

Kant's Transcendental Deductions

The Three *Critiques* and
the *Opus postumum*

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Preface

In the Preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant wrote: “I know no inquiries which are more important for exploring the faculty which we entitle understanding, and for determining the rules and limits of its employment, than those which I have instituted . . . under the title *Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding*. They are also those which have cost me the greatest labor—labor, as I hope, not unrewarded.”

Kant’s expectations were at first disappointed; the reception of the deduction fell short of what he had hoped for. Early reviewers of the *Critique* failed to penetrate the complexities of the difficult argument with which Kant tried to prove that the pure concepts of the understanding relate a priori to objects. As one of them put it succinctly, the part of the *Critique* that, in view of its importance, should be the clearest is in fact the most obscure.

Kant acknowledged this obscurity in a long footnote to the Preface of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), pointing out that the shortest way is hardly ever the first the understanding becomes aware of in its inquiries. Confident that a more perspicuous presentation of the deduction was now within his reach, he promised to take the earliest opportunity to clarify his argument.

Such an opportunity presented itself to Kant only one year later, when a second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was called for.

For this edition, Kant completely rewrote the chapter on the transcendental deduction of the categories. Perhaps even more than its predecessor in the first edition, this argument has fascinated philosophers ever since. But, as 200 years of scholarship suggest, the perspicuity that Kant foresaw for the new version is not one of its many merits. Questions about the details and structure of this argument, and about how the two versions compare, continue to preoccupy Kant's readers. When facing the many problems posed by the transcendental deduction of the categories, the reader may find little consolation in the fact that Kant himself, long after the second edition of the *Critique*, continued to struggle with this argument (C 12 : 222–25).

There is another dimension to the problem of understanding Kant's deduction of the categories that must be mentioned. Kant's aim in writing the *Critique* was to establish the possibility of metaphysics as a science, by determining the origin, limit, and extent of possible a priori knowledge. The *Critique* is designed as the propaedeutics for the entire system of pure reason—the metaphysics of nature as well as of morals. That another critique might be required to secure metaphysics, or one of its branches, in its proper employment is a thought entirely foreign to the *Critique* of 1781.

Yet shortly after, even before the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant began to realize that the metaphysics of morals requires a separate propaedeutic study, and with it a transcendental deduction of its own. The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), which culminates in a deduction of the moral law, was designed to fill this lacuna. Three years later, however, Kant followed this with a *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which the moral law is presented as a fact of reason, in no need of special justification; instead, Kant here proceeds from the moral law to a deduction of the concept of freedom.

Whether Kant's position in the second *Critique* amounts to a revision of that of the *Groundwork* or merely reflects a shift of emphasis is a question of considerable controversy. However that may be, the question of how any deductions in his moral philosophy relate to, and compare with, Kant's master argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* suggests itself almost immediately. Any comprehensive interpretation of the transcendental deduction of the categories in the first *Critique* should also elucidate the structure of deductions in Kant's ethics.

Such an interpretation should also be able to accommodate the

two transcendental deductions Kant offered two years later when the critical undertaking was further expanded with a *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Here, Kant provides a deduction of the principle of a formal purposiveness of nature, developed in the two versions of the Introduction to this text, and a deduction of pure aesthetic judgments or judgments of taste, to be found in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*.

Finally, we must notice that in the large, unfinished work that has become known as his *Opus postumum*, Kant also speaks, for a while at least, of a deduction of an ether, that is, of the collective whole of the moving forces of matter. In other parts of this text, he develops arguments that have suggested to some commentators that Kant, during the last years of his life, worked on a new transcendental deduction of the categories.

What unity is there in this diversity? Can a better understanding of Kant's strategy in his transcendental deductions result from examining these arguments, not in isolation but in relation to their counterparts in the other domains of Kant's philosophizing?

To explore this possibility, and to commemorate the bicentennial of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the Stanford Philosophy Department invited some of today's leading Kant scholars to discuss their research on the various forms transcendental deductions take in Kant's work. With two exceptions, the papers collected in this volume were presented at the resulting conference, held at Stanford University in April 1987. Wolfgang Carl read his paper the day before the conference at a colloquium of the Stanford Philosophy Department. Lewis White Beck, although unable to be present at the time, kindly agreed to write a commentary on Carl's paper. All papers are published here for the first time.

The conference was made possible by generous grants from the Division of Research Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Goethe Institute of San Francisco, the Provost of Stanford University, its Dean of Humanities and Sciences, and the Stanford Humanities Center. I record their support with gratitude. I was also fortunate to enjoy a Fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center, and the intellectual stimulation and freedom from other responsibilities that come with it, during the time when this volume was in its various stages of preparation.

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