

Idealism and freedom

Essays on Kant's theoretical
and practical philosophy

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to the manifold of a given intuition in general" (B144–45). Only such an argument would suffice to eliminate the specter of the nonconformity of appearances to the categorical functions of the understanding, which is precisely what is required at this point.

Kant attempts to establish this result in two stages: first, in §24, he argues that the representations of space and time as unities require a transcendental synthesis of the imagination governed by the categories; then, in §26, he argues that the empirical synthesis of apprehension, which is constitutive of perception, is itself subject to the conditions of the transcendental synthesis. Together, they yield the conclusion that all of the manifold of human sensibility is subject to the categories, which completely eliminates the specter of nonconformity. As I argued in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, however, the key move, the very locus of syntheticity in the B-Deduction, occurs in §24 with the appeal to the transcendental synthesis of the imagination.³⁶

This is not, of course, to say that this complex second part of Kant's argument, which involves, among other things, an explicit appeal to the results of the Transcendental Aesthetic, is entirely unproblematic. On the contrary, I have maintained that there are major gaps in the argument and that on even the most charitable interpretation (one which accepts as valid the results of the Aesthetic, the Metaphysical Deduction and the first part of the Transcendental Deduction), it falls far short of complete success.³⁷ Nevertheless, none of this need concern us here, for our present focus is on the proof-structure of the B-Deduction rather than on the validity or overall soundness of its argument. Moreover, to this end, it suffices to show that the analyticity of the principle of apperception is perfectly compatible with the goals and strategy of the Deduction as a whole. Indeed, it makes it much clearer than alternative readings just why Kant divided the proof into two parts.

On naturalizing Kant's transcendental psychology

Even though Kant himself never used the term in that way, 'transcendental psychology' has attained wide prominence as a label for what is thought to be most objectionable in Kant's theoretical philosophy, namely, the account of the transcendental activities of the mind. This state of affairs is largely the work of P. F. Strawson, who in his enormously influential study, *The Bounds of Sense*, endeavored to separate what he took to be Kant's "analytic argument" from the concept of experience to "a certain objectivity and a certain unity" as conditions of the possibility of experience from the "imaginary subject of transcendental psychology."¹

In spite of widespread disagreement regarding the nature and soundness of this analytic argument, the general Strawsonian approach to Kant, and particularly the curt dismissal of Kant's account of the mind and its activities, has been the hallmark of analytic Kant interpretation for approximately a quarter century. Recently, however, things have begun to change, as a new generation of analytical philosophers, trained in naturalized epistemology and cognitive science and distrustful of conceptual analysis, have turned their attention to Kant. Among the forefront of this new breed of Kantians is Patricia Kitcher, who in the very title of her recent book, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*, issues a bold challenge to Strawson.² According to Kitcher, Kant's transcendental psychology, properly, that is, naturalistically, construed, contains an account of mental unity that is demonstrably superior to Hume's, combined with a functionalistic and, therefore, essentially causal account of the content of representations. Thus, far from being an unnecessary appendage that can easily be removed without substantial damage to the body of the work, Kant's transcendental psychology is now seen as the very heart of the enterprise. Indeed, it appears to contain virtually everything that is of interest in the *Critique*.

But herein lies the problem; for in its own way this new reading of Kant is as dismissive of central features of the *Critique* as the analytic reading which it replaces. Accordingly, my concern here is precisely with those aspects of Kant that are dismissed by Kitcher on the grounds that they do not fit into her naturalized picture. I shall argue that her version not only leaves a distorted view of the historical Kant, but also obscures some of his most important insights, specifically, those regarding self-consciousness and spontaneity. This

essay is divided into four parts. The first presents a brief sketch of Kitcher's account, including her dismissive treatment of Kant's treatments of self-consciousness and spontaneity. The second and third parts attempt respectively to rehabilitate these notions, arguing for both their coherence and their centrality to Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The fourth deals with the thorny question of the nature of the self or subject of transcendental psychology. It argues against Kitcher and other naturalizers that it cannot be equated with the empirical self, but also that it is not to be identified with some inaccessible noumenal entity.

I

Although she begins with an analysis of Kant's account of spatial perception, the major focus of Kitcher's concern is Kant's transcendental psychology proper, that is, the doctrine of synthesis *cum* apperception, which constitutes the heart of the so-called "subjective deduction." Quite apart from its role in the proof-structure of the deduction, she finds in Kant's treatment of this complex topic an explicit answer to Hume's doubts about mental unity, which can be elucidated in contemporary terms and which when so elucidated makes a significant contribution to the ongoing debate about personal identity.

