

# Mapping the Island of Truth

An investigation into the possibility of metaphysics

Damon Kutzin

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Can philosophy get at truth? Is there any proposition I can assert that cannot be doubted in some way? After reading Hume, it is difficult to believe that I can. Reason is all well and good, but if it is true that my experience of the world is the only data I have at my disposal, how can I be sure that the things I reason about accurately reflect those things? If I want to speak about being in general, the laws of nature, or ground any science with absolute certainty, but all I have access to are sense impressions, then no matter how valid my reasoning is, there exists the ever-present danger that I am not reasoning upon the objects themselves, but rather a false model of them. I simply cannot access things independent from my experience of them. Kant illustrates this problem as follows (B9):

“The light dove, in free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space. Likewise, Plato abandoned the world of the senses because it set such narrow limits for the understanding, and dared to go beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of pure understanding. He did not notice that he made no headway by his efforts, for he had no resistance, no support, as it were, by which he could stiffen himself, and to which he could apply his powers in order to put his understanding into motion.”

Now the science that needs to fly like this dove, that is tasked with the delicate problem of truth-finding, is known as metaphysics. The problem with metaphysics, according to Kant, is that prior to his work it has been plagued by dogmatism, or in other words, it has used pure, speculative reason without critique. This point of view has much in common with Hume’s skepticism, for Kant acknowledges that with all prior metaphysics, “the dogmatic use of it without critique...leads to groundless assertions, to which one can oppose equally plausible ones, thus to skepticism” (B23). So they both begin by denying reason’s access to things in themselves, and that the only objects of metaphysics can be objects of experience. Hence when we speak of concepts like causality or personal identity, if these ideas are not somehow contained in objects of experience, then there is nothing real justifying their existence. For Hume, this leads to fundamental doubt about such ideas: “objects have no discoverable connection together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another” (T 1.3.8). Yet unlike Hume, who by Kant’s own admission “came closest to this problem” (B19), the problem of the possibility of metaphysics, Kant believes that there is a way

to discover necessary connections between objects of experience; not by the old method of dogmatism, “i.e., to the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles” (Bxxxv), but rather by supplying a criticism for this pure cognition. So despite our inability to access things in themselves, we can still achieve certain knowledge through pure metaphysics (although the objects of this science have changed, no longer being things in themselves, but objects of experience).

The task in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, then, is to supply a ‘critique’ for speculative philosophy that restricts its domain from things in themselves, so that metaphysics can achieve the same levels of success and certainty as mathematics and the natural sciences seem to have achieved. From the preface and introduction, Kant points to two main ways this critique is accomplished: a Copernican way of thinking wherein we assume that the object of experience “conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition” (Bxvii), as opposed to the *vice versa* assumption of prior metaphysics; and secondly, the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements, wherein metaphysics “is not concerned merely with analyzing concepts that we make of things a priori...but we want to *amplify* our cognition a priori” (B18). It seems that with these two elements, Kant believes he can set metaphysics on the path to certain knowledge. If the fundamental nature of Kant’s critique of pure reason consists of these elements, are they really sufficient to save metaphysics from skepticism?

## I. The Insensible Interval

To see how Kant's new system works, let us follow the development of a key concept in philosophy and in the *Critique*, namely causality, and observe how the Copernican revolution, as well as the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements, play a role in the deduction of this concept. Kant's starting point for considering the nature of cause and effect is Hume's skepticism. How can we say with certainty that causality is naught but a habit of the mind, derived from frequent appearances of contiguity and succession through time in our experience of objects? If we examine a simple case of supposed causality, say the motion of one body setting another in motion (T 1.3.2),

“we find only that the one body approaches the other; and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval. 'Tis in vain to rack ourselves with farther thought and reflection upon this subject. We can go no farther in considering this particular instance.”

