

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 represented" 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 to⁴ 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*⁵ 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."

⁷ Or "of the representing subject" ("des Vorstellenden Subjects").

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

130 [500] (468)

To Jacob Sigismund Beck.

January 20, 1792¹

of the categories (that they in fact represent anything at all and are not empty concepts).

Perhaps you can avoid defining "sensitivity" right at the outset in terms of "receptivity," that is, the kind of representations that occur in the subject insofar as the subject is affected by objects. Perhaps you can identify it rather as that which, in a cognition, constitutes merely the relation of the representation to the subject, so that its form¹, in this relation to the object of intuition, allows us to cognize no more than the appearance of this object. But that this subjective thing constitutes only the manner in which the subject is affected by representations, and consequently is nothing more than the receptivity of the subject, is already implied by its being merely a modification² of the subject.

In short, since this whole analysis only aims to show that experience is only possible with certain a priori principles,⁴ and this thesis cannot be made truly comprehensible until those principles are actually exhibited, I think it prudent to keep the work as brief as possible before these principles are presented. Perhaps the way I proceed in my lectures, in which I have to be brief, can be of some help to you.

I begin by defining "experience" in terms of *empirical cognition*. But cognition is the representation *through concepts* of a *given* object as such; it is empirical cognition if the object is given in the senses' representation (the latter includes both sensation and sensation bound up with consciousness, i.e., perception); it is a priori cognition if the object is given, but not given in a representation of the senses⁵ (which⁷ thus nonetheless can always be sensible). Two sorts of representations are needed for cognition: 1) intuition, by means of which an object is given, 2) concept, by means of which it is thought. To make a single cognition out of these two *pieces of cognition* a further activity is required: the composition of the *manifold given in intuition* in conformity with the synthetic unity of consciousness, which is expressed by the concept. Since composition, either through the object or through its representation in intuition, cannot be *given* but must be *produced*, it must rest on the pure spontaneity of the understanding in concepts of objects in general (of the composition of the given manifold). But since concepts to which no corresponding objects *could* be given, being therefore entirely objectless, would not even be concepts (they would be thoughts through which I think nothing at all), just for that reason a manifold must be given a priori for those a priori concepts. And because it is given a priori, it must be given in an intuition without any thing as object, that is, given in just the form of intuition, which is just

¹ "die Form derselben" is ambiguous: the form of sensibility or the form of the affecting objects.

² *Bestimmung*

⁵ *Sinnensvorstellung*

subjective (space and time); it is therefore in conformity with the merely sensible intuition, whose synthesis through the imagination, under the rule of the synthetic unity of consciousness, the concept expresses; for the rule of the schematism of concepts of the understanding is then applied to perceptions (in which objects are given to the senses by means of sensation).

I close herewith my hurriedly composed sketch and beg you not to let my delay in replying to your letter, a delay caused by random impediments, keep you from disclosing your thoughts to me at any time that you encounter difficulties. I am, with the greatest respect,

Your

I. Kant.

Königsberg, 20 January, 1792.

P.S. Please mail the enclosed letter right away.

- 1 This letter is an answer to Beck's letter (not extant) of Dec. 9, 1791.
- 2 Or, "I wanted to present the categories themselves as concepts that make it possible to think of objects in general" ("... Kategorien ... als Begriffen Objekte überhaupt zu denken").
- 3 Or, "I wanted to secure [ausmachen] the [non-cognitive] extension of the categories beyond the limits of the senses." Both the meaning and relation of "ausmachen" is ambiguous.
- 4 Or "is only a priori possible..."; grammatically, "a priori" could modify either "principles" or "possible."
- 5 Grammatically, the word "which" (*die*) could refer either to "a priori cognition" or to "representation." As the remainder of this paragraph shows, Kant's point is that even a priori cognitions require something given, hence they are "sensible" in the way that pure intuitions are, though not "of the senses," i.e., empirical.