According to Kitcher's formal definition, "A synthesis is an act, or to be more neutral, a process that produces a representation, by adding or combining diverse elements contained in different cognitive states in a further state that contains elements from these states."³ The result of a synthesis of "cognitive states" (which is Kitcher's preferred rendering of Kant's *Vorstellungen*,) is thus a further cognitive state, which contains within itself the content embodied or encoded in the preceding states. Representations, on this view, are said to represent, that is, have cognitive content, partly because they are produced by sensory states that are themselves caused by objects affecting the sense organs and partly because they can lead to further representations.⁴ Since the cognitive or representative content of a particular representation is thus a function of its place within the system of representations rather than its own intrinsic nature, Kitcher appropriately terms this, "a 'functionalist' theory of the content of representations."⁵ Also in the spirit of functionalism, this cognitive system can be analyzed independently of any consideration of the nature of the material or "hardware" in which it is actualized.

Given this analysis, it follows that not merely the content but the very existence of cognitive states or representations is dependent upon previous states (plus initial "input"). Accordingly, Kitcher claims that syntheses produce a "relation of existential dependence on cognitive states."⁶ In explaining this choice of terminology, Kitcher remarks that synthesis, so characterized, would appear to be a causal process, but she refrains from calling it such on the grounds that the introduction of the doctrine of synthesis in the Deduction

precedes the demonstration of the principle of causality in the Second Analogy and would thus open Kant to a Humean critique. Consequently, the notion of existential dependence is supposed to capture a connection among cognitive states that is stronger than Hume's appeal to association but weaker than the "strong notion of causation" affirmed in the Second Analogy.⁷ But since Kitcher neither explains how this relation differs from full-fledged causation nor shows any compunction elsewhere about referring to causal connections between cognitive states, it seems reasonable to take her to be attributing to Kant the view that cognitive states synthetically connected are related as cause and effect.⁸

For Kitcher, this functionalist analysis not only provides the key to explaining how cognitive states can represent and, therefore, in Kantian terms, how judgment is possible, it also accounts for that unity of the mind that proved to be so problematic for Hume and that Kant termed the "transcendental unity of apperception." According to Kitcher, then, "the 'unity of apperception' refers to the *fact* [emphasis mine] that cognitive states are connected to each other through syntheses required for cognition."⁹ As such, the doctrine of apperception is the conclusion of Kant's anti-Humean argument rather than, as is usually thought to be the case, the veritable first premise of the Transcendental Deduction.¹⁰ Moreover, as she is quick to point out, apperception, so construed, has nothing to do with the awareness of a self and/or its states or the reflexivity of human experience. Kitcher admits that it often seems as if Kant had something like the latter in mind, but this is glossed as the result of Leibnizian ideas that he was able to neither abandon nor integrate into his essentially functionalist account.¹¹

This complete exsistence of any reference to self-awareness or reflexivity from the authentic Kantian account is also a prominent feature of Kitcher's discussion of synthesis. To be sure, the synthetic processes that produce the unity of the mind and make possible the representation of objects are guided by concepts or rules, but Kitcher is insistent that this not be understood as a matter of conscious rule following. On the contrary, she appeals to Kant's characterization of the imagination as a "*blind* [her emphasis], but indispensable function of the soul" (A78/B103), and suggests that "[R]ules govern syntheses only as the law of gravity governs the movements of the planets."¹²

This view of synthesis is thoroughly in the spirit of contemporary functionalism and provides a reasonably plausible reading of Kant, as long as one confines oneself to the putative activity of the imagination. It is clear from what she says elsewhere, however, that Kitcher does not limit her claim to the operation of the Kantian imagination as distinct from the understanding. On the contrary, appealing to Kant's own emendation of the above cited passage from A78/B103, in which 'understanding' is substituted for 'soul,' she takes the activity of the understanding in conceptualization and judgment to be identical to that of the imagination and, therefore, likewise "blind" or uncon-

enable them to have cognitive capacities required for agency. In Daniel Dennett's useful terminology, they are 'subpersonal' processes, not acts performed by persons.¹⁵