What we want to find, Hume claims, is a necessary connection between the objects. But we are unable to, for no matter how closely we look at the objects in question, all we can find are the two relations mentioned above: contiguity and succession through time. When attempting to define the nature of this causality, Hume observes that we cannot help committing the fallacy of presupposing a necessary connection in our definition, and thus beg the question (T 1.3.3). Kant seems to recognize this as well, and defines the problem in a similar way (A90/B122):

“I take, e.g., the concept of cause...in which given something A something entirely different B is posited according to a rule. It is not clear a priori why appearances should contain anything of this sort (one cannot adduce experiences for the proof, for the objective validity of this a priori concept must be able to be demonstrated), and it is therefore a priori doubtful whether such a concept is not perhaps entirely empty and finds no object anywhere among the appearances.”

So no a priori, certain laws can be found in objects of experience. Then if our idea of causality comes from those objects, it is not capable of being, by definition, an a priori concept. This is a problem not just for causality, but for all concepts that Kant wants to call categories.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> He has taken the name as a nod to Aristotle, “for our aim is basically identical with his although very distant from it in execution” (A80/B105). What is this aim? In the *Categories*, Aristotle claims that “expressions which are in no way composite signify substance, quantity, quality, etc.” (1b25), going on to list his categories. These categories then are words that signify fundamental, non-composite things in nature.

categories have to be necessary conditions of experience (similar to space and time) for them to carry objective validity (hence their status as *pure* concepts of the understanding), rather than being the results of habit when processing experience. And this possibility illustrates Kant's Copernican shift away from prior metaphysics. Instead of attempting to derive concepts from experience, he will show that experience depends on concepts; hence changing the starting point of first philosophy from the observed to the observer.<sup>2</sup> As he explains (B127; emphasis added):

“David Hume recognized that in order to be able to do the latter [grasp concepts beyond possible experience] it is necessary that these concepts would have to have their origin a priori. But since he could not explain at all how it is possible for the understanding to think of concepts that in themselves are not combined in the understanding as still necessarily combined in the object, and it never occurred to him that *perhaps the understanding itself, by means of these concepts, could be the originator of experience* in which its objects are encountered, he thus, driven by necessity, derived them from experience (namely from a subjective necessity arisen from frequent association in experience, which is subsequently falsely held to be objective, i.e., custom)”.

This possibility is not, however, a mere hypothesis which can ‘save the appearances’ just as well as a skeptical empiricist. At first glance, it may seem that when the table of categories is presented, Kant is already assuming them to be a priori conditions of experience, as if it is evident what those would be. But if this were the case, we could simply doubt the contents of the table and quite easily return to a Humean skepticism. Hence Kant wants to show that this shift in perspective is superior in accounting for experience, as well as logically necessary: “In this Preface I propose the transformation in our way of thinking presented in criticism merely as a hypothesis...even though in the treatise itself it will be proved not hypothetically but rather apodictically from the constitution of our representations of space and time and from the elementary concepts of the understanding” (Bxxii). How does this apodictic deduction come about in the case of causality?

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<sup>2</sup> Although one could claim that Descartes also made this shift with his famous declaration, “I think therefore I am”, there is a fundamental difference in what they are observing. While Descartes would claim that certain knowledge is a result of ‘clear and distinct’ ideas from the intellect independent of sense perception (e.g. the cogito), Hume and Kant would argue that there are no such ideas, and that the ideas resulting from the intellect alone may have no relation to the objects of our experience, and thus cannot be said to be true. Hence the observer for Kant is arguably more of an observer in the common sense of the word, for his objects are always related to experience.

## II. The Limits of Knowledge

Before looking at this specific argument, however, it may be worth considering what an apodictic deduction for the pure concepts would entail in general. As stated above, the deduction cannot be empirical, i.e. cannot consist in discovering the origin of the concept in experience. But Kant has also denied reason access to things in themselves, so we cannot merely reason purely on the concepts either without reference to appearances at all. Hence we are left with a new kind of metaphysics, what Kant calls a transcendental deduction: “the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects a priori” (A85/B117). So this deduction maintains a relationship to objects of experience, yet nevertheless professes to be objective and a priori; its pure concepts “are related to their objects without having borrowed anything from experience for their representation” (A86/B118). Given this dual restriction on reason, such a deduction seems impossible, until we remember the implications of the Copernican hypothesis. If it can be proven that the categories are *conditions* for all possible experience, then these concepts will be both meaningful (for they relate to experience) and necessary (for they are a priori). So in the specific case of the pure concept ‘causality’, we are seeking to establish it as a precondition for any experience at all, one where “something *A* be of such a kind that something else *B* follows from it *necessarily* and *in accordance with an absolutely universal rule*” (A91/B124). This, then, is the aim of the deduction of causality. And Kant has high hopes for this kind of deduction (A62/B87):

