

IMMANUEL KANT

Correspondence

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

ARNULF ZWEIG

1784
1785
1786
1787
1788



unavoidably driven to seek the *unconditioned*, where our thinking becomes *transcendent*; i.e., involves concepts whose objective reality cannot be assured at all and by means of which, therefore, no *cognition* of objects can take place. I wanted to show, in the Dialectic of Pure Reason (setting up its antinomies), that those objects of possible experience are to be recognized as objects of the senses, appearances only, not things in themselves. I wanted then to make the Deduction of the categories comprehensible by showing its relation to the sensuous forms of space and time, as the conditions of the uniting of these for a possible experience; but I wanted to present the categories themselves as concepts that make it possible to think of objects at all² (be the intuition of whatever form it will), and then I wanted also to determine³ their extension beyond the boundaries of sense, an extension which however yields no cognition. Well, enough of this.

You put the matter quite precisely when you say, "The union⁴ of representations is itself the object, and the activity of the mind whereby this union of representations is represented⁵ is what we mean by 'relating them to the object.'" But one may still ask: How can a union of representations, being *complex*, be represented? Not through the awareness that it is *given* to us; for a union requires *uniting*, (*synthesis*), of the *manifold*. It *must thus*, (*since it is a union*), be *produced*, and produced furthermore by an inner activity that is valid for a *given* manifold in general and that precedes a priori the manner in which the manifold is given. In other words, the union can only be *thought* in a concept by means of the synthetic unity of consciousness – thought in a concept (of object in general), a concept that is undetermined with respect to the manner in which anything may be given in intuition, and this concept, applied to⁶ an object in general, is the category. The merely subjective state of the thinking subject,⁴ insofar as the manifold is given to that subject in a particular manner (for composition and its synthetic unity) is called "sensitivity"; and this manner (of intuition, given a priori), is called the sensible form of intuition. By means of this form and with the help of the categories, objects are *cognized*⁶ but only as things in the realm of appearance and not as they may be in themselves. Without any intuition they would not be cognized at all, though they would still be thought; but if one not only abstracts from all intuition but actually excludes it, then one cannot guarantee the objective reality

⁴ *Inbegriff*

⁵ Or "presented," "conceived" ("vorgestellt wird").

⁶ Or "composition," Eckart Förster's suggested translation of *Zusammensetzung*. The verb *Zusammensetzen* that Kant uses here could also be rendered as "combining."

⁴ Or "of the representing subject" ("des Vorstellenden Subjects").

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Worthiest friend,

I have made you wait a long time for a response to your letter of December 9 of last year, but it is not my fault. For pressing labors hang about my neck and my age imposes on me a necessity I would not otherwise feel, to devote my thoughts to the project before me until I am finished with it. I must not let anything alien interrupt my thinking, for once I let go of the thread, I cannot find it again.

You have presented me with your thorough investigation of what is just the hardest thing in the whole *Critique*, namely, the analysis of an experience in general and the principles that make experience in general possible. – I have already made plans for a system of metaphysics to handle this difficulty and to begin with the categories, in their proper order (having first merely expounded, without investigating their possibility, the pure intuitions of space and time in which alone objects can be given to the categories); and I would demonstrate, at the conclusion of the exposition of each category (for example, Quantity and all predicables included under it, along with examples of their use), that no experience of objects of the senses is possible except insofar as I presuppose a priori that every such object must be *thought* of as a magnitude, and similarly with all the other categories. Here I shall always remark that such objects can be represented by us only as *given* in space and time. Out of this there emerges a whole science of Ontology as *immanent* thinking, i.e., a science of things the objective reality of whose concepts can be securely established. Only afterwards, in the second section, will it be shown that in this same science all *conditions* of the possibility of objects are themselves *conditioned*, and yet reason is

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