Since, as Kitcher herself notes, Kant links spontaneity closely with apperception (the consciousness of the 'I think'), this response simply begs the question against anyone who might try to make sense of Kant's appeal to spontaneity and a consciousness thereof. She goes somewhat beyond the bare reiteration of her position, however, in the attached note, in which she reiterates to criticisms of her earlier accounts of apperception by Robert Pippin and myself. There she suggests that the real difference between her view and ours is the nature of the spontaneity involved in acts of synthesis. She takes it to be a merely "relative spontaneity," while Pippin and I regard it as absolute. The latter, she maintains, can be ruled out on the grounds that if Kant thought that his doctrine of apperception or synthesis implied absolute spontaneity, he would also have thought that he had a theoretical proof of transcendental freedom, something which the "critical" Kant explicitly denied. Nor, she maintains, is it possible to avoid this implication (as Pippin attempts to do) by claiming that a proof that reason must be assumed spontaneous in one context does not entail that it must likewise be viewed as spontaneous in others. She thinks that this response is too weak, since even though absolute freedom in thinking does not entail a similar freedom in acting, "it would be a giant step in the right direction." And, she adds, "If the universal sway of determinism is once breached, then the plausibility of other exceptions would increase dramatically, as Kant would fully appreciate."¹⁹

Unfortunately, Kitcher never bothers to explain how she understands the notion of relative spontaneity (which plays a significant role in Kant's "precritical" accounts of agency²⁰) or how it relates to her causal-functional account of synthesis and mental unity. Accordingly, it seems safe to conclude that for Kitcher's Kant, as for a contemporary functionalist, the mind is nothing but a causally and contentually connected system of mental states, which, as such, allows no room for a consciousness of the I and its activity. Thus, in spite of this rehabilitation of transcendental psychology, Kitcher's Kant, like Strawson's, turns out to be very much a "bowdlerized Kant."²¹ Whether this bowdlerization is warranted is the question we must now consider.

II

In dealing with this question, it will be useful to begin with a consideration of a particularly dense passage from the "preparatory" section of the *A-Deduction*, which contains, either directly or by implication, virtually all the features of Kant's transcendental psychology to which Kitcher objects. The passage follows upon Kant's initial introduction of the notion of transcendental apperception, its distinction from inner sense or empirical apperception, and

scious.¹³ Given this identification, it is not surprising that Kitcher consistently denies any proper role for consciousness or awareness with respect to the subject's own mental activity, dismissively characterizing such a putative consciousness as "synthesis watching."¹⁴

Nevertheless, as in the case of apperception, Kitcher can hardly deny the existence of numerous texts which suggest a quite different reading, since they appear to affirm the conscious nature of synthetic activity (at least to the extent to which this activity is attributed to the understanding). Although she never really deals with this exegetical problem in a direct and detailed fashion, she does adopt a number of tactics intended to defuse its seriousness. One of these is to accuse Kant of a confusion of levels. Accordingly, Kant is judged guilty of confusing what the theorist asserts about the generation of cognitive states with what the subject is aware of in this process of generation.¹⁵ Another is to suggest that Kant was not serious about synthesis watching, since he denies it almost as often as he affirms it.¹⁶ Still another is to blame it on the influence of Tetens' psychology, whom Kant supposedly followed on this point without recognizing its incompatibility with his own best insights.¹⁷ Together, then, these tactics are intended to reinforce the claim that it is safe to ignore the aberration of synthesis watching in an investigation of Kant's account of the cognitive activity of the mind.

Another prominent feature of Kant's account that is notably lacking in Kitcher's reconstruction is the notion of spontaneity. Since Kant characterizes the understanding as the "spontaneity of knowledge" at the very beginning of the *Transcendental Analytic* (A51/B75) and refers to it on several occasions thereafter (including a characterization of the representation 'I think' as "an act of spontaneity" [B132] and a characterization of apperception as a "consciousness of spontaneity" [B158n]), one would expect an analysis of this central conception to loom large in any account of Kant's views on the nature and activity of the mind. Instead, we find merely a single brief discussion of spontaneity in the text of *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*, which is then expanded upon somewhat in a note attached to that discussion. In the text, Kitcher acknowledges these passages and admits that "taken at face value" they suggest that "a thinker is not a contentually connected system of states, but that which connects cognitive states." And, given the fact that Kant himself links apperception and spontaneity so closely, she admits that "it is tempting to interpret the self, or consciousness, or apperception as something like the power or source of spontaneity itself." Nevertheless, she insists that we must resist this temptation on the grounds that it leads to incoherence. As she puts it:

The self cannot be identified with acts of spontaneity, since these are distinct events. It could only be the agent that performs these acts. But acts or processes of synthesis could not be performed by agents. They are unconscious activities within agents that

the affirmation of the unity of apperception as a transcendental condition of the representation of objects. In this context, Kant claims that the unity of consciousness required for cognition "would be impossible if the mind in knowledge of the manifold could not become conscious of the identity of function whereby it synthetically combines it in one cognition" (A108). Apparently, by way of reinforcing this point, Kant adds one sentence later:

For the mind could never think its identity in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this identity *a priori*, if it did not have before its eyes [*vor Augen hätte*] the identity of its act [*Handlung*], whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, thereby rendering possible their interconnection according to *a priori* rules (A108).

