

Kant's B Deduction

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Kant's B Deduction

By

Mario Caimi

Translation into English by María del Carmen Caimi

Edition revised by Pablo Muchnik

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PREFACE [TO THE FRENCH EDITION]

The Transcendental Deduction of the pure concepts of understanding – that is, the attempt to establish the objective validity of the categories in their application to empirical reality – is certainly a decisive moment in Kant’s work. In a sense, it is the cornerstone of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is also one of the most difficult passages in the book, as Kant himself confesses to the reader, who,

if he is not to lament over obscurity in matters which are by their very nature deeply veiled, or to be too easily discouraged in the removal of obstacles, [...] must have a clear foreknowledge of the inevitable difficulty of the undertaking. For we must either completely surrender all claims to make judgments of pure reason in the most highly esteemed of all fields, that which transcends the limits of all possible experience, or else bring this critical enquiry to completion. (B 121)

This difficulty accounts for the care that Kant puts into writing these pages. In 1781, he admitted that they have cost him “the greatest labour” (A XVI). Except for the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, the Transcendental Deduction is the only passage that was completely rewritten for the second edition of the *Critique* in 1787, for the sake of removing its “obscurity” (B XXXVIII). The Transcendental Deduction has always left commentators perplexed, resulting in a host of competing interpretations. Estimating that the philosophical problem handled by Kant is that of the relation between thought and things – and thereby reversing Hermann Cohen’s epistemological interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction, according to which the main aim of the chapter is to ground the synthetic *a priori* principles of physics – Mario Caimi proposes an ontological or metaphysical reading. His interpretation, however, is certainly different from Heidegger’s, whose predilection for the 1781 Transcendental Deduction and conception of the status of imagination Caimi does not share. While carefully examining some of the most difficult passages and offering valuable clarifications, Caimi avoids dwelling on the text in a purely scholastic manner. He commits himself to disclosing its structure and placing it in the whole of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and of Kant’s philosophical project, showing that the Transcendental Deduction of the pure concepts of understanding has a much larger scope than it is usually

supposed to have. The adopted perspective thus successfully renews the interpretation of these difficult Kantian passages.

Mario Caimi, professor at the University of Buenos Aires, is an internationally acknowledged specialist in Kantian philosophy. The rigour, precision, and clarity of his work make these *Leçons sur Kant* – which originated in a lecture held at the Sorbonne in 2004 – an unparalleled scholarly contribution in our language.

—Christian Bonnet

FOREWORD

The Kantian tradition has supplied us with outstanding commentaries on the Transcendental Deduction which appears in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (the so-called B Deduction). Because these commentaries have solved almost all of the problems posed by the text, we can scarcely make any claims to innovation in the field. Consequently, we have confined ourselves to expound the argument as a whole rather than explain single issues. Our goal has been to bring to light the structure of this most elusive text.

Since many other essays have previously undertaken this task, we should explain the specificity of the present approach.

- 1) We will underline the role of the Principle of Apperception, endeavoring to show that it is the synthetic enrichment of this principle that drives the development of Kant's argument.
- 2) We will devote particular attention to the question of what an eventual failure of the Deduction would amount to. This will allow us to set forth a kind of negative purpose for the Deduction, namely, the purpose of demonstrating that the categories are not empty concepts. Such demonstration, in turn, will help us grasp the Deduction as a whole.
- 3) Finally, we will assign particular importance to the synthetic method followed by Kant in his exposition.

Here also, there is by no means a claim to originality; still, we hope to call attention to some aspects of the text that have often been neglected. Our purpose is not to criticize the *Critique*, but rather to understand what it tells us.

The book is organized as a commentary that follows the Transcendental Deduction line by line. In so doing, it becomes evident that each step of the Deduction necessarily follows from the preceding step and is grounded in it. The succession of steps is but the unfolding of the Principle of Apperception. As already suggested, the commentary assumes that the entire argument of the Deduction consists in a progressive enlargement and enrichment of the Principle of Apperception. The book draws its unity from this assumption, as well as from the strong

concatenation of the successive steps. It is for this reason that I have set aside many discussions and explanations that would have introduced divergent paths into the exposition. I have also avoided displaying the “big picture” of Kant’s philosophy, since my aim is not to expound the whole of Kant’s thought, but to write a monograph about the very narrow problem of the B Deduction’s argumentative structure. I hope that this book’s focus on a single problem will make it useful to specialists.

In the English version, some changes and corrections have been introduced. Quotations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* have been taken from the translation by Norman Kemp Smith¹. The source of the translations of other quotations is indicated in footnotes. Those translations whose source is not declared are our own. The abbreviation “AA” refers to the edition of Kant’s works by the German Academy of Sciences: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*. Herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften / von der Deutschen / Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1900 and later.

