

WHAT HAS TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTION PROVEN?

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Abstract: This short paper intends to point some evidences that Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the categories should be read as an argument whose goal is to demonstrate that a discursive intellect has to be able to know objects, since otherwise a representation would not be able to be ascribed to the "I".

Keywords: Transcendental, critic, Kant.

INTRODUCTION:

The expression "Copernican Revolution", used by Kant to emphasize the rupture between critical philosophy and metaphysical tradition, takes us, above all, to consider the object of knowledge in a new way. Now, the problem of the relation between a representation and its object has a concept of the latter which is similar to a mathematical construction as its solvability condition. In other words, the form of the object is taken as constituted by cognitive operations. By exploring the Transcendental Deduction, we believe to have discovered that, more than the possibility that an object in the "weighty" sense is constituted by cognitive operations, Kant has even advocated that we always have to be able to execute those operations (since we have discursive intellect and sensible intuition). This amounts to say that it is our position in this paper that Kant, in the Transcendental Deduction, intended to be an opponent of skepticism, and not just of empiricism.

At the moment when we follow a tradition of interpreters who have found strong conclusions in the Transcendental Deduction (like, in our version, a proof that, in principle, a discursive intellect is always able to constitute objects in the "weighty" – intersubjective – sense), we have to answer to Karl Ameriks, who, in his famous paper "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument", aims to rule out this kind of interpretation, by proposing that we read Transcendental Deduction as an argument from assumption that there is empirical knowledge to its conditions. To provide that answer will be our goal.

1.

According to a well-known Kantian Thesis, there is not representation without syntheses, a subject activity. I have read both versions of Transcendental Deduction as a proof of necessity of *a priori* rules being able to be used in those syntheses, therefore, as a proof of possibility of objective

syntheses, so that an identical self-conscious subject can ascribe representations to itself. In a short paper like this, I can not follow Kant steps in this argument neither in Deduction A nor in Deduction B, but I can make an important movement by dealing with Karl Ameriks objection to this kind of reading.

For Ameriks, his major departure from those who read Transcendental Deduction as a proof of objectivity is that he “takes the *Critique* to accept empirical knowledge as a premise to be regressively explained rather than as conclusion to be established” (1978, p. 276)¹. This being so, Ameriks starts to criticize Strawson, Bennett and Wolff. Indeed Ameriks objections against Strawson and Bennett are not essential here. I take more advantage of his objection against Wolff, since I read the Transcendental Deduction in a similar way like Wolff does. This point, above all, has to do with a reading of the following passage in A-Deduction:

For even though we should have the power of associating perceptions, it would remain entirely undetermined and accidental whether they would themselves be associable; and should they not be associable, there might exist a multitude of perceptions, and indeed an entire sensibility, in which much empirical consciousness would arise in my mind, but in a state of separation, and without belonging to a [one] consciousness of myself. This, however, is impossible. For it is only because I ascribe all perceptions to one consciousness (original apperception) that I can say of all perceptions that I am conscious of them (*KrV*, A 121-2).

According to Ameriks, Wolff, with what I agree, takes that passage as a checkmate in favor of a strong reading of the Transcendental Deduction. Then, immediately, Ameriks points out that “What Kant is denying is the possibility of having a ‘multitude of perception’, an ‘entire sensibility’ which is ‘in my mind’ while there is no ‘one consciousness of myself’” (1978, p. 280). Thus, Ameriks omits the “state of separation” of that “multitude of perception”, what is even an indication of a distortion, because Kant’s argument, even if it is restricted to the above-cited passage, does not support only what Ameriks believes to be a triviality: many representations could not belong to one consciousness while there is no subject who has those representations (cf. *ibidem*, *idem*)². The passage makes clear that perceptions should be associable in themselves, because, if we were not able to associate them, it would happen the consequence that Kant thinks to be impossible: a multitude of representations would not be able to be ascribed to one consciousness of myself. Therefore, we can say that it is trivial that such multitude has to be ascribed to one self-consciousness, but it does not seem true that the passage aims only at making that point. That alleged “triviality” (personally, I prefer to call it “analytic truth”), in itself, just matters to a reduction to the absurd of a hypothesis opposed to the Kant’s one.

And what would Kant’s hypothesis be? Well, the argument in the passage, it is easy to note (“For even though...”), it is not complete without the immediately preceding passage, that is:

¹ Even though Allison does not take Ameriks as an opponent, that point seems to oppose the following Thesis in his paper “Apperception and analyticity in the B-Deduction”: “At least from § 16 on, then, the first part of the B-Deduction might be regarded as a ‘synthetic’ or ‘progressive’ argument” (1996, p. 49).

² Ameriks says “states”, but the argument is about “representations” (Kant, in the passage, says “perceptions”), and it is not true that every mental state is a representation in the sense that matters to the Kant’s argument here.

Now if this unity of association had not also an objective ground which makes it impossible that appearances should be apprehended by the imagination otherwise than under the condition of a possible synthetic unity of this apprehension, it would be entirely accidental that appearances should fit into a connected whole of human knowledge... [the next sentences are those that we are discussing about] (*KrV*, A 121, my emphasis).

Hence, it is textual that Kant drew allegedly absurd conclusions from the denial that *an objective ground* for phenomena determination is possible, which means the same as saying that he draws absurd conclusions from the denial that empirical knowledge is possible. Now, how can we say that the Transcendental Deduction does not aim at defending the objectivity notion, but it just starts from it?

2.

At this point, Ameriks adds nothing to the claims above ascribed to him, but, maybe with this kind of thought in mind, he makes some sort of a concession: “perhaps Wolff is right in thinking Kant did [advocated a strong thesis in the passage], but then it is significant that the passage occurs only in the first edition” (1978, p. 280). That just seems not true. I do not see as a fact that we can not find parallel passages in the second edition. I would like to offer two examples. First one:

The thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me, is therefore equivalent to the thought that I unite them in one self-consciousness, or can at least so unite them; and although this thought is not itself the consciousness of the synthesis of the representations, it presupposes the possibility of that synthesis. In other words, only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them one and all mine. For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself. Synthetic unity of the manifold of intuitions, as generated *a priori*, is thus the ground of the identity of apperception itself, which precedes *a priori* all my determinate thought (*KrV*, B 134-5).

That is from second edition and Kant is saying that a synthetic *a priori* unity of the manifold of intuitions is the ground of the identity of self-consciousness. I think it is safe to say that, according to Kant, a synthetic *a priori* unity of the manifold of intuitions is the same as a synthesis whose *a priori* rules allow us to refer our representations to their objects. Anyway, that seems clear in my second example:

The synthetic unity of consciousness is, therefore, an objective condition of all knowledge. It is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but is a condition under which every intuition must stand in order to *become an object for me*. For otherwise, in the absence of this synthesis, the manifold would not be united in one consciousness. Although this proposition makes synthetic unity a condition of all thought, it is, as already stated, itself analytic. For it says no more than that all my representations in any given intuition must be subject to that condition under which alone I can ascribe them to the identical self as my representations, and so can comprehend them as synthetically combined in one apperception through the general expression, 'I think' (*KrV*, B 138).

3.

At last, since Ewing's work *A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, I would like to add an objection against Ameriks' use of the way how Kant accounts for a Transcendental Exposition in the Transcendental Aesthetic to explain the structure of the Transcendental Deduction in the Analytic. That is what Ameriks says about the Aesthetic: "In a remarkably systematic paragraph added in the second edition Kant explains what he means by a 'transcendental exposition' and how it is that his analysis of space is one. Briefly Kant declares a transcendental account of a particular representation (B) to be one which shows how B explains the possibility of a kind of synthetic *a priori* knowledge (A)" (1978, p. 274). In other words, the transcendental ideality of space would be deduced when we prove that geometry as a science whose truth is presupposed flows from the space representation and it is only possible if that representation has an ideal nature.

I agree with Ameriks. I believe that is at least one of Kant's arguments in the Aesthetic, but Ewing had already shown a good reason why we should read Kant's strategy in the Transcendental Deduction in a different way: "On Kant's view synthetic self-evident propositions only occur where the characteristics connected can be found or brought together in a pure intuition" (1938, p. 67). Indeed, Kant says: "the synthetic propositions of pure, transcendental reason are, one and all, infinitely removed from being as evident – which is yet so often arrogantly claimed on their behalf – as the proposition that *twice two make four*" (*KrV*, A 733, B 761). Since mathematics has principles whose truth would be evident, it is easy to understand why Kant takes that certainty as a starting point in an argument that intends to show that it would not be possible if space or time had absolute reality. However, because the truth of discursive propositions does not have the same evidence, we can not conclude that a strategy once announced in the Aesthetic context holds for the Analytic too, even though, in the second edition of the *Critique* Introduction, Kant defends pure physics reality as well as pure mathematics reality (see *KrV*, B 20). In this regard, I would say that that passage should be read as a reference to the factual existence of a science called physics, and not to its supposed indubitability, for that would not make any sense at all before "The Discipline of Pure Reason" which we have dealt with and it is the section that treats systematically the question of certainty degree and of proof strategy appropriate concerning each kind of knowledge³.

³ Paul Guyer also pays attention to the use of two different methods by Kant. One of them has as starting point the truth of *a priori* principles, the other one does not: "In fact, Kant employs two radically different methods for the investigation of our cognitive constitution. In one mood, he simply assumes that we know certain proposition as universal and necessary truths; he then argues that such claims to knowledge of necessary truth can be explained only by our antecedent possession of certain conceptions and capacities which we must, in turn, be able to impose upon a reality [...]. In his other mood, Kant makes no initial claims to our knowledge of necessary truth but painstakingly displays principles that we must adopt in order to confirm even contingent empirical judgments" (1987, pp. 5-6). But, unlike us, Guyer does not care about the different contexts in which Kant uses each different method. By pointing changes in Kant's mood out, he thinks to find an "ambivalence about the proper method for the critical philosophy" (1987, p. 6).

Besides, back to the passage of the Introduction under analysis here, when Kant treats the possibility of someone placing in doubt pure physics reality, he tells us that science really exists, because it is contained in the principles of empirical physics (see *KrV*, B 21, footnote). Now, nobody will say that empirical physics is self-evident for Kant. Moreover, in the same context, he says that Hume would not have treated the rational knowledge involved in causal knowledge as a delusion if he had envisaged that pure mathematics is constituted by a rational knowledge of the same type. Then Kant says that Hume's good sense would have saved him from an objection against pure mathematics reality (see *KrV*, B 20), but Kant is not accusing Hume of not having good sense just because he intends to have overturned the objective grounds of physics. That is why that passage seems to take us to the distinction between intuitive and discursive certainty.

FINAL REMARKS

In short, my point is that a discursive synthetic judgement could not be the Transcendental Deduction starting point, exactly because a skeptical could not be, beforehand, accused of not being reasonable by placing it in check. Therefore, or Transcendental Deduction shares the skeptical point of view (mere empirical intentional consciousness) in its starting point or Kant was woken up from a dogmatic sleep by Hume, but he could not stand up to Hume.

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