“The part of transcendental logic, therefore, that expounds the elements of the pure cognition of the understanding and the principles without which no object can be thought at all, is the transcendental analytic, and at the same time a logic of truth. For no cognition can contradict it without at the same time losing all content, i.e., all relation to any object, hence all truth.”

If this kind of deduction can be established, then it would be the only kind of metaphysical deduction possible, the only one that leads to the truth. For Kant, truth is simply “the agreement of cognition with its object” (A58/B82), a definition which, perhaps, allows only for a transcendental deduction to fit its criteria. For an empirical deduction would suffer from problems of induction, while a pure reason without critique would go beyond experience, and hence be impossible to form a relation, let alone agreement, with experience.

So that is how causality fits in with one aspect of Kant's system, namely the Copernican revolution. But our discussion of the truth of this concept is incomplete without considering it as a judgement. The proposition 'all alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect' (the proposition as stated in the Second Analogy) is, as Kant wants to show, a synthetic and a priori judgement. It is synthetic rather than analytic, for it supposedly amplifies our knowledge rather than clarifies it. This implies that the concept of a cause is not necessarily contained in the concept of an event, and hence there must be something relating the two concepts for the judgement to be valid. Kant wants to prove that this 'third thing' is the relation between the category and its objects (A156-157/B196; emphasis added):

"Experience therefore has principles of its form which ground it a priori, namely general rules of unity in the synthesis of appearances [i.e. categories], whose objective reality, as necessary conditions, can always be shown in experience, indeed in its possibility. But *apart from this relation synthetic a priori propositions are entirely impossible, since they would then have no third thing, namely a pure object, in which the synthetic unity of their concepts could establish objective reality.*"

In sum, to be able to assert the proposition 'all alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect', there must be a third thing relating an event in experience to the pure concept of cause. And this third thing must be a principle that is a necessary condition for experience in general. In this way, Kant is attempting to fill that interval Hume failed to see between a supposed cause and its effect (T 1.3.2; page 3). Interestingly then, Kant's requirement for the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements is the Copernican revolution. Now the chain of reasoning seems clearer. To prove that every event has a cause, we will have proved the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements; for this to be possible, we must have proved Kant's Copernican turn. To prove that, however, we must show that the pure concept of causality is indeed a condition for experience that is used in the synthesis of appearances as the 'third thing' in the synthetic a priori judgement. Along these lines, we will have established with certainty fundamental laws of nature, and be able to declare that we *know* they are true.

### III. Synthesizing Manifolds

This recent expression, ‘the synthesis of appearances’, points to the solution of our next question: how exactly can we determine which concepts are conditions for experience, let alone that concepts are such conditions? The answer to this is crucial to the argument in the Second Analogy, and depends on understanding this mental operation of synthesis. Synthesis is defined in general as “the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition” (A77/B103), and described as “the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious” (A78/B103). This activity of the mind is one of the most mysterious aspects of the *Critique*. Is synthesis a psychological process, something our brain is always doing to sense data it receives? How can Kant deduce the structure of such a process, let alone prove its anteriority to all experience? We can begin to consider these questions by briefly examining our experience. When I look around the room I am in, I perceive all sorts of objects that I naturally distinguish from each other. According to Kant, this kind of experience can only come about by a synthesis in the manifold of perceptions before me (A120):

“No psychologist has yet thought that the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself...it has been believed that the senses do not merely afford us impressions but also put them together, and produce images of objects, for which without doubt something more than the receptivity of impressions is required, namely a function of the synthesis of them.”