I am indebted to many people for their encouragement and help: Christian Bonnet, maître de conférences at the University Paris 1 (Panthéon-Sorbonne), whose kind invitation to lecture at the Sorbonne in 2004 gave occasion for me to write the French version of this text; Pablo Muchnik, editor of *Kantian Questions* and President of the North American Kant Society, for his careful revision of the manuscript, his many valuable suggestions and his untiring energy as editor; my sister, María del Carmen, who undertook the difficult task of translating the book into English. Thanks are also due to the many other people who cooperated in the various stages of publication, the ranks of whom are too numerous to name.

Buenos Aires, September 2014.

¹ *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. Sometime Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh. London, Melbourne, Toronto, New York, Macmillan, (1929) 1968.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA *Immanuel Kants Schriften*. Ausgabe der Königlich Preussischen (Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1900f)
- Anth *Anthropologie in Pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), AA 7
Anthropology from a Pragmatic Standpoint
- AT René Descartes: *OEuvres de Descartes*, Charles Adam & Paul Tannery (editors), Paris, Vrin, 1996
- BDG *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, AA 2.
The only possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God
- FM *Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?* (written 1793-1794, published 1804), AA 20.
What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?
- KrV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781, 1787). Cited by A/B pagination.
Critique of Pure Reason
- Log *Jäsche Logik*, AA 9
The Jäsche Logic
- MAN *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (1786), AA 4.
Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science

- MSI *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (1770), AA 2.
On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World
- Op *Opus postumum*, AA 21, 22.
Opus postumum
- ProI *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (1783), AA 4.
Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics
- Refl *Reflexion*, AA 14-19
Reflection
- ÜGTP *Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie* (1788), AA 8.
On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy
- VAnth *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, AA 25
Lectures on Anthropology
- WDO *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?* (1786), AA 8
What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?

INTRODUCTION

SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE DEDUCTION

In its most general form, the problem Kant deals with in his Transcendental Deduction is that of the relation of thought to things. How is it that pure thought can relate to things? This question, when formulated in such a degree of generality, furnishes no novelty. It might be regarded, as the same question Parmenides once posed and answered in a well-known statement that identified thought with being: “being is the same thing as thought.”¹ The logical structures of thought are legitimately applicable to what exists, since the order of thought is the same as the order of being. The unfortunate consequence of Parmenides’ solution to the problem is that the diversity of things and their changes become but deceitful appearances. To Parmenides, actual being is neither subject to time nor to change; for to admit of change in what exists would amount to both asserting and denying the changing properties of a thing, thus infringing the principle of contradiction. On the same grounds, diversity cannot be admitted, since it introduces negation in what is to be asserted.² Thus, the laws of thought are the very same as the laws of what exists. Therefore, the application of pure thought to actual beings offers no difficulty, provided we avoid being deceived by appearances.

If we now turn to the authors and doctrines that Kant himself mentions, we find the Scotist³ doctrine of the transcendental predicates, that is, universal concepts such as *unum*, *verum* and *bonum*, which, although belonging to pure thought, may be legitimately applied to any thing. Kant criticizes this dogmatic application of thought to objects in paragraph 12

¹ Parmenides’ poem. Kirk & Raven’s edition p. 269. We depart here from Kirk and Raven’s translation, which reads: “The same thing exists for thinking and for being” and “for the same thing can be thought as can be.”

² “For thou couldst not know that which is-not (that is impossible) nor utter it” (Parmenides’ poem, Kirk & Raven’s translation, p. 269).

³ Duns Scotus, *Metaphysica*, IV, 9 (according to Eisler: *Handwörterbuch der Philosophie*, p. 673).

of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 113f).

But the question of the relation of thought and world is not limited to ancient and scholastic philosophy; it is an ongoing concern for the moderns. To *Descartes*, the radical heterogeneity (real distinction) between the thinking and the extended substance calls for posing the problem of their relation and for explaining the possibility of it. It might very well be that the ideas of material things are empty, meaning there are no objects to which they could refer. Thus, *Descartes* feels compelled to demonstrate the existence of extended things. He does so in his sixth Meditation:

But since God is not a deceiver, it is quite clear that he does not transmit the ideas to me either directly from himself, or indirectly, via some creature which contains the objective reality of the ideas not formally but only eminently. For God has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any such source for these ideas; on the contrary, he has given me a great propensity to believe that they are produced by corporeal things. So I do not see how God could be understood to be anything but a deceiver if the ideas were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things. It follows that corporeal things exist.⁴

This proof of the existence of corporeal things aims at showing that the ideas that refer to them are not tricks of a deceptive God but are truly related to things.

Kant critically resumes this Cartesian issue (which he calls “problematic idealism”) in the chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* called “Refutation of Idealism” (B274-275) and in paragraph 49 of his *Prolegomena*.⁵

Malebranche, too, poses the same question about the relation of

⁴ *Descartes*, *Méditations métaphysiques* AT IX, 63, *Meditationes de prima Philosophia*, AT VII, 79. We follow Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch’s translation vol. 2 p. 55.

