory faculties an affection that otherwise would have issued in sensory qualia failed to do so, *that too would be no reason to suppose that the affection itself does not exist, since, by contrast with the qualitative aspect of sensation, affection, as such, is not dependent on the peculiar constitution of the subject's particular faculties of sense.* It thus proves not only possible but necessary to distinguish the existence, or transcendental matter of sensation, from sensory qualia, with respect to dependence of the constitution of sensibility. But since whatever is prior to and independent of the constitution of our sensibility is *ipso facto* independent of our minds, it follows that Kant was quite within his rights to affirm the existence of things in themselves:

this so-called idealism of mine concerns not the existence of things (*Sachen*) (the doubting of which however actually constitutes idealism in the received signification), for doubting it never entered my mind; [my idealism concerns] merely the sensible representation of things, to which space and time especially belong, and shows that these, and so too all *appearances* in general, are neither things nor determinations pertaining to things in themselves but mere modes of representation. (PFM, Pt. I, Rem. 3)<sup>9</sup>

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Transcendental Aesthetic. Without transcendental idealism, the thing in itself would be a mere thought, an empty surmise, but not something capable of being affirmed.

<sup>8</sup>This subjectivity, and our knowledge of it, will be examined in detail in subsequent chapters. Here it will suffice to accept either that no misuse of the category is involved in the notion of 'subjective dependence' or that, if it is, the problem permeates Kant's entire system, including his claims that space and time depend on the subjective constitution of sensibility and that the categories (logical functions) depend on the subjective constitution of understanding. In the former case, the present interpretation of Kant's idealism, if sound, will show that there is no problem with the affirmation of things in themselves at all, while, in the latter case, it will show that there is no *special* problem with their affirmation.

<sup>9</sup>See also letter to Beck, 4 December, 1792: "I speak of ideality in reference to the *form of representations*; but [Eberhard and Garve]

This, then, is Kant's refutation of *Berkeleyan* idealism.<sup>10</sup>

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interpret this to mean ideality with respect to the *matter*, that is, the ideality of the *object* and its very existence."

<sup>10</sup>It is surprising how often commentators treat the text Kant added to the B edition of the *Critique* and entitled "Refutation of Idealism" (B275-9 with additional elucidation at Bxxxix-xli) as applying to Berkeleyan instead of or as well as Cartesian idealism - this despite Kant's express statement to the contrary at B274-5. However, if one understands Berkeley's view properly, it is obvious that this cannot be so; for the Refutation premises that we are in possession of genuine representations both of matter and of space, whereas Berkeley held that such notions are self-contradictory and impossible. Although the Refutation is currently enjoying a vogue among commentators (mainly owing to the highly suspect assumption that it is more or less detachable from the context of the Second Postulate and the First Analogy), it seems to me something of an afterthought, and of far less interest or importance than the refutation of Berkeley just sketched. For whereas the latter goes to the very heart of the doctrine of the Transcendental Aesthetic, the refutation of Cartesian idealism is a result that simply falls out of the First Analogy once we recognize that the only way that the demand for a permanent can be satisfied is through space (outer appearance), not time (inner appearance). The point of the First Analogy is that a permanent in appearance is a necessary condition for there to be objects of experience (i.e. cognizable phenomena, whether matter or psyche); so, once it is recognized that such a permanent is possible only in space (see B277-8 and B291-2), it follows that experience (cognition) of the object (phenomenon) of inner sense is possible only given a cognition of the object of outer sense (matter, reality as filling space). Why does this Refutation occur in the Second Postulate rather than in the Analogy itself? The refutation of an idealism involves an assertion of the real existence of something, and, in the context of experience, this means an assertion of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*); and the Second Postulate extends actuality from everything we immediately perceive to everything that is bound up with what we immediately perceive through the relations expressed in any of the Analogies of Experience (see A225-6/B272-4). (Interestingly, the Second Postulate does exactly the same work that Hume ascribed to cause and effect: it expands the scope of real existence beyond the immediate given of the senses and its reproduction of memory.) Since the argument of the Refutation of Idealism would be a nonstarter if the notions of matter and of space are, as Berkeley claimed, impossible, it also premises the refutation of Berkeley in the Aesthetic. See also note §21 above.