So our experience is effectively that of unities in manifolds; every object we cognize has been made into a unity by this synthetic faculty of the imagination. In other words, all objects are judgements. So now the question becomes, how far should we trust this synthesis, or judgement? Hume also acknowledged a similar mental process, by looking at the various relations of ideas we make. But for him these are merely empirical, and carry with them no properties of necessity (e.g. I connect two appearances that often appear in sequence to form the notion of causality). Thus there is a necessity for a *pure* synthesis of the imagination; for if the synthesis is pure, Hume would be unable to make such an analysis, since this process must occur prior to experience, and hence cannot be a mere habit derived *from* experience.



Hence this process of synthesis also plays an important role in Kant's Copernican turn, for it too is a condition of experience, perhaps even more primary than the categories, for it is only the pure synthesis of imagination that "yields the pure concepts of the understanding" (A78/B104). But this origin of the concepts becomes more puzzling when, in the same section, Kant briefly outlines the three necessary elements for cognition of an object (ibid.):

1. A manifold of pure intuition (space and time) given a priori
2. Pure synthesis of this manifold by the imagination
3. Pure concepts of the understanding (categories) that give this synthesis unity (a necessary rule governing the synthesis)

So pure synthesis seems to be how we can relate the intellect with objects of experience or combine an intuition and concept objectively, and so is perhaps this 'third thing' necessary for a valid synthetic a priori judgement. Yet how this comes about remains ambiguous. What is the relationship between steps 2 and 3? Must these pure concepts be already present in the mind to give the synthesis a unity, or does the pure synthesis yield the unity and the concept, as stated above? If I perceive ball A colliding with ball B and putting it in motion, is it because of the synthesis that a pure concept results, or does a preexisting pure concept apply itself to a synthesis, yielding the cognition, 'A caused B to move'? If the source is in the pure concept (and thus in the understanding), it would seem that Kant is presupposing what he is trying to prove; but on the other hand, it is difficult to see how the imagination could be responsible for the a priori concept, which should be a product of the understanding alone.

Kant goes into more detail on this process in the transcendental deduction. It is worthwhile to examine his conclusions about synthesis, for they are necessary for a full proof in the Second Analogy deduction of causality. Elaborating on the process behind the necessary conditions of our experience, Kant approaches the problem in two ways in the first and second editions of the *Critique*. In the first, he ascribes a 'threefold synthesis' to the action of step 2 above: apprehension in the intuition, reproduction in the imagination, and recognition in the concept (A97). It is clear simply from these names what he aims to achieve with this distinction - to describe how pure synthesis can bridge the gap between intuitions and concepts to create cognitions. Whereas in the second edition, he focuses on what he calls the original-synthetic unity of apperception, another element of synthesis that will turn out to be a necessary condition for experience. The stakes for these

arguments are quite high, for Kant is beginning to prove his Copernican hypothesis, and indeed, the possibility of metaphysics at all. If and how we synthesize a manifold of perceptions, then, are the questions by which Kant's entire system stands or falls.

One of the first things to notice about experience is that it belongs to *me*; with this thought Kant begins his discussion of the synthetic unity of apperception (B132):

“The ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me...Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the ‘I think’ in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered.”

He goes on to give two main properties to this process; namely, that it is spontaneous, pure, or original (each of these implies the others), since it *produces* the representation “I think” and hence is not derived from experience,<sup>3</sup> and it is also a unity, for “the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be *my* representations if they did not all together belong to a [one] self-consciousness” (ibid.). The fact that all my experience is bound up in a single consciousness means that they stand under conditions that allow them to be united as such. There must, then, be a pure synthesis of impressions so that they can stand under this unity of self-consciousness, so I can consider my experience *mine*. This point is key to Kant's philosophy, for it is what makes an objective and necessary metaphysics possible (B137; emphasis added):

“Understanding is, generally speaking, the faculty of cognitions. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. An object, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently *the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity*, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions and on which even the possibility of the understanding rests.”