⁵ AA IV, 336f *Kant* takes heed of *Descartes*’ “problematic idealism”, that is, the doubt about the existence of material objects corresponding to our representations, and the need of a proper demonstration of their existence. His “Refutation of Idealism” is an attempt to offer the required proof. There he maintains that “[t]he mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me” (B 275), since the determination of my own existence in time is possible only through the perception of actual external things. In *Prolegomena* *Kant* maintains, against *Descartes*, that my own existence is not more certain than the existence of objects of outer sense, since both (the empirical I as well as the objects in space) are appearances whose reality is demonstrated on the ground of their being subject to the “universal laws of experience” (*Prolegomena* AA 336f. We quote L. W. Beck’s edition).

thought to that which is not a thought, namely, extended things:

We affirm then, that it is absolutely necessary that the Idea's we have of Bodies, and of all other Objects we perceive not immediately by themselves, proceed from these same Bodies, or these Objects, or else that our Soul has the power of producing these Idea's; or that GOD produc'd them together with her in the Creation; or that he produces them as often as we think of any Object; or that the Soul has in her self all the Perfections which she discovers in these Bodies; or lastly, is united with an All-perfect Being, who comprehends universally in himself all the Perfections of Created Beings.⁶

The main difficulty here lies in the real distinction between thought and extension. To produce an idea (a thought) out of a corporeal (extended) object is as difficult as producing an angel out of a stone:

Nay, it is even harder to produce an Angel out of a Stone, than to produce it out of nothing; because to producing an Angel out of a Stone, so far as that is possible to be done, the Stone must be first Annihilated, and afterwards the Angel Created; but simply to create an Angel, there needs no Annihilation at all. If then the Mind produces its Ideas from the Material Impressions the Brain receives from Objects, it does still the same thing, or a thing as difficult, or even difficulter, than if it Created them: Since Ideas being Spiritual, cannot be produc'd out of Material Images that are in the Brain, to which they have no Proportion or Analogy.⁷

Thus, for Malebranche, the ideas of existing objects are not produced by these very objects; these objects do not relate to the corresponding ideas by producing them. Nevertheless,

our sensations, which are not distinguished from ourselves, & which consequently can never represent anything different from ourselves, can however represent the existence of things, or more precisely they can induce us to judge that these things exist. Because God, by means of a non-sensible action of which we are not conscious, excites in us our sensations when the objects are present to us, we imagine that we receive from the object not only the idea that represents its essence, but also the feeling that brings us to judge about its existence.⁸

⁶ Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité*, livre troisième, p. 236. We follow T. Taylor's translation, London, 1700.

⁷ Malebranche, op. cit. p. 240, trad. cit..

⁸ Malebranche: *De la recherche de la vérité*, vol. III (Eclaircissements), p. 142-143. Our translation.

Thus, to Malebranche, it is divine assistance that makes possible the relation of ideas to corporeal things. Since the argument is an explanation of this relation, the doctrine of assistance acts as a deduction of ideas. Kant mentions this *systema assistentiae* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in A 275, B 331.⁹

The question of ideas' relation to extended objects is also present in *Spinoza*, although Spinoza's solution is far from being shared by Kant. It is perhaps the closest to Parmenides' and is the most remarkable example of a dogmatic solution (in the Kantian sense of the word). Since both thought and extension are attributes of the Substance, they absolutely coincide, both being expressions of the one and only essence of the Substance. Spinoza formulates this in proposition VII of the second part of his *Ethics*, where he states that the order and the connection of ideas are identical to the order and connection of things: *Ordo, & connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo, & connexio rerum*. In this manner, Spinoza demonstrates the connection of thoughts and things. This demonstration may be called a "deduction" of the reference of ideas to extended objects.

Kant was well acquainted with Spinoza's philosophy¹⁰ and conceived his own *Critique* as an antidote to the metaphysical dreams of Spinozism.¹¹ He rejects in particular the validity of Spinoza's geometrical method when applied in philosophy.

In Leibniz's philosophy, the function of a deduction is fulfilled by the system of pre-established harmony. Certainly, Kant takes this Leibnizian concept in a different sense, as he attempts to prove that it is impossible to explain causality and reciprocal interaction only by means of concepts, without recourse to sensibility.¹² But in Leibniz's texts we find that it is precisely this harmony that explains the relation of representations and their objects, even if monads do not have windows. Leibniz writes:

There will be a perfect agreement among all these substances, producing the same effect that would be noticed if they communicated through the transmission of species or qualities¹³

⁹ KrV A 275, B 331 ("Note to the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection"): "an occasional special intervention in each particular case (*systema assistentiae*)"

¹⁰ See BDG, AA II, 74; KU AA V 393, 421, 440, 452; KpV AA V, 102; FM AA XX, 302; etc..

¹¹ WDO AA VIII, 133f, especially 143 note. It seems that Kant's interest in Spinoza's philosophy grew while writing the *Opus postumum* under the influence of Lichtenberg (José Gómez Caffarena: *El teísmo moral de Kant*, p. 144-145).