131 [503] (471)

To Johann Heinrich Kant.

January 26, 1792.

Dear brother,

Herr Reimer, the bearer of this letter, a relative [nephew] of your wife's, my dear sister-in-law,¹ visited me, and I could not refrain from

- II. Sphere of *simplicité* ou de *jugement* (intuition, "sens commun", intelligence, "bon sens");
 III. Sphere of *raison* (*perspicuité, conséquence, prudence*);
 IV. Sphere of *perspicacité* ou de *transcendance* (*méditation, profondeur, intégralité, philosophie*);
 V. Sphere of *esprit* (*sagacité, imagination, goût, génie*).
 Between the individual spheres lie the "espaces d'erreur," and beyond the fifth sphere, "espaces imaginaires."
 2 Kant's sentence is incomplete.
 3 Terence, *Eunuchus* I, i. Cf. Kant's *Anthropologie*, § 43.

141 [520] (488)

To Jacob Sigismund Beck.

July 3, 1792.

11:346 It is certainly not indifference to the questions you posed, treasured friend, that has kept me from answering your latest letter. Rather, there were other tasks to which I had committed myself, and at my age I must not interrupt my reflections on one subject with issues of a different sort, for if I do I shall not be able to recover the thread where I left off. —

The difference between the connection of representations in a concept and the connection of representations in a judgment — for example, "the black man" and "the man is black" (in other words, "the man who is black" and "the man is black"), lies, I think, in this: in the first, one thinks of a concept as *determinate*;^a in the second, one thinks of the activity of my *determining*^b of this concept. Therefore you are quite right to say that in the *synthesized* concept, the unity of consciousness should be *acknowledged* as *subjectively* given, whereas in the *synthesizing* of concepts the unity of consciousness should be *acknowledged* as *objectively* made; that is, in the first, the man is merely *thought* as black (problematically represented), and in the second, he is *acknowledged* as black. Therefore the question arises, Can I say without contradicting myself: the black man (who is black at a certain time) is white (that is, he is white, has paled, at another time)? I answer no; for in this judgment I carry over the concept of black along with the concept of non-black, since the subject is thought as determinate with regard to

^a *bestimmt*
^c *erkannt*

^b *die Handlung meines Bestimmens*

the first. Consequently, since the subject would be both black and non-black at once, the judgment would unavoidably contradict itself. On the other hand, I can say of the same man, "He is black" and also, "Just this man is not black" (namely, at some other time, when he has paled), since in both judgments only the activity of *determining*, which here depends on experiential and temporal conditions, is indicated. You will find more of this in the discussion of the principle of contradiction, in my *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹

As for your definition of intuition as a thoroughly *determinate* representation in respect to a given manifold, I would have nothing further to add except this: the thorough determination here must be understood as objective, not merely as existing in the subject (since it is impossible for us to know all determinations of the object of an empirical intuition). For then the definition would only say that an intuition is the representation of a *given* particular. Now, since nothing composite^d can be *as composite*^e be given to us — rather, the *composition*^f of the manifold is something we ourselves must always *produce*^g — and since too the composition, if it is to conform to the object, cannot be arbitrary,^h it follows that even if a composite cannot be given, nevertheless the form, i.e., the only form in accordance with which the given manifold can be composed, must be given a priori. This³ form then is the merely subjective (sensible) aspect of intuition, which is indeed *a priori* but is not *thought* (for only *composition* as activity is a product of thinking); rather it must be *given* in us (space and time) and consequently it must be a *singular* representation and not a concept (a general representation, *repräsentatio communis*). It seems to me a good idea not to spend too much time on the most subtle analysis of elementary representations, for the discussion that follows makes them sufficiently clear through their use.