Kant seems to think that, since our self-consciousness is a priori, when it synthesizes impressions it does so in accordance with rules of unity (for intuitions are *united* into objects). This is important,

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<sup>3</sup> Kant must have Hume's idea of the self as a mere bundle of perceptions in mind, for he distinguishes this new pure, transcendental self with the following self (which he took to be what Hume criticized): “The consciousness of oneself in accordance with determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called inner sense or empirical apperception” (A107). In all this confusion, one is reminded of Alice's apt remark: “I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, sir. Because I'm not myself you see.”

because for an object to be given, there must be a concept combined with the intuition for its representation, and these concepts are the rules by which synthesis into an object is achieved. The function of the categories, then, consists in relating representations to our apperception, or self-consciousness. To illustrate what he means, Kant uses an example of substance ('bodies are heavy'), but it should work with a causal example as well. If we make the judgement 'representation A caused representation B', these representations "belong to one another in virtue of the necessary unity of the apperception in the synthesis of intuitions, i.e., in accordance with principles of the objective determination of all representations" (B142), and are thus not merely empirically related. Hence from now on, whenever we speak of synthesis, implicit in this process is the unity of self-consciousness, which provides objective rules (categories) in the cognitions of objects.

So one part of synthesis consists in unifying my perceptions in one consciousness. Another aspect, emphasized more with the threefold synthesis, is imagination's role in achieving this. In the above aspect of synthesis, Kant seems to have demonstrated the *fact* that we unify the manifold, but not *how* this is achieved. The essential process for this task is the synthesis of reproduction in imagination, for after noting that all experience is bound up in a unity, Kant claims: "this is impossible if the intuition could not have been produced through a function of synthesis in accordance with a rule that makes the reproduction of the manifold necessary a priori and a concept in which this manifold is united possible" (A105). How imagination achieves this is through reproduction, where a representation "brings about a transition of the mind to the other [representation] in accordance with a constant rule" (A100). This means whenever I experience or think something, such as a line in my thoughts, or a particular view over the course of an hour, I must always relate my immediate representations with prior ones for the experience to be possible at all. If this did not occur, then midway through my thinking of a line or appreciating the view, I would lose cognition of the first parts of the line and the continuity of the view, such that the representations would no longer be connected in my experience (A102).

So I have to reproduce the manifold according to a rule in order to establish necessary concepts. Needless to say, what is at work here is not imagination in the ordinary sense of the word; here it is elevated to a crucial element in the possibility of experience (A124; emphasis added):

"We therefore have a pure imagination, as a fundamental faculty of the human soul, that grounds all cognition a priori. By its means we bring into combination the

manifold of intuition on the one side and the condition of the necessary unity of apperception on the other. *Both extremes, namely sensibility and understanding, must necessarily be connected by means of this transcendental function of the imagination, since otherwise the former would to be sure yield appearances but no objects of an empirical cognition, hence there would be no experience.*"

We are now in a better position to address our earlier question. Where do these pure concepts, or rules for synthesis, come from? The synthesis itself, or the understanding? At the moment we can note that there may be different rules governing the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination. The relationship between the set of particular representations in a given time may be different. And thus far in the *Critique*, we have been acquainted with three different kinds of pure relations in the categories, namely subsistence, causality, and reciprocity. Without going into their meanings in detail, we can see that Kant thinks these are the only three ways the imagination can reproduce a manifold, and the task now is to deduce each one. So the question still stands, what is the origin of these rules for synthesis?

## IV. The Second Analogy

Perhaps he only answers this question fully in each individual deduction of the categories, so we will turn to the Second Analogy to see how it is done for causality, and hopefully find a microcosm of the whole system there. Before looking at the proof, it is worth considering why causality is termed an ‘analogy of experience’, along with the other categories of relation. As we have noted before with Hume, the concept of causality is not in the objects, but an idea imposed on them by the mind. Hence the concept has to do with the relation between objects, as opposed to the objects themselves. With this basic idea Kant distinguishes these analogies of experience with the analogies, or proportions, of mathematics (A179-180/B222):

“In philosophy analogies signify something very different from what they represent in mathematics. In the latter they are formulas that assert the identity of two relations of magnitude, and are always constitutive, so that if two members of the proportion are given the third is also thereby given...In philosophy, however, analogy is not the identity of two quantitative but of two qualitative relations, where from three given members I can cognize and give a priori only the relation to a fourth member but not this fourth member itself, although I have a rule for seeking it in experience and a mark for discovering it there.”