¹² Kant, FM, AA XX, 283f.

¹³ Leibniz, *Système nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances*, Gerhardt IV, 485. Ariew and Garber's translation p. 143-144.

On account of this perfect harmony, the soul (the thinking substance, which generates by itself its own thoughts) has a true knowledge of the other substances of the universe. Thus, the representations (the thoughts) that the soul generates in virtue of its own nature (i.e. *a priori*) are made to correspond to their objects. As Leibniz explains:

And since this nature that pertains to the soul is representative of the universe in a very exact manner [...], the series of representations produced by the soul will correspond naturally to the series of changes in the universe itself.¹⁴

In this way, Leibniz explains how *a priori* concepts, though independent from any experience, can be applied to objects.

Kant criticizes Leibniz's doctrine in many places, especially in the "Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection" (KrV A 271/B 327f) and in the *Progress of Metaphysics* (FM AA XX, 282-285). He associates the problem of the Deduction with the pre-established harmony in *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (MAN AA IV, 476), when he mentions that he will not place his "acute critic" in the

doubtless, to himself, unpleasant necessity of taking refuge in a pre-established harmony, by reason of the unaccountable agreement of the phenomena with the laws of the understanding notwithstanding that the latter have sources quite distinct from the former—a remedy, by the way, far worse than the evil it is intended to cure, and against which it can really avail to nothing at all.¹⁵

In paragraph 45 of Lambert's *Treatise on Method* there is a kind of forerunner of the problem of a Deduction of pure concepts.¹⁶ According to Lambert, the fundamental concepts of metaphysics are acquired by mere examination of thought; their validity is grounded upon the fact that,

¹⁴ Leibniz, *ibidem*. See also *Monadologie* § 56 and § 60.

¹⁵ MAN AA IV, 476, note. Translation by E. Belfort Bax, p. 146 note. See, too, Kant's letter to Markus Herz on February 21, 1772, AA X, p. 131, and KrV, B 293. For more on the pre-established harmony in the Deduction, see Claude Piché, "Feder et Kant en 1787. Le § 27 de la déduction transcendante", p.74-75.

¹⁶ Johann Heinrich Lambert: *Über die Methode die Metaphysik, Theologie und Moral richtiger zu beweisen*. This essay was Lambert's contribution to a literary contest called by the Academy of Berlin. Kant's contribution was his essay "Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral", AA II, 273f (Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality), published in 1764.

without them, thought would be impossible. Even the “egoist” (i.e. the solipsist) must admit them. But the relation of these concepts to an object is for the solipsist no more than a hypothesis that must be demonstrated:

Finally I have added that this more rigorous method makes that the world appears to the Egoist as a mere illusion, until there be enough grounds to advance from this hypothetically supposed illusion to the Truth, as the astronomers do.¹⁷

The authors we have hitherto mentioned conceive of thought as being independent from the experience of material things; that is, they conceive of it as *a priori* thought. This, indeed, is the origin of their difficulty in relating thought to extended matter. But thought –or at least the concepts and ideas which constitute it – could also be conceived of as being dependent upon things. It seems that in such a case it would be less difficult to explain the relation of thought to things. This kind of relation resembles the relation of an effect to its cause. *Locke* has conceived the problem of the Deduction in this manner. Certainly he was well aware of the difficulty that he frames in almost Kantian words, stating, “Mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate objects but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate.”¹⁸ Consequently, he cannot avoid the question, “How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?”¹⁹ Now, for *Locke*, all simple ideas must accord with things because they are precisely the product of things. As to complex ideas, which are formed by the addition of simple ones, their objects are framed by human understanding, which gathers together those collections of simple ideas that we call “objects” and organizes them, *Locke* says, according to concepts established by understanding itself. In the end, “the particular existence of finite beings without us”, which agree with our knowledge of them, is demonstrated through the factual evidence of ideas originated in the senses.²⁰ The relation is thus grounded upon empirical origins.

Kant rejects this empirical deduction of ideas in *Critique of Pure Reason* B 127f and in A 271, B 327.²¹

¹⁷ Lambert § 45, Bopp edition, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter 1, 1, Alexander Campbell Fraser’s edition, vol. II, p.167.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Chapter IV, 3, p. 228.

²⁰ *Ibid*, Chapter II, 14, p. 185.