The passage as a whole contains at least three distinct claims which need to be sorted out: (1) The unity of consciousness (equated with the transcendental unity of apperception) is a necessary condition for the mind to perform its basic cognitive task: the representation of objects. (2) This unity is inseparably linked to the mind's capacity to think its own identity in the representation of its manifold, indeed, to think it *a priori* (which Kitcher presumably regards as a level confusion). (3) The mind can think its identity only insofar as it can become conscious of the identity of its function or act (which, for Kitcher, amounts to synthesis watching). Although we shall begin with a consideration of the first claim, since it underlies Kant's whole account of objectivity, the focus will be on the second and third, which are the main targets of the naturalizer's critique. The difficulty, however, concerns not simply the claims themselves, but also the fact that here and in many other places Kant seems to move from one to the other without anything in the way of argument, as if the connections between them were self-evident. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that much of the Deduction has remained opaque to many interpreters (including both Strawson and Kitcher).

I do not pretend to be able to remove all of this opacity, and certainly not within the brief confines of this paper. Nevertheless, I do hope to reduce it somewhat by filling in some of the gaps and bringing out the underlying assumptions of Kant's argument. As a first step, it is absolutely essential to keep firmly in mind the normative concern of the Deduction. That the concern of the Deduction is normative is itself hardly controversial, since Kant famously distinguishes the *quid juris* from the *quid facti* and contends that he is concerned only with the former (A84–85/B116–17). What is not always recognized, however, is that even Kant's transcendental psychology or, as it is usually termed, the "subjective deduction," must be understood in light of this normative concern, that is, as part of the project of justifying or establishing the objective validity of the categories.²²

This normative dimension is made evident by even a brief consideration of the subjective deduction, which can be characterized as an investigation of the

subjective conditions of the representation of objects by a mind relevantly like the human (a discursive intelligence with space and time as its forms of sensibility). At the heart of the deduction is an account of the imagination, which has the intent of showing that it is both indispensable and insufficient for cognition. Although rich and suggestive, we can here neglect the details of this account and need consider only the basic reasons for the imagination's indispensability and insufficiency.

Simply put, the indispensability of the imagination stems from its role in unifying the temporally discreet data of inner sense (the manifold of representations). Without this unifying activity, the mind would not have a whole of representations with which to work. As Kant puts it at one point, "since every appearance contains a manifold, and since different perceptions occur in the mind separately and singly, a combination of them, such as they cannot have in sense itself, is demanded" (A120). Of itself, however, imaginative unification is insufficient for cognition, since it yields a merely subjective order of representations, one which reflects the contingencies of the perceptual situation (e.g. the fact that one happens to perceive *a* before *b*) rather than an objectively valid connection. It is in order to account for the conditions of the possibility of the latter, which is, after all, the goal of the Transcendental Deduction, that Kant introduces the understanding and its indigenous set of pure concepts.

The argument for the constitutive role of the understanding turns on the familiar, yet crucial, reflection that, since we cannot, as it were, step outside of our representations in order to compare them with an object, objective representation requires that we think our representations as unified in consciousness by means of a rule which requires that they be thought in a determinate way (e.g. as *a-b* rather than *b-a*). Such a rule is, of course, a pure concept of the understanding or category; it supposedly accounts for objectivity by imposing a conceptual constraint on the *thought* of the order and connection of the intuitively given representations. In other words, it provides an ordering principle that applies not merely to the connection of representations in a particular consciousness but to their connection in what Kant in the *Prolegomena* terms "consciousness in general." This, in turn, gives to the thought ordering the necessity and universality requisite for objectivity.

Although this line of argument establishes a necessary (rule-governed) unity of consciousness as a condition of objective representation, it says nothing about the mind's thought of its own identity or, indeed, about *self-consciousness* in any form. In order to understand this aspect of Kant's thought (and, therefore, claims two and three), it is necessary to realize that what is required for objective representation is not simply the *de facto* presence of a rule-governed unity of representations in consciousness (something like Kitcher's relation of "contentual dependence"), but the thought or conceptual recognition of this unity. In other words, this unity must not only be