If ball A strikes ball B a certain way, and I have the data of ball A’s movement, and that there is a causal relation between A and B, then I can deduce where ball B will go. This deduction reveals nothing constitutive in ball B (like its quantity or quality, the other categories, even its existence), but merely a result of an objective relation between the objects, that makes ball B’s motion a necessary consequence. What we have to deduce is the existence of such a relation as the condition for experience.

Let us forge onwards to the deduction. The argument at the start goes as follows (B233-234):

1. I perceive succession, i.e., I connect two appearances in time.
  - This perception is unified in my self-consciousness.
2. This succession could be determined in two ways, so that one appearance or the other precedes in time.
3. Hence through perception alone, there is no objective relation of appearances.
4. But I *do* cognize the appearances in a definite order, therefore this relation must have come from a concept that determines the appearances a certain way.
  - This necessity of connection is a product of the synthetic faculty of the imagination, which determines temporal relations.
  - This concept, that gives representations a certain necessary time-order, is the category of cause and effect.

5. “Therefore it is only because we subject the sequence of the appearances and thus all alteration to the law of causality that experience itself, i.e., empirical cognition of them, is possible; consequently they themselves, as objects of experience, are possible only in accordance with this law.”

To make this abstract argument more concrete, Kant employs two examples to expand on this line of thought. The first thing to note is that, in my experience, appearances are always successive. This simply means that I can only perceive one thing after another, that my whole perception is bound by a temporal order. So when I perceive, e.g., a house standing before me, I cannot see the whole house at once, but perhaps first the front door, then the windows, then the back, etc. Hence the “representation of it in apprehension is always successive” (A190/B235), and step 1 above. But we want to distinguish this kind of succession from a causal one. For instance I do not think that, upon seeing the front of the house followed by the back, that the appearance of the front caused the appearance of the back. This seems absurd, because I know I could have experienced the back of the house before the front, and hence that there is no necessary order to this manifold of appearances. So without any rules applied to my perceptions, the succession of appearances could be in any order (step 2).

Now for step 3, Kant compares this perception of a house with that of a ship driven downstream, in what seems to be a *reductio* argument from experience. My perception of the position of this ship begins upstream, and then downstream. Notably, we think it impossible that I could perceive the position downstream first, as opposed to the arbitrary order in my perception of the house. And this is precisely the rule in experience to which Kant repeatedly refers. Thus he makes an interesting distinction in the synthesis of our experience, between subjective synthesis of apprehension and objective appearances. The distinction is meant to illustrate the difference between these two examples by noting that for one of the aspects of synthesis (the apprehension), there would be no way to distinguish them. Recalling Kant’s earlier description of the synthesis of apprehension makes it easier to see why, for this aspect of our synthesis in experience is “aimed directly at the intuition” (A99), and hence cannot give us rules for succession. Apprehension merely results in perceptions of succession, and so a rule is needed to bound this apprehension to an objective order of appearances (A193/B238):

“The former [apprehension] alone proves nothing about the connection of the manifold in the object, because it is entirely arbitrary. This connection must therefore

consist in the order of the manifold of appearance in accordance with which the apprehension of one thing (that which happens) follows that of the other (which precedes) in accordance with a rule. Only thereby can I be justified in saying of the appearance itself, and not merely of my apprehension, that a sequence is to be encountered in it, which is to say that I cannot arrange the apprehension otherwise than in exactly this sequence.”