²¹ According to Kant, “The illustrious *Locke*, failing to take account of these considerations, and meeting with pure concepts of the understanding in experience, deduced them also from experience, and yet proceeded so *inconsequently* that he

In *Hume's* philosophy, the general problem is solved in a skeptical manner: The idea of a necessary connection between a cause and its effect is not produced by a corresponding object in the real world. The necessary connection thought by this idea is a product of imagination. Thus, the world as we perceive it, insofar as it is framed by the necessary connection of causes and effects, is not real, but is instead a product of imagination.²²

In considering the relation of thought to its corresponding object, Hume refers to a particular concept (he calls it an idea), namely, that of the necessary connection of a cause with its effect. In accordance with his empiricist principles, he first looks for the sensuous impression out of which that idea could possibly have its origin. Thus, Hume admits that there is a relation, according to which the former produces the latter (a relation of production) and unites the thing with the idea. But his search for the sensuous impression that might have produced in us this particular idea of *necessary connection of the cause with its effect* remains unsuccessful. Thus, he concludes that this connection, which seemed to be a necessary one, is indeed merely imaginary:

It appears, then, that this idea of a necessary connexion among events arises from a number of similar instances which occur of the constant conjunction of these events; [...] This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion. Nothing farther is in the case.²³

The idea of necessary connection of a cause with its effect proves to be a product of the mind, one to which no real thing corresponds beyond the link introduced by our imagination. Thus, according to Hume, the principle of causality involves an empty idea, namely, the idea of necessary connection.²⁴

Kant acknowledges that Hume's remarks about the necessary connection have shattered his own blind confidence in the legitimacy of

attempted with their aid to obtain knowledge which far transcends all limits of experience [...]. Now this *empirical* derivation [...] cannot be reconciled with the scientific *a priori* knowledge which we do actually possess, namely, *pure mathematics* and *general science of nature*; and this fact therefore suffices to disprove such derivation" (B 127f).

²² David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, book 1, 4th part, section II, Selby Bigge's edition, p. 198f. See too, p. 208-209. Alois Riehl, *Der philosophische Kritizismus. Geschichte und System*, vol. 1, p. 189.

²³ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section VII, part II, p. 75.

²⁴ B 19/20.

applying pure concepts to real things: “I openly confess my recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber.”²⁵ He tries to formulate Hume’s problem in its entire generality. He asks not just how it is possible that the idea of necessary *causal* connection can be related to objects, but, more radically, how it is possible that an *a priori* idea in general (not just of causal connection) can be related to an object. Yet, Kant moves away from Hume insofar as he does not think that this relation is merely imaginary. He proves, instead, that pure *a priori* concepts do bear a relation to objects. Making this clear is the task of the Transcendental Deduction.

We must now consider a particular aspect of the question with which we began. Starting from the Cartesian principle according to which all clear and distinct ideas are true, rationalism develops a metaphysics that claims to attain knowledge of its objects on the sole ground of these ideas. A *simple* idea is always entirely present to the mind as far as it is conceived by us (in this sense, it is clear)²⁶. A simple idea cannot contain in itself anything alien which could possibly raise any confusion about its content (in this sense, simple ideas are necessarily “distinct”)²⁷. If we had a stock of simple (i.e. clear and distinct) ideas, and if we always strictly observed the rules of their combination, we could be sure of always attaining true knowledge with our judgments. In this manner, metaphysics becomes nothing else but logical calculation that would always bring about true knowledge. Leibniz expresses it this way: in metaphysics,

instead of disputing, it would be possible just to say: let us calculate. Thus, it would be found that errors in reasoning were mere errors of calculation which could be detected by means of testing, as it is usual in Arithmetics.²⁸

Against the rationalist assumption of reason having blind confidence in itself, Kant introduces the question: “What and how much can the understanding and reason know apart from all experience?” (A XVII). Are we entitled to the confidence that rationalists have with regard to the

²⁵ Prol, AA IV, 260. Beck’s translation, p. 8.

²⁶ An idea is said to be clear insofar as it is manifestly present to the mind. Descartes, *Principia Philosophiae*, XLV, AT VIII, 22.

²⁷ An idea is said to be distinct insofar as, being clear, it includes anything else and does not include but what is clear. *Ibid.*

²⁸ Leibniz: draft of a letter to the Duke of Hannover, ed. Gerhardt vol. VII p. 25f. See also Guilielmi Pacidii Lubentiani [=Leibniz] *Aurora*, V, [...] *ut sufficiat duos/ disputantes omissis verborum concertationibus sibi invicem dicere: calculemus*, ed. Gerhardt vol. VII, p. 64-65.

powers of pure reason? This is the “chief question” of philosophy²⁹ – a question that finds expression in the very title of Kant’s book, *Critique of Pure Reason*. The answer to this question is the Transcendental Deduction, a fact which underscores the centrality of the Transcendental Deduction for the Kantian project.³⁰

The question posed here is equivalent to the question of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Kant states in Reflexion 4633 (about 1772-1775), “Thus, it is the possibility of any cognition *a priori* which subsists in itself without being drawn from the objects that makes our first and most important question.”³¹

Kant had to pose this question after he had admitted, in the *Dissertatio* of 1770, that there are *a priori* concepts spontaneously generated by understanding in its “real use.” He explains the concept of a *real use of understanding* as follows:

as to *intellectual* concepts, it is above all to be well noted that the use of the intellect [...] is two-fold. By the first use are given the very concepts both of things and relations. This is the *real use*.³²

And later on:

Such concepts both of objects and relations are given by the very nature of the intellect.³³

This real use of understanding impelled Kant to pose the question underlying the Deduction in the well-known letter to Markus Herz from February 21, 1772: “On what grounds rests the reference of what in us is called representation to the object?”³⁴ This question does not seem difficult to answer as concerns *empirical* representations, but it poses huge

²⁹ A XVII.