As for the question, Can there not be actions incompatible with the existence of a natural order but which are yet prescribed by the moral law? I answer, Certainly! If you mean, a *definite order of nature*, for example, that of the present world. A courtier, for instance, must recognize it as a duty always to be truthful, though he would not remain a courtier for long if he did. But there is in that *typus* only the form of a *natural order in general*, that is, the compatibility of actions as events in accord with *moral laws*, and as in accord too with *natural laws*, but only as regards *their generality*, for this in no way concerns the special laws of any particular nature.

But I must close. — I would be pleased to receive your manuscript. I

^d *Zusammengesetztes*

^e *Zusammensetzung*

^f *wilktürlich*

^g *als ein solches*

^h *immer selbst machen müssen*

shall go over it with Court Chaplain Schultz as well. — Please thank Prof. Jacob for his letter,⁴ and Magister Hoffbauer for sending me his Analytic.⁵ Tell them both that I shall soon have the honor of answering their letters. I remain

Your
I. Kant

- 1 See "The Highest Principle of All Analytic Judgments" and "The Transcendental Ideal," *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 189 ff. and B 599 ff.
- 2 *Zusammensetzung*, as pointed out in earlier letters, e.g., Ak.[33] from Lambert and Ak.[500] to Beck, is sometimes translated "synthesis" or "combination," since Kant, at least in some passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, uses the word interchangeably with "synthesis" or the Latin "combinatio."
- 3 Kant's "this" (*Diese*) could grammatically refer back to *Zusammensetzung*, the composition, or to *Form*. That the latter is his meaning seems clear from the remainder of the sentence.
- 4 Ak.[502].
- 5 Johann Heinrich Hoffbauer (1766–1827), *Analytic der Urtheile und Schlüsse mit Anmerkungen meist erläuternden Inhalts* (Halle, 1792). A brief summary may be found in Ak. 13:323.

142 [522] (490)

To Johann Erich Biester.

July 30, 1792.

Your efforts, worthy friend, to obtain the censor's permission to publish my recent essay¹ in the *Berliner Monatsschrift* have to all appearances impeded its early return to me, which I requested. Now I repeat my request; for I wish to put the piece to another use, and soon. This is all the more necessary since the previous essay must create an unfavorable impression in your journal without the succeeding pieces. But the verdict of your three Inquisitors² seems to be irreversible. I therefore urgently beg that my manuscript be returned to me as soon as possible, by regular mail and at my expense, for I have not kept a copy of various marginal notes I made in the text and I would like not to lose them.

From my earlier letter you can easily refresh your memory as to why I submitted my work to the Berlin censor: as long as the essays in your *Monatsschrift* (as has heretofore been the case) confine themselves

11:350

within narrow limits and allow nothing to enter in that, in the private opinion of the censor, could seem offensive to matters of faith, it makes no difference whether they be printed within the royal territories or abroad. But since I had been somewhat worried about this in the case of my essay, if it were to appear in the *Monatsschrift* without the censors' approval, the natural consequence would be that these censors would raise objections, putting obstacles in the way of this detour around their censorship in the future, and they would cite my article (which without doubt they would not fail to slander all around) as justification for their petition to have this detour forbidden. And that would cause me considerable unpleasantness.

Leaving all this aside I shall not neglect to send you very soon, if you like, another essay in place of this one,³ something entirely on moral philosophy, namely on Herr Garve's recently expressed opinion about my moral principle, in his *Essays*, Part I.⁴ I am moreover with immutable esteem and friendship

Your
I. Kant

Königsberg, the 30th of July, 1792.

- 1 Cf. letter Ak. [518], n. 1.
- 2 Hermes, Hillmer, and Woltersdorf.
- 3 "On the Proverb: That May Be True in Theory but Is of No Practical Value" (1793).
- 4 Garve's *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Literatur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben* (1792–7).

143 [523] (491)

From Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

August 6, 1792.