Again Kant seems to have possible objections from Hume in mind, which this distinction also addresses. Hume would have said that my perception of the ship sailing downstream was governed by causal rules merely in my apprehension of the events, whereas Kant believes he has now proved that these rules are actually in the appearances themselves, according to the synthesis of reproduction. For if they were merely in my apprehension, again, there would be no way to distinguish the succession of the ship from the house, and “we would have only a play of representations that would not be related to any object at all” (A194/B239). So this distinction of the faculties at play in our experience has allowed Kant to assert step 3.

However, our question about the origin of this rule for experience yet remains. And this is the key point in the argument where it is most necessary, and perhaps where Kant is most obscure. For although in the Second Analogy he has only mentioned one of the aspects of synthesis in his threefold distinction, the others seem necessary to account for the conferring of objectivity to appearances. Even if thus far he has shown by a *reductio* that such objectivity must exist, this would still be supported by a reminder of how the other two faculties of synthesis confer this necessity. We know there must be a reproduction of representations in imagination with reference to a constant rule for empirical associations to be possible (A100; page 10), and also that the synthesis leads to a recognition of a concept through which the representation can be experienced (A103). What does this imply here? If we apply our conclusions from the above section on synthesis, then when I synthesize the manifold of the house or the ship, I am effectively reproducing the series of representations according to different rules, and hence the mind experiences them through different concepts. In the case of the ship, noting that its representations are unified in my self-consciousness, for this uniting to have taken place, a pure concept must have been combined with the manifold of intuition for the experience to be possible (for the only way for unity in consciousness to be possible is an *a priori* synthesis in accordance with a rule, and in the case of a ship, the rule is the necessary time-order).

In brief, it seems that the argument becomes clearer once experience is dissected into all the faculties that make it up and the processes behind it. After noting the interaction between the unity of self-consciousness, the synthesis of apprehension, and the synthesis of reproduction, we should realize that the very fact of our experience implies that all events are governed by the law of cause and effect. As Kant notes earlier, “appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity”, a circumstance where our minds would solely contain subjective synthesis of apprehension, “and everything would then lie in such confusion that, e.g., in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect” (A90/B123). This is a *reductio* of the same kind as the more formal proof laid out above, where Kant is claiming that if we did not have this certain rule governing the synthesis of the manifold, there would be nothing in the appearances to *even make us form the empirical habit* corresponding to causality. So there must be an a priori synthesis in accordance with pure concepts. Again, he claims (A100-101):

“If cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy, if a human being were now changed into this animal shape, now into that one, if on the longest day the land were covered now with fruits, now with ice and snow, then my empirical imagination would never even get the opportunity to think of heavy cinnabar on the occasion of the representation of the color red...if one and the same thing were sometimes called this, sometimes that, without the governance of a certain rule to which the appearances are already subjected in themselves, then no empirical synthesis of reproduction could take place.”

So the causal rule for experience is arrived at by necessity; Kant attempts to avoid assuming what he is trying to prove by examining the faculties of the mind behind our experience, and discovering what these faculties must be doing (or even what they are) in order to give us the experience we have. Hence although he frequently phrases the process of synthesis as combining our intuitions and concepts as if they are already given, this does not mean that the concepts can be deduced prior to considerations of pure synthesis. So a concept, then, is simply what we call a certain necessary rule of synthesis.



## V. The Island of Truth

“We have now not only traveled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end.”  
(A235-236/B294-295)

After inspecting only a small part of this supposed island of truth along with Kant, are we convinced that what we have seen is really land, or (if I may extend the metaphor) is this merely a mirage in the ocean of illusion? The transcendental analytic is vast, extensive, and complex, so it is easy to get lost in the details and thus be unsure of what Kant’s position really is, or what exactly needs to be doubted. Rather than attempting to continuously reiterate these details until they are rigorously clear to us (perhaps a futile project anyway), let us take a step back and survey some doubts and implications of what we have understood from the argument.