³⁰ Wolfgang Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, p. 67.

³¹ “Es ist also die Möglichkeit einer jeden Erkenntnis a priori, welche vor sich beständig ist, ohne von den Gegenständen selbst geschöpft zu seyn, welche unsere erste und wichtigste Frage ausmacht.” AA XVII, 615, quoted by Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, p. 67.

³² MSI, paragraph 5, AA II, 393. We follow the translation of W. J. Eckoff, p. 51f.

³³ MSI, paragraph 6, AA II, 394. Eckoff’s translation, p. 53. It should be noted that this interpretation of the “real use” is not universally accepted. For more about this question, see Michael Oberhausen: *Das neue Apriori. Kants Lehre von einer ‘ursprünglichen Erwerbung’ apriorischer Vorstellungen* and also Markus Herz: *Betrachtungen aus der spekulativen Weltweisheit*, p. 44 (24/25).

³⁴ AA X, p. 130. Ellington’s translation p. 117.

problems with regard to *a priori* concepts:

In the Dissertation [...] I had passed over in silence the question as how else, then, a representation referring to an object is possible without being affected by the objects in some way.³⁵

From then until the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and even beyond, almost all of Kant's efforts were directed toward solving this problem.³⁶

ABOUT THE AIM OF THE DEDUCTION

How should we understand what Kant tells us about the nature and the aim of the Deduction? There are various alternative readings. The classical interpretation is that of Hermann Cohen, according to whom the aim of the Deduction is to provide a ground for the synthetic *a priori* principles upon which the science of physics is based. In the present work, we shall deviate from this canonical approach: we would like to propose another interpretation on the basis of a close analysis of the text.³⁷ This deviation from the ordinary approach will find justification if we succeed – as I dare hope – in offering a comprehensive explanation of the argumentative structure of the Deduction and of the way it fits into the larger project of the *Critique*.

In the “metaphysical deduction” (B 102f), Kant states that the new element we are compelled to admit – namely, understanding or spontaneity – is a faculty of performing synthesis that bears in itself different functions (or more exactly, it consists in a set of these synthetic functions). On account of this, it is possible to shed light on spontaneity by means of a table that displays these different functions. The concepts through which these diverse functions are represented in their generality (that is to say, the concepts through which the form of each one of these functions is represented, disregarding its concrete application in particular cases) are what Kant calls “categories.” As they are the most general (conceptual) representations of pure synthesis, the categories might very well be entirely void of any concrete content, raising the possibility of their being

³⁵ AA X, p. 130. Ellington's translation p. 118.

³⁶ For a history of the Deduction in the years preceding the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Wolfgang Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989.

³⁷ For an exposition of this interpretation, see M. Caimi: “Zum Problem des Zieles einer transzendentalen Deduktion.”

empty concepts.³⁸ At the stage of the “metaphysical Deduction”, it is still unclear whether the categories have, beyond thought, actual objects to which they could be applied. If they had none, they would certainly still be the very same spontaneous products of understanding, but they would not have any function in knowledge, because to “know” (*erkennen*) means to refer the representation to an actually existing object. Thus, the Kantian formula, according to which the Transcendental Deduction is “[t]he explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate *a priori* to objects” (B 117), may be interpreted in the sense that the Deduction consists in the proof that the categories are not empty concepts, since they necessarily refer to actual objects.³⁹ We would like to interpret the Deduction in this sense.⁴⁰ The expression “empty concept” has a well-defined meaning in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴¹

THE PROCEDURE OF EXPOSITION

If we observe the argumentative course Kant takes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and especially in the development of the Transcendental Deduction, we find that it closely coincides with the description of the

³⁸ A category might be an “[e]mpty concept without object, *ens rationis*” (B 348).

³⁹ “Since we nevertheless make a use of them, in which they actually belong to the *knowledge* of objects (of experience), then also the possibility of an objective validity of these *a priori* concepts in regard to what is empirical had to be especially demonstrated so that they may not be judged as lacking any significance or else as being originated in *experience*: and this was the *positive* intention with regard to which the *Deduction* is certainly unavoidably necessary.” Kant, ÜGTP, AA VIII, 184.

⁴⁰ There are certainly other interpretations concerning the aim of the Deduction. Kant himself provides some of them. For more on this issue, see W. Carl: *Der schweigende Kant*, p. 168-171.