Dear Sir,
Esteemed Herr Professor,

In a roundabout way (because the *Literatur-Zeitung* arrived very late) I received news of an indefinite sort to the effect that the *Literatur-Zeitung's* Information Column had identified my essay as a work of yours, and that you had found it necessary to protest this announcement.¹ I cannot understand how anyone could say such a thing, and I

11:350

1 Rath (1758–1814) was rector of the *Gymnasium* in Halle and a friend of J. S. Beck's.

2 Friedrich Gottlob Born (1743–1807), *außerordentlicher* professor of philosophy in Leipzig. See his letter to Kant, May 7, 1786, Ak.[260]. Born's *Immanuelis Kantii opera ad philosophiam criticam* only appeared in 1796.

147 [537] (504)

To Jacob Sigismund Beck.

October 16 (17), 1792.

Treasured friend,

I mailed back your manuscript the day before yesterday, October 15, wrapped in gray paper, sealed, and labeled To Magister Beck, but too hastily, as I now see. For my memory deceived me so that I thought that the date by which you needed to have it back was the end of October rather than November, and in my eagerness not to miss the next postal departure I neglected to reread your letter to confirm this date. And since in browsing through the first pages of your *Deduction* of the Categories and Principles I had nothing important to say, I just left it in your good hands.

This mistake can still be remedied, if you think it necessary, by having the relevant pages quickly transcribed and sent to me by courier (at my expense, of course) so that my answer will still get back to you before the deadline. – In my judgment everything depends on this: since, in the empirical concept of *something composite*^a the composition^b itself cannot be given or represented by means of mere intuition and its apprehension, but can only be represented by means of the *self-active connection*^c of the manifold given in intuition – that is, it can be represented only in a consciousness in general (which again is not empirical) – it follows that this connection and its functioning under a priori¹ rules, rules that constitute the pure thought of an object in general (the pure concept of the understanding) must be in the mind. The apprehension of the manifold must be subject to this pure concept of the understanding insofar as it constitutes *one* intuition and insofar

^a *des Zusammengesetzten selbstständige Verbindung*

^b *Zusammensetzung*

as it [the pure concept] constitutes the condition of all possible experiential knowledge of what is composite (or of what belongs to what is composite, i.e., something that requires a synthesis), experiential knowledge that is expressed by means of these principles. It is commonly supposed that the representation of a composite as such is *given*, and included with the representation of the apprehended manifold, and that thus it does not entirely belong, as however it really must, to spontaneity, etc.

I was very pleased by your insight concerning the importance of the physics question about the varying density of matter that has to be conceivable if one disallows any appeal to empty interstices in explaining this. For very few people seem even to have understood the question properly. I think the solution to this problem lies in this: the attraction (the universal, Newtonian attraction) is originally equal in all matter; it is only the repulsive force that varies in different kinds of matter, and this is what determines differences in density. But this solution seems to lead to a kind of circularity.² I cannot see how to escape from this circularity and I must give it more thought.

Your own solution to the problem will not be satisfactory to you either if you just consider the following. – You say that the effect that a small body has on the whole earth is infinitely small compared to the attractive effect of the earth on that body. What you in fact should have said is: compared to the effect that this small body has on another body of *similar* (or *smaller*) size; for, to the same extent that the small body attracts the whole earth, the former will be set in motion (it will receive a certain velocity) by the earth's resistance [against attraction], a velocity that is just equal to the velocity that the small body would receive from the attraction of the earth alone, so that the small body's velocity is just twice the velocity that it [the body] would achieve in case it did not itself attract the earth. The earth, on the other hand, would have received a velocity through the resistance of the body that the earth attracts, [a velocity] twice as large as it would have received from that body alone if the earth itself did not have any attractive force. – But perhaps I have not fully understood your way of explaining this problem; I would be grateful for a more detailed explanation.

By the way, I wonder whether you could shorten your extract, though without detracting from its completeness, in such a way that the book could serve as a basis for lectures. That would be highly advantageous to your publisher and to you too, especially since the *Critique of Practical Reason* is included. But I fear that the Transcendental Dialectic will take up a fair amount of space. However I

