

# Class Ten - Kant on Substance and Causality

Appearance and Reality - Ryan Simonelli

April 17, 2024

## 1 Recap of the Basic Picture

- **Kant's Copernican Turn:** Rather than thinking about our cognition as *conforming itself to objects*, and thinking about what those objects must be like, independent of any relation they bear to our cognition, think instead about objects as *conforming themselves to our cognition*. Then, we can think about what objects must be like by thinking about how they must be insofar as we have cognition of them.
  - **The A Priori Methodology Yielded by this Turn:** An investigation into what objects must be—which, if objects were conceived of as wholly independent, would seem to have to be an *empirical*—turns into an investigation into how it is that we conceive of objects insofar as we cognize them at all—a *reflective* investigation into the form of our own cognitive capacity.
- **Kant's Analysis of an Act of Cognition:** Kant breaks down an act of cognition as a joint act of two basic faculties of mind:
  - **Sensibility:** The faculty of mind through which we are *passively given objects*, through representations (or, perhaps better, “presentations”) that Kant calls “intuitions.”
    - \* **Intuitions:** “Intuition” here doesn't mean what we mean by it nowadays (for instance, when we say “I have a gut intuition that *p*”). Rather it is a *having in view*. My intuition of this blue bottle is my having this blue bottle in view. These are supplied by the faculty of sensibility and it is through them that we are “given” objects for cognition.
    - **Synthesis:** Intuitions are not simple immediate sensations (how Hume seems to imagine “impressions” to be) but, rather, are the product of the *synthesis* of a *manifold* of sensations.
      - Question for Hume:** How, actually, are “impressions” individuated. I've been speaking of an “impression of this bottle” but isn't there actually a manifold of impressions of gray patches, here, and then here, and then here?
      - Question for Kant (which he'll answer):** What's doing the synthesizing of the sensations that give rise to intuitions?
  - **The Understanding:** The faculty of mind through which we *actively grasp objects* through the use of *concepts*.
    - \* **Concepts:** A concept, for Kant, is a kind of rule: something that determines what an object can, must, and cannot do if it is to be the object that it is.
      - **Pure Concepts of the Understanding:** Rules that an object must conform to, not insofar as it is this kind of object or that one, but, insofar as it is an object *at all*.
- **Kant's Task:** Explicate the capacity for cognition in such a way that makes it clear that its objects—things that we can possibly be given in intuitions and conceptually grasp—necessarily conform to the pure concepts of the understanding, such as cause and effect.

## 2 The Objective Application of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding

- **The Basic Concepts of Natural Science:** Natural science is based on the idea of things with *natures*; things “whose existence is determined according to universal laws,” (46). Now, there are *particular* principles of natural science—for instance, that an object accelerates to earth at 9.8 meters per second squared—and then there are completely *universal* principles of natural science. These include principles of *substance* and *cause and effect*:

“But among the principles of this universal physics a few are found that actually have the universality we require, such as the proposition: that substance remains and persists, that everything that happens always previously is determined by a cause according to constant laws, and so on. These are truly universal laws of nature, that exist fully *a priori*. There is then in fact a pure natural science, and now the question is *How is this possible?*” (47).

- **The A Priori Nature of These Principles:** Unlike the particular principles of special natural sciences, which we arrive at through experimenting on objects and observing what they do, the absolutely universal principles that such as substance and cause and effect must be *a priori*, since any observation *presupposes* them, and so they can’t be based on observation.
  - **Note:** Kant takes a lot (Newtonian) physical concepts (e.g. motion, matter, and inertia), to be empirical rather than *a priori*, but the *basic conceptual framework* for physics is *a priori*. It’s interesting to wonder what Kant would have to say in light of more recent developments in non-Newtonian physics.
- **Subjective Validity and Objective Validity:** Two kinds of judgments:
  - **Subjectively Valid Judgment:** I look at one burner on the stove, which is black, and then I look at another burner on the stove, which is red.
    - \* I have an experience of “black burner” before an experience of “red burner,” but the succession of the two experiences is *merely subjective*.
  - **Objectively Valid Judgment:** I look at the black burner, turn the heat on, and then see it turn red, knowing that it’s because I turned the heat on that the burner went from black to red.
    - \* Ascribes an objective causal relation between heat, the burner’s being black, and the burner’s being red. Here we have a similar succession of impressions, but this succession is determined according to an objective rule.
      - **Note:** “Objective” here does *not* mean pertaining to things in themselves.
- **Hume’s View:** The only kind of judgments we can make regarding “causal connections” are merely subjectively valid—the simple linking of one sort of sensation as regularly following another sort of sensation in our consciousness.
- **Kant’s View:** Experience is, fundamentally, experience *of objects*, and, as such, requires taking the objects themselves to have objective validity, and this, in turn, requires the objective validity of the application of concepts such as causation to objects.