⁴¹ Although the expression “empty concept” is now clear to us, in the Leibnizian and Wolffian context in which the Kantian *Critique* arose, it was referred to as a problematic thought. Setting aside those concepts which conceal a contradiction, all clear and distinct concepts were thought to be necessarily endowed with content. It is a novelty of Kant’s work that there may be concepts that are empty although they are free of contradiction (*Gedanken ohne Inhalt*); they are empty insofar they have no corresponding intuition. On this account, a demonstration that the pure *a priori* concepts of understanding are not empty (*viz.* that, beyond being free of contradiction, they refer to actual objects) becomes a main task of the Deduction. For more on the expression “empty concept”, see J. Benoist: “Le ‘mythe du donné’ et les avatars du kantisme analytique.” See, too, M. Caimi: “Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer.”

method of philosophy he had expounded in some of his 1762-1763 writings. Whoever proceeds according to this method receives a concept which is initially confused and whose origin is undetermined, and engages in the task of bringing distinction to it. The goal is to attain such clarity and distinction as to make possible a definition of the concept. Thus, definition has its place at the end of the philosopher's labour, not at the beginning of his endeavours (as is the case in the work of the mathematician). In order to attain this distinction, the philosopher must first isolate the elements of the concept and study them separately.⁴² He must isolate a single element and bring it to distinction. This leads him to other elements which might have possibly been unknown to him but which are hereafter necessarily required for the complete analysis of the first element. (It is precisely this necessity which justifies the introduction of the new elements.) The new elements, so introduced, are in turn brought to distinction and joined to the first element. This procedure is repeated in a synthesis of increasing complexity, until the searcher is in a position to reconstruct the original concept, but now with entire clarity and distinction.⁴³ In the ideal case, this method would allow the philosopher to formulate a definition of the original concept.⁴⁴

The concept investigated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that of pure reason itself, taken as a faculty of metaphysical knowledge. But the starting point is the notion of *representation*, not taken as a psychological event but as a logical fact.⁴⁵ That Kant will apply the method of isolating the elements is already announced in the title "Transcendental Doctrine of Elements" (A 17, B 31) and leads, first of all, to a study of sensibility (in the Transcendental Aesthetic).⁴⁶ The insurmountable difficulty of explaining the unity of consciousness by the sole means of a passive sensibility,⁴⁷ however, compels Kant to admit an active faculty, the

⁴² A 22=B 36; A 62=B 87; A 305=B 362. See also A 842 =B 870.

⁴³ A 730/731 =B 758/759.

⁴⁴ The complexity of philosophy, however, makes this result most unlikely. See B 758.

⁴⁵ Jocelyn Benoist (in "L'impensé de la représentation", p. 300) states "that the main contribution of the *Critique of Pure Reason* [...] is the elucidation of the concept of 'representation'." See also p. 301: "At the beginning was the representation." See, moreover, p. 311.

⁴⁶ A 22, B 36: "In the transcendental aesthetic we shall, therefore, first *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, we shall also separate off from it everything which belongs to sensation."

⁴⁷ Since "this 'object' or this 'matter' given in the forms of sensibility cannot

understanding. The latter is studied in the chapter on Transcendental Logic (the second part of the “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements”). We isolate this concept,⁴⁸ analyze it and distinguish its component parts, thus bringing the concept to distinction. Later on, in the chapter on the transcendental faculty of judgment, Kant synthesizes the two elements, sensibility and understanding, in a more complex synthesis. Thus, the *Critique* is built following this method of isolation and progressive synthesis.⁴⁹ The same pattern is observed in each part of the text and

supply by itself any knowledge or science” (Christian Bonnet, “Kant et les limites de la science”, p. 365). For additional material on the relation of passivity and activity in this context, see also Éric Dufour: “Remarques sur la note du paragraphe 26 de l’Analytique transcendantale. Les interprétations de Cohen et de Heidegger.”

⁴⁸ A 62, B 87: “In a transcendental logic we isolate the understanding --as above, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, the sensibility--”

⁴⁹ I have found here a difficulty I shall merely point out, without attempting to solve it. The procedure we have described is called *analytical* in the texts of 1762-1764. Now in Prol (AA IV, 274) Kant explicitly says that in the KrV he has employed the *synthetical* method. He also states that, in following the so-called analytical method (the one applied in Prol and in other writings), the searcher starts from a cognition which is presupposed to be true, and seeks for the conditions which make it possible. On the contrary, the synthetical method employed in the KrV does not presuppose anything except reason itself (“based on no data except reason itself” Prol, AA IV, 274, Beck’s translation p. 22). We will dare to identify this method with the one expounded in the writings of 1762 under the name of “analytical method” without attempting to solve the inconsistency resulting from it, since the designation of the method as analytic or as synthetic has no consequence upon what we would like to establish. This may just be a seeming inconsistency, anyway, since the text of *Prolegomena* refers to the *procedure of exposition* whereas the *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* (*Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit* AA II, 273f) as well as the Doctrine of Method of the KrV deal with the *method of philosophical science in general*, whose results may thereafter be exposed either synthetically or analytically. Jacques Rivelaygue solves the problem by admitting a twofold order: “In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the order of exposition is inverse to the order of demonstration. The main burden of proof lies upon the analysis of possible experience, but the exposition follows a synthetical order and starts from an initial theory of faculties which is not given as a first ground but is simply discovered by analysis.” (Jacques Rivelaygue, *Leçons de métaphysique allemande*, vol. II, p.75). See, however, the exact remarks of J. Benoist, *op. cit.* p. 310: “The subject is precisely that by which [the exposition] should not begin.” It should be observed that in the KrV the proof is not limited to establishing the conditions of the possibility of experience (as is the case in the analytical method employed in Prol and in FM), but rather proceeds its course towards an ever more complex