One of the more exciting and unintuitive implications of this system is the new relationship between us and nature. Kant foreshadows it from the beginning, as it is in some ways implied with the characterization of his philosophy as a Copernican revolution, but we are now in a better position to appreciate this change. If experience is a result of synthesis, especially the pure synthesis of apperception and imagination, then nature as we know it is entirely our creation (A127; emphasis added):

“The understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances; *it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all...* Thus as exaggerated and contradictory as it may sound to say that the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature, and thus of the formal unity of nature, such an assertion is nevertheless correct and appropriate to the object, namely experience.”

The law that all events are caused, then, is not something present in nature itself, but is only a result of the necessary structure of our minds, specifically in the understanding. This idea becomes more extraordinary the longer it is meditated upon, for our common sense ideas want to resist its implications. For instance, we are now led to believe that for billions of years, there was no life on

Earth or even an Earth, and there could be a time billions of years in the future when humans or the Earth no longer exist either. What are we supposed to make of ‘nature’ at these times, when there is no faculty of understanding around to give laws to appearances? Can we maintain that events are governed by the law of cause and effect when there are no minds around to supply this law? Do events ‘happen’ at all? I believe that common sense wants to say yes, that things in themselves exist, and humans are not needed for their existence. Perhaps we could even get around the problem with a hypothetical claim: *if* someone *were* around at those times, then such laws would still hold, and events would proceed the way they do at present. This must be the case if the human mind is always structured the same way, placing all representations under space, time, and the categories. But at the same time, just as there cannot be a solar system without the Sun at the center making the planets revolve, what if there cannot be nature without an observer to turn things into appearances?

Turning now towards some possible doubts, let us first note that Kant’s position depends significantly on the geography in this island of truth, i.e. on the faculties our mind possesses that render our experience the way it is. But how does Kant know that we have these faculties, or that there are not other possible configurations our minds could be in? We entertained arguments above that the connectedness of our experience is evidence for this particular structure of the mind, but might there be other compatible systems? Kant even entertained the possibility of a being who could directly intuit a manifold without the need for concepts, or who need not unite the manifold in one self-consciousness (B139). But even supposing that ours is the only system possible to account for our experience right now, why couldn’t our faculties change? It does not seem to conflict with Kant’s system that our minds might one day necessarily impose the causal law on appearances, but then fail to do so the next day. This is a related, though distinct, problem to Hume’s problem of induction, and perhaps one of the ways he might answer Kant. I could accept that at this moment, all of my experience is governed by the causal law, but this does not necessarily entail that it will always be; not because I was wrong about the necessity before, but merely about its necessity for all time.

In closing, I am not completely convinced that Kant has established a metaphysics on absolutely certain grounds, although I believe he has gestured towards the kind of thinking needed for such a task. Aside from the doubts just explored, there seems to be a question remaining about how he is

able to ‘get behind’ experience, to examine the conditions for experience independently of experience. How can we even start this inquiry without engaging in some reasoning without critique? Would Hume have thought the endeavor to be valid? To illustrate with a quick (and thus unfortunately inadequate) example, much of the conclusions about categories stem from the proposition that manifolds must be unified in a self-consciousness for experience to be possible, “the I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (B131). Now there are many details in Kant’s account of this that were beyond the scope of this investigation, but it seems to me that claiming our experience is in a self-consciousness is already an assumption Hume would disagree with. Not just because we have no perception of the self beyond impressions (something Kant agrees with anyway), but because of the claim that our perceptions necessarily presuppose a subject experiencing them. How can we know for sure what the conditions for our experience are? What if Kant is smuggling a purely intellectual concept devoid of critique into his premise? For instance, maybe this transcendental unity of self-consciousness does not refer to anything in experience after all, and Kant falls into the same trap that Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” does; mistaking an empty intellectual concept for a meaningful one.

That being said, if we agree with both Hume and Kant’s premise that our experience is all we have access to reason upon, then Kant seems to be looking in the right direction for establishing a true metaphysics. For the objects of this science must be either completely within us, or else consist in some relation between us and things, but it can never presume to describe the things themselves. Thus the search for truth (assuming such an end is attainable) ought to set its sights on the mind, as Kant has done, and spend its efforts critically examining this lawgiver of nature, this refuge in an ocean of illusion.

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