“For experience it is not, as is commonly imagined, sufficient to compare perceptions and to connect them in one consciousness by means of judging; from that there arises no universal validity and necessity of the judgment, on account of which it alone can be objectively valid and so can be experience,” (Prolegomena 52).

“[T]he relation between the two states must be thought in such a way that it is thereby necessarily determined which of them must be placed before and which after rather than vice versa. The concept, however, that carries a necessity of synthetic unity with it can only be a pure concept of the understanding, which does not lie in the perception, and that here is the concept of the *relation of cause and effect*, the former of which determines the latter in time, as its consequence,” (CPR B234).

- **Question:** How do we determine that the concepts are that objects of experience must, as such, conform to?
- **Kant's Basic Strategy:** Start with the basic forms of *judgment*, which we can arrive at through thinking about the capacity for judgment itself. Then articulate objects of experience as conforming to corresponding *concepts*, since they are, given our conception of them as cognizable, *fit for judgment*. In other words, insofar as cognition through judgments is possible, objects must conform to the concepts that correspond to the forms of the judgment.
 

“In order therefore to explain the possibility of experience insofar as it rests on pure a priori concepts of the understanding, we must first present that which belongs to judgments in general, and the various moments of the understanding therein, in a complete table; for the pure concepts of the understanding – which are nothing more than concepts of intuitions in general insofar as these intuitions are, with respect to one or another of these moments, in themselves determined to judgments and therefore determined necessarily and with universal validity – will come out exactly parallel to them,” (54).
- **The Strategy Applied:**
  - **Two Basic Kinds of Judgments:** Kant distinguishes between *categorical* judgments and *hypothetical* judgments:
    - \* **Categorical Judgments:** Judgments of the form “*S is P*” that assert, straight up, what or how something is.
      - **Example:** “The billiard ball is plastic.” Here, we’re saying what the billiard ball is made of. In this judgment, there is a *subject*—the billiard ball—and a *predicate*—plastic. We *apply* the predicate to the subject.
    - \* **Hypothetical Judgments:** Judgments of the form “If *S is P*, then *S is (or will be) Q*” that assert what or how something is or will be *on the hypothesis* that something else is the case.
      - **Example:** “If the billiard ball is plastic, then it will melt at 266 degrees Fahrenheit.” Here I’m not claiming that the billiard ball really *is* plastic (I might not know), just that *if* it is, then it will melt.
  - **Two Basic Categories of Concepts:** Corresponding to these two basic kinds of *judgments* are two basic kinds of *concepts*:
    - \* **Substance and Attribute:** The concept of some *persistent thing* and the various different *properties* or *attributes* that it possesses.
      - **Example:** The *billiard ball* is a *substance*, and one of its *attributes* is that it is plastic.
    - \* **Cause and Effect:** The concept of some object—a *cause*—having a *power* to bring about a certain effect.
      - **Example:** The billiard ball’s being heated to 266 degrees *causes* it to melt.
  - **The Core Thought:** The fact that objects *really do* conform to the principles of substance and attribute and cause and effect follows from the fact that they are cognizable by us and so capable of figuring in categorical and hypothetical judgments that we might make.
  - **Responding to Hume:** “This complete solution of the Humean problem, though coming out contrary to the surmise of the originator, thus restores to the pure concepts of the understanding their *a priori* origin, and to the universal laws of nature their validity as laws of the understanding, but in such a way that it restricts their use to experience only, because their possibility is founded solely in the relation of the understanding to experience: not, however, in such a way that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them, a completely reversed type of connection that never occurred to Hume,” (64-65).
- **An Argument:** Putting the pieces together, here’s the Kantian argument that objects (of experience) really do stand in causal relations and really do instantiate a substance/attribute structure.

1. Objects are essentially cognizable.
  - This is the explicit stipulation of transcendental idealism: what we *mean* by “object” is object of cognition—the sort of thing that is given to us in intuition and conceptually grasped.
2. Objects are cognizable only if they are fit for the fundamental forms of judgment.
3. Two fundamental forms of judgment are categorical and hypothetical.
4. Objects are fit for categorical and hypothetical judgment only if they conform to the categories of substance/attribute and cause and effect.
5. Thus, objects really do stand in causal relations and instantiate a substance/attribute structure.

**The Explanation for this Correspondence:** The explanation of this fact being that the same capacity that is actualized in judgment—the understanding—is actually at work in intuition:

- **From the First Critique:** “The same function that gives unity to the different representations *in judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding,” (A79/B105).

### 3 The Conventional and the Ultimate Revisited

- **Transcendental Idealism:** Don’t lose sight of the fact that this whole account is within the context of Kant’s *transcendental idealism*: “[E]ven the pure concepts of the understanding have no significance at all if they depart from objects of experience and want to be referred to things in themselves,” (64).
- **A Question to Keep in Mind:** Though Kant acknowledges that we can only think of things as having natures and standing in causal relations insofar as we conceive of things as objects of experience, does he not maintain that the mind itself has an intrinsic nature that can, itself, be regarded as “ultimately real”?