especially in the Transcendental Deduction, our subject of study. We propose, then, to interpret Kant's argument as beginning with the observation of a blurred (confused and indistinct) concept, whose elements are then isolated and brought to clarity and distinction. In so doing, we will probably be compelled to admit new elements, which will in turn be joined to the foregoing ones, thus synthetically enriching the concept with which we started. Whereas the starting point of the *Critique* as a whole is, as we have already said, the very general notion of representation, in the particular case of the Transcendental Deduction, the starting point is the vague concept of synthetical thought related to a manifold, that is, the indeterminate concept of "Combination in General."⁵⁰

After the chapter on the Transcendental Aesthetic, a new element is incorporated in the *Critique*: synthetical thought or spontaneity, i.e. understanding. This new element is introduced to provide an active function necessarily required for the possibility of representations, in addition to passive sensibility. This active function differentiates itself in various synthetical functions whose concepts are the categories. Now an explanation must be given as to how this spontaneous activity (and the concepts produced by it) may be applied to objects that have played no role in the generation of the *a priori* concepts produced by spontaneity. This gives rise to the Kantian formulation already mentioned:

The explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate *a priori* to objects I entitle their transcendental deduction. (B 117)

THE DEDUCTION AS A JURIDICAL QUESTION

The text of the Deduction begins with an introductory section in which the question to be handled is posed, not in a general manner, but in the context of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. At the beginning of Chapter 2 of the Analytic of Concepts, Kant introduces, in the very title, the term "Deduction", which he employs in a different sense than the usual one it receives in the Logic. How should "deduction" be understood in this context? The usual employment of the word might lead us to error. Should we expect to meet a logical structure composed of major and minor premises followed by a conclusion, we would be searching in vain. Some years ago, Dieter Henrich called attention to the fact that, in the 18th

representation, synthetically adding new elements. On account of this, we prefer to leave the question open.

⁵⁰ B 129, title of paragraph 15.

century, the term “deduction” referred to a genre of juridical literature, now obsolete but well known at the time.⁵¹ Deductions were allegations presented before the courts of justice of the Emperor. It was through deductions that issues of international law were handled and conflicts between states or kingdoms expounded. Each one of the contending parties aimed at proving the legitimacy of its claims by means of “deductions” in which they endeavoured to state that their claims were founded upon principles of law universally admitted as legitimate. Furthermore, juridical deductions had a specific rhetorical structure. It was normal to formulate the same claim many times from different points of view, which explains the frequency of repetitions and detours within a single text (a striking feature of the A version of the Transcendental Deduction). It was also typical to add a summary of the deduction at the end, such as that which is found in A 128f under the title “Summary Representation of the Correctness of this Deduction” and in B 168f under the title “Brief Outline of this Deduction.” Kant has before his eyes this work of the jurists, which he took as a model, as he himself suggests at the very beginning of the text. Henrich has shown in detail how the rhetorical structure of the Kantian Deduction, with its repetitions, its fresh beginnings and its detours, follows that of the juridical deductions of the time.

Thus, the rhetorical prescriptions of jurists account for the external wording of the Transcendental Deduction.⁵² But that does not mean that the Kantian Deduction of 1787 has no logical structure beyond these rhetorical features. Precisely, our hypothesis of interpretation aims at expounding the Deduction’s argumentative structure.

Our exposition of the Deduction in the following chapters is framed according to the main steps of Kant’s argument. In Chapter 1 (commentary on paragraphs 15 through 20), “a beginning of a Deduction” (B 144) is made, starting with the vague concept of combination and ending with the necessary connection of the pure concepts of understanding with an *object in general*. In Chapter 2 (commentary on paragraphs 21 through 25), the pure logical structure of “object in general” yields its place to the object given within the form of sensibility. Time is introduced, and imagination appears as that function of understanding which is able to operate not only in accordance with logical laws, but also in accordance with the conditions

⁵¹ Dieter Henrich, “Kant’s Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First *Critique*.”

⁵² “It appears that Kant thought his deduction as a text should be modeled on the juridical paradigm and meet its criteria of excellence” (Henrich, “Kant’s Notion of a Deduction...”, p.34).

of sensibility. In Chapter 3 (commentary on paragraphs 26 and 27 and on the “Brief Outline”), the scope of the Deduction is enlarged to embrace not only isolated actual objects but the whole of